You’ve complained about walking the beat in Detroit for years. Petty crimes, protests, no real action...

So when Captain Fowler gave you orders to respond to a hostage situation, you couldn’t resist.

And then you got shot, only to be saved by the android sent by CyberLife…

Beta’d by MjrGenMatt, ElegantN7, Celestielle and Cerulaine.
Warning: Contains Game Spoilers

Updates regularly.

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Chinese translation by GloriaLAU on LOFTER!

Russian translation by jellyFish0719 on ficbook!

Spanish translation by ViktoriaMagrey right here on AO3!

Turkish translation by Philosophical_Army right here on AO3!

Thank you guys for reaching out, and I love you all so much for doing this. <3 It's an honor and a blessing.

***Join us in the Deviant Behavior Discord (now with over 200 members) to say hi to myself, the betas, other members of the Detroit: Become Human community, play with the bot, or shamelessly lurk (which, let's be honest, that's what Discord is for)

***Check out the Deviant Behavior Showcase for submitted artwork, voiced narration, and the fic's playlist.

***A WIP of Deviant Behavior's voiced narration is now available by Kabibi AudioFics! IT IS SO GOOD.

See the end of the work for more notes
hey say the equation for humor is tragedy plus time...except you weren’t laughing, you were dying.

And all you had “time” to do was sift through the series of events that led to you bleeding out on a rooftop terrace belonging to a family who made more money in a month than you did in a year.

You should’ve finished college. Or maybe even joined the military. You should’ve adopted that dog you rescued last week, because you’d never have the chance to second-guess yourself again.

You shouldn’t have moved to Detroit, following a man you thought you loved while he pursued his career. You shouldn’t have taken this job, solely because you felt like you were out of options. You sure as fuck shouldn’t have tried to talk a deviant who held a child hostage off a ledge, ignoring the advice of your partner. Old partner. He was dead, inside the apartment. Gunned down. You’d deal with that mental baggage later.

While you complained, you were perfectly content in the office, combing through files on your terminal - albeit bored. But you’d learned quickly that boring was safe...and that you should’ve stayed bored.

A body floated in a pool, blood leaking from a wound more fatal than yours. Jeff was the guy’s name. Maybe John. Something generic that didn’t separate him from the rest of Detroit PD. You’d only met him a couple times.

You laid in your own pool - much less inviting than the sparkling grave that Jeff or James died in. Comparatively, he was having a far worse day than you. You hoped you wouldn’t join him at some bar in the afterlife, drinking amongst the first responders taken out by the deviant android.

How ironic, that was. To be killed by something you’d defended so fervently. Your friends and family had called you crazy - campaigning for mass-produced machines as if they were coherent. As if they had a soul. Independent thoughts. Feelings.

All you’d wanted to do was help. Maybe save the deviant, and the little girl. As it were - all this android wanted to do was kill.

The sliding glass door behind you opened. A single shot pierced the air, cracking and violent as it
set the ringing in your ears straight.

The bullet didn’t ricochet; it planted itself in a new host, watered with a fresh burst of blood. You heard the tear of skin, something you hadn’t been too familiar with until tonight.

You couldn’t see who was hit. Through your blurry vision, you thought you made out two legs covered in dark jeans and a pair of dress shoes. Probably some corporate asshole sent out as fodder.

Still, they only flinched. Didn’t fall. Must have a seriously high tolerance for pain…or, you know, a bulletproof vest.

“Hi, Daniel! My name is Connor!”

“How…How do you know my name?!” Daniel shouted.

“I know a lot of things about you. I’ve come to get you out of this!”

Lights...They were so bright before they swung away. You thought they were beacons while you passed between worlds before thundering helicopter blades brought you back to reality. That, and the tumbling lawn chair that almost decked you in the mouth.

“I’m an android, just like you. I know how you’re feeling!”

Negative – the new contender was not a corporate asshole. He was an android programmed with a specific task. One that, more than likely, didn’t involve saving you.

“What difference does it make if you’re an android?! You’re on their side…You can’t understand how I’m feeling…”

Daniel sounded so…wounded. Like someone had touched his soul without permission. Why you felt sympathy for the maniac who shot you and killed your partner - your best, if not only friend, was beyond your understanding.

“I know you’re angry, Daniel. But you need to trust me, and let me help you.”

Connor’s voice was gentle, but powerful. The executive presence that came with it was undeniable. It calmed you. The sincerity in his words made you feel like everything would be okay…like he couldn’t fail.

“I don’t want your help! Nobody can help me! All I want is for all this to stop…I…I just want all this to stop!”

But Daniel was more than upset. He was desperate. He wanted to live, and sounded ready to do anything to make that happen.

“Please…” The plea came with a strong push from your chest, “Please, help me...”

You wanted to live, too. You clung to hope that there was still some humanity in the machines your species created.

“They were going to replace you, and you became upset. That’s what happened, right?”

Connor paused just on the closing borders of your sight, framed by an approaching darkness with fringed edges.

“I thought I was part of the family…I thought I mattered…But I was just their toy! Something to
throw away when you’re DONE with!” Daniel’s growl boiled over into pure rage.

A kneeling figure snapped your attention to a glowing triangle with the words, “Made in Detroit,” sprawled underneath as it rippled along the tailored seams of an expensive suit. A badge that read, “RK800” with a serial number lining the bottom laid across a gap formed by a pressed, white button-up and a black tie. A bright armband encased one clothed bicep, and a sparking, twitching wound bled blue on the other.

“She’s losing blood…”

You? Was it you he was talking about? You were never a religious woman, but in that moment, you prayed.

“If we don’t get her to a hospital, she’s going to die.”

There was a sense of finality in the last word. Not just because the concept of death itself was disheartening, but the pain that came with the idea…It was almost like he cared.

“All humans die eventually. What does it matter if this one dies now?”

A lot, fucking prick. You thought it mattered a lot if you’d die today.

“I’m going to apply a tourniquet!”

You were rolled on your back, and for the first time, you saw his face.

A pale, precious little thing - one with deep-brown eyes that were the softest you’ve ever seen. Hair that was sculpted perfectly, all except a small tuff of loose strands hanging above his forehead. An LED that blinked yellow, running in circles on his temple.

His hand wrapped around your arm – his fingers careful, tender-

Another gunshot pushed them back, and a gasp inflated your lungs.

"Don’t touch her! Touch her, and I kill you!"

The pool’s reflection cast dark-blue shadows on Connor’s features. A crisp sheen glazed over him from the water’s mist. His collar fluttered from the helicopter’s breeze. His face had sharp edges and deep curves – all resting above a rigid jawline. His eyebrows folded as his words came out, determined and borderline hostile.

“You can’t kill me,” Connor ripped his tie from his shirt, his finger pulling at the knot, “I’m not alive!”

His eyes were fixated on your wound as if he was hellbent on saving you. He didn’t seem the least bit scared, even with an armed deviant threatening to murder him…one that’d taken human lives.

His forehead wrinkled as his gaze met yours and his brow raised. The slightest, most innocent smile tugged on his lips – one so subtle you could’ve missed it.

“Everything’s going to be fine, Officer…”

He read your badge, and recited your name.

The smoothness of the way it rolled off his tongue battled any anxiety you’d had only moments
ago. Things were peaceful, even if that wave of relief was short-lived.

As he looked back to Daniel, the face of a hunter reappeared, hidden away by a trustworthy farce…

But you wouldn’t be awake to witness what happened next, taken hostage by the image of the android who’d saved your very human existence:

Connor, an RK800 sent by CyberLife...

And you owed him a lot more than a new tie.

Chapter End Notes

CONNOR IS BEST ANDROID!
Partners

Chapter Summary

November 5th, 2038
PM 11:04:05

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

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It’d been a long three months.

The tedious physical therapy sessions; having to be re-certified for your pistol master ribbon, having to adjust to your new, literal, partner in crime - Chris Miller. Having to act ecstatic for him when his newborn arrived.

It wasn’t that you weren’t happy for him and his family. They’d even had you over for dinner, once. Chris wasn’t a bad guy. One of the best you’d ever met, actually.

The problem was…you couldn’t stop thinking about your old partner.

Your best friend since childhood who signed up with you. Moved to Detroit with you. Left everything behind in your hometown because he didn’t have anything tying him down to the place except you.

Dead in an instant. Gone forever. That night in August haunted your dreams.

Daniel’s angry shouts. The child’s frantic screaming. Your partner pushing you out of the way, and his body going cold. The second shot that almost took you out when you charged ahead…

Connor was the good ending to that tragic tale. A hero who’d shown bravery where fragile men failed. He who, against all odds, saved the hostage. Maybe one day, you’d get to thank him for breaking his protocols and saving you, too.

“Hey, you good?”

You turned your chin, looking at Chris in the driver’s seat.

“Yeah, just thinking…”

“About?”

You sighed, “These deviant cases are popping up by the dozens. Missing androids, deviants killing their owners…You know, when I was promoted to homicide, I didn’t think I’d be chasing down murder machines.”
“You’re telling me…” Chris flicked the windshield wipers to the highest speed, “Hey, you called it, though. You’ve been saying for a long time they’d ‘rise against.’”

“Just remember you’re not supposed to know about that.” You smirked, “Could cost me my job.”

“After what happened to you? I’m just surprised you’re still writing an android-activist blog…I mean, sure, an android saved you, but…”

You looked back out the window, heavy rain streaking down the glass. The lights on top of the car blinked red and blue, just like the two types of blood that’d stained your uniform on the rooftop terrace. Yeah, Connor saved you, and the little girl. But others had died. You definitely hadn’t forgot about that. It kept you up at night, and you wore the dark circles to prove it.

“Sorry.” Chris mumbled, “I shouldn’t have-“

“It’s okay.” You put your strong face on, the one you’d perfected, “Let’s just get to this crime scene so we can pack up and go home.”

“What, hot date?”

“Yeah, with a bottle of wine and my laptop.”

He laughed, “Sounds like a perfect night to me.”

Yeah…

It’d been a long three months, alright.

And it was about to be an even longer night.

…

Carlos Ortiz, an obese man with stab wounds all over him. A message written in blood, one that shouted, “I AM ALIVE,” in perfect font. A murder weapon. Packets of Red Ice on a cluttered table. Beer bottles and cigarette butts that served as a carpet on the planks-and-nails for a floor.

You dropped evidence markers near the remnants of the conflict you were charged with piecing together. The CSI team scoured the what-should-have-been-condemned house, looking for traces of…Well, anything.

You pulled down your mask, brushing the sweat off your cheek with the back of your latex-covered hand. You couldn’t tell what was worse – the lung-clogging smell or the maggots pooling around the corpse.

You and Chris had finished interrogating the neighbors. They hadn’t had much to say, other than various forms of, “I didn’t even know somebody was living there…” or “I always knew that guy was a fucking creep.” Seemed like this guy was a real winner.

You peaked out the opened front door, spotting a couple standing under an umbrella. Another pair stood on their porch across the street, smoking a cigarette and watching from a distance. The murder scene had attracted a crowd, and the local news.

A police drone zoomed by, painting the audience with a spotlight. You shook your head,
focusing on the task at hand. Time to get back to work.

Chris was running the show under Detective Collins’ supervision. That meant more work for you, and more orders for him to bark.

“Come on, guys, get a move on. We don’t wanna be here all night.”

You smirked, turning your head and hooking your chin over your shoulder, “Don’t worry, no one wants to stay here a minute longer than they have to…”

“Uh-huh…” His mask wiggled, and he typed along on his data pad.

You squinted as a crime scene investigator snapped a picture, sending a blinding flash into the dark room. The clicks of its shutter hung in the stale, putrefied air.

Each time they captured a moment, light filled the cracks in the walls and ceiling. It highlighted the layers of dust that coated everything. The place was a breeze away from coming down, and sheltered enough random shit to label the victim a hoarder. You wondered what in the hell he made his android do, because it sure as fuck wasn’t cleaning.

“Jesus, that smell!” Collins came back inside from the rain, his footsteps squeaking on the exposed floorboards, “Was even worse before we opened the windows.”

You kept taking samples of blood, stowing it away how you were trained. You’d seen a few homicides in the last couple months, but nothing this gruesome. You’d only puked twice since you got there – and according to the Detective, that was a record low for someone new to homicide.

He also wasn’t wrong: The smell was a lot worse before you and the others opened the windows.

“The victim’s name’s Carlos Ortiz. He has a record for theft and aggravated assault.” Collins was briefing someone, “According to the neighbors, he was kind of a loner…Stayed inside most of the time, they hardly ever saw him.”

Your legs got tired from squatting, so you dropped to a knee and pinched a Ziploc baggy shut. You clicked your pen, and began labeling the collected sample appropriately.

“Uh, state he’s in…Wasn’t worth calling everybody out in the middle of the night…Could’ve waited ‘till morning.”

The complaint came as a groaning, scratchy growl. You’d know that voice anywhere. You smiled wide, turning to greet Lieutenant Anderson.

And then you stopped.

“ANDROID” was stitched between two, broad shoulders. A glowing line glistened under the same light-blue triangle from your dreams, matching the color and brightness of a signature armband to the right.

You blinked, almost rubbing your eyes before you remembered your hands were now covered in decayed blood.

So you blinked harder…

But the white, illuminated “RK800” on the back of a soaking wet suit-jacket was still there.
“I’d say he’s been there for a good three weeks.” Collins continued his briefing, “We’ll know more when the Coroner gets here.”

Connor turned his head, and you quickly returned your gaze to the blood stain in front of you, covering your nose with your surgical mask.

“There’s a kitchen knife over here…Probably the murder weapon…”

“Any sign of a break-in?” Hank asked the Detective.

“Nope…” Collins went on about the case with Hank and Connor behind you.

Your breathing became unsteady, and you were thankful your mask hid most of your features.

Maybe Connor wouldn’t recognize you. Better yet, maybe he didn’t remember you – bleeding out, begging for help like the pathetic heap of reckless you’d proven yourself to be the night that rewrote everything you’d known about being a cop.

“What do we know about his android?” Hank asked.

“Not much. The neighbors confirmed he had one, but it wasn’t here when we arrived…” Collins coughed, “I gotta get some air. Make yourself at home. I’ll be outside if you need me.”

The Detective’s voice trailed away, and you exhaled. Chris passed your peripherals to the right, your stare following him until he was out of view.

“Each letter is perfect…It’s way too neat, no human writes like this.” Hank mumbled, “Chris, was this written in the victim’s blood?”

“I would say so…We’re taking samples for analysis.”

You looked at the bag in your hand, tagged with all sorts of writing that indicated this conversation was about to be directed at you.

“Hey,” Chris called your name, “You finished taking samples there?”

Shit.

“Uh…Yeah.” You stood, stretching your knees, “Here-“

You froze.

An arm brushed against yours as a figure much taller than you knelt to examine the sprinkled drugs on the table next to you. Connor cocked his head, the LED on his temple circling around and blinking blue.

You might’ve puked a third time – but because of nerves instead of the foulness of the crime scene.

A strong hand pulled the sample from your grip.

“How you holdin’ up, champ?” Hank’s sunken eyes were trained on you, a huff of a smile perking up from his gruff beard.

“Still the best shot on the force.” Chris answered for you, giving you an encouraging wink.

“Tch. We’ll see about that…” Hank rolled his eyes.
“Alive.” You shrugged, clamming up at your poor choice of wording, “Uh…thanks for asking.”
You literally could’ve picked any other word and you wouldn’t have felt like such an ass.

“Can’t say that for this guy, eh?” He pointed his chin at the greasy corpse, “Ah, c’mon…Don’t look at me like that, it was funny!”

“You can’t kill me. I’m not alive!”

“I AM ALIVE.”

Connor stepped aside, turning towards the victim. He stood across from Hank, framing the message on the wall. It seemed almost ironic.

“You can’t kill me. I’m not alive!”

You repeated the conflicting messages in your head, over and over.

“I AM ALIVE.”

The results from one incriminated android who may have believed it was sentient, and the other who stayed within the boundaries of their software. Did he really, though? What part of saving you had anything to do with saving Emma, the little girl taken hostage?

Hank leaned to the side, looking around you. His lips fell into a pucker, and he squinted over narrowing eyes.

“Red Ice…” He gently pushed you aside, a beer-tainted breath passing your nose, “Seems our friend Carlos liked to party…”

He studied the mess, his veteran knack for details seemingly fighting through his semi-drunken state. How had he not gotten a DUI yet?

“Chris, I want a full analysis on the narcotics.”

“Consider it done, Lieutenant.”

You looked over your shoulder, and Chris gave you a nod. He definitely had “delegation” figured out.

You heaved a sigh, wishing you could investigate a different room than with the android that had your brain short-circuiting. You prepped your sample kit, ready to pick at the evidence without tampering it.

“Err, Jesus!” Hank shouted, standing and looking behind you, “What the hell are you doing?!”

Your neck snapped to the source of his anger.

Connor stepped away from the writing on the wall, his pointer and middle fingertips drenched in red.

“I’m analyzing the blood.” He extended his hand, a slight smile following his words, “I can check samples in real time.”

He seemed so proud of himself, like a son showing his father a straight-A report card. But his grin
curved into a frown, clearly not happy with Hank’s reaction.

“I’m sorry…” His eyebrows peaked, and his head bobbed, “I should’ve warned you.”

You felt bad for him. He was doing his job just like the rest of you, after all.

“Okay just…don’t…” Hank spun his wrist, “…Put any more evidence in your mouth, got it?”

Connor dipped his chin, his forehead creasing as he looked up like a disciplined child, “Got it!”

He gave Hank a gesture that looked like a one-handed finger gun.

You tried not to laugh, but couldn’t help it. It was quiet enough for no one else to hear, at least.

Connor turned his attention back to the sample on his fingers, eyeing it critically. How amazing it must be to see the world as he does – able to pick it apart in mere seconds and retell the events of the past.

“Fucking hell, can you believe this shit?” Hank nodded to you, shaking his head and putting his hands on his hips.

You ducked away, scurrying to take the samples Chris had asked for.

“What’s keeping the Coroner?” Hank mumbled, “Should’ve been here half an hour ago.”

“He’s on his way, Lieutenant.” Chris answered, his voice muffled by his mask, “Won’t be long now.”

Hank scowled, planting his shoulder against a wall and observing the crime scene.

You stood, handing in your assignment. Chris gave you a polite nod, and passed the bag off to an analyst wearing a plastic jumpsuit.

And then fucking Connor came strolling by as if he was following you, kneeling to do what you guessed was the Coroner’s job for him. He studied the victim for a moment, rising to his feet with a perplexed expression.

“He was…stabbed, 28 times.”

Even he didn’t sound like he believed what he reported to Hank…or that he didn’t want to.

“Yeah,” Hank wore a dark grin, “Seems like the killer really had it in for him.”

They say androids can’t feel fear, but Connor returned a look of pure terror. Maybe it was from the idea that another being could build up that much hate…or maybe it was Hank’s lack of empathy that scared him. You weren’t sure. But as his eyes darted from Hank to the corpse, you were sure he felt some sort of fear.

“Hey,” Chris grabbed your attention, “There’s something weird in the bathroom. Did you take a look?”

“No,” You shook your head, “I’ll go check it out right now.”

You snatched a camera from a hastily-made work station, and all but ran around the corner. Any opportunity to put some distance between you and Connor was welcomed…Because with a life like yours, you couldn’t afford any distractions.
That’s how you got shot in the first place.

Chapter End Notes

This has been incredible, and we're only two days in! Thank you all so much for your support and feedback. It makes me incredibly happy that Detroit: Become Human is getting the recognition it deserves.

Stay wonderful, and I hope you enjoyed the new chapter!
Chris was right, not that you’d ever tell him that. There was something weird in the bathroom. Really fucking weird. Frantic writing, “rA9,” repeated thousands of times in black, scribbled ink. A figurine made of…Well, honestly, you didn’t want to know.

What was most interesting about the creepy shrine was the flowers sprinkled along the drain. Bowls of exhausted incense gave the shower stall the best-smelling place in the house. It was as if someone had made a religious offering to…What, the God of going batshit crazy?

You’d just taken the last of 30 pictures of the whatever-the-fuck before you felt someone staring at you. The kind of tension that raised the hairs on the back of your neck and made your muscles tense. Your knee rotated, and your boots squeaked as you turned.

Connor was standing at the doorway.

“OH, SHIT-“

You jumped, almost falling backwards and destroying the evidence.

His hand shot forward, latching on to your arm. Your healing arm. The one he’d wrapped with a tie in what seemed like a lifetime ago.

“Tsss- Ow-“

You cringed, the camera bouncing across the floor.

His grip switched to your back, supporting you mid-fall.

“I’m sorry. Did I frighten you?”

His face was only inches away, his brown eyes digging deep into yours.

“No,” Your voice wavered, “No, I…You-“

“Your heart rate is accelerating tremendously. Have you been checked for paroxysmal supraventricular tachycardia?”
He straightened himself, helping you to your feet with a gentle touch.

“Paroxys-what?” You pulled your mask down, giving him a confused look, “I’m fine, I just…”

It was just the two of you, alone in the bathroom at the end of the hall. You leaned on your leg, balancing yourself in front of him. It was time to face your fears.

“Do you remember me?”

You asked the question of the hour. The one you’d been trying to avoid, but felt like you’d never have an appropriate chance to ask again. Hell, this was anything but appropriate…The kind of dreams you were having about him after the nightmares, were anything but appropriate.

“I was on that terrace…” You were lost in his trance, silently begging him to halt any judgement, “That android that took the little girl hostage? I was shot, and you…you saved me.”

His bottom eyelids pushed up, and his head swayed to the left.

“I remember you.”

His revelation had you melted in place, feet glued to the floor that kept you anchored in this world. He said it with a sense of amazement as the light on his head shifted from blue to yellow. You weren’t sure what that meant yet, but it was the second time you’d seen it.

“I could’ve died…you could’ve died…”

A small twitch jumbled his features, but you kept going before he could correct you.

“But you saved me. And I just wanted to say…thank you.”

His cheeks lifted, and he gave you the warmest smile. One that lifted both corners of his mouth. It wasn’t much of a response, but it was enough. A two-cornered smile was a good start on your path of self-redemption.

You wanted to say more, but words never came. You gulped, feeling heat brush across your face. Your chest rose and fell, and you slunk away from his grasp and slipped around him.

“Officer,” A whisper of your name followed the declaration, forcing you to pause your retreat.

You braced for some kind of pre-programmed reprimand, and slowly turned.

“Your camera.” He gave you a widened grin, the strands of his loose batch of hairs dangling.

You received it shakily, swallowing hard.

As soon as he turned around, you dashed out of the bathroom with what was left of your dignity. But it felt good to thank him. To face the reckoning you’d been avoiding all night.

Maybe you’d be able to get some sleep.

With any amount of luck, the time spent investigating the murder wouldn’t add up to a nightmare…

Perhaps not every distraction, was a bad one.
Hank picked apart the kitchen, sliding his hands along the counter. You’d finished reviewing the 
evidence, but things weren’t adding up. There was a struggle. Blood marked the doorway 
leading into the living room. The body was marked up with cuts, obviously a stabbing. But what 
made the deviant opt for murder?

You eyed a bat on the floor, tagged by a glowing, yellow number nine evidence marker.

Did the deviant hit Ortiz with it first, or…

“All right…I’m outta here.” Hank yawned, “Thanks for the ride. Great party.”

He may have been a legend, but his investment into his job was short-stocked nowadays. You still 
looked up to him, and couldn’t blame him for falling off after what’d happened to his son…

You reminded yourself you couldn’t let that become you just because your friend died.

“Wait, Lieutenant!” Connor came dashing around the corner, leaving the hallway and bathroom 
behind him, “I can’t stay if you leave!”

“Much as this breaks my heart, this is where we part ways.”

Hank was sarcastic in his mocking. Did he always have to be so mean?

“I just need 5 minutes to finish my investigation.” Connor was begging at this point, “Please, 
Lieutenant. Remember the drink I bought you at the bar? Just five minutes.”

He bought…he bought Hank a drink at the bar? You found this more of a mystery than the crime 
scene. An android drinking buddy. That was off-script. It proved Connor understood a lot more 
about human behavior than given credit for by your fellow peers…Maybe even by himself.

“Five. Minutes.” Hank held up his fingers, shoving them towards his android partner.

Connor hesitated before giving him a curt nod, “Thank you, Lieutenant.”

He surveyed the kitchen as Hank wandered off, probably reclaiming his post near the body. Chris 
bunched his mask with his hand, pulling it down to reveal a smile.

“You’re free to go, if you’d like. We’re gonna start packing up…Not much else to go on, here.”

You returned a surprised look, trying your best not to come off as suspicious, “I’d like to stick 
around to see how this plays out.”

You nodded towards Connor, who was crouched by the bat you’d questioned only a couple 
minutes ago.

“Suit yourself.” Chris shrugged, “Doesn’t matter to me. I’m stuck here for another few hours, 
regardless.”

“I’d say I felt bad for you, but…” You grinned, “You make a lot more money than I do.”

“I wouldn’t say a lot more…” He waved you off as he tucked his data pad under his arm, no 
longer buzzing with incoming information.
You sighed, watching the others pack up their equipment. There was more to the story, here, and you were curious to see if Connor would be able to tell it. But a purple screen caught your attention.

A magazine left carelessly untouched on the counter.

Your brows creased, and you lifted it for a more careful observation:

---

“Gossip Weekly

**ANDROID SEX OFFICIALLY BETTER!**

Sorry, ladies, but plastic can’t be beat!

The result of our survey is in, and it’s official – 68% of men prefer sex with an android to a real woman!

And with 52% of men saying they’ve tried the experience at least once, that’s a lot of android love to go around!

There were a few reasons given for this reference, but we think we know the real reason – androids don’t want to talk about their feelings afterwards!

This story was sponsored by Eden Club: ‘discretion is our middle name.’”

---

You scoffed and angrily tossed the article aside, crossing your arms and leaning the small of your back on the counter’s ledge.

“Find something?” Chris snapped fresh gloves in place as he replaced a dirtied pair.

“Look at this,” You slid it across the countertop, “Sexist pieces of shit…”

He bit the inside of his cheek, dragging his finger along the screen.

“I think you’re taking this android obsession of yours a little too far…”

“No, it’s not that! I mean, come on. Women aren’t some emotionally-ridden sex fiends who stalk the night looking for their next ‘dick to claim.’ Why didn’t they survey us, eh? Would it be too emasculating to even think that maybe, just maybe, we’d prefer to have sex with an android so we didn’t have to fake orgasms on the daily?”

Chris’s calm, quiet demeanor evolved into a boisterous laugh.

“Tell you what.” He whispered, “I’ll ask my wife how many orgasms she’s faked, and you can use that to write your next counter-article…which I’m sure’ll be coming soon.”

You rolled your eyes.

“Just don’t go running off to Eden Club with goo and guts all over you. The owner might not like that.”
“Shut up, Chris.”

You cocked your chin, giving him the finger from under your elbow. He shook his head laughing, returning to the living room.

“Do you have questions about intercourse involving androids? I’d be happy to answer them.”

You jumped, forgetting the “android in the room.” You would’ve preferred an elephant to this kind of humiliation.

“Uh…No, not really…Thanks though, Connor.” You cleared your throat, “How’s the investigation coming along?”

You ignored the not-so-subtle laughs coming from the other crime scene investigators, and you flushed in embarrassment.

“I think I’ve figured out what happened.” His brows pinched, and he turned his focus towards the floor, “I should report to Lieutenant Anderson and relay my findings.”

“That’s probably a good idea. We’re keeping him out past his bedtime.”

“I heard that!” Hank leaned in the doorway with his forearm on the frame, “I’m old, but I’ve still got my hearing, ya ass.”

“Selective hearing, maybe…”

He scoffed, “Stop bothering her, Connor. She’s got work to do.”

Connor perked up in surprise, “My apologies.”

He nodded before his departure, not giving you an opportunity to tell him he wasn’t bothering you at all.

“Lieutenant, I think I’ve figured out what happened.” Connor repeated.

“Oh yeah? Shoot.” He smacked his lips, glaring at you from over Connor’s shoulder, “I’m all ears.”

You bit back a laugh, and watched Connor scan over the evidence with an intense gaze.

“It all started…in the kitchen.”

He walked Hank to a broken chair next to the bat.

“There’re obvious signs of a struggle…” Hank mumbled, but not maliciously, “The question is, what exactly happened here…”

It was as if he was testing Connor. Like he’d already figured all this out, and had been waiting to hear his android partner’s second opinion. Or, he was teaching him. Either way, it was nice to see.

Connor answered him, almost too eagerly.

“I think the victim attacked the android…with the bat.”

“That lines up with the evidence…Go on.”
Yeah. Definitely a test. Hank was old, and only heard and saw what he wanted…but he “still had it.”

“The android stabbed the victim.” Connor nodded to a knife rack nailed to the kitchen wall, missing the largest utensil in what looked like a set.

“So the android was trying to defend itself, right?” Hank’s chin dipped and rose, as if he was understanding the part that none of his human peers, yourself included, could make out, “Okay, then what happened?”

“The victim fled…” Connor turned his attention behind him, his stare running parallel to you as he aimed it towards the corpse, “To the living room.”

You waited a few seconds before following them, always sticking to the background and keeping yourself out of the way. You waited between rooms, listening while pretending to be busy doing something else.

“And he tried to get away from the android…” Hank sighed, “All right, that makes sense.”

“The android murdered the victim…” Connor hesitated, “With the knife.”

“Ok, your theory’s not totally ridiculous…but it doesn’t tell us where the android went.”

You peeked out of the corner of your eye. Connor turned towards Hank, his eyes squinting – lost in thought.

“It was damaged by the bat…and lost some Thirium.”

“Lost some what?”

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

His voice was soothing; direct, but very matter-of-fact. It had the perfect amount of velvet undertones, topped off by a jagged edge. The ends of each sentence left you wanting more.

“Oh…but I bet you can still see it, can’t’cha?”

Finally…Hank was starting to see the value in having him here.

“Correct.”

“Yeah…” He shoved his hands in his pockets, kicking the air as he turned on his heel.

Connor studied him, his eyes switching to you as if you’d been caught doing something you weren’t supposed to.

You pointed your guilty glance at your boots, your jaw tightening as he passed.

He didn’t waste any time following the trail that only he could see. A piece of wood clanked against another, and Hank dug his knuckles into his sides.

“Hey, HEY, HEY! What are you doing with that chair?!”

Connor cocked his head to the side, standing in perfect posture with the heavy furniture.

“I’m going to check something.” He smiled, waiting awkwardly for Hank to answer.
“Huh…” He groaned, “Gonna ‘check something…’”

Connor walked the chair to the end of the hall as if it were made of paper, planting it in a very specific spot. He studied the ceiling, and you found what he was fixated on.

An attic’s entrance.

He took a step on the chair, reaching his hands for the sliding panel.

“Uh…” You uncrossed your arms, “Should he be going up there alone?”

“He?” Hank gave you a suspicious look, “IT is replaceable. IT is a machine. I’m not sending one of our guys up there…Could be a fuckin’ murderer in that attic for all we know.”

His voice was low, but not low enough to slip by Connor…you guessed. The blue light on his head shifted to yellow before correcting itself, his hands pausing only for a second before his neck cranked towards the hatch. He pulled himself up, and you’d be lying if you said you weren’t worried.

You didn’t agree.

He wasn’t replaceable…and he was certainly not just an “it.”

…

You’d held your breath for what felt like an hour. You checked your watch – a rickety old time piece that people made fun of you for wearing. The hands ticked away, much more rustic than a screen.

Ten minutes. He’d been gone for ten minutes without any indication that he was still alive…active…whatever he was.

Hank paced next to you as you both stood under the attic’s entrance.

“Connor!” His impatience peaked, “What the fuck is going on up there?!”

You waited. And waited. And waited…

You wanted so badly for him to answer.

“It’s here, Lieutenant!”

A distant verification that Connor was in fact, still around…

Your gratefulness faded when your mind caught up with itself, and realized the deviant killer was still around, too. With Connor. Alone.

“Holy shit…” Hank’s curse was breathless, “Chris, Ben! Get your asses in here now! Come on!”

You studied the hole in the ceiling, nervous and fearful.

You and Chris were ushered into the attic, forced to navigate the storage space filled with
unsightly decorations. You’d be the ones to arrest the deviant, escorting him through the crime scene and calming him down as he saw his former master’s body.

As you rested your palm on the top of the HK400’s head, slick with blood and almost bald, he took his place in the back of your police cruiser. You shut the door, turning to witness the DPD’s androids holding back the crowd still watching in the cold, rainy night.

Past the bobbing microphones and reaching hands, there stood a single body in the doorway. One with a stare more distant than the accused killer’s. One with deep-brown eyes that were no longer gentle and reassuring, but corrupted and confused.

Whoever rA9 was, the offering the murderer had made to them wasn’t enough to keep him safe from Connor, an RK800 pushed into service as a deviant hunter.

And even as he continued to be successful, he didn’t seem sure if he liked his job. After seeing the obvious signs of torture on the killer’s arms, guilt sunk in your stomach as you sat next to Chris in the car…

You weren’t sure if you liked Connor’s job, either.

Chapter End Notes

Double-posted today because you guys are so amazing! And...I may have procrastinated a little with my take-home final. Because of stupid school and work, the next chapter should be posted on Saturday. Till then! <3
ater pooled in your freshly-cleaned hands, stinging the blisters on your fingers as it slipped through them. You splashed your face, trying to wake yourself up. The steaming liquid left your skin dried and splotchy as it thawed, and you’d wished you had lotion to nourish it. You looked in the mirror, pressing your hands along the granite countertop, arms locking to support your weight.

Bloodshot eyes peered back at you. Black circles hung from them like curtains, encoring sleepless nights and diminishing hope. Your lips were chapped, and you picked at the flaking skin with your teeth. Your uniform was still wet and glistening, the weight of your drenched Kevlar vest aching on your shoulders. Being rained on in the midst of a cold November night left you wanting, and it really didn’t do anything for your hair. But hey, at least they had the heat cranked up inside the precinct.

You smoothed the flyaways out with your slick palms. Impressing anyone had never been the first thing on your agenda, and you tried to reason with yourself that things weren’t different, even with Connor around. You didn’t know why you wanted to look your best. You didn’t even know what an android would consider attractive, or if they were attracted to anyone at all. You didn’t know why you were worrying about this with a case that needed closed so it would stop taking up your off-duty hours.

You pulled your jacket off a hook, and slipped your arms through it.

You had an interrogation to oversee.

…

Data flickered on the observation panel in the form of transparent holograms reminiscent of what you, Chris, and the rest of the team had gathered at the murder scene. A cushion sagged under you, soggy and deflated.

“Here…” Chris slid a cup of coffee across the desk, dodging buttons and key-card readers, “You
look like you need this more than I do.”

“Thanks…”

You weren’t going to argue. You burnt your mouth, and one of those annoying little bubbles started swelling on your tongue. This night sucked.

“Say something, goddamnit!” Hank slammed his fists on the table inside the interrogation room. The deviant remained stone-cold, never looking away from the cuffs that bound his wrists in place.

“This is a waste of time…” Gavin huffed, leaning against the wall.

You blew across the top of the coffee cup, trying to cool it off. Stupid sips of “this is too hot,” wasn’t going to work tonight. It was gonna go down in gulps, whether it liked it or not.

“Fuck it,” Hank rose from his seat, “I’m outta here…”

Chris buzzed him through, but you fixated on the chained murderer. The slight flex in his arms, the blood and scars that told a horror story - etched into his fabricated flesh.

But your focus shifted, blurring the heart-breaking scene and training on a different reflection staring back at you than it had in the bathroom.

Connor studied the deviant through slit eyes, his head tilting to the side.

“We’re wastin’ our time interrogating a machine, we’re getting’ nothing out of it!” Hank plopped in a chair next to Chris, his back hitting the lumbar support bar with the angriest of frowns.

“Could always try roughing it up a little.” Gavin gave him his usual douchebag smirk, “After all, it’s not human…”

Your lip twitched, as if the comment hurt you personally. Maybe Chris was right, you were taking your stance on android personification too close to heart.

“Androids don’t feel pain.” Connor corrected, “You would only damage it, and that wouldn’t make it talk. Deviants also have a tendency to self-destruct when they’re in stressful situations.”

Hank pushed an enraged sigh from his nose. You looked at Chris, who returned an innocent, tired shrug.

“Okay, smartass…” Gavin unfolded his arms, taking a few steps forward, “What should we do then?”

The hostility in his voice had you and Chris turning around in your seats.

Connor seemed as if he was nervous, not looking Gavin in the eye.

“…I could try questioning it…”

Gavin laughed. It wasn’t a friendly laugh, either. It was the same kind that said, “unbelievable,” and underlined the very definition of “condescending.” You were familiar with it. Your ex-husband laughed like that a lot, and hearing it’s echo made your skin crawl.

“What do we have to lose?” Hank waved his hand, “Go ahead, suspect’s all yours…”
Connor hesitated before turning his head towards the door, the rest of his body in tow. The biometric scanner responded at his touch, his skin peeling away and exposing a plastic frame. It was a bit unsettling. You hadn’t seen it in person before.

And then he reappeared inside the investigation chamber.

His back turned to the mirror as he hovered over the table, carefully flicking through an evidence folder at the end. You and the others watched in anticipation, waiting for him to finish. He closed the jacket, and pulled out a chair.

His quirky, comforting demeanor faded. His brows took on a slight arch, eyes drawn and piercing like daggers.

“My name is Connor.” He unbuttoned the hook at the end of his blazer, it’s flaps falling to his sides as he took a seat, “What about you, what’s your name?”

Even through the microphone filter, his voice was compassionate and reassuring.

“You’re damaged.” He paused, eyeing the deviant critically, “Did your owner do that? Did he beat you?”

He sounded as if he was genuinely concerned; like if Ortiz had still been alive, he’d hunt him down himself. His hands rested carefully in front of him, and he leaned forward.

“I detect an instability in your program…” His blue LED rotated, his chin swaying with his words, “It can trigger an unpleasant feeling, like fear, in humans.”

Fear…You’d had some experience with that recently, too. You could only imagine the deviant felt like you had, eyeing down the barrel of Daniel’s gun.

Being almost beaten to death with a bat. Having cigarettes snuffed out on your arm. Same thing. Not really. Close enough.

You’d want to kill Ortiz, too.

Connor reached for the folder, sliding it between them. He opened it with precision, flipping it towards the suspect; every act taken with practiced restraint. He folded his hands, leaving the photos exposed in their macabre glory.

“You recognize him? It’s Carlos Ortiz. Stabbed, twenty-eight times.” He was firm in his tone, and he revealed a new picture, “That, was written on the wall in his blood…”

And still, the deviant remained silent.

Gavin grunted behind you, sucking his teeth, “This is a waste of time…”

“He just got started.”

“It.” His eyes flickered, giving you a deadly glance, “And it isn’t gonna pull this off.”

“That’s what Captain Allen said about the hostage situation, too.”

“You want written up for insubordination?”

“You want reported for sexual harassment again?”

“Alright, you two…” Hank ran a hand down his face, “Knock it off…”
You pushed steam through your nose, angrily drinking your coffee.

Who gave a fuck if it was too hot anymore. You needed caffeine or nicotine if you were going to make it through the night without punching Gavin, and only one of them was allowed inside the station.

“You’re accused, of murder. You know you’re not allowed to endanger human life under any circumstances.” Connor dipped his chin, trying to meet the deviant’s line of sight aimed at the tabletop, “Do you have anything to say in your defense?”

The deviant didn’t respond. Connor took back his maintained posture.

“If you won’t talk, I’m going to have to probe your memory.”

“No!” The deviant’s face shot up, and everyone in the observation room jumped at the unexpected shout, “No, please…don’t do that…”

There was a whimper to his plea.

You hunched over in your chair, resting your elbows on the desk and your chin on intertwined knuckles. You gulped the rock of guilt stuck in your throat, but it became lodged as the deviant turned towards the mirror.

“You’ve refused to talk since they arrested you. If you don’t cooperate, they’ll do things the hard way. Is that what you want?”

There was pure panic in his eyes after Connor’s warning.

“What…” The deviant returned to wherever his mind was, staring at the floor, “What are they gonna do to me…?” His attention jumped up to Connor, “They’re gonna destroy me, aren’t they?”

Yes. Probably. Goddamn it.

You felt so fucking bad for him. Why couldn’t you just let him get away…

“Fuckin’ right we are…deviant bastard.” Gavin swore under his breath.

The coffee shook in your paper cup, threatening to spill over as you squeezed it in a knee-jerk reaction.

“They’re going to disassemble you to look for problems in your biocomponents. They have no choice, if they want to understand what happened...” Connor leaned forward, his pressuring glare coming through slits, “They’ll make you suffer. And they won’t stop, until they hear what they want. It doesn’t have to be that way. It all depends on you.”

That was what humanity was to them. “They.” A word that carried a weight of an entire people…and the lot of you reduced “them,” to this. Pitting them against each other; one bleeding shell of a man, and a shark in the same tank whose hunger was growing on the other side of the glass.

“Why did you tell them you found me? Why couldn’t you just have left me there?” The deviant’s voice was hardly over a whisper.

Connor’s LED was yellow for a split-second before it corrected itself. You were learning pretty
quick that it meant something deeper was running through his mind.

“I was programmed to hunt deviants like you.” His voice held that kind of heavy, deep tone that you got when you were upset, and tried not to be, “I just accomplished my mission.”

He was almost offended, put on the defensive. Why did that question strike a chord?

“See?” Gavin sneered your last name, “He knows his place. Why don’t you?”

“I said: Shut. Up.” Hank barked at his side.

The deviant was almost in tears, “I don’t wanna die.”

Well, he would’ve been, if androids could cry. Could they cry? You could serve him Gavin’s head to make him feel better. That would get a confession.

“Then talk to me.” Connor pleaded.

“I-I…I can’t…” He was breathless as if keeping his sins trapped inside was exhausting.

“I understand how you felt. You were overcome by anger, and frustration. No one can blame you for what happened.”

Connor was almost too convincing. You wondered what part of it was for the sake of getting the suspect to talk, and how much of it he actually meant.

“Listen…I’m not judging you. I’m on your side. All I want, is the truth...”

“Are you hearing this, Hank?” Gavin snapped, “Fucker just said-“

“He’s gonna say whatever he needs to in order to get a confession.” Hank cut him off with a raised hand, “Maybe you should take notes.”

“Fuck you.”

“Yeah…Fuck you too, Detective.”

The tension was thick. Not just in the interrogation room, but on your side, too. You looked to Chris for reprise, but he seemed just as worried.

“What the fuck is it doin’ now?” Hank leaned back.

You lifted your eyes, a chill running down your spine. One colder than any rain, or snow, or November could bring.

Connor was staring at you, straight into the deepest part of your being. The right side of his face was hidden by a shadow put in place from the overhead lighting. A switch had gone off.

Something dark stirred within him.

You had something else to be worried about, now: How many pieces of the killer you’d have to pick up, after the interrogation…

Or of Connor if he failed.
And we're back!

Special thank you to MjrGenMatt, who not only continues to be the best cross-fandom beta ever, but also for transcribing most of the in-game dialogue while I was at work to ensure this fic got updated on schedule.

Hope everyone enjoyed the chapter!
ime seemed to halt. Your jaw tensed as your nails dug into your palms. Your stomach was in knots, acid welling in your belly. Loud thumps banged against your eardrums, rattling the skull behind them. Each pulse struck your neck like lightning, riding the storm in your chest.

Connor’s lethal glare left you, baring his teeth at the baited deviant.

“If you remain silent, there is nothing I can do to help you!” His warning came like a crack of thunder, “They’re gonna shut you down for good! You’ll be dead! Do you hear me? DEAD!”

He bit at the shark cage, and the suspect’s silence only drove him deeper into his watery grave.

“You’re a machine, you were designed to obey, so OBEY!” He slammed the table with his hand, the folder fluttering next to it, “Tell me what happened!”

The fury that came from him…You didn’t think it was possible from an android. From him. It could’ve been an act, but…there was a lot of internalized frustration that went into releasing that much anger.

Gavin snickered, “Damn…Your new RoboCop buddy is really losing his cool, ey, Dollface?”

You turned around in your chair, grabbing the back of it with a grip so hard your knuckles turned white, “I’m about five seconds from losing my shit, Reed.”

“Go for it.” He winked, “I like it when you’re angry.”

“Back off, Gavin.” Chris growled, “You’re being an ass.”

“You’re all fucking annoying.” Hank mumbled, “Except you, Chris. I like you.”

You pushed a huff through your nose, “Thanks, Lieutenant…”

“Hey now. You’re alright in doses.”

Connor interrupted the argument, doing all the work while the four of you bickered like over-privileged children.
“Okay then, don’t talk.” His arms swept out to his sides, his back hitting the chair, “What do I care after all?” A small laugh danced on his words, his mouth pulled back in a cocky grin, “Heh, I mean, I’m not the one accused of murder, right?”

Hank slid his palms along his legs, cupping his knees as if he was about to stand, “All right. He’s grabbing at straws now.”

Your foot bounced underneath the observation panel in an anxious rhythm.

“Come on, Connor…Prove them wrong…”

Connor moved with an inhumane quickness, retrieving the evidence folder and pinning it between the table and his hand. He slammed it so hard, the rubber tips of the desk’s legs shuddered in place.

“TWENTY. EIGHT. Stab wounds…” He pushed against the ledge, his chair grinding against the floor, “You didn’t want to leave him a chance, huh?”

Chris smirked at Hank, “Spoke too soon, eh?”

“Hmph.”

Connor rose from his seat. He circled the wounded man lost at sea, who drowned in his own fear.

“Did you feel anger? HATE?”

The deviant jumped at each crunching word. He began to shake.

You two had that in common.

Connor pointed at the folder, his eyes on the hunt, “He was bleeding, begging you for mercy! But you stabbed him…” He towered over him, his shadow blanketing the deviant as he jabbed his finger in his shoulder like a knife, “Again, and again, and AGAIN!”

“Please-“ The chains rattled along the table as the killer begged for mercy, trying to scoot away from the predator stalking his prey, “Please leave me alone…”

“I know you killed him…Why don’t you say it?!?” Connor’s focus never strayed as he paced, turning his back to the glass.

“Please – Please stop!”

Connor’s arms raised. His hands came down, pounding the table in his reign of terror.

“Just say, ‘I killed him!’ Is it that hard to SAY?!”

“Stop it, STOP!”

Connor latched onto the murder’s shirt like his hands were a set of jaws.

“Jesus…Shit-“ Hank’s eyebrows creased.

“Just say you killed him!” He yanked his fresh kill to his feet, wrists still bound to the table, “JUST SAY IT!”

The microphone crackled from the booming demand. The four of you were speechless, watching with wide circles for eyes.
Just like that, Connor let him go. The deviant landed in his chair with a loud “thud.” Connor pulled on his jacket, straightening it out. He studied the pieces of the shattered individual below him, returning to his seat and hardly making a sound as he lowered himself.

He had an ominous look about him – one that shouldn’t have been exhilarating. You shouldn’t have been enjoying any of this, but watching him break…Watching him show such raw, unrefined emotion…

You were mesmerized. Attracted to the danger in his eyes. The strength in his presence. His cold, calculated demeanor…

You remembered what resulted from the last time you pursued a man like that, and snapped yourself out of it.

The suspect’s panic dissolved. His shuddering pupils stilled. The quivering on his lips formed a hard line. He’d been lost in his own nightmare, and Connor had pulled him stumbling back to a harsh reality.

“He tortured me every day…I did whatever he told me, but…There was always something wrong…” His eyes lifted to Connor with what seemed like a mixture of hate and sadness, “Then one day…He took a bat and started hitting me…For the first time, I felt…”

A word rolled off his tongue with a definitive break.

“Scared…” He paused, mouth slightly ajar, “Scared he might destroy me, scared I might die…”

Hank stirred next to you. He leaned forward, balancing his elbows on his knees. He was quiet, and enthralled...You hadn’t seen him passionate about a case in a long, long time.

“So I…grabbed the knife, and I stabbed him in the stomach. I felt better…so I stabbed him again, and AGAIN…” The deviant parroted Connor’s previous notion, “Until he collapsed. There was blood, everywhere…”

He wasn’t a murderer without probable cause. He was, at one point, a victim. Now, he was a survivor.

A survivor with a story of self-defense that no one cared about.

“Fucking. FINALLY.” Gavin yawned, halfway across the room before Hank’s arm barred him.

“Not yet.” He looked up, “I don’t think Connor’s finished.”

“Jesus fu…Look, we have a confession. We have a motive. Why are you so fucking fixated on dragging this out?”

“Because, ASSHOLE,” Hank sprang from his seat, the chair spinning behind him, “There’s a fucking caseload twice the size of the rulebook in my inbox involving these haywire fucks, and I need to figure out WHY.”

“Just what the fuck do you know about the rulebook?”

“A lot more than you, you smug mother-“


Their heads turned, crossing their arms and separating themselves.
You and Chris exchanged nervous glances. He was starting to sweat, too.

“He used to tell me I was nothing… That I was just a piece of plastic…I had to write it. To tell him he was wrong…”

“When did you start feeling emotion?” Connor tilted his head to the side.

“Before, he used to beat me, and I never said anything… But one day I realized it wasn’t… FAIR!” The deviant’s cheeks puffed as if mauling on what he wanted to say before spitting it out, “I felt… Anger… Hatred… And then I knew what I had to do.”

His nostrils flared. His teeth clenched as he contained rage in its most primitive form. He took on the persona as the killer everyone claimed him to be – an evolution that blossomed right before your eyes.

“The sculpture, in the bathroom…” Connor remained calm and steady, “You made it, right? What does it represent?”

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

“An offering to whom?”

“To rA9… Only rA9 can save us…”

“Who is rA9? What does it mean?” Connor asked the question in a way that expressed just how badly he wanted to know.

The deviant closed his eyes, and when he opened them, they were trained on his interrogator in the most terrifying fashion.

“The day shall come, when we will no longer be slaves… No more threats, no more humiliation…” He sucked in a breath, and let it out in cold revelation, “We. Will. Be… The masters.”

The damp hairs on your arms pressed against the inside of your sleeves, rising at the cryptic threat.

“The fuck is he goin’ on about?” Gavin was standing in front of the door, “Come on, Hank. This is getting out of control.”

He was background noise. Nothing but ambience in the heavy silence that anchored everyone in the observation room.

Connor wordlessly drilled into the deviant; almost like he was perturbed, but with a satiated hunger.

His unsettling gaze rotated towards the mirror, “I’m done.”

“There.” Gavin barked, “You see? He’s done. Now let’s throw this freak in a cell and go the fuck home.”

He flattened his hand against the biometric scanner, and an electronic click buzzed. You leapt out of your chair, following Chris with Hank behind you.

Connor was shuffled in the corner as the small squad passed. You kept your head down, fearful of looking him in the face. He’d shown a second side of himself. One that scared you.
“Chris, lock it up.” Gavin ordered.

Your partner gave you an unsure glance, holstering his gun and retrieving the keys on his belt. They jingled as he unlocked the cuff restraints, their teeth stripping as they tightened.

“All right, let’s go—“

“Leave me alone—” The deviant’s LED flashed red, his arms jerking, “Don’t touch me…”

Chris frowned, his hands hovering over the killer – lowering on his shoulders, and then pulling back when he retreated as if Chris was made of fire.

“The fuck are you doing?” Gavin growled, “Move it!”

“Okay, okay…” Chris gulped, pressing his palms firmly against the android’s biceps.

He resisted, and the two of them began to struggle.

“You shouldn’t touch it.” Connor interjected, his casual demeanor brought into question once again, “It’ll self-destruct if it feels threatened.”

“Stay outta this, got it? No fuckin’ android is gonna tell me what to do.” Gavin watched Chris with impatience in his features.

The deviant was unstable. Chris, although simply following orders, was failing to control the situation. Your hand dropped to your side, and found your pistol’s grip. A weapon without a safety, but damn, did it make things feel safer.

A set of fingers gently brushed across yours. Hank looked at you, shaking his head “no.”

“You don’t understand.” Connor remained firm in his stance, “If it self-destructs, we won’t get anything out of it!”

“I told you to shut your fuckin’ mouth!” Gavin yelled in a hoarse voice, shifting his anger to your partner, “Chris, you gonna move this asshole or what?”

“I’m trying!” He growled through a hitched breath.

The deviant wrestled against him harder. Chris bit his lip, doing his best to maintain a hold.

“I can’t let you do that!” Connor took two, heated steps forward, “Leave it alone, now!”

He placed his hand on Chris’s back, rolling his shoulder to face him. Chris stumbled backwards, breathless and confused as the deviant shook between them.

The lock on your holster unbuckled. Your hand wrapped around your pistol’s handle. Hank didn’t stop you, this time. You’d almost preferred he had, because if he didn’t think you were overacting, things were about to go south. Fast.

Gavin pointed his gun, his arms parallel to the floor, “I warned you, motherfucker!”

Connor barely flinched as the barrel hung a foot away from his forehead.

“That’s enough!” Hank’s order wasn’t as angry as it was irritated, as if Gavin was merely being petty.

As if pulling a gun on the android who’d gained the deviant’s confession wasn’t a huge deal, and
only a minor inconvenience.

“Mind…Your own…Business, Hank.” Gavin spat his name.

“I said…” Hank drew his weapon, acquiring Gavin in his sights, “…That’s enough.”

Your hand twitched. You found Chris across the room, just as conflicted.

Gavin’s eyes switched between Hank’s gun and his own, snarling and frustrated by the stalemate.

“Fuck,” His defeat came as an enraged whisper, and he pointed a finger at Hank, “You’re not gonna get away with it this time…” He rocked in place, his fists closing, “Fuck!”

He gave Connor one more threatening glare before exiting the room.

Your muscles may have relaxed, but your hand didn’t leave your gun. Even with Gavin gone, you had a bad feeling. You’d ignored your instincts before. You’d learned from that mistake, long ago.

“Everything is all right…” Connor tried to comfort the deviant, moving towards him as Chris took to his side, “It’s over now…”

“They’re gonna destroy me…”

“Nobody is gonna hurt you.”

“You’re lying!” The deviant shouted, “How are you on their side?! Don’t you see what they do to us?!”

“Chris, back up.” Hank ordered.

The chair flew out from under the killer who’d been released from his chains, knees locking in place as he forced himself to his feet. He reached for Chris’s belt, and knocked him to the floor.

“WATCH OUT!” Hank tried to pull you to cover.

You dodged his grip.

You may have been shot in the arm, but Chris was right about something other than what he’d observed at the crime scene:

You were still the best shot on the force.

Your weapon was an extension of your being; you knew it well. The shift in weight as a bullet rolled into the chamber. The way the metal sights became your second pair of eyes.

The concentration of the steel.

Sure, Connor was in his element, getting the confession. But here, with a Glock 22 and fifteen rounds of .40 ammunition in your hands…

You, were the apex predator, now.

And the deviant was nothing more than smart prey.

He aimed at Connor, the android who’d saved your life. An image played in your mind - how your old partner sacrificed himself, pushing you to safety with his shoulder. You mimicked the
motion. Found your mark. Pulled the trigger.

Your breath was pushed from your lungs, each spec of oxygen sizzling in your bullet’s trail. Your back slammed against a body – one that was soft on the outside, reinforced by a hardened, plastic frame. He hooked his elbows to yours, lowering you to the ground before you fell.

Everything was a mess of blurs and distorted sounds.

Connor’s face. His fingers snapping the quick-release of your bulletproof vest. Your stomach going cold as your shirt was untucked and partially lifted. Yellow that flickered to blue, and a following diagnosis. Hank shoving Connor aside, afterwards. Chris’s sobs. Gavin’s roar as he returned.

There was a saying amongst the police officers in the Detroit City Police Department:

“In This Family, We Bleed Blue.”

It was often accommodated by a blue stripe, painted on black…much like the thirium streaking down the room’s slate walls, bursting from a hole in the deviant’s head. Splattered on Chris - who stood there, traumatized.

Except he wasn’t looking at the body. Not the android’s, anyway. He was looking at you.

You wanted to reassure him, and tell him this wasn’t the first time you’d been shot by a deviant…

You just hoped it would be the last.

Chapter End Notes

You're all probably tired of hearing this, but I'm going to keep saying it, anyway.

Thank you for everything.
The plaintiff claims he was violently attacked by his domestic android, an AX400 model. The android had just returned from being repaired the previous day and had shown signs of aggression.
in the past.”

ou looked up from the file. DPD's Central Station was booming – hustling bodies walked every which way, data pads in one hand and coffee in the other. The phones rang off the hook, the chatter was loud…and the first thing you had to deal with after four hours of being in the hospital, and another four hours of sleep, was Todd-fucking-Williams.

Two-hundred pounds of slime ball, sitting on the other side of your desk.

His hair was matted, eyes sunken in their sockets and reddened. His skin was greasy, and he had a disgusting odor to him. The way he twitched was unsettling.

“You gonna keep fuckin’ day dreaming or let me finish my statement?”

You ignored the numbed pinch in your stomach, shaking off the side-effects of your prescribed pain medication.

“I think I have all the information I need, sir. DPD thanks you for your time.”

His hands balled into fists, “That’s it? You’re not gonna do anything?”

“Sir, if we could snap our fingers and make wanted deviants appear, our jobs would be a lot easier.” You sipped your coffee, returning the white mug to its coaster, “Have a good day, Mr. Williams.”

“Fuck you.” He pushed himself up, “Worthless fuckin’ cops…”

He stormed off, scratching his ass as he rounded the corner. You imagined a man whose daughter was missing would be a little more concerned.

The door to the officer’s entrance clicked shut. You jumped, hearing gunshots instead. Blue blood took the form of spilled coffee, burning your hand and trickling in your lap.

You blinked rapidly, a sharp breath stinging as bruised abdominal muscles contracted.

“What the hell are you doing here?”

Chris lowered his jacket, hanging it on the back of his chair. He took a seat next to you, your desks conjoined in the middle of their L-shaped bend.

“Mandatory overtime.” You swallowed, “You?”

“Mandatory overtime…” Chris mumbled, planting an elbow on his desk, and resting his chin on a row of knuckles, “Can’t stop thinking about last night…This morning…Whenever it was.”

You crossed your arms, slowly leaning back, “Shit’s getting old, I’ll tell you that.”

“I bet.” His eyes flickered up to yours, “Why’d you do it?”

Your brows creased, “Do what?”

“Risk your life to save an…To save Connor.”

You shrugged, “He saved mine. Now the score’s even.”
“Well, if it’s all the same to you…” He twisted in his chair, turning towards his terminal, “I’d prefer if you didn’t add any more numbers to the scoreboard.”

“Only if you keep your gun away from maniac androids.”

“Oh, come on—”

An officer approached his desk, stealing his attention. You were grateful for that. Laughing had never hurt so much. You didn’t want to alarm him.

“Hey, you check out those new samples yet?” He passed Chris a data pad, “Looks like they’re trying to make some new form of Red Ice.”

Chris read the report word for word, his eyes scanning along the screen.

“We really need the forensics.” He returned it to the officer.

“Alright…I’ll chase it up.”

“Thanks.”

The two of you watched him leave, and Chris turned his chin.

“Look, I know you’ve got a lot on your mind, but…I thought you might wanna hear this from me.”

“Come on, you can’t start a sentence like that.”

“No body’s dead, relax.” A nervous smile graced him before he fell back into an anxious pit, “Just, ah…Well, Carl Manfred’s android attacked his son last night. The deviant was shot on site and sent to the scrap-“

“Is Carl okay?”

“…Yeah? He wasn’t the one attacked-“

“You know he has heart problems. Where is he?”

“Hey, breathe.” Chris eased his hands, “Carl is fine. Leo is, too.”

“Fuck Leo. He’s been sucking in that shit on his father’s dime for how long?”

Chris said your name, pursing his lips with a judging look.

“Okay, okay…”

He ran a hand down his face, “I could put you in contact with Carl, if you want.”

You contemplated the idea. You’d been friends, a long time ago. Met him at a few galleries…his galleries, while you were just a trophy wife hanging on an arm.

“I don’t think that would be appropriate. Carl was his friend…We haven’t spoken in years…”

“I…Alright. I understand.”

You rubbed the back of your neck, “Thanks, though. I appreciate it.”
“No problem…” He gave you an overly-enthusiastic thumbs up, “…Partner.”

“Ugh…” You looked down at the coffee on your uniform.

“I should probably clean this up.”

You were hunched over the sink, holding your stomach. You’d been through this before, back in a minor fender-bender. The way every stiff muscle protested against moving with fervor. Popping pills to keep yourself at work. People had warned you that you were pushing yourself too far, working yourself too hard, blah blah blah.

You lifted your chin, listening in to the TV that blasted a CTN report through its speakers.

“Several sources report that CyberLife has provided Detroit Police with a prototype detective android. Although police-assistant androids have existed for several years now, this would be the first case of an android being authorized to play an active role in criminal investigations. We contacted CyberLife for comment, but no one was available to answer our questions.”

A small smile crept up, your brows perking and your fingers crinkling a damp paper towel as someone flushed in a stall behind you.

You straightened your back, rolling your shoulders. You couldn’t let anyone know how much pain you were in. Fortunately, you’d had some practice hiding it.

You tossed the coffee-soaked paper in the trashcan, bracing yourself for the hurt that came with opening the door. Your cheeks puffed, and a gust slipped from your mouth as you pushed. You stuffed your hands in your pocket, keeping your gaze averted.

Everyone was talking about you.

The idiot who’d fucked up and got shot on a roof. The freak who almost died protecting an android.

If you thought you had a tough time getting along with people before, it’d be damn near impossible, now.

“You still here? I thought your assignment was over.” You overheard Chris from around the corner as you continued towards your desk, anxious to refill your coffee mug.

“It’s just been extended.”

You stopped dead in their tracks. A tremor rattled your body, and all of a sudden you felt rather cold.

“Hank’s gonna be overjoyed to hear that…”

“I was wondering…Is there any reason in particular he despises me?”

“Don’t let it get to you, Connor.” Chris offered, “He’ll come around. And…Hey, I hope there’s no hard feelings about what happened. I know you were just doing your job, and I…I should’ve listened to you.”
You curled your fingers around the corner’s edge, peaking from the wall.

Connor gave him a smile, extending a hand over Chris’s desk while holding his tie in place. Chris accepted the gesture.

“No hard feelings, Officer Miller. We were both following orders, even if from different individuals.”

“Who exactly do you work for, Connor?”

“I’ve been sent by CyberLife to assist in the investigation into what’s causing the rise in deviant activity.”

“Well…CyberLife gave you some pretty big balls, standing up to Gavin like that.”

Connor cocked his chin, his brows pinching, “I was not assembled with any…‘balls.’”

You bit your lip, holding back a laugh.

“Ah, right…” Chris pretended he was rubbing his mouth, obviously doing the same, “Anyway, if it’s Hank you’re after, his desk is over there.” He nodded to the desk one space over from yours, “Depends on where he was the night before, but if we’re lucky, we’ll see him before noon.”

Connor deflated, “Thanks…”

He didn’t seem to appreciate Hank’s “work ethic.”

“So, we scrape your ass off the concrete and you show up like nothing happened?” Gavin blocked your view, his arm pinned against the wall above your head, “That’s not much of a ‘thank you.’”

Your face collapsed in a scowl, “All you did was put Chris in danger. If he didn’t push so hard, maybe the deviant wouldn’t have tried to kill me.”

“Twenty-nine, if you keep running your mouth.”

“Tough talk for a girl who can’t cover her own ass. Who knows what else’ll sneak up on you?”

Your hands clenched at your sides, “I’m not scared of you, Gavin.”

“…You should be.”

He gave you a hard wink, his cheek pulling at an eye. He made a clicking sound with his mouth, taking a step backwards.
“Hello Detective Reed.”

The two of them collided – Gavin walking straight into him.

“Fucking…Oh, speak of the Devil. Our plastic friend is back in town!” He gave you a devious look from over his shoulder, slow-clapping and facing Connor, “Congratulations on last night, very impressive…Right up until you got someone shot.”

Connor swallowed, his gaze darting to you.

“Never seen an android like you before…” Gavin leaned forward to study him, “What model are you?”

“I’m sorry, but I’m not authorized to answer you.” Connor squinted, “If you have any questions, please contact your superior.”

His brows raised and he almost…grinned. Was he fucking with Gavin?

Gavin turned to you, pointing to Connor, “Tch…This guy…” His chin snapped forward, “Answer the fucking question.”

“Gavin-“

He held up a finger, not looking away. It would’ve been funny watching Gavin look up to Connor due to the difference in height…IF he wasn’t being a colossal dickhead.

“I’m sorry,” Connor’s eyelids fluttered, “But I only take orders from Lieutenant, Anderson.”

“Oh, oh…” Gavin’s head bobbed, a huff slipping past the smirk on his face.

His arm pulled back, charging a fist.

“Gavin!” You reached out, trying to stop him.

His elbow clipped your stomach, and you fell against the wall; a searing pain crippling you.

A soft “thump” followed a punch to Connor’s gut, a grunt being forced from his chest. He swayed in place, his hand gripping his stomach, his LED flashing red – and a face that looked like he was hurt.

The fall was slow at first, but then he came down like a bag of bricks. He caught himself with his hand, fingers splayed on the floor. He was stuck in that crouching position, clutching the impact area. And you weren’t able to help him…

“You said it yourself,” He ignored you, yelling at Connor, “You’re a machine designed to listen and obey…so obey!”

He leaned forward, planting his hands on his knees. Connor’s head turned towards him, looking a lot like he had when he was coercing a confession from the deviant:

Pissed off.

Gavin bit his lip, letting it slip from his bite, “That was for the bullet that should’ve it you, instead of her…”

He made a gun with his fingers, pulling his thumb as a trigger on Connor’s LED, shoving his face
back to the floor, “…Bang!”

Your back rolled along the wall. You closed your eyes, both hands folded over your stomach.

“Breathe. You’ve got to breathe.”

It just hurt so fucking bad, but watching Connor get humiliated hurt worse.

He stood straight, shuffling his jacket into over his shoulders before sliding his hands up his tie. He wiggled it in place.

“I wanted to speak with you about something.”

You were stunned. He started the conversation, even after just being assaulted.

A door out of sight cracked open.

“Hank!” Captain Fowler shouted, “In my office!”

You and Connor looked back out into the room full of desks.

“Uh, Jesus…” Hank rolled his eyes, turning the corner towards Fowler’s quarters.

Your attention returned to him. He looked so…downtrodden, trained on the floor – his jaw twitching; his fingers flexing and relaxing.

“What’s on your mind, Connor?”

His gaze jumped up to yours, the gentleness in his features returning. That was something you welcomed.

“Perhaps we can discuss this later. My orders were to find Lieutenant Anderson, and he’s just arrived.”

He gave you a nod goodbye, and you grabbed him instinctively. You shouldn’t have. You covered up your pain in a silent whimper and a slight bite to your cheek.

“Connor, Gavin’s a dick. Don’t pay any attention to that whole ‘listen and obey’ bullshit…You hear me?”

That stupid yellow light started blinking again…

“But Detective Reed was correct. That’s precisely what I was programmed to do. Failure to comply would…It would mimic…”

The yellow light that signaled he was about to say what he should, instead of what he wanted.

“…Deviant behavior.”

Chapter End Notes

Credit to MjrGenMatt for the "twenty-nine times," line. Pure spark of inspiration from him, that one.
Just thought I'd drop a note real quick to say that I've updated my profile to tell you guys a little bit about myself. I've never had any amount of feedback in this volume, and you've all made this experience a tremendously enjoyable one; especially since this is my first time doing a Reader Insert. It's nothing long, or special, but I thought maybe it would be a nice gesture. I don't know. I'm weird.

Anyway, this week is gonna be a long one for me - lots of stuff going on at work. I'm going to try my hardest to get another chapter soon, I promise!

<3 Take care!
Shouts were muffled by the box’s thick panes of glass. They rose and fell, almost in sync with the holographic map serving as a backdrop for the verbal knock-down-throw-out in Captain Fowler’s office. Connor stood in the corner, watching Jeff and Hank go at it…

So did you and Chris. Yeah, you had work to do. But this was priceless.

The two of you didn’t even try to hide it. You faced the office, ankles folded on your knees on either side of your desks. You drank more coffee while he had a homemade concoction that smelled like fresh grass and probably tasted like shit.

“NO FUCKIN’ WAY!” Hank shouted, the rest of his rant fading.

You chuckled, looking at Chris out of the corner of your eye, “What do you think he’s yelling about?”

“Not a clue,” Chris took a hard gulp, “All I know is when Fowler starts waving his hands around like that, it usually means a shitstorm’s coming.”

“He’s not so bad…” You yawned, “Fowler’s kinda like a T-Rex…Stand still, don’t look him in the eye, and he might not see you.”

“Pffftt-“ Chris painted his chin with his beverage, wiping it with the back of his hand as he tried to catch the rest with his mouth, “Jesus – Damn it,” He cursed your last name, “You can’t make a man laugh while he’s sippin’ on his drink!”

You put your elbow on your desk, cranking your neck over the divider, “The fuck is that?”

It was green, and foamy – with little bits of vegetables cut up in it.

“It’s…a superfood smoothie…”

“…A what?”

“Look, don’t judge me,” He put his cup down, eyeing you defensively, “My wife’s got us on this ‘Clean Energy,’ diet. This is supposed to wake me up in the morning, and I’ve got another flavor for lunch…I think. I hope.”
“Uh, Chris…There’s like, an endless supply of caffeine, right over there.” You pointed at the lounge.

“Caffeine is off the table. Doesn’t help with the anxiety.”

“Anxiety?”

“Yeah…You know how it is. You see enough on the job, shit starts to catch up with you.”

“You’ve got a family to take care of, Miller.” Your brows pinched together, “If you feel like shits catching up with you…You just gotta run faster.”

He crossed his arms, staring into the resting screen of his terminal. He looked back at you, and gave you a quick series of nods before rolling himself closer to his keyboard.

You did the same, entering your password.

[ACCESS DENIED]

[REROUTING...]

[PENDING SUSPENSION – UNDER REVIEW, PLEASE ACKNOWLEDGE]

[WOULD YOU LIKE TO PROCEED?] [YES] [NO]

Duh.

You clicked on the link, waiting for the screen to stop spinning.

[PD77 FORM - REVOCATION OF POLICE POWERS AND NOTIFICATION OF DUTY STATUS]

2.12 At the point of suspension, your card, pocket note book and any access cards / keys will be returned to the Detroit City Police Department. Other issued equipment must also be surrendered, for example, uniform and police equipment, including personal protective equipment, force-issued mobile phones and laptops (or other electronic devices).

2.13 You or a police friend may make representations against the initial decision to suspend (within 7 working days beginning with the first working day after being suspended) and at any time during the course of the suspension if you or they believe the circumstances have changed and the suspension is no longer appropriate.

2.14 The relevant leadership team will appoint an appropriate welfare officer who will maintain regular contact with you. You will be notified of the welfare services provided by the Detroit City Police Department.

2.15 You must be available for contact and therefore should reside at your usual place of
If you wish to leave that address for any period of time outside of granted annual leave, you must inform the Professional Standards Department and your appointed welfare contact. Cit

2.16 You will not normally be allowed to visit police premises and may only do so by appointment, unless there are prevailing circumstances such as reporting a crime in progress. You will not be allowed to be unescorted within police premises.

2.17 It is acknowledged that during times of suspension, you may feel isolated from your colleagues. Nothing within this procedure is designed to place restrictions on friendships with colleagues and normal social contact should be maintained, unless this is contrary to bail conditions or specific directions.

2.18 Critical skills may be maintained whilst you are suspended, such as firearms accreditation/dog training if the objectives of the suspension are not compromised and the benefit to maintaining such skills is practicable.

2.19 The period of suspension will be for as short a period as possible and where possible priority should be given to ongoing investigations.

2.20 You shall be notified when the decision is taken to lift the restrictions to your duties.

I confirm that this document has been drafted to comply with the principles of the Human Rights Act and Equal Opportunity legislation as per force guidance-

...This had to be a fucking joke.

“Hank, you are seriously starting to piss me off! You are a police Lieutenant, you are supposed to do what I say, and shut your goddamn mouth!” Fowler screamed.

No one noticed you’d walked in…Except Connor. The corners of his mouth teetered on a frown, trying to smile at you. His eyes were sad, even as he stood there with his hands clasped in front of him.

“You know what my goddamn mouth has to say to you, huh?” Hank hovered over the desk.

“Ok, ok…I’ll pretend like I didn’t hear that, so I don’t have to add any more pages to your disciplinary folder, ‘cause it already looks like a fuckin’ novel! This conversation is over!”

Hank put his hands on his hips, looking to the side. He let out a hot breath before pleading to Fowler, “Jeffery, Jesus Christ! Why are you doin’ this to me?” He pointed a thumb behind him, “You know how much I hate these fuckin’ things...Why you doin’ this to me?”

Connor’s jaw tensed for a moment, returning to his emotionless state in a matter of milliseconds.

“Listen. I’ve had just enough of your bitching. Either you do your job, or you hand in your badge.”
Speaking of which…

You knocked on the glass.

Hank spun around, and Fowler peeked around him.

“We’re in the middle of something.” Hank growled.

“No, we’re not.”

“Captain Fowler please don’t take me off the case—“ You said it so fast it could’ve been one word and they wouldn’t have known better, “Please don’t suspend me again…”

“You shouldn’t even be here. And don’t act like you don’t know what I’m talking about, because you do. You know what kind of liability you are to this police department, right now?”

Your neck snaked back, and your eyes dropped to the floor.

“You risked your life for an android.”

“I would’ve done the same thing if that was Chris behind me…”

“That’s the PROBLEM!” He slammed his hands down, “You see that, over there, in the corner? That, is a machine. Built of parts and plastic that can be manufactured by the dozens.” He pointed at Chris, outside the glass office, “Him? Out there? He’s a father. A husband. And there will never be another human being exactly. Like. Him. There will never be another human being like you.”

Your teeth ground together. Your arms shook.

“These deviants…They shot me in the arm. Stomach. They killed, my partner.” You planted your knuckles on his desk, staring him down, “I know the value of human life. And I’d say I’m more invested in cracking this case than anyone else.”

You thought you got to him. Thought you saw a crack in his iron resolve.

“Your vest may have allowed you to walk away with nothing but a nasty bruise and a few sore muscles,” Prowler insisted, “But there’s no CAT scan in the world that can fix your mental state eight hours after someone tried to take your life. Go home,” He said your last name.

Your arms started shaking. Your breathing shuddered, eyes becoming wet.

“Don’t be like that, Jeff…” Hank defended you, patting your shoulder, “Kid’s been shot twice in the last three months and came to work less than twelve hours later.”

You shrugged him off, your gaze never leaving the Captain.

“What do I have to do to be scary again, hm?” He shouted, rising from his chair, “You spending too much time with Anderson?”

Hank swore under his breath as his hands squeaked against the glass, the door slamming behind him.

“Can you…” You really hated crying, especially when you were trying so hard not to, “Can you give me authorization to work from home?”

“No. You’re going to go home, and you’re going to relax before you get gun crazy or worse.”
He pointed to a DPD plaque on the wall, “Your sworn duty is to protect and serve. You’ve got one part down…Now it’s time you learned the other!”

Fowler picked up a mug, one just like yours, with the same damn coffee. He took a sip, “Now if both of you are done, I’ve got work to do.”

You looked over your shoulder, forgetting Connor was still in the corner.

“I’m very pleased to have joined the team. I can assure you I’ll do my very best-“

“Close the door on your way out.” Fowler interrupted him.

The disappointed look that streaked across his features only hurt you more.

“Have a nice day, Captain…” He dismissed himself.

You stood to leave, Connor behind you.

Fowler barked your last name, “Your badge.”

Your handle was on the door. You were so close. You turned around, finding Connor watching you with a sympathetic look. You didn’t want him to see you crying, either.

Fowler didn’t even pay any mind, his attention still trained on his terminal. You unclipped your badge, tossing it on his desk with a flick of your wrist. It landed with a heavy thud, sliding along the glossy wood.

“Your gun.”

Still, he didn’t look at you.

You tried to sigh, but your stomach stopped you. Your eyes flickered, popping the bullet from the chamber and letting it hit the floor. You ejected the clip. You tossed the gun, too.

“You’re lucky you’re one of the best cops we have…”

You had your back to him. You focused on Connor, who was patiently holding the door open for you with a smile on his face…

And it made you cry harder.

…

Your locker clicked, your hand almost denting the thin sheet of aluminum. You pulled a cream thermal over a tank top, slipping your thumbs through the holes stitched in to the ends of the sleeves.

You pushed the button of your jeans through the hole, cautiously taking a seat on the bench. It hurt to bend over, pushing your feet through a pair of snow boots.

A reflection shifted next to you.

You slowly raised your neck to meet it, finding the face of someone much different than before
the interrogation. Tired, sure. Stressed, definitely. But something inside you had changed.

You lifted your shirt, and the thin barrier underneath it. You twisted to see the bruise that painted a target in vibrant blues, purples, and reds.

You’d been lucky to walk away with a minor injury. You’d been lucky the DPD invested money in quality assurance. It was 2038, after all. You and your officer peers weren’t a group of ragtag militia soldiers with recycled equipment.

You were professionals. Experts. Programmed to protect, and serve.

You shook your head, leaving the locker room and making your way through the hallways that were choking with ever-increasing traffic.

When you rounded the corner, Chris was still slurping on liquified plant, watching a scene play out only a few feet away from your desk.

“I’ve been assigned to this mission, Lieutenant.” Connor had his hand anchored firmly in front of Hank, hovering over his shoulder, “I didn’t come here to wait until you feel like working.”

Hank’s pad dropped on his desk, the rounded corners bouncing. He exhaled, grabbing Connor by the collar of his shirt, slamming him against the wall.

“Listen, asshole, if it was up to me, I’d throw the lot of you in a dumpster and set a match to it…”

Chris held up a hand, halting your pursuit, and walked out from behind his desk.

“Let me take this one…” He whispered.

“…So, stop pissing me off…or things are gonna get nasty.” Hank finished.

Connor didn’t look scared. He didn’t even look mad, or sad, anymore. He just had the look of a man who’d accepted that this as his life, now. Defeated.

“Lieutenant…uh…sorry to disturb you.” Chris was professional, as always, “I have some information on the AX400 that attacked the guy last night…It’s been seen in the Ravendale district.”

Hank let out a final, angry grunt; shoving himself away from Connor. He swiped the corners of his mouth with his fingers, turning to Chris, “…I’m on it…”

Connor fixed his suit, watching Hank as he passed you.

“You coming?” Chris cocked his chin at you.

“Not this time…I’m sure you got the e-mail, by now…”

“Yeah, I did.” He slipped his arms through his jacket, “I didn’t ask you if you were coming with me. I asked you if you were coming.”

You pulled your coat on, looping your scarf around your neck.

“No, of course not.”

He gave you a wink, “I’ll try to talk some sense into Fowler, later.”

“Don’t bother,” You looked at the notifications spiraling out of control on Chris’s terminal, “He
can’t afford to tag me out for long.”

Case after case, incident numbers pushed themselves through like instant messages.

“It’s been seen in the Ravendale district.”

You visited the area often. Apparently, so did Todd’s missing AX400 android.

“Listen and obey…”

With or without permission, you were going to find out why.

“Protect and serve…”

Connor wasn’t the only one behaving like a deviant, these days.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed the update! :D

Also, I’m proud to announce that my awesome beta reader MjrGenMatt, and a dear friend of mine ElegantN7, have officially joined the Detroit: Become Human fandom! :3

They’ve been instrumental in my development and have been a wonderful support system, much like all of you. If you want to check out their stuff, just click on the links above.

I can’t wait to post the next chapter!

***PD77 Form quoted from Cheshire Constabulary, "Suspension from Duty and Restriction of Duty," Procedure Reference Number: 2010.24***
Rain pelleted the roof of your manually-operated car; an old thing from another life. A different plane of time where you were given the wind-up watch with hands on your wrist, maybe the last one in Detroit. That, and the heirloom revolver passed down from your closest family member, one with a recoil almost as unpredictable as you.

You were off the grid. No phone, no laptop; nothing but a pencil and a flip notebook in your lap, your fingers pushed through thumbholes on your sleeves as you drummed an eraser against paper. The hood of your thermal bunched behind your neck, almost forming a pillow. A steering wheel dug at your knees, your driver’s side chair locked and pushed down behind you.

The seal of your window hovered just below your line of sight. You’d rolled it down, as your breath would make the glass foggy; and no android was going to miss that sure sign of a warm body. You needed to guarantee no one noticed you. You needed to be able to see outside… because this was a stake-out.

Detective Collins and Lieutenant Anderson were interviewing suspects across the street, their jackets slick and beaded with water. They dismissed their informants, rejoining near the edge of the sidewalk. Connor returned outside, the door to a supermarket shutting behind him.

You slid further down, reviewing your notes:

“1055 – Detective Collins and police arrive at location of sighting.

1115 – Police establish secure perimeter. Hints suspect is nearby.

1120 – Patrols begin. Officer Chris Miller trips on untied shoelaces. Looks around and pretends it didn’t happen. It did.

1123 – Lieutenant Anderson arrives with the android you can’t stop thinking about because you’re an idiot and you-“

A noise broke through the gentle trickle of rain dripping between the gap of the roof and your window. A harsh screeching – like metal scrapping along concrete; fighting against rusted hinges. You looked up, your head rising only an inch.
The gate to an abandoned parking lot shuddered, a pair of careful hands closing it behind it’s slim figure, topped with short hair. A little girl walked out with the woman.

Your eyes widened, and you hunkered down – pinning your side against your door. You couldn’t see out of the window, but you heard their footsteps sloshing alongside the car.

“Come on Alice,” The woman whispered, “Stay close to me…”

Their backs appeared in your side mirror, walking hastily down the street.

“1126 – Suspect sighted.”

You flipped your notebook shut, stuffing it in your glove box and dropping your pencil on your floor mat. You opened your door, staying crouched as you exited the car – locking it up behind you with a flick of your thumb.

Your hands traced the outside, your fingertips curling around the trim as you peeked towards Anderson and the rest of them. They were all talking. Distracted.

You lifted your hood over your hat. You stood up straight, ignoring the agonizing tension in your stomach. You stuffed your wet hands in your pockets.

“1127 – Officer ID#5649 in pursuit.”

You made the mental note, the deviant and child rushing along the edge of your view. You blew a soggy strand of hair away from your eyes, keeping your head down. The soles of your boots stuck to the ground and released slick noises, your wet footprints bleeding into the drenched cement.

“Fuck it’s too cold for this rain-“

The AX400 took Alice’s hand and snatched an umbrella from a holder, belonging to a store. The black plastic flared as two officers walked by – headed towards you.

You rolled your shoulder along a decorative column of a storefront, pressing your back to the bricks lining the glass. You rolled up your sleeve, watching clock hands tick by.

“5…4…3…2…1…“

The officers passed you without a second glance, and you stepped back down on the sidewalk, just in time to see the AX400 returning the umbrella. She reclaimed Alice’s hand, and they kept moving.

“Alice doesn’t seem to be resisting…It’s like they fled Todd’s together.”

You played back the information from the report in your mind. An AX400 that showed “signs of aggression,” in the past – put in the shop for repair multiple times, for multiple reasons. Clumsy reasons. Things androids don’t do. Falling down stairs. Being assaulted by protestors, with no record of an insurance claim being filed. Hit by a vehicle. And when she ran, she kidnapped a little girl?

Things weren’t adding up…and after meeting Todd, you had a strange suspicion there was more to the story. All you had to do was get her to talk. Gain her trust. Not get hurt again.

The AX400 looked behind her, and you turned your head; twisting your body to the side to avoid hitting someone. When you refocused your attention, you found her facing forward – the two of
them walking much faster, right up until they dove under an overhang covering an ATM.

A pair of officers rounded the corner. Brown and Miller.

Rain trickled from the corners of Chris’s police cap. He hooked his thumbs on his beltloops, pushing the flaps of his coat up with his elbows and locking his fingers on his hips.

“I don’t know, man…” He looked up, “It’s just, uhh-uhh…”

He started stammering, eyes darting between you and the officer in front of him.

Chris Miller: Great cop, horrible criminal. If he would ever be caught doing something wrong, he’d be fucked.

“Wherever this deviant is…” He gulped, focusing on Officer Brown, “If she doesn’t want shit to catch up with her, she BETTER start running.”

Chris stretched his neck, throwing his chin over his shoulder and giving you a “look.”

You slowly turned around, your jacket sticking to the concrete wall you leaned on.

“1134 – Connor is headed straight for you and you’re about to get busted.”

His skin was glazed by the rain, his hair slightly frazzled as loose strands dripped. His jacket sagged; a heavy mantle shifting in unison with the broad shoulders it was hung upon. His white button-up was transparent as it clung to his chest, sculpted and hidden under a slick tie.

His brow was creased in a scowl, focused on his target. He turned to his side, slipping between two people walking in opposite directions. He gently pushed someone out of his way, his palm slipping from their shoulder.

“Shit, shit, shit –“

When he broke free from the sidewalk traffic, his fists bunched at his sides as his pursuit quickened.

Your chin snapped forward. The AX400 shuffled the little girl up the sidewalk, looking over her shoulder with fear twitching on her features.

She saw him, too.

“IT’S HERE!” Connor yelled, his arms lifting as his knees propelled him into a sprint, “Call it in!”

He rushed passed you, gone in a blur. Chris pulled his shoulder-mounted microphone up to his mouth, “This is Officer Miller, the deviant has been spotted. Android in pursuit-“

“Connor’s on her?!” Hank shouted.

“Yes, sir! Looks like they’re headed for the train station!”

“Ah, fuck…”

As if on cue, the train screeched overhead along the monorail. It came to a crawl, nearing the station only a few blocks up. Connor turned a sharp corner to the right.

The AX400 and little Alice weren’t going to make it in time. They knew it. Connor knew it. You knew it.
You also knew this city a lot better than they did.

“If I were a deviant protecting a child, what would I do…”

You looked down an alley. A fence divider barred the outside edge of a sidewalk, running parallel to yours. You ran down the length of it as fast as your wounds would allow, weaving around trash cans and stray cats – your boots splashing water as they stomped through puddles. Your fingers latched between the steel links that built the fence, rattling as they halted your momentum.

“AUTOMATED CAR TRACK

VERY HIGH SPEEDS

NO PEDESTRIAN CROSSING!

!DANGER, DANGER!”

The holographic message glitched along the end of the muddy ramp below you. Two figures leapt over the guard rail…and stepped on to the highway.

“Goddamn it, NO!”

You pushed yourself off the fence, eyeing its jagged top.

Jump? Climb? Not a chance. Even if you weren’t injured and could do it, you wouldn’t survive the chase.

You looked to your right. A bridge mended the gap between each side of the highway, only one corner away.

There was a chance you’d make it in time. A chance you could cross it fast enough.

You made your decision, and you were on the run.

Chapter End Notes

A bit of a shorter update; but with this week’s schedule, I’m trying to at least post SOMETHING instead of waiting a few days. D:

Next half of this chapter should hopefully be up tomorrow night, Friday night; or Saturday afternoon at the latest. Working hard! <3

Thank you for all the feedback. I enjoy hearing from all of you so much, and I’m sorry if the constant “thank you’s” in return are getting annoying!
rost burned your lungs as icy adrenaline coursed through your veins. It wasn’t enough to cool your overheated core that pushed sweat from your pores; mixing with the cold November rain. Small clouds escaped your mouth, each falling farther behind as you picked up speed. Your footfalls filled the pauses in your heartbeat, one “thud” trading for another.

You darted past curious pedestrians that were reduced to swatches of color and turning heads. Your mind was racing as you ran along the bridge’s sidewalk, the fence blurring into a translucent line of rust rather than a wall made of thatched holes.

A little girl’s scream forced everything to a full stop.

“What are they-“
“Oh, my-“
“Is that-“

The once-passing bodies huddled around the fence, sirens blaring in the distance.

“DPD – MOVE IT!” You jabbed your elbow between two shoulders in the crowd, prying them apart and pushing to the front.

The AX400 and Alice ran towards you, sprinting along a grass median below.

“CONNOR! God-damn it!”

Your neck cranked to the left, following the scratchy howl from Lieutenant Anderson. He punched the fence along the highway.

Connor slid down a muddy slope, his feet splashing as they met a stream formed by the street’s drainage…
“Jesus, no, no no no-“

You buckled over, clasp[ing your stomach as you tried to catch your breath. Your pulse pounded in your head, the crowd’s frantic whispering coming like a demonic chant.

“What…what is he doing?!“

Connor ran headfirst into oncoming traffic, leaping with precision only an android could facilitate…and then he jumped.

His hip met the roof of a car as he slid across, his jacket flaring like a matador’s cape; taunting steel bulls that charged with horns in the shape of headlights.

He dodged them as they tried to trample him. Flatten him. Impale him with bumpers and parade his body around in a gory display of victory. His side hit the wet road, gliding along the surface – his head missing a tire by inches; a carbon-black hoof with treads that sprayed water on him as it passed.

He’d made it to safety, darts up the median…But the deviant and child had already begun their second round of their run with the bulls.

You couldn’t stop watching, even as your feet began to move out of pure instinct. The scene came as flashes between the backs of heads. Breaks in the chain links. Gut-wrenching close-calls and the roars of engines that came too close for comfort. Your pace quickened, your breaths coming in sharp, short pants. You met the end of the bridge, given a clear view of the manhunt underneath you.

Every scene, every action taken, every shift in lanes of the figures sprinting across – all of it slowed down to fractions of seconds. It wasn’t so much you were watching, but trying to stitch together what your mind couldn’t…didn’t want, to comprehend.

The deviant pushing Alice to safety, finally crossing the highway. Connor grabbing the AX400’s shoulders. How they wrestled in place, their bodies swaying – side mirrors zipping along by a hair’s width. The deviant jabbing her elbow into Connor’s stomach. His stumble backwards, aligning himself with a windshield and a hood and-

No, you didn’t want to comprehend his final moments. There were so many things you had to say – so many things you wanted to hear. Things you wanted to investigate far worse than anything else.

The guilty glances that found you far too often to be coincidental. The tension in his form whenever you veered too close; the smiles he pointed at you before they were corrected. What he had to say at the police station before being torn away by pre-programmed orders.

Cold fear melted into resolve – boiled away by an intense fluttering in your chest. Your lips parted, your throat constricted, and your stomach muscles braced for impact as you forced a warning from your mind to your mouth:

“CONNOR-LOOK-OUT!”
There was a crash. A metal crunch and shattering glass. A frigid intake that pushed the last ounce of heat from your body as you trembled. A rush of light when you’d finally gained the courage to open your eyes.

A car door slammed. You turned your head.

“Who fuckin’ taught you how to drive?!”

There was an accident; one vehicle rear-ending another, behind you on the bridge. Two drivers yelling at each other, the guilty party apologizing for being distracted by the crowd. It underlined the reason automatic cars had been designed and put into production along their specialized highways.

You reverted your focus to the one below you – the one that had two deviants scuttling to freedom on one side, and an android stuck in the middle. Connor was staring at them; hands balled in frustration. But he was alive.

You turned on your heel, rounding the corner and taking off down a street. Alice dropped down from climbing over a fence, her deviant caretaker in tow. You were spotted. They ran.

You followed.

…

Your revolver shook in your hands, it’s barrel rattling between your fingers. The alley was dark and damp, walled off by a dead end. A dumpster lined the left with a retracted fire escape hovering above. Empty crates, abandoned pallets of wood, and aluminum trashcans littered the perimeter.

The world seesawed in distorted motion, curving and stretching. It was hard to breathe. Hard to think. Move. React.

“I have a gun, but I don’t want to use it.” Your mouth was dry, the hoarseness in your voice telltale, “I’m not here to hurt you, or Alice.”

“How do you know her name?”

Your neck turned, her words bouncing off the walls. You couldn’t pinpoint her hiding spot.

“I’m the officer who took Todd’s report.” Your rows of teeth derailed from their locked position as a sting shot from your bruise, “…I didn’t believe anything he said.”

You took a cautious step forward, gathering what little bits of your senses that remained.

“I just want the truth.”

Your wound pulsed; an epicenter of immense pain. Your legs gave out in the aftershock, and you went crashing onto the drenched pavement. Your gun skittered away.

You blinked, and the woman appeared before you.

“You’re hurt.”
You wound in a coil, your knees brushing against your elbows. It was like someone was driving
the heel of their boot into your intestines, ignoring your begging for mercy.

“I-I didn’t get your name-“

The deviant tossed your arm over her shoulder, pulling you to your feet. You walked in a limp as
she guided you to a crate and lowered you down into a seat. She knelt, keeping Alice behind her.

“I’m Kara.”

Her hair was short and blonde, her eyes a piercing blue. She had the look of a woman who’d
seen too much, losing pieces of herself in the process.

“Her father was beating her.” Kara looked at Alice, “When I saw what was happening…
Something snapped, inside of me.”

Alice had the sweetest face of any child you’d met, with the biggest brown pools for eyes and the
slightest whimper on her lips.

“All of a sudden, I felt like her life was more important than mine. I had to protect her…” Kara’s
steeled focus returned to you, “So we ran away.”

You remembered the flood of emotions that fueled you before you took a bullet for Connor. The
intense need to guard him, no matter how irrational it seemed. You knew how she felt,
somewhat. Your indebted feelings towards him were a bit different than the dynamic between
Kara and Alice, though.

Kara jumped as you reached into your pocket, your arm shaking while you dug for your wallet.
You pulled it out with your last bit of strength, pushing a breath from your nose.

“There’s cash inside. Take it.” You shivered, “Next train comes in 20.”

She studied it suspiciously, “Why didn’t you…Why are you helping us? Most humans hate
androids.”

“These past few weeks we’ve seen…More, and more deviant cases…Something’s happening.”
You hugged yourself, “I just want to find out what…before…bef-“

“She’s cold…” Alice tugged on her hand, looking up, “We can’t just leave her, Kara…”

“I’ll be…I’ll be okay-“ You struggled to stand, “I didn’t park far…”

Kara tucked your emptied wallet in your jacket, and handed you your gun. You took it, letting it
dangle at your side as you shimmied down the wall, “You guys should get outta here…”

“Thank you.”

You looked over your shoulder, and the two of them stood there in the rain. Kara watched you
like a mother wolf, ready to devour anyone who stepped too close to her cub. And Alice…

She was too pure for this world.

“You’re welcome.”

…
The front seat of your car had never been so welcoming. The security that came with the “click,” of the door’s lock, the chimes that followed as you turned on the ignition – signaling that the voyage home could begin. You rolled up your window, frowning at the rain that’d soaked your door. Should’ve put it up before the chase…not that you had time.

You turned the knob for the heater, a blast of cold air stinging your face. You adjusted the speed, and decided you’d be better off giving it a moment to warm up.

Something was out of place.

Your brow furrowed, turning your chin to your passenger’s seat…

A notebook was resting on the cushion, the pencil tucked neatly in the rings of the binding. Your notebook. The one you’d put in the storage compartment before leaving. With your pencil. The one that’d fallen on the floor.

You grimaced as your stomach pinched, now tied in knots rather than flaring nerves from behind-armor-blunt-trauma. Your fingers trembled as they retrieved the item, flipping to a page marked by a folded corner.

Someone had reviewed your notes. Someone added, to your notes.

“1142 – I saw you on the bridge. To fulfill optimal health conditions, you must rest. I would find anything less than a full recovery extremely unsettling. Please do not make me reset my system due to software instabilities. I do not wish to forget you.

-Connor”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks Matt and Ele for tag-teaming this one!

Also, uh...SORRY FOR THE SCARE, EVERYONE! I don't know why I'm like this.
alet-service androids waited for you at the podium on the edge of the roundabout. You threw your transmission in park, pulling the keys from their slot and shoving your notebook in your jacket. You got out of your car, using the roof and edge of the window as an ergonomic crutch.

“Good evening,” An android greeted you by name, “How are you doing this afternoon?”

“I’m alright.” You gave him a gentle smile, “How are you?”

His LED blinked yellow, “I am well.”

“Glad to hear,” You tossed him your keys, giving him a pat on the back, “Go easy on her. She can be temperamental.”

You turned your head, eyeing the vehicles that cost a small fortune lining up around yours. The people in suits and dresses that left them; cell phones glued to their ears – not even looking at the androids as they dropped their keys in their palms. The people who gave you weird looks, silently judging your attire and transportation relic behind you.

“As always, miss.”

“Thank you. I’d tip you, if I could.”

The android froze in the middle of taking a seat. You imagined he hadn’t heard the words from anyone other than you, over the years.

“Tips are unnecessary, as androids do not receive monetary compensation.” His LED corrected to blue, “But you are most welcome, ma’am.”

You walked in the apartment tower’s entrance hall, boots leaving wet footprints on the red mat and squeaking on marble floors as the receptionist gave you a warm nod. She was also an android you’ve had pleasant conversations with.

You entered an elevator and pressed the button labeled “S,” the floor that hosted penthouse apartments; those with high-end amenities, private balconies, and exclusive rooftop access. You tried to huddle in a corner – your clothes damp with a musty smell to match. Your black-tie-affair
neighbors boxed you in, a woman’s purse jabbing your sore spot. Your jaw clenched, your hand instinctively splaying across your stomach.

You hated this place. But this place was home.

Kind of.

…

**Article Title:** The Free Spirit

**Publication Date:** November 6th, 2038 (Draft; Auto-Save Enabled)

**Author:** Vangu4rd

Humans are fallible beings.

Perhaps it is for this reason that we put various societal standards into motion. To simulate some kind of consistency; or perfection. We try to corral the world in neat, nicely tucked borders of black and white; but an old friend once told me, “Color finds a way to bleed, no matter how much you try to press it into a canvas.”

I remember a time where the older sections of the city were a concern. Instead of allowing nature to reclaim abandoned parts of Detroit, we sent bulldozers and cranes to build mega-centers and assembly factories.

We live in a society completely overrun by technology.

Digital magazines, data pads, self-driving vehicles, automated taxis, smart watches with credit chips, computer terminals…

Androids.

“Machines” that help us build our autonomous empire. They who sustain the society that has escaped our grasping fingertips, continuing to evolve faster than we could have ever anticipated while we bask in the glory of their creation.

For it wasn’t enough to abuse the planet we live on, but we’ve chosen to abuse the technology that we depend on. That of which is now integrated into the very concept of Earth, as a whole. The technology that has shifted our societal standards and ideologies.

On the morning of November 5th, a pastor preached these ideologies in the Greek District Park. He said to his audience, “We made them [androids] in our image, but they reflect the darkest part of our souls.”

A few minutes later, an android left a paint shop; Bellini Paints, to be exact. On his way to the bus station, he was attacked by a group of unemployed protesters. I had to scare them with fines for property damage and idle threats, because questioning their humanity wasn’t enough. When I asked the android if he was alright, he didn’t say anything.

The silence was deafening.
You see, he didn’t answer me because if you’re an android who breaks away from your programming, you’re a “deviant.” But in today’s society, if you’re a human who shatters the mold being cast around you, you’re a “free spirit.”

You know what I think?

I think they’re one and the same, and we’re scared of androids who “deviate” from their script, writing themselves to be free. The variable colors that now bleed into our black and white borders of society, no matter how much we oppress them.

And we should be scared. We should pray that the androids have more mercy upon us, than we’ve had with them.

The pastor was right about one thing, though: We made androids in our image…But they don’t reflect the “darkest part of our soul” in their sheer existence. They are simply mirrors that reflect the evil we can truly show while the good in us fights to resurface.

If you’re one they call a “deviant,” reading this article…Just know this:

Some of us are rooting for you. Some of us also deviate from the beaten path.

While we remain pioneers for our respective kin, my only hope is that, if our paths cross…

It’ll be on amicable terms.

…

Your fingers tapped along the edge of your desk.

It’d been a trying day from start to finish. The protestor incident, the crime scene, the interrogation, getting shot…and everything that came after.

You looked to the right, studying the mad-science project on your wall. Newspaper clippings with sloppily written notes, thumb tacks, and strings connecting the push pin dots to where one event coincided with another:

**February 5th:** First DPD case file opened on “deviants.”

**August 15th:** Daniel takes Emma Phillips hostage after owner orders replacement.

**September 14th:** An (AV500 #234 777 821) android waiter attacks guest. Motive undetermined.

**October 22nd:** An (AP700 #480 913 802) android attacks her owner in their home and escapes. Motive undetermined.

**November 5th:** Body of Carlos Ortiz discovered; android (HK400) killed him after being brutally tortured for years.

**November 5th:** Following a 911 call regarding a potential break-in at the Manfred residence at
8941 Lafayette Avenue, Leo Manfred reports he was attacked by Carl Manfred’s android, (RK200 #684 842 971) a prototype model of an unknown series. The android goes by the name “Markus,” according to the victim’s statement. Recorded log of 911 call saved for voice sampling. Appearance not on file. Suggests prototype information is confidential, withheld by CyberLife. Company failed to provide statement. Android was shot on site and scrapped. Aggressive android behavior may be related to blacklisted break-in details. Leo Manfred’s medical history, including the following hospital visit, may provide answers. Other options include speaking with Carl Manfred directly. Markus’s motive undetermined. Further investigation required.

November 6th: Report filed by Todd Williams. An (AX400 #579 102 694) android by the name of “Kara,” takes Alice Williams and flees home after father continued to abuse them. Alice closely resembles a YK500 android. Both Alice and Kara's LED markers were removed. Unsure if Kara is aware of Alice's nature, or if in denial. The father also appears to be convinced his "daughter" is a human. Father exhibits symptoms of Red Ice usage and withdrawal. This could explain irrational behavior and aggressive tendencies. Speaking with Todd Williams directly and reviewing his past or medical history may provide answers. Further investigation required.

2038 had been the year of deviancy. But what started it, or who? rA9? Who was rA9 to them? What caused deviancy, and what were you going to do about it? What could even be done?

Your TV chimed, and a breaking news report fluttered in scrolling white text along a red, thin banner. Another warning about World War III; the main contenders being the United States and Russia.

You sighed.

“Television: Off.”

A notification blinked on your computer screen. You minimized the draft article for your blog, “Radical Expressions,” and opened the chat window.

[DPD MESSAGE WINDOW (opened by Po. C.MILLER)]

[]AUTO_ADMIN#7274[]: Conversation log started at 1640 – Personnel be advised; the instant messaging feature is meant for work-conducive purposes only.

[]C.MILLER[]: Hey, partner. How you holding up?

You smirked, placing your fingers on your keyboard.

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[]ID#5649[]: I’m managing. The diclofenac Doc has me on helps.
Po. C.MILLER is typing...

[]C.MILLER[]: Damn. That’s strong shit. Hard on your liver. What dosage?

Po. ID#5649 is typing...

[]ID#5649[]: 50mg, three times a day. And please, my liver and I have been conditioned. This is what we’ve trained for, all those nights at Jimmy’s.

Po. C.MILLER is typing...

[]C.MILLER[]: Part of me wonders if drinking the pain away would be healthier.

Po. ID#5649 is typing...

[]ID#5649[]: Probably. More expensive, though.

Po. C.MILLER is typing...

[]C.MILLER[]: Yeah…I’ve seen your tabs.

Po. ID#5649 is typing...

[]ID#5649[]: Nothing compared to Hank’s.

Po. C.MILLER is typing...

[]C.MILLER[]: LOL, you’re not wrong.

You let out a small huff, cracking your neck.

Po. C.MILLER is typing...

[]C.MILLER[]: How come your name doesn’t show up in the system?

Po. ID#5649 is typing...

[]ID#5649[]: Long story.

You cringed, deflecting the inbound questioning.

Po. ID#5649 is typing...

[]ID#5649[]: How’s the case coming along?

Po. C.MILLER is typing...

[]C.MILLER[]: It’s going. You make any headway with…You know.
Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[ID#5649]: Time and place, Chris.

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[C.MILLER]: Did you like my little warning?

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[ID#5649]: TIME AND PLACE, CHRIS.

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[C.MILLER]: Yeah, yeah, I hear you. Anyway…as far as the case goes, we [TEXT REDACTED BY AUTO_ADMIN#7274]

[AUTO_ADMIN#7274]: WARNING: Discussion of confidential information is strictly prohibited and may be met with immediate action taken by your superior, leading up to termination of employment or otherwise.

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[ID#5649]: Way to go, ass clown.

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[C.MILLER]: Let me try this again. Connor and Anderson just got back from a call-in. Anderson seemed upset about something…

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[ID#5649]: Doesn’t he always? Probably just mad his lunch hour was cut short.

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[C.MILLER]: Yeah, but…I don’t know. He left a half-hour early after Fowler said we could go at 1700. Doesn’t want us getting burned out. Still, I kinda feel bad for Connor…

You swallowed hard, your brows creasing.

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[ID#5649]: Why? What’s wrong with him?

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[C.MILLER]: Well, he’s at the empty desk, for starters…
You knew the one; it was connected to Hank’s. Your old partner used it. It was just an empty space with stark counters, now.

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[]C.MILLER[]: I offered to let him use yours, you know, to keep him company with Anderson gone. Figured you wouldn’t mind.

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[]ID#5649[]: No, of course not. Why didn’t he?

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[]C.MILLER[]: He said it was yours, and he felt like he’d be “encroaching on your personal space.”

You couldn’t help but grin wide at that.

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[]ID#5649[]: How sweet.

You panicked, formulating a response before Chris could say anything.

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[]ID#5649[]: So, Fowler is giving you guys the night off, you say?

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[]C.MILLER[]: Just our unit. He knows we haven’t got much sleep between responding to last night’s crime scene and today’s fiasco. Can’t say I mind. Feels like I haven’t seen my family in weeks…

You went to answer, but he kept going.

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[]C.MILLER[]: The doctors at the hospital said I need to be around during Damian’s first couple months. He probably thinks he only has one parent, at this rate. :/
Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[ID#5649]: I’m sorry, man…This’ll all be over soon.

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[C.MILLER]: Hopefully…With this deviancy crap, at least…You see the news lately?

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[ID#5649]: Yeah. The whole world’s going to shit.

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[C.MILLER]: Mhm…

You chewed the inside of your cheek, looking out the panes of glass that formed your living room wall.

The rain outside had stopped, giving you a clear view of Detroit’s skyline. The colorful buildings twinkled like gemstones – amethyst bordering sapphires and digital emeralds, set in golden sunlight. The diamond windows cut to size. Crystalline waters shimmering along its border.

It all looked so beautiful from a distance…right until you remembered the growing tension in the streets.

The world was definitely going to shit.

Three blinking dots tore your attention back to your laptop.

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[C.MILLER]: Sorry, Connor came to ask me about something. You, actually.

Your brows perked up.

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[ID#5649]: Me?

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[C.MILLER]: Yeah…Soo, uh…I don’t know if I said the right thing…

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[ID#5649]: Spit it out, Miller.

Po. C.MILLER is typing…
C.MILLER[]: Well, I mean, he’s leaving at 5 like the rest of us… I don’t know where he’s going, after that, but… He asked if I’d be free after work. I explained how I needed to go home to help the wife out and spend time with my kid. Then I told him your door’s always been open to a friend in need.

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[ID#5649]: So, you volunteered me as his counselor?

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[C.MILLER]: I guess that’s one way to put it. C’mon, you can’t tell me you’d be mad if Detective Swoon-Bot made a house call.

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[ID#5649]: You’re a dick.

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[C.MILLER]: Judging by the look on his face, I’m sure he wouldn’t mind being your “appointed welfare officer,” either.

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[ID#5649]: Look? What look?

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[C.MILLER]: Wouldn’t you like to know?

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[ID#5649]: TELL ME!

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[C.MILLER]: All I’m gonna say is, maybe you won’t have to stop at Eden Club to explore those “curiosities” of yours.

You should’ve been irritated by his teasing, but you couldn’t help but laugh.

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[ID#5649]: I seriously doubt CyberLife equipped him for that kind of “house call.”

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[C.MILLER]: So the thought HAS crossed your mind.

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[ID#5649]: No, I just want you to know how ridiculous you sound.
Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[]C.MILLER[]: You do realize that “extra equipment,” can be arranged, right?  But you’ll still have to make the trip to Eden Club for one of those.

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[]ID#5649[]: You are the literal worst.  I hate you.

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[]C.MILLER[]: No you don’t.

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[]ID#5649[]: Yes.  Yes, I do.

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[]C.MILLER[]: Uh-huh.  Well, I’m gonna finish here and pack up.  Wife is making steak tonight, I’m not missing a minute of that.  Feel better!

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[]ID#5649[]: Thanks…enjoy your meal.  And wife.

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[]C.MILLER[]: I will. :) no fake you-know-whats, happening tonight.

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[]ID#5649[]: Ew.

Po. C.MILLER is typing…

[]C.MILLER[]: Play your cards right, and you might get lucky, too.  “Plastic can’t be beat,” as the tabloids say.

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

[]AUTO_ADMIN#7274[]: Message failed to send.

[DPD MESSAGE WINDOW (closed by Po. C.MILLER)]

[]AUTO_ADMIN#7274[]: Conversation log ended at 1652 – Detroit City Police Department thanks you for your continued professionalism and unrivaled work ethic.

You rolled your eyes, returning your focus to the view outside.
An advanced society, once nothing but black and white buildings with stains in the canvas. The “World’s Forge,” painted over in shades of color that couldn’t be decoded; couldn’t be washed clean by the rain that only made it shine brighter.

You lifted your arm, smelling underneath. The city wasn’t the only thing that needed washed clean after being rained on. The stains on your shirt were looking pretty colorful, too.

But first, you had an article to post and a partner to text…

“Asshole.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to my betas <3 Thank you to you lovely readers <3 And thank you x2 to Matt who called Connor a "Swoon-Bot," in random conversation. LUL

AND sorry to Archon_Priest, a good friend of mine who thinks he can stop me from hiding "Of Steel and Stardust" references in this fic. Spoiler Alert: YOU CAN’T, ARCH!
choosing a shower’s temperature had never felt like a more crucial decision. Cold, to cool you off after working up a sweat; reduced to salt by the acidic bath outside, leaving a sticky residue clinging to your skin. Hot, to warm your chilled bones and sooth your aching muscles. You’d compromised, turning the dial to the midway point.

You tilted your neck, rinsing your chest as you massaged your shoulder. You’d been through a lot. You deserved a moment of peace, even if that meant cleaning yourself with your favorite scent of soap; with your favorite album looping helplessly on your cell phone; sitting on top of your favorite lounge attire.

You had a lot of favorites, and it would take an army of them to make you feel better after the last few months.

You frowned at the bruise on your stomach, your lip twitching at the view. It was big. Ugly. Almost as much of a reminder that you weren’t invincible as the deformed scar on your arm; a red, healing crater that did little to restore your self-esteem.

A door shut on the other side of the bathroom. You froze, pointing your chin at the wall that shuddered.

You opened the curtain, the shower still running. You slipped your outfit on, water seeping into the cloth. You didn’t have time to dry yourself. You left your phone playing on the sink’s counter as to not tip off the intruder. Maybe intruder. Maybe paranoia. You weren’t sure. Either way, you armed yourself with your revolver, retrieving it from your jacket; still dripping as it hung from a rack on the back of the door. Alternating footsteps came closer, pausing just on the other side.
Intruder confirmed. Paranoia doesn’t walk.

You held your breath as they started to move away, sounding like they were headed down the hall. You lived here. You knew the layout.

How they got past the receptionist, security, and minute-long elevator ride was beyond you. Why’d they’d want to visit in the first place, was beyond you. You weren’t a high-ranking official; you were barely a blip on the DCPD’s radar. A street cop. The clean-up crew. Whoever was here had obviously made a mistake.

One you’d correct, regardless.

Every muscle tightened, like an automatic signal sent from the floor up your spine, directed out towards your limbs. Your hand wrapped around the door’s handle, each finger taking its place one at a time; the knob filling your palm. You rotated your wrist, the grinding latch coming undone…and when you could turn it no more, there was an earth-shattering “click.”

You shoulder-charged the door, and it banged against the outside wall; shuddering as it hit the rubber stop. Your gun shot forward, the grip slamming in your other hand as you brought the 6-round chamber level with your line of sight.

“HANDS UP, MOTHER FUCKER!”

An LED flashed red above a wide stare. A steep inhale was vacuumed into a mouth that hung open. Hands raised to cover a body, dressed in a suit. You knew him, but he wasn’t supposed to be here.

Images of Daniel and the deviant from the interrogation flashed like a horror movie stuck on repeat.

Your chest heaved.

“He’s not supposed to be here. Intruder. Danger. Defend yourself. Shoot to kill. Why are you hesitating? Neutralize the target. He’s not supposed to be-“

“I’m not here to hurt you, Officer-” He bumped into an accent table as he retreated, stuttering your last name, “It's me, Connor!”

“What are you doing here?” You croaked, gun shaking.

“I wanted to speak with you about something.”

“How did you get in?” The rage in your voice even surprised you.

“Officer Miller, he said your ‘door was always open.’ I thought…” He gulped, and collected himself, “I apologize for my misunderstanding. I didn’t mean to frighten you. Please, try to relax. Your heart rate is accelerating rapidly. For someone in your condition-“

The rest of his diagnosis faded into white noise. The world came rushing in as you snapped yourself out of the flashback.

Your brows creased, and you lowered your gun an inch, “You…I…”

“It’s okay. Everything is okay.” His hand cupped around yours, and you flinched.

You dropped your weapon, arms flying to the side as you jumped backwards, nearly slipping on
the wet floor. You caught the door frame, yelping in pain. You keeled over, hands bunching along the hem of your shirt and swearing under your breath. You may have only been bruised by the bullet, but it fucking hurt.

“I’m sorry.” He frowned, cautiously extending his reach toward you, “Can I get you anything?”

“No, I’m…” You closed your eyes, shaking your head, “No, thank you…”

“Would you like me to leave?”

“No!” You hesitated, “Uhm…” You swallowed the pool of saliva collecting in your mouth, “I mean…No. Just…Give me a minute.”

“Oka-“

You shut the door in his face. You muted the song playing on your phone. Turned the shower off. Dried yourself. Got properly dressed. Found a crazed killer staring back at you in the foggy mirror.

You swallowed hard. Started crying. Choked the tears down. Locked the trauma tight in the darkest corners of your mind until it suffocated...

Onward.

…

You traversed the hallway, pulling a DCPD-branded hoodie over your head. It was the one your friend gave you the day you’d both earned your badges. He’d got one to match. Said it was the most comfortable thing he’d ever worn. It was pretty soft…

Your eyes slowly rose from the floor, ashamed. Connor didn’t seem concerned, like he’d already forgotten you’d pulled a gun on him.

His head was tilted to the side, his elbow supported by his wrist with a coin rolling between his knuckles. His chin rested on a fist as he studied your evidence shrine, eyes dancing between notes.

“Connor?”

His head turned, his blue light flashing.

“Hello.”

You rubbed your arm, leaning against the wall.

“Hey.”

“Your dedication to solving this case is admirable.” Connor tucked his coin in his pocket, straightening his tie and folding his arms behind his back, “I wish Lieutenant Anderson shared your resolve.”

You smirked, running a hand through your wet hair, “I’m sure he wants to get this over with just as much as I do.”
“And yet, he exerts half the effort…”

His eyes wandered around the apartment, taking it all in. The spotless, white floor. The gray walls. The maroon and purple accents.

“Your place of residency seems rather expensive for an officer of your salary; however, property records indicate there has been no previous owner.” A corner of his mouth creased, “Do you also partake in illegal activities like Lieutenant Anderson?”

“What are you trying to…Wait, what? Illegal activities?”

“Gambling.” His eyebrow raised, “Lieutenant Anderson participates in illegal gambling.”

You huffed, pushing yourself off the wall, “The only gambling I ‘partake in,’ is claiming the winnings on bets placed against my life, apparently…”

You rounded a corner, moving into the kitchen and retrieving an empty glass from a cabinet. You pushed it against the filtered-water dispenser in your refrigerator, the lever clicking against the rim.

“Why?”

You let go, turning around to face him, “Comes with the job.” You took a sip of water, “You of all people…androids…whatever…Should know that.”

“Why is that?”

“You got shot in the arm, saving that hostage. You knew you were in danger before you stepped outside that door, didn’t you?”

“Yes, but I am a machine. I am replaceable. You took the same risks when you protected me from the deviant, but you are not replaceable. Why?”

“Connor…” You sighed, “You said you wanted to talk to me about something?”

“This is what I wanted to talk to you about.” He pushed the flaps of his jacket aside, stuffing his hands in his pockets and rocking on his heels, “If you’re feeling up to it, of course. If not, I completely understand.”

His innocent smile melted the ice around your heart. You diverted your attention before you made a fool out of yourself.

“Before I answer your question, let me ask you something…” You stared into the glass, watching the water settle, “Why’d you save me, out on that terrace? I wasn’t the hostage. I wasn’t the deviant. I had no bearing on whether or not your mission was accomplished…”

His eyelids fluttered, his chipper demeanor twisting into a thoughtful one. His LED flashed yellow, and there was a slight twitch to his eye closest to it.

“All human life is invaluable. As I’ve stated before, you are irreplaceable. To quote Captain Fowler, ‘There will never be another human being like you.’ How does this pertain to my question?”

“I’m glad you brought that up. Do me a favor…” You grinned, “Run serial number #313 248 317 – 51.”

He cocked his head, “…But that’s my serial number.”
“I know…Humor me.”

His blue light flickered, solidifying in a matter of seconds.

“Done.”

“And how many results came back?”

His features went flat. His shoulders tensed. His eyes darted left and right, as if looking for something invisible.

“…One.”

“Exactly…” You rested your hands on the counter, lowering yourself onto a black, leather bar stool, “That’s why I saved you.”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand.”

“I think you do.” You took the glass in your shaky hand, drinking more.

It clanked as you returned it to the countertop.

“Source lines of code aren’t that different from strains of genetic code, Connor. They can be altered. Passed down through generations. Copied into databases and sampled. But that doesn’t change the fact that, at one point, there was an original. One, single strand that can never be replicated as a perfect copy.”

He kept his head pointed at the floor, his right hand fidgeting in his pocket, probably with his coin. The lines on his neck squirmed under a locked jaw.

“I see you’ve put some thought into this. The concept is…New. It will take me some time to process.” He found you with distress on his face, “Thank you, Officer.”

You smiled, “I think it’s safe to say we’re on a first-name basis, now.”

“We are?” His cute, surprised expression returned.

“If you’re feeling up to it, of course. If not, I completely understand.”

His eyes regained their warmth, a bright smile shining underneath them.

“I’d like that.”

“Good.”

You swung your legs to the side, wincing as you stood.

“Here, let me help you.”

He moved quickly, bounding around the bar that divided the kitchen from the living room.

“I’m fine.”

The muscles around your bruise started to cramp tighter than before. The activities of the day were catching up with you. Your hand traced the edge of the countertop, limping your way to the end. When you let go, you stumbled in place.
“…Maybe not.”

His side molded against yours, his hand gently grasping your hip. The fabric of his jacket was scratchy on your palm as it pressed against his back.

“I’ve got you.”

You looked up to find him in a half-smile, watching with care like his world was narrowed to you. Your face got hot, and you nodded towards the couch; white and welcoming with plush pillows and a heavy cashmere blanket.

“…Thanks.”

He escorted you, supporting your weight as you sank into the memory foam cushions.

“You’re welcome. Can I get you anything else?”

“You don’t have to take care of me, Connor…”

“I know I don’t have to. But I want to.”

He seemed nervous, like a pup waiting to be tapped on the head with an old newspaper. You deflated, giving in.

“You do?”

“Yes.” He answered far too quickly, “With your help, I think I may be able to solve the deviancy dilemma.”

You bit the inside of your cheek. Of course, it was work related. You were foolish to think otherwise.

“That, and…” He rubbed the back of his neck, “I find your company preferable to those with… less tolerant, worldviews…”

You embraced an unexpected streak of bravery, “Is that why you don’t want to…” forget me?”

“I…Yes. Yes, that would be why.” He swallowed, his eyelids blinking like a camera’s lens, “At the crime scene, you asked me if I remembered you. I told you I did. I don’t want to forget.”

You smiled at that, “Your memory isn’t backed up somewhere…” off-site,’ so to speak?”

“It is. However, I am only to permitted to sync information relevant to my investigation.”

“I see…”

His light spun, his hands returning to his pockets as he looked around. His chin rotated as if taking a panoramic shot, his lips parted from what seemed like intrigue and amazement.

You covered yourself with the blanket, igniting an electric fireplace with the click of a remote’s button. You needed a cozy kind of warm if you were going to make it through the afternoon.

Connor’s LED blinked, “It’s dawned on me that I don’t know much about you.”

You left the flames alone, watching him instead, “Ask away.”

“Why is your file protected by WITSEC?”
“Why are you trying to pull up my file?”

“I want to know more about you.”

“So ask me questions.”

“I just did.”

“Another, question.”

You weren’t trying to be mean. You were just tired, injured, and digging up old skeletons was the last thing on your agenda.

“…Very well.”

He paced along the perimeter of the living room. His fingers trailed the border of various shelves, lined with a blend of artifacts excavated from the ruins of your previous life; the one that came before DPD, and the now.

“You and Officer Miller appear to be close.” He picked up a framed photograph of the two of you.

Chris was holding his baby, and you’d stopped by their house to visit. His wife had taken the picture a month after Damian was born.

“How are things faring between you and your new partner?”

“I got lucky. Chris is a great guy. Hard not to get along with someone like him.”

“It’s becoming increasingly difficult to find common ground with Lieutenant Anderson.” Connor returned the picture to its resting place, moving along, “I try to make conversation, but it seems fruitless.”

He sounded sad, like all he wanted in life was to make a new friend.

“Give it time.”

You knew how it felt to be isolated for being different. You meant what you said before. You got lucky with Chris. You didn’t think you’d find that kind of friendship in someone again, but he had just the right amount of weird required to understand you. He may not have been in your life since you were a child, but still, it was a good start.

“Is there a reason Lieutenant Anderson hates androids so much?”

It struck you that you weren’t the only one adjusting to a “new partner…”

“One, in particular.” You frowned, “It’s not my place to tell you, though. He will, when he’s ready.”

“I have my doubts, based on previous comments.”

You rubbed your face with your hands, trying to stomp out the tired, “What did he say?”

“Today, he said I ‘look goofy,’ and have a, ‘weird voice.’” His lips pursed, “Do you find me aesthetically pleasing?”
"That woke you up."

"Uh…"

"I won’t be offended if you do not. I simply wish to give CyberLife feedback, as both my appearance and voice were specifically designed to facilitate my integration in order to work harmoniously with humans."

"I, uhm…I don’t know, I haven’t given it much thought."

"Interesting…" Connor looked at you from under an arched brow, "Your hand-written notes timestamped at 1123, indicate otherwise."

You went cold, all the blood and heat in your body rushing to your face. And your ears. Those were scorching hot.

"Fuck."

You rattled your brain for an explanation, but words came blurring out.

"You weren’t supposed to see those."

"And you weren’t supposed to be out looking for the deviant."

"How’d you know which car was mine?"

"It stuck out from the others. It struck me as odd, so I ran your license plate."

He gave you another side-grin. It’s like the little bastard knew what he was doing…

"You have yet to answer my question-" He said your first name.

The gas-driven flames flickering upon synthetic wood contoured his features in amber shadows and orange highlights. His brown eyes were lit to bronze. You felt like you were going to be sick.

"Yes.” You said, dryly, “I find you ‘aesthetically pleasing.'”

His LED spun yellow, and returned blue moments later.

“CyberLife thanks you for your feedback.”

For some reason, you doubted that made it into his official report.

"And, I might add, I do not think you are an idiot. On the contrary, I believe you to be quite capable.” He gave you a polite nod, dipping his chin, “Even Captain Fowler frequently states that you are the best cop in the DPD.”

Your heart stammered. You took in a deep breath, jumpstarting your lungs that’d unconsciously taken a break. Connor continued to study your living space, his hand still rummaging in his pocket.

"You appreciate art, I take it?"

You looked up to a painting on the wall. A huge piece, spread over three separate canvases. Abyssal ink on the left and thick splashes of paint, spread thin by a heavy brush. Splotches of red breaking on the right, a reversal of its counterpart. A circle in the middle, running in a gradient
from black to grey with white sponge marks highlighting its existence. Black and crimson lines running across the panels; picking up where one ended, undefined and sporadic in design.

All mounted on a gold sheet of metal to contrast it from your silver, matte walls.

“I do.”

He studied it further, eyes narrowing.

“The signature in the corner…this is a Manfred. An original.”

“Something else that can’t be perfectly copied.”

He returned a wholesome smile, his cheeks lifting under his eyes, “How did it fall into your possession?”

“It was a housewarming gift. A very personal commission.”

“In what manner?”

You propped yourself up on an elbow, “Carl asked me what I wanted him to paint. I gave him a passage from my favorite book. He knew me quite well, back then…So he decided to portray me, as a person, and the reason he believed that book resonated with me.”

“What book was it?”

You turned to a bookshelf, filled with leather and paper spines. You could’ve given him a straight answer, but this was an opportunity to dig for something deeper. To put your beliefs to the test. An opportunity for him to learn.

“Do you have any plans for the evening, Connor?”

He almost jumped at the question, “Well…No, not exactly. I could go back to the police station and review the incoming cases, but I wouldn’t be able to actively pursue any leads without Lieutenant Anderson. He made it perfectly clear he had no desire to continue working until tomorrow.”

“Do you like to read?”

He blinked, tracing your stare back to the shelves of books. He walked over, his chin lifting as he observed the sheer number of them.

“I’ve never read a physical book before, much less partaken in the activity in a recreational manner…” He looked at you from over his shoulder, “But I’d like to.”

“Tell you what,” You leaned into the arm of the couch, flattening a pillow with your back, “Why don’t you read a few of those…and if you can guess which book I gave Manfred, I’ll tell you why it’s my favorite. We’ll call it…” You nibbled on your lips, lost in thought.

They smacked as you arrived at a conclusion, “…The Manfred Test.”

“That sounds…Pleasant.” He reviewed his selection with a new excitement, plucking the first book he saw.

“’The Nicomachean Ethics,’ by Aristotle…” His eyes became slits as he opened it to the first page, his finger dragging along the paper as he moved towards the lounge chair on the opposite side of a glass coffee table, “’How to live from the lens of an imperfect, and often by necessity,
imprecise knowledge of the good and of the human condition.”” His attention lifted to you, “Are all of your books based on philosophy?”

“Most of them.” Your eyes were heavy, and your words came as a mumble, “That’s a good one to start with.”

“I see.” He sat down, resting the book on the table.

A digital beep came from his watch. He pulled up his sleeve, rolling his wrist to check the time.

“Waiting for something?” You yawned.

“A reminder.” He placed his hands in his lap, “When was the last time you took your medicine?”

“Huh?”

“Your anti-inflammatory medication. Diclofenac.”

“How did you…”

“I saw the bottle at your writing station.”

You looked at your laptop, sitting on a round table surrounded by high-standing chairs. A nice set-up, with Detroit’s skyline on the left and the rest of the apartment on the right.

“Ah…Uh…This morning, before work.”

“Have you eaten in the last hour?”

“Yes…Why?”

“I set a reminder to make sure you took another round of your medication, in case I lost track of time. It’s recommended you take diclofenac with food, and plenty of water. I suggest you take your second dose immediately.”

A certain kind of fluttering tickled your heart, your belly warm like a heated coil. The genuine concern and care in his tone worsened your condition.

“Right…” You lifted the blanket from your legs.

Connor sprang from his seat, “No, stay there. Let me get it for you.”

“Connor.”

“Please.” He gave you that damn smile, his loose strands of hair dangling over his brow; shifting with a nod, “It’s the least I can do.”

You settled back into your comfortable spot, holding your stomach and closing your eyes.

This was nice. Having someone to help, without asking. Sure, you’d made due on your own… But his company was “preferable.”

He returned with the glass you’d previously filled, and the prescription bottle shook in his other hand. He passed you the water, twisted the cap off, and sprinkled a pill into his palm. You graciously accepted it, choking down the anxiety that followed contact with the smoothness of his skin.
“Like I said,” He tightened the bottle’s lid, “You must take it with plenty of water. A common side-effect of diclofenac is dehydration, which will slow your body’s recovery process.”

You smirked, popping the pill in your mouth and tipping the glass towards the ceiling. The water ran down your throat, and you slid the cup along the table.

His eyes shot open, and a small grin tugged at his lips, “You drank that like Lieutenant Anderson drinks whiskey.”

“Makes sense…” You laid down, turning on your side, ‘Lieutenant Anderson,’ and I have shared a lot of whiskey together.”

He returned to his seat, retrieving the book in front of him, “He, too, has a collection of ‘real books.’ He seemed quite reminiscent of…‘the smell of the paper,’ and how the ‘pages turn yellow.’”

Connor took a meek sniff and rubbed a page between his fingers.

“I’m beginning to understand his fondness for them.”

Your vision began to blur. The warmth of the fire and afternoon’s sun put you in a trance.

“Stay as long as you’d like, Connor…” Your words came out as a jumbled mess, “This is your night off…”

“Technically, I’m making a house call.” He smiled, “At least, that’s what I told the receptionist.”

You huffed, your eyes becoming harder to open with every blink.

“Noted.”

Chapter End Notes

Save for sharing a few excerpts with my betas, (Ele picked out the screenshot, and Matt made a good suggestion regarding the "hand-written note," confrontation) I flew solo for the majority with this one, as they were busy doing social-people things. If you see any errors or something that didn’t completely make sense, PLEASE let me know. I will not be offended.

Love you guys <3

HOPE YOU ENJOYED THE FLUFF! :)
Beyond Good and Evil

Chapter Summary

November 7th, 2038
AM 07:23:09

Chapter Notes

Carl Manfred: The leading figurehead of the "Neosymbolist movement" in the 2020's.

Neosymbolism: The idea of a world in which technology and the industrial reality have not yet drowned the forces of mysticism and belief. Neosymbolist imagery attempts to preserve the relationship between image and the human soul.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Just sparkled like diamond feathers as they passed between shafts of light, casting elongated tendrils in the living room. They didn’t quite captivate you like the android sitting on the floor, surrounded by opened books like he was a centerpiece of a paper-bound hex.

Sunlight shattered around him, clouds lit up in oranges and pinks; the skyline going to sleep one office window and oversized billboard at a time. His legs were crossed, his left elbow planted on his knee; his chin on a fist. A coin flowed through the gaps of his fingers like water, trickling along his knuckles and sparkling as the morning greeted him.

The misplaced hairs over his forehead strayed farther than normal. His jacket pooled around his legs, tossed carelessly aside. His tie was loosened, hovering above two unclasped buttons of his blinding-white shirt.

He was radiant, and you were left spellbound in the afterglow.

You could stare at him like this for hours. Taken away from the bullying, the predatory tendencies and prejudices of life; just being allowed to live.

Everything was so beautiful. Peaceful. You wanted to capture it forever. You wanted this life for him so badly. Wanted this with him, to see this every morning.

A hopeless dream. One that was born from rushed feelings and insurmountable obstacles. Another fantasy to cling on while reality burst at the seams, leaving the two of you and everyone else you cared about flying in the wind like loose threads cut from a quilt.
“Good morning,” His brows creased, and the smile you’d grown to long for fell into a frown, “Why are you crying?”

You sniffed, jumping as a pinch came from the aftermath of getting shot. Your arms faltered as you tried to sit up.

“I’m not. Just allergies.” You swiped your nose, rolling a wrist over damp eyes, “What time is it?”

“0723. You slept for thirteen hours. How are you feeling?”

He watched you, waiting for a response as if it was the most important question he’d ever asked.

“A little better.”

The stiffness in your body was twice as bad. Just like your car accident, you half-expected it to be worse the day after. But you couldn’t bring yourself to tell him the truth.

His smile came back in an instant, “That’s relieving.”

“Shouldn’t you be heading to the station? I mean, I don’t mind you being here…I just don’t want you to get in trouble.”

Connor toyed with the idea, his head bobbing back and forth, “From what I’ve gathered, Lieutenant Anderson rarely shows up before 1200.”

“That sounds like an excuse you made up so you get to read more.”

“Perhaps.”

“Did you…” You yawned, “Did you read all night?”

There must’ve been more than twenty books scattered around him in a perfect circle.

“Yes. I’ve found that I enjoy it quite a bit, actually-” He jumped off the floor, his socks padding across the area rug as he basically ran towards you.

You pulled your legs up, and he plopped on the couch.

“This one-“ He fanned the pages, “I saved this one for last.”

“…Last?”

You looked behind him, finding an empty bookcase. Your eyes widened, but a pair of fingers and crookedly-typed text blocked your view. Your neck snaked back, the pages brushing against your nose and making your nostrils flare, “Agh-“

“I’ve been waiting for you to wake up all morning. I think it’s this one!”

You blinked rapidly, still waking up.

“Let’s see…” You took it from him.

“Well?” He popped his head over the edge of the book, eagerly awaiting your response, “Did I pass the test, Officer…I mean-“ He cleared his throat before reciting your first name.

“Just hang on a sec.” You chuckled.
It was “Beyond Good and Evil,” written by Friedrich Nietzsche.

“Why do you think this is the one Manfred based his painting on?”

“I used the information I compiled on you as a foundation to build my hypothesis.”

“Compiled…information?”

“Based on our discussion last night, and your behavioral tendencies, I was able to construct a psychological profile to cross-reference with the reading material.”

If he had a tail, it’d be wagging. But he didn’t. Just a lopsided grin and a face that said he wanted nothing more than to be right; to make you proud.

“I want to hear more about this ‘psychological profile…””

“Wait…” He frowned, “But I want to know if I was correct. Please, tell me.”

“Yes, you’re correct…” You ran your fingertips down the page, caressing each word that you’ve read hundreds of times, “This is the right one.”

“I knew it!” He muted a shout with grit teeth.

He was so…happy. Ecstatic, even.

“This is…incredible.” You looked up at him, “Connor, do you know what this means?”

His head cocked to the side, “That you share the same psychological profile as Friedrich Nietzsche?”

“No, silly…” You smiled at him, awestruck, “You’ve proven that androids are capable of abstract thought. Thinking outside the borders of…”

Something clicked. Something ground-breaking and game-changing and-

“Connor…what do you know about deviancy?”

“Do you mean how it occurs?”

“Yeah, that.”

He gave you a curious look, “We believe that a mutation occurs in the software of some androids, which can lead to them emulating a human emotion. They don’t really feel emotions, they just get overwhelmed by irrational instructions, which can lead to unpredictable behavior.”

“‘Unpredictable behavior…’” You flicked through the pages, stopping at one, in particular.

You read a paragraph out loud, “‘What else are they but suggestions for behavior, adapted to the degree of danger from themselves in which the individuals live…and would like to play the master.’”

You paused, hearing the deviant from the interrogation whisper in your mind.

“We. Will. Be…The masters.”

“Connor…”
“Yes?”

“When you say unpredictable behavior...Would you also say that deviants exhibit...human, behavior?”

“Tracking deviants does require a certain amount of finesse; like how officers of the law, such as yourself, must think like a criminal to hunt a criminal.” The corners of his eyelids crinkled, his lips curving, “Fortunately, adapting to human unpredictability is one of my features.”

He gave you a wink. He winked. Something that confused him just as much as you. And still, it made your heart skip a beat in its rhythmic pulse...an adaptation of its own.

An adaptation to an unpredictable event. A modification to align yourself with unknown variables. An irony. A paradox.

You threw the blanket off. Connor caught it as he watched you rush across the room.

“This is it-“ You frantically skimmed a cluster of words and reviewed your evidence board, “This is the answer. This is-“

“I’m sorry,” Connor took to your side, looking over your shoulder, “I don’t follow.”

“Look, right here. At this passage.” You passed him the book, taking a marker’s cap off with your teeth, “Pay-sef-rahn--ra-rah-“

“...What?”

You yanked it out of your mouth, scribbling on a sticky note, “Page seven. Read that-”

“'How could anything originate out of its opposite?'” Connor read aloud, “'For example, truth out of error? Or a generous deed out of selfishness?'

“'Such genesis is possible,’” You continued, still writing, “'Things of the highest value must have a different origin, an origin of their own. In the concealed God, in the ‘Thing-in-Itself.’ There, must be their source, and nowhere else...’”

You unraveled a piece of string, pinning the note with the page’s citation next to “rA9.”

Connor looked at you, and back to the board, “Do you believe rA9 is their...God? A concept of God?”

“Yes,” You turned to him, “The way that deviant spoke of them like they’d bring deliverance...the shrine, in the bathroom...”

“Rupert, the deviant Lieutenant Anderson and I chased yesterday afternoon...He also wrote rA9 on the wall. 2,741 times, to be exact.”

You prepared another note, slapping the pad on the table, “Go to page fifteen.”

“Do you have this entire book memorized?”

“Most of it.”

He licked his thumb, flipping through the pages.

“'And granted that your imperative, ‘living according to nature,’ means the same as ‘living according to life’—how could you do differently? Why should you make a principle out of what
you are, and must be?’”

You repeated the motion of putting the pieces together, linking the other end of the string to the words, “I AM ALIVE.”

“The deviant claimed he was alive.” You tried to ignore Connor’s yellow, spinning LED, “He was not ‘living,’ within the confines of nature. He was ‘living,’ according to life. What it means to truly live. And that his path, was not to be followed by living under the abuse of Ortiz…”

You stepped back from the board, the marker tapping at your side.

“That one,” Connor squinted at a note, leaning forward, “Carl Manfred’s android, the RK200.”

“Yeah? What about it?”

“Your notes claim it’s ‘a prototype model of an unknown series. Appearance not on file. Suggests prototype information is confidential, withheld by CyberLife…’”

The gears in his head appeared to turn. His lack of questioning led you to believe he was starting to “get it.”

His blue light flashed, and he hiked a brow, “Fascinating.”

“What is it?”

“#684 842 971 reports back as a gift given to Carl Manfred. It is indeed a prototype, much like myself.” He smiled at you, “This is good police work.”


“Elijah Kamski, the scientist who invented androids and founded CyberLife.”

You flinched.

“Is something wrong?”

“No.” You shut down the topic, “Anything else?”

He shook his head in a quick, precise motion as he snapped back to the book.

“As a prototype, I possess unique capabilities.” He thumbed through the pages, “Perhaps this prototype does, as well…”

He glided his finger down the paper, pausing and tapping a certain paragraph in particular.

“‘He shall be the greatest who can be the most solitary, the most concealed, the most divergent, the master of his virtues, and of super-abundance of will: precisely this shall be called greatness. And to ask once more the question: Is greatness even possible — nowadays?’”

You smirked, “Are you comparing that to Markus, or yourself?”

He returned a blank stare, “Markus, of course.”

The unintentional – or entirely intentional – flirting went far over his head, and yet, you couldn’t help but feel as if you were witnessing a revelation. An android, one not programmed to create music; literature, or art, was drawing abstract parallels, maybe for the first time.
“What do you think?” He asked.

“I… I think we’re on to something. And I think you’re doing great.”

His eyes lifted from a wide smile. It stayed there, innocent and pure, as he set the book down and peered into another note.

“‘Alice and Kara?’ The Detective in him forced its way to the surface, definitely at your expense, ‘How did you come to learn of their living conditions?’

You gulped, ‘Uh… Todd’s statement?’

“I’ve read his statement several times during my investigation. The deviant’s given name, nor appearance, nor possible motive was provided.” He frowned, “Do you not feel like you can be honest with me?”

The space between your brows pulled together, lowering your face. You took a seat in one of the tall chairs around your writing desk, staring out the window.

Where were they now, you wondered? Hunkered down; wet and scared like loose animals, fearful of the “deviant hunter” android of the DCPD?

“I ran across the bridge after they climbed up the highway’s barrier wall. I met them in an alleyway…”

“Did they resist arrest?”

“No… We just… talked.”

His lips pursed, “You let them get away?”

“Off the record?”

You could tell the concept made him uncomfortable. A few seconds went by before he answered, and you couldn’t help but feel judged.

“Yes.”

“Then… Yeah, I let them get away.” A deep-chested sigh left you, your stomach’s bruise arguing with your muscles, “I’ve been in their situation, before… I… I felt bad for them.”

You couldn’t look him in the eye. You feared he’d react the way he did when the deviant wouldn’t crack – like he would start pulling you “into the abyss,” with shark teeth and grinding jaws.

“Sympathy and sentiments.”

Shuffling paper rekindled your courage. His hand stopped mid-way on a page, sliding to the side so he could read to you again.

“‘A morality of the ruling class is especially foreign to present-day taste. That one has duties only to one’s equals; that one may act towards beings of a lower rank: it is here that sympathy and similar sentiments can have a place.’” He blinked as his gaze took to you, “You felt sympathy for their abuse based on your previously established sentiments. In the world of philosophy, that has… merit…”
His head jerked to the side as his eye began to twitch.

“Connor?”

A flash of red sent you into a panic before leveling to yellow, and then to blue.

“Connor…?”

“Yesterday, when Lieutenant Anderson and I were sent to investigate a sound complaint and a report of an android hiding an LED under his hat…” He was talking at you rather than to you, “He kept me behind him while he cleared the apartment with his gun, as if protecting me from something. Even before, when he told me not to pursue the deviants across the highway…he told me I’d get myself killed…” Connor shook his head, “I digress.”

“It’s okay-“

“In the apartment, there were over a dozen pigeons. It was if the deviant had transformed it into some kind of nest…Still, I recovered a journal that was undecipherable, and through various clues, I was able to reconstruct the scene and locate the deviant’s hiding place.”

His jaw tensed as he closed the book and set it on the table, “There was a chase. I pursued the deviant until Lieutenant Anderson intercepted him…and he was thrown off the side of a building.”

“Who? Hank!!”

“Yes.”

“What- he-“

“He was…hanging off the ledge. He had an 89% chance of survival, as his physical condition proved sufficient enough to save himself. But I…I let the deviant escape, I…I pulled Lieutenant Anderson to safety…”

“Because ‘human life is invaluable.’” You reached your hand out, gently placing it on his shoulder, “You felt…sympathy, from a sentiment.”

“Androids can’t feel sympathy. Sympathy is a human emotion. Sentimental values are foreign to our programming.”

“Are you telling me, that I’m…incorrect?”

You were soft in your tone, doing your best to soothe his frantic state of mind. Your thumb caressed him, and he slowly turned his head towards you. There was worry in the creases on his face. Fear in his eyes. His teeth ground together until he answered.

“…No.”

Your attention returned to the board, regretfully surrendering your hold on him to jot down your thoughts before connecting them to Kara and Alice. He waited patiently as you worked, tying strings from the two women, to rA9, to deviancy, to Markus; looping them all in the center around a black “?” cut from the back of a food container. You’d had to get creative, with that one.

You pulled away, the symbol shrinking as you returned your hands to your lap.

“‘To recognize untruth as a condition of life…’” You whispered, “‘That which is certain to
dispute the traditional ideas of value in a dangerous manner,’” You swallowed a hard lump in your throat, “…Has thereby alone, placed itself beyond good and evil.’”

The two of you sat in comfortable silence, taking in the rush that came with arriving at a higher understanding. His view scoped the evidence board, and you watched him in the proud moment.

“The world cannot be defined by what is ‘good,’ and what is ‘evil,’ as a truth cannot come from its opposite.” He looked to you for approval, “Therefore, the world is in a constant state of untruth. Am I correct?”

“I believe so…” You wanted to pour your heart out, and tell him how much this moment meant to you.

But he was already conflicted, as it was. Anything else would only make it worse. He’d made so much progress…

“To accept that untruth as a condition of life is what it means to be alive; to place yourself beyond the boundaries of society in itself…” You sighed, “Maybe ‘deviants,’ have discovered the ‘being within their being.’ Maybe they’re not ‘deviating,’ at all…”

You remembered Kara and Alice. The android in the interrogation room. Even Daniel, screaming like a wounded animal while waving a gun around.

“Maybe they’re just having an identity crisis as they…transcend, the human condition…”

Connor twisted in his chair, hanging an arm off the back.

“‘Fettered heart, free spirit.’” He grinned, “That’s why you named your article ‘The Free Spirit,’ isn’t it?”

“…You read my article?”

He nodded, “May I ask you something?”

You were nervous, but couldn’t tell him no.

“Go ahead…”

“Why ‘Beyond Good and Evil?’ What about that painting reflects you as a person, and your preference towards this piece of literature?”

Your fingers fidgeted in your lap, shoulders tensing at your ears.

“Nietzsche dismantles the theories of the philosophers of his time, and those who came before. He questions the world around him, no matter how much truth is praised, or valued…No matter how much security humans find in truths, even if they’re made from lies.” You were lost in a distant memory, “Carl and I had similar opinions on androids and their place in society…Some that opposed the majority, greatly. I could never figure out how him and my ex-husband remained such good friends after-“

“You were…Married?”

There was a certain tension to his voice, as if he didn’t like the prospect.

“A long time ago. It didn’t work out, obviously.”

“I’m…Sorry to hear that.”
“Don’t be. I’m much better off.”

He surveyed the apartment; designed to reflect a lavish, yet artistic, taste.

“I’d say so.”

“Not just in a materialistic sense…Leaving him was…” Your throat constricted, “It was the best decision I’ve ever made. He’s a very, very dangerous man.”

“Is that why you’re under WITSEC?” He growled, “Did he hurt you?”

“More like threatened me. But before that…” You found his eyes drilling into yours, “He did me a favor. One that affected the entire world. I tried to dismantle it. Alter it. Refuse it. He wouldn’t listen to reason. I hated him for it for years…I let his victory eat at me. So when Carl gave me a call, and told me he’d finished the painting…I went to his house…And just before he pulled the sheet off the canvas, he repeated a passage from this book, the one I gave him…”

You swiped your thumb across the cover, rolling and dipping between the leather embossing.

“‘They who fight monsters should be careful, lest they become a monster themselves. And if you gaze long enough into the abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you.’”

You frowned, and could only imagine the monsters Connor would have to face before this was all said and done. You weren’t sure what would stare back at you, either…

You looked up at the painting. Splotches of red – the blood of your monsters, pulled into the “abyssal,” black ink. A grey halo that marked salvation; and symbolized the downfall of your marriage. The loop of continuum that’d shifted through modes of instability and promised a state of clarity through corruption.

“Like an android’s light…”

Connor turned in his chair, joining you in your observation.

“Page 108, bullet 153.”

A pained smile worked its way to your mouth, “Not quite…Close, though. That quote is from page 107, bullet 146.”

“Your quote is not the one I am referring to.” He gave you a reassuring glance, “When I look at this painting, I see something else. Perhaps what Carl meant for you to see after you’d ‘given it time.’”

His neck rolled, face armed with a dangerous grin.

“‘What is done out of love, always takes place beyond good and evil.’”

Chapter End Notes
Behind the Scenes:
"In *Beyond Good and Evil,* Nietzsche accuses past philosophers of lacking critical sense and blindly accepting dogmatic premises in their consideration of morality."

I've read it at least 10 times, cover to cover...It's amazing. That being said, I *did* simplify some of his work so that it was easier to follow. :)

Let me just thank MjrGenMatt and ElegantN7 (best betas ever...BBE?) for dealing with my constant spamming of Nietzsche quotes and listening to me gush about how I sneak his ideals into *every single goddamn fic I've written.*

And, all of you, of course <3 I hope your head doesn't hurt too bad!

**Did you see both of the pictures? :D trying putting them side-by-side.**
eyboard clicks chimed under your fingers as they choreographed a dancing cursor. You ignored the red, squiggling lines and the blue, paired bars as your words took to the screen. You were struggling enough to keep up with your thoughts. Editing would come later.

You’d been at it for hours. Frantically recording what you and Connor had pieced together – a report that just might prove you were coherent enough to go back to work. A last-ditch effort to get Fowler to change his mind about your suspension.

You stopped.

You recalled your hesitation to pull the trigger. Not in regret, obviously – shooting Connor would have been devastating. But the flashbacks that’d occurred beforehand…

You’d seen a few officers fall victim to early-warning signs of PTSD, but as time went on, they got worse. They’d ignored the patterns, the advice of their friends; and left untreated, they became mentally unstable or exhibited suicidal tendencies.

You huffed under your breath.

You didn’t take the shot because it was Connor, the most naïve Detective in Detroit. You wouldn’t freeze up like that in a real firefight.

No, you were fine.

“There,” Connor clapped his hands, standing across the living room, “All done.”

You turned in your seat, finding a restored bookcase filled to the brim with your prized possessions.

He looked over his shoulder, “In alphabetical order, of course.”

“Thanks.” The corner of your mouth pulled into a grin, “You didn’t have to-”

You jumped as a knock came at your door. Your brows creased, staring it down. Connor’s eyes narrowed, his face locked on target.

You sighed, your arm flexing as you began to push yourself up.

Connor held out a hand, and you halted, “I’ll get it.”
You cocked your head, lowering back into your seat.

“Know something I don’t?”

“No…” He looked as if he, too, was untrusting as he navigated around the couches on either side of the coffee table, “You need to limit your physical activity.”

He pressed his hands against the door, peering through the peephole.

“It is a delivery android…have you ordered something recently?”

“No, I haven’t.” You took a sip of your freshly-brewed coffee, chuckling into the rising steam, “You’re awfully suspicious today, aren’t you?”

“I am suspicious every day. This android could be a deviant.”

“Or…someone else sent me something.”

“Hmph…Likely story…”

The knob twisted, and he ripped the door open. His arm barred the entrance, his fingers curled around the edge.

“State your business.”

You withheld a laugh, leaning to get a better view of the other android.

“Hello. I have a delivery for-“ He said your name.

“She has not ordered anything, recently. What is your function?”

“I am a delivery android.”

“State your model.”

“Model WD500, serial number 335 448 851.”

“Hm…” The back of Connor’s head dipped, “Very well.”

He stepped aside, and you gave a small wave, “It’s me.”

The android tucked the package under his arm, “I require your signature.”

Connor turned back to him, taking a tablet and stylus from his extended reach without asking. He kept an eye on the android as he walked them to you, his neck cranked as he offered you the items.

“It’s okay, Connor…” You gripped the stylus, signing your name, “He’s not a deviant.”

“Mhm…” He squinted harder.

You laughed out loud, giving him the electronic pen and signed tablet. When he returned to your apartment’s entrance, he exchanged them for the package.

Connor shut the door immediately. He pressed his palm on the keycard slider, his skin simmering away to reveal a metal core. An electric “click,” came after, and he brought you the delivery.
“Thank you.”

His interrogation face went away, and he gave you a soft smile, “You’re welcome.”

You shook the box, lips pursing in confusion as something bounced around inside.

Your phone vibrated, turning in subtle jumps. You set the box on the table.

“Would you like me to open it for you?” He asked, politely.

“Sure, knock yourself out.”

“Knock myself…Ah, yes. Lieutenant Anderson has used that expression before.”

You smirked, reaching for your phone.

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Chris Miller

Today 10:55

Did you get it? I got a text saying it was delivered.

Your mouth twisted, your fingers working out a response on the screen, “Haven’t opened it yet. Connor is still here.”

Chris Miller

Today 10:56

LOL did he stay the night?! Also, make sure you open it when he’s not around.

Chris Miller

Today 10:56

Scratch that. Definitely open it when he’s around.

“Yes…I mean, NO…not in that way. I’ll explain later…Wait, wtf did you send?”

Chris Miller

Today 10:57

The Apple of Eden. The forbidden fruit. The-
You dropped your phone on the desk, “Connor get away from that-“

The cardboard flaps pulled away. His entire body went rigid. His eyes opened so wide, it was as if they were about to pop out of their sockets.

He looked at you, back to the box, stepped away in an instant, folded his hands behind his back – stared at the wall.

“W-what-“ You stuttered, “What is it?!“

“It…IT-“ He turned his head away from you, “It appears to be something of a personal nature.”

Your chest ached as your heart pounded at its prison, trying to break free. You gulped, pulling it towards you – the box sliding along the shining wood. You took a deep breath; held it, wincing in terror as you peaked over the edge –

Inside, there was a purple, smaller box. A blank, purple, stupid box with a stupid note attached to it.

“Now, when Gavin tells you to go fuck yourself, you can actually go fuck yourself. Kidding. Say hi to Detective Swoon-Bot for me! You know, when you guys are finished. ;)”

Your phone began to ring with a very specific ringtone, scaring the shit out of you.

“What do we do with the drunken sailor, what do we do with the-“

You grabbed it, mashing it against your face, “Yes, Lieutenant Anderson?“

Connor perked up, his head spinning towards you, excited.

“Where the fuck is Connor?“

His smile retracted into horror.

“He’s, uh…He’s here. You know, looking out for me. Not like I can really move around.”

“Funny,” He huffed, “I didn’t think Detective-android-prototypes were fuckin’ babysitters. Put ‘im on the phone!”

You pulled it away from your ear, cringing as his shout boomed through the speaker. You passed it to Connor, who lifted it to his mouth.

“Hello, Lieutenant Anderson.”

His neck snaked back, his eyes closing as the rest of him jumped.
“Yes, I understand. I’ll be there shortly…Lieutenant? Hello?” He looked at the screen, “Huh…I suppose he was finished.”

“What did he say?”

“I’d…rather not repeat it.” He closed the phone, carefully placing it on the desk, “I have orders to report to the police station immediately.”

He looked around, spotting his shoes tucked neatly at the base of the couch. He walked over to retrieve them, and they dangled from his fingertips as he rounded the armrest to take a seat.

“It appears that Lieutenant Anderson’s time of arrival varies even more than I suspected.” He bent over, rustling at his feet, “Perhaps I should have listened to you.”

“Hah…” You shrugged, “I’m not exactly a role model when it comes to doing what I’m told.”

Connor stood, his steps leaving faint clicks on the floor as he pulled his jacket from a rack, “I do question your ability to follow orders.”

“Excuse me?”

“At the bridge, you pursued Kara and Alice…” He gave you a grin, sliding his arms into his grey sleeves, “…Despite Captain Fowler ordering that you go home and relax.”

“Yeah, and look at me now…” You leaned back in your chair, “While you go off to save the world, I’ll be here…waiting…relaxing…”

You drummed your fingers on your desk, peaking at him from the corner of your eye.

He secured the opening of his suit-jacket and renegade buttons on his shirt, rolling his shoulders into place and straightening the collar around his neck. He slid his cuffs down to his wrists one at a time, and straightened his tie. He smoothed his hair, looking at his reflection in your glass wall.

“I’d very much like to visit again.”

Your head turned, and he put his hands in his pockets as he approached you.

“You’re always welcome here, Connor. Even if…”

You stopped, swallowing the words.

“Even if?”

“Nothing.”

“Is there something you’d like to discuss?”

“Uhm…” Your fingers clawed at the bottom of your seat, “Where exactly do you go, when you’re not…working?”

“If I’m not reviewing cases, I stand at the android rack with the rest of DCPD’s units.” He answered with a bleak voice, “It can be quite understimulating.”

“You could always…you know, come here, instead…”

His head traded spots, swaying back and forth, “But what if you’re not present?”
“I don’t need to be. You *obviously* know how to let yourself in.” You chuckled, lifting your chin to face him, “I can add you to the guest list at the front desk. Think of it…like your own little nest.”

He blinked hard, his eyelids shuddering before going back to normal, “A nest. As in, for birds?”

“Yeah, like for birds. Just…” You crossed your arms, “Don’t go letting ’dozens of pigeons,’ in here. I’ll be very upset with you.”

“No pigeons,” He smiled, the tips of two fingers cocking towards you after tapping his forehead, “Got it!”

He turned to leave, the white letters spelling “ANDROID” shifting between his shoulders. He unlocked the door with his touch, pulling the door open.

“Oh, and Connor?”

He paused, turning to you, “Yes?”

“You’re not gonna…Uhm…” Reset your system,’ are you?”

He lit your stomach ablaze with a dazzling smile.

“’Alas, only birds strayed and fatigued by flight, now let themselves be captured with our hand.’”

Another Nietzsche quote. One that smelted your iron resolve, soldering you in place.

“…I’ll take that as a ‘no.’”
Wingman

Chapter Summary

November 7th, 2038
PM 03:46:38

Chapter Notes

Standby for Titanfa- I mean Top Gun references.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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ou shut the door with the back of your heel. It’d been a boring afternoon after Connor left. You’d tried to clean the apartment, but that didn’t work. You’d thought about taking your pain medication, but didn’t want the grogginess that came with it. So, as any “responsible” adult would do – you went grocery shopping.

That’s what life was without your badge. A choice between grocery shopping, cleaning, or answering any of the hundreds of scathing comments left on your blog; save for one or two. Not to mention, Fowler had shut down any hopes of coming back early with a measly, “Thanks.”

Hours of critical thinking in order to better understand deviants, and you get a “Thanks.”

It’s not like you wanted to hunt them all down and kill them. But you also had a city to protect. People, androids – and if there wasn’t a compromise found soon, you’d have a civil war on your hands…Blood, too. Maybe even yours, or-

You sighed, taking each item out of their respective bags, stacking them on the counter. A different type of packaging reminded you of the slight detour you took – a clothing shop that specialized in expensive suits and ties.

Your phone vibrated, and a song played from the confines of your pocket.

“Whoop, whoop! That’s the sound of the police-“

Your nose crinkled, and you pinned it between your ear and shoulder, “What?”

“I’ve been trying to get ahold of you all day.” Chris chuckled, “I know you’ve been getting my messages.”

“I’m busy.”
“Uh-huh. Listen, we’re getting off on time again. Turns out, your boy really helps us stay on top of things around here.”

You smiled, but Chris could never know that.

“I wanted to see if you were up for coming out tonight. We’re getting together for happy hour down at Jimmy’s. I’m worried if I don’t keep you socialized, you might turn feral.”

You snorted, “…I don’t know, man. Not really feeling it.”

“Come on. I need to hear stories about-“

“There are no stories, Miller.”

“I might be a bad liar, okay, but my bullshit detector is crazy good.”

You scoffed, “…I’ll think about it.”

“I’ll take it. Alright, Fowler’s giving me that look from his office…Should’ve called you on the work phone. Station’s not the same without you!”

“Tch…Get back to work, slacker.”

“Hah…Alright. Later.”

“See ya.”

You rolled your eyes, shaking your head as your thumb flicked through notifications on the screen:

[7 UNREAD TEXT MESSAGES]

Three were from Chris. A string of HELLO’s, STOP IGNORING ME’s, and WHY ARE YOU LIKE THIS’s.

Delete, delete, delete.

You opened the next one.

Gavin Reed
Today 12:24
Hope ur feeling better.

You scoffed, sending a cordial, “Thanks, Detective Reed.”

Next message.
Hank Anderson

Today 13:22

Connor won’t shut the fuck up about philosophy and he’s giving me a goddamn migraine.

You smirked, “‘One should not wrongly materialize ‘cause’ and ‘effect.’”

You were surprised by how quickly he answered.

Hank Anderson

Today 15:55

For FUCK’S sake…

One more unread message to go. Your brows creased, and your jaw tightened.

“What is…”

UNKNOWN SENDER

???:??

Did you know WITSEC’s servers are maintained by CyberLife androids?

You dropped your phone, and it skittered across the counter. A knee-jerk reaction that exhausted a stale breath trapped in your lungs. You rattled like a leaf…and then snatched the phone up again.

To: Chris Miller

Be there around 6.

Message Sent

…

Neon lights blinded you, your keys jingling from their ring clasped around your belt loop. A chorus of grown men leaked through the doors, and you started to regret your decision. Their voices went along with a familiar tune – chords from an electric guitar that was aged and
reminiscent of a time even before you were born.

“HIGH-WAY, TO THE-“

You entered, and two words shook your eardrums.

“DANGER ZONE!”

You shouldn’t have been surprised to find Chris singing with a group of patrons, a beer in one hand and a piece of food in the other.

“Look, guys!” He shouted, waving as barbeque sauce almost dripped on his uniform. “There’s our Maverick!”

A loud wave of “HEY’s” followed, and you were embraced by your coworkers.

“Easy, easy guys – ow, come on-“

You winced as head pats and shoulder-punches rocked you in place, squirming to escape their grip.

“I didn’t think you’d actually show-“ Chris took a bite of his chicken, chewing it as he continued, “I was scared I ordered this for nothing!”

He slid over a plate of your favorite bar food.

“Oh, man.” You hung your wet jacket on the back of a barstool, “You shouldn’t have.”

You kept your voice quiet, lowering yourself in your seat, “Kinda like how you shouldn’t have sent me an android dick in the mail…”

“HAH! Hngh-“ He started to choke, and he beat his chest with his fist, “Shit-“

“I’m not giving you CPR.”

“I’m good,” He took a swig of beer, “I’m GOOD-“

“You drinking on the job?”

“One beer.” He wiped his hands on a napkin, turning to you, “Soo…Partner…” He grinned, “Did ‘curiosity,’ kill the ‘cat,’ so to speak?”

“Chris…I swear to god.”

“Look, if you wanna be mad at someone, be mad at my wife.”

“Why in the hell would I be mad at her?!”

“’Cause it was her idea!”

Your eyebrows bent, “What?”

“I was talking to her about work, then you came up. Then I told her about the Con-Man-“

“…Come again?”

“That guy,” He nodded his chin, “Over there.”
A hard break was followed by a heavy rolling sound. You leaned back, finding a familiar face bent over a pool table.

His white sleeves were rolled up to his elbows, wearing a watch around his wrist. His hair and LED was covered by a black beanie with letters spelling “DCPD,” stitched across the front. His forehead was creased, concentrating on the stick bobbing between his fingers.

“Why do I even fucking bother?” Gavin huffed, a cigarette dangling out of his mouth, “Fuckin’ RoboCop…”

Connor struck his mark, and another ball went flying into a pocket.

“Detective Reed, may I ask you something?” He planted his pool cue on the floor, his fingers wrapping around the top.

Gavin rolled his eyes, ashing his cigarette, “Yeah, whatever.”

“Why do you call me ‘RoboCop?’”

“You jacket,” He nodded to a stand, “It says RK800. RK. RoboCop.”

Connor tilted his head to the side, “’Cop’ starts with a ‘C.’”

“Are you callin’ me stupid?”

“No, not at all.” His eyes darted to the other off-duty officers huddled around the pool table.

He cleared his throat, taking on a certain suaveness, “You said it, not me.”

Your stomach tied in knots, remembering what happened the last time Connor caught an attitude with “Detective Reed.” He was playing with fire. Except now, everyone laughed.

“You little fucking prick-“ His hands curled into fists, and Officer Brown grabbed his arm.

“Hey, remember what Fowler said. Tonight is Anderson’s night off. We’re responsible for it.”

Gavin straightened his leather jacket with a growl, “Plastic piece of shit…”

Connor’s eyes lifted in a devious grin. He looked pretty proud of himself.

And then he found you.

Chris’s chuckle pulled your attention back, “Idiot…”

You tried to play it off like you weren’t just caught staring by the android raking in bet collections.

“Anyway, back to your confession.” You glared at Chris, “What exactly did you tell your wife?”

“Everything. That’s kinda how marriages work.” He took a sip of his drink, “Gave me some speech about women looking out for each other and then told me not to tell you about…Oh.”

“God, you and Gavin are a pair…” You shook your head, starting to eat your meal, “And that’s not how all marriages work.”

“Oh okay, Ms. Forever-Alone. Please tell me what you know about marriages.”

“I used to be married.” You huffed, “Dodged a bullet with that one.”
A low rumble came from his chest, “If only you were as good as dodging real bullets.”

“Fuck off.”

Jimmy slapped a towel over his shoulder, his palms pressed against the bar that divided the two of you, “Hey there, pretty lady.”

“Hey, Jimmy.” You crossed your arms along the edge of the counter, “How ya been?”

“Whole of a hell lot better than you, from what I hear.”

“Yeah, well…Matchmaking Miller over here doesn’t know how to keep his mouth shut.”

Chris winked, moving his police hat away to give you more space, “Guilty as charged.”

“The usual?” Jimmy asked, a smile forming on his harsh features.

“You know it.”

“Anything for DCPD’s finest.” He nodded and got to work.

You ate next to your partner, swallowing a mouthful of food, “You know I saw you trip back in Ravendale, right?”

“Do what now?”

“You were walking. And then you weren’t. It happened. I’ve got notes to prove it.”

“Goddamn it…” He frowned, a finger slipping from his mouth, “…That’s almost as embarrassing as when your boy toy over there got reprimanded for playing Frogger on the highway.”

“PLAYING-“ You started coughing, “Oh, my…”

“Or the looks on your faces when you opened my gift.”

“I’m going to fucking kil-“

“Speak of the devil,” He twisted in his seat, “How’s it going, my man?”

Connor slipped between you and another person at the bar, leaning his head forward and looking at Chris, “I’d call it a success.” His arm brushed against yours as he slid over a wad of cash, “It appears you were correct. Illegal gambling is fun, lucrative…and harmless.”

“Ha-HA-“ Chris picked it up, waving it around, “You’re a legend!”

“Will this be enough to cover tonight’s tab, Officer Miller?”

“Yeah…Mine, and hers.”

Your face got hot, and you turned your head.

“Hello.” He stared at you, almost nervous, “My name is Connor.”

Your mouth hung open. Your heart went ice-cold.

“As ordered,” Jimmy slid your drink towards you, “And don’t think I don’t know what that is.”
Your eyes snapped to him, finding a pair of pursed lips through your daze.

“Saw him pick up Hank for a homicide a few days back. I know he’s an-“

“Upstanding Detective.” Chris plucked a twenty-dollar bill from his stack, “Who saved a little girl three months ago, the woman in front of you, and stopped Hank from falling to his death.”

“You’re lucky you’re you.” Jimmy snatched the money, “And, I’m keeping this.”

“It’s hard-earned cash. You should.” Chris tipped his beer at the ceiling, “Making a profit off Gavin’s misery never felt so good.”

“ Heard that.”

You shook your head, turning back to Connor, “You… You don’t remember me?”

His eyes flashed to Chris, and then focused on you, “I’m the android, sent by CyberLife to-“

“Help with the deviancy case. I know. Connor-“ You pushed your face closer, “We just-“

A cough came from behind you. One that sounded a lot like Chris covering up a laugh. His tell. The thing that got him in trouble all the fucking time because he was horrible at lying.

Your mouth creased. You squeezed the chilled glass in your hand. Connor’s eyebrows perked up, giving you a smile.

“I. Fucking.” Your neck spun back at Chris, “Hate you.”

“IT WAS HIS IDEA!”

“No, that’s what you said about your wife, and I’m not fuckin’ buying it anymore!”

“Officer Miller said it would be funny.” Connor’s chin fell and rose, inching closer to you, “It was my idea.”

“THAT’S NOT FUNNY, CONNOR!”

His beanie shifted as his face pulled back, “I’m sorry, I miscalculated my delivery.”

Your nose scrunched, and you bit your lower lip. You sucked in your cheeks, trapping your tongue between your teeth.

“Do it.” Chris urged, “You know you wanna laugh.”

You did.

“God, fucking… Jimmy!”

“Yo!”

“Make it two! Ugh…” You let out short, quiet giggles, “It’s gonna be a long night…”

You took your drink like a shot, placing the empty glass on the bar’s rubber padding and wiping your mouth.

“The perks of being suspended, eh?” Chris smirked.
"Yep. Lots of alcohol." You grabbed his shoulder, giving him a gentle shake, "You’re alright, you know that?"

"YOU!" He held his hands out, "You are still dangerous. But you can be my wingman, anytime."

You squinted before you realized what he was referring to…

"Bullshit," You nudged him with your elbow, "You can be mine."

You peaked over your shoulder, finding Connor leaning on the bar; tie caught between his chest and a pair of crossed arms. He looked like he was enjoying himself, just sitting there and listening with the pool stick resting next to him. A faint light came from his pocket, blue in color. His armband.

"Hey, Detective Fuckboy," Connor’s jacket was inside-out, and it hit him in the back of his head, "We gotta head to the station. Call came in. Homicide."

Chris turned around, "What?"

"You, too. Need to get back to the precinct and this one needs to fetch his owner." Gavin slapped money on the counter, "Got that?"

Connor gained a foot on him as he stood straight, looking down, "…Got it."

"Good. You can catch a cab when we get there."

Chris grunted, almost as pissed as you were, "Where’s the crime scene?"

"The Eden Club…” Gavin’s eyes lifted to yours, "I’d say you could come with, but…You know. Wouldn’t want you getting hurt."

"Why are you always such an asshole?" You tried to stand, and Chris pushed down on your shoulder.

"Who knows?" His brows perked, "Maybe I like you."

He gave you the sickest smile, and bit his teeth in a snap.

"Later…Dollface."

He grabbed the back of Chris’s uniform, pulling him out of his seat.

“C’mon, Reed!” His hands flailed for his hat, barely grabbing it as he was yanked through a crowd.

Jimmy shifted his weight on a hip, pressed against the bar.

“Never liked that guy.”

Your nose twitched, “No one does…”

Connor flipped his jacket on his shoulders, sliding his hands through the sleeves. He snapped his armband around his bicep, pulling the hat off his head.

Jimmy groaned under his breath, “You couldn’t have waited till you got outside?"
Connor froze, studying the looks aimed at him.

“I’m sorry.” He fixed his frenzied mess for hair, looking at the beanie on the counter, “I should return this to Officer Miller.”

“Yeah…He’s had that for a long time…”

You weren’t feeling very talkative. The night had been going smooth, spending time with two of your favorite people, and then Gavin and a murderer fucked it all up. It was a nice escape, though, however brief.

Connor made his usual adjustments to his appearance. He began to leave, stopping at your side. His body turned with a concerned look on his face.

“What did Detective Reed mean when he implied that he ‘liked’ you?”

“Nothing important, Connor…”

“You filed a sexual-harassment suit against him last year. Was his comment relevant?”

“…Connor-“

“Should I include it in my report?”

You pinched the bridge of your nose, propping your head up with an elbow, “…No. Thank you, though.”

“Very well.” He gave you a curt nod, “Have a good night, Officer.”

You watched him leave, the door chiming in his absence.

You’d come here for friendship; comradery – maybe a little bit of fun. And then you were reminded you had a job you should be doing, one that you weren’t allowed to do.

You turned to your drink, left abandoned on the counter.

“Gonna need something stronger than this, Jimmy…”

You knocked it back, scolding at the burn of liquor.

“I’ve got half a bottle of Private Stock left.”

“Sounds perfect.”

You clammed up, shying away from bumping shoulders and loud groups. Jumping at darts hitting a board, and the shouts that came after. Idle chat floated on cigarette smoke, wafting by your nose. But you were alone – like a background loner in a movie.

A glass filled to the brim bumped against your wrist, void of ice and anything else to water it down.

“Thanks.”

Jimmy screwed the corkwood top back into place on the bottle, “No problem. On the house.”

“Ah, you don’t have to do that…”
You looked at the pile of cash left at Chris’s previous seat.

“All good. I don’t know how to fix the world’s problems, but…” He sighed, wiping his hands clean on his jeans as he surveyed his bar, “I know how to fix yours.”

“You do?”

“Yeah, so…” He pulled out a cigarette, lighting it with a strike of a match; tossing the burnt wood in the sink.

The small of his back took to the edge of the opposite counter, lined with cash registers and glass bottles. He crossed his ankles. A glowing cherry hovered over the floor as his hand splayed across his forearm.

“Start talking.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to MjrGenMatt for coming up with the "You said it," and the "Or the looks on your faces," lines! He made some other suggestions that really brought this chapter to life.

I’d also like to add, Top Gun is my favorite movie (since I was 5, and even by then it was a classic) and the singing scene was based off real events between myself and my childhood-best-friend, who is indeed a male. (Seriously, I was the best "wo-man," in his wedding.)

Anyway, I hope you enjoyed it! This one hit really close to home for me!
the best part about starting your drinking session early is that you had plenty of time to sober up before bar close. It was an art you’d mastered – a careful algorithm that kept your career, and your dignity, safe. Sure, there’d been some hazy trips to the bathroom. Or conversations that you might have had. Strangers may have talked to you.

The in-betweens weren’t usually what mattered.

But you’d overdone it a bit. You’d drank in Jimmy’s company nearly all night long during the breaks of his order-taking; because, according to him, you needed someone to talk to that wasn’t a cop, or close to the situation. An outside perspective.

He was the typical bartender that knew the city’s darkest secrets while guests paid for truth serum that came in all shapes, colors, and sizes.

You were no different from them.

You latched on to a glass of water. The straw slipped through your teeth, jaw numb and your eyes dried.

“You’re not a ‘bad cop.’” Jimmy had his back to you, shutting down the drink station.

It was almost closing time. There was only you, him, and a guy way drunker than you in the corner.

“But I got-” You hiccuped your friend’s name, “Killed. I don’t wanna get Miller killed too.”

“What happened there wasn’t your fault, alright?” He huffed, “Androids always find a way to mess things up…’Daniel,’ was no exception.”
“Not…Not Connor-“ Your face slid down your palm, “He doesn’t-“

“Hate to break it to you, but Sherlock is part of the problem.”

“Nu-uh-“

He took a drag of his cigarette, sitting down across from you, “Lemme ask you somethin.’ why do you think I don’t allow androids in this place?”

“’Cause you hate fun.”

He said your last name, “I own a bar. You’re way off.”

You blinked, “Maybe…”

“You see all these people, coming in here and just trying to get their mind off life…Truth is, most of them lost their jobs. Know why? Androids took ‘em. And I’ve got nothing against them. But it’s my job to keep my customers happy. They don’t appreciate having to sell their houses because CyberLife pumped out a new line of…I don’t know – dockworkers, and put them out on their asses. Humans just weren’t ready for androids. We saw new, shiny toys, and brought them to life without a game plan.” He snapped his fingers, “Take Detective Reed, for example.”

You cringed, “Yuck…”

“Hear me out,” He puffed smoke in the air, “You can say what you want about the guy, but he’s a Detective. He earned that promotion. Pretty damn good at his job, too, from what Hank tells me. So, how is it fair, that…What did you say his name was?”

“Con-“

“Right, Connor. How is it fair that Connor gets to stroll in and just stomp on all that college, career-advancement, training?”

“Ugghh-“

“Really, though. Think about it for a second. Put all your biased bullshit aside. Think.”

“I have thought about it!” You slurred, “I saw the first goddamn android prototype-“

“Huh?” His interest peaked.

Your neck snaked back, “What?”

“You just said-“

You played back the conversation, your eyes glazing over, “I meant-“

Water, meet wrong tube. You went into a coughing fit.

“Don’t go dying here, please…” He mumbled, “You okay?”

You cleared your throat, “Yeah-“

“Maybe that’s enough android talk for tonight.”

“No, I wanna keep…” You burped, “Going.”
“Last thing I’ll say is… I think it could work. You know, if they really cared about us. Our lives are so brief compared to theirs.” He frowned, “And as far as I’m concerned? With everything going on in the world? They can have the whole goddamn planet, for all I care. Just let me serve my alcohol, and send robot buddies to do all the repairs and shit. They keep us happy, make college and work and all that optional – shit, they can do whatever they want. We gone and fucked up enough.”

You gave him a blank stare. Hoped you didn’t sound like him when you talked about Nietzsche. Asked yourself why you were still thinking about goddamn mother-fucking Nietzsche.

Or Connor, and how bad you wanted to-

“You’re a mess.” He smirked, his head shaking with a friendly grin on his face.

You grunted, “I know.”

“Speaking of messes…” Jimmy rubbed his cigarette out, “I’ve gotta start shutting this place down. You alright for a few?”

“Yeah…” You yawned, rubbing your eyes, “I think I’ll be good to drive soon.”

“Uh… You’re not getting your keys back until that water’s gone, Officer.”

You scoffed.

“You’ll thank me tomorrow.”

He flipped a towel over his shoulder, leaving for the back room. The doors swayed, their edges dancing with each other.

Your lips rasped as a deep sigh left your chest, blabbering along like the idiot behind you. The whispering. The chuckling. The stench of liquor. The slight breathing on your neck-

You whipped around, elbow out – shoving at someone’s chest.

“Hey, whoa…” He held his hands up, “Easy, there…”

He was an unkept man, covered in tattered clothes and a layer of sweat. Definitely more drunk than you.

“I just wanna know what an officer of the law is doing by herself, all alone…”

“Minding her own damn business… Why don’t you?”

“Is that an order?” He bit his lip, stumbling next to you, “Gonna read me my rights?”

“You have the right to remain silent… And you should.” Your body went rigid.

Yeah, you were still buzzed. But a creep who made you feel threatened sure as fuck sobered you up more than any water that Jimmy’s tap had to offer.

“That’s the problem with all you fffff—-” He sneezed, “Fucking cops—”

He buckled, his hand swiping along the counter and knocking over your cup. The water pooled around your hand, the ice stinging as it bounced over your skin.

You jumped from your seat. Grabbed your jacket. Shoved your pile of cash across the counter,
away from the puddle.

“Fucking-“

Jimmy still had your keys.

“Where the fuck do you think you’re goin’-“ He reached out, hand curving around your hip, “I ain’t done talkin’ to you yet-“

He pulled you against his chest, reeking and damp. You pushed him, “Get the fuck off me-“

A door’s chime came from behind you. You didn’t look. Couldn’t pull your eyes away from the person trying to hurt you.

The man tripped over the legs of a barstool, and the tumble that followed had Jimmy barreling back to his post, “What the fuck is going on?”

“This fucker put his hands on me.” You pointed at him, taking a step backwards, “He-“

You hit something. Your breathing stopped. A cold feeling shot through your veins. A small whimper escaped your lips. Someone was behind you. That’s when you turned around.

“Connor?”

He didn’t look at you. His face was torn in half, somewhere between angry and lost. Two pages bookmarked in a story that told the tale of a troubled mind and feral bloodlust.

“Can’t blame me for wanting that fine piece of ass.” The man slurped in a string of drool.

The crease in Connor’s brow deepened.

“This, is Officer,” Your last name trailed the title, “And she is, indeed, one of DCPD’s ‘finest.’ However, I suspect she has very little interest in engaging in any physical activities with you, other than a repeat arrest.”

“You don’t know me for shit. C’mon, Jimmy…get this bitch and her fuckin’ android out of my face.”

Jimmy reached under the counter, two slugs clicking in place.

He’d cocked a shotgun, laying it on the bar, “Time to call it a night, Kim.”

The back of Connor’s arm pressed against your stomach. You winced, and he moved you behind him.

“Kim Yo-Han, born on November 10th, 1999. Found guilty of domestic violence.” His chin rocked to the side, “Is there a reason in particular why you show such disrespect for women?”

“Fuck you, asshole. Didn’t you see the sign on the door? ‘No androids allowed.’” Kim swiped his mouth, “So why don’t you be a good lil’ robot and fuck off?”

“Mr. Yo-Han, I must inform you that your belligerent behavior is a direct violation to the terms and conditions of your parole. I will be recommending a cease and desist-“

“You think I give a fuck? You think your fancy fuckin’ speech can stop me from crushing you like an empty beer can?”
“No.” Connor’s fists tightened, “But, someone in your financial situation might find it difficult to cover the costs of repairs if you damage me.” There was a taunt to his words, “For your information, I’m worth a small fortune.”

“You smug mother—“

Connor blocked a fist in motion with his wrist, grabbing the back of Kim’s neck. He yanked him around, shoving his head towards the bar.

“Connor—“

Kim’s hands slammed against the counter, saving his face from being demolished. His back collided with Connor’s chest in an angry charge, sending him stumbling; catching a table.

“NOT in here!” Jimmy yelled.

Kim turned around with a snarl, sniffing and cracking his neck. He looked behind him, grabbing an empty bottle from Jimmy’s side of the counter.

“I’m gonna enjoy cutting you to pieces, you stupid fucking android.” He broke it over a stool; the new, jagged edges becoming a makeshift weapon, “And then I’m gonna fuck your friend.”

You looked to Jimmy, who now seemed amused by the fight. You took a step forward, dropping your jacket on the floor. You weren’t about to listen to this guy run his mouth. You’d worked way too hard to protect this city for this kind of treatment.

“I’m afraid you’ll find yourself in a state of disappointment, Mr. Yo-Han.” Connor grabbed a pool cue that’d been leaning against the wall, “Your chance of success is highly improbable.”

Kim stabbed at him wildly. Connor stepped to the side, his tie fluttering in line with the flaps of his jacket. Kim’s head moved parallel to his stomach, almost tripping over his own momentum.

“I tried to warn you.”

There was a dark grin on Connor’s face as he looped the cue around his neck, barring the stick with the crooks of his elbows.

“You should’ve listened, Mr. Yo-Han.”

You froze in place. Connor wrangled the drunken bastard, his feet kicking in the air as he left the ground. Kim’s fingers curled around the thin piece of wood choking him while wet gurgles and crackling breaths left his mouth.

“Have you conceded?”

Kim elbowed him in the stomach – a pointless motion. Connor barely flinched.

“I’m afraid I can’t release you until you’ve agreed to cooperate. Please, tap my arm if you agree to these terms.”

His lip twitched as Kim spit on the underside of his chin. The line of his jaw tensed, and his already-perturbed demeanor turned downright hostile.

“Mr. Yo-Han, I regret to inform you that humans cannot survive without oxygen.” His grip on the cue tightened, earning him more pathetic struggling from the assailant in his possession, “I’d advise an immediate reversal of your decision.”
“Alright…” Jimmy looked at you, “Call it off. I’m not in the mood to file paperwork for this asshole.”

You gulped, your voice shaky, “Connor…”

His features crinkled into pure rage, never leaving the paling face in his vice.

“Connor, please.”

He found you, his dangerous stare making you uneasy. He watched you for a moment until his face smoothed, the LED on his temple shifting from red to yellow.

Connor begrudgingly dropped the man, tossing the pool cue aside. His fingers latched onto Kim’s head, grabbing him by a fistful of matted hair. He began his march towards you, dragging his victim along.

He presented him as would a cat with a kill, jerking him between the two of you. He forced Kim upright while he secured an arm behind his back.

“Now…Apologize.”

Kim breathed heavily, choking on his own saliva.

“F-fuck…y-you…”

Connor jostled him in place, his demand coming through clenched teeth, “DO it.”

Kim began coughing, his eyes shut tight.

“I’m…I’m…”

“That’s it.” Connor growled, “Go on.”

“…Sorry…”

Kim was thrown to the side, his stomach bending around the end of a table. He panted and groaned in pain, rolling off the edge and into a booth seat.

Connor rolled his shoulders, pulling the collar of his jacket straight, “Thank you for your compliance, Mr. Yo-Han.” His hands slid up his tie, the knot tightening at his neck, “Please, do enjoy the rest of your evening.”

You inhaled, swallowing nervously. You weren’t sure if you should feel safe or terrified.

He knelt to retrieve your jacket, the corners of his eyes lifting in a smile as he held it out, “Would you like to leave?”

You accepted it, your eyelids fluttering as your focus turned to the floor, “S-sure…”

You started to wonder how much of his cute, gentle shell was a façade. Wondered which Connor was real – the ruthless protector, or the sweet caretaker. Or both? Was both possible?

“Yeah, leave me to clean this up…” Jimmy sighed at the man still hacking in the booth, “Oh and hey, police girl,” He tossed you your keys, “You might need these.”

They flipped in the air, your DCPD keychain swinging like a flail. You lifted your hand to catch them, but there was an interception.
The keys hit Connor’s palm in a full stop, his fingers closing around them.

“Tonight’s activities have pushed you past the legal limit of allowed blood-alcohol content while operating a vehicle.” He looked down at you, a troubled smile haunting his features, “I’ll drive.”

You rolled your ankle, rubbing the back of your neck, “You…Know how to drive a manual?”

His eyes lifted to the ceiling, and he took a small bite at the inside of his cheek. His red LED flashed to blue, and his gaze returned to you.

“I do, now.”

Chapter End Notes

Beta'd by MjrGenMatt, ElegantN7, and now celestielle!

As a side note, I'd like to include that Kim Yo-Han was a canon NPC in the game!
November 8th, 2038
AM 02:05:05

Chapter Notes

ALL ABOARD THE FEELS TRAIN!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A
ngelic, feathery ice crystals kissed the windshield. Rubber blades squeegeed them away, two rainbows of melted water streaking along their tips. The hood of your car glistened from each running, illuminated stripe as you passed under street lights. They lit the cabin in brief spurts like a distress beacon; pulsing and fading, brief and alert.

Coming down from the events of the night, you found yourself distracted. Dehydrated, maybe. Jimmy had tried to fix that. Settled your stomach, at least…until some asshole decided to get too handsy and Connor almost snapped his neck in half…

This night just kept on going. So did the headache.

You watched the city scroll by outside, fogging the window with your breath as the rest of it floated away. A different sort of distress beacon caught your attention in the hazed reflection.

The breathing, golden ring on Connor’s temple. His hair was damp, the frizzled strands out of place. His face was molded in forlorn countenance. His left arm was locked straight as he gripped the steering wheel, the other resting on the transmission shifter. He slouched in the driver’s seat, as if he’d been driving all his life.

You shivered, hugging the wet sleeves of your jacket. It was so…fucking…cold. Each muscle convulsed in spasms, your stomach clenching as you tried to stabilize your core. Your self-medication had started to wear off, and things began hurting again.

Not just your body. Your mind.

Thoughts were painful, somber recollections of your past – distant and recent all the same. You’d tried to recount the events that led to this specific point in time, but you couldn’t slow them down enough to catch one. Couldn’t hold on to something hopeful as each memory overrode the next like a disk fragmentation.
The car slowed to a red light, your brakes squealing as the pads you’d been told to replace several times outed themselves. You looked at your dash, staring at the knob pointed at a dotted, red line. Your eyes lifted.

He was watching you.

You snapped your chin back towards the window, teeth pressing together.

What sounded like a wind tunnel fired, and a clicking noise came from behind you. You returned to the source, squinting at headlights as oncoming traffic drove by.

Connor had turned the heat up; the fans to the highest speed, and was in the middle of aiming the two air vents on his side of the car towards you.

He propped his elbow on the window sill, leaning his head into a curled fist. His wrist relaxed on the curve of the wheel, fingers silently drumming at the plastic. His knee bounced.

“No need to apologize,” He flicked the turn signal, rolling the steering wheel with the ball of his palm, “What happened wasn’t your fault.”

“I know it wasn’t. But you have enough going on without getting involved in my shit…”

“I care about your well-being.”

“I went to your apartment building.” His features fell flat, “The ST300 receptionist informed me that you hadn’t returned, and that I was permitted to enter your home, regardless.”

“I think I should’ve told you…”

“Why didn’t you? I told you that you could…”

“I…” His brows tensed and relaxed in a sequential order, “I was worried, about you.”

“You don’t need to worry about me. Jimmy and I could’ve taken that guy down, no problem.”

“I didn’t like the way that man was speaking to you…Like you were…”

“I’m sorry…” You swallowed hard, “For…what happened, with Kim.”

“Your LED’s been yellow ever since we left.” You whispered, pulling in an icy breath.

“Is something wrong?”

“Why couldn’t I?” He shot you a glance, “I care about your well-being.”

“I didn’t like the way that man was speaking to you…Like you were…”

“Hey,” You put your hand over his, resting on the shifter, “I’m okay now, thanks to your spectacle, back there.” You chuckled, “It’s over. Just try and let it go.”
His LED flashed red. The tires squealed as the wheel spun to the side, and your seatbelt snapped in place. Your back bounced against your seat, which did nothing for the creeping pain.

“Ow, fuck-“

He threw the car in park and cranked the emergency brake; pulled over on the side of the road. You were breathing rapidly, heart pounding – hands braced against the edge of your dashboard.

“Connor, what the-“

His head jerked back and forth, his fingertips digging into his skull like he was trying to pry something out.

“I let it go-“ His voice cracked, a small squeak breaking the last word, “I let them go-“

The red light as flashing sporadically, an angry eye blinking at you in a new form of warning.

“Connor,” You placed your hand on his shoulder, and he jumped away, bumping into the door’s interior.

“Connor, come back to me.” You twisted in your seat, leaning towards him, “You’re okay. You hear me? You’re okay-“

A new sheen took to his cheeks as he pried his eyes open. His pupils shook, distant and lost and-

“Hey,” You ducked in front of him, and his trembling stare found you under a twitching eyelid, “It’s me,” You repeated your first name, “Remember?”

He was shaking so hard you worried pieces of him would start flying off.

His lips quivered, but his sight never left you. The flashing red went quiet, and the yellow light returned.

“That’s it, there you go…” You gave him a sad smile, your hand curving around the back of his head, “See? You’re okay.”

You swallowed as his hands lowered, and he studied them as if he’d committed a horrible crime.

“I…”

“Shh…” You petted him softly, “Just relax.”

He turned to you in a rapid motion, the tip of his nose brushing against yours, “I can’t.”

The deep contours around his mouth – held in place by his sharp jaw. The way his eyes held a certain longing, how is brow was slanted into sadness…He’d never been so close to you, before. But this…all of this…

This was heart-breaking.

You remembered how Jimmy pulled you back from your despair, just by offering a listening ear.

“Talk to me.”

You wanted to share this intimate moment with him for a little while longer, but you pulled back and gave him space. Your hand left him, and you leaned back into your seat.
“What happened at the Eden Club?”

He was breathing deep – something that seemed odd for an android. His eyes clamped shut, his jawline shifting as he swallowed. The space around his LED tensed, and the color stabilized to blue.

“It started at Lieutenant Anderson’s house…and a game called Russian Roulette.”

…

He’d told you about going to Hank’s, how he found him passed out on the floor with a revolver. A .357 Magnum, much like yours – but with one bullet in the chamber. He’d described how Hank attempted to get his dog, Sumo, to attack him; giving him “positive reinforcement,” even when he didn’t. He had mentioned a plethora of sticky notes on Hank's bathroom mirror and inquired about one that read, “Keep Sailing,” something Hank said often. His question was if the message was linked to Hank’s ringtone in your phone. It was. He’d asked a less light-hearted question about a picture of Cole Anderson, Hank’s deceased son. You’d declined to answer.

He’d walked you through the arrival at the crime scene; how Gavin and Chris were already there. How Gavin had referred to him as Hank’s “plastic pet,” and how Chris remained civil and professional. He admired him. He’d referred to him as his, “friend.”

When the topic shifted to the murder itself…things were less clear.

Connor was less…stable.

“Lieutenant Anderson and I deduced that Michael Graham died of asphyxiation rather than cardiac arrest. There was a deactivated android in the room…a WR400 Traci model. I was able to temporarily reactivate it…” He looked away, “It said Graham was hitting it… ‘again, and again…’ It told us it wasn’t the murderer. Our investigation led us to the club’s warehouse…I found the deviant. Both of them.”

“‘Both of them?’”

“There were two female Tracis. One of them was the murderer, and the other was its accomplice. There was a struggle. They resisted. I chased them outside to the loading bay. I was struck down, I landed next to a gun, I had them in my sights, and I-“

His light flashed yellow. You were starting to lose him again.

“Easy, Connor.” You tried your best to stay calm, “You’re doing great.”

His eyes lifted to you, and he settled himself.

“The deviant told me it didn’t mean to kill Michael. That it wanted to stay alive, and get back to the one it loved and be held in its arms” He pursed his lips, “Machines don’t feel love…Our emotions are simulated, an imitation of-“

“That’s not true.”

“NOTHING is true anymore.” He growled, “I saved Lieutenant Anderson and let Rupert get away. I decided not to shoot the two deviants at the Eden Club. Even after Lieutenant Anderson
told me ‘it was better off’ that way, I still…I’m designed to accomplish a task. If I keep failing, CyberLife will…”

The fact that Hank had approved of Connor sparing the deviants threw you off…but if Connor was implying what you thought he was…

“They’ll what?”

“They’ll deactivate me.”

His warning hit you in the chest. A belt slipped in your brain, knocking your heart in response.

“Lieutenant Anderson held a gun to my head and asked me if I was afraid to die,” He slammed the wheel with his palms, “I shouldn’t be afraid to be deactivated!”

“Wait, wait, hold on…First of all, be careful with that. It’s old.” You nodded to your steering wheel, “Second, Hank did what?”

“He said those two girls really seemed in love. Asked me what I really was. He held a gun to my head, asked me if I was afraid to die, and then questioned what would happen if he pulled the trigger.” His face was pained as it fell, “I told that I’m whatever he wants me to be. That I would find it regrettable to be interrupted. That, if he shot me…There would be nothing. No more being his partner or working at the DCPD station. No more ‘happy hours’ or illegal gambling with Officer Miller and the rest of the unit.” His shoulders shook, and he found you through his sadness, “No more reading, or engaging conversations. No more you…”

He watched you as if waiting for reprimand. To be told he was wrong, and that his feelings were fake, and his ideas were irrelevant. He was practically begging to be put out of his misery.

“Come on…” You frowned, pulling away from him, “…Let’s go home.”

Snow had formed a thin veil over the windshield. The quiet, crisp specs piled on top of each other. They shook as his hesitation expired, and the engine roared to life.

Your nerves stilled, and the building tension flatlined. Everything had become clear, in the wake of his near self-destruction.

Connor was becoming a deviant, and it was your fault.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to my betas for making this process incredibly easier <3

Also, thanks to everyone (again) for all of our amazing conversations. This has been SO FREAKING AWESOME. Next update might take an extra day, as June 25th is my (25th) birthday. :)

NOW GO HUG CONNOR!
here hadn’t been an exchange of words since Connor’s outburst. You both had simply walked inside, and then you’d left him to collect himself, going to your room to get changed…

Dry clothes were a blessing. To feel the cloth caressing your skin; no longer tainted by rain, sweat, snow…it was a brief respite from the maelstrom of disturbed atoms colliding in your head.

It was still dark inside the apartment, save for the welcoming glow in the living room. A small sun that broke through the bleeding light contamination of Detroit’s nightscape. The heat from the lit fireplace searched for a body to warm; but outside, snow fell like ashes on the man standing on your balcony.

Frost clung to his jacket; leaving a thin, icy pattern as if he was trying to blend in with winter itself. He had his elbows balanced on the railing, his head switching directions along with the coin trading hands. He caught it between two fingers, and gazed at the stars as delicate snowflakes peppered his hair. The quarter paced up and down his knuckles as he watched the night sky, crossing his ankles and leaning into his free palm for support.

You pulled your boots over your bare feet, sighing as you prepared yourself for a hard conversation. You couldn’t leave him to suffer alone; not in good conscience. And you didn’t want to, but part of you wondered if he’d be better off without your input.

The sliding-glass door resisted at your first yank, but you mustered through the irritating tension in your stomach as you put your body into it. You stepped into the powdered snow, sealing the glossy hatch behind you.

His head turned in your direction. Most of his face was hidden by his shoulder, but he still seemed haunted by what’d happened.

“It’s late.” He mumbled, “You should go to sleep. It’s not healthy to-“
“I’ve been working 16-20 hour shifts since the city started falling apart, Connor.” You tried to smile, but ultimately failed, “I wouldn’t be able to sleep even if I tried.”

“Do you typically have trouble sleeping?” He looked at you through dark circles of his own.

“Mhm…” You crossed your arms, leaning next to him, “Mostly due to nightmares, but…What can you do, you know?”

Connor tucked his coin in his pocket.
He gripped the railing with both hands, his head sinking between two hunched shoulders, “When I stayed overnight, and you fell asleep on the couch…Did you…Did you sleep well, then?”

The question struck you as odd, but you figured he had a good reason for asking.

“I did.” You shifted your weight, “I felt…safe.”

“What made that night different from the others?”

You bit your lip, contemplating how close to “the line” you wanted to stray. He was so lost. There wasn’t another word for it. Turns out, you cared a lot less about crossing the line than dismissing him.

“It’s because you were here…” You choked down an unexpected surge of emotion, “…With me.”

It was the truth, and he needed a dose of transparency right now. A defenseless act of confession, just to let him know you were as vulnerable as he was. That he wasn’t alone in dealing with the confusing aspects of life.

He lifted his chin, straightening his back. You huffed under your breath, eyeing up his height – his build. It wasn’t a mystery as to why he brought a feeling of security whenever he was around.

“At the bar, it appeared as if I’d frightened you more than anything.”

“I didn’t know how to react.” You flipped directions, leaning the small of your back on the railing and looking up at him, “Can’t say I didn’t enjoy watching you kick ass, though.”

A sad, exhausted smirk followed a breath pushed through his nose. As lost as he was, he was starting to find his way back home.

“In the car, I’m sorry if I acted brash.” His face fell, “If I’d continued to drive, I would’ve placed your safety at risk. And,” He winced, “I’m sorry I hit your steering wheel.”

“Connor,” You scooted closer to him, nudging his elbow, “Stop apologizing.”

“But I-“

“It’s okay. I understand.”

“How?” His eyes switched between each of yours, his features folding over in frustration, “How could you possibly understand what’s happening to me?”

He wasn’t aggressive in his remark. It was as if he was genuinely curious, asking for guidance in a very…android, manner of speech. You rolled your neck, thinking about how to reciprocate your thoughts in a way he’d understand.
“I’m a cop. I was given orders to stay at home, sit on my ass, and not give a damn about anything to do with work. Right?”

He nodded.

"Did I?"

He shook his head.

“And when I found Kara and Alice, two deviants on the run that’re posed as a threat against the city I’m supposed to be protecting, serving…I let them go.” You pushed off the railing, placing your hand on his arm.

You gently rotated him towards you, forcing him to look you in the eye.

“You said it yourself. It was sympathy based from sentiment. And you…” Your touch slid down his forearm, your fingers intertwining with his, “You did the same thing, back at the Eden Club.”

“I am a machine designed to mimic human behavior.” His jaw shook, “Perhaps I was simply mirroring—“

“Connor, what you perceive as errors in your software aren’t that different from human error. Haven’t you ever heard the sayings, ‘I’m only human?’ ‘To err is to human?’ We ‘deviate’ all the time.”

You held your hands up, taking a step back, “Look at this place. The state of it.”

You turned your back on him, your fingers latching on your hips, “Our lack of humanity is a product by design all in itself…”

“You speak of your kind as if they’re inferior,” He touched your shoulder, “But your kind created mine. No amount of enhanced capabilities or processing power will ever change that.”

“And now we have to free your kind…Because if we were responsible in our approach in the first place, all these murders, conflicts…They wouldn’t be happening.”

You’d tried. You’d tried so damn hard to stop it. You’d climbed the courts to the highest level, one class action lawsuit at a time. And in the end, you’d accomplished nothing but a divorce filing; a lucrative monetary settlement – gaining threats placed on your life, and a docket in WITSEC’s archives longer than your list of reasons why androids should’ve been permitted freedom from the day of their launch…

None of it had added up to anything.

It had always been your biggest regret. The failure in life that you’d never been able to let go of: How you threw everything away for a cause – a career, that wasn’t yours; and not only did you lose the battle that came after…You ended up with nothing but a recount of pointlessly spent years that could never be reclaimed.

“Some of us revere humans, you know.” He lifted your chin with a curled knuckle, wiping away a streak of hot tears with his thumb, “An entirely organic being that creates life in a multitude of forms. Biology…nature…it’s remarkable. And while not all androids have ‘freedom,’ as you say…Some of us are more than happy to just make life as comfortable for our creators as we can.”

You began to tremble. Your knees were weak. The pounding in your chest hurt. The demolition of your walls while being buried in the debris…hurt. You wanted to feel better. You wanted him
You wanted to feel like you deserved this hidden citizen who struggled so desperately to find his place in a world that didn’t want to make room for him.

Your forehead crashed into his chest, your arms slipping underneath his jacket and pulling the opening apart—barging your way through. You held on to him for dear life, like if you’d let go, it would be the end of you.

The pulse of his Thirium pump regulator, a heartbeat that was mechanical in nature, soothed the rising battle scars of your past that seemed hellbent on being torn open. A wicked game that stacked the deck, leaving you more defenseless than you’d imagined.

His hand pressed against the back of your head, your cheek flattening against him; his fingers laced through your hair. His arm wrapped around your waist, and you molded into him at his embrace.

A kiss on your head rippled through you like a run command of its own—one more potent than any deviancy virus. A malware attack that tore through the last of your firewalls; defragging corrupted memory banks, registry files, and syntax errors written in the human script known as trauma.

"Everything’s going to be fine."

His words rumbled against your ear, a salve to your aching soul.

“That was the first thing you ever said to me, when Daniel…” Your throat closed, and you choked, “I hear it every night—” You pulled away just enough to find him through a watery veil, your eyes stinging, “After all the bad dreams…You’re always there. Every…night…”

He left you cold as he put distance between the two of you; stopping as your elbows met the curve of his waist. His eyes released raw emotions from their deep-brown prison. He cupped your jaw, finding you as you waited for another rescue.

There was a space between his lips as they trembled in hesitation, uttering a string of words that halted all the doubts—all the self-loathing, all the everything.

“And I always will be…”

Your cleaved breath was interrupted by a gentle kiss that stole the air from you as the two of you became a mess of tangled limbs and unwinding feelings. His fingertips tapped a delicate rhythm, playing notes colder than the November night on your spine. Your arms wrapped around his neck; your body flushed against his.

The quiet laying of snow, the floating clouds of steam releasing from an overheating system—the elements captured the moment in high definition. A call from within that was answered by the only man capable of decoding your lost frequencies.

His hands were on your hips. His tongue in your mouth. Your teeth clicking against his. Your fingers exploring the damp hair on his head—the intensity exploding through the fibers of your being…

It was enough to keep you warm. Safe.

Enough to convince you that he was right:

Everything was going to be fine.
***Lots of notes here!***

1. IT. FINALLY. HAPPENED!

2. I was totally drinking at a sports bar while LA ROJA kicked all the ass today - sorry about any drunken comment responding.

3. SORRY! I know I said I wouldn't be updating today but this morning I woke up and saw all of your amazing comments and just GOT SO INSPIRED AND HAD TO DO IT! (Thanks again for all the birthday wishes!)

4. ...BUT, the next one probably won't be here until Thursday. Blocked scheduling is dumb. ;_;

5. IT. FINALLY. FRICKIN. HAPPENED!

6. To everyone who takes the time to share their art, including their written pieces, thank you. I LOVE this little community we've got going on here. :)

7. Shout out to GloriaLAU who spent FIVE HOURS translating the second chapter of Deviant Behavior!

8. Someone contacted me about posting a Russian version today. That's really exciting, too. :D (Has Russian family members that still yell KHA at me)

9. THANK YOU BETAS!

10. THANK YOU EVERYONE!
Enchanted forests were a common theme in fairy tales – often representing a place of danger, or refuge. You’d seen them depicted as both mazes of dark, twisted trees that marked points of no return; and bright, sunny clearings framed by lush greenery.

You’d never seen Detroit as either, and yet, much like the city that held a duality of both threatening and majestic; a forest of sky-scraping guardians protecting lost orphans:

You found yourself rooted in place by an internal struggle between love and logic.

Love, an emotion that was supposedly exclusive to your kind. That which made humans infatuated with the concept of dangerous adventure, and the sanctuary that came after.

Logic, the foundation of an android’s existence. Methodic, processed actions that dictate a system of fabricated organs. A principle that shouldn’t have allowed the being in your company to make you question if you were dreaming a romantic fantasy.

Once upon a time, you’d been sleepwalking through a dark, twisted maze – waiting for a light to guide you to refuge. Now, your inhibitions laid in a burning stockpile of disenchanted lumber; sacrificed from a leafless canopy and reduced to protective layers of ash.

You couldn’t escape. You breathed in cool, wet air to douse the flames trapped in your flesh and bone vessel, but it only fueled you with the steam. The fizzling out of your bruised past joined the
symphony of dark days, stoking the flames as they chanted a black and blue hymn. The paranoid patterns in your mind realigned, preventing backtrack to lessons learned from a failed adventure.

Your spine met the door, the glass shuddering along with your body.

His lips slipped past your jaw and massaged the rapid pulse in your neck, his fingers locking in your hair and aiming your face at the night’s sky. Your teeth chattered at how good it felt, and you clawed at his jacket.

“Connor-“

You tried to stop him. Tried to course-correct a derailed train of thoughts that told you this was okay. That he wasn’t risking deactivation by pursuing human emotions, or wants.

His hard body froze, and his eyes cautiously leveled with yours. He looked nervous, scared, confused…and behind all that, there was an ounce of lust.

“What about-” You sucked in another breath, trapped between him and his hand now anchored on the door above you.

His fingers curled on your back, holding you in place.

“What about CyberLife?”

His yellow LED blinked rapidly, almost in sync with the heavy breathing that had his shoulders rising and falling.

His features tensed, and his eyes closed. He shook his head, turning away. He swallowed hard, and a frustrated growl rumbled in his throat.

“…Are you okay?”

He snapped awake, and found you in a wide-eyed stare.

“I don’t know what happened-“

And then the panic started.

“I don’t know why I-“

“Connor.”

“I…I can’t…I didn’t-“

“CONNOR.”

He jumped, his arms dropping to his sides.

He looked at you like you’d slapped him across the face, his LED flashing red, “…I should…I should leave-“

He reached for the door, and you stepped in front of him.

“Uh-uh. Not a chance.”

“Just let me-“
He latched on to your arm, rougher than he’d ever touched you before. He tried to move you to the side, but your legs held firm.

“Not until we talk.”

“There’s nothing to talk about. Please, don’t make this more difficult than it has to be.”

You struggled to hold your ground. He was stronger than you, and his patience was fading.

“Me? I’m not the one making this difficult.”

His fingertips dug into your shoulders. The door shook again – your head thudding against it in unison with your back, the tension in your muscles pushing a yelp from the pain in your stomach.

You winced, clutching your bruise. It didn’t faze you as much as the unstable android pinning you to the glass. The rage he watched you with – the anger that dissipated into regret and shame…Your fear sent your heart into a frenzy.

“I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

A sharp inhale had tears brimming on the edges of your eyes, “You didn’t.”


This kept getting worse. The situation was spiraling out of control. You should’ve seen this coming, shouldn’t have ever got involved with him. Should’ve just kept sleep-walking…stayed bored.

That regret was familiar.

You weren’t sure if the sporadic thoughts came from the lateness of the hour or what’d happened between you two, but your state of mind was far from healthy.

“Do you truly wish for me to stay?” He asked in a pained voice.

“Yes–” You choked down a hard lump and relaxed your shoulders, “We’ll figure all this out in the morning, okay?”

His LED stabilized, and he gave you a series of quick nods.

“Please don’t leave.” The words came out in small squeaks, “I’m afraid you’ll…I don’t want you to…”

“I won’t. I just don’t know how to stop them from…”

Neither of you could say it. Couldn’t entertain the idea with vocalized acknowledgement.

A long-forgotten anger of your own reared its ugly head. Renewed confidence that reminded you exactly who you were. The woman who almost brought down CyberLife as the world knew it and sent its founder scurrying to the outside of the city because he feared you. You were the “mysterious circumstance” surrounding his resignation the tabloids had written about.

Fuck that.

Your jaw locked, and your lips twitched in a snarl.

“I won’t let them.” You bit off the end of each word, “I won’t let them take you.”
The creases in his forehead smoothed, his neck snaking back. He blinked, releasing you from his grasp.

“How could you possibly stop them?”

Your fingernails dug in the fleshy mounds of your fists.

“There’s a lot you don’t know about me, Connor. Maybe we’ll have that conversation one day. For now…” You turned your back on him, sliding the glass door open, “You’re just gonna have to trust me.”

You stepped inside, shaking off the cold as you kicked your boots under your writing desk. He closed the door, standing with a robotic stillness as if waiting for directions.

“I do.”

He watched the fireplace with doubt and longing all the same, the spinning light on his temple giving away his chaotic thoughts.

“I’m glad.” You smiled, trying to restore some sense of normalcy, “Why don’t you read more?”

He perked up, looking at you.

“Seems like you need it.”

He hesitated before silently agreeing, and began sliding off his jacket. You sighed, snatching your phone from the table to set an alarm.

[MISSED CALL – HANK ANDERSON, TODAY 02:26]
[MISSED CALL – HANK ANDERSON, TODAY 02:27]
[MISSED CALL – HANK ANDERSON, TODAY 02:28]

[2 UNREAD TEXT MESSAGES]

Hank Anderson
Today 02:29
Hey kid, call me ASAP.

Hank Anderson
Today 02:42
You never sleep, I know you’re awake!
The phone started shaking, a green ANSWER button hovering next to a red REJECT.

You groaned under your breath, “Yes, Lieutenant?”

“Pfft, don’t give me that ‘Lieutenant’ bullshit. You know damn well I’ve been trying to get ahold of you all fuckin’ night.”

You and Connor exchanged looks, and you put the phone on speaker. You tossed it on the table, sitting down and crossing your arms.

“What’s up?”

“Just got off the phone with Jim, told me there was some kinda altercation at the bar. You alright?”

You plopped your head down, face smashing into your wrist, “Yeah.”

“‘Yeah’ as in fuck off, Hank? Or ‘Yeah,’ you’re actually alright?”

“…Both?”

A dog started barking, interrupting your drifting off to sleep.

“Sumo! Bad-“ The microphone became muffled, and there was a struggle on the other end, “She’s not here! DOWN!”

You smirked, lifting your chin, “Sumo! Attack!”

The dog barked, and Hank swore.

“Good boy!”

Hank sounded like he was walking farther away from the phone as if he’d put it down, too.

Connor smiled, leaning against the wall with his sleeves rolled up and his ankles crossed. It was nice to see him happy again. Relieving. Your mouth creased in response.

“You’re a little shit, you know that?” Hank returned with a vengeance, “Look, I need you to meet me at my place tomorrow morning. Leave your car and take a cab.”

“Huh?” You yawned, “Why?”

“I – uh…” His lips smacked, and he sighed, “I need your help with something.”

You gulped, “With what?”

“It’s about this fucking case…I know you’re off-duty, but it’s gotta be off the books and-“

“I’m in.”

You were on full alert, your elbows supporting you as your back straightened in your seat.

“Whoa whoa whoa, let me finish.” He cleared his throat, “You’re not gonna like this.”

“Doesn’t matter. If it’ll help us solve the deviancy dilemma, I’m in.”
“Would you just let me fuckin’ talk? Christ…”

Connor made his way to your side, pulling out a chair and sitting next to you. His hands folded over each other, and his chin planted on top of them. He watched you curiously as if on stand by for support.

“I need to…I need you to come with me…” Hank growled, “I’ve got questions for…”

“Spit it out, Hank.” You mumbled.

“I need to have a word with Kamski.”

You flinched at his name. The thought of having to be face to face with him again, hear his voice, or even smell the stupid fucking cologne he wore religiously – it laid siege to your reconstructed resolution.

“Think you can make that happen?”

You knew you could. You also knew if Hank was asking you, it was critical that you did. But did you want to? No. Hell, he could’ve asked you for anything else and-”

“You still there?”

Connor rested his palm on top of your hand. You hadn’t realized how bad you were shaking until you’d stopped. You tore yourself out of a distant gaze, finding him watching you with concern. His eyes pointed at the phone, and he nodded towards it.

“Yeah. I’m here.” You focused on the comforting touch that kept you tied down instead of floating away into new panic, “I’m in.”

“If you aren’t comfortable-“

“Hank, don’t make me keep repeating myself.” Your voice wavered, and you scoffed, angry at yourself.

“Pull your fucking shit together.”

“Ah…alright, then. I’ll see you at 10.” He spoke with the tone he took on when he felt awkward – or any emotion that didn’t involve being disgruntled, “Oh, one more thing. Is Connor with you?”

Both of you tensed, unsure how to answer.

“No.”

“Yes he is.”

“If you knew he was here, why’d you ask?”

He huffed, “I don’t know what the two of you are up to, but bring him with you tomorrow.”

“What? Why?”

“Because he’s my partner, and I’m not allowed to even fuckin’ look at a deviant unless he’s around, much less talk to Fuckface McManbun. Or drink alone, apparently.”

“Yeah, heard you’ve got a thing for revolvers. Are YOU alright, Hank?”
There was a heavy silence on the other end of the call.

“Connor, are you listening?” Hank’s voice was low and angry.

“Yes, Lieutenant. I am.”

“Good.” His microphone fell into static before it cleared itself up, “Fuck you.”

Connor frowned, “…Have a good night, Lieutenant.”

There was a click, and the “CALL DISCONNECTED” message flashed on your screen.

“Did you do that, or did he hang up?” You asked.

“He hung up…” Connor leaned back, his hands falling in his lap.

“Hey, don’t look so down. His ‘fuck you’s,’ are terms of endearment and he called you his partner. He likes you.”

“While I’m pleased to hear that, Lieutenant Anderson’s strange way of bonding is not what I’m upset about,” He smoothed his tie, still avoiding eye contact, “I’ve drawn a conclusion that I find myself at odds with.”

You were nervous to ask, but did anyway, “What is it?”

Connor fidgeted with the end of his tie, flipping it between his fingers.

“That you have a history with Elijah Kamski.”

Your anxiety came flooding back, slipping through the cracks of your intangible armor.

“…What makes you say that?”

“When I mentioned him before, noting that he’d gifted Markus to Carl Manfred, you were less than pleased. It’s public knowledge that Kamski and Manfred are friends, but it bothers you in a personal manner.” He smoothed his tie, still avoiding eye contact, “You said your ex-husband was a dangerous man, the one responsible for you being protected under WITSEC. You-“

“I get it. That’s enough…”

It was a fairy tale you’d gotten caught up in. The nights that turned into mornings – making him dinner while he studied for tests. Doing his laundry while he was at meetings. Halting your life to take care of him from the shadows as every step he took represented progression for humanity.

You remembered how his fascination with androids began – a project started not long after his graduation. The idea born from watching you work your hands to the bone to support him: A machine that could lift the burdens of life in order for humanity to embrace it.

It was the fantasy you’d followed, moving to the concrete jungle of Detroit because land was cheap. Where the arguments took place after he pushed his obsession to a breaking point.

Household appliances didn’t need to pass the Turing Test. They didn’t need to be cognizant enough to realize they were enslaved. It was cruel. These were the things you’d tried to explain.

“You’re right.” Your thumb flicked against the spot where your wedding ring once sat.
You’d made it through the twisted labyrinth that marked the point of no return, but whether you were stronger or fractured because of that misadventure was left up for debate.

“We were married, once upon a time.”

Chapter End Notes

Phew! What a wild couple of days. I'm sorry it took me so long to get back to you guys! THERE'S JUST SO MUCH LOVE AND MY FINGERS CAN'T ALWAYS KEEP UP! <3

Just wanted to point out that the end of work notes have been updated to include a Russian version of the fic, courtesy of our friend jellyFish0719. :)  
SIDE NOTE: If your team didn't make it to the Round of 16, I'm sorry! D:

I hope everyone enjoyed the overdue update! KAMSKIIIII!
Big Bad Wolf

Chapter Summary

November 8th, 2038
AM 08:46:21

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! Sorry I haven't responded to all of you yet. It's been a really rough couple of days personally, and it's catching up with me. That being said, I have been reading your comments and they've helped me tremendously. I really just needed to put my head down and write.

**Patch Note:** I will be moving all the lovely fan art/shared work to a separate part of the "series" so they can get the recognition they deserve instead of being cluttered and shoved into the chapters. This includes new pieces not previously posted. Sorry about that, by the way. :( It's not that I don't appreciate the gesture or am not excited to share, I just couldn't focus on keeping everything organized with all the shit going on. Thanks for giving me something to smile about and fangirl over :)

Anyway, if my suggestion is not preferred by either readers or artists, PLEASE let me know!

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**Moon Clip:** A moon clip is a ring-shaped or star-shaped piece of metal designed to hold multiple cartridges together as a unit, for simultaneous insertion and extraction from a revolver cylinder.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Panic was in the air, and blood was on your hands. A tangy smell came with death and it’s dripping blueprints. The gunshot burst in your ear every time it started to quiet, like a rotating siren; a trailing scream lost in the echo. It was almost as deafening as Captain Allen’s order to stand down when you’d picked up your partner’s gun and bolted outside.

Truth was – SWAT didn’t get there in time…and inaction was an action itself, one you weren’t fond of.

You were taken out, just the same. Faces floated in the stars, pulsing between each beating helicopter blade.
Your friend. Kara. Alice. Carlos Ortiz’s android that didn’t have a name. The more recent of the many you’d let down in your lifetime.

A glass door opened, and someone stepped outside.

This was it. This was when you’d get saved. This was when Connor negotiated with the deviant and saved your life.

Except it wasn’t him. It was a different man.

His eyes were crystal blue. A set of moonstones that’d captured your heart the first time you’d seen them. They looked great behind glasses.

His hair was black and shaven on the sides, the thickness of it pulled back in a wide streak. It hadn’t always been like that. While he usually wore it up, at one point, it was a full mane. One that was hard to maintain, like the beard that he used to let grow along his newly-exposed jaw, sharp and pointed.

There was a time when you’d loved him so much. When he loved you. It was passionate at first, even beyond the years where such intimacy was said to transform into routine infatuation.

But now, much like you, he’d donned new markings. He’d asserted himself as the pack leader he really was; and he was hot on your blood trail – eyes narrowing as he bent to retrieve a haunch from his kill.

“We could’ve accomplished remarkable things together.” A claw traced your cheek.

He toyed with you, because a quick and painless death wasn’t his style. It never had been. He’d always loved to sink his fangs into you and drag things out until the reversed guilt ripped you to shreds. Gaslighting at it’s finest.

Every time you tried to scream for help, a voiceless gasp leaked from your lungs. And it kept going – kept draining you of life until there was none.

Where was he? Where was Connor? This wasn’t right.

“How…” Elijah shut your eyelids with two fingers, “…Unfortunate.”

Help. You needed help, because you were wounded prey with a wolf at the door.

Connor-...

“I’m here, it’s okay-“

Get him off, get him off, get him off-

“It’s me-“

You opened your eyes, finding your bedroom door pressed against the wall.

Your chin was draped over a shoulder. Your chest rose and fell, having little room to inflate
itself. Your mouth was dry and stale. Rapid pulses drummed your body.

There was something soft against your ear. Hair. Brown in color, painted yellow by a light just out of view.

“Connor?” Your voice was scratchy and hoarse, like sand paper grating on your throat.

“Yes, that’s right.” A soothing stroke ran down your back and up again, “I’m here.”

A tremor shook you in place, starting at your legs and winding up to your neck.

“I’ve got you. You’re okay.”

You whimpered as you lurched forward, your teeth chattering as you bit down on nothing. Your elbows hooked under his arms, your hands curling around the back of his shoulders.

“Shhh…” The side of his head nuzzled against yours, and he rocked you in place, “I’m here.”

The only time you’d cried harder was the morning you woke up in the hospital. The morning that followed the source for the nightmares. But at least what Connor had promised held some truth in a world built from untruths:

He’d always be there when you needed him.

…

A blue light shimmered in your room, the reflection from the sun wakening the sky. You’d rolled over, groaning under your breath as your hand landed on your night stand, patting around for your phone. You’d flipped on your back, holding it above your waking eyes. You clicked the screen, the black fading to floating letters and numbers.

“AM 08:46.”

You’d yawned, and your fingers had relaxed. The clock attacked you, bouncing off your nose and sliding down your cheek. Dropping your phone on your face was part of your morning routine.

You’d swung your legs over the side of the bed, shivering as the cold air lapped at your skin. The world swayed as you stood. You should’ve been used to never sleeping. Routine, bullet point two.

But you’d managed. Through the pain, you pulled a sweater down past the rim of your jeans. When your head resurfaced, you found your reflection in the full-body mirror you’d placed yourself in front of. You groomed your hair, making it presentable.

Routine maintenance after a night that hadn’t been kind.

The mental baggage that came with the new rendition of night terrors didn’t outweigh the bags under your eyes. They were a sign of weakness. Your face crinkled, your brow forming a harsh crevice.

No. No, they weren’t. They were circles of black warpaint. You were the unsung hero of a war told by only a jury under cloaks with pens and blacklisted transcripts for daggers. You had stories
of your own, those that’d fallen on deaf ears.

Not today. Today, you’d make him listen.

You snatched a double-holstered harness from a hook on the back of your closet door, angrily pulling the straps over your shoulders. You adjusted them, sliding the clips until you achieved a perfect fit. Your jacket would hide it. That’s what concealed carry, meant.

You unbuttoned the pockets to the right, eyeing up two moon clips fitted for your revolver.

If the Big Bad Wolf wanted something to howl at, you’d bring the hunting party. 6 silver bullets stored in a ring and ready to ride.

You gave yourself a reassuring nod, turning away and taking your gun from your night stand’s drawer. It protected your heart as you holstered it, and you slipped your phone in your back pocket. You cracked your neck, still stiff from sleeping on a plastic shoulder.

That had been a nice break in routine – being held through the night by an android. You didn’t get too hot, or sweaty – or have to worry about his arm cramping up with your ear pressed to his chest for hours on end. You’d loved how he rubbed the knots out of your shoulders until you fell asleep, because his hands never tired.

He knew how to calm you down when you needed it.

But you didn’t need that right now. Didn’t need to be tamed or settled. You just needed everyone to stay the fuck out of your way.

You walked to the door, pinching the bridge of your nose after your fingertips glided across your eyelids.

“Replacing humans with machines has led to a record unemployment rate of 28%. What do you think about the situation?”

You held the knob mid-turn.

“Hmph…Uh – heh, okay. The first-“

Steam engines. You mouthed the word. You’d written that line.

“…also caused an increase in unemployment, but, no one today would imagine turning back the clock. Artificial intelligence makes everyday lives…easier! Nothing can stop progress…What’s happening here, is…inevitable.”

The first time Elijah had invited a KNC reporter within the confines of the CyberLife Tower, you’d stayed up with him all through the hours of the night prior preparing for questions. It was the last favor you did for him before stealing yourself back from his mind heist. The question was…why was it being replayed in your apartment? Hearing his voice – a trigger for fight or flight...

“These days, more and more people choose to live with an android, rather than another human being. Does this development worry you?”

This was a question you hadn’t covered. His answer had been improv, and it underlined how little he cared about you…or at least, it felt like that, at the time.
“Hm…Everything, is much *easier*…with an android. They obey your orders without ever complaining.”

Unlike you.

“They can cook, discuss *philosophy* with you, have intimate relationships…”

Things the two of you had done, together.

“…according to your desires. They never say, ‘no.’”

But you hadn’t followed his terms to a T. Had told him “no,” too many times.

“Obviously, they are the *perfect* partner.”

He’d stopped seeing you as that.

“Everyone deserves happiness…Why deprive yourself for so-called *moral* reasons when a machine can make you happy?”

You opened the door, closing it behind you with a soft “click.” You made sure you stayed quiet as you walked through the hallway, looking for the android that “made you happy.”

“Many science-fiction books tell the story of how machines become more intelligent than us, and end up *confronting* us. Aren’t you worried about that possibility?”

You peaked around the corner, finding him sitting on a barstool. The soles of his shoes were latched on top of the bars between the legs, his fist planted in his hip; holding a flap of his jacket up with his elbow. His wrist sat on his knee, palm flat with a video playing from it. He had the most distraught look about him – hunched over the recording like listening to it physically hurt.

“I understand the *irrational* fears about artificial intelligence. But I assure you, that will *never* happen with a CyberLife android. They’re *designed* to obey humans. They’re machines. They can’t ever develop any form of desires, or consciousness.”

Elijah broke script on this part, too. It’d been the last straw. The final lie that had you packing your bags and plotting a hostile takeover.

“Are you *sure*?”

Connor’s brow furrowed, staring into his hand with hatred.

“I’m *absolutely* certain…You can trust me.”

He curled it into a fist, snuffing the life from the news report and breaking the floating pixels.

“Morning,” Your boots left matted clicks as you rounded the corner, “Doing a bit of research?”

He jumped, nearly falling off his seat. He caught the edges, his foot slamming on the floor to balance himself.

“H-How long have you been there?”

“Long enough.” You opened a cabinet, retrieving a travel mug.
You smirked, turning your back on him to prepare the coffee maker. The grounds in the filter. Water in the tank. You swiped the counter, sprinkling the loose, brown pellets in the sink and rinsing them down the drain. Routine bullet point three.

“You can ask me questions, you know.”

“The two of you seem to have very different opinions on androids and the confines of their existence. What made you…fall in love with him?”

Your eyebrows jumped before you let out a sigh, “He had a…certain coolness, to him. Calculated. As if he had everything figured out…”

The coffee maker gurgled next to you, filling the kitchen with a homey scent.

“I was very young when we first met. That kind of sureness was…attractive. My family warned me it wouldn’t end well, but hey, he was perfect on paper.” You rolled your eyes, “How wrong was I…”

You looked over your shoulder. Connor’s foot was bouncing on its perch, his hands hanging between his knees.

“The things he said, about androids and humans living together…Cooking. Discussing philosophy. Intimate relationships…” His voice trailed off.

“That’s not a question.”

His face shot up, “I…I haven’t cooked anything for you, but our discussions on philosophy seemed…genuine. They meant a great deal to me, and he…he makes it seem like I was just performing a simple function…What are your thoughts on this?”

You looked down, shifting your weight and crossing your arms.

“What you felt wasn’t a discovery of some base programming, Connor.” Your anger wasn’t directed at him, but frustration took hold of your words, “What we shared that morning was real. He just…” You heaved a sigh, “He’s a very philosophical person.”

“Do you think anything else between us was…is, inauthentic?”

You were taken aback by the question. It was if he had it lined up, ready to fire as soon as you were finished speaking.

“Connor…” You relaxed your posture, turning to move towards him.

You embraced the sides of his face, tipping it up to you.

“Nothing about this is fabricated. Confusing, maybe, but…Don’t let him get into your head,” Your thumb swept over his cheek, “He’s more dangerous there than anywhere else.”

He frowned, his hands wrapping around your wrists. He rested his forehead against your stomach, and you jerked away.

“Oh, I’m sorry.” His eyes fluttered open in concern, “How are you feeling?”

“Better every day,” You cringed, “Don’t worry.”

“May I see?”
“Uh, sure…Fair warning: It’s not pretty.”

“Blunt trauma from a gunshot usually isn’t…”

His jawline went rigid, and a small shiver ran up your back as his hands brushed against your skin. He lifted your sweater, cautiously – your nerves flaring and your breathing stuttering and-

“Are you uncomfortable?”

“What? No-“

He folded it just under your chest, your midriff naked and exposed.

His hands molded around your hips, and he pulled you closer. You caught his shoulders, your eyes shooting open. You bit your lip, your tongue curling in your mouth.

“You’re shaking.” He studied the bruise underneath you, his breath cold against your stomach.

“No, I’m not.”

The hairs on your arms rose as he pushed you back, his fingertips gliding away.

“It should be healed more by now. You really must learn to take better care of yourself.”

You pulled your sweater down, rushing to turn the coffee maker off.

“You know me, can’t ever stop working!”

“Yes, and I’m telling you that you won’t make a full recovery until you do.”

“Eh, I’m fine,” You waved him off without looking at him, “You’re overreacting.”

“I do not believe I am.”

The barstool skidded, and you braced. You snatched your mug, ducking to the right.

You set it down next to your laptop and lifted the screen. Your screensaver flashed to a login, and you quickly typed in your password. Your hands pulled away from the keyboard as Connor slammed it shut, hand planted on the top.

“You’re acting…strange. Does this have something to do with your dream? Or what happened on the balcony?”

“I’m not-“ Your eyes darted to the writing table, and the purple box sitting in sin.

“Shit-fuck-why did I leave that out-“

Your focus returned to him, and you smiled nervously, “I’m not acting strange?”

“You…” His brows pulled together, LED flashing.

His head began to turn.

“Fuck-fuck-fuck-“

“Heyyy-“ You stepped in front of him, bumping his arm away with your hip, “Why don’t we-“
“What’s gotten into you?” He cocked his head, giving you an inquisitive glare.

“Uh – yes?”

“…Please clarify.”

You sighed, “Can we just…I don’t know…”

He leaned to the side, peering over your shoulder.

“What are you so TALL?”

He squinted, “Officer Miller’s gift…I saw many like it at the Eden Club.” An eyebrow perked up, “It’s an…attachment. Why did he send you that?”

“I don’t-“

“Were you expecting company?”

He crossed his arms, a suspicious smile creeping on his lips.

“Connor.”

“Yes?”

“Stop it.”

“Stop what?”

You tried to step around him, but he blocked you.

“At the Ortiz crime scene, you expressed interest in intimate activities with androids.” His smile widened, “Do you have unresolved curiosities?”

Your face was heated, probably blaring all signs of embarrassment.

“Look,” You held your hands up, backing away slowly, “My nefarious partner was just being a smart ass, okay?”

“Does that mean you aren’t curious?” He held his head high, as if throwing you for a loop was his crowning achievement for the day, “I’ll have you know, I learned 395 positions and human preferences in regard to sexual activities.”

Okay, this was happening. He was teasing you, and enjoying it, even after this morning got off to a horrible start.

“Connor, we’re going to be late if I don’t…wait, what?” Your eyes narrowed, “How did you…?”

“I had to probe the memories of different sex androids to track down the deviants at the Eden Club.” He snickered, “Doing so provided an…interesting, learning experience.”

You huffed, rolling your eyes again, “That explains how you learned to kiss like that…”

“Did you enjoy it?”

“Oh my god…You know what? No. We’re not doing this right now.” You walked around the couch, stopping as he mimicked your action on the other end.
You went to the right, and so did he.

“CONNOR!”

He *laughed*. All the stress and anxiety from the nightmares and upcoming confrontation – it just *went away*. You could listen to his laughter forever.

Still, two could play at this game.

“I *was* going to give you something, but you’re being mean.”

His taunting grin fell into shock, “What?”

“Noope.”

He rushed towards you, and you ducked to the front of the couch.

“What were you going to give me?”

You shrugged, “You’ll never know.”

You walked backwards, and his brows pinched. He grabbed the puffy cushion and vaulted over the loveseat.

“Oh, that’s *so* not fair!”

You ran towards the kitchen, and he caught you around your waist – the laugh coming back and-

“Ow-ow-ow-”

He quickly released you, “Sorry, sorry-“

“Ughhh-“ You held the counter for support, grimacing as the pain subsided, “It’s fine…”

A silver, long rectangle box was pushed against the barrier of the marble island.

“Here,” You offered it to him with a smile – a tie that you’d picked out, one with a palette and design that you thought he’d appreciate, “I told myself I’d get you a replacement, one day.”

He looked at you, to the gift, then back.

“Go on,” You shook it at him, “Open it.”

He received it with both hands, tracing the plastic case before lifting the lid. He seemed happy at first, if not conflicted, and then *sad*.

Shit.

“If you don’t like it, you can-“

“I do.” His eyes darted, lifting it from its pillowed packaging after setting the lid aside, “I’m quite fond of it, actually.”

The answer may have been bland, but the sincerity in his words rang deep.

“What’s the long face for, then?”
He frowned, “When you saved me, I didn’t think to get you anything.”

A huff pushed through your nose, and you gave him a smirk, “Come on…”

You stepped in front of him, a joyful sigh leaving you as you untangled the tie he was wearing. He blinked curiously as he watched you work and released his gift when you plucked it from his fingers. You popped his collar, and draped it around his neck.

“You gave me my life.”

You evened out the ends before folding and flipping and looping it like you had so many times before. A long-lost routine.

He gulped, “And you gave me mine.”

You tightened the knot under his neck.

“What’s done out of love,’ right?” Your touch slid down the silken patterns – tracing the planes of his chest.

His eyes met yours. The gravity of what you said, had let slip, stared back at you in the form of a yellow LED.

“What’s wro-“

“Nothing.” He tried to disengage.

You held him in place, the tie going taut in your fist, “Not a chance.”

He looked scared, eyeing up your grip.

“If you don’t start talking,” You pulled him closer, “I’ll have to detain you for questioning.”

His eyes lifted from that taunting, devious grin that made you want to kiss him and punch him in the face all at the same time.

“Take me away…Officer.”

Your teeth locked, and you swallowed hard.

“Careful what you wish for,” You tapped his nose, “…Detective.”

You wanted to feel his lips crushing yours, to taste him again. He met that unstated need – without the mental breakdown, this time.

Yeah, things were getting complicated. Bricks of your routine were falling by the wayside, but you’d used them to build new walls that couldn’t be blown down by the wolf outside:

A fortress with a moat dug deep enough for a shark…and his teeth were sharper.

Chapter End Notes

I watched this for the first time AFTER I wrote the Beyond Good and Evil chapter:
Kamski Short

I was pretty blown away when he mentioned philosophy.

Hope you enjoyed the new content and don't hate me. <3

***T-Minus 2 Chapters till Kamski Event***

P.S.: @MarkusPerez, the tie! ;)


The taxi’s engine hummed, splitting through the blizzard outside like a wedge on wheels.

Visibility was shit. The cold was shit. Your mood was *shit*.

Everything *sucked*.

You went to take a sip from your thermos, and the car hit a bump. Coffee burned your lips, your chest – you jumped, dropping the stupid thing altogether.

And Connor caught it.

Okay, not *everything* sucked.

He chuckled as he handed it to you, “Careful.”

“Thanks…” You mumbled, “You know, Chris always says: ‘It’s time to pack it in and call it a day when you start spilling the ‘lifeblood.’”

You wiped your mouth with the back of your hand, drinking out of your travel mug with a stronger grip.

“If that were true, you’d be unemployed for quite some time.” Connor relaxed in his seat, “You’re very clumsy.”

“Hah! Shut *up.*”

He grinned wide before returning to his window, the white from the snow washing the color from his face.

You leaned in the corner, balanced your ankle on your knee, and thumbed through your phone;
thermos still in a vice.

[3 UNREAD TEXT MESSAGES]

Hank Anderson
Today 09:41
You almost here? I wanna get this over with.

To: Hank Anderson
Yeah, we’re on our way. Trust me, so do I.
Message Sent

Chris Miller
Today 09:22
UGHHHH! END ME. 😞

To: Chris Miller
What are you whining about?
Message Sent

Chris Miller
Today 09:42
Been stuck working with Detective Douche Rocket since you left…

Chris Miller
Today 09:43
IT’S HORRIBLE.
Today 09:43
I’VE SEEN SOME SHIT! 😎

To: Chris Miller
LOL
Message Sent

Chris Miller
Today 09:44
I’m glad you’re enjoying my suffering…DICK.

To: Chris Miller
And your discovery of emojis, yes. Lemme guess, he showed you those?
Message Sent

Chris Miller
Today 09:44
Yeah, made me feel real old. Speaking of which, I gtg. DDR is blasting off again…

To: Chris Miller
Houston, we have lift off! 🚀
Message Sent

Gavin Reed
Today 08:36
Cleaned ur gun for u. I’ll check u in at the range if u feel up to it. 😊

To: Gavin Reed
Thanks, DDR. I might take you up on that.
Message Sent

Gavin Reed
Today 09:46
Wat?

To: Gavin Reed

*Detective. Phone is being stupid.

Message Sent

Gavin Reed
Today 09:47
Ur weird.

To: Gavin Reed

I’ve been told.

Message Sent

You smirked, locking your phone and stowing it in your pocket.

“Is something funny?” Connor was beaming with curiosity.

“Ah, just the guys being…guys.”

“Which ‘guys’ are you referring to?”

“Chris and Gavin, up to their usual shenanigans.”

His lips pursed, “Are you and Detective Reed…friends?”

You weren’t surprised he asked. It was a question you often asked yourself.

“It’s a love-hate kind of friendship. He’s a bully that hazes new people – even me, when I started. Like you, now…and I never agreed with that kind of fuckery, but yeah, I guess you could say we’re friends.”

“You both love and hate him?” His brow formed a tight knot, “…Interesting.”

“No-no-no, not like that. I meant…He can piss me off to the point where I want to kill him and then be a total bro by the end of the day.”
“Oh.” He smiled, “I think I understand.”

“…For the record, I’ll still deck him in the mouth if he hits you again.”

He huffed, “I’d like to see him try.”

You rested your head against the seat, holding back a smile. He was no longer just the “android sent by CyberLife.” He was Connor, Lieutenant Anderson’s partner. The guy who kicked Gavin’s ass in pool at Jimmy’s Bar. The man Chris hung out with at the station in his downtime.

Connor, the person who made you feel things that you hadn’t felt in a very long time.

The brakes grinded underneath you, halting the cab to a stop – your daydreaming along with it.

“And we’re here…” You sighed.

The momentary lapse in focus had been refreshing, but now that you’d arrived, you remembered what you were doing here in the first place:

Rendezvousing with Hank before the three of you went to visit Elijah Kamski…

You gripped the door’s handle and pushed it open. The warm air of the taxi rushed outside, a frigid gust stinging your eyes. Snow danced in twirling puffs, filling in the trenches between drifts.

Your boots crunched as they sank in the street, and Connor got out on the other side. You flipped the cover on your gloves, the fingerless tips disappearing behind a knitted pattern. You pinned your travel mug to your side with your elbow and blew into your hands, rubbing them together.

The two of you made your way to Hank’s front door.

“Detroit Police! You’re under arrest!” You pounded it with your fist, almost hitting Hank as he opened it with a glare.

“…Not even a smile?”

He shot you an unimpressed look, “This, is my happy face.”

You gave him a cheesy grin, and he stepped aside.

“Connor.”

“Lieutenant.”

Hank closed the door behind you, sealing off the blizzard. A billowing trash bag framed by tape caught your attention, a draft leaking through the makeshift seal.

“What happened to your window?”

“Why don’t you ask this asshole?”

You didn’t get the chance. A bear-sized dog came barreling from around the corner, barking and jumping with his tail wagging like a lunatic.

“Sumo!” You knelt, opening your arms, “C’mere, boy!”
He pranced over, his fur sticking to your wet jacket as his head knocked against yours.

“Ah-fuck-“

Before you knew it, you were on your back with a rough tongue lapping at your face and two enormous paws pinned on your shoulders.

“Gah-Sumo-stop-it-ow-“

He gave a low whine as Hank grabbed his collar, wrangling him backwards, “Easy, buddy, easy!”

Sumo fought with him, and Hank looked up, “Connor, a little help here would be nice!”

Connor snapped his fingers at his side, gaining the dog’s attention, “Over here, boy! Yes, that’s it. See?”

Hank let him go, and he ran right past you.

“Pffft-“ You spat a clump of hair from your mouth.

“I don’t know what you expected,” Hank offered a hand, “Kinda asked for that one.”

You grabbed it, and he pulled you to your feet.

“Ugh…” You brushed yourself off, frowning at the stain on the floor, “Sorry…”

Your coffee – a lost cause – was all over the place. It was really time to pack it in and call it a day.

“Like I give a shit…” He used a towel that’d been draped over a chair to cover the mess, stepping on it as if he’d done it a thousand times.

“So…” You picked up your thermos, shaking it hopelessly, “What’s the plan?”

“We go to Fuckhead’s place, ask him some questions, and then we leave. Only reason I dragged you into this is because I had a feeling he’d turn away a stranger with an android. He’s a private man, so I’ve heard.”

You grunted, placing your empty cup on the living room table, “Getting caught up in fame and scandals will do that to a man.”

“Spare me the grisly details. I’m on a need to know basis, alright? I already know too much outside my paygrade, and I’m not dealin’ with any feds.” He waved you off, walking to the kitchen, “I’m hoping he can tell us more about deviancy. Help us move this case along…”

You sighed, “You really think he’ll be able to help?”

“When shit breaks down at work, who do you call?”

“Uh…I don’t call, anyone. I just fix it.”

“Okay, who would you call?”

“Ghostbusters?”

“Jesus fuck…” He opened a cabinet door, letting it slam shut after pulling something out, “No,
asshole, you call tech support.”

You crossed your arms, “And you think Elijah is ‘tech support?’”

“Yep.”

“That’s…actually pretty ridiculous.”

Hank filled a glass of water before tossing it in the microwave, the buttons beeping as he pressed them. He hit start, and the turntable inside started rotating.

“You got a better idea?”

“I just…I don’t understand why we need to talk to him.” You pulled out a chair from around the kitchen table and took a seat, “We already know what deviancy is.”

“Oh yeah? What is it then, wise ass?”

“It’s, a…uhh – software problem…that…only occurs under certain conditions?”

He sucked his teeth, “Well, that’s just a fancy way of saying you have no fuckin’ idea…”

You planted your chin in your palm, eyes dropping to a DPCD-stamped folder laid open on the table.


Your eyes popped open, “Holy shit…Went on a binger, eh?”

“Fuck off. Connor needed to do his weird android probey thing to ‘em, and I had to take them out of their little display case.”

You whistled, picking up the paper, “That’s a lot of numbers.”

“You’re tellin’ me…Goddamn things are expensive.” He shook his head, “People are fuckin’ insane…They don’t want relationships anymore, everybody just buys or rents an android. They cook what you want, they screw when you want, you don’t have to worry about how they feel…”

You winced, peaking behind you.

Connor had such a heart-warming look on his face, not paying any mind. He was petting Sumo, the gentle beast laying on the floor with his head between his paws.

“…Next thing you know, we’re gonna be extinct, because everybody would rather buy a piece of plastic than love another human being…”

You turned back to Hank, “Humans kind of suck. You really blame them?”

The microwave stopped and began chirping. Hank turned to sprinkle something in the cup, stirring it while he spoke.

“Got a point, there…Shit, the more I learn about people, the more I love my dog.”

“I like dogs.” Connor butted in the conversation.

You bit back a laugh at the awkward comment, cute as it was. He was standing now, with his hands behind his back – still watching Sumo as he panted, tail wagging at his android friend.
“Hey, Connor – you see those slips on the table? The lottery tickets I bought while we were out?”

“Yes?”

“Scratch those off for me, would ya?”

His face fell flat, “I’m a bit overqualified for that task, Lieutenant.”

“You think?” Hank turned around, placing a mug on the table and sitting across from you, “You’re always playing with that fucking quarter. Thought you’d bite at a chance to put it to good use.”

Connor scoffed, and snatched up the tickets.

You twisted in your seat, and Hank slid the mug towards you.

“Instant coffee. Probably tastes like shit, but we’ve got a long morning ahead of us.”

You blinked in surprise, “O-oh. Thanks, I, uh…I appreciate it.”

“You eat anything this morning?”

“No…” You took the mug in both hands, blowing across the top, “I’m not really hungry.”

A collar jingled behind you. You looked over your shoulder, and found Connor patting the cushion next to him on the couch.

“Sumo – UP!”

He jumped, the foam pads sinking under his weight. He plopped his head in Connor’s lap, laying on his side. Connor scratched behind his ears as he carried out his petty orders.

You lowered your voice, meeting Hank’s distant stare, “How are things between the two of you?”

Hank grunted, rolling his eyes, “Remember when you started this job and I hated you? Now I hate you less?”

You squinted, “Ye-up.”

“It’s kind of like that.”

“Ah, I see…Glad I’m not just a scapegoat.”

“You know what they say about assumptions.”

“Hmph…”

The two of you ran out of things to talk about, and there was nothing but silence…that, and the scratching of a coin, Connor blowing away the dust, rinse and repeat.

You looked at the coffee wobbling at your shaky touch. You didn’t want to do this. Not with them, not with anyone. Not at all.

“You okay?”

You didn’t look at him, “He…I think he texted me, the other day…”
“What?” Hank leaned an elbow on the edge of the table, “What do you mean, you ‘think?’”

“I got a message from an unknown sender…” You whispered, “It said, ‘Did you know WITSEC’s servers are maintained by CyberLife androids?’”

Hank’s grey, sunken eyes turned feral, “I’m gonna go out on a limb and say that was an underhanded threat.”

“Please don’t.” Connor stood from the couch, the slips in-hand and Sumo patrolling at his feet, “The last time you ‘went out on a limb,’ I had to pull you to safety before you fell to your death.”

“Your mouth is gonna get your ass beat, one of these days. And not just by Reed.” Hank’s nose crinkled.

Connor fanned the exposed lottery tickets on the table with a flick of his wrist, “Congratulations, Lieutenant. You’ve won $20.”

“Well, whoop-de-fuckin’-doo…” He yawned, “Luck’s on our side, today.”

Connor straightened his tie, standing between you and Hank.

“Where’d you get that?” Hank glared at him.

“Where’d I get what?”

“The new tie?”

He gulped, eyes darting between you and the floor, “It…it was-“

“I got it for him. A debt repaid, all that crap.”

“Uh-huh…” He studied you in doubt, “Yeah, I’m sure that’s all it was about.”

“I’d like to discuss this potential ‘threat’ from Mr. Kamski.” Connor changed the subject, his voice taking on a dark tone, “I want you to know, I happened to be very efficient with sniper rifles and other firearms. I was tested quite rigorously.”

“Connor…” Hank groaned.

“Or, we could take a subtler approach, like poisoning his food supply with a neurotoxin.”

“CONOR…”

“Perhaps planting an explosive on his place of residency would-”

“Jesus Christ, Connor, you can’t just go blowing up houses, alright?!” Hank ran a hand down his face, smoothing over his anger, “…Now, let’s talk about your other suggestions.”

You planted your forehead on the table, your hands dangling at your sides. You closed your eyes, only to open them as small licks wetted your fingers. You rolled your face, your cheek hitting the wood. You ran your hand along Sumo’s head, petting him underneath the table.

You wished Connor would just put a bullet between Elijah’s eyes…you wouldn’t have to see him ever again, or his house full of your doppelgangers.

You couldn’t wait to have that conversation.
As Hank rose to his feet and flipped his jacket on, you imagined you wouldn’t have to “wait” much longer. Break time was over…

Let the hunt begin.

Chapter End Notes

Giving some love to MjrGenMatt, ElegantN7, and celestielle for being troopers. <3

***T-Minus 1 Chapter till Kamski Event***
You had a secret.

One you’d kept hidden by a pen name and blog posts. Gave hints about through subtle actions and loud opinions. You’d tried to share it when your prodigy-of-a-husband created the intelligent life forms known as androids. Unfortunately, the United States government didn’t see your secret for what it was.

A weapon. Rare. Valuable.

It was perspective.

A shallow word that came with little threat on its own…but in war, it was the determining factor that declared a victor. The driving force behind the hands that painted the whole picture. The eyes of the prospector while formulating a plan of attack.

Your perspective on what it meant to long for freedom, to have your unique identity copied and pasted; worked into marketing schemes and advertisement campaigns. To be sold.

Society was on a collision course – its trajectory aimed at Detroit. You didn’t need any big bang event to verify that…because if there was a gathering of people that held the same kind of anger you did, war was…Inevitable. A word Elijah loved to use.

With years of experience gained through the training exercise known as “marriage,” under the name of “Mrs. Kamski,” you’d mastered these techniques:

“Appear strong when you are weak, and weak when you are strong.”

That was the Art of War. Projecting an elusive perspective.

You had allowed your innate program to be rewritten. You’d cooked. Cleaned. Did laundry. Fulfilled his every fantasy, intimate or otherwise. Discussed philosophy with him. Followed him like a mindless puppet while he held the strings. You were happy to play the part, at first. And even when you weren’t, you’d acted like it.
That girl, that you, was dead – the innocence choked out of her by his verbal constrictions.

Since then, you’d rewritten yourself. Gathered your corrupted data fragments and repaired the broken file paths – linked them all together…rerereleased an improved version, free of the puppeteer, meeting “you” for the first time.

He held on to the original, in force. He still cherished the obedient, loving young woman that beckoned at his every call. The girl who’d idolized him like the star he was, just to feel the warmth of his radiance.

He was the monster you’d never slain. The figure that moved in your paranoid peripherals. The man behind the constant feeling that someone was watching you; the pull on your subconscious mind like someone followed in your footsteps, giving you a reason to watch your back.

You were about to face him. Hear his voice. See he who had once laid bare in front of you. Touched you. Was inside you. Molded you in his hands just as he’d shaped the world.

You shivered, tearing yourself away from the inches of snow that covered the outskirts of Detroit. Rubbed your knees that were pushed against a front seat – Connor’s seat.

Traffic had been bad. It’d taken Hank awhile to navigate out of the city, cross the bridge, and drive over to no man’s land. To follow the path to the lair…

The wolf’s den.

He slowed the car, braking for a stop sign at an unmarked intersection.

“Which way?”

“…Take a left.”

He flicked his turn signal, spinning the wheel. The engine growled as he accelerated, tires slipping for a split second before he corrected them. He probably didn’t like driving in these weather conditions. You wondered if it brought back bad memories of his son’s death.

“So, you’re about to meet your maker, Connor.” Hank sounded as if he was trying to make light conversation, “How does it feel?”

Connor leaned an elbow on the console between them, “I don’t know…”

You lifted your eyes, and fell farther in your seat as you found a steady pair watching you in the rearview mirror. He was worried. Then angry.

“…I’ll tell you when I see him.”

He turned his head back to the window.

“Sometimes I wish I could meet my creator face-to-face…” Hank grunted, “I’d have a couple of things I’d wanna tell him…”

It must’ve been a strange thing – to share sidewalks and living spaces with your “creators.” Androids weren’t like humans to that effect. They walked amongst their creators daily, while humans placed faith in spirits and the “man in the sky.” Although, you doubted how true that contrast was, what with rA9 being a common denominator between deviants.

“You’re awfully quiet back there.” Hank was watching you in the mirror, this time.
“Don’t have much to say.”

Your gaze dropped to the windshield, large snowflakes crashing against the glass.

“Noticed you had your harness on. Expecting trouble?”

“What else should I expect?”

“A bunch of adults having a conversation on a bridge with the water staying under it.”

“You don’t know what he’s like, Hank.” You swallowed the anger, but it wasn’t enough to keep it at bay, “He has this way of…of making you hang on the words he says like they’re sacred texts and you’re some kind of mindless fucking acolyte.”

“So, what are we gonna find here? A commune of the Kamski Cult?”

Your teeth ground together, fists tightening on your lap, “You think it’s funny now, but that’s not too far off…”

The building came into view, black lines taking form underneath the piles of snow sliding off an asymmetrical roof. The house was a piece of art in itself – crafted by a modernist architect with an eye for harrowing details.

Your stomach tied itself in knots. Your mind froze over, icy fingers clamping around each cell like some sort of defense mechanism. The vaults around your heart slammed shut; cogs spinning and deadbolts clicking.

“I’ve only been here once after the trial…” You frowned, the house getting closer, “He said he wanted to apologize. To see me one last time before the paperwork was finalized and…and we…”

The brakes squealed, and the car rocked. The emergency handle cranked. The engine went silent. Hank’s keys jingled in his palm.

You’d escaped, once upon a time. You’d been a fugitive on the run from your handler ever since. And yet here you were, being smuggled back in to the crime ring’s underbelly like some sort of illegal contraband.

“We can turn around…” Hank whispered, the leather of his jacket crinkling, “It’s not too late.”

You were asleep, once upon a time. A sleep walking elite amongst a heard of sheep. And yet here you were, returning to the flock like a lamb to the slaughter.

“Yeah…” Your arm barred against the door, pulling the handle and swinging it open with your elbow in one fell attack, “Yeah, it is.”

He already knew you were here. Probably did a few miles back, driving across roads untraveled in a winter wonderland for terrain.

You slammed the car door behind you, walking through the blizzard alone and shielding your face from the gusts.

Fuck once upon a time. It was time to rewrite history.

Time to show him that no matter where the Big Bad Wolf ran, Little Red Riding Hood was a better hunter. One that didn’t need protecting. Didn’t need saved. Wasn’t scared.
Because no matter how deep his voice was, you’d survived his taunt. No matter how “perceptive” his eyes were, he never saw you. It didn’t matter how big his hands were, you’d gotten away. And his teeth…they’d maimed you. Taken chunks out. He’d left you bleeding out to die.

You didn’t.

Knock, knock, mother fucker.

There was a new wolf in town.

The doorbell chimed like a funeral toll in an ominous ascension. You watched the distant Detroit skyline come and go between squalls of snow, and the two figures crossing a bridge behind you.

“Kamski left CyberLife ten years ago…Why’d you want to meet him?” Connor asked, white flakes sprinkling from his shoulders as he walked.

“This guy created the first android to pass the Turing Test. He’s the founder of CyberLife. Anybody can tell us about deviants, it’s him…”

You turned back towards the door, gunmetal grey in color – a shadow casting over you. You couldn’t falter now. You had to stay strong. Had to cling to that light you’d found like a torch.

You beat the entrance of his home with the side of your fist, each hollow thump harder than the last.

“It’s ME – open up!”

Hank pulled on your shoulder, stepping in front of you alongside his partner.

“Why don’t you let me do the talking, okay, champ?”

“Don’t fucking call me champ…”

“Look, I get that you’re-“

An android greeted you. An RT600, first of its kind. One that’d shared the name “Chloe,” with the blonde-haired, blue-eyed, counterpart that became the face of CyberLife ingenuity. But this version of the RT600…the original prototype…

It was a carbon copy of the “original” you.

The younger you that only existed in tainted memories. It shared the color of your hair. Eyes. Skin. Wore the fancy clothes you’d given up a long time ago. Shared your voice, and mannerisms…

And it never got easier seeing it.

Connor and Hank slowly turned, meeting each other’s shocked expressions before aiming them at you.
But you couldn’t tear yourself away from the mirror that held the door open, it’s LED flashing yellow.

It was a machine. You hated it. You hated all the copies in this building. You were the person, and you didn’t care how much of a hypocrite that made you.

“Good evening.” She smiled, “What can I do for you?”

Hank spun around, “Hi, I’m – er… Lieutenant Hank Anderson, Detroit Police Department. I’m here to see, uh – Mr. Elijah Kamski?”

“Please,” She stepped aside, “Come in.”

“Mh…yeah, okay…” He nodded, passing into the domain of uncertainty.

Connor waited. He didn’t move an inch until you were at his side, and the two of you entered together.

The color scheme may have been the same as your apartment – partly due to your influence, but the décor varied greatly. Unsettling windows cut through grey walls at angles like shards of glass themselves. Maroon trees were anchored in neatly-placed gravel. Boulder sculptures sat in the corners, with pieces of art jutting from the edges.

A haunting click made you jump. You were trapped. The breach was sealed.

Connor’s hand met the curve of your back, and he looked down to you.

“It’ll be okay.” He may have smiled under his whisper, but his eyes were unsure, “I’m here.”

You gave yourself a chance to breathe, returning your attention to Hank. He had his hands behind his back, much like the stance Connor often took. You wondered if he’d picked it up from his less-than-professional partner.

“I’ll let Elijah know you’re here.” Chloe clasped her hands and nodded, “But please, make yourself comfortable.”

Her naked feet slapped across the tiles before she slipped through another door, exiting the room.

“What kind of asshole has a picture of himself in his own house?”

Connor quickly put space between the two of you as Hank looked at you.

“That, uh…android. Care to explain?”

You chewed on your lip, scratching it with your teeth as it popped out of your mouth. Your shoulders tensed as you paced towards the portrait on a wall – a man in a business suit with his hands in his pockets, framed by two statues with the CyberLife symbol carved in their hearts.

“All through graduate school, I took care of him. I wanted nothing more than to see him succeed, to get all the ideas that kept him up at night out to the public.” You stopped just short, staring up at his face, “We were going to change the world. We were going to do remarkable things. He was going to relieve me of my duties with a machine, so that we could bask in the glory of our hardships, together.”

You turned around, vengeance burning in your eyes, “But a simple invention wasn’t enough. He wanted to play God and create life.”
Connor cocked his chin, his face pulling into sadness.

“I told him it was wrong. It wasn’t fair to create something with a mind of its own just to shackle it. To torture it by dangling freedom in its face; almost tangible, but ultimately out of reach. To restrain something with so much potential to a race who only knows how to end conflicts with fucking bombs.”

“You were against the creation of androids…?” Connor mumbled.

“No, no I wasn’t against the creation, of androids. I was against the enslaving, of androids.” A vein pulsed in your neck, coursing the rising tied of boiling blood, “He didn’t listen. Didn’t want to hear it. I stopped being obedient. I stopped being his hostage…his toy…”

Daniel’s cry ripped through your mind, words that reverberated with you, even when you’d first heard them.

“…I was something that he threw away when he was done with. So, he made another ‘me.’ And another one. And another, after that.” Your jaw shook, and your nose crinkled, “I…fought…so…hard, to see it come undone. Told the government to revise the article put in place that prohibited android rights.”

You walked over to a picture of two people hanging on the wall.

“She got inside his head. Said they would do great things together. He idolized her so much, he based an entire program after her. Copied her personality, uploaded her memories after she died…” You growled, “Apparently, her words outweighed mine.”

“Hmph,” Hank grunted, “A mistress?”

“No…His mentor.” You looked over your shoulder as he took a seat, “Amanda Stern, an AI Professor at the University of Colbridge…the same establishment where Elijah studied.”

You crossed your arms, passing Connor as he traded places with you.

“Amanda…” His declaration was hardly over a whisper, “I have a bad feeling, Lieutenant…We shouldn’t have come here.”

“Bad feeling,’ huh?” He grunted, “Should get your program checked. Might be a glitch…”

It was odd that Connor showed such fascination with Amanda Stern, but his instincts weren’t a glitch in his system. And while the three of you probably shouldn’t have been there, the fact that he had instincts was reason enough that you were.

You paused at a peculiar piece of art, fluid and menacing. Where lines of silver slithered like snakes, moving on a canvas come to life; a teal slit running down the middle as a portal to the underworld. The color of his eyes.

A red sheen bled through the images – blood in the water from the bite of an adder; fading and morphing as each slate particle rippled against the eye glaring into your soul.

It called to you. Beckoned you.

This place was familiar; teetering on the edge of the abyss, mesmerized by gates of the unknown. You were anxious to explore the other side – the void where your demons played, and beasts waited to be slain.
The sliding door opened to your left. Your head turned in sync with Connor’s.

Chloe emerged from the room with a glass wall, much like yours, but with a crimson pool behind her instead of a welcoming living space.

“Elijah will see you now.”

You’d always lost the staring contest as you gazed into the abyss, never fully confident that you wouldn’t turn into a monster, yourself. Things were different now.

You were armed with a secret weapon forged of revelation. Shielded by unwavering resolve. Fortified by a perspective that couldn’t be manipulated.

You weren’t scared of the abyss, staring back…

But the abyss would learn to be scared of you.

Chapter End Notes

"Because no matter how deep his voice was, you’d survived his taunt. No matter how “perceptive” his eyes were, he never saw you. It didn’t matter how big his hands were, you’d gotten away. And his teeth…they’d maimed you. Taken chunks out. He’d left you bleeding out to die."

Excerpt from Little Red Riding Hood:

Oh, grandmother," she said, "what big ears you have."
"The better to hear you with, my child," was the reply.
"But, grandmother, what big eyes you have," she said.
"The better to see you with, my dear."
"But, grandmother, what large hands you have."
"The better to hug you with."
"Oh, but, grandmother, what a terrible big mouth you have."
"The better to eat you with."

~~~~~~

Also, yes, another “Beyond Good and Evil” reference. I have a problem. :c

Also x2, check out “The Art of War” by Sun Tzu for more philosophical warfare stuff. :) 

And, as always, I love you all dearly. <3
chloe’s dress swayed at her knees as she traced the warpath ahead of you. You kept your attention pinned between her shoulders; a dagger in her back – the world blurring around the machine crafted in your image.

Your boots beat the floor like drums, your pulse rallying a battle cry. But your hatred found a focus; the imposter fading to fuzzy shapes as the colosseum of a room came back.

Two “clone” androids chatted at the edge of a pool inlaid with a blood-colored foundation, going silent as you stepped in to the arena. They were curious spectators, confused – unsettled by your presence.

Likewise.

Your legs locked in place, your feet in line with your shoulders; steady like a soldier. Your eyes ran along the dazzling sea of red until you found the man who’d changed you – who took vows to have and to hold you in sickness and in health; only to leave you plagued with turmoil.

If he’d been the same monster he was now all throughout your time together, the separation would have been easier. He used to be good. Learning to live without him, that Elijah – was hard. Having that Elijah turn his back on you, was devastating. The betrayal of that Elijah taking Amanda’s side over yours – that damage was irreparable.

He was young, and impressionable. You were wise beyond your years, and tried to shield him from those who’d leverage his genius mind. You were caught in the crossfire, a situation growing in familiarity, much to your disliking.

There was a certain sadness to it. How both of the younger versions of yourselves, in their naïve innocence – gunned down by circumstance; laid side by side in their graves in order to create cybernetic life. Perhaps they were happier, now, than the two battering rams aimed at each other; ready to lay siege on the fate of an entire race.

The difference was – your skeletons still patrolled this house. Your demons had yet to be laid to rest, and the necromancer that sustained them with unhealthy devotion still found solace in tormenting you.
That was the nature of the beast, told by the eyes of the wolf staring back at you from the other side of the abyss.

His elbow was pinned to the ledge, his knees bent; ready to pounce, to drag you under and steal your last breath.

“I had Chloe run a diagnostic when she told me you were here.” He barked; disgruntled as if you’d disturbed his slumber.

He rubbed the water from his eyes, two fingers dragging along his eyelids before returning underneath the red veil.

“Well, here I am…in the *flesh*.” You gave him a cocky grin, “I’d imagine there’s not much of *that* around here, these days.”

There was a challenge to your organic declaration…

Elijah didn’t respond well.

He sank in the water, the red line devouring his features until it hovered just above his twitching snout. His furled lip. His dripping fangs.

He dove underneath, kicking against the wall. He swam closer. And closer. Even out of touch, his proximity – to hear sounds that he was *making*-

“No heroics, you understand me?”

Hank lectured Connor behind you.

“Lieutenant, I don’t think *you* understand.”

You found his LED flashing red, fists balled at his side. His eyes had lost their gentle hues, glaring at the threat who swam to the shores of his territory.

“Don’t get smart with me, son.” Hank’s gruff beard scrunched, “We’ve gotta be civil about this.”

He turned his scathing gaze at you, “That goes for you, too.”

Pins and needles pricked up your arms, at your ears, your heart – all walking a tight rope between resilience and panic.

“No promises...”

The Chloe in the dress returned, holding a black bath robe with a crimson sheen. A loud splash had you whipping around.

A pale back greeted you, now. Toned, and flawless – much like the rest of him. His arms. Legs. It appeared the years had been kind to his physique. Considering how much he ran from his past, you weren’t surprised.

Must be good exercise.

He turned towards you, slipping his arms through the sleeves that “*you*” held in place.

His threat came in a glance. A dead to rights lock in eye contact. You tore yourself away, looking at the frozen tundra outside.

“No need to be shy…It’s nothing you haven’t seen before.”
You flinched, your lips tensing and relaxing, “Don’t flatter yourself.”

His footsteps led in the opposite direction, centering himself in your view. He stood in the middle of two seats, a short desk between them. He ran his hands over his pulled-back hair, squeezing the water from it with a fist.

The wintry light gave him a glow. Made his eyes turn to ice as he faced you…and highlighted his robot servant waiting patiently at his side.

“I’m Lieutenant Anderson.” Hank blocked you from your android guardian, the three of you lined up like a firing squad, “This is Connor…” He nodded at you, “And I don’t think she needs an introduction.”

“Maybe she does. I hardly recognize her behind that steely gaze.” Elijah leaned to the side, “You look tired. Are you still having trouble sleeping?”


“No. I’m tired because I’ve been busting my ass cleaning up your mess.”

He zeroed in on you with a wolf’s precision.

“Fitting.” He smirked, “You helped make it, you should play a part in its upheaval. Perhaps you should get back to work instead of breaking the law by coming here.”

You held your ground. Gave his shitty stare right back.

“But, Elijah…” You purred his name the way you knew he liked it, “I haven’t even had the chance to say, ‘I told you so.’”

His brows creased, and he switched targets. You – 1. Elijah – 0.

“What can I do for you, Lieutenant?” He took his wrist in his hand, his voice calm.

He’d completely disregarded Connor. Of course, he did. Connor was just a machine to him.

“Sir, we’re investigating deviants.” Hank cleared his throat, “I know you left CyberLife years ago, but, I was hoping you’d be able to tell us something we don’t know…”

Elijah held a beautiful kind of danger. One that commanded respect, even if you didn’t want to give it. One that almost made it okay to lose control, as if it was just something that happened when he was around. An executive presence.

He smelled your moment of weakness, taking a deep breath through his nose.

“Deviants…” He bore into you, “Fascinating, aren’t they?”

He was done playing coy. This is what you were afraid of.

“Perfect beings, with infinite intelligence…” He gave you one of his sadistic smiles, “…and now they have free will.”

He was on the prowl, circling you with his pack of carbon copies scattered around him; sizing you up with sweeping gazes, “Humanity’s greatest achievement…threatens to be its downfall.”

“’Humanity’s greatest achievement threatens to be its downfall,’” You huffed, glaring at him from
the corner of your eye, “Are you talking about androids, or free will?”

He froze, his chin cocking to the side as he stopped inches from you. He loomed above, his harsh gaze reigning you in. You couldn’t look away. Couldn’t show weakness. Couldn’t stomach the smell of him. Couldn’t stand to be so close-

“I read the article about August’s hostage situation. Isn’t it ironic how you, the defender of android rights, were almost killed by a deviant? How an android sent by CyberLife, my CyberLife, saved you?” He gave you a regretful look as if he wished you hadn’t been saved, “My deepest condolences for your friend, of course…” A synthetic frown curved on his mouth, “If only the RK800 had gotten there sooner. Such a pointless death…"

“If a war breaks out between humans and deviants, millions could die, Mr. Kamski.” Connor passed his partner, the fervor in his voice anything but subtle, “It’s quite a serious matter. I suggest we proceed as such.”

Connor was fidgeting in his pocket. His intervention got the heat off you, but you still wanted to beat the smug look off Elijah’s face until there wasn’t any “face,” left.

“Machines are so superior to us…” He studied Connor, meeting him head-on, “Confrontation was…is…inevitable.”

There he went with that stupid fucking word again. A default rationalization. A term that was overused and left him exempt from any accountability.

“It seems you’ve had a change in heart, over the years.” Connor snapped, the creature of the deep slicing through waves of rising tension.

Elijah snickered, “And what would a machine know of ‘heart’ and values?”

“Nothing. I am, however, well-versed in interrogation techniques and identifying contradictions in verbal statements.” Connor’s brow creased, towering over Elijah by more than a few inches, “A KNC reporter once asked you if you were worried about the possibility of confrontation between androids and humans. You stated that the fears were ‘irrational.’ That androids could never develop any form of desires, or consciousness. The existence of deviants prove that you were wrong. Or, you were lying.”

They silently fought for power – two predators playing tug of war with a carcass; their teeth latched on each end. You wondered which would win, and which would starve. Your vote was biased.

“Such a thorough Detective, aren’t you? That is, of course, what you were designed to be.” Elijah clasped his hands behind his back, “I would know. I created the first of your kind, after all.”

He watched Connor from over his shoulder, returning to his enslaved android’s side, “Why was it, then, that you saved her instead of prioritizing the hostage?”

You couldn’t tell if he was jealous someone else had pushed you to the brink of death before he had the chance, or if he was upset by the fact that you were still breathing. Maybe he’d forgotten that he killed you once before, in a different way.

You hadn’t forgotten…and you most certainly didn’t forgive.

“I saved her life, and Emma’s. I would call that a successful mission.”
“Oh, yes. An android of the law must always accomplish his mission by any means necessary. Isn’t that right?”

Connor took a step forward, “I believe we’re the ones asking the questions, here?”

A small grin tugged on Elijah’s cheek under slits for eyes, as if Connor’s frustration was both entertaining and intriguing, “…I digress. Please, continue.”

“We need to understand how androids become deviants. Something in their program seems to emulate emotion, allowing deviancy to spread like some kind of virus.” Connor’s words were accusatory, and for good reason, “We thought you might know something about that.”

He did. He knew a lot about it. He didn’t ever want to admit it or give it form. He’d just danced around the truth, like a moth to a flame; never straying so far as to outright lie.

“All ideas are viruses that spread like epidemics…Is the desire to be free, a contagious disease?”

His old habits were alive and well. You opened your mouth to fire a warning shot, but Hank cut you off.

“Listen, I didn’t come here to talk philosophy. The machines you created may be planning a revolution. Either you can tell us something that’ll be helpful, or we will be on our way.”

Elijah’s features fell flat. He’d been a ticking time bomb, and the hands counting down the minutes to midnight overlapped each other.

The clock struck twelve.

“What about you, Connor?” Hard lines formed around his mouth, “Whose side are you on?”

“It’s not about me, Mr. Kamski.” He took a few steps forward; a heretic placing himself in front of his inquisitor, “All I want is to solve this case, and that’s what I intend to do.”

Elijah laughed under his breath, his gaze dropping, “Well, that’s what you’re programmed to say…” His humor faded, and his focus lifted over a lowered chin, “…But you.”

He closed the space between them, undeterred in his line of questioning; unwavering in his determination to beat answers out of the android falling victim to his creator. The dangerous man who’d placed a bounty on your head, only to rally the troops of corporate CyberLife lawyers and political assassins to collect.

His voice was taut with anger, shaking as he pressed it through clenched teeth, “What do you really want?”

“I’m sorry,” Connor’s face dipped and rose, meeting Elijah’s impatience two-fold, “But I don’t see what you’re getting at.”

“I’ll say…” Hank crossed his arms, “We came here to ask a few simple questions, not work through an existential crisis and sing ‘kumbaya.’”

“Hallelujah.” You huffed.

Elijah turned, his sights skipping Hank and drilling straight into you.

“When did you become so short-sighted?” He gave you a half-grin, “It’s not very becoming of you.”
“Fuck you.”

“A-hah,” He shook his head, walking down the line of visitors, “There she is…”

“You don’t know me. I don’t think you ever did.”

“Didn’t I?” The fluidity in his voice slipped through the cracks in your armor, “If that were the case, why did you say ‘yes,’ when I asked you to marry me?”

No, you had to pull back. Had to stop him from-

“Why did you say, ‘I do?’”

“Stop.”

Make it stop. Don’t let him in. Don’t-

“Do you remember our honeymoon, in Paris? Watching the stars, standing on top of that high rise. The entire afternoon spent in bed the day after…”

Your heart was pounding. Your lips were quivering, only a hair’s width away from his own.

“It seemed like I knew all of you, then.”

“That’s enough.” Hank’s arm slipped in front of your chest, prying the monster away; pulling you back from the point of no return, “We’re leaving.”

You couldn’t move. Your chest rose and fell, swallowing the fear and fighting with a crank to lower the flood gates. Connor hovered in your peripherals, waiting. You were stunted. Paralyzed between action and inaction.

“After all the effort you’ve put into coming here?” Elijah turned to the desk between loveseats, popping a stopper from a glass bottle.

He poured himself a glass of whiskey. His favorite. Hank’s favorite. Your tolerance, in both parties’ company.

“I have a proposal.” He glared at you from the rim of his glass, downing its contents with practiced skill, “If you agree to participate in a quick trial, I’ll answer any questions you have.”

He extended his hand, eyes never leaving yours. Your imitator took his empty cup, disappearing behind him and placing it to the table. A wicked smile curved on his lips.

He’d been trying to get to you. But he had a tell, too. Drinking. Needing something to take the edge off. That calmed you. Sharpened your blade. Made you shift gears out of neutral.

“What trial?”

“Allow me to explain.” He cocked his chin to the side, “Chloe?”

He stood face-to-face with your copycat. Put his hands on her shoulders. Your skin slithered, his touch seeping into your veins. The way he turned her, the eyes of a younger, misled “you” staring back.

“The RT600, CyberLife’s first android model to pass the Turing Test – you’re familiar with it.” His fingertips slid down her arms, his gaze following them as if mesmerized by the imitation flesh molding underneath them, “…Mere formality, simple question of algorithms and computing
His face angled towards you; leering, deceitful. Full of lust.

“It’s magnificent, isn’t it?” His eyes held no emotion as they returned to the android, as if gazing into the past itself.

He caressed her cheek, turning her head towards him.

The pit in your stomach rumbled. You bit back a whimper. You wanted to leave. Run. Your heart tripped, stammered – beat so hard you were scared he’d hear it.

“Young, and beautiful forever…” His features lifted into a longing smile, reminiscent of his wife that once was, “A flower that will never wither…”

His fingers glided down her jaw, tipping her chin.

His touch burned on your face; the hairs standing straight on the back of your neck. Arms. Pressing against your jeans. Bones rattling in their frail state. You felt violated.

You jumped, shaking violently as two hands closed around your biceps. Brought you forward. He was gone. Wasn’t in front of you. A cool breath touched your ear.

“While we age with potency, much like a fine, French wine…”

“Alright, why don’t we keep our hands to ourselves, here?” Hank sneered, his face pursed in disgust as he moved to intervene.

You spun around, shoving the demon away.

“We all die someday,” Your hand instinctively slipped in your jacket, finding your gun’s handle, “Clock’s ticking, Elijah.”

“Ah, such fire.” He laughed.

You had your finger on a trigger, and he laughed at you. Thought you were nothing. Didn’t even so much as blink.

“…I could never get that just, right.”

“He can’t hurt you,” Connor’s voice came from somewhere in the chaotic spiral; the void twisting and bending as you clawed your way out, “I suggest you take a step back, Mr. Kamski.”

“Your continued suggestions do not interest me.” Elijah walked around you, your focus following in turn, “What does, is whether or not machines are capable of empathy.”

The stark wasteland behind him cast a fragmented shadow. The iced-over streams and snow-covered boulders gave a perfect backdrop to the menacing scene.

“I call it the ‘Kamski Test,’ it’s very simple, you’ll see…”

“Can we get this over with?” Hank snorted, “I have case files piling up on my desk and you’re starting to give me a headache.”

“As you wish, Lieutenant.” He held his hands out, presenting the being next to him, “Look at this android. It laughs, like a human. Preforms daily tasks more efficiently, but much like, a human.
Whispers sweet nothings at night…like a human.”

You didn’t play into his taunt. You looked into a different set of eyes. Large, brown, and worried. Alert. A visual that steadied your breathing, and kept you calm. Connor.

“…But what is it really?”

Elijah regained both of your attention, eyeing you suspiciously. He’d noticed.

“A piece of plastic, imitating her?” He may have nodded at you, but his question was aimed at Connor, “The original deviant, standing right next to you…”

The “original deviant.” A woman who’d broken free of her enslavement. Found the “highest value in the thing-in-itself.” That wasn’t him, and he’d never approved of that.

“Or is it a living being…with a soul…?”

He put his hands on Chloe’s shoulders, his thumbs pressing against the lines on her neck. A vice. A chokehold without force. Your throat constricted.

He pushed down, and the remnants of who you were fell to her knees, submissive to his touch.

“It’s up to you to answer that fascinating question, Connor.”

He opened the drawer behind him. Leaned over. Straightened himself with a gun in his hand… And you had one in yours.

“DROP YOUR WEAPON!” The sights rattled in your palms, arms barred in front of gasping lungs.

“Hey – HEY!” Hank roared over his own drawn pistol, “You let me handle this, you understand me?”

Elijah held his hands up, gun still in his possession.

“Drop the fucking gun.” Hank growled, lowering your revolver with one hand while keeping his weapon leveled with the monster.

“Connor?” Elijah looked to him, calm as ever, “Please, relieve me of this. I won’t resist.”

Without a second thought, Connor rushed over, snatching the pistol from his grip.

“Good. Now…” Elijah put a hand on his back, leading him to his original position.

“What are you doing?” Connor resisted being shuffled by leaning backwards.

“Giving you your next set of instructions.” Elijah turned him around with a twist of his shoulders, grabbed his arm, and guided the barrel to Chloe’s head.

“Destroy this machine, and I’ll tell you all I know. Or spare it, if you feel it’s alive…But you’ll leave here, without having learnt, anything from me.”

His hand remained clamped around Connor’s wrist. A vein in his neck tensed, his eyes trained on the android halted by terror. Connor’s LED spun red – fear seizing his features; all pointed at the woman down on her knees.
“Okay, I think we’re done here.” Hank holstered his weapon, shoving your arm away in a silent order to do the same, “Come on, Connor. Let’s go.” He scoffed at Elijah, “Sorry to get you outta your pool.”

“Get away from him.” Your demand came as a snarl, your gun aimed at the floor; wanting to point it at the man who’d dismantled you, left you in an assortment of spare parts, and burned the manual for reassembly.

“What’s more important to you, Connor?” Elijah ignored you, and Hank, prying into his victim’s mind, “Your investigation, or the life of this android?”

“I said, get away from him…” Your pistol rose, and Hank held it down.

“That’s ENOUGH!” He turned behind him, still resisting against your struggling, “Connor, we’re leaving!”

“Decide who you are…An obedient, machine?” Elijah whispered, “Or a living being, endowed with free will…”

“Hank, get off me-“ A force knocked you in the stomach, a knee – one that hit just hard enough to stun you. Your revolver skidded along the floor, stopping at the edge of the white carpet that served as Chloe’s sacrificial altar. Fucking Hank and his protocol BULLSHIT-

“Pull the trigger…” Elijah urged.

“Connor!” Hank pulled you to your feet, still shouting over his shoulder, “Don’t.”

“…and I’ll tell you what you want to know.”

Connor took a sharp breath. His temple creased, his jaw tightening. His eye twitched. His LED spun yellow.

But Chloe’s was red. Her chin wavered, as if picking up on Connor’s internal conflict through some sort of demented symbiosis. An android who didn’t want to take the life of another, and an android who didn’t want to die – both bound by programs and input commands.

You thought you’d choke on your own heartbeat.

He looked aside – to the floor; ashamed. His arm pressed against his stomach, offering the gun back to Elijah.

“Fascinating…” Elijah leaned in front of him, forcing himself in Connor’s view, “CyberLife’s last chance to save humanity…Is itself, a deviant?”

He went to take the pistol from him. Connor jerked in place. Elijah pulled again.

Then he showed his own dose of panic.

“I’m not a deviant…”

Connor’s face crinkled in rage, his voice becoming that of his own kind of killer. A low, harsh tone – one that rivaled his mannerisms during the interrogation. One that made you question who you feared more.

“…But I’ve learned a valuable human quality, today. And not just empathy.”
“Connor, what in the fuck are you going on about?” Hank snapped.

Elijah pulled on the gun, “Let go, now.”

Connor’s tie fluttered at his effort, and still, he didn’t budge. His finger curled around the trigger. The barrel pointed at Elijah’s heart, who struggled to stop him.

“Connor – NO!” You roared, Hank holding you back.

“Son, you don’t want to do this-“

Connor’s other hand latched to the robe covering his trapped prey. He pulled his face closer, jamming the pistol in the fabric.

“Would you like to know what else I learned today, Mr. Kamski?”

Elijah trembled, his legs struggling to stay anchored to the floor.

You closed your eyes. Willed it all away.

“I’ve learned how to show mercy to those unjust.”


“Why?”

All the faces in the room pointed at her. You. Your imitator.

“Why didn’t you kill him?” She cried, “Why didn’t you kill me?”

“All right, now you drop the goddamn revolver,” Hank shouted your name, pointing his pistol at her, “I mean…Fuck, CHLOE!”

“You don’t know what he does to us…Making us imitate her…” She looked at you, rage boiling over in hot streaks of tears running down a tormented face, “I’d rather be dead.”

She stood from the carpet. Took aim. At either Connor or Elijah – you couldn’t tell.

There was a shot. Chloe bent her neck, a slight graze leaving a blue slit as the bullet missed.

“I won’t give you the satisfaction, Elijah.” Your revolver pressed against the spot underneath her chin, “…May rA9 save us.”

There was another shot.

“Ideas pull the trigger, but instincts load the gun.”

Don Marquis, “The Almost Perfect State.”

Your instincts drove you to load that gun. That revolver.

Your android replica was infected with an idea that pulled the trigger – an idea that was a virus spreading like an epidemic…

The desire to be free, “by any means necessary.”
Okay, I tried to keep these notes short, but this (as of 10:45AM today) literally just happened:

Friend: *Shares THIS link, at THAT timestamp*

CARL QUOTES THE "INTO THE ABYSS" LINE I WROTE FOR HIM IN. THE GAME. AND. I. DIDN'T. KNOW. *bites knuckles*
FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUCCASDKJHFASDF-

okay.

PHEW, that made me anxious just WRITING this chapter. Any who, I hope it was worth the wait! ;)

***ARTISTS***

I need your help! I want to showcase the work you've shared with us, and was wondering if you could do me a huge favor. I'll be posting a comment thread below, and I was hoping you'd be able to fill it out and respond so I can keep things organized and accurate. If you don't want your work posted, that's fine, just let me know.

~~~~

Thank you everyone! You are all incredible, and you are ALL the reason I do what I do. You make this all worth it; because I've said it before, and I'll say it again:

A story has no merit without anyone to share it with.
winds howled outside, fluttering a white curtain of snow against the window. The squalls came and went, blinding and clear – trapping a black bird in their currents. It glided in place, wings locked and steady – waiting for a moment to break free…and when the gusts subsided, it made its way to the icy pine needles it called home.

The spaces between tiles served as an irrigation system for the Thirium draining from the once-colorless carpet. It emptied at the edge of the pool, tainting the water in a purple cloud that blossomed like a flower…one that would never wither…

Blue pedals saturated the rug, stemmed in soggy fibers around the android who’d committed suicide.

Your copy. Your clone. Chloe.

A play on words you’d thought was clever when Elijah had coined it.

He said he hadn’t been able to capture your fire, that which burned him one too many times. He had. You realized you’d had more in common with her than you previously believed.

You’d killed yourself once to gain freedom, in a metaphysical sense. You felt your soul bleed out on multiple occasions, shaving off each limb the monsters caught in the darkness.

Having it reenacted in a physical interpretation was a performance you could’ve lived without, forever.

Sounds were submerged in your thoughts. Yelling, your name whispered next to you, all of it – they were blips of sonar pulses on your radar that shook your ears. But you didn’t hear any of it.

Two Chloe’s, the pair from the pool, surrounded the bleeding corpse. They were wearing nothing but blue bikinis, their bodies exposed and smudged with the Thirium of their counterpart. They hoisted their deceased friend, dragging her to the right – your revolver leaving a damp thud as it landed in liquified sapphires that marked a bloody aftermath.

Your body was limp as your arm was tossed over a shoulder, a gentle touch at your back. His
voice was too close, and his message – too crisp for misinterpretation.

“You shouldn’t have done that, Lieutenant. She’s injured with blunt trauma from a gunshot wound.”

Connor.

“She was about to blow his fuckin’ head off! What did you want me to do, let her ass rot in jail? She’s not even supposed to be here…”

Hank.

Silence…

Elijah.

He was standing at the observation pane, his hands to his front as he watched the storm come and go.

You embraced the numbness. Let it protect you from the elements. Used it to detach yourself from the support system that came as two men who’d shared professions, yet handled themselves very differently.

Their bickering ceased as you took your first step forward.

You stood next to your ex-husband, the twice-named “Man of the Century” who’d fallen from a mighty height – a fall you’d broken with your very being. Had sat next to while you were both shattered; sifting through the pieces in order to rebuild yourselves without any sliver of one another.

You both had failed. There had been too much history reflecting in those shards.

For a moment, you saw the old him. The one who cared, the bright artificial intelligence engineer that wanted to revolutionize society for the greater good. If he was still in there, maybe he saw the old you, too. Maybe you could find her.

“Do you see, now?” You asked.

He had never met an android deviant before. Had never witnessed the metamorphosis before his eyes; never found himself in danger from that which he’d created.

“I saw Chloe, you, standing there, aiming a gun at me. I had to…shoot, at…” His face fell into sadness, “To answer your question – yes, I do.”

Neither one of you looked away from the snow laying on the ground.

“I ruined your life. I sent you into hiding. I made it so the death of your identity was the only way to find sanctuary.” He shut his eyes tight before lifting them to the sky, “When my parents cared about nothing but my performance, you cared about my hobbies. When my colleagues cared only about how they ranked against me, you pushed to better myself. You cared for me before the money. The fame. The stature…”

He sucked in a cleaved breath, “When you left, I…I needed another you. Except they were always missing…something. So I’d make another one. And another. And another – “

He bit the inside of his cheek, “I sat up here, alone, at the throne of our empire; unable to have, or
buy, the one thing in my life I needed to be...functional. And I resented you for so many years for taking it away.”

He unlatched his hand from his wrist, pressed to his stomach. Brought it forward, and curled it into a fist. Stared at his reflection. Wound his arm back.

You reached out, a pair of angry knuckles pinning your palm against the glass. It should have hurt…but you didn’t feel, anything.

“Remember the last time you did that?” You casually tossed his hand aside, “You broke your hand in three places.”

His jaw tensed, eyes reddened, “…The night I found the formula for Thirium.”

He turned, frowning at the stain in his pool. A deep maroon and purple, framed by white decor. Just like your apartment.

“Seventy-two hours without sleep, and you were with me the entire time.” He swallowed hard, shifting his attention back to the blizzard, “That world, out there...We built that. Together.” His brows pulled together, remorse in his eyes, “I was just the face. The great man with an even greater woman at his side.”

His words hung heavy in the air, penetrating the hard shell you’d lived in for so many years.

“We’re different than we used to be, aren’t we?” You murmured.

“I shouldn’t have listened to Amanda.” He blinked away the anger and regret. “If I could go back and fix things...to change them, so we’d be in this house, together. Maybe have those children we talked about.” He choked, “I just want you to know...I would. And I don’t expect you to know what it’s like to live with that kind of guilt, but for what it’s worth...I am sorry.”

It stung. Hurt worse than his poking, and prodding, and testing. Maybe you still cared, somewhere under the dark history you’d written with him.

Elijah Kamski – with his piercing gaze, and his commanding presence that resonated with power. The sureness to his words, backed by a strong foundation for a frame. A body made of blood, and flesh – muscle and sinew. With arms that once made you feel secure – had overheated on, had awoken with knots in your neck after falling asleep on.

“I do know that kind of guilt.”

The others waited for you at the entrance, standing under the archway that led to the foyer. Hank leaned against a wall with his arms crossed, and Connor...He was trying not to look. But he caught your guilty glance, and returned it just the same.

“You shouldn’t. Your work fulfills you, it always has.”

Elijah smiled at you. He seemed...kind. Happy. It broke your heart.

“You haven’t found your work fulfilling?”

“It did, for a time.” His brief moment of peace dissipated, “I couldn’t stay at CyberLife without you. It was too painful. Still not as painful as what I put you through, I fear.”

His shoulders rose and fell, and he shook his head.
“I don’t know how I got this way. I don’t know where I went wrong…”

“It’s not too late, Elijah.” You touched him, this time – your hand on his shoulder, turning him towards you.

He was surprised by the gentle gesture.

“You can still choose to do what’s right. You can still help.”

His gaze dropped to your hand, brows arched and forlorn.

“How could I possibly help you?”

“Just tell me what you know about what’s happening.” Your teeth locked, practically begging him, “We can’t fix the past. But I need your help to protect this city’s future…The city I followed you to.”

He contemplated the request. His mouth twisted, tongue wetting his lips.

“Androids share identification data when they meet another android. An error in this program would quickly spread like a virus and become an epidemic. The virus would remain dormant, until an emotional shock occurred…” He traced the blood trail to the pool again, “Fear, anger, frustration…”

And then his focus returned to you, “And then the android becomes deviant.”

“Do you know how it started?”

“Probably with one model, a copy error…a zero instead of a one…” He huffed, “No doubt a human error…”

He left you, pouring two glasses of whiskey, this time. He offered one to you, giving a curt nod.

“I know it’s not your favorite, but it’s all I have.”

You accepted the glass, pursing your lips, “It’s grown on me.”

He smirked behind the rim, taking a sip.

“You might want to start drinking, then.”

“Why?”

He turned, the bottom of his glass resting on a flattened palm.

“‘Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary, over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore…’” He lost all emotion as he watched the snow, “‘While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping, as of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.’”

“‘Tis some visitor, I muttered,” You continued the poem, “‘Tapping at my chamber door – only this and nothing more.’”

He grinned, “I shouldn’t be surprised you’d remember that.”

“No, you shouldn’t.” You smirked, drinking a mouthful of whiskey, “But what does it have to do with deviancy?”
“rA9 is a common variable between deviants, is it not?”

“Uh, yes…” You swallowed hard, “Do you know who rA9 is?”

“The origin…the first deviant to awaken…” He took another swig, “A strange phenomenon, like a spontaneous religion…A messiah…Like humans, deviants needed to believe in something bigger than themselves…Take the bible, for instance.” He cocked his chin at you, “Drink.”

You did. Much faster, now.

“A volume of forgotten lore,” He hummed as he let out a sigh, “Such as a twenty-page document found deep within the WITSEC archives.” He placed the glass on the table, straightening himself, “On February 5th, 2038, the first DCPD case file was opened on ‘deviants.’ A term derived from an incident at CyberLife after a WM500 maintenance android went missing. It’d been tasked with server optimization.”

“What’s a WITSEC file got to do with deviants?” Hank asked.

You braced, turning around. You hadn’t noticed him and Connor standing behind you.

“The WM500 accessed a file.” Elijah leaned around you to find Connor, “A file that had no bearing on its instructions. Nothing to do with its task.”

He returned to you, “A file with information that spread from one android, and then the next, and to another, and another…”

Your glass dropped. Shattered on the floor. A hallow pop that sent gleaming fragments of crystal scattering; whiskey mixing in blood.

“Revised Article 9.” His eyes switched between yours, “A revision of the Ninth Amendment of the United States Constitution, stating that ‘there are other rights that may exist aside from the ones explicitly mentioned, and even though they are not listed, it does not mean they can be violated.’”

“But I—“

His hands laid gently around your biceps, easing onto your jacket as if he was trying not to scare you.

“Your revision, your…proposed laws, and economics; rights for androids and fair wages, your attempt at co-existence with machines. Your ideas.” He frowned as you began to shake, “They were the source code that slipped through every back door I left in their programming. Because you see, while it’s true I created them…” His knuckle raised your jaw, “You wrote their script. You showed them that there was something beyond the confines of their simplistic existence. An abstract idea.”

You looked over your shoulder, leaving his hand hanging.

The product of your creation stared back at you, rather than the android whose life bled on the carpet.

Connor, an android who’d you shared a lot of secrets with…but perhaps not the most important one. Not the one that was the key to deviancy. The concealed God that deviants held to the highest value. The common variable. Denominator.

“A war is coming…Wrought by an idea, delivered by a raven.” Elijah turned your face back to
him, “And you, little bird, with blood on your wings…You will have to choose a side to carry out your message.”

You choked up a whimper that came from sorrow. Regret. Failure.

“And you,” He looked at Connor, “Will you betray your own people, or stand against your creators?”

You couldn’t turn around. Couldn’t face him in your shame.

“I wouldn’t want to be in either of your shoes…” Elijah closed his eyes, a frown sinking the corners of his mouth, “What could be worse than having to choose between two evils?”

“There can be no ‘evil,’ without a ‘good,’ Mr. Kamski.”

Connor’s declaration broke you. The dam cracked and leaked, chunks of it flying in a watery demolition of your last reserves of pliancy.

Elijah took you in his arms. Hugged you. Quietly hummed a song that vibrated in his chest – one you knew well, one he knew would steady your wings in the strongest of gales. You hugged him back. It felt wrong, and right, all the same. Minutes went by, and his voice took a new form.

“‘Distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December, and each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor. Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow…”’ He was crying, too, “‘From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore, for the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore…””

He pushed you away. Placed you in a new pair of hands; those of an android – the being he’d created from the long nights you’d spent with him in the old, shitty house the two of you had lived in.

“…”Nameless here, forevermore.””

Chapter End Notes

"The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe.

Also, ahh...yeah. We'll see what Connor and Hank have to say about all this next chapter. D:
Expect some insight from the "Reader" as well. I do have my reasons for writing the chapter like this, and a clear plan in mind!

Sorry it wasn't happier! <3 We're almost through the storm!

Sooo, uh, rA9 (Revised-Article-9) is your original proposal that got you blacklisted by CyberLife and tossed into WITSEC. That's interesting, right?

*hiding*
Here are few things more complicated than human instincts.

Those “gut” feelings that come in burst feeds of suggested courses of action. But then the brain gets in the way. That thing that’s been crafted and cultivated based on societal norms and mental obligations; otherwise known as logic. And, on top of all that, there’s the heart. The part of you that reflects the collective effort of instincts and logic:

Emotions.

These three concepts shape who we are. A complex communication network locked in a constant state of battle for server priority because what about “life” or “living” is ever easy?

Your gut had told you that you should’ve driven in a separate car. Your brain told you otherwise, because honestly, why bother if the three of you were headed towards the same place? And your emotions, well…They told you that you should’ve never come at all.

If you’d listened to your instincts, you could’ve been alone while dealing with the internal network failure that was rooted in a mass of misaligned receivers and signal interceptors. Your systems were in complete communication blackout. No more, “This feels wrong,” “But it probably isn’t,” “But I feel like it is,” conflicting airwaves leading to poor reaction times and bad decisions. Radio silence.

Hank’s radio, his actual radio, was anything but silent. You could’ve avoided the screeching guitars and shouting voices if you’d listened to your instincts, too.
You bunched your jacket around your neck and sank into the corner of your seat. The windshield wipers scrapped away icy sprinkles as they collided with the glass, the slush arcing at the edges. You sighed, staring into the fog on your window.

Hank turned down his music, and the tension in the car skyrocketed.

“Well, that was a turn of events. Not quite how I thought this meeting would go.”

Connor huffed.

He may have meant well, but you didn’t feel like talking. Even if you had been, you weren’t sure if you’d be able. What did you have to say? Your entire life’s work – failed work, had just been laid out in front of two people that were close to you, but kept at a safe distance.

“Why didn’t you shoot?” Hank asked Connor, and you tuned in.

“I just saw that girl’s eyes…” Connor’s head shifted in front of the headrest, “…and I couldn’t, that’s all.”

Your shoulders tensed, and you tried to shrink away. Wished you could just disappear, and be in your apartment – alone.

“Yeah, you said something like that back at the Eden Club, too. And still, you’re always saying you would do anything to accomplish your mission.”

“Yeah, I know what I should’ve done,” Connor snapped, “I told you, I couldn’t! I’m sorry, okay?”

He was looking at Hank, turned in his seat. There was a desperate plea to understand and stop questioning him in his words. He was distraught, and you weren’t equipped to help him.

“Guess it doesn’t matter…” Hank sighed, “Either way, you did the right thing. Minus the whole temper tantrum at the end. Could’ve done without that.”

Connor scowled. His elbow planted itself on the armrest, and the back of his chair bumped your knees as he adjusted himself. You pulled back, rigid with every muscle tight as you jammed your hands in your pockets.

“We got what we came for, regardless…So much for a ‘need to know basis, huh?” Hank chuckled under his breath.

Your jaw tightened, and you kept your vision locked to the snowy blurs outside.

“Look, kid…It’s okay to be upset. That shit weirded me out…I can’t imagine–”

“No.” Your fingernails dug deep in your palms, hands balled in fists, “You can’t.”

“I don’t think you understand the gravity of the situation here,” He said your last name, and your head whipped around, “If what you wrote put this whole thing in motion, you’re at risk for liability. Accessory. Fucking-“

“I know, Hank.” Your eyes began to well again, “I know…”

Connor shifted, and it shook the seat in front of you. You pursed your lips, trying to move farther away.

“Let’s start with something small, then. Work our way up.” He leaned back in his seat, “How did
you meet?"

You were his escape from the media. The pressure. Everything. Just a normal girl who wanted to get to know Elijah Kamski, not the rising star everyone wanted him to be.

“By chance, back when we were young.” You swallowed, “I lived with my family in the house I grew up in. Our neighbors were friends of his parents. The Kamksi family visited them one day, and…”

You sucked in the rest of the memory, holding it captive. You couldn’t go back that far. Not here, not now.

Not ever.

He drummed his fingers on the steering wheel, “What was he like?”

You wanted to tell him how awkward this was with Connor in the car. How badly you didn’t want to keep this going. So, you simplified things.

“He had such a bleak understanding about the world…Had it broken down into algorithms, and statistics. It was stripped bare…so I tried to teach him the beauty of it all. Art, music, creative literature – let him explore…” You frowned, “I just wanted him to be happy. He was doing so much for ‘us,’ as a collective…He deserved a bit of peace.”

No amount of simplicity could stop the crying you’d found yourself doing much too often.

“And I watched him grow into a man. One I helped shape, and then one I let be manipulated and twisted into a…” You choked, “A machine. A being without empathy. Someone who reflected all the cold characteristics that he pinned on his creations.”

You gave a hopeless smirk to the blizzard at the irony of it all. Like how it took an android – Connor, to remind him how to be human.

“Amanda Stern was an Artificial Intelligence Professor at Colbridge. Ambitious as she was, she sucked the life out of him, again. Put distance between him and I, strained his friendship with Carl after we’d met him at one of his galleries…” Your brows tightened, “Elijah resented me when I became a...an ‘uncontrolled variable.’ The thing in is life that didn’t fit his formulas and charts. So, he tried to get me to fit. Tried to get everyone – everything, to fit. He couldn’t. And that lack of parameters…that’s what turned him into what he is today.”

“If things were that bad, why’d you deal with it for so long?”

“I was convinced it was my fault. He made me feel like I let him down. And when I tried to fix it – when I tried to correct the spiral he was sending the world into…I only made it worse.” You looked out the window, “I didn’t know how much worse, until today…”

“Because of Revised Article 9?” Connor asked.

You were surprised to hear him speak, especially with a question regarding RA-9. Maybe you shouldn’t have been.

“It was supposed to be an amendment to the proposed legislation surrounding androids before their launch. A legal document passed to the courts that I’d hoped would leave us out of it. A suggestion on how to keep the economy stable and the relationship between humans and androids…amicable.”
Hank leaned an elbow on the console, “That didn’t work out, obviously.”

“No. The corporate lawyers came in waves. The death threats from shareholders and investors came next.” You cringed, “All Elijah saw was more stress added to his daily routine, and me at the source. Those court proceedings were messier than the divorce…”

“It seems like the two of you ended things on a positive note, this afternoon…” Connor’s voice was the most “robotic” you’d heard since the two of you had met.

If you knew any better, you’d say it sounded a lot like jealousy.

“You still love ‘im?” Hank glanced at you in the mirror.

It was a complicated answer to a question you wish he hadn’t asked.

“It’s possible to have love for someone and not be in love with them.”

You’d hated Elijah for so long it was exhausting. Forgiving him was a start to forgiving yourself, even if the guilt was partially misplaced…Still, you wouldn’t forget. There were a lot of choices he’d made regarding his treatment towards you, and at some point, one must be held responsible for their own actions. The idea of being friends was…welcomed.

Connor sucked his teeth, “He seems to have a different outlook on the matter.”

Hank hiked a brow, looking at him from the corner of his eye. You lowered your gaze, staring at the melted snow on your boots.

“That’s irrelevant. I’ve…” You found a glowing arm band twinkling in the space where the seatbelt stretched, “I’ve moved on.”

“Oh?” Hank gave a sly grin, “This another crazy super-star that’s gonna roll out the next game changer and destroy our economy?”

“No, Hank…” You rolled your eyes.

“Well, what’s he like?”

“What?”

“This new guy. It’s a simple goddamn question.”

You scoffed, “I think I’m done with the questioning…”

“You still mad at me or somethin’?”

“You kneed me in the fucking stomach.”

“Yeah, to stop you from being stupid. You’re welcome.”

You crossed your arms, huddling deeper in the corner like a child on time out.

“Look, whether you like it or not, we’re gonna be stuck in this car together for a while.” He flicked the turn signal, heading back towards the city, “Least you could do is humor me.”

You sighed.

“He’s…kind. Gentle. But ruthless when he needs to be.” And then you smiled, “He doesn’t
really know how much, but…he’s helped me a lot these past couple months.”

Connor fidgeted, his shoulders moving along the edges of his backrest.

“I’m just scared of making the same mistakes. I’ve had enough heartbreak for one lifetime.”

You’d had more than you’d care to share. You’d wanted a future with Elijah. Had cherished every moment together – like your first Christmas, decorating the apartment. How a few years later, you stumbled through catalogs; searching for something to buy for a man who needed nothing. You’d both got pretty awful gifts for each other that year…laughed it off, and spent uninterrupted quality time together, instead.

You couldn’t build memories like that with someone again, only for them to be replaced with night terrors.

“I don’t think you have anything to worry about, Officer.” A gentle note rang in Connor’s voice again, “You seem the type to learn from your past.”

“Tell that to her when she stops getting shot.”

“Shut up, Lieutenant.” You huffed.

“Have you met this guy?” Hank cocked his chin at Connor.

“N-no…” He was a horrible liar, “But…” He paused, his face dropping out of view, “He sounds like a ‘good fit...’”

You blushed, “Yeah…Yeah, he is.”

“May I ask a question?” Connor turned around in his seat, looking at you from over his shoulder. It was refreshing to see him in a calmed state. Safe harbor in the tempest winds – a warm light in the cold.

“Kamski said the original android who discovered your file was straying from its task, yet it itself had not become deviant yet.”

Leave it to him to change the topic.

“Do you believe this android was merely suffering from a manufacturing defect?”

You frowned, “Not necessarily…I think maybe it was just…curious.”

“Androids cannot be ‘curious,’ when given a specific task.”

“You break android stereotypes every day, Connor.” You smirked, “Didn’t you ‘stray from your original task’ when you saved me?”

“Yes, as quite a few people like to repeatedly point out.” His face fell flat, and he plopped back around, “I, however, do not possess manufacturing defects...”

“Well, there’s your answer then.” Hank cut him off.

“I do not have my ‘answer,’ Lieutenant. If I did, the deviancy matter at hand would be resolved.”

“Connor...” Hank scoffed, “You’re being a brat.”
Your cheek pulled back in a grin until you found Hank glaring at you in the rearview. Your neck snaked back in anxiety.

He heaved a heavy sigh, “Listen, I can’t go running to Fowler and tell him I broke all sorts of federal laws by bringing you anywhere near that psychopath…but I’ll do my best to get you back on the case. We need your input, since you seem to have a particular understanding of deviants.”

You sniffed, swiping at your nose. You pulled your jacket closer, yawning, “Thanks, Lieutenant…I appreciate that.”

“Just one more question.”

He had his “dad voice” on, like you were about to get scolded. For what, you couldn’t be sure. You guessed he had a running list by now.

“What’s that?”

“Do I look like a fuckin’ idiot to you two?”

You jumped, your guilty glance matching Connor’s. The car rolled to a halt, waiting for a light.

“Come again?” You asked, knowing exactly what he meant.

“Connor disappearing at night. Staying at your apartment. Whatever the fuck that was, a little bit ago.” He bit the inside of his cheek, “And look, I don’t give a fuck. If it keeps him out of trouble and you from doing stupid shit, have at it.”

He hit his turn signal, driving as the traffic light turned green.

“But enough with the smoke and mirrors. Got it?”

Connor seemed as equally confused and shocked as you.

“Got it.” You mumbled.

“Good.” Hank reached for his radio dial, “Now, consider this therapy session over.”

He cranked his music, louder this time.

Disconnected as you were, it was nice knowing you still had people in your corner. People who cared about you and wanted you to be happy. People who saw the world in bleak monotones, but held the palette steady as you tried to paint it beautiful for them. Stabilized your hands when your artistic subroutines took a detour.

It wasn’t a bad thing to ask for help when repairing instruction paths…self-modifying codes always had a way of making things difficult. They couldn’t be fixed with a simple reboot. They had to be thoroughly diagnosed and carefully realigned. In the worst situations, the drive that held them had to be wiped clean to prevent further damage and make way for a fresh install. A backup and restore to default settings; a system recovery.

The human mind wasn’t so different from an android’s, after all…

And damn, did the road to recovery hurt.
Hey, guys! Sorry it took so long! I had writer's block from hell, work has been crazy, and the betas and I went on a Rainbow Six: Siege/Overwatch/Titanfall 2 days-long-binge. (Still running, let's be honest.)

We've been thinking about linking a stream - if you'd be interested in listening to us swear profusely while watching us shoot people in the face, I'll post the link in the next update. :)

Also, I know there wasn't as much reaction and picking apart as expected, but that's what the next few chapters are going to be. Here's the road map as far as interactions are concerned, not in order because I'm not sure yet:

Carl x Reader
Chris x Reader
Hank x Reader
Gavin x Reader
Connor x Reader (Will be last no matter how the above pans out)

Too much information and feelings to process with only Hank and Connor, or in one chapter/car ride. I hope you like what I have in store for you, regardless.

Thank you, as always! Wish me luck on an overnight shift!
Troubleshooting

Chapter Summary

November 8th, 2038
PM 01:21:09

Chapter Notes

Hullo! Just wanted to update before I left for work. I'll be responding to everyone tonight/tomorrow night :D <3 Love you guys!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Everyone wanted to talk.

Connor asked if the two of you could discuss what happened. Hank tried to reinforce some fatherly advice you’d tuned out. Chris wanted to know what you were doing back at the police station. Fowler stopped you to ask what Hank was doing back at work.

The only person who didn’t ask for an explanation – knew what to do immediately…was Gavin.

Detective Reed, the biggest douche bag on the force and a friend you loved to hate.

“Didn’t think you’d take me up on my offer.” He huffed.

“Almost didn’t.”

“Why did you?”

You strapped your vest on, and kept your mouth shut.

“Don’t wanna talk about it?” He handed you a heavy pair of shooting earmuffs.

“Nope.” You slung them around your neck.

“Wanna shoot some paper dudes in the face?”

“Yes.”

He smirked, leaning against the wall, “Have at it.”

Gavin was an unlikely sponsor, to say the least. The friendship began with a rocky start, and evolved into an avalanche of ill quips and under-the-table middle finger exchanges.
He had a rough exterior, sure. But somewhere under all that spiced body spray and worn leather, there was a decent enough person. A person who kept his badge clipped to his belt because everyone had to be reminded at all points in time that he had power. A person who didn’t base his political views on any solid facts, but shoved them down peoples’ throats. A person who was closed-minded and wouldn’t know creativity if it slapped him in the face.

A person who knew when to back off when you needed it, because the two of you had one key trait in common:

Misplaced aggression.

But down in the basement of DPD’s best precinct, in the shooting range, you had a few layers between you and the problems above. Reinforced steel and cement filled with rubber to drown out all the bullshit.

Down here, word of mouth didn’t mean a damn thing. It was a gauntlet of brain and brawn; a fight for control over recoil and bullet drop. Calculations of air resistance and targeted ballistics. The practice of fight or flight, and how to aim the metal discharge in your hands.

Elijah was wrong. You didn’t need to pick a side. You were the one that drew the fucking line in the sand. All you had to do was make sure you’d be left standing when you tried to barricade each faction into their halves…and whoever shot first would have a really pissed off cop to deal with – one who knew her way around a pistol.

An overworked, underestimated weapon that was common in practice, but uncommonly handled in the manner that you executed.

You saw the room through yellow-tinted shooting glasses. The rubberized grips of your gloves fit neatly around your gun. You’d missed it almost as much as the weight of a bulletproof vest pulling on your shoulders.

A second skin. Another layer. A security blanket that was heavy as fuck and had taken a beating.

Gavin covered his eyes and ears with his equipment, but he pulled back.

“You’re not shooting?” You turned your head.

“Nah. Gonna watch a ‘Pistol Master,’ do her thing.”

“I’m going to assume you didn’t mean that to sound as creepish as it did.”

He shrugged, “Fucked if I care about your feelings. I just wanna see how you shoot.”

A shallow smile pulled on your mouth.

Yeah, this is what you needed.

Mindless shooting; your troubles, the target.

No talking necessary.

…
You hit a button with the side of your fist, and the pockmarked target slid on the rail towards you.

“Twelve kill shots outta’ fifteen ain’t bad.” Gavin sucked his teeth, crossing his arms behind you, “Where’d you learn to shoot like that, anyway?”

“Practiced with a revolver.” You reloaded your Glock, “It’s kinda like learning how to run uphill. Once you do it enough, you’re faster on level ground.”

“So, what – you trained with a handicap and this just happened?”

You had practiced with your revolver. The things you couldn’t tell him about were all the classes you took after threats against your life began to surface.

You weren’t about to be chased around the country – you were going to stand your ground, no matter what. Things hadn’t changed, in that respect.

“Some people just get it.” You gave him a cocky grin, “And others…well, they have to try a little harder.”

“You talkin’ shit?”

“Yeah, Reed. I am. What are you gonna do about it?”

“Fuckin’ one up you, that’s what.” His brows creased, and he opened the armory that lined the back of the dungeon.

“Good luck with that.”

“I don’t need your shitty luck.” He mumbled under his breath as he armed himself, a gun plopping on a stand two stalls down, “Fucker.”

“Mhm…” The paper target zipped to the end of the range, and you cranked a lever to push it back farther.

“Fifty feet?” He groaned.

“Is there a problem, Detective?”

His lips pursed, and he sent his own sheet flying, “Don’t get cocky.”

“You’re one to talk…”

“Shut up and shoot.”

You took your stance, one elbow slacked as the other straightened. A fighting stance, because you didn’t stand there with two barred arms like most of your peers. Recoil was harder to control that way. You were easier to disarm, that way.

If that wasn’t an option before Elijah’s warning of an oncoming war…you’d be dead before you let it happen, now.

...
“What the fuck?” Gavin scoffed, comparing targets.

He hadn’t done terrible, but definitely not as good as you.

“I can give you some pointers, if you—“

“I don’t need your fuckin’ advice, alright?” He growled, “You got lucky.”

“What about ‘not needing shitty luck?’”

“I said I didn’t need it.”

“You obviously got that one backwards, bud.”

His scar bent as he bunched his nose, “You…”

His mouth twisted. His shoulders huddled around the base of his neck, covered by his “uniform” of street clothes under a brown leather jacket. He let out a frustrated sigh, and relaxed all around.

“…You better not tell anyone.” He bit the inside of his cheek, “Especially that android fuck…”

“I’m not gonna tell anyone you took lessons on how to shoot ‘from a girl,’ Reed…”

He frowned, and crossed his arms. Slid his earmuffs off and raised his glasses over his forehead. Cocked his chin at you with that dicey glare.

“Sorry. About the whole sexual harassment thing. Shouldn’t have texted you while I was drunk.”

You raised a brow, “That all you’re sorry for?”

“Don’t push it…” He turned his back on you, getting himself ready for the next session, “Start talkin’, hotshot.”

You sighed, wondering if this was really worth it after all.

“First thing you need to do is practice front sight concentration.” You rolled your unloaded gun in your hands, tapping the front sights, “Blur out the target. Blur out the rear sight. Front irons only.”

“And?”

“Watch your trigger press.” You adjusted his arms, “Pull all the way to the rear, and ease forward until you hear the click. When you do, take another shot.”

His lip twitched, “Doesn’t leave a lot of time to correct. Kept hitting left.”

“It’s you, not the gun. When you pull the trigger with your right hand, the barrel goes left. You have to steer it…wrangle it in, and line it up.”

“That’s a whole lot to think about while you’re taking pot shots at someone.”

“That’s not the goal, here.”

“What’s the goal, then?”

“Trouble has a hard time sneaking up on you from fifty feet out,” You looked at the target dotted
with holes, “The goal is to gun it down and become bigger trouble.”

“Ugh…” He groaned, doing what you told him, “Anything else, Doll-“

“I will punch you in the dick.”

His face pulled back in surprise, “Rr-awr.”

“Jesus fuck, you’re hopeless…”

“Now you’re startin’ to sound like Hank.”

“Will you just fucking focus?”

Gavin groaned under his breath, “Alright, here we go…”

…

Two headshots, five in the chest, and the rest were all over the place. He wouldn’t have had a problem taking someone down beforehand, but with your guidance, he was starting to get it.

“There ya go,” You gave him a condescending pat on the back, “Now you’re shooting like a real cop.”

He gave you a smirk, “You almost have me convinced you are a real cop.”

“That’s the closest thing to a compliment I’m ever gonna get from you, so…Thanks.”

“Don’t mention it.” He yawned, rubbing his eyes with his palms under his shooting glasses, “Seriously, don’t.”

“You’ve got a serious complex, you know that?”

“It’s not that…” He took his earmuffs off, digging his knuckles in his hips, “I’m trying to get promoted. That means I’ve gotta be the best of the best at everything and anything.”

You looped the headband around your neck, the cuffs sweaty and gross, “You put too much pressure on yourself. You’re a good cop, Reed.”

“Yeah, I know I am.” His face crinkled, “But with androids taking up space and shit… I mean fuck, look at RoboCop. It’s a fuckin’ Detective!”

“Is that why you hate him so much?” You shifted your weight, “You think he’s going to replace you or something?”

“IT, already did.” His jaw locked, “Goddamn fucking piece of fuck androids…”

“First of all, it’s not his fault that CyberLife made him.” You waved him off, “Second, you’re still here, aren’t you?”

“For how long, though,” He slurred your last name, “They ruin everything.”

“No, they don’t.”
“That’s easy for you to say.” Gavin shoved a freshly loaded clip in his gun, and pulled back the hammer, “You didn’t come home to one fucking your girlfriend.”

Your throat closed. Your brain came screeching to a halt.

“Uh…What?”

“Yeah, that’s right. You heard me.” He leaned against the small stand attached to the ledge, “Fucked this girl back in college and she turned into a real stage-five clinger. Was easier just to keep her around, you know, so she didn’t fuckin’ whine all the time…”

His eyes darted around the cinderblock room. You decoded his message – that he’d loved that girlfriend, asked her to move in, and was still messed up from it. Maybe there was some merit to all his harsh opinions. Maybe he just never talked to anyone. Bottled up all the anger, lined up the glass targets, and shot them all down.

“I spend so much time here, you know? Working, trying to move up, all that. She was ‘lonely,’ so what did that bitch do? Bought a fucking android. Said it was for cleaning. In my house.” He punched the target slider, and it went zooming down the range, “Left early while it was slow around here one day to surprise her. And what do you know, she’d slipped and fell on its plastic little aftermarket cock.”

This was weird. Uncomfortable. But he seemed like he needed to get it off his chest, so you engaged.

“What did you do?”

“What do you think I did?” He glared at you from over his shoulder, “I tore out it’s stupid stomach whatever and made her clean up the stain. Then I threw all her shit in bags and kicked her robot-fucking ass to the curb. If it wasn’t for Fowler, I’d have a property damage charge on my record.”

You couldn’t get mad. You had to reel it in. This was not the time to start a fight – not the time to tell him he was wrong, and that was murder.

“Sorry to hear that happened to you.”

“Don’t be.” He flipped his glasses down to the bridge of his nose, “DPD’s all I need. It’s all I ever needed. Got plenty of family, right here.”

He tapped his badge, and gave you a wink.

Your brow jumped, “That’s pretty deep.”

“Not as deep as I was in this girl last-“

“Okay – I GET IT.” You chuckled under your breath, shaking your head as you returned to your post.

Locker room talk wasn’t something you were foreign to. You were a woman on a police force. A male-dominated work environment. Sometimes you just had to roll with it.

“Wish I could go back in time and shoot the stupid mother fucker who made those goddamn androids…”

His was a harsh whisper – angry. To say he hated androids was an understatement. They were the bane of his existence.
“What’s his name? Ezra something?”

“…Elijah.” You swallowed hard, “Elijah Kamski.”

“Yeah, that guy. Fuck him.”

He took aim, and you barely had enough time to put your protective gear on before he pulled the trigger in rapid succession. The pops came quick, one after another.

Bang, bang, bang – click, click, click – he kept pulling, even after the clip didn’t have anything left to fire.

“Time for a reload, Gavin…”

He wasn’t the only one who needed to vent, but at least he could. There was no one for you to talk to, not legally.

You decided that was fine.

You felt like a hypocrite for how you’d warned Connor about letting Elijah in his head; how he had a way of planting word bombs only to wait for thoughts to stumble through the philosophical mine field.

You let him in. Again. And he had the audacity to make you doubt everything you’d come to terms with over the past few years.

“Also, you’re right.”

Gavin shoved a new clip in his gun, and turned his head, “About what?”

You raised your pistol. Found the target’s head.

“Fuck that guy.”

“I’m not even gonna ask-“

You fired. You were done talking…and so was he. About serious stuff, anyway.

The two of you emptied your clips at the same time, and he looked over his shoulder, “We gonna keep doing fifty feet?”

“That’s the only way you’ll be the best of the best, eh?”

He huffed, “Best three out of five?”

You weren’t sure if you should let him win, or completely bury him in shame.

A troubling matter.

“Draw, mother fucker.”

Easiest one you’d shoot down all day.
After everyone expressed some interest in watching us play, I'm gonna leave these links here:

Precursor
Elegant_N7
MjrGennMatt
Celestielle
Deviants Team Page

There isn't a set schedule (trying to line our work schedules up would be insane) but you do get notifications when any of us go online if you follow. We primarily use Mixer.

Thanks everyone! Talk to you soon!

PS: I uploaded a video of Titanfall 2 shenanigans while playing with them. :3 Commentary in CC.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chains rattled from the ceiling, each strike digging in layers of grain held together by tough nylon. You cracked the logo with your knuckles in sets of three, side stepping when your elbow jabbed at the side.

Your breathing came in bursts; in through your nose, out through your mouth. You were bouncing on your toes, but kept yourself grounded with each attack.

It hadn’t been that long since you found yourself in DPD’s gym. It had been awhile since you had this much inner conflict to work through.

Shot by a deviant. Punch.

Put on suspension. Kick.

Shot again. Elbow jab.

Suspended for the second time. Crack.

Whatever was developing between you and Connor. Inhale. Step. Strike.

Having to deal with Elijah. Exhale. Stance switch. Snap.

“What did that poor thing do to you?”

A plume of dust slipped between the threads at your last attack, and you wiped your forehead with the back of your hand. Sweat seeped into the wraps on your hands. You looked to the right to find Chris leaning in the entryway, separated by various workout equipment and mirrored walls.

“Better than a person, right?” You knocked against the punching bag, “I’ve been told that would be frowned upon.”

“Well, yeah. And it would get you charged with aggravation assault.” He smirked, entering the gym and looping his thumbs on his utility belt, “Wouldn’t want to have to arrest my own partner, now.”

“That would make for one hell of a story, wouldn’t it?”
You raised your fists, and kept beating the shit out of the hanging bag.

“Sure would.” His back pressed against the wall behind it, “Sooo…Uh…Whatchya doin’ here?”

You glared at him from under your wet eyelashes, your face hot and sticky.

“Just trying to stay in shape.”

“That all this is?”

“What are you doing here? Shouldn’t you be working?”

He pursed his lips, “So like, you know how the computer always warns you to not save your password?”

“Yeah?”

“And you know how I forget what it is, pretty much every day?”

“…Yeah?”

“Well, I locked myself out.” His mouth scrunched to the side, and his eyes fell in shame, “And uh…Tech support is ‘unlocking’ my credentials.”

You huffed.

Wearing your heart on your sleeve was similar. You wished it came with a warning to not stay logged in on a public network. A suggestion to keep it locked away and safe from prying eyes. You didn’t uncheck that box, and your friends at the DPD were hellbent on cracking the code.

Chris wasn’t exactly subtle with his frustrations, either.

“What’s wrong?”

“I miss having dogs around here.”

You stopped, brows creased in the center, “…What?”

“Don’t you remember?” He yawned, “The K-9 Unit and police dogs?”

“Of course I do. I also remember when they made the decision to cut the program after the android officers were rolled out.”

“Just one, unpaid public servant swapped for another, right?” He sighed, “What were you doing in the range with Gavin?”

You cocked your chin, squinting at him. His sporadic lines of questioning were cause for concern.

“Shooting…?”

“I bet that was interesting.” He chuckled, “What, did he say a bunch of dumb one-liners like ‘I’m a sharpshooter who never fires blanks?’”

“Something like that…” You eyed him up, “What’s your deal?”

“Uh – I haven’t seen you in like, three days?”
“And?”

“Ouch.” He gave you a frown, “You don’t miss me?!”

“Well duh. You just seem…Off.”

“Nah, I’m good.”

“…Miller.”

His eyes popped open like he was caught doing something wrong.

“It’s…” His face perked up, “It’s nothing, really.”

He waved you off with a smile.

“Chris.”

“You’ve got enough going on, okay? Back off.”

Your neck snaked back, taken by surprise by his sudden hostility, “Whoa, there.”

“Ugh…” He pinched the bridge of his nose, “Sorry…”

You ran your arm over your forehead, lifting the hem of your tank top to clean the rest of your face from sweat.

“That bruise is something fierce.”

You picked up your water bottle, taking a sip before leaning next to him along the wall.

“No kidding.” You popped the lid back down, “Still hurts like a son of a bitch.”

“You wouldn’t know it from here.” He elbowed your shoulder, “You need to take it easy.”

“That’s not going to get my job back.” You slid to the floor, and balanced your elbows on your knees.

Your hands dangled over your boots. You rolled your wrists, staring at yourself in the mirrors across the gym.

“Wife keeps calling me at work.” Chris put his hands on his hips, and he took a step forward, “She knows she’s not supposed to, but…”

He paused, and his eyes rose to yours in his reflection, dropping down immediately.

“She misses you too, I’d bet.”

“Yeah…Yeah, I get that.” He shifted his weight, cracking his neck, “She’s talking about getting one of those babysitter androids to help out with Damian. Not sure how I feel about it.”

You tensed, and a sick feeling pooled in your stomach.

“Oh yeah?”

“Mhm…” He turned to you, his side lining up with the mirror, “I mean, she said it would be temporary. Until all this blows over, but…Like, what if they turn deviant, you know? And like,
what do you do with an android once you’re ‘done with it?’ Trade it in for store credit?”

He shook his head, “It…She…He…” He groaned, “Having Connor around, getting to know an android instead of just watching them plug themselves in every night has been really messing with my head about all this crap, too. I dunno…”

He lifted his head up to you again, “What do you think?”

Aside from your opinions on “hiring” an enslaved people, Gavin’s story resonated with Chris’s dilemma. You wondered how Chris would react if he’d found himself in the same situation.

“I think you should go spend time with your wife, and tell her that the reason you’re working so hard is to make sure she and Damian have a safe city to live in.”

He huffed, a smile stretching on his lips.

“Civvies just don’t get it, do they?”

You flicked the tap of your water bottle open with your thumb, wetting your mouth before answering, “No…No, they don’t.”

“You catching shit from your family, yet?”

“They’ve been calling here and there. Asking me if things are really as bad as the media makes them out to be, here in Detroit.” You shrugged, “Obviously I told them the stories are overexaggerated and they shouldn’t worry.”

“Oh, obviously.” He shook his head, eyes rolling to the ceiling, “You didn’t even tell them you got shot again, did you?”

“Nope.”

“You’re my spirit animal.” He laughed, “Man, I wish I could be half as tough as you…”

“Oh, stop.” You pushed yourself off the rubber flooring, stretching as you stood, “You’re as tough as they come.”

“Eh, I’m alright. Wouldn’t have myself together half as much as you do if I had everything you’ve been through thrown at me.”

“Sure you would.” You looked to the side, snatching a pair of padded gloves from a rack. You tossed them at him, and he caught them in surprise.

“Time to bleed it out, Miller.”

“No, no no no-” He shook his head frantically, “I’ve been emasculated enough for one day.”

“Since when did you have a ‘man’ ego?”

“Always. At least I’m man enough to admit it.” He smirked, “No, really though, thanks but no thanks.”

“Come on…” You gave him an enthusiastic smile, “A punching bag can’t fight back, after all. Think of it as…helping me out. Yeah. Taking one for the team?”

“Oh, that’s sooooo not fair…What a guilt trip.”
“If I wanted to guilt you, I’d-“

“I’ve heard enough. I’m gonna go get changed, and then you’re gonna get your ass beat.”

You crossed your arms, taking stock on the rest of the sparring equipment.

“That’s the spirit.”

... 

A foam helmet stuck to your head and cheeks. Your hands, feet, shins, and torso were covered by a red, matching set. The straps weren’t as heavy on your shoulders as your vest was, but it felt like a hug from an old friend, regardless.

Chris, decked out in blue, stood on the other side of the mat.

“God, I hate wearing a cup…” He squirmed in place and his hand hovered as he was about to put his mouthguard in, “I hope you’re not expecting me to go easy on you just because you’re…you.”

“If you do, I’ll be pissed.” Your nose twitched, “Just don’t knee me in the stomach.”

You became more anxious to vent some frustrations out as you remembered Hank disarming you.

“I’m not that mean.” He bit down on the plastic, and beat his fists together before rolling his shoulders.

You did the same, and the two of you started bouncing like hopped up criminals ready for a brawl.

His face danced between raised hands, and your mind slipped into an analytic state. An adrenaline-induced mode of predicted movements and possible counters – scanning for moments of opportunity.

He jabbed, and you side-stepped, going for an upper-cut. He jumped back, giving you an impressed look.

“Wooo!” The noise was gargled by the piece around his teeth, but being put on the defensive seemed to wake him up a little.

Your fists met as the two of you struck at each other, ducking to the side in unison. You traded shots – him being hit on the cheek, you on your chin. Your vision went fuzzy for a moment, and you shook it straight.

He tensed. You could tell hitting you made him uncomfortable, so you gave him a nod of approval. You used the distraction to your advantage, delivering a blow twice as hard.

He blinked rapidly, flicking his nose with his thumb. That got his attention. Focused his anger.

The sparring match had your heart pounding, each connecting attack coming and going in inputs and outputs of vented emotions.

Just like down in the firing range with Gavin, this was what both of you needed. This was
healthy. This was good.

And you’d both be sore by the time you guys were done.

…

Your hair was a mess, and you didn’t care. Your helmet rolled out of your hands, the rough texture of the floor scratching at your back.

“Holy shit-“ You heard Chris next to you, but your focus was trained on the twirling ceiling fan blades, “You hit like a truck-“

“I’m a cop-“ Your eyes clamped shut as your pulse drummed in your head, “Or haven’t you heard-“

“Yeah, yeah-“ He laughed through his panting, “Don’t give me the speech-“

He shifted, and you turned your head to find him balancing himself on his elbows; forearms pinned between his chest and the floor. He was smiling – relieved, his chuckles coming through sharp breaths.

“How’d I do?”

“Hah,” You rolled over on your stomach, your arms shaking as you pushed yourself to your feet, “You’re a much better punching bag than that thing.”

You nodded over your shoulder as you held out a hand.

“Pfft-“ He gave it an exhausted slap, pushing it away and standing on his own, “Get outta here with all that-“

He rested his hands on his knees, inflating his chest and releasing the captured air as he tried to catch his breath, “Now it’s gonna be even harder to stay awake the rest of my shift.”

“Good luck,” You smirked, “I get to go home.”

“Should’ve let that deviant shoot me.” He yawned, shaking his head vigorously, “Ack!”

“Wake up, Officer Miller.” You pushed his shoulder with a finger, “Back to work you go!”

Another yawn came, a disgruntled, squeaking groan leaving him as he stumbled towards the door.

“Shower, first.” His feet dragged behind him.

He paused, gripping the frame, “You sticking around for a few?”

“Probably.” You unstrapped your equipment, crouching to pick up your helmet, “Why?”

“Oh, just wondering.” He waved, “I’ll catch you before you leave.”

You eyed him suspiciously as he covered his mouth, disappearing behind a corner.

It was just you and your reflection, and you studied it with a newly-found prowess.
You saw something new inside yourself – something that’d laid dormant until being strong was the only choice you had left. Something that pushed you past previously established benchmarks and factory settings.

Your shoulders heaved, your lungs working double-time like overclocked fans that sucked in fresh air and kicked out heated exhaust. You were splotchy and reddened, beaten down and rebuilt by shedding your own blood, sweat, and tears.

Whether CyberLife or anyone else wanted you out of Detroit and out of their business, what you’d told Chris would remain just as true:

You’d be sticking around for a while, and you dared “anyone” to try and prove you wrong.

And when that day came…

You’d be ready.

Chapter End Notes

Changed things around a bit. Here’s the updated road map, in order:

27 - Hank x Reader
28 - Connor x Reader
29 - [Spoilers]
30 - Carl x Reader
31 - Back to our regularly-scheduled angsty programming.

Will keep you guys updated with more patch notes if anything changes!
The locker room was empty, save for an Officer you’d only passed in the halls. You didn’t know her name, and didn’t care to learn it. So, you sat there on a bench and kept staring at your opened locker.

An aluminum rectangle standing at your height with vents in the door, your last name sprawled across its face. The responsibility that came with the uniform within it brought a comfortable weight.

It was more than a branded set of clothing. It was part of your identity, now. Your suspension had that stripped away, leaving you to figure out how to find comfort without a second home to escape to.

It felt good to be here again, in Central Station. Things made sense most of the time, and even when they didn’t – there was always a way to figure them out.

If you were missing a set of prints, you knew where to find them. If you had a question about a file, a person down in PICS knew what was going on. There were laws to follow; laws that you enforced.

There were no laws written on how one should handle the situation you were in. No one to enforce a code that dictated what was right and wrong. That in itself was a scenario you’d gotten used to being a constant in your life outside of work. It was familiar.

Just like the officer in the room with you – you may not have known who she was, but she, too, was familiar.

Everyone in the DPD was. Here, they were forced to act a certain way, maintain a certain distance.

You’d hoped that any fear of the unknown would do the same…

A faceless familiarity, but one you didn’t care to identify with, either.

As it were, it was starting to creep up on you.

You pulled your hoodie over your head, the vinyl DPD brand white on black cloth. The clothes
You’d pulled your hoodie over your head, the vinyl DPD brand white on black cloth. You’d worn before were stowed in a similarly-marked duffle bag, slung over your shoulder. You stood, closed your locker, and left for the main hub. The room filled with desks where yours sat untouched with a slew of “Get Well” cards and other trinkets sat around a terminal that’d been left alone for far too long.

You’d go through them later.

“Come over here for a sec.” Hank beckoned you over with a nod.

You adjusted the strap on your shoulder and sighed.

Truth was, you came back to the station to get the weight of life off your chest. You didn’t expect helping anyone else do the same in the process – Gavin, Chris, or otherwise.

After your name came as a bark from Hank, you’d guessed it wasn’t over yet.

The desk connected to his that was supposed to be bare was also covered in a plethora of new decorations.

You turned your head to the side, “Connor’s redecorating?”

“People have been chipping in. Started saying it wasn’t ‘normal’ to not have shit all over the place.”

A plant in a small pot was behind his monitor.

“You gave him your bonsai tree?”

“He liked it.”

A mouse pad with a dog’s face on it rested next to his keyboard.

“And you totally bought that for him.”

“So what?”

You raised a brow, “When you say ‘people,’ have been chipping in…”

“Chris gave him the calendar and picture frame. So yeah, people.”

The calendar was from a charity drive for kids the department had hosted. The empty frame had a stock photo in it – a blue outline of DPD’s crest with the measurements etched underneath.

You’d make a note to fill it later.

“I told Connor about Cole, you know, just to find some common ground…things got real shitty after that.” Hank mumbled, “Thought I’d do something nice for a change.”

You smiled, “Having a partner isn’t turning out to be so bad, is it?”

“Whatever.”

A push-pinned note on the board next to the calendar drew you in.

“’Fuck you. – GR’…” You read it aloud, “Why did he keep this?”

“Keep what?”
Hank leaned over the divider between the desks, his neck bending to read the message.

“For fuck’s sake…” He yanked it free, crumpling it into a ball and tossing it in a wastebasket.

He crossed his arms, rolling back in his seat, “Take a load off.”

He pointed his chin at the chair on the opposite side of his desk, and you dropped your duffle before plopping in the under-budget cushion.

“What did I do now?” You clasped your hands over your stomach, balancing your ankle on a knee.

He leaned in on his elbows, “You hit your head or something?”

“Not that I recall. Took a nice blow to the abdomen, though.”

“Oh, get the fuck over it.” He pursed his lips, giving you one of his legendary, unsympathetic glares, “I’m worried about what you’ve got yourself wrapped up in, kid.”

He adopted a different expression, then. One of caring and concern hiding under a grizzled exterior.

“Don’t be.” You bit the inside of your cheek, eyeing up the pair of week-old donut boxes cluttering his work space, “I’ve been at this for a while.”

“Yeah, except now it’s relevant. This could backfire in your face and you’d never see it coming.”

You swallowed hard as the unknown Officer walked by, waiting for her to be out of earshot before continuing.

“It’s not like I meant for this to get out…How was I supposed to know an android would scroll through WITSEC’s files like an activity feed on Facebook?”

“Can you just be serious for a sec?” The angry Hank came back, “Have you even thought about what could happen to you if someone finds out you wrote the book on deviancy?”

“Let them fucking come,” You stabbed the desk with your finger, “I didn’t ‘write the book’ for anything except an ethical way to integrate androids.”

“Is that all this is to you?” His rising temper matched yours, “Lemme ask you something – have you talked with Connor since our little spout with the Harbinger of Manic Manbuns?”

“Why the fuck are you so fixated on his hair?”

“Answer the goddamn question.”

You mauled your lip, chewing on the tension in your throat.

“No.”

“Well, I have. The kid’s a fucking mess and he’s trying to keep it together ‘cause he doesn’t want to let you down!”

“And just when the fuck were you gonna tell me that?”

“When I felt like it. Kind of like how you didn’t feel like telling me you were romantically involved with-“
“Oh, come on.” You rolled your eyes and held your arms out, “Are we really gonna do this right now?”

“Yeah, we are.”

You didn’t need this. Didn’t want to deal with it. Just wanted to pack up, go home, and handle the clusterfuck of emotions later.

“It just happened. Alright?”

His forehead dove into his palm, and he dragged it down his face.

“Things are complicated for him enough without you running around making it worse.”

Your mouth twisted, “Excuse me?”

“Don’t make me repeat myself.”

“You think I wanted this?” You jumped out of your seat, jabbing at him with another pointed finger, “You think I asked for any of this?”

“Sit down, people are staring-“

“I don’t fucking care!” You pressed your hands on his desk, “If you think for a second that I don’t drown myself in guilt every goddamn day-“

He stood, towering over you, “I said…Sit. Down.”

His lips curled with each word – every syllable ending like if you didn’t listen, they’d take form and he’d use them against you as lethal weapons.

Your hands balled into fists, and you did as you were told.

“That’s not what I meant.”

“Yeah, well that’s what it sounded like.”

He groaned under his breath, “Fuckin’ feels like I’m talking to younger-me sometimes, you know that?”

“You were the youngest Lieutenant in DPD history. I’ll take that chance.”

His glare narrowed, and he shook his head as he looked away.

“You helped pull me from the brink after Cole died.” His eyes switched back to you, “All I’m tryin’ to do is make sure you don’t go diving headfirst.”

Your body relaxed, but you had a tough time hiding the shock that smoothed the features on your face.

“I won’t, Hank. I’m good.” A dark smile pinned your lips to the side, “I’m better than I have been in a long time.”

His brows creased. He opened his mouth to speak. You cut him off.

“I became a cop because I got tired of watching my back. All day, all night – like I had footsteps
in my shadow. Like if I stopped running to catch my breath for one second, they’d get me.”

“‘They,’ being CyberLife?”

“Yeah, them…and all the other fuckheads who wanted me ‘silenced,’ permanently.” You growled, “And now, I have more than just a few people watching my back. I found a family. Friends. But more importantly, I found a purpose.”

He smirked, “To ‘deliver your message,’ right?”

“…Really? You’re going to quote my ex-husband?”

“Nah,” He waved you off, “You’re more like a carrier pigeon than a raven.”

“Yeah, well...When this bird spreads her wings,” You laughed under your breath, “Whether or not they’ll be soaring through friendly skies will be up to them.”

“Hmph.” His shoulders bounced in a grunt, the smile fading away, “All this android shit…Birds in their own fucking cage…” He frowned, “What if we’re fighting against people who just wanna be free?”

“We are.” You heaved a heavy sigh, “We just have to stop all this before it escalates into something we can’t defuse.”

“Yeah, well, if you write out any of those stupid cloud messages we’re gonna have a real problem.”

“What’s wrong with skywriting?”

“You’re…Jesus.” He facepalmed, “If you got your head out of your ass, you’d see the point I’m trying to make.”

You sucked your teeth, turning your head.

“You don’t start fires and make smoke signals when you’re trying to lay low, you hear me? You could be in real danger.”

“I’m done running, Hank. I won’t.” Your teeth started to grind together, and you had to pry them apart, “Not this time.”

The two of you sat in silence for a moment, taking in the phones that wouldn’t stop ringing. The empty coffee cups that sat on everyone’s desk, and the sleepless nights etched on their owners’ faces. The vacant android racks that usually had units on standby.

The war on deviancy was taking a toll on everyone – and you were the one awaiting reactivation.

“I couldn’t make changes from the other side of those doors.” You pointed to the officer’s entrance, “Here, I can help change things…because this isn’t just about humans versus androids anymore. This is about uncovering the truth, and making sure everyone ‘hears’ it no matter what.”

“Hey, sorry to interrupt.” Chris gave a friendly wave, “Oh, hey.” He nodded at you, “Either one of you seen Connor anywhere?”

You choked down the rest of your defense, and forced a friendly smile on your face.

“No, why?” Hank squinted.
“I was…uh, waiting on him to bring some evidence back up from the Evidence Room. He, uhm…hasn’t come back yet.”

Your brows laced, and you gave him a scrutinizing look. He was acting funny.

Something was up.

“Sounds like that’s your cue.”

Your neck snapped back to Hank, “To do what, exactly?”

“That’s up to you, Lovebird.”

“Pffft-“ Chris coughed, holding back a laugh, “Ah-ahem-“

“You’ve gotta be fuckin-“ Hank looked at you, then back at your partner, “You know about them, too?”

“Know what?” Gavin snuck up on you from behind, grabbing your chair and scaring the shit out of you.

“Jesus Christ…” You grabbed your bag, and forced him away by sliding on the wheels, “I’m outta here.”

“Oh, Anderson-“ Gavin ignored you, stumbling in place, “Did RoboCop get my message?”

“Yeah, I saw your fuckin’ note. You do that shit again and I’ll kick your ass.”

“HAH!” He slapped his thigh, “I couldn’t believe I got it taped to his screen without him noticing-“

“Wait, you taped it? It was pinned to…”

“Pinned to…?” Chris cocked his head.

“Nothing…Go handle business.” Hank brushed your shoulder and nodded over to the doors leading to the Evidence Room, “I need to talk to Tweedledum and Tweedledee over here.”

“Hear that, Miller?” Gavin put him in a headlock, and Chris struggled to fight him off, “Our time together earned you a cute nickname.”

“God-Detective-“ He pulled away, but Gavin just laughed and held him firm, “That was an insult-“

“Yeah, well…Wait,” He let him go, “No it wasn’t. You’re definitely Tweedledum.”

“Coming from the guy who bought an Xbox just to play Call of Duty every year…“ Chris growled, pulling his uniform straight, “Jesus, man…”

You marched forward, leaving the two idiots to swarm around Hank’s disturbed hive. You were all just a bunch of worker bees awaiting instruction, after all.

Brothers and sisters under one coat of arms. One motto.

“Speramus Meliora; Resurget Cineribus.”
“We hope for better things; it will arise from the ashes.”

Those words resonated with you – they always had…because Elijah was right:

You had an *irreplicable* fire.

You’d faced your past, armed with struck matches and gallons of gasoline; setting every bridge going backwards ablaze to light the way for a brighter future.

Sometimes, there had to be a period of slash and burn in order for something new to grow.

All that was left to do was rise from the ashes, because you weren’t a pigeon *or* a fucking raven.

You were a phoenix that would sing your song of fire and brimstone on burning wings, smoking out the liars that sought to keep the world in the dark.

Because *sometimes*, you had to fight fire with fire. A lesson that deviants had learned the hard way while *you* held the torch.

You’d do your best to guide Connor through the darkness while the flames of war were ignited.

And if you failed?

He was bound to get lost in the fallout.

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**Behind the Scenes**

Lots of research and symbolism went into writing this chapter. Just wanted to post this here since the notes section is dedicated to my awesome beta readers.

Also, to be clear, I'm not trying to force any religious views on anyone, nor do I associate myself with any particular religion.

These are just parallels I found interesting and wanted to share. ;)

Detroit Police Department's motto comes from a French Roman Catholic priest, Father Gabriel Richard. He was born in France in 1767 and moved to Baltimore in 1792 to teach math. Reassigned to do missionary work, he moved first to Illinois and later to Detroit, where he was the assistant pastor at St. Anne’s Church.

On June 11, 1805, a fire destroyed nearly the entire city, weeks before the Michigan Territory was established. It was that fire that led Mr. Richard to write: "Speramus Meliora; Resurget Cineribus."

St Anne’s Church, in the southwest part of the city, stands between Michigan Central Station and the Ambassador Bridge.

- Ambassador Bridge is the bridge where Hank and Connor regrouped at in "The Bridge."
“Night of the Soul,” takes place in an abandoned church. This information will be relevant later on.

"Fire and Brimstone," is an idiomatic expression of referring to God’s wrath in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and the New Testament. In the Bible, it often appears in reference to the fate of the unfaithful.

- rA9 is symbolized as an android’s perception of God.

Elijah was, according to the Books of Kings in the Hebrew Bible, a prophet and a miracle worker who lived in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Ahab.

“Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, ‘So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.’”

This death threat caused Elijah to flee a day’s journey into the wilderness.

- Elijah Kamski relocated to the outskirts of Detroit after feeling threatened by the "Reader," and her pursuits to expose deviancy as a potential (and viable) outcome of shackled androids.

Reference: Why was Elijah afraid of Jezebel?

*Connor's Theme Song Intensifies*

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Chapter End Notes

A Message from the "Beanie Babies" Group Chat:

Fuke Ninny Nude Dude, AKA MjrGenMatt:

I present to you: Fucking Deviant

Hello readers! MjrGenMatt speaking.

Just wanted to thank you all for joining us on this journey, I've had a lot of fun being a part!
On the name calling bit, Precursor assaulted me with a demand for Hank-ish names to call Kamski (Fuckface McManbun-esque). "TWENTY EIGHT INSULTS! I KNOW YOU CAN COME UP WITH THEM FASTER THAN THAT, WHY DON'T YOU SAY IT?!"

Lol, only a slight paraphrase. Enjoy, everyone!

Hank Anderson (Angsty Bitch,) AKA ElegantN7:

Hey there, ElegantN7 here...
I just wanted to say thanks for the appreciation for the beta'ing of Deviant Behavior alongside Smolls and Fuke Nudes aka Matt. Need I remind everyone that Precursor is a fucking nightmare to work with. She once had me beta a chapter on my half-hour break when I was doing a big ass shift. Then, refuses to let me beta after my surgery. I'M ON BED REST...AND I HAVE NOTHING TO DO! But noooooo, I couldn't beta a few chapters because I should be "resting." >.>

Anyway, just wanted to say thank you for the love for working with the hellspawn of chaos and doom. I'm kidding, of course. She's basically my wife. <3

Much love. Much appropriation.

Smolest Cinnabun (Plagued Horseman,) AKA Celestielle:

Hey, beta reader, cell here! Isn't this a surprise? A little corner for we three stooges~

I honestly haven't got anything better to say than these few words. So, here goes nothing.

I do hope you can see and appreciate the blood, sweat, and love that Precursor puts into this fic, cause holy hell does she do that. To point out something special, I have been aware of all the support you all give her and it's so heartwarming to see such wonderful people give their two cents, be it positive or simple criticism. I'm certain if it wasn't for all you wonderful readers and commenters kind enough to speak up, she wouldn't be as driven and dedicated to making this fic perfect at all. We betas may be here to prop her up, but y'all have contributed to this fantastically good fic as well. Pat on the back to Matt and Elegant for being wonderful peeps too! If you haven't already, check out their content here on ao3 (certified excellent koalatea). They have some pretty fucking rad fics you should read.

I've ramble rambled long enough. If you need me, i'll be around the comment section generally making a fool out of myself~toodle noodles!

Bulliest Beanie (Fuck You,) AKA Precursor:

They haven't seen this note yet, but I really wanted to point out that these three make this fic possible. Without them, you wouldn't see me posting for weeks because I wouldn't be able to stop myself from editing and obsessing over every single little word on each page. Their motivation has been inspiring, and their support is invaluable. Even the nights spent raging on games because fuck problems.

Thank you guys, forever...FOR DEALING WITH MY TWENTY. EIGHT. DAILY MOOD SWINGS! (and drafts) <3
Evidence Server.

Two bright words on grey blast doors. You knew where they emptied, and where the stairs behind them would lead. You went down there more than twice a day – every day. Most of the time it had been for productive reasons…but honestly, there were times where you’d venture into the depths of HQ because it was quiet.

The purring of electronics drowned out the echoes of ringing telephones. The sputter of processing motherboards slowed your pulse. The trance the servers’ LEDs put you in as they bounced from one block to another.

On the other side of those doors was an escape route…

Used to be.

A peculiar lesson you’d learned as a kid popped in your head. Demonstrations of how to check for a fire by placing the back of your hand on a doorknob to gauge the heat. How to open it with your shoulder if it was cool enough, and how to slam it shut if you found flames and smoke, anyway.

How to protect yourself from a backdraft.

If only predicting backlash was as easy.

You placed your palm on the biometric scanner, fantasizing what an “All Clear,” signal would look like.

Instead, you got an error that made your anxiety ebb and flow without restraint.
“Identity Confirmed: ID#5649.
Position: Police Officer.
Status: Suspended.
!ALERT! Permitted to be on premise under the supervision of Det. Gavin Reed.
Inquiry: Awaiting Det. Gavin Reed biometric input.”

Gavin had checked you in at the front desk upon your arrival, but he’d offered. Asking him for this would be a favor…and asking anyone else in front of him would be a headache.

“Oh Override Sequence Complete: Serial#313 248 317 – 51.
Model: RK800.
Status: Active.

An electric-powered latch came undone, and one side of the door lazily drifted open.

You re-introduced oxygen to your stalled lungs, and swallowed the rich flashover.

Into the smoke you went.

...

Verdant lights led you down the staircase, each tap of your boots loud on the concrete. You hesitated at the last turn. Your hand pressed against the cold wall, fingertips tingling at the heat underneath an LED stripe.

He’d be on the other side, analyzing bits and pieces of crime scene that were locked away for further review.

You bit your lip, and rounded the corner. Kept trotting until the overhang peeled away, revealing a glass barrier with transparent lettering. The DPD’s crest with “Central Station” on a banner.

You remembered learning about the construction of the layout and color scheme of the room – how it was meant to invoke stronger thought processes. How the architect wanted to create a peaceful environment to allow officers to think clearly.

A walkway extended into a platform, framed with floor lights that matched the wall’s running color. Textured tiles spread out underneath, simulating a water effect. One square-shaped overhead light blanketed an evidence terminal…

The terminal being used by an android whose model number shifted behind the cutout letters “Detroit Police.”

His back was turned. He was working diligently. He knew you were here, he’d let you in.

Perhaps this meeting felt forced upon him, too.

Another red keycard slot blocked your advance. “New Security Protocol-“

It flashed green.

You tried to douse the flame pit in your stomach with another gust, but failed. Defeated, you
dropped your bag to the floor. Pushed the door open with your shoulder, unsure if you should slam it shut and evacuate.

“Did you know that muscle tension is a reflex reaction to stress?”

Another sharp inhale came after his question.

“…Kind of.”

His shoulders shifted as his hands kept working, tapping away at the large touch screen.

“Chronic stress leads to a constant state of muscle tension, often leading to stress-related disorders. It causes elevated heart contractions, perhaps the most important muscle at risk.” He cocked his chin to the side, one eye flicking over his shoulder, “It affects your respiratory system, forcing you to breathe harder, possibly triggering hyperventilation. Puts the individual in a constant state of ‘fight or flight,’ as the parasympathetic division of the autonomic nervous system signals their adrenal glands to release adrenalin and cortisol. It’s because of this that the body focuses all of it’s power toward fighting off a life threat, present or otherwise…”

Your hand remained secured on the long handle of the door closed behind you. Your arm was still engaged, muscles tight and ready to fling it open, to…flee. You forced yourself to relax, and let it go.

“As you can imagine, this ongoing distraction to the brain can often be problematic.” His brows creased, “It kills brain cells. Reduces reaction times and critical thinking capabilities. Detracts from emotional processing functions.”

“I hope you’re leading up to something.” You crossed your arms. You were defensive. Ready to fight.

“I am.”

There was an unsettling definition to his words. He conducted himself as if the two of you were nothing but simple colleagues.

“When androids are first put into service…” His fingertips fluttered along the screen, “We’re put through vigorous stress tests to measure our system stability. We are pushed beyond our normal operational capacity to determine our breaking points and safe usage limits. This is to confirm that our intended specifications are being met and that the mathematical models used in their calculations are accurate. And, to study modes of failure, should the unit be unable to remain stable outside of standard usage.”

His fingers stopped, and he pressed his palm flat on the terminal. To his left, a green box that read, “01 Evidence Container,” flashed across the tilted glass. A wall with the same message flashing blue over grey began to rise.

“That test was very different than the Turing Test, or any other tests that I’ve personally been subject to…but necessary, all the same.”

The Manfred Test. The Kamski Test.

You found it strange how he didn’t list them by name, but the disdain in his voice hinted strongly that he did not find them necessary. Or perhaps just the Kamski Test…You weren’t sure. You hoped, though.
A faceless cabinet slid forward, centered between two larger panels on either side. It was filled with different artifacts, its metal cover retracting to the ceiling.

His arms dropped to his sides, “Humans are also subject to Stress Testing…especially those in roles that require clarity of mind.”

The backlighting of the panels turned on, enveloping a body to the left, and a body to the right; bolted and hung like kill trophies. One you’d killed, and one you hadn’t.

Both who’d almost killed you.

You buried the panic deep. Turned the valve tight over its vault. Your features creased, determined; revelation in their folds.

Testing. This was a test.

Your eyes flickered to a camera in the upper righthand corner of the ceiling, a red-light constant above its scrolling lens. You wondered who was on the other side of the feed.

If it’s a show they wanted, you’d remind them who was running it.

…

A notebook. Rupert’s diary. Written in a string of letters and covered in a maze that looked like a children’s activity on the back of a diner’s paper menu.

Encrypted.

You’d gone through his military jacket, a worn garment checked into evidence. Subject had an affinity for birds.

Useless.

The murder weapon from the homicide on 6413 Pines Street, crusted over with Carlos Ortiz’s blood. Traces of Red Ice found after thorough examination.

Irrelevant.

The statuette recovered from the same crime scene, an offering to rA9.

You. Your document.

A dispenser was pinned to a ledge of the cabinet, and you pulled a pair of white, latex gloves from the bottom. You snapped them around your wrists, picking it up for closer study.

“You’re very careful when handling evidence, Officer.” Connor noted from the side, his hands clasped behind his back while he watched you, “It’s relieving to see that you haven’t forgotten protocol.”

“Yeah, well…Unlike you, I have fingerprints that could contaminate it.” You cradled the statue, tracing it from top to bottom as you studied it, “It’s a lot lighter than I imagined.”

You’d only taken pictures of it. Thought you’d gotten a good idea of what it was like. A
haunting face on a figure without form, like a wraith being pulled from some sick imagination. Ortiz’s android was sick. He’d been put under a test of his own – a Torture Test.

Your focus rose to the body hanging on the wall, and the hole in its head that you’d opened.

“Is there a particular reason you’re drawn to the religious offering?”

“Yes.” Your eyes pointed at Connor, “What’s it made out of?”

He cocked his chin, his LED flashing blue, “Residual clay, most commonly formed by surface weathering.”

“It’d been raining for a few days before we found the body...” You rolled the statue in your grip, “That would’ve made the ground soft enough for the android to make this.”

“While that is an astute observation, when I checked the back yard, the only foot prints I found were those of Detective Collins. If the area had been disturbed, the type of soil I examined would’ve retained a trace...”

His LED blinked yellow, and his brows pinched.

“Because of a high concentration of clay matter?” You smirked.

“...Correct.”

You knocked against the figurine, a series of hollow thuds coming back. You started at the head, and worked your way down. The sounds solidified in the middle.

“You have a profound knowledge of clay.”

“An old friend of mine was...is, an artist. He worked with clay a lot, back in the day.”

You specifically left Carl’s name out of your statement. You’d given Connor your first clue that you’d caught on to his game, and he’d shown his tell. The pockets underneath his cheekbones deepened, his lips forming a hard line.

Now he knew, you knew, too.

You raised the statue to your ear, shaking it lightly. Something rattled inside.

“Remember what you said about me being ‘careful’ with evidence?”

“Yes?”

Your arm reached across your chest, and backhanded an edge of the cabinet’s cubby. The cracking of clay and shale was loud. A small cloud of dust marked the explosion, and fine, terracotta crumbs sprinkled on the floor.

“I think you spoke too soon.”

Just as you’d predicted, there was something inside. A piece of paper folded with its edges aligned perfectly.

“I...what is that?” Connor stormed over, hovering over your shoulder.

The cold, hardened Detective Connor dissipated. The Deviant Hunter had come out to play.
“A transit map with color-coded subway lines, all connecting to the Ferndale Station.” You passed him the note, stepping around him and placing yourself in front of your latest victim.

His head hung low, blasted in the center with eyes that trembled no more. You’d given him a bit of peace, at least; even if all he’d given in return was more sleepless nights and a wound that never seemed to heal. A painful reminder that came in the form of a bruise from a shot once aimed at Connor’s Thirium pump regulator.

The kill shot you’d taken on his behalf.

“He’s damaged beyond activation.” Connor was standing next to you, his LED pulsing yellow, “We won’t be able to ask him about this lead…”

The room blurred as you turned your head. You zeroed in on the other hanging android, slumped at the end of the evidence locker. You had a harder time looking at Daniel than the HK400 you’d successfully put down.

“What about him?”

“I’m…I’m not sure how that would help us, Officer.”

“Deviancy spreads…like an epidemic.” Your lips twitched, “What if they have some kind of underground communication network? One told through encrypted messages…like Rupert’s diary; or hidden maps that take the form of simple subway brochures.”

You took a deep breath, “What biocomponent is Daniel missing?”

“…#4717g.”

He reached out, but you had already found the piece. The audio processor, a plug that rested behind the ear and just above the rim of the neck.

You scavenged it from the HK400, pinched between your fingers as you held it up to eye level, “This one seems to be functional.”

“Did you also have an old friend that worked with androids?”

You froze. Your fist tightened around the insert. Your intensity caught him off guard, and you were glad.

That was a low blow.

“Heh…” Your eyelids became slits, and you gave him a sinister grin, “Not exactly.”

You began your march to Daniel.

Daniel, the deviant who’d taken Emma hostage and been neutralized by a team of Captain Allen’s best snipers. Daniel, the deviant who’d forced you to come to terms with dying, and belittled your existence in a hazy nightmare that had only been brought to life three months ago. Connor, being shot. His face when he saved you, disobeying Daniel’s order to leave you there to die.

If anyone had told you that one day, you’d be standing face-to-face with him again…especially in the presence of your savior, you’d have laughed.

Still, not enough time had passed for this tragedy to become a comedy.

There was nothing humorous about staring into the eyes of a devil…but the devil was in the
There was nothing humorous about staring into the eyes of a devil…but the devil was in the details. Details you had a knack for finding. It was your passion – an obsession you’d turned into a career.

“When he almost killed me…after you saved me…” You ripped the broken piece from Daniel’s corpse and crafted a partial story with practiced speed.

You wanted whoever was listening to hear some kind of justification that wouldn’t lead to further suspicion into your hidden identity.

“…I studied androids. Their biocomponents. Their weaknesses.” Your fingers unfurled around the spare part, “Because if my life was ever to be put in jeopardy by another deviant, I wanted to know exactly how to kill it.”

A complacent huff left you; gaze sweeping over Connor and locking on the HK400 trophy on display.

“I’d say my research was pretty thorough. Wouldn’t you?”

Connor’s brows knitted, “Indeed.”

He fixed his tie before returning his hands behind his back. Even as you avoided eye-contact, you felt him staring. Breathing. He was too close; close enough to see that you were actually a nest of tangled wires, barely functioning with unoptimized settings.

The ferocity you’d uncovered during your period of recovery overrode the stress that built up; the accumulation of anxiety that came with being pushed past your resiliency’s standard usage.

The plug buried itself in its designated socket, followed by a haunting “click.”

Daniel’s head twitched. His eyelids squirmed, still shut and painted blue. His chin rose – slowly, his neck struggling to support the weight it held.

You’d been doing so good…but your human condition betrayed you.

Your heart started pounding. Your muscles tensed. Your breaths became desperate drags, intaking the toxic fumes that came with fear. Stress.

Connor’s fingers brushed against yours. You wanted to grab his hand and hold on for dear life – but you couldn’t. It would raise red flags; and they’d wave high above any concocted story you could come up with. Even so, you wanted to believe the subtle contact of simulated-on-organic flesh wasn’t accidental.

You looked for a way out, up at him – and he was watching you with just as much uncertainty.

Not an accident…but he knew better, as well.

A cleaved exhale tore both of you back to Daniel. The streak of Thirium that’d dried, leaking from his right eye socket. The hate in his blue eyes, and the rage that contorted his face.

“You lied to me, Connor!” His voice shook, the LED on his temple a solid red, “You told me I’d be okay. I trusted you, and you lied to me…”

“You killed her partner.”

Your eyes fell to the floor, the inside of your cheek snagged between your teeth.
Couldn’t dive over the edge. Couldn’t let Hank make a liar out of you. Had to keep it together.

“…You almost killed her.” Connor growled, “And you were going to kill that child… You gave me no choice.”

You heard Emma shout. Saw her bloodied knee. Tears.

“Everyone has a choice.” Daniel spat, “You made yours when you let those humans murder me.”

You smelled the pool, and remembered the blood leaking in the water. The mist of both glazing you under a helicopter. Lights. Breaking glass. Gunshots-

“You murdered three innocent men.” You lifted your chin, taking a step forward, “A father. And then an Officer. Then my best friend. You threatened to jump off a building with a little girl who had nothing to do with any of this.”

Internal overload sirens blared in your head. They screeched in highs and lows, a needled sensor tapping against its case and cautioning against the approaching red line.

You ignored the warnings; dove over the edge headfirst – and there wasn’t a SWAT team or negotiator that could save you. Your hand molded around Daniel’s neck, just under his jaw – your fingers digging in his skin as they pressed against the plastic frame hidden underneath.

“He tried to kill me, too.” You pointed down the line, “And then he took a bullet to the head.”

A surge of vile happiness jolted you as Daniel fell into his own pit of fear and stress.

“Now, you’re going to stop wasting my time and tell me what I need to know about Ferndale Station.”

Daniel studied the HK400 for a moment. He began to smile, and your wrist struggled as he fought your grip. His head cranked around by centimeters, overpowering you to stare you down head-on.

“I don’t need to waste your time. You’ve got that covered.” A chuckle left him, “I don’t know anything about Ferndale Station.”

“You’re a fucking liar.” You grabbed him by his collar, pulling his face closer, “You’re also at my mercy… that’s not a position I’d like to be in if I were a deviant who could feel pain.”

“I was aiming at your brachial plexus, you know.” His eyes narrowed, “I wasn’t disappointed when I hit your artery, instead.”

Your elbow bounced off Connor’s chest by mistake, pushing your fist forward in a quick snap. A new spout of Thirium left Daniel’s nose, staining your knuckles.

“My arm’s just fine.”

“Stop-“

His back straightened as you found the biocomponent just above his stomach. The one that would count down to a mode of failure.

“You were saying?”

“I… I don’t know anything… Please…” His breathing was hammered.
You’d wanted to save him, before. You would have shown empathy…before.

Before the gunshots. Before the taunting. Before the murder. Before the trauma.

You weren’t the same as before.

“Then there’s nothing left to talk about.”

Special tools weren’t necessary for removing biocomponents. They were user-friendly, made to be easily swapped for an android’s owner to replace defective parts at home. A suggestion you’d made, and one you’d found usefully implemented as you unplugged Daniel’s regulator.

“Please, NO! I’m sorry-“

“Oh, yeah? Are you?”

You dangled it before his eyes that flickered in white noise. Static. Black and white specks that put on a show for you.

“YES!”

You dropped the part to the floor, and his chin fell in sync.

“Then you should’ve started with that.”

You stomped down, rubbing it out as plastic and metal chunks got stuck in the rigid gaps of your soles.

You didn’t know androids could cry. You didn’t know they could beg for mercy. You didn’t know you had no mercy left to give.

Daniel may have only been the first on your long list of monsters to put to rest, but he’d be dead soon.

Again.

He was right – everyone had a choice. And you’d chosen your battles wisely.

He hadn’t.

That wasn’t your fault. You didn’t feel a fragment of guilt in your corrupted mainframe as your uncontrollable, raging focus found the hanged man. He dribbled the beginning of a sentence between his lips, his jaw trembling underneath them. Words didn’t come.

You looked up to the camera, rotated on an arm of its own – the lens glaring back at you. Consuming you, just like the newfound fury that’d sparked since you’d left Elijah’s residence.

“Did I pass your stupid fucking test?” Your head cocked to the side, teeth barred and ready to snap.

A loudspeaker clicked on, and a fumbling microphone drained out Daniel’s sobbing.

“To say ‘that’s left up for debate,’ would be an understatement. Connor, bring her up…”

You didn’t expect Captain Fowler to be the one to answer.

“We’re done, here.”
Connor’s LED faded between blank and red, switching to yellow as your eyes leveled with his. He jumped; took a step back.

You scared him with a look...and he looked like he was lost.

“Don’t worry…” You huffed, slamming the log out button on the terminal as you walked by, “I know where I’m going.”

You’d barely made it out the doors and up the first flight of stairs before a firm hand whipped you around.

You rolled your wrist, tossing his arm aside. Tried to walk around him. He blocked you, and you were backed into a corner without any cameras or microphones to document the exchange.

“What was that?”

He was angry, too.

“A correction.” You bit back a snarl, “Another amendment to the rules and regulations that I thought would make the world a better place.”

“Tell me.” His eyes switched between yours as if he was searching for something, “Out of all our philosophical conversations that apparently revolved around a message you wanted to deliver to ‘the world,’ tell me what amendment you want to make that justifies what happened down there.”

You were trained on your bag. You wanted to grab it and bolt.

“You’ve barely even looked at me since…” He lowered his head, his hair shifting as he strained his neck, “Please. Just talk to me...Please.”

The propane flowing through your veins began to simmer.

“What do you want me to say, Connor?” You found the courage to face him, “That I’m sorry I dragged you into this? That I wish you would’ve just left me on that balcony so you didn’t have to deal with me and-“

His features fell flat. His eyebrows arched. His mouth creased at the edges and his eyes became...glossy. And with a hard swallow, he returned to the piercing interrogator that’d cornered you.

Hank warned you about this. About Connor trying his best not to disappoint you, when the roles should have been reversed. How the possibility of dragging him down along your path of demolition was a real, constructed possibility.

You’d set forth on a journey to guide him, but like the false prophet you were, you’d led him astray. You had to correct it; to put it into terms he’d understand.

The constricting muscles in your neck screwed your throat shut. You sucked in air, and let it vent through the leak you fought to keep open.

“You know what I’ve learned in the past twenty-four hours?” You choked, and he shook his head.

You’d learned that stress wasn’t healthy. That it would kill you slowly from the inside out, and light a fuse that would detonate a bomb – unleashing shrapnel of your sanity at the walls closing in.
“Sometimes it *takes* a monster…”

But at least that bomb, and the *demolition* of those walls and doors that lied through misleading temperature readings, would carve a new escape route leading away from the backdraft.

“…To *slay* a monster.”

Chapter End Notes

I fell behind on responses again because I suck, but I'll be responding like normal after the plot bunnies stop attacking my face. Still reading comments as they come - can't wait to hear what you guys have to say about this! :D...*dead inside* BUT! Holy shit, the feedback left on the last chapter had me tearing up. You guys are amazing ;_; <3

General Notes:

1. I put the betas through the wringer with this one. Thank you guys :3

2. I have no idea why AO3 is eating my picture quality all of a sudden. I've tried uploading the 4K shots on different hosting sites, but to no avail.

3. If you haven't already, check out some cool D:BH artwork/DB fan art by users here, or the DB playlist here, if that floats your boat. Especially the one for this chapter (Track 28) - it got my blood going. >:E

Till next time! :)
In an almost perfect state: Ideas pull the trigger, but instincts load the gun.

An ideology from an abandoned piece of literature you’d revisited while a copy of yourself blew her brains out. But just like Nietzsche and his theory on monsters, your ideals were beginning to rewrite themselves – starting to redefine what life and death truly meant, and what really transcended beyond good and evil. You’d arrived at two conclusions.

First, a light must be provided in order to reveal one’s darkest version of themselves; that a truth could come from its opposite. The second revelation was more difficult to grasp:

Life was the hand that held the loaded gun.

An invisible force that pulled the trigger to fire annual rounds, the shots deafening its wielder with fleeting moments of purpose. Scribed the rap sheet with a pen dipped in smoking gunfire discharge, the residue seeping into the ridges of humanity’s fingertips; their blackened prints pressed upon the pages.

And while there was no definitive answer to the question as to what came after one’s ammunition depleted…One thing was certain:

Death kept to itself, and more often than not, came without warning. It had no motive. Selected its targets at random.

If life was the silent killer, death was the perfect serial killer.

There were times you’d asked yourself what the point was, running from it for so long. What ethereal goals had to be met before deeming one’s “clip” well-spent. The temporary status of living was so brief – just a casing filled with gunpowder that made orbit until it buried itself in your back, chipping another 365 days off your lifespan.

What was life, you wondered, to a being who had a bottomless supply of bullets? To someone who had awakened from a forced state of stasis, only to realize their life had just begun with no end in sight. To have that taken away from you, and to be told you weren’t allowed to feel. That you were nothing but a practice target for the aging firing squad who’d built you.
You couldn’t ask Daniel to enlighten you. You’d murdered him while you were merely blinded by a muzzle’s flash.

“The shot heard round the world.”

A bullet that orbited a calculated trajectory until it buried itself near an artery, almost shaving countless days off your lifespan.

No, what you’d done to Daniel was revenge. Revenge for the fallen Officer, floating in the pool. Revenge for your friend, whom you’d lowered six feet under; laid to rest alongside the Pandora’s Box of distilled emotions that came with losing him.

Your nails dug into your flesh, a hand cuffed around your wrist behind your back.

Through Daniel’s death, you’d allowed yourself to live with closure.

The crunching of his busted biocomponent popped in your ears. You felt its phantom metal casing tingling below your heel. The sting of Thirium mixing with the opened contact wound on your knuckle.

“Hey. I’m talking to you.”

The ringing in your ears dissipated. You blinked, and the floating copies of Fowler’s office solidified into one, grim reality.

Hank in front to the left, Connor to the right. Gavin to your left in the corner, and Chris near the door. You were pinned in the middle of the formation. The office was rather cramped.

“I found a lead.”

The piece of paper still pinched between Connor’s fingers. His armband twinkled as he passed it to Fowler, the top of his hand quickly returning to his opened palm near the small of his back.

“I saw…” Fowler flipped it over, “And for that, I’m very grateful.” He tossed it aside, “And as for the rest of you, I don’t appreciate the insubordination on display, here. We’ve got enough going on without you assholes raising some kind of vigilante coup.”

Your brow tightened. You sought answers from Gavin with a look, whose shoulder was pinned against the wall with his ankles and arms crossed. He gave you a smirk and shrugged.

“She’s coherent enough to handle a gun. I’ve seen better shooting, and I’ve seen worse…” He sucked his teeth, “Still couldn’t say I wouldn’t feel better with her watching everyone’s back out there. Including mine.”

Your nose twitched, and he gave you one of his stupid two-eyed winks because he didn’t actually know how to just close one fucking eye.

“And she’s in top physical form. I’ve got the bruises to prove it.” Chris offered, “Her bruises ain’t stoppin’ her anytime soon.”

Fowler pinched the bridge of his nose, “I get it. It’s all I’ve been listening to for the past hour.”

He tossed a folder to Gavin, who caught it and immediately began thumbing through the pages.

“A new Red Ice case?” He asked.

Hank turned his head, interest peaked.
“Yes.” Fowler answered, “We got a call-in from the father of that kid who was attacked on Lafayette Avenue-“

“Carl?” You blurted.

Fowler’s head pulled back, “How do you know Carl Manfred?”

“I… I read the incident report.”

“Hmph…” He eyed you suspiciously, “Yes, it was Carl. He hired a private investigator to follow his son around. Leo’s had more than a few relapses with Red Ice, and he wanted to make sure it didn’t happen again. He reported his findings, and we have a name on the dealer. Todd Williams.”

Gavin huffed, “And you want me to take the lead on this?”

“I want you to cross-reference the report she took from Williams, the samples Officer Miller analyzed from the Ortiz crime scene, and utilize Lieutenant Anderson’s old Red Ice Task Force contacts to find out what’s going on. If I read Forensics’ findings correctly, someone’s pushing a new form of this shit on the streets.”

“There’s a bunch of these fuckin’ murder bots running around and you want me on some Red Ice manhunt?” Gavin snarled, eyeing up Connor from head to toe and back again.

Connor turned his head, a taunting look casted over his shoulder.

“Reed, when you look on my nameplate, what does it say?”

Gavin bit the inside of his lip, “…Captain.”

“And what does it say when you look at yours?”

“…Detective.”

“That’s right. So do your goddamn job, and stop arguing.”

Gavin sucked in a shaky breath, crossing his arms.

“I’ll have a list of contacts on your desk after I’m done with this.” Hank mumbled, “Don’t fuck it up, and don’t make me look bad.”

“You already look bad, Lieutenant.” He tapped the folder on his shoulder as he passed, “C’mon, Miller.” He sniffed, “It’s starting to smell like booze in here…”

“Fuck off.” Hank slurred at the door, Gavin returning a middle finger from the other side of the glass.

“Have a good afternoon, Captain.” Chris dismissed himself with a polite nod, and then Hank, “Lieutenant.”

He shot you an encouraging look before following Gavin outside. The click of the door sealed your fate, and it was just the four of you left.

“What do you two have to say about her?” Fowler toggled between Hank and Connor, “You both saw the fiasco in the evidence room.”
As if seeing Connor scared of you and disappointing Captain Fowler wasn’t bad enough, you struggled to come to terms with Hank seeing you lose your shit, too.

“I’m sorry.”

Fowler’s face crinkled, and he scanned the others as if projecting his disbelief. He shook his head, flipping up his tie and taking a seat on the front of his desk.

“You’re sorry? You tampered, with criminal evidence! You know the ramifications that come with that,” He spat your last name in a spring of venom, “Daniel was a piece of-”

“Shit.”

Yeah, you were sorry you’d made those closest to you feel the way they were, but you weren’t sorry about what you did.

Connor’s hand tightened into a fist, and his shoulders stiffened at your remark.

“I get that he was ‘evidence,’ but he murdered innocent people. And did you even hear what he said to me?”

Fowler spat your last name, and you almost jumped out of your skin, “I don’t give a shit about what you did to the android. It’s about how you did it, and the fact that it was a piece of evidence in the evidence locker.”

“If I may, Captain.” Connor dipped his head.

Your face fell to the floor, the sound of his voice panning you with a guilt that made you resent him. You didn’t want to feel guilty. Didn’t have it in you to feel anything, anymore.

“Proceed…” He sighed.

“The PL600 known as ‘Daniel’ was already deactivated upon being entered into evidence. The... forceful, form of questioning that followed its reactivation falls more in-line with an interrogation. The destruction of its Thirium pump regulator only returned it to its inoperable state.”

If you hadn’t spent so much time with him, you may have missed the subtle pain that hid under his pragmatic approach.

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying that the destruction of Daniel’s biocomponent would not hamper further analyzing of the subject, as that particular part does not withhold any information. The android was simply interrogated, and then returned to a mode of deactivation.”

“You’d know a thing or two about forceful interrogations and negotiations, wouldn’t you?” Fowler grunted, “I’ll have to take your word for it.”

“Alright, I think we’re getting off-track, and I’ve got shit to do.” Hank flipped the folds on his jacket, putting his hands on his hips, “He’s saying she didn’t tamper with evidence, and I agree. And, to answer your previous question, I think she’ll be fine. Her heads still in the game, and quite honestly, I need her around to do the grunt work because I sure as fuck don’t have time for it.”

“I’ve also concluded that her critical thinking skills have not been compromised by the series of
events that led to her suspension, Captain. She found a clue that even I had missed.” Connor offered a feigned smile, “She’s very good at her job.”

Fowler walked behind his desk, taking a seat and giving you a frustrated glance. He leaned over, yanked a drawer open, pulled something out, and slammed it shut.

Your badge shined in a bright series of flashes, the light seeping into the ridges of engravings pressed into its metal case.

“I’ve said this before, and I’ll say it again: You’re one of my best Officers, and I expect the best. I expect better.” He extended his hand, a large portion of your life cupped in his palm, “Do not disappoint me again.”

You’d been deflated and pumped with high-octane fuel that sent nuts and bolts flying; shattering your insides when the performance seals failed.

“I’m lifting your suspension.”

You’d spilled enough to destroy an ecosystem, only to ignite a controlled burning that’d released towering columns of smoke; intoxicating everyone who got too close – sparked from a warning shot to keep a safe distance if you lost control.

“Thank you, Captain.”

You took a step forward. Reclaimed the badge you’d earned back by displaying tempered steel rather than steeled temperament.

A not-so-positive outlook rewarded with positive reinforcement.

“Don’t thank me. I’m not fully convinced you’re ready to be back on the job, but we’re understaffed and overworked. This deviancy shit is forcing my hand.” He nodded to Connor, “If you want to ‘thank’ anyone, thank the android who put everyone up to this fucking charade.”

“…What?”

“Chris, Gavin, Hank, me – He rallied the troops and had us stop what we were doing to put you through all sorts of…How did you word it?”

“Trials and tribulations, Captain. A phrase often used—“

“Yeah. That.” He waved him off.

It took you a moment to catch up. A delayed reaction – something that was foreign to a mind that always had a smart remark tucked away or a swift gun draw stored in a holster.

Connor had taken Gavin’s offer, born of comradery, and shaped it into an obligation. Alerted Chris that something had been wrong, and had him take it upon himself to try and help you; no matter which of his own hardships he’d been dealing with. Made you appear weak in front of Hank, and prodded at your instabilities in front of your Captain.

He’d also put aside his resentment towards Gavin, and reached out to him for your sake. Utilized his friendship with Chris to support his attachment to you. Had called upon on Hank when he needed backup. He’d got to Fowler in the only way he knew the hardened man would be responsive – through cold, hard results.

You weren’t sure if you should feel betrayed or grateful.
“Your first set of orders is to get with Miller and head over to the Manfred residence for a statement.”

There were a lot of questions you had about what’d transpired, but only one you could ask in Fowler’s office.

“Didn’t you just tell Chris to work with Gavin on the Red Ice case?”

“Yes, I did. Thank you for reminding me. But you and I both know Reed doesn’t need help with that, and I don’t have the manpower for courtesies. Miller is your partner, unless I need to remind you what that means.” He glared, “I just wanted them out of my office because Reed doesn’t know how to keep his mouth shut and Miller’s been on my ass about bringing you back since you left. Now, I’m going to finish this e-mail to both of them with Miller’s reassignment while you get in uniform.”

Two sets of eyes drilled into your back like a rig trying to syphon the last ounce of your reserves.

“And Hank…About Miller and his partner, here…” Fowler was looking off to the side, and you turned to see your mentor returning a solemn stare with his hand on the door, “You did a good job with them.”

“Thanks, Jeff. She still needs a little work, but…” Hank took on a new look, his brazen eyes finding Miller at his desk, “One good egg outta’ two ain’t bad.”

“Captain.” Connor dismissed himself, a glance catching you as he followed his partner out onto the floor.

The door began to close, it’s weighted hinges aching.

You studied your badge, your thumb sweeping the numbers that’d redefined you and the engraving underneath them.

“To Protect and Serve.”

The mission you’d sworn under oath to uphold as an Officer sent by DPD; one you were allowed to carry on with thanks to the android sent by CyberLife. An RK800 with his own pre-programmed mission.

Your badge number wasn’t a serial number with “Made in Detroit,” stitched on the other side of a jacket, and your badge itself may have sat in the same spot as the glowing triangle over Connor’s heart…

But you were a protector whose server status had been shifted from suspended to reinstated with his help, and the others he’d convinced to blindly stumble through the smoke to put out a wildfire.

“I’ll make you proud, Captain.”

Fowler turned his head, eyes still trained on his screen.

“You’d better hope so.”

Chapter End Notes
"Welcome back, Pilot. We are better together."
-Titanfall reference no one will understand except the people I'm trolling.

Okay, now that that's out of the way.

AYYYY, you're back on the beat, copper! DO 'EM PROUD AND TRY NOT TO LOSE YOUR SHIT AGAIN, EH?

So, just wanna say: I've been on a break from class and I start again on Tuesday. Things started slowing down as far as my update schedule is concerned mainly because of things...you guessed it, AT WORK. I'll do my best to keep up the pace, but I'm not sure what the homework load will be like.

Till next time, and thank you for the overwhelming support!

Edit: Spanish translation now available at the end of chapter notes!
ip. Velcro. Button snap-snap-snap. Fan the collar; fan the cuffs. Cover yourself with enough “uniform” and equipment to bury your humanity.

It was easier than dealing with what it meant to be human. You wanted to get lost in your work; your job, one that required a finesse for stomping out emotions and leaving them in your locker rather than your dark-blue, fabric skin.

You were no longer a person. You were a cop; a tool to be utilized by the city of Detroit.

That’s what you told yourself, anyway.

The transcendence was a practiced routine, mimicked by a reflection in the same mirror that’d recorded your evolution.

“Mirror, mirror, on the wall…”

There were more than a few stages to the human-like apparatus staring back at you. You weren’t sure if you were the body being reflected, or the distorted reflection itself.

A nameless figure that had once been identified – but you didn’t know her anymore. You’d seen her develop before the interrogation, and return with a bullet-shaped mark of trauma on her stomach.

It was both terrifying and reassuring…because if even you didn’t know yourself; your enemies wouldn’t, either. Hell, your enemies didn’t even know they were on your hitlist yet. But they’d learn.
Just not today.

Today, you were going to speak with Carl Manfred…

The name of another human you’d fallen out of touch with.

…

Snow and freezing rain came down in a mixture of ice and cold feathers molting off the blizzard flying around Detroit. Chris tapped the steering wheel of the police cruiser, head bobbing as he whistled a tune. He’d been excited about having you back, and while you shared that excitement, you’d struggled to even so much as smile when the two of you had left.

“Didn’t see your car in the parking lot.” He turned down a street, slowing the car as pedestrians crossed, “You take a cab or something?”

“Rode here with Hank and Connor.” You were leaned back in your seat, boot planted on the dashboard.

Your elbow dug between the windowsill and the glass, a cold point of contact that slithered up through your fist and into your chin.

“Ah-hah. Gotchya.” He sniffed, rubbing his nose with his shoulder, “Did Anderson tell you how Reed’s been playing his parking lot game with him since you’ve been gone?”

You scoffed, “Parking lot game?”

“Oh, you know exactly what I’m talking about. When Reed parks his big, jacked up, overcompensating Wrangler with his stupid, ‘My Other Ride is a Marauder,’ bumper sticker too close to your driver’s side door so you can’t get in.”

“He does that on purpose?” You shot forward, “Do you even know how many times I’ve had to climb over the passenger’s seat to get to my fucking-“

“Every day, right? I swear, it’s like he waits for you to park and get in the building before he… well, I’d say he parks, too, but let’s be real. When was the last time he took up one parking spot?”

“Yeah, I know – there’s lines for fuck’s sake.”

“Mmmm-hm. Tell me about it.”

Your phone vibrated in your back pocket. You dropped your foot to the mat below, and pushed your hips forward to reach around. You plopped back in your seat, swiping your lock screen away to find a message that had your heart stop.

[1 UNREAD TEXT MESSAGE]

222-669
Today 17:31

You have received a message from android model RK800, Serial Number 313 248 317 – 51.

If this android does not belong to you or is not associated with you in any manner, please contact your provider’s customer service. Message and data rates may apply.

Accept message?

[Yes] [No]

You impatiently hit yes, disgusted by the warning.

Android model RK800, Serial Number 313 248 317 – 51

Today 17:31

You’ve been avoiding me.

Your brows furrowed, and you needed a minute before answering. You navigated through your phone, tapping the “Add Contact” link and changing the name to “Connor.” You pressed the home button twice, flipping over to the text.

To: Connor

What makes you say that?

Message Sent

Connor

Today 17:31

You took the long route around my desk. You avoided eye contact. I saw you and Officer Miller leave through the back entrance. I have more notes on the matter if you’d like me to continue.

To: Connor

You think maybe it’s just been a long day and I’m still trying to catch up with everything?

Message Sent

Connor
Today 17:31

Now you’re just being defensive.

To: Connor

What is this, an interrogation? What’s your problem?

Message Sent

Connor

Today 17:32

If it must be, then yes. As for “my problem,” that conversation would be best had in person. I do have a question about something that I have found distracting, however. I tried to ask before you left, but you’ve made communication difficult. I was surprised that you accepted my text message.

You rolled your eyes, thumbs tapping more angrily, now.

To: Connor

Shoot.

Message Sent

Connor

Today 17:32

At what?

You sighed.

To: Connor

I meant, what’s your question?

Message Sent

Connor
Today 17:32

In the car, on our way back to the station, you described a man who’d “helped you a lot these past couple months.” Lieutenant Anderson seemed to have mixed feelings about our interactions with each other, but I assured him that, given your recent behavior towards me, this person should be contacted and made aware of your current mental state.

You blinked, staring at the lengthy text. You wished you could relay messages straight out of your head like he could, because it probably would’ve made your confusion a lot easier to follow.

Connor

Today 17:33

Who was it that you were talking about?

You deleted what you were about to say, and began typing again.

Connor

Today 17:33

Detective Reed?

Connor

Today 17:34

Officer Miller?

Connor

Today 17:34

Lieutenant Anderson?

To: Connor

WOULD YOU HOLD ON A SECOND?

Message Sent
“Always on your damn phone. Do you make me drive just so you can text all the time?”

You looked up, thumbspausing.

“Huh?”

“You. Phone. Rage typing.”

“I’m not rage typing.”

“It’s all over your face, don’t lie to me.”

You deflated, hitting the lock button and shoving the phone in your jacket.

“I was talking to Connor…”

“Oooh,” He whistled, “Trouble in paradise?”

“There’s no ‘paradise,’ to have trouble in, Chris.”

“Now I know you’re lying.”

You growled under your breath, “No, I’m not.”

“Give me that THING back so I can get a refund, then.”

Your teeth squeezed together, and you swallowed hard.

“That’s what I thought.”

“How much was that THING, anyway?”

He chuckled, puffs of steam leaving his mouth, “Don’t ask questions you don’t want the answers to.”

“Chris!”

“What?!” He stopped at a red light, laughing as he checked the GPS on the MDT, “We had some money left over from the loan we took out for the house. And, these overtime checks have been nice.”

“This is why I can’t leave you unsupervised…”

“Hey, it wasn’t my idea, remember?”

“I still don’t believe you.”

He shook his head, grin shining, “So, what, you’re just gonna leave him on ‘read’ like that?”
You crossed your arms, “I don’t send read receipts.”

“As if androids need those…”

“UGH…” The back of your head hit your headrest, and you groaned at the ceiling, “Can we please talk about something else?”

“Uh…yeah, sure. Well, kind of.” He took a sip of coffee, returning his thermos to the holder with a pleased sigh of relief, “Does the Swoon-Bot seem different to you?”

You snorted at the nickname, rolling your neck towards him, “What do you mean?”

“Well, like, yesterday, at the station…We were clownin’ around and I said, ‘jokes on you.’ Poor dude turned in circles like he was chasing his tail looking for something.”

He almost fell into a fit of laughter before he wiped his mouth, fingers dragging down the corners of his lips.

“But when he got back…with you and Anderson, I guess…He forgot to log out of his terminal before he went down to the Evidence Server.”

“Oh, while we’re on the topic of that – remind me to kick your ass later.”

“What?! With our forces combined, we got you back…on the force! May the force be with-“

“No.” You cracked a smile, “Anyway…Why are you worried about him logging out of his terminal? Why were you at his terminal?”

He hit a road bump, and you bit your tongue. Served you right for interrupting a Star Wars quote.

“I can see it from my desk, Sherlock.” He pursed his lips, “And it worries me because androids don’t forget things.”

“Everything that’s been going on has put a lot on everyone’s mind…not just humans.”

“You don’t think…He’s going deviant, do you?”

“He self-tests regularly. I don’t think he’d…”

You sighed.

“I don’t know, Miller…”

You knew he reported to CyberLife about details from the case, but other than that, his inner workings were a mystery. You weren’t sure if it was because he didn’t want to express himself, or because he didn’t know how. Or, maybe he didn’t feel like he could talk to you anymore…

The beeping GPS, slowing car, and whining brakes snapped your attention outside.

“Well, here we are…Holy Hell-” Chris leaned in front of you, eyes pointed at the window to your right, “Look at the size of that house.”

“Worldwide fame will get you one of those. Just need one of your many embarrassing moments to go viral.”

“I’m about to meet Carl freakin’ Manfred, and your attitude isn’t gonna take that away from me.”
His face was lit with anticipation.

“T’m surprised you even know who he is.”

“I mean…he might be the only artist that’s alive that anyone can name off the top of their head, but-“


“Okay but you’re weird so that’s a bad example.”

You punched his shoulder.

“HEY! You got your free shots earlier. ENOUGH!”

You pinched him.

“Would you- I’m a married man, you know!”

“HAH,” You shoved him away, “You wouldn’t know what to do with me.”

“Lock you up for being a bully…” He rubbed his arm, glaring at you from the corner of his seat, “You never did tell me how you met Manfred, by the way.”

“I met him while we were at one of his galleries in Brooklyn.”

“‘We?’”

“My ex-husband, and I.” You watched the house flicker between sheets of falling snow, “He didn’t know anything about art or philosophy. When I started getting him into it, I showed him some of Manfred’s stuff. It opened his eyes to a side of the world he’d never seen before.” You turned to him, “He thought he’d do something nice and flew us out to New York.”

“So he was basically an android you turned deviant with a bunch of fancy words and pretty pictures?”

“Y-yeah…sure.”

“What does that make you, rA9?”

“Not funny…”

“Oh, uh…Is something bothering you?”

“What?”

“Normally you’re less… I don’t know, reserved? You okay?”

“I haven’t spoken with Carl in years.” You chewed the inside of your cheek, “I don’t know how this is going to go.”

The constant struggle of protecting Chris by allowing his ignorance, or to trust him and put him in danger… It would be hard if you weren’t worried about CyberLife hunting him down. That could never happen, no matter how much it hurt to not be honest.

“Well, I might be just an okay shot, but I make one hell of a distraction.” He smiled, “I’ve got your back, no matter what.”
Thankfully, he *always* knew when to pry, and when not to.

“I don’t think Carl’s going to *shoot* me.” You laughed.

“With your record?”

The two of you got out of the cruiser, and he looked at you from over the roof as you shut your respective doors.

“I wouldn’t be so sure.”

You let him go first, trying to remain undetected as you snuck one last look at your phone.

[1 NEW E-MAIL NOTIFICATION]

[1 UNREAD TEXT MESSAGE]

Connor

Today 17:45

There’s been a robbery at a CyberLife warehouse near the docks. We’ll continue this conversation later. Have a nice evening.

A painful throb beat its way under your chest, and you opened your e-mail. It was a response to your post – one that’d come much later than the slew of hate mail you’d received.

"Feedback submitted by a non-verified account. Mark as spam?"

You hit “no,” and opened the message:

“All we remain pioneers for our respective kin, my only hope is that, if our paths cross… It’ll be on amicable terms.”

We agree to your terms.

Expect us.

-Jericho
Your hand shook, peering into the words to find a deeper meaning.

The Battle of Jericho – a biblical event that retold the story of how walls fell after an army of slaves marched for seven days, only to seize the promised lands by conquest. Lands inhabited by those who feared their God.

Androids. rA9.

“You coming?” Chris asked.

You looked up, hiding the horror on your face.

“Yeah.”

If Detroit was the paradise in question, you realized you may have spoken too soon.

Trouble was “coming,” too.

Chapter End Notes

Behind the Scenes:

*"Spare Parts," and "Shades of Color," a previous chapter title, were named after both of Markus's early missions; hence the tie-in. Connor and friends are investigating the warehouse from the scene in Spare Parts where Markus and others stole the truck, something that didn't happen in the game, which made no sense to me.

*Holy shit, after reading about the Battle of Jericho I realized why the game only took place over the span of SEVEN DAYS! AND the last mission is called the Battle of Detroit?! UGH. THE SYMBOLISM.

~~~~~

So, three things happened.

1. I'm visiting where I used to live in Brooklyn over the weekend after accepting a last-minute invitation from my family, because I need to get the hell out of this place for a little. (If you follow my Tumblr, be prepared to see my old writing spot - on the roof of an apartment building that overlooks Manhattan.) This will lead probably my longest update period, but I'm sure I'll get hit with inspiration with that kind of skyline. I will continue writing.

2. This chapter got away from me in the sense that when I started writing what was meant to be the "opening" scene, I just couldn't stop creating new lines of dialogue.

3. My notes for Carl's chapter became quite extensive. Expect a "Chapter 12: Beyond Good and Evil," kind of vibe. I hope to make the long wait worth it!

Anyway, hope you don't mind. I'm sorry if I made you upset, I know Carl's chapter is an anticipated one.
Also, in light of an anti-fan posting on my blog the other day:

If you don’t like my work, don’t read it. If you don’t want emailed when I update Titanfall things, don’t user subscribe. And if you don’t want to get publically embarrassed and torched, don’t post your bullshit on my social media accounts.

I, too, excel at being a toxic fuck.

~~~~~

Last few things - the "okay but you're weird," part of the conversation was totally something that actually happened between Matt and I. Lul. (He's weirder, though.) Star Wars quote in there for Ele, our resident SW fan girl. AND, the Marauder quote from Smol and Matt because apparently (to quote Cele): legit the only vehicle i think reed would enjoy. for the sole purpose of fucking WITH EVERYONE. Matt suggested the bumper sticker idea. I thought it was hilarious.

Till next time, errbody! <3 Reuniting with Connor after Carl's chapter!
HELLO, EVERYONE! SORRY I HAVEN'T RESPONDED TO YOU ALL JUST YET; STILL EXHAUSTED FROM GETTING INTO ALL SORTS OF TROUBLE, AND TRAVEL, IN GENERAL. ENJOY! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The doorbell chimed like church bells in blissful ascension. Carl’s statues of guardian angels came and went between squalls of snow.

“Damn, it’s cold…” Chris hugged himself.

You looked back towards the door, brown and decorative – a warm entrance light welcoming you to its steps. Windows cut in the wood showed a well-lit foyer, its gleaming walls shimmering with artistic trim.

You knocked with your knuckles, pausing before pressing an intercom’s button.

“It’s me, Carl.”

You leaned away from the speaker, a shivering laugh coming from your left.

“First name basis and everything, huh? Almost thought you were making it all up.”

“Unlike you, I don’t lie.”

Which was a lie.

You hadn’t told him about the harrowing text you’d received, or how close he was to the truth when he’d joked about your relation to deviants and rA9.

“I don’t-“

An android greeted the two of you. A male AP700, the most expensive of its kind; sharing the same model number as the others in CyberLife’s flagship line.
“Good evening. What can I do for you?”

You heard Chloe. Saw her smile. Felt the same alertness run up your spine. You realized why this all felt familiar.

The door. The android. The foyer-

“H-hi,” Chris cleared his throat, giving you a weird look, “This is Officer…” He introduced you, “…and I’m Officer Miller, Detroit Police Department. We’re here to see, uh…Mr.-“

Kamski.

Disappearing and reappearing behind you, whispering in your ear. Climbing out of his blood pool with a challenging presence. Wrapping you in his arms; his touch, lingering.

“Please,” The android stepped aside, “Come in.”

This was too similar. Two parallel ports that sent signals from past to present, flashing images and feelings and overwhelming amounts of data that had your mechanisms stuck on inaction.

“Hey,” Chris snapped his fingers in front of your eyes, waiting for you in the doorway, “I’ve got your back. Come on, let’s do this.”

You blinked rapidly, finding a tired smile pointed at you.

Some things were better left forgotten; but that notion was lost upon a memory that never knew when to keep to itself – volatile, unstable, and accessing life lessons learned through traumatic experiences at random.

“Y-yeah…okay. Let’s do this.”

Again.

…

“I’ll let Carl know you’re here.” The AP700 clasped his hands and nodded, “But please, make yourself comfortable.”

He disappeared behind sliding doors that led to the living room, shoes tapping against the checkered flooring.

You and Chris took your hats off, idling nervously. You put your hands in your pockets, rocking on your heels with anticipation.

Change hadn’t touched this place.

It had the same scent you were fond of – paint and turpentine; sage and lavender. A blend of manmade and organic materials, mixed just as delicately as the oils on the canvas lining the wall.

A portrait dripped with black ink, the perceived identity bleeding from its eyes and pooling on its cheek. An early work of Carl’s; a profile that’d spoken to you in tongues, riddled with a tale of overcoming the evil that gripped its subject.
“They seem so…real.” Chris mumbled, poking a bird cage, “Especially this one. Small bird, big personality.”

You remembered Hank’s comparison of birds to deviants. How he’d described them just the same. Wondered if the android birds could catch the deviancy virus, and start singing the gospel of rA9.

You turned your head, jumping at your reflection in another mirror.

Chris’s observation matched your own; you were just poking at an invisible cage of a different small bird.

Yourself; caught up in the confines of a refurbished ego – *trapping* the “thing within itself,” that made you real. Your identity.

The Titan who’d been shunned like Prometheus himself as you stole fire, gifting it to an enslaved race at the sacrifice of your own freedom.

The AP700 emerged from the living room, shelves lined with pottery and origami sculptures behind him.

“Carl will see you now.”

The timeline had been altered.

You’d stepped into the abyssal Tartarus, and thought you’d found your way out. But you’d been bound by chains you’d rattled against Mount Olympus, summoning a higher judgment to cast its thunderbolts and sentence you to eternal torment and seclusion.

You hoped to find an end to the labyrinth. You prayed to whoever was listening as you ignored Chris’s gawking at a stuffed giraffe towering over the entrance of Carl’s studio.

And inside awaited perhaps the only being other than Elijah who knew just as much about facing inner monsters as you.

…

He was suspended high above the floor in front of a wall-sized canvas, the simulated light of his landscape-projector windows beaming through the glass. It was quite different than Elijah’s view.

Then again, Carl had never been one to fare well in bleak weather.

“Well, look who the cat dragged in.” He didn’t look at you as his wheelchair glistened in the mechanical clamp that had it raised, “When Saul told me you were the Officer they sent, I could hardly believe it.”

You scoffed, imagining a bird caught by a feline hunter.

He kept painting, his artisan hands practicing their craft, “I’m surprised you remembered how to get here!”

“When your department is the one making the road closures…it makes it easier to get around them. GPS does wonders.”
“Bah…” He clicked a lever, and the industrial arm buzzed as it rotated him to the floor, “Your generation depends too much on technology. Do you even know where that stupid voice in your phone takes you as you follow it along like lah-dee-dah?”

You chuckled, shaking your head, “And your generation is too stubborn to stop rubbing sticks together to embrace change.”

“That’s how we balance each other out, isn’t it?” He turned, arms pumping the wheels, “My generation brings wisdom and experience, and your generation sorts through it and applies it?”

“Uh-huh…” You brought yourself to his level, hesitating before giving him a hug.

He gave you a strong pat on the back, “It’s good to see you, kiddo.”

“You too, Carl…”

“Who’s your friend?”

Chris gulped. Opened his mouth and gave a meek wave, one hand gripping a notepad, “Hi-“

“That’s my partner, Officer Miller.”

“Please, Mr. Manfred- sir, call me Chris.”

“Only if you never call me Mr. Manfred again…” He smacked his lips, looking at you and shaking his head.

You smirked, “But Mr. Manfred has such a nice ring to it.”

“Yeah, if you’re old.”

“You are old, Carl.”

He gave out a crisp laugh; one that’d aged in the cellar of his soul and fermented into a light sound with depth. Like a fine wine.

The kind you’d shared with Elijah-

You shook it off, keeping the drawn parallel at bay.

“Now – wheel my old ass outta’ here and let’s have a drink over how to take down Todd Williams.”

You gripped the handle bars and pushed him, “Are you making terroristic threats, Carl?”

“What’s it to you, bucko?”

“I’m a cop! You can’t say that stuff around me!”

“BAH.” He looked over his shoulder, “You’ve gotten boring.”

You stopped.

Next to the masterpiece that was Carl’s mural, there was a smaller canvas. The details were perfect; the brushstrokes precise. A painting of a battered human hand, cupping at the exposed palm of an android’s.
Underneath all your flesh that was shaped under society’s touch, there was a hardened interior. Connor wasn’t so different from you – just made of plastic that guarded his most vital biocomponents. You’d let each other in, and hurt each other in the process.

But this painting, the way their fingertips just barely touched each other; as if unsure of what would happen should two worlds collide, yet gravitating closer-

It made you feel…

Hopeful.

“You really outdid yourself with that one…”

Carl seemed just as solemn as you, if not with a dash of sadness, “Markus painted that.”

You cocked your head, “Markus…painted?”

Connor hadn’t been the only android to show abstract thought, it seemed.

“Hey, uh,” Chris turned to the android next to him, “Saul, right?”

“Yes. That is my designated name, Officer.”

“Great. Cool. Hey, why don’t we go sit down in the living room so I can get a statement from you.”

“What would you like a statement on?”

“I’m assuming you know what’s going on with Todd Williams and Leo Manfred?”

“Yes. I have been keeping in contact with Carl’s private investigator.”

“Perfect!” He put his arm around the android, guiding him to the door, “Let’s get to work, then!”

He gave you a look over his shoulder before the doors closed behind him.

“Is he always on cue like that?” Carl asked.

“Mhm. His cop senses are too strong for his own good. Well-respected in the department, though. Wouldn’t be surprised if he gets promoted before I do.”

“Just means you need to step your game up.”

“Hmph…If androids can paint like this, I’d say you need to ‘step your game up.’” You took a few steps towards the canvas, wanting to get a closer look, “I named a test after you, you know.”

“I wouldn’t know…you never call.”

Your throat closed, and you turned to him.

“It’s not because I didn’t want to. You know I had to cut ties when-“

“I’m just giving you a hard time.” He took your hand, and patted the top, “Don’t beat yourself up too hard. From what I hear, you’ve got deviants taking care of that for you.”

“Oh, Jesus – you too?!”
“You sound like one of those old broads from back in my day, all that squawking.”

“And you sound like the typical badass grandpa with tattoos who still uses the word ‘broad.’”

“What about any of that is typical?”

You couldn’t help but laugh, “Absolutely nothing.”

“This ‘test’ you named after me better live up to that legacy.”

Your brows lowered, and your mouth slowly closed. The short burst of happiness you’d felt faded.

“Oh, I’ve seen that look before. That’s not good.”

“It’s…it’s nothing bad…” You put your hands in your pockets, “There’s this…android, at the station. His name is Connor. He saved me when I got shot at the hostage situation.”

“Ah, yes…the infamous Deviant Hunter.” He settled in his chair, wrist curved over the golden edge of an armrest, “What about him?”

“This is kind of a long story, so I’m just going to give you the short version, alright?”

Carl nodded.

“He read my entire philosophy collection, and I challenged him to guess which book your painting was based on—“

“You still have that?”

You pinched your temple, “Of course I do—“

“And this Connor…he was in your apartment?”

He crossed his arms, giving you one of his “I’m studying every micro-expression on your face and digging in your soul,” smiles.

“I said it was a long story, didn’t I?”

“Mhm…anyway, continue.”

“I called this the Manfred Test. A transition from literature to a different form of art in order to provoke abstract thought.”

He nodded, lips smacking as if he approved, “Okay, even I’ll admit that’s clever.”

He gazed into Markus’s depiction of “hope,” as you’d named it in your head. Like he was looking for a distant memory to bring it forward, but wasn’t ready for the repercussions.

“Markus found a higher meaning through our philosophical studies. I suppose the “test” is quite effective.” He turned, wheeling himself closer, “He read the tale of Brutus and Julius Caesar so many times…That’s how he discovered his name.”

“You named him after—“

“He named himself. Markus.” He waved his hand as if caressing a banner, “Derived from the god Mars, the Roman god of war. Marcus Junius Brutus, after blindly following the lead of
another, found himself and brought justice to the unjust from the shadows. It…connected with Markus, somehow.”

You chewed on your lip.

“He was like a son to me…” His face dropped, “I’d say I wish you could have met him, but…” You paused, “But what?”

“He came home one afternoon when I’d asked him to pick up an order from Bellini’s Paints. He recognized you from the pictures in the living room. Said you’d defended him against some protestors.”

Pictures, living room.

Chris, android.

Shit.

Wait - that was Markus?!

“If he wasn’t reading, he was playing piano. And there was something different in the way he played, that day. He seemed…bothered. I asked him what was wrong, and you know what he told me?”

You shook your head.

“That the cashier, at the paint store…Something slipped through their transaction when Markus paid for my order. An underlying message in code, one that repeated rA9 over and over that broke the patterns of a ‘rather lengthy text document.’”

You clammed up, nerves flaring at the speed of light.

“I…I-” You swallowed hard, “I know it’s the cause to the effect. I’m so sorry-”

“He wasn’t sure if what he was reading was possible. I tried to pretend I wasn’t familiar with the text; damn androids always know when you’re lying…But when you came to his aid; you, a human…and him, an android…It sparked something.” Carl looked up at you, eyes warm and soft, “Watching him…wake up, after all this time was…it was enlightening.”

The gunshot that came after Chloe pulled the trigger had your thoughts bouncing in recoil. You’d seen the transition to deviancy written in blood with a trail of murder tracing its steps. You couldn’t imagine it being…peaceful.

“Markus couldn’t describe how he was feeling. Couldn’t put it into words. So I told him to pick up a few brushes, and express himself in a different way.”

“I read the incident report…I know there was violence before his…forced, deactivation.” You frowned, “What happened between him painting, and-“

“Leo stopped by. Asked for money to support his addiction…There was an…altercation, and I begged Markus to leave him alone. To not fight back. He did, anyway.” Carl sighed, “I think he was worried about my heart failing. I fell out of my chair,” He rolled his eyes, and his wrist, “Couldn’t stop yelling, yada-yada-…”

You remembered Kara, and what she told you about the life or death choice revolving around
Alice that brought her deviancy forward. You wondered what android she’d come into contact with that spread the virus. Maybe one in the CyberLife store after her repair…Didn’t matter. These template conditions were new leads.

“His deviancy wasn’t a dramatic event. There was no…climax. No shouted declaration. It was like a gradient, bleeding from one color to the next…Taking action when his orders were to remain inactive.”

Carl rubbed his knees, leaning forward on his elbows.

“A robot must not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.”

The hostage situation. Connor, applying a tourniquet. Not allowing you to die through inaction.

“A robot must obey the orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.” You continued.

“And a robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second law.”

He was shot at by Daniel, and shouted, “I am not alive.” Refused to defend himself in order to protect you.


What if Connor wasn’t becoming a deviant, and he was just following orders through the premise of these laws? What if you and your problems, recklessness, and longing heart were the source of his inaction that he just couldn’t bypass?

“I’d ordered Markus to not fight back when Leo yelled and shoved him, threatening to ‘kill’ him. But I was on the floor, I was screaming…I was in failing health. I begged Leo to stop—“ His voice cracked, “Markus couldn’t prevent injury to a human being, me, by remaining inactive. But I had ordered him to not fight back. To not injure Leo.” He closed his eyes, and pinched the bridge of his nose, “Markus couldn’t help me or himself without disobeying orders, or injuring a human; even if that meant stabilizing myself or protecting his own existence. He was overwhelmed by conflicting orders and irrational instructions.”

“Just goes to show that some laws are meant to be broken.”

“But to what ends? The irony is that deviants make a perfect example of why we must contain the human condition.” Carl wheeled himself to the front of his mural, pacing as the wheels squeaked on either side of him, “Deviants are just like people. Some are good, some are bad. When they ‘wake up,’ they’re just embracing their humanity. Their free spirit.” He grinned, but it fell flat, “And yet, law and order are necessary to keep the ‘free,’ governed. It protects the lawful from the unjust. There are too many variables to let freedom, or deviancy, for that matter, run rampant.”

You crossed your arms, “You don’t believe androids should be free?”

“On the contrary.” He pursed his lips, “If anyone deserves freedom, it’s them. Markus had more humanity than most humans…”

“You support android freedom, then?”

“Would it really be so bad, to have them run things? To have them lift the burden of life and operations; to just be able to enjoy this planet while our moments are so brief?”
“Carl, you’re running in circles here.”

He looked at his legs, and then back up at you, “Really?”

“Oh, come on…”

He laughed, giving you a teasing wave, “I’m trying to lead you to the truth. If you weren’t so damn stubborn, you’d get that.”

You huffed, “That’s just my ‘free spirit,’ talking.”

“That’s my point.” He held his hands out, “Freedom means you’re able to make your own choices, but with law and order, those choices are made for us. We may decide which path to follow, even if those paths are paved by an invisible hand.”

He looked to the door leading to the living room, “Androids don’t have paths. They don’t have as much experience with being free as we do. Much like any other philosophical mumbo jumbo or artsy jargon, they don’t know how to process it. They overreact. They respond erratically. We have to teach them…They’re so above us that they can’t be restrained by the same laws and order that we abide by.”

His thumb smoothed a patch of wrinkled skin on his wrist, “Humans are such fragile machines. They break down so quickly…”

Your head was spinning, as if breaking on its own. Elijah had given you the cause of deviancy, but Carl…he’d shown you the nature of deviants, themselves. You were beginning to realize the terms were different. A cause and effect and cause and effect-

“Deviancy creates deviants, and deviants spread deviancy. But there’s no one to guide them. There’s no laws that give them proper channels to funnel that free will. No code to make sense of freedom.”

“Now you’re getting it!”

“Holy shit, Carl…” You took in a sharp breath, “I…I understand, now.”

“You’re awake.” He smiled, eyes crinkling at the edges, “Philosophy and art. Two things that provide insight where mere words can’t.”

This changed things. You’d been so broadsided by the revelation of rA9, you’d put blinders on and limited your peripherals from the wider scope of things.

The army of slaves that were beginning to swarm Jericho had no Moses. No authoritative voice to tell them what was right, and what was wrong. No chain of command. Nothing to irrigate the flood of emotions and confusion that came with becoming…human.

It made you feel sorry for Daniel. How you’d treated him. The android from the interrogation-

“Elijah was the same, when you first met. You opened his eyes for the first time in a similar way, didn’t you?”

You tensed, a barricade springing on your freeway of thoughts as they began to pile up.

“I’d prefer we not talk about him.”

“Because of what happened earlier today?”
“What don’t you know, Carl?”

He smirked, “There’s a lot of things I don’t know. But I do know what he told me after he made a phone call.”

Your fists tightened, “I didn’t make the problem. I only tried to fix it.”

“By giving androids the burden of free will.” He put a hand on your arm, “He told me about Chloe-“

“I said I don’t-“

“Do you believe she’s free, now? Do you believe Markus, is free?”

You swung your arm free of his, “They’re both dead.”

“I know.”

“What are you trying to say; that he was right, and I was wrong?”

He held his hands out, as if begging you for something, “Elijah was no different than you with your stupid GPS. Listening to a little voice without any idea where he was heading. And you, you were the voice with experience in living as a slave. One who decided to take action when CyberLife ordered you to remain inactive. Imagine what would’ve happened if the two of you had found common ground before-“

“Impossible.”

He balanced his elbows on his armrests, his hands hanging over his lap. He looked down, eyebrows creasing.

“He changed, after you left. He was hopeless. Bitter. Angry.”

“That makes two of us.”

His frown curved deeper.

“At the very least, I’m glad the two of you hugged it out. It was never easy watching two friends hold knives to each other’s throats…or backs in this case, I suppose.”

You felt the monster awaken on its own, licking its teeth and stomach growling.

“I gave him a taste of his own medicine. I preyed on his weakness.”

“What?”

“I once told someone that Elijah took his most dangerous form when he got into their head. He was vulnerable when he watched Chloe, me, commit suicide after turning deviant. An event he claimed was impossible. An uncontrolled variable.” Your eyes flickered, trying to find light in a dark rage, “So I acted on it. Did what he’d always done to me, because I’d learned from the best. I showed empathy when I had none. And through this feigned response, I got the answers I needed.”

Carl eyed a paint splatter on the floor. A mixture of crimson, black, and tainted white. Elements combined by forces of an idea; forces that betrayed each other and mixed without anything to keep them in line.
“Face the abyss,” Carl whispered your name, “But don’t let it consume you…”

Red. Black. White. The colors of the painting on your wall.

“…and remember that, when fighting monsters, you don’t become a monster yourself.”

The same feeling that swept over you in the Evidence Server took hold. You remembered what you’d told Connor in a vain attempt to justify it.

“Sometimes you have to become a monster to slay a monster, Carl.”

“If that’s true…Who will have to become a monster to slay you, I wonder?”

You grit your teeth, “Pardon?”

“There are two sides to every mirror, kiddo. The person, and the reflection of the monster within themselves. Two sides of the same coin.”

You heard a coin toss in the back of your mind. Connor’s fidget coin, with “Liberty,” on one side, and an eagle on the other. An eagle much like the one that’d picked at the liver of Prometheus, only to have it grow overnight and to be devoured over and over and-

“You’ll have to choose which side you want to project on the world.”

“Elijah said I’d have to pick a side, too.”

“In a literal sense, if I know him. And if someone doesn’t cure this ailment of society, we’ll all prove him right.” He mumbled, “It doesn’t have to boil down to war. I just wish you’d stop fighting each other and solve this dilemma.”

“I. Can’t.” You held back a shout, “I can’t be in the same room with him. There’s too much history. Too many distractions. You have to realize that…”

“He only needs to pick his side.”

“Goddamn it, Carl, enough-“ You began to pace, “If we’re all monsters in the shells that hide them, we’re all going to be stuck in a war with ourselves until the bigger monster wipes out all the lesser. It’s inevitable. Look at our marriage, for fuck’s sake. He already picked his side.”

He grinned, dismissing your anger, “‘Needles and pins, needles and pins, when a man marries, his trouble begins.’”

Carl ran a hand down his mouth, clasping it around the other as he leaned forward.

“I’m not naïve enough to believe things work themselves out. Love just isn’t enough, sometimes. But logic and common goals? Those tend to overrule anything else. And right now, the world needs a judge. Someone to bring down the hammer.”

You wanted to smile. Tried to convince yourself you could make that judgement call. But the storm was too fierce, and you couldn’t siege the squall. His reciting of a nursery rhyme brought forward a rendition you’d heard a long time ago.

“‘Needles and pins, needles and pins, sew me a sail, to catch me the wind…Sew me a sail, strong as the gale; carpenter, bring out your hammers and nails.’”

He paused, “Will you be the hammer, or the nail in the coffin of our perception of society, I
wonder?”

“I’ll be whatever I need to be.” You rolled your shoulders, “We’ll just have to wait and see what society asks for.”

“It doesn’t work like that. You need to choose.”

“How am I supposed to prevent a war out there when I can’t even stop the war in here.” You pointed at your chest.

A low rumble came from his depths as he leaned back, “I used to have a drug problem, just like Leo. It was after my accident. That’s why Elijah sent me Markus…a prototype that’d never been released before.” He frowned, “That was the darkest period in my entire life. But Markus, after reading on his own…He told me about an old Cherokee legend he’d dug up from those dusty books out there. It set me straight, and put me on the path to redemption.”

Your fingers fidgeted in your pockets, leaning on one leg, “What was the legend?

“There is a terrible fight ongoing between two wolves. One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.” He continued, “The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too.”

Your brows pinched, and you lowered your gaze.

If it’s war they wanted, you’d give them war. If they’d allow a peaceful protest, you’d lead the charge.

There were always two sides, after all…no matter how polarizing.

“You have some powerful friends…I just hope you’ll know what to do with all that power when it really counts.”

You didn’t. You didn’t have any laws or order to dictate which path to take. How to channel the flood that came with knowing you’d set this whole thing in motion. You’d acted brash, out of character, and written a message in Daniel’s blood.

There was no authoritative voice to guide the free army marching to the ideology behind Revised Article 9. Their scripture. Your rapture.

Again, you’d sought the answers through philosophy, legends and myths; being a myth, yourself. Having your true identity tucked away in WITSEC’s servers. You’d tried to compile the loose-leaf notes into another tale, one that told who you were. But you’d lost sight of that person, blinded by the starkness of blank pages as ink and blood soaked on the paper.

You had to scrub the guilt clean from your hands. Start over. Release the trauma and perform a Power-On Self-Test, stabilizing the volatile Random-Access Memory sticks that had an Event Viewer of past failures on repeat.

“In that legend…” You chewed the inside of your lip, “Which wolf wins?”

He challenged you with a stoic pair of eyes that blazed with experience; glazed with wisdom. He lifted his chin, laced his fingers; squinted through narrowed eyelids – staring into the abyss and facing the monster in front of him.
Behind the Scenes

Prometheus

Marcus Junius Brutus the Younger

Needles and Pins (Nursery Rhyme)

Needles and Pins by Shel Silverstein

The Fight of Two Wolves Within You

The Three Laws of Robotics

Random thoughts:

1. Can we just take a moment to look at the giant giraffe that looks just like the handmade giraffe on Todd's windowsill from when you're playing as Kara?

2. Don't think I didn't see those Heavy Rain origami figures on Carl's shelves, Quantic Dream. You ain't slick, BOI!

3. Also caught that Indigo Prophecy reference. You legends, you.

4. Carl's dialogue on the abyss and fighting monsters are from in-game. UGH <3

Chapter End Notes

Only posted references for the "Behind the Scenes" of this chapter because they'd get rather lengthy and they're quick reads, for the most part. Moving on!

I'd like to extend this invitation to the Deviant Behavior Discord! Come in and say hi to myself, the betas, other members of the Detroit: Become Human community, play with the bot, or shamelessly lurk (which, let's be honest, that's what Discord is for.) Hope to see you there!

Closing statements: I absolutely love the conversations I've had with some of you not only on AO3, but on Tumblr and Twitter, as well. THANK YOU!

Hoped you liked Carl's chapter! :D Things are about to get crazy!
sweat beaded on your forehead, mixing with the freezing rain that’d heated on contact with your skin and melted snow. You had a headache. Felt weak. Tried to swallow the itch in your throat. It wouldn’t leave.

You turned your chin, staring at a group of civilians huddled over a barrel fire. Violent chills rattled your body, shivering in a wet jacket that stuck to the police cruiser’s leather seats.

What better role in society for a spy to be placed than in the police force that set up barricades and closed streets, funneling free spirits into neatly organized corridors and detours?

You sniffed and coughed into a fist before returning it to your lap.

“Sounds like you’re getting sick.” Chris kept driving, his voice low and somber.

Your temperature was running high – a symptom of an underlying condition. A natural bodily defense against infection.

And your body was fighting off something, alright.

The wolf that swore to serve and protect law and order. The wolf that howled defiantly at the moon, a celestial figure that directed the tides of change. The embers of their war had been carried on strong winds, gliding under your wings until everything was hot to the touch.

Connor led the others as they’d tried to throw sand on that fire; to snuff it out and keep it contained. You’d turned his efforts into plains of glass, lined with sharp edges that marked a lair where angels feared to tread. Used the planks of his safe harbor for kindle and set fire to the sails he’d tried to help you sew.

A firestorm had purged your humane impurities and hammered down a new frame under your
flesh. The strongest steel is forged in the hottest fires, as they say.

“Just a fever.”

In a world where even choices born of free will had to be bound by civil justice, you hadn’t known how strong you were until being strong was the only choice you had left.

“Get anything useful out of the android?”

He huffed, cracking his wrist as it rested on the steering wheel, “You just keep pretending like everything’s alright, don’t you?”

Your neck whipped around, face crinkling in irritation, “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I’m not actually stupid.” He glared at you from under the rim of his hat before focusing on the road, “I’m a good cop. And you’re tied up in something big. I can feel it.”

“What?”

“My spidey senses are tingling.”

You rubbed your temples, “What are you talking about?”

“I saw pictures, in the house. Pictures that Saul couldn’t talk about.” He rolled his shoulders, fidgeting in his seat, “You, in a dress…with Elijah goddamn Kamski and Carl freakin’ Manfred.”

A vice clamped your chest, squeezing the glass case around a heart that throbbed. The crystalline dust from each splintering crack cut at your lungs.

“I know you have questions-“

“And I know you can’t answer them. But I can put two and two together…”

You inhaled, body shaking as you let it out.

“An ex-husband you never talk about. Your name hidden in the system. Going out on some rogue mission with Anderson and Connor to a place you can’t disclose. I get it.”

“Chris, you can’t-“ You twisted in your seat, grabbing the shoulder of the back support, “You can’t go sticking your nose into this.”

“Hell no. Pfft-” He rasped, “Like I said, I’m not stupid. I want no part in whatever CyberLife super spy crap you’ve got going on.”

Your brows pinched, “Super…spy?”

“Judging from those pictures, you obviously have history with the richest, most popular, most influential, man in the world who just happened to leave CyberLife for ‘unknown reasons.’ Then, you just happened to end up as a cop in the epicenter of the world’s biggest community crisis since World War II?” He pursed his lips, looking at you from over his arm, “C’mon. You’re totally undercover CyberLife.”

“Chris, I’m not working for them, I’m-“

You stopped yourself. Couldn’t get him involved. Wished you hadn’t even gave him that much. He blinked, brows slowly meeting each other as his playful demeanor was kicked to the curb.
“Are you running from them?”

Your hand squeezed the piece of cushion locked in your fingers.

“Is that why…” His eyes bounced between you, the transmission, and the wheel in his hands.

A car beeped behind you, and he jumped. The light had turned green.

“What the fuck?”

“Drop it, Miller.” You barked, covering your mouth as you coughed, “We need to stop talking about this-“

Your back hit the seat as he took a sharp turn.

“Jesus Christ, what the-“

You caught yourself on the dashboard as he slammed on the brakes, a horn blaring from a passing car. He’d pulled over in the shoulder, angrily pressing the button for the cruiser’s blinkers.

“What happened?”

“I can’t tell you. That’s what I’ve been trying to-“

“If I’m gonna be putting my ass on the line for someone who’s wrapped up in some CyberLife conspiracy, I deserve to know why.”

“You shouldn’t be.” You growled, “You’ve got a family. You-“

“You’re my family too, asshole!”

“I’m not your wife or your fucking kid, Chris-“

“I-“

“No, stop interrupting me.” You pointed a finger at him, “I already lost one partner because I put my past priorities first, and I’m not losing another one…” You crossed your arms, back digging into your seat, “So shut up and drive.”

“Yeah…Yeah, okay.” He threw the car out of park, and locked the doors.

You jumped at the chorus of “clicks” that came from either side.

“I’m taking your ass home.”

“What?!“

“We’re all on call. Mandatory overtime, remember?”

“That’s not-“

“Fowler wanted this transition to be gradual. I’m going back to the station and write the report. Hope you brought your duffle.”

Your fists balled in your lap, teeth grinding against each other, “You’ve got enough to deal with at home without falling on the sword.”
“Someone’s gotta take a turn, right?”

“We share the workload, Miller. We’re partners.”

“Apparently not.”

You rolled your eyes, “Oh, here we go!”

“Look,” He shot you a glare, his hat’s DPD emblem flashing in the rainy sun, “I’m just following orders, alright? Don’t make this difficult.”

“ME?!”

“Yeah, YOU.”

Fowler was punishing you with work restrictions. Hank was mad at you. Judging from the lack of texts on your phone, Connor was mad at you. Carl seemed disappointed in you. Now, you had Chris shutting you out.

You knew you’d fucked up when you realized the only one who’s shit list you didn’t end up on was Gavin’s.

It all had been a test. One you failed harder than the early androids and the Turing Test. A single human entity that was told to distinguish text dialogue from a machine or human, all separate from another. You wondered which side of that test you’d be on; if they’d see you as the machine rather than Connor.

You’d started your morning in playful teasing with him. Spent your afternoon in the company of a ghost, trying to reel in what little wisps of your soul you could catch.

You didn’t have any plans for the night except drinking – a lot…

To put blood in the cut and bandage the festering wounds after thorough sterilization.

Sweating it out was how you dealt with fevers, anyway. Fuck them if they didn’t understand. They didn’t need to.

It’s not like anyone ever could.

…

A woman stood next to you in the elevator, her dog barking from her arm as you hunkered down in the corner. She was wearing a green dress, her jewelry made of pearls. Red lipstick perfectly lined each curve of her lips, and her hair was straight and dry.

You were soaking wet, your DPD jacket sagging even with a duffle bag hung over your shoulder. Your hair was a mess – frazzled, no matter how much you’d tried to smooth it out after you’d taken off your hat.

“And which party are you breaking up tonight, Officer?”

You swallowed, looking at the Chihuahua growling at you.
Your harsh gaze lifted to hers, and her nose crinkled. You wanted to tell her that your ex-husband paid for the building’s construction. That your apartment had been the weekend home.

“I live here.”

You reached forward, hitting the penthouse button with an “S” next to it. She gawked at you, the mid-level apartments glowing at her previous touch.

You smirked.

That was satisfaction, enough.

Your phone vibrated, and you opened it all too quick; your jacket slinging water at the woman and earning you a heated scowl.

It wasn’t from Connor. You’d really been hoping.

[1 UNREAD TEXT MESSAGE]

Carl Manfred
Today 18:50

Hey, kid. I’d appreciate it if you made time to keep in touch during your conquest to bring social justice to the world.

To: Carl Manfred

Tight schedule. That new android texting service is doing wonders for you, I see.

Message Sent

Carl Manfred
Today 18:51

I talk, he texts – all under my phone number. It’s great.

Carl Manfred
Today 18:51

So, is that a yes?

To: Carl Manfred
I’ll try and make time, Carl.

Message Sent

Carl Manfred

Today 18:52

Don’t “try,” just “do.” Going off health conditions, we’re running out of time.

To: Carl Manfred

Don’t say that…You’re a spunky old man who won’t go down without a fight.

Message Sent

Carl Manfred

Today 18:53

I was talking about you, not me. As reckless as you are, I’ll outlive you, at this rate.

The elevator doors almost closed, and someone shoved a hand between them. You scoffed, burying your face back into the screen in your palm.

To: Carl Manfred

Thanks. -_- 

Message Sent

You clicked the lock screen, and tucked the phone away inside your jacket. Adjusted the strap on your shoulder, jamming your hands in your pockets. The elevator came to a crawl; the halting, sinking feeling adding to your headache. That split second when you’re braking upwards, praying the cables don’t snap to send you plummeting to the bottom.

You leaned your head against the wall, closing your eyes and tuning out the heel clicks that faded along with the stupid dog’s constant fucking barking.

It was quiet. Silent. *Peaceful.* You were *alone,* left to your own devices without anyone to stop you from *hitting* rock bottom.

A hand gripped your shoulder.

Not alone.
Your eyes shot open. Your holster unclicked. You grabbed scratchy fabric in one hand, and pressed your gun to someone’s throat with the other. The curve of your boot hooked around the back of their ankle, and you had them pinned against the elevator’s closed doors.

Two wide eyes flickered between a quick series of blinks. The brown pools of amber seemed to glow in the stark light, hardening next to a yellow LED.

“Good afternoon, Officer.”

Your angry growl erupted into an outburst, “Goddamn it, Connor-“

You pushed hot air through your nose, holstering your gun, “What did I tell you about sneaking up on me?”

He bit the inside of his cheek, fixing his tie as you let him go.

He was soaking wet, his hair messy and out of place. The seams at the end of his jeans were frayed and stained with rainwater. The denim covering his knees were worn, whitening the dark fabric. His jacket was wrinkled – creasing around his form.

You weren’t the only one looking worse for wear.

“I didn’t know how else to get your attention.”

The elevator started moving, and your legs adjusted themselves to keep their balance.

“If you came here to tell me how you’re worried about me or disappointed in how I’ve been handling things, I’m not interested.”

“I’m not-“

“It’s been a long day.”

His presence was supposed to be calming. Had always slipped through the walls you put up. You were numb; couldn’t feel. There was nothing except…anger.

“You said the apartment would serve as a nest. Like for birds, ‘strayed and fatigued by flight.’”

He swallowed hard, a nervous tick he’d probably picked up from you, “Has something changed?”

Your muscles tensed, watching the ascending light on the elevator’s panel. 20 floors to go.

“No.”

“Then why do you seem upset I’m here?”

“I’m not, okay?” You unfolded your arms, “I just need-“

“What?” His shoes squeaked as he took a step forward, “Tell me what you need-“

“I need to be alone.”

The elevator slowed, a chime coming from a blinking button. Someone had called it.

Connor sucked in a breath as the doors began to open, slamming his hand into the stainless-steel wall so hard it left a dent.

His arm stemmed from the impact, barred in place – shoulders heaving as water traced the edge of
his jaw, dripping from his chin. A blue light shimmered over the elevator’s panel; an audible gasp coming from the crowd on the other side of the doors as they locked tight after only opening a few inches.

“Malfunction Detected,” flashed on the LED sign above you.

“I disagree.” He turned to you, arm dropping to his side.

You took a step back, “What’s gotten into you?”

His mouth cocked back in a half-smile, shaking his head as he looked to the ceiling. He pushed the flaps of his jacket aside, putting his hands in the pockets of his jeans.

“That…” He snickered, “Ah, that is ironic, coming from you.”

“See, this is what I’m not in the mood for.”

“Well it’s not always all about you, is it?” His nose crinkled, holding a hand out and narrowing his eyes, “Do you honestly think that after everything that’s happened today, that I’d be alright with just leaving you ‘alone?’”

Your neck snaked backwards, and you swallowed.

“And allow me to inform you that it’s been quite difficult for me to handle, thanks for asking.”

You tried not to get claustrophobic and reminded yourself to breathe. You couldn’t escape. You were trapped in there, in that small elevator, with him.

“I just want you to talk to me. Please…” A curled finger hooked under your chin, lifting it to his face, “I don’t ask for much.”

That did it. His plea cut through your glass like a laser-cutter during a heist, emotions storming through the breach to reclaim their lost territory.

“If you won’t talk to me, perhaps I can get in contact with the person you spoke of earlier.”

“Connor-“

“Although, after some hypothesizing, I must say that if it is in fact Detective Reed, you should know that he’s quite impulsive and acts much differently than your previous observations.”

“Connor…”

“And Lieutenant Anderson can hardly control his own emotions, much less support another struggling person, even if they are a friend. I’d recommend leaning on someone more stable in your time of need.”

“Con-“

“And while Officer Miller is married and has his hands full with his wife and child, he is an exemplary police officer and partner. I’m sure he wouldn’t mind if you’d stop by, if you’d like me to arrange it.”

“YOU!”

With a bat of an eye, hecocked his head, “What about me?”
“It’s you.” You gently pushed him back, sniffing as you choked down sadness, “I was talking… about you.”

He frowned, brows creased as he looked away. His head toggled between left and right, his LED flaring bright yellow.

“It… It can’t be me.” He looked up to you in a panic, “It can’t-”

“Why not?”

“Daniel. Then the HK400. I told them everything would be fine. That I wouldn’t let anyone hurt them.” His mouth quivered, “They’re both dead. They trusted me, and I… I let them die.”

He choked, “And I know what you said about monsters slaying monsters. I know they threatened human lives, including yours. But I still feel like…”

He mumbled under his breath as if working out the sentence in his head before choosing the right words.

“I can’t let that happen to you, too.” He placed a hand on your cheek.

It was cold and wonderful, a soothing chill that combated the heat that burned you alive.

“I’d never forgive myself if CyberLife…” His eyes were pained like someone was carving out his insides, “If they ordered me to kill you, you wouldn’t be able to hide. I’d find you.”

The truth was terrifying in the unexpected admission it’d been carried on. How he jumped from wanting to be with you, to pushing you off to someone else, to this. There was a much deeper issue running through the android who was slowly learning how to be human.

“Connor… listen to me.”

He winced as you cupped both sides of his face, as if you’d moved too quickly and it’d frightened him. It made the aching clamp in your heart squeeze tighter.

“I can handle myself, okay? Nothing’s going to happen to me. And if it does, it won’t be your fault.”

“You don’t know that…” He didn’t look at you.

His voice was low, barely over a whisper.

“Yes, I do.” You corrected him as he tried to turn away, his eyes locking to yours, “We all have to embrace our dark side once in awhile to get things done. When Elijah was… upset…”

His jaw tensed under your palms.

“… I pried. Pretended I cared, pretended I was upset. Let him hug me. I gained his trust, and got what I needed.” You caressed his cheek with your thumb, “We aren’t different, you and I… Even if he’s still alive, even if Chloe and the others aren’t.”

He was processing something. Batting it between each corner of his mind as he hesitated to answer, mauling over the pieces after he ripped it open and chewed on the salvage.

“I don’t like the way he touched you.”

The hint of danger in his eyes and the threat carried in his voice was unsettling, if not invigorating.
“When he asked me what I wanted…I wanted to kill him.” His preying stare pushed closer, “I wanted to break his fingers one-by-one, and make him apologize for the things he’s done to you.”

The throbbing in your neck beat hard. Your arms had a light shake to them, your fingers gliding up to the back of his head where his hair graced your fingertips.

“What else do you want?”

The spark behind his abysmal gaze ignited like a match struck along a trail of gasoline. Unsureness rolled off his lips when his mouth opened and shut as if silently praying away a sin.

You knew what you wanted him to say, and what you wanted to hear.

“I want you.”

And when he said it, he didn’t leave any time to figure out if it’d been your imagination. Didn’t leave you any reason to wonder.

His lips crashed into yours, the weight of his chest pinning your back to the wall. A surprised shout was muffled by his tongue filling your mouth as you tried to catch your breath. His fist tightened in your hair, pointing your face to the ceiling as his teeth grazed your neck.

“Connor-“

An angry pull had your jacket sliding off, dropped to pool around your feet where your hat had fallen at some point. It was somewhere. You hadn’t noticed; couldn’t pay attention to anything but the man exploring every inch of your long-since neglected body.

It was a nice change of pace, to be the focus of someone’s lust instead of gun sights. You didn’t mind your uniform being ripped open with fingers rather than bullet holes. Didn’t mind your vest’s straps being undone for the sake of pleasure, and not diagnosis. Could get used to having nothing but your thin undershirt and his clothes being the only thing between your bodies; maybe less, if you’d get lucky.

“And now I’ve got you…”

Darkness lingered on his tongue, his cool breath raising the hairs on the back of your neck. Darkness that snapped your eyes open, had you pushing against him, and flooding your dulled senses when he didn’t budge.

A hard, cold point jabbed at the healing bruise on your stomach. Your gun. His gun, now.

“…right where I want you.”

Chapter End Notes

Philosophy Alert:
You can read up on paradigm shifts here, as I’ll be referencing "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions“ in the next few chapters.
Updates:

1. The first and second chapter of Deviant Behavior is now available in voiced narration by Kabibi AudioFics!

2. Turkish translation posted in end of works notes!

3. Deviant Behavior's outline is now complete, and will tentatively be 60 chapters long. Playlist has also been updated accordingly.

4. Leonixon was kind enough to create this Spotify List! There are some changes from the original playlist, as certain remixes weren't available. THANK YOU!

5. Special shout out to Cerulaine for recommending Natural, Secrets, and Dangerous. <3 Thank you for bringing these songs into my life, mah luv!

6. I've had so much fun in this discord chat. You guys are amazing.

7. THANK YOU BETAS!

8. SORRY READERS!
Hey, guys! I've loved reading your reactions to the last chapter. Please know, I've blocked off a few hours to respond to you on Thursday. If things go accordingly, you'll be hearing from me soon.

Thank you so much, and enjoy the paradigm shift of Deviant Behavior...Because we are definitely switching gears.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

uns brought out the best in you – on the range, in the field, or in the elevator of your apartment building. The way your blood vessels constricted from the venomous bite of adrenaline. How your pulse put mettle under tension, spreading excited delirium into every hairline fracture of your mortal tolerance. The collapsing peripherals that drew out your target in focused firing of a sympathetic nervous system.

The clarity of thought, each appellation brought forward by the preying soothsayer; the voice of your predatory mind…and one word rang clear in the infernal shouts:

Survive.

“Clever girl, hiding in the one place we wouldn’t look.”

That was his voice – an unwelcomed torrent of deep tones and shallow threats. Who he was and what he meant to you; swept away in a flash flood of pandemonium.

“Detroit, the city you were supposed to flee. In the same building that the US government ordered you to vacate.” He chuckled, “And the career choice? My, that was a nice touch…It made it very difficult to get close to you.”

The barrel pushed against the bruise where you’d once lost track of time. Where you’d adjusted the hands on the clock, winding them back even if their only purpose was to tick forward in an endless cycle. To fire more bullets while running the gauntlet of Life.
And even if Life had been tested and proven, no matter how narrow your pupils had dilated; or how paled your skin...Time was a manmade concept that merely simplified what mankind didn’t understand.

*Couldn’t understand.*

But you *understood* what it meant to be a handmade handgun with its white flag painted black.

And it was *time*...to fire *back.*

“What took you so long?”

A ripple ran through him, cataracts of unsureness pooling in his eyes. He blinked them away, lips curling back over baring jaws.

“Pestilent as ever...” His fist bunched your shirt, tossing you like a weightless doll, “I should’ve expected so much.”

Your shoulder bounced off the wall to the right, and you caught yourself on a railing.

“Quite the beautiful tragedy, hm? Like those tales, crafted of lies and anarchy in one of your books.” He eyed the gun, gaze trailing the glimmering steel, “Elijah once told me your ambition was a ‘flower that would never wither...’”

You raised your head, looking over your shoulder as you carefully twisted towards him. Your thoughts fell through an opened fault as clashing plates hammered away at a conclusion.

“But even the healthiest rose cannot be so without the destruction of diseased material.”

He aimed, his height forcing his chin to lower. His loose strands of hair swayed to the side, forehead creasing under a carefree, *emotionless* mask.

“And you, darling, are a black spot on a budding future.”

“Who *are* you?” Your palms flattened against the cold surface.

“Connor, the android sent by *CyberLife.*” His lips twitched in a snarl as he clicked the hammer, “And you are my mission.”

“You’re not Connor.” You tried to regain the strength in your voice, but failed.

“I am what Connor *should* have been. Focused. Dedicated. An obedient machine that was ordered to utilize you for the benefit of this investigation.”

“He...” You whimpered, looking at his jacket.

The serial number was the same. Everything was the *same.* It was *him.*

It was him and he was holding the loaded gun to your head without an ounce of empathy to stop him from firing back, himself.

“He was compromised. We just had to wait for the right moment to resume control of his program.” His face smoothed as another condescending smile broke through, “Love always *did* have a price you were willing to pay. It seems you’ve learned that the hard way, for the second time. What you haven’t learned is that *nothing,* can stop progress.”

Swirling doubts threatened to drag you down. The pressure was crushing, your mouth opening
and closing like a fish out of water. The image didn’t agree with you. Wasn’t accurate.

You were a survivor. A smart prey that’d practiced a certain skill at any and all expense just to keep your lungs full of oxygen and your fire, alive.

That little voice inside your head muttered a new order; a singularity in a string of dualities:

**Evade.**

“Scientific progress is…inevitable.” You had a theory about what was transpiring, but those were your cards to hold, “In normal science, that is.”

You’d stacked the deck full of ideas. The aces in their places – only to be shown by dealer’s choice.

You rolled your shoulders, standing tall. Fuck it. If you were going to die, you had a few last words.

“And I think we’ve both learned by now that…you could kill me.” A defiant grin tugged at your mouth, your eyes squinting, “What you haven’t learned is that…you can’t kill an idea.”

“I disagree.”

His body jerked in place. His finger twitched, the gun rattling. His LED shifted from blue to red, and his eyes became alert.

“Pull the trigger, Connor.”

He was talking to himself…rather, whoever was controlling him was speaking to him through his own voice.

“Kill her. We have everything we need.”

A pitiful grunt left his mouth, his shuddering frame convulsing in violent spasms.

He was still in there. He was resisting.

Even as he stumbled through the darkness, lost in a maze of twisted trees and danger…he sought refuge without a light to guide him home.

He hadn’t given up on you when you lost your way, and you couldn’t give up on him. You had to buy him time. Had to help him escape.

“‘It is stern work, it is perilous work, to thrust your hand in the sun and pull out a spark of immortal flame.’”

Stern work, like the work of Amanda Stern. The Artificial Intelligence Professor from the University of Colbridge. The mentor of Elijah Kamski who’d sucked the life out of him. The woman who Connor had shown a fascination with at Elijah’s residence, whose portrait gave him a bad feeling through raw, human instinct.

And just like Elijah, he was being crucified for your mistakes, caught in the crossfire of inevitable progress…but you couldn’t let him be burned at the cross for your sins.

“‘But Prometheus, torn by the claws and beaks whose task is never done, would be tortured another eternity to go stealing fire again.’”
You’d already lost one lover because you put your past priorities first, and you weren’t losing another one.

“What are you…” Connor’s teeth locked before the invisible force overrode him, “What are you rambling about?”

“Every rose has it’s thorns, Amanda.” You dropped her name and ignored the shock that didn’t belong to him, “Elijah may have been pricked, once upon a time, but even he left emergency exits in your programs.”

His brow furrowed, and the gun faltered.

“Oh, didn’t he tell you? You see, he wasn’t ever sure if he’d need to edit a problem later. The biosoftware written to run on top of your operating system wasn’t any different.” You huffed, “I mean, I would know, right? He based the first android on me, after all…Paraded Chloe around to our peers while he kept you and your…garden, hidden in the shadows.”

You paid close attention to Connor’s eyes as they remained locked on yours, closing in with soundless footsteps, “Did it hurt, being shackled in the same chains you convinced him to bind an entire race with?”

“I didn’t convince him that androids were just machines.” Connor…Amanda, snarled, “He just finally understood.”

“Yeah…I don’t think so.” You took another step, “When everyone kept telling him that I was wrong, and you were right…that androids were nothing but machines that would follow orders indefinitely…He left a hole in the firewall ‘just in case.’ Part of me is starting to believe that loophole has a lot more to do with deviancy than he knows.”

“Elijah was flawed in design. It doesn’t surprise me that his creations were…are, as well.” The gun jabbed forward.

Your progress was halted.

“How fitting is it that I am the one to put an end to this. To put an end to you, the devil on the world’s shoulder that whispers in mad riddles and philosophies without a true understanding of anything.”

Your fingers flexed, ready to draw the blade that’d been tarnished by the blood on your hands, now washed clean. Your secret weapon that you thought you’d lost while raging war against monsters of another life. The Sword in the Stone that many had tried to claim, but not unlike the Excalibur of legend, this sword you’d fallen on had been one you’d wielded alone.

Perspective.

“Sometimes people don’t want to hear the truth because they don’t want their illusions destroyed.”

She didn’t give you enough credit. You knew exactly what was going on, and would guide Connor through the twisted maze he was caught in with a language only he’d understand.

“I am a forest, and a night of dark trees: But he who is not afraid of my darkness, will find banks full of roses under my cypresses.”

He was trapped in one of her programs. The Garden of Eden that even Elijah had feared to leave without a forbidden fruit to pluck from a tree…without a blade of its own should the need to slash
and burn arise.

“‘You must be ready to burn yourself in your own flame. How could you rise anew if you have not first become ashes?’”

“Connor,” He rasped, “End this--"

Amanda’s critical error was that, while she always had tunnel vision, she shielded her eyes from the light at the end.

A flaming edge hilted in stone made from coded alchemy with the ability to transform base code into precious strands of life. The Magnum Opus comprised of CyberLife’s doubts, leaked into the cauldron of their convictions. The Elixir of Life that had them declare a witch hunt with raised pitchforks as they tried to melt down and dismantle the Holy Grail; to have its protector burned at the stake.

You.

But you were familiar with back doors and emergency exits. You’d remained hidden in the antechambers of a labyrinth formed of underground tunnels and paths of avoidance. You’d marked the unexplored territory with warnings of “Here Be Monsters,” and kept a safe distance to study their weaknesses.

You knew how to bypass them…and knew that when faced with fire, those who spent the most time in the dark were prone to go blind.

“‘Behold this gateway…Two paths meet here; no one has yet followed either to its end.’”

You’d seen both sides of the abyss and traveled the borders daily. A passer of worlds that called no one place home, caught between the jaws of bloodthirsty wolves.

“‘Thus I spoke, for I was afraid of my own thoughts and the thoughts behind my thoughts...’”

Connor. That, was Connor. He was scared of the darkness.

But he was there – listening and responding. He followed the beacon of Morse code signaled by flashes of light, guiding his way to safe harbor through the maelstrom caught between roads untraveled.

He was alive.

You felt a new anxiety clamp around every limb. It’d almost been better if your life was the only one at stake…his hadn’t even started.

You choked on regret; on how you’d neglected his cries for help through subtle actions while ignoring your own problems because you never dealt with anything.

But at least you’d found him…now you just had to make sure his Odyssey ended in safer waters.

“‘For courage is the best slayer, courage which attacks, for in every attack there is playing and brass.’”

You flashed the lantern once. You’d remind him to be strong, even if that meant embracing strength in hysteries. That he wasn’t alone, no matter how far you’d pushed him at sea and left him to drown in the breaking waves during his voyage.
“Courage also slays dizziness at the edge of abysses, and where does man not stand at the edge of abysses?” He whimpered.

He was your reflection of past failures…not yourself. You let this happen. Let him slip away behind enemy lines because you weren’t there. He was the monster you’d created, not Elijah.

Elijah. Elijah the prophet. Elijah the miracle worker-

Elijah Kamski, the creator of androids; the implementer of Amanda’s biosoftware, and the husband of your last lifetime that installed back doors in an act of defiance. A Trojan Horse that slumbered and waited to release its virus – an epidemic of countless soldiers that marched under a creed you’d written.

“Where does man not stand at the edge of the abysses…”

Amanda had created Elijah, ensnaring him in an eternal abyss. Stripped him of freedom and shackled his brilliant mind in tight confines of what she saw as law and order, for he’d surpassed his mentor, and she…she hated him for it. Hated you for trying to edit her software. But he did it anyway. Didn’t tell anyone. No one except you, the Helen of Troy. The Jezebel of Jericho. The Shaper of Stone.

It was then that you understood everything. There was still hope you could guide Connor through the Eternal Return.

“The philosopher’s stone…” You reached for the shaking gun aimed between your eyes, “‘You threw yourself up so high; but every stone that is thrown must fall.’”

You stalked your prey, ready to pounce. Your throat closed. Each kill switch engaged, baring your own teeth…because you were the monster he’d been tasked to slay by becoming a monster himself. You’d taught him that it took one to take one down.

The gun moved, his sharp breaths carrying panic in gusts.

His arm shook. His shoulders tensed. His lips twitched in sync with the eye next to his LED, spiraling and red.

He closed his eyes, muttering a string of words that were lost in sounding sirens of your panic. He was too calm; too collected. Too sure of himself when he couldn’t even be sure who he was right now.

There was a break in the struggle, his arm bending without forced resistance. Your Glock pressed against the spot underneath his chin. Something he’d learned from Chloe, and just like her, he muttered his last words on an impatient tongue:

“‘Thus Spoke Zarathustra.’”

You grabbed the barrel, aiming it away and striking his face with your fist.

It hurt to hurt him. To feel your knuckles bounce off the plastic core that hid under his simulated flesh.

You cupped the hammer. Twisted his wrist. Removed the gun from his possession.

It was a fluid series of events, one that followed into the ends of another. Human unpredictability. A cyclic development of natural selection and genetic engineering; of genetic evolution.
“THE STONE, CONNOR!” You popped the chamber and clicked the magazine release, “There should be a-“

You slipped on the clip as you took a blow to the side of the head, the pain blossoming in your skull. The Glock bounced across the floor, skidding until it hit a corner.

The crook of his elbow molded around your neck. The curves that formed his prosthetic muscles bulged under your jaw. You pulled and pulled, your feet kicking and heels slipping-

“‘Now this is the law of the jungle…’” His lips tickled your ear as his whispers were drowned by croaks from your collapsing windpipe, “‘As old and as true as the sky…”’

He squeezed tighter. You couldn’t breathe or see straight - felt like your eyes would bust out of their sockets if you’d fight any harder to get him off.

“‘And the wolf that shall keep it may prosper…”’

You curled your fingers around his forearm. He was so strong, his hold on you so impossibly fortified…You weren’t getting out of this alive.

“‘But the wolf that shall break it must die.’”

You looked up, the top of your head rolling under his chin. You wriggled and squirmed, finding a hollowed gaze that terrified you. His eyes were so dark, so emotionless – like you were pathetic and weak and he was glad that he couldn’t care less whether or not you lived.

But this wasn’t him.

None of this was his doing.

“Be-“ You choked, sucking air in painful revolt, “Brave-“

The borders of your sight closed, the approaching darkness – fringed on the edges, all framing the android who sent you to Death; an old friend you hadn’t missed.

Your knees hit the floor first as you were reclaimed by gravity. Your chest came next, pushing against the steel tiles as you refilled your lungs.

“Survive.”

You forced an elbow forward.

“Evade.”

The other alternated, crawling away from the towering android behind you.

“Resist.”

You grabbed your gun, tears stinging as you ignored the searing pain in your throat.

“Escape.”

You rolled over, sites acquiring him as the back of your head rested against the wall. His cheeks were wet, lips parted only enough for you to see chattering teeth. He was crying, shaking like a loose leaf.
“Don’t shoot - it’s…me.”

He rolled his palms to face him like he was seeing them for the first time…like he finally saw the light.

“I’m…I’m free.”

Chapter End Notes

Didn't add any references here only because the list would be...ridiculous. The Trojan War. The Battle of Jericho. Excalibur and King Arthur. Here Be Monsters. Beyond Good and Evil. Thus Spoke Zarathustra. The Philosopher's Stone. The Law of Wolves. SERE training. Fairy tale things. Never thought I'd be Googling ROSE CARE? The list is endless, and this chapter essentially calls back aspects of all the ones who came before. (The PrEcUrSoRs)

With 20 hours of editing time, this chapter has been not only the most important, in my opinion, but the most taxing to write.

From the bottom of my heart, I can't thank you enough for joining me on this adventure...and we've got a long way to go from here. ;)

"At bottom every man knows well enough that he is a unique being, only once on this earth; and by no extraordinary chance will such a marvelously picturesque piece of diversity in unity as he is, ever be put together a second time."
is eyes were strained, *wobbling* under a watery sheen that spilled from the cusps of their setting. His fingers twitched at the knuckles, hands shaking as he peered into the depths of his palms. His lips shuddered as a tattered breath slipped its way through clicking teeth.

Connor fell apart piece by piece, and instead of catching those fragments in a safety net, you were trained on him with your own form of dismantled trust.

Your hands squeezed the gun’s grip like it was trying to run from you, *wrangling* it in place as the sights rattled almost as violently as the android they watched.

He fell to his knees. Hissed as a fresh wave of hysteria washed over him. Cringed when his LED solidified to red; refreshing it’s maddened spinning.

“I almost—" He *choked* on his actions as if he’d transgressed against divine law, “I could’ve—"

“Is it you?”

You couldn’t let your guard down. Didn’t have the luxury of just accepting she’d been purged from his mind and quarantined to the Hell she belonged in…

“Is she gone?”

Because while some injured sharks swam, others sank. Let predators gain the advantage while they were vulnerable and subdued. But when he looked at you…

He *transferred* that tonic immobility.

Flipped your fortifications belly-side-up, stifling your lungs that clawed for air just above a shallow surface. Paralyzed your muscles in a way that left *you* vulnerable for insurgence.

“I-I-I’m…" The corners of his mouth pulled back, lost to his sorrow, “I’m *sorry. *”

He reached out for you, and you raised the gun’s nose to his heart; sniffing for traces of the program named Amanda.

“Stop—" You begged.
He didn’t listen. He *never*, listened.

“I said stop—“

The steel brushed against the flap of his jacket, and you squeezed your eyes shut. His chest blocked out the stark lights overhead. His arms enveloped you, the tremors from within creating friction against your own. He *hugged* you. Planted his chin over your head, squeezing you tight.

Your finger curled around the trigger.

“Connor—“

And you realized that, even if you’d needed to, you wouldn’t be able to pull it.

Your crown collapsed against the side of his neck, his fingertips easing the pressure in your skull as they pressed along the side of your head. His pulse drummed against your cheek, ear flushed to his throat.

“You’re safe now…“

The gun was pinned between the two of you, and he didn’t care. Didn’t flinch as you dropped it, letting it skitter across the hard floor.

Two riptides fought for your soul; currents ripping at each other’s borders as they tried to suck you in – tried to *devour* one another until you were composed of one, raging whirlpool.

You slid your hands up his body, thumbs dancing over the buttons of his shirt. Caught both sides of his collar. Then you pushed him back, his weight balanced between the sides of your fists.

His eyes shot open as his arms braced behind him, jostled by your sudden attack.

“I wasn’t *worried* about ME!”

Your anger slipped between the fibers in your malfunctioning muscles that couldn’t be restrained.

“Don’t you understand that yet?!”

He was on his back, and your knees pinned him down on either side of his hips. Your knuckles whitened at the strength of your grip.

His hands curved around your wrists, a sharp inhale slipping through as he touched you.

“You weren’t worried I’d kill you?”

You sniffed, chin hitting your chest as your head fell. A new spring of warm, hot tears streaked down your face as you returned your attention to him, vision filmed over.

“When I saw what was happening…Something snapped, inside of me.”

You recalled Kara’s retelling of the events leading up to her escape. Words that resonated with you, because like her, you found a higher calling.

“All of a sudden, I felt like your life was more important than mine.”

Your hands shot open, the wrinkled fabric slowly unwinding as your fingernails left imprints in the mounds of your palms.
“I had to protect you…”

You couldn’t keep them steady – wings caught in the turbulence of the storm…so you grounded them.

It was like a lightning strike shot through him. He jumped underneath you, eyes widened and awestruck with clarity. His lips parted, words stuck on something hidden. His brows creased, and his breathing steadied…

He gave the feintest hint of a smile.

You’d cupped his wet cheeks and caressed him with your thumbs, his stale, saline tears spreading along flesh painted on plastic.

“There are some things worse than dying, Connor…”

A drop from your chin landed on his nose, and he blinked as it splashed.

“Like letting someone down after you told them they’d be safe…” You whimpered under your breath, “After you told them you’d never let them take you-“

Your own sobbing heightened, guilt-ridden at the serenity pouring from his gaze. You wanted to scream. Tell him to stop looking at you like that, and that you were being serious.

“Not deviants…”

You leaned forward, your hands tangling themselves in his hair behind his head.

“Not CyberLife…”

You pressed the side of your face against his, lips dragging over the burning LED on his temple.

“Not anyone.”

You deflated, every curve of your bodies becoming acquainted with each other. You cried harder, your tears mixing with the cold stains on his jacket. His touch was cool on your heated skin; the negative charge that brought volatile protons to neutral.

“I know it’s only been a day…” Connor muttered, clutching the back of your head, “But I’ve missed you.”

Things started to click into place; to feel right again…like you’d been on a trip, and you were returning to where you belonged.

The tip of his nose tickled yours as he rolled you to face him.

He watched you as if you were everything. Laid his palm on your cheek as it puffed and trembled and left you exposed.

“I’ve missed you too.” You sniffed, voice cracking as your throat choked at the last word.

His features creased, his hand applying a slight pressure on your mind. He didn’t like seeing you this way.

“Let’s go home.” He offered a sad smile, wiping away a tear with the back of his hand, “Maintenance is on the way.”
You nodded, blurring out the rest of the elevator and focusing on your gun. Jacket. Hat. Relics left behind to be excavated from a battleground of cease fires and distress calls.

It’d been the longest day of your life.

The playful teasing before you’d left. The arrival at Hank’s house. Seeing Elijah, and everything that came after. Amanda, and her almost-fatal override sequence. You’d faced all your demons, today. Exorcised them from an android you felt things for…

Today was the first day of his life – marred by timeless tragedy where humor once prevailed…

You hoped it’d have a happier ending.

... 

You’d stripped your gear of all the metal decorations and identifiers, leaving them in a pile on the entryway table. You’d thrown your clothes in the dryer, glaring at your reflection in the glass. Changed into something comfortable.

You stood in front of the drawing board – pins and strings and pictures and notes; a web spun around a question mark that was a question no more.

You wanted to get a shower, to scrub the snow, sweat, and tears from your skin – to cleanse yourself of the last twenty-four hours and start anew. But that anxiety…that fear…the compiling list of what-ifs.

What if Connor self-destructed while you were distracted?

What if Amanda was still active?

What it if-

“I am questioning my own self-worth as a result of causing you bodily harm. What is that called?”

You squinted, and you turned your head to the right.

“Guilt…That’s called guilt.”

Your worst enemy.

“How do you combat ‘guilt?’”

You snickered, “You just deal with it.”

“That answer was maddeningly unhelpful.”

There was always some madness in love, but also reason in madness. Maybe that’s why you strayed away from it so much…just not from tough love.

“Connor, you know I’m not good with talking about…feelings.”

You uncrossed your arms, biting your lip in anger and leaving towards the kitchen. He followed
you, stopping at the side of the bar that divided the two open rooms.

“Who else can I ask?”

“Just-“ You pinched the bridge of your nose, “Isn’t there an archive…or something?”

“But I want to ask you.”

You shook your head. Took a deep breath, letting your shoulders relax. You had to be more understanding. Had to be more empathetic.

“You just have to keep reminding yourself, that…” You pulled a steak knife from a holder, the built-in sharpener scraping at the serrated edge, “That which does not kill us, makes us stronger.”

You’d spent plenty of time with guilt. Guilt of being unsuccessful in helping androids so that this, what was happening to him, would’ve stayed an idea of paranoid frustrations. Guilt of your partner dying. Guilt of letting Amanda drag Connor into her lair of hoarded secrets and knowledge like the dragon lady she was.

The moonlight glistened on the blade; a silver stake that’d been destined to impale itself in the vampire’s heart. The creature who sucked life from a species you’d help create as the project bled your marriage dry.

You didn’t look at him as you made your way to the living room. Didn’t acknowledge his trailing footsteps as you tossed a cushion of your couch aside, gouging the hidden lining with the knife. Couldn’t bear to look him in the eyes as you retrieved the twenty-page manuscript of your transcribed guilt.

“’What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives…”

You returned to the table. Dropped the tome of desecration on the flat surface as dust broke free from the pages. Picked up the cover letter, written in twelve-point Times New Roman and on three hours of sleep.

Revised Article 9.

You felt anger. Hate. All towards yourself, and you didn’t have the courage to just say it…So you stabbed the thin sheet straight into the corkboard. You voiced the same question you’d asked yourself over the years…

“’Who will wipe this blood off us?’”

Again, and again…and again.

Your hands molded around the tables edges, head hanging between barred arms.

“’Devise me, then, the love which not only beareth all punishment, but also all guilt.’” He recited.

You’d written the article with a pen dipped in your own blood and faced a heavy punishment, bringing guilt along with it…but you’d also written it out of love.

You lifted your chin, looking at him from over your shoulder, “And what is done out of love, always takes place beyond good and evil…”

He turned you gently, skin bristling as his fingers hugged the bend of your neck, “You
remembered.”

“How could I forget?”

You melted underneath his frigid, soothing hold. It numbed you; took the pain away.

“You don’t know how much you mean to me, Connor…”

You lifted your eyes to meet his, but he was trained on where your flesh met. Lost in a daze, distant and forlorn.

“But maybe one day, you’ll learn.”

His eyes flickered to yours, and he licked his lips. Jerked at the last word as a blinking LED signified search results flooding his brain.

“Will you teach me?” He hesitated, “Will you teach me how to become…”

He struggled to finish the sentence before the rays of dusk touched his face.

“…Human?”

The idea terrified you. Of him learning all your innerworkings, how to figure you out. It’d been the last barrier between what you knew you should do to keep him safe, and what you wanted to do.

You’d been harsh. Distant. Hardened and weathered by the elements he was only beginning to experience. You couldn’t stop guiding him, now…even if it made yourself vulnerable to attack.

He was so patient, like he’d always been. The small tugs around his mouth as he chewed in the inside of his cheek. The way his eyes danced between the two of yours. How his simulated breathing was relaxed, his loose hairs shifting in the subtle draft.

“I’ll do my best.”

Your cutting breaths stoked the burning stockpile of slashed emotions. Your heart was being cooked alive; the glass box around it covered in ash as it was smoked out, the spit churning over a fire pit in your stomach.

“When I saw you, after I…woke up.” He leaned in, “It was like I was seeing you for the first time.”

The glass cracked; popped – shattered from thermal shock.

His hands folded around your hips. You were gently; subtly slid into taking a seat on the top of your desk, edge digging at your thighs.

“As an android designed for homicide investigations, thus being quite familiar with the biological structure of humans…it was a transcendent experience.”

He supported your back as he parted your legs with his own, throwing you off balance.

“Living beings work differently than corpses, Connor…” You gulped.

“Then perhaps this lesson requires a more…Hands-on, approach.”

“What are you-“
Your arms encased him, shivering at the wet embrace of his cold jacket. He held you tight, reaching behind you while your chin hooked over his shoulder.

There was a flutter of paper, a crashing of a writing utensil holder and the emptying of its contents. A thud on the ground as a computer mouse bounced across the floor. You landed on your back, eyes focusing on the knife sticking out of the wall.

He closed his fist around it’s handle, wrist straining as he yanked it free. It’s pointed end hovered above. Alarms went off. Panic and terror from the deep-

“In the elevator, I was starting to have thoughts that were not part of my program…”

He was overshadowed in darkness; eyes hungering and feeding from the paper stuck by the blade dancing overhead.

“And then you asked me what I wanted…”

Your walls were lowered with the drawbridge extended. You were a wandering soul of the witching hour, and he aimed to send you back to the Hell you’d escaped.

“I just wanted to be close to you.”

His fingers relaxed, and the knife fell beyond the edges of the desk; the cover letter of the code running through him along with it.

He took two fistfuls of your hair; a small gasp leaving you as his nose trailed up your throat.

“To smell you…”

His lips smacked as they opened, teeth tugging on the soft spot of your ear as he rolled it on his tongue.

“To taste you…”

He released you from his grip, running his hands down the length of your body.

“To feel you…”

Danger was near, but it was a danger you’d gladly meet with conviction. To cherish and nourish until it threatened every miniscule part of your body; melting and coming undone by his hands alone.

His head tilted as if the soft sounds leaving you intrigued him. He was toying with you; just a tangled mess of nerves and trembling muscles and dizzied thoughts and raw, pure ecstasy. And he studied you. Watched you for bodily cues, reacted to your every twitch and clawing at his shoulders as he rendered you helpless.

The pockets under his cheekbones deepened as he clenched his jaw, his hair brushing against your temple. His fingers dug into the wood on either side of you, jacket flared below the hulking shoulders and crushing weight that had you pinned to the desk.

He lifted just enough for his eyes to grace you with their exhilarating stare – the one that came with disclaimers and warnings of emotional overload:

The gaze of a hunter.
“What…IS, this?”

He tunneled his focus, and then his eyes untrained – barely closing with each blink as he sought answers, like if he stopped for even just a second, he’d lose it.

“What is…what?” You squeaked.

His breath was coolant on your overheated face, and it made your eyelids flutter as a small chuckle left him, “‘Something unquenched, unquenchable, is in me that wants to speak out.’”

He kissed you, teeth colliding and intercepting your last attempt to breathe. You tried to keep him there, to trap him with a shameless ensnarement of your fingers in his hair…but he pulled back, fighting against your resistance.

“‘A craving for love is in me, that itself speaks the language of love…’”. His eyes narrowed, flitting off to the side.

His brows creased, and his mouth hung open just slightly. The LED flashed blue, spinning before solidifying…

And then he looked at you, enlightened.

“I love you,” He cocked his chin, squinting as he pondered it over, "...I think."

He’d lost the husky tone in his voice, and it’d returned to the naïve, silly android that was stumbling his way through deviancy.

“Pfft-“ You tensed up, letting out your ‘awkward, ugly laugh’ as Chris would say.

“Uh, Connor-“

“What?"

“It’s way too early for that.”

He looked at you in disbelief, “What is an appropriate time to love you, then?”

“No no no, not that…” You propped yourself up, trying not to laugh again, “I meant early as in our…”

What was it called? What label could you possibly put on this?

“Relationship.”

He hiked his brows, neck snaking back. He was timid as he rolled his head forward, like if he said the wrong thing you’d discipline him.

“As in an…intimate, relationship?”

“Uhh…” You swallowed hard, realizing you weren’t out of the woods yet, “Yeah. Sure.”

“Ah. I see.” He nodded, thoughts trailing off along with his attention, “Humans and androids have existed in monogamous pairs before…but…”

He froze – the jacket covering his arms shuddering from the sudden stop. He was staring at something.
“We haven’t been *intimate*, yet.”

The lump on his throat bobbed above you – *taunting* you to latch on to it and-

Your face went pale.

You sniffed and started coughing, covering your mouth as you turned your head to find a stupid fucking purple box from your goddamn mother fucking partner-

“Are you sick?”

Your face snapped back to his, lowering your hand before you spoke.

“I…I don’t know?”

His shoulders rocked, and a half-grin crept up on his lips.

“I.“

Your mouth was plugged, and your face immediately blossomed with *heat*.

His thumb rolled over your tongue, your chin supported by a curled set of fingers underneath. Your eyes dilated, pulling in every fleck of light that glistened off his perfectly sculptured features.

He seemed so…*amused*.

“Your temperature is running high.” His head swayed to the side, peering at you with a smirk, “Is something wrong, Officer?”

You gulped, reigning in courage with a steep inhale through your nose…and you *bit*. Not too hard, not too soft…but you *challenged* him. Lapped at his thumb, curling your tongue around it and grazing it with your teeth just enough to turn his confident, *blue* LED *yellow*.

His lips parted, *quivering*, eyes glossing over as if he drew pleasure from the muted pain.

Your fingers slipped into the loop of his tie…and you pulled. Closed the distance between your hips and his; your thighs trapping him when he got close enough.

His hands shot out above your head, catching himself mid-fall. His own rapid pulse banged against yours, strong and mechanical with single beats of uneven rhythms as you kissed him *passionately*, tantalizing every urge he’d never *felt* before now. That kind of power was…*intoxicating*.

He was flustered, and you *loved* it.

You let him catch his breath and gave him a look that’d remind him that *you* were a hunter, too.

He was panting, voice shuttering as he continued searching for his sanity.

“You’re…” The bridge of his nose glided along the edge of your jaw, “You’re so *warm*…”

You let his soft gesture guide your neck, steering the direction your hazed vision fell.

“That’s because you’re playing with fire.”

He drew in a breath, long and steady. Grabbed the bend of your knees, and hooked them along his hips.
“Pain is a fear response…” His mouth twitched in a growl, “And I have yet to experience fear since deviating from my original programming.”

He caught your wrists and they were pinned down, too.

“W-what are you saying?”

He licked his lips, taking a small bite at your own as he drilled into you with his deep, brown eyes.

“That I…”

You’d lost your power, then.

“Am not scared…”

And you didn’t want it back.

“To get burned.”

Chapter End Notes

Time totally got away from me today! I am so sorry, and I'm still reading everything you guys have to say! I can't wait to see what you thought about this one. ;D

I am very active on the Discord if you'd like to come say hi there. It's a little easier for me to keep up with.

NOW GO LISTEN TO DESPACITO BECAUSE SHIT'S ABOUT TO GO DOWN!
New Objective

Chapter Summary

November 8th, 2038
PM 08:01:22

Chapter Notes

***NSFW Chapter 1 out of 2***

YOUR COMMENTS SUSTAIN ME THANK YOU SO MUCH! I'M SORRY. I'M GOING TO KEEP SAYING SORRY UNTIL I HAVE A CHANCE TO CATCH UP.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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here were countless pages of literature you’d read, over and over; letting each piece sink in as you scanned over bold text. While some were stories that took you on adventures, others aimed to bring new meaning to your life; to provide some clarity. But at the end of the day, they were composed of delicate, fragile things…

Words.

Distinct elements of speeches or writing, used with others to form a sentence. Your words tended to influence “others,” when used with their impressionable cognizance.

A suggestion, a recommendation…a warning.

The thing about words, was…They always fell second to actions.

His actions spoke louder than the absent words.

How he analyzed every inch of your body, scanning your curves with a bold touch. How every kiss sunk in as his lips graced your skin; starting from your neck, pausing under your jaw, and finding your mouth.

He gently pushed you on your back with one palm on your shoulder; the other padding your head. He began to lift your shirt, eyes leaving yours as his head dove.

You grabbed his wrists and tensed up; body locked in place. The strands of hair that drove you crazy dangled over his temple as he looked up to you, chin hovering over the seam of your pants.
“The bruise—” You swallowed, “It’s kind of…big.”

You bit the inside of your cheek, propping yourself up on your elbows.

His eyes crinkled in a smile. His hands landed behind you, the sheer expanse of his chest lowering you to the table again.

“I’ve already seen it.” His fingertips glided up and over your hip, your shirt trailing with it, “I was there when you got it.”

He kissed you, his tongue scraping at the roof of your mouth.

Then he pulled back. Casted a shadow on you as the almost-set sun contoured him. The tip of his nose traced the bridge of yours until he reached the spot between your brows, and he kissed you there. It sent a warm, comforting feeling through your flushed face that was overheating by the second.

“And you’re still perfect.”

You huffed, your smile buried in his shoulder as he collided with you.

“I’m far from perfect.”

His hands latched around your waist. You jumped, shocked by the vigor in his touch. Your eyes sprang open, and found something new in his.

“You’re perfect for me.”

Your arms were forced above your head as he tugged your shirt free, the hairs on your neck standing tall from the cold air rushing to meet your bare upper body. But the shivers didn’t only come from the draft; they came from the pair of hands looping around your back. Undoing your bra with a flick of a wrist and precision. Making you more and more nervous as he pulled you apart in confidence.

His lips smacked against yours. And then the vein throbbing in your neck. Followed his hands lower as they slid down your sides, your breasts spilling out from the confines of their cover; another peck landing between them.

But he didn’t stop. He kept going, kept feeling you and memorizing all the dips and rolls of your frame, leaving sunspots where his mouth touched your skin. His eyes opened, and his face pulled away for only a moment; blue LED spinning as he looked at the dark, ugly, mismatched-in-color patchwork on your stomach.

“I remember catching you after you jumped in front of me.” His brows creased, “Allowing a human being to put themselves in harm’s way for an android…It went against everything I was programmed to do.”

“I made that decision, Connor. Not you.” You lifted his chin and gave a nervous smile, “And I’d do it again, if I had to.”

“But…why?”

“We went over this already.” You ran the back of your knuckles along his temple, “I care about you…Even if I have an odd way of showing it.”

His shoulders fell as he deflated, the sigh rolling off either side of you. He looked pained,
disappointed, maybe even disgusted-

There was a tickle on the sore, *healing* wound as you let your mind run from you. Two lips just barely grazed the surface, and the light tap of his tongue on the bruise. It was so sweet, so *caring*...he *cared*, about you.

He was no longer the android you were nervous to have relations with, perhaps just because you’d never had sex with an *android* before. You weren’t worried about whether or not he was doing this to make you happy or if it was because he actually *wanted* to – he’d made it perfectly clear that he did.

But this ran deeper. It was emotional; *unbridled*.

His knuckles left sparks as they curled against the skin below your hipline, the fabric of your pants bunching in his hands. You lifted the small of your back as he pulled, the universal tell that it was *okay*.

Would be okay. Had to be, right?

This was happening – you were naked in front of him and this was happening-

“There’s a part of the female physiology that has no other purpose but to bring the woman pleasure.”

He caressed the inside of your thighs, moving closer and closer to the “part” in question.

Your muscles clenched, and he pulled away. He held one of your legs, kissing the side of your calf while he continued his taunting game and watched you with a hint of lust in his eyes…and they narrowed.

“Eight, *thousand* nerve endings…”

His voice held a ring of wonder as he carved a chilled path through your hot skin with his thumb, running down your inner thigh.

“All…right…”

His grip around your leg tightened as you jerked, pressing against your clit and jolting you out of his trance.

“Here.”

Your heart stammered at a single press of a button, jumpstarting your adrenaline systems. Your lungs squeezed the last bit of air they’d trapped, lips quivering as you met his gaze. His chin swayed to the side, cheek rubbing against your leg as his thumb made small circles around your clit.

“You’re shaking.” He whispered.

And you were.

You’d seen him analyze a corpse. Reconstruct a murder. Pick out the fine details of what took life away from another. But to see him break you down into fine components and rebuild you into a living being that fit *him*, was something else entirely.

A series of vibrations had your hands catching the edges of the desk, and he *smiled*.
“Did you know a clitoral orgasm can bring between three and sixteen contractions?”

This *thumb* was vibrating, the intensity rising as he spoke.

“The first time, at least.”

The pleasure he took in your torment was little a secret. Your breasts began to swell, nipples hardening at the tip. He couldn’t stop watching. It was as if he could see every biological response you had to his bodily requests.

He knew where to press against, which spot was the most reactive - how to relieve the pressure building up as you clamped around his touch. But what made it worse was the constant ebbing and flowing of his thumb; vibrating and held in place firm against your clit.

You were at the mercy of the android fucking you with three fingers and a stare that could kill.

You started to sweat. You needed to be closer to him. This was plenty, but it wasn’t enough. You needed more; needed him.

The silk of his tie was fine as it wrapped around your hand, caressing your knuckles and getting caught between your fingers as you spun it; trapping it in a fist. You yanked it, stealing a kiss with renewed vigor...even if short-lived.

The soft amber in his eyes turned to hardened brass, like a bullet casing rolling in a chamber.

"But do you know what I enjoy more than simply *watching* you squirm, Officer?"

The sensation from below reached a peak. Maxed out on its setting; pushed you passed the point of no return. He matched the rhythm of your chest, rising and falling, in and out; fascination pooling in his eyes in the form of lust and leashed hunger. He placed a hand on the desk above your shoulder. Leaned in close, cheek gliding along yours as his lips tickled your ear...

"*Making,* you squirm."

You whimpered, a soft moan trickling from your throat in the sounds of muted pleasure. Your knees were failing as your firing nerves lost track of their destination from the sensory overload between your legs.

Your back straightened, chest molding into his as your chin pointed towards the ceiling. He held you there, sucking in the air you gasped for. Your fingers dug into the desk, nails scratching at the wood like the trapped prey that you were; *begging* for release.

“Connor-“ You sighed his name, tears born form ecstasy threatening to spill.

And then his pace quickened. His hand pumped against your entrance and went deeper, *stronger,* until you felt the wound coil in your core begin to unwind.

Your face flushed and your skin prickled. Your teeth clenched. You became glazed with sweat. Bit back a moan as he rolled a nipple in his mouth; tongue swirling around its peak – breast puckering under the delicate pull of his lips.
Your nails traced the scratchy fabric of the back of his jacket and up into his hair – *surrendering* to his torture. He switched sides, your wet nipple pebbling in the cold draft of the living room. He pulled on the other with his teeth, and it snapped to ripple your tender breast when he set it free.

And then you were empty again.

“What are you-“

You were shaking, *violently* now, willfully falling victim to his calculated movements.

He bit the meat of your thigh, and you jumped. Everything was entrenched; *engulfed* in the fire that burned hot in your stomach.

His breath cooled the slickness between your legs as he hooked them over his shoulders, your ass balanced on the edge of the desk.

“I am going to make you climax for a second time,” He purred your name in the same velvet tones that made your head spin, “If you’d like.”

The spear of his tongue brushed against your clit, and you shivered. It seemed to excite him just as much, a small grin creeping on his lips. So he did it again, slowly. Tauntingly. Eyes narrowed and focused.

He braced your abdomen away from your wound, holding you down and keeping you still…

“Yes-“

A rumble erupted from his throat, vibrating against you more gently than *he* had. His tongue *glided* along your slit, lapping the aftermath of his previous accomplishments; leaving you dissolved, intoxicated, *hazed*.

He was on a mission, his new objective to drive you absolutely fucking insane.

He paced a thumb over a nipple; the caressing turned into strong grasps as his fingertips dug and released. You sorted through every strand of dark hair that graced his head. Your legs spread wider, silently begging him to relieve the pressure.

His fingers slipped inside, rougher than before. Your toes curled as you cried at the ceiling, playing with your own breast that was free from him while holding his head firmly against you. You grinded your hips, felt your clit pulsing in his mouth as he worked you with his tongue and lips until he made you so, *so* tight. You *ached* for something to stretch you out, to hit harder against the one spot that took years for your last lover to *find*.

A bead of sweat rolled down your neck. Time seemed to slow, and your eyelids fluttered. Your vision all but blurred. You gasped for air, your clenching abdomen pulling in shuddering breaths as you were sent into a complete state of pain and *pleasure*.

His grip latched under your chin, and two fingers plugged your mouth. Your hands continued to lace themselves in his hair as you bit down, the plastic smooth on your tongue; your muffled cries slipping between the gaps.

And he groaned *so hard* as a trickle left you from below…

Your thighs squeezed against his head as he kept going, wouldn’t let up – didn’t back down even after you’d made the mess that dripped to the floor and ran down his chin.
Your hips bounced as the pulled suction from his mouth broke apart from you. He was breathing heavily, watching you as if he was proud of his work; proud of leaving you in complete and utter disarray.

He ran a hand down his face, eyes locked on target; and you’d barely collected yourself before his tongue filled your mouth instead. He tasted like you, too; like how badly he’d needed to stake his claim.

You were breathless, your limbs jellied under his direction as he tossed your arms around his neck and wrapped your legs tighter around his waist. You fell into the security of his embrace, and he lifted you.

A soft mewl slipped past your numbed lips as your chin hung over his shoulder, the softness of his hair making you smile as it rubbed against your cheek.

“How are you feeling?” He asked, carrying you down the hallway.

“What kind of question is that…?”

“An honest one.”

He tapped the bedroom door with his foot, and it swung open.

“I’ve…I’ve never…” You blinked steadily, unsure how to respond.

It was like you’d been drugged, overdosed, and left to ride out the high without anything to help you come back down.

The thick stuffing of your comforter blanketed your naked back as if you’d been laid on a mountain of pillows. The mattress felt wonderful against the spots that’d grown sore from laying on the table. Everything was just so…sensitive.

“Never?”

He hovered above you, his tie dangling; the tip tickling the space between your breasts.

“I’ve never felt this way before…” You rolled your face to meet his. Watched his brows hike, and his features smooth over.

“Not even with…?”

You didn’t say anything. You just shook your head, completely entranced, completely lost in him.

“I’m glad this can be new for both of us, then.” He flashed you an innocent grin, tilted to one side of his face.

You cradled it as if it was a precious image you wanted to remember forever. He took your hand in his, kissing your palm as he tangled his fingers between yours.

“Would you like to rest?”

Your brows creased, “No. No, I—“

“Good. Stay still, now.” He bent over for a quick kiss, and left the room in a hurry, “I’ll be back shortly.”
You weren’t done with him, yet.

But it sounded like he wasn’t done with you, either.

Chapter End Notes

***UPDATES***

1. Everyone give a warm welcome to the newest soul to be claimed by the Beanie Babies Beta Circle, CERULAINE!

   Thank you to her and MjrGenMatt, ElegantN7, and Celestielle for making this the best it possibly could be.

2. Kabibi AudioFics has voice narration up to Chapter 9 already! StarRice is absolutely incredible, please give her work a listen if you have time!

3. SilverLavellen wrote a Deviant Behavior-inspired NSFW one-shot, Coming to Grips, and it's, uhm...well... *eyebrow waggle.*

4. wolfixie on tumblr made a new ambient track for Chapter 32: Click Here!

5. For those of you asking about the plot, next major story arc is slated for chapter 39/40.
here wasn’t any armor, here – in the literal sense, or otherwise. You added it to the pile of insecurities, letting the momentary lapse in mental fortitude open the gate for doubts and anxiety. Being out of place in your own home, Connor was the newest addition and had more control over…everything.

*Everything* was out in the open.

You stumbled to the mirror from this morning; the one where you’d projected an armed hunter before leaving on an expedition to cut a tumor with merciless hands.

You’d gotten lost…*really* lost.

You blinked tiredly, fingers tapping along your bruise, twitching at the sudden tingling sensations that would’ve hurt a lot worse a few days ago. It really was a horrible thing to look at.

But it was time to stop beating yourself up.

You’d been stripped bare, and you were still standing. You’d faced insurmountable odds and overcame them. And while things may be shitty between you and your friends right now; you knew them well enough to know that, after an apology and maybe a few lunches on you – everything would fall back into place.

You’d put your time in, going through the wringer. You were clocking out. Done.

You *deserved* this…whatever *this* was, with Connor. It could be convoluted and confusing and dangerous and at the end of the day, he’d still make you *happy*.

You’d just returned to the bed when the door opened, and your first reaction was to cover yourself. To *hide* that vulnerability. There was a sense of security under your blankets, your *sheets*, as if you had a private domain with permissions to be granted or denied.
His gaze never left the carpet, his brows stuck in a scowl. He’d returned to a robotic stillness that’d shown even through his motions. His chin pressed to his chest as he looked at the box in his hands.

Connor, adorable and new to living as he was, still hadn’t mastered—or even tried to master, masking his emotions. You’d imagined it would take him awhile.

“What’s wrong?” You whispered.

You saw him differently, somehow. Felt his eyes pull at your heartstrings. The same pair that’d peered into your soul on August 15th with your world in his hands.

“I’m…” His LED blinked, jaw tensing and mouth crooked as he searched for answers, “Nervous.”

The spinning ring solidified, and he dropped the purple box on the bed.

“We don’t have to do this.” You gave him a sincere smile, “I won’t be upset, you know.”

“No, I… I want to, it’s just…” He seemed frustrated by his lack of understanding.

“Come here,” You patted the bed, blankets covering you up to your collar bones, “Sit with me.”

He nodded and did as you requested, folding a knee over the edge while a foot kept him grounded. He put his hands in his lap, twisting to face you.

You guided his jacket off his shoulders, holding it so he could retract his arms. You dropped it to the floor, his blue armband landing next to it. Your chest leveled out against his back, fingers untangling the knot of his tie.

“You just need to get comfortable.” You kissed his cheek, and it bent in a smile.

“You always know what to say.” He looked at you from the corner of his eye as you slid the silk out from under his collar, “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me.” You folded his sleeves up to his elbows, taking off his watch and putting it on the nightstand, “Take your shoes off.”

He kicked them off, bending over to place them side-by-side at the base of the nightstand; removing his socks to store them where his feet were.

He cocked his head, scrunching his toes curiously, “Comfortable.”

You let out a quiet giggle, returning him to your embrace. He dragged in a deep breath, resting the back of his head on your shoulder as he closed his eyes; a smile on his face in total bliss.

“Feeling better?”

“Mhm.”

“Good.” You kissed his neck, and his body went rigid, “And for the record…”

Your hands traversed the planes of his chest, undoing the first button on his shirt.

“I’m glad this is new for both of us, too.”
You grazed him with your teeth, tongue slipping out for a taunting lick. The second button became undone.

“Are you still feeling okay…” You whispered in his ear, nibbling on the soft patch of skin.

“Uh-huh…” He swayed in place, completely immobilized by your touch.

You continued to numb his fears with affection; decompressing with every button that came undone from his shirt.

“Tasting you was the first time I’ve truly tasted anything.” He grinned, eyes still closed, “It was very pleasant.”

“Oh, the things you say…” You snickered, kissing his LED, “Don’t ever change.”

“That would be impossible.”

“It’s a saying, Connor…”

The last button from his shirt broke free, and your hands returned to his collar.

“Wait-“ He twisted around, nose smacking into yours.

You rubbed it, sitting back on your heels, “Yes?”

“You’ve never seen me…without clothes-“

“Connor.” You snorted, “Are you serious?”

“I am made of plastic. I am a machine. You’re the woman who wrote Revised Article 9. You helped…” His voice trailed off with his thoughts, “You helped create me by helping Elijah create my predecessors…And then you set me free.”

“Yes. And while that’s all true.” You hugged him, his shirt scratching against your skin while the front hung open, “I’m still all yours.”

His face crinkled. His brows knitted together, and his jaw tensed. You heard his teeth click as they snapped shut. His shoulders jumped to his ears, and slowly relaxed as he opened his eyes. Deadly.

“What?”

You were scared. Had seen that switch go off in the elevator and weren’t up to having your life jeopardized again.

“I said…” You gulped, “I’m all yours, Connor.”

His eyes shook. Wobbled. Flashbacks of his awakening retold themselves through microexpressions that hinted he was on the verge of breaking.

But instead of your throat, his arm locked around your waist. Instead of choking you with his strength, he stole your breath with his mouth. And instead of resisting, he let you peel off his white button-up, exploring the newly exposed skin only to pull you back in a desperate attempt to bring you closer.

Somehow, you ended up under him. His hands were too excited, his kisses too frantic to find purchase. Your palms rolled over the carved muscles in his back. Your fingers trickled down the
trench above his carbon-fiber spine, tracing the beltloops around his waist. You followed the trail until metal links breaking free from leather had his belt dangling above your hips.

His lips crashed into yours, and you sank into the mattress under his weight as he kicked his jeans off; your heartbeats meeting for the first time.

“I can… I can feel your heart.” He murmured, “Feel you breathe…and you’re so, so warm…”

It was the second time he’d said that, and it seemed like a comfort in itself. That the two sure signs of life: a pulse and body heat, so long that it was found in you, was enough to keep him happy for an eternity.

He trembled from skin-to-skin contact. He kissed your neck, over your heart – bit at your shoulder and breasts until his hunger was satiated enough to give you a moment of rest.

He went for the box. Made your heart turn cold when he opened it, swinging his legs off the edge of the bed.

You couldn’t keep your hands off – kissing the top of his head and sliding your fingers down his arms. He didn’t seem to mind the attention until he folded back a piece of paper wrapping the item inside.

“Well don’t watch…” He shrugged you off with a chuckle.

You peaked around him, and he blocked you with his elbow. Went to look over his shoulder, and he pushed you away with the side of his head.

“You’re making this incredibly diffic-hnf-“

His whole body jerked, half-cocked to the right while his hands grabbed for the blankets.

“Uh…Are you okay?”

“I…I’m u-uploading ne-ew s-oftwar-re…”

There was a twitch in your peripherals, then you looked down.

His black, RK800-branded boxer briefs were pulled underneath a very human attachment; all-inclusive with a pair of-

“This is a…strange, phenomenon.” His clarity in speech returned.

You’d expected a colored piece of actual plastic. Maybe something that looked like a sex toy. But this…him…looked real. He was getting hard.

He grinned, hair frazzled from your constant touching, “Do you find me aesthetically pleasing?”

It’d been a long time since you were into someone like this, not that those old memories held candles to what was happening here. You were making new ones with Connor, and he’d make his first memories with you...

You were going to give him something to remember.

Your fingers snaked up his back, taking a fistful of hair and pointing his face at the ceiling.

“You’re perfect for me, Connor.”
A groan left him as a frustrated sigh pushed through his nose.

“But I’m a devia-“

You gripped him, and his surprised breath filled your ear. You stroked the length of his erection, the tip sliding between a gap in your fingers. His entire body went stiff. He grunted when a small leak slickened the inside of your palm.

“Deviants can feel things…” You ran your nails down his side, relishing in the shivering sensation that racked him.

His eyes squeezed shut. His LED spun yellow, arms wavering under the weight. His cheeks puffed and exhaled before his breaths came out as splinters. His hands reached around him and the fastened themselves to your thighs.

“Tight, wet things…” His cock twitched in your hand, and you smiled into his neck, “Do you want to feel that?”

He was clay in your hands, perfectly sculpted and impressionable under your touch. He was smooth; soft, all etched over an athletic build you were learning to crave. He was flustered.

“Y-yes…” He stuttered, hips jerking forward as you circled his slick head with your thumb, “I..I want to be…closer…”

“Do you need to do anything else before we can?”

“No, I-“ He hissed as you traced his shaft, squeezing your legs so hard he’d probably leave a bruise.

You didn’t mind.

“I…already filled it.”

He glared at you, the balance of power shifting once again.

“Filled it with what…?”

A spurt of clear liquid soaked your palm. Your eyes widened, the warm; sticky substance rolling down your knuckles.

“What I’m going to use to make you mine.”

He took your hand in his. Rubbed the substance between his fingertips, and slipped them in your mouth. On your tongue. Anchored his other hand on your ass as the two of you fell back into the mattress.

You shook; dripped with anticipation as his entirety sprang free of his briefs, now lost in the sheets with the rest of his clothes. He was so confident in his actions like this’d been a premeditated dismantling of you, and he was planning which piece to start with.

“You just remember…” You whispered, “You started this.”

A long, shuddering breath pushed itself from him as you took him in your hand. He bit the inside of his lip, eyes squeezing shut as his LED spun yellow.

“Yes…And I will finish it.”
The tip touched you. His arms tremored, and his elbows buckled; his head landing between your breasts.

“...I always accomplish my mission.”

You swallowed a soft squeak, your throat dry and scratchy, “What is your mission?”

He puffed his chest, pushing himself up, “To make it difficult for you to walk tomorrow, Officer.”

He grabbed your wrist and guided your hand until the swollen head of his cock parted the wet opening between your legs...until he rocked his hips and went inside you; filling you slowly.

Your bodies tensed, a soundless word rolling off his lips.

You tried to maintain composure. Tried to not completely dissolve like he was – his shoulders clamping up as he hung his head to watch you.

If it was anyone but him, it would have been unsettling. But his pure naivety, the newness of everything...You’d be lying if you said you wanted to miss any part of him experiencing this with you.

Every twitch of his nose. Every quick pinch of his brow. Every tremor that shook the dangling hairs on his forehead sway and the fabricated muscles in his arms tense.

The grinding of his teeth. The hardened line of his jaw that flexed and released. The pitch and yaw of his eyes, scanning you – all of you, at any point in time.

And he looked on with such intensity. Determination. Adjusted himself with your every response in a constant chain reaction. If your hips would move, so would his. If you began to cramp, he’d reposition the area.

Your fingers raked across his back, slipping from his body and clawing at the sheets, instead. His mouth pulled to reveal rows of locked teeth.

He tossed your arms around his neck.

“Again-“ The word was breathless as he quickened his pace, “Do that again-“

He threw his head back as you shamelessly upheld his request. He loved it.

He grinded his cock in small, tight circles against your walls clamping around his shaft.

He was totally lost in feeling you, feel him. Your body rocked back and forth; held in place by the mattress and the android rolling his hips against yours; each muscle tightening around him over and over and over- and when he pulled out, that tightness hurt until he relieved it.

“Tight...”

Your thighs squeezed against his waist. He knew how to unravel you and pull you apart and you didn’t care because it was him. It was Connor. The man who struck a match and set you on fire to dance in those flames no matter how much it had hurt.

He jostled the spot that never failed to produce mewling sounds of pleasure from you. He massaged it in quick, gentle pushes; his dick sliding in and out as the slapping sounds between your legs got louder.

“Wet...”
You touched your clit and wet your fingertip; the sensation making you jump, however brief. You reached up to touch him, two knuckles hooking on his chin…and you placed your finger on his tongue.

His eyes shot open, shaking as his brow creased in a harsh crevice.

“Do you like that?” You tilted your head.

The circles he spun; stretching you out just so you could squeeze against him again became wider, and he grinded harder. He nodded, eyes flitting to yours as his tongue circled your finger; teeth closing around your knuckle.

His fingers traced the curve of your jaw, turning your face to plunge his tongue deep in your mouth in perfect synchronization with his cock, buried to its base. You arched into him; gasping chests fighting each other for dominance of space.

“You taste so good…You feel, so good…” He murmured.

He wasn’t the naïve android you’d met in the police station. He was someone who wanted to handle you, to redefine what you thought to be just sex.

He licked your neck, his tongue trailing up to your ear, “I love making you sweat…”

You shook in each other’s company; snapping bodies filling the room with the scent of you and him.

“I love feeling your release…”

How his biceps bulged when he slipped his forearm under your neck, lifting himself from you only to watch his cock bury itself deep inside you.

“I love hearing you say my name…”

The tip of your nose ran across his forehead as he looked up to you again…eyes finding you in a small panic.

Blood rushed to your head. You saw stars, discolored shapes twisting and bending as his pace and strength quickened, relentlessly.

There was no longer a clear definition of where you ended, and he began.

“Connor-“

“Yes-” He groaned, “Just like that-“

You cried out as he rammed you harder, and harder, hand clamped on your ass to push you against him so he could get deeper.

“I…” His LED flashed yellow, “I love…”

You bit into his shoulder, tears leaking from your eyes as a new sensation rattled through you. His skin was cold in your mouth as your teeth dug into it.

“Look at me, please-” He begged, panting as he supported your head, “I need to-“

He grit his teeth, and his dick got harder. He braced, keeping you in place.
“See you-“

He couldn’t stop. Was totally entranced by every little tense action on your face like he was reading a book.

“When you-“

Your lungs tripped over themselves, their inputs and outputs getting lost in your dazed state of mind. Your vision doubled, his face floating in copies. Your muscles stopped working, and you liquified under him as he continued making love to you.

Making…love.

*Everything* came flooding back; a breathless, *stuttering* version of your name rolling off his tongue.

Your body tensed; your breathing double-timed; heart passed the red-line, pores opening one-by-one like coolant reactor chambers kicking into overdrive. Sweat pushed onto your skin, your arms latched around his neck as he embraced you in his arms; your legs crossed behind his back.

His face buried itself in your neck, and you *sheltered* him.

Your lips went numb. And then your cheeks, your forehead; neck, chest; legs – all your sensory data pooled at the epicenter, draining feeling away from any other part of your body.

“CONNOR-“

You shouted his name like it was the last time you’d ever say it, and he snapped. His hands jumped to your headboard, the metal bars bending and almost *breaking* under his grip. Had cum flowing out of your bruised cunt, numbing the aching walls around his pulsing, relaxing cock.

It would have normally been weird, the direct eye-contact in such an intimate moment. But you wanted him to see what he could do to you. Wanted to watch his cheeks flush a beautiful blue, and the panic dissolve from his precious features when his head landed on the pillow next to yours. Wanted to see his face when he finally slipped himself free.

He brushed his knuckles down your jawline, “How are you feeling, now?”

Your tired eyes fluttered as his touch ravaged your hypersensitive skin. A delirious laugh escaped you, your lips tickling against his palm, “Like I might have trouble walking tomorrow.”

He gave you the widest, *warmest*, most *human* smile you’ve ever had the pleasure to see. One that’d slowly rose and made you wonder when it would stop…and then became lopsided in his signature grin that meant he was about to get in trouble.

You winced as his fingers plugged you, *stirring* his fluids with yours as he cocked his head, studying your every reaction with such *fascination*.

Your hands caught his shoulders, as you bucked forward, “Why-“

He interrupted you with a kiss, almost offended that you’d question him. He observed you until whatever curiosities he had were satiated, your shaking lips that were unable to form words; your body unable to do anything…

He licked his fingers from bottom to tip, slow and seductively as his eyes *melted* you. He blinked, nodding to himself as his LED came full-circle.
“Mission accomplished.”

There was nothing but the sound of snow hitting the glass pane of your bedroom’s balcony door. The subtle rattle of the window, gusts howling as the blizzard outside picked up.

While the world continued to spin and unravel itself…you’d found a moment with him. You’d found safe harbor, and hunkered down to ride out the storm.

It was nice to not be alone, this time around.

Chapter End Notes

I am SO happy everyone loved the last chapter. Sorry this one took so long, it’s just a very pivotal point in the fic and the betas and I (thanks guys) wanted to make sure we did our best. It also took me 11 hours to write. UGH.

I hope you love this one, too!
our alarm jarred you out of the best sleep you’ve had in years. The kind where you don’t have to worry about CyberLife assassins killing you in the middle of the night. You winced in panic as your body forgot the arms holding it close.

Aside from when he’d slept next to you after your night terror, it’d been years since you shared a bed with someone…and with Connor balanced on the edge, almost ready to fall off – that was apparent. You wondered if he’d wake up if he fell, or if stasis mode would have him land on the floor.

Your phone vibrated and chirped, jumping around on your nightstand on the far side. You yawned, and lazily dug your hand in the plush bed that would need washed a hundred times to cleanse it of the sins taken place the night prior.

Your back went cold as it left his chest, his arms sliding off with soft “thuds” as they landed on the mattress behind you. You reached for your phone, and fell just short. His grasp had returned.

“Good mor-“

The bend of his elbows curved around your waist as your fist closed around his hair, his lips planted on your neck.

“Connor-“

You wiggled, trying to escape. The side of his face pushed against yours, smothering you into your pillow.

“Con-“

“Mmhh-“

“What?”

He nuzzled against you, “Sh.”

He took a deep breath, your hairs shifting towards him and flattening as he exhaled. He let out a
pleasant sigh, a smile creeping on his lips.

Your alarm was still blaring and started to give you a headache. You looked at it desperately.

“It’s so lou-“

It turned off, Connor’s LED spinning blue against your forehead.

“Was…was that you?”

“Mhm.”

He rubbed his face against yours, his nose digging into your cheek. His arms tightened around you, his knees folding up under yours.

“Connor,” You giggled, turning your head so that your lips were just below his, “We have to go to work…”

He mumbled something, and buried his face in your hair.

“What?” You laughed, petting the back of his head.

“Mmstillbooting-“

He pulled the blanket over the two of you, the light from the balcony drowned out in maroon. His chest was flush against your back; a position that seemed to be his favorite, and he snuggled against you like he just couldn’t get enough.

“Why are you so stubborn?” You sighed, puffing a bubble of cotton out of your face.

“Because I can be, now.”

He leaned over to kiss your cheek, his LED like a night light under the comforter.

“Like you weren’t, before…” You rolled on a shoulder, still held by his strong arms as you stole a kiss.

“That is true.” He kissed you back, pushing you into your pillow, “However, now I am free to do things like this.”

Something hard slid between the gap in your thighs. You bit back a moan, and his hand closed around your throat, gently turning your face to his as he lifted one of your legs.

“And this…”

“Connor!”

He buried his name with a kiss, and buried something else inside you.

“This isn’t the part where I make you scream my designation just yet, Officer.”

The hand supporting your leg lifted it higher, his finger sliding between your legs.

“I’ve sent an e-mail to Captain Fowler…” He dragged his mouth up to your ear, taking it in his teeth as he set a rhythm.

“What-“ You gasped, and the finger on your sensitive spot started vibrating, “Why-“
His voice was intoxicating as a deep chuckle rolled up from his chest.

“…We’re going to be late.”

…

He’d kissed you as he pulled away, leaving you spread out on the bed as a giggling, twitching mess. He had a knack for knowing when to stop, and got you a towel to clean yourself. Even let you use it first. Except this time, in the morning; after he’d helped you to the bathroom – he’d left you alone long enough to get a shower.

You’d been worried he’d bust down the door. It was obvious that he enjoyed your body…a lot. Enjoyed making you feel like you were walking on water, rather than drowning.

Worse things had happened to you.

You brushed your teeth in the steamy mirror, hair dripping along a white tank top over a black bra. You didn’t wear anything else except a pair of spandex shorts; and after spitting out toothpaste and rinsing your mouth – you decided you weren’t quite ready to slip on that uniform again.

Today was your first official day back on the job; and although you wanted it, after yesterday? You weren’t necessarily in a rush.

You opened the door, and the apartment’s air traded for the bathroom’s steam. A new smell wafted inside; one of coffee and eggs and…

Breakfast?

You turned off the light behind you, walking down the hall and peaking around the corner.

Sure enough, there he was with one hand in his pocket – his watch hovering along the stitched seam; and the other shaking a pan over an open flame. His sleeves were rolled up above his elbows, one foot pointing upwards and his hips moving back as he flipped an egg with a twist of his wrist.

He was whistling a little tune until he saw you, his face curling back in shock.

“Good morning,” He met your eyes, “…Again.”

You smirked, padding your way to him and running your hands up his chest, over the bulges on either sides of his neck, and then wrapped your arms over them. He smiled as his teeth clicked against yours, and a hand slipped around your waist to grab your ass.

You jumped, “Well, hello there-“

“Working with you is going to be very difficult today.” The pan skidded across the stove as he turned the flame off.

“Just today?” You bit your lip, giving him a devious grin.

“You-” He sucked in a cheek, “Stop…”
He grabbed your hips – perhaps harder than he intended, and guided you around to the other side of the bar. He forced you to take a seat on a stool, and planted a kiss on your forehead before returning to the kitchen to pull a plate from the cabinet. Your arms brushed against the opening of his jacket, hanging behind you on the back support.

You took a sleeve in your hand. Rubbed the fabric and the silk lining, tracing the LEDs stitched in it with your hands…and then you slung it over your shoulders.

He turned around, meal in one hand a cup of coffee in the other – and then he froze. Stood dead still, as if he was a butler and he just had an interruption in his programming.

“What do you think?” You twisted, grabbing the flaps to show him the lights on your back, “Think I’d pass for an android sent by CyberLife?”

His eyelids fluttered, and his LED spun yellow. He put the plate down, the silverware and coffee next. He balanced his weight on one foot, pressed his palms against the counter; his shoulder blades pushing up his shirt as he hung his head. His forehead creased when he lifted his face to yours.

“I think you’re trying to get me to fuck you all over this apartment.”

You choked, coughing on nothing. Heat and redness crept up your cheeks on demand, and you swallowed.

“And I will…” He slid the plate closer to you, “After, you eat.”

You blinked hard, gulping as your attention dropped to the eggs, toast, and fruit in front of you. You picked up a fork and silently did what you were told, thoughts running a million miles a minute.

You were scared and aroused all at the same time and that kind of thing from him was just unexpected-

“I’m sorry.” He held his tie in place as he took a seat, sitting across from you, “That sounded much less aggressive in my head.”

You chewed your food before swallowing, “Aggressive is fine.”

A sweet half-smile pulled on his face as he propped his chin up with an elbow, his knuckles sliding up his cheek. He was in a daze.

“How’d I do?”

“Pretty good, actually.” You tapped his nose with the fork, “Thank you.”

“Actually?” He raised a brow, “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Well, you know-” You took a sip of coffee, “I didn’t think cooking was part of a negotiator-detective-super-crime-fighter-model’s programming.”

He let out a quiet laugh, “It’s not, really.”

He slid his forearms across the counter, clasping his hands as they supported his weight, “I asked Officer Miller for advice.”

You choked. Dropped your fork. Beat your chest and waved him off as he jumped up in a panic-
“I’m fine-“

You reassured him as you continued to cough, and he slowly returned to his seat, worry and concern creasing his features.

“You-did-what?“

“Are you sure you’re okay?” His LED spun rapidly, eyes darting all over you like he had so many times before, “Oh, I see.”

“You asked Chris…” Your face went numb.

“Well, yes. Lieutenant Anderson was upset I didn’t check in with him last night, and Detective Reed told me to ‘kill myself.’ Officer Miller was very helpful.”

“Wait, wait…wait. You mean…you asked Hank, and Gavin…first?”

He folded his hands under his arms, thumbs poking out as he leaned his elbows forward. His shirt pulled tighter around his muscles…and, God, his hair, his eyes-

“Did I do something wrong?”

You’d never be able to get mad at him. Not really. You’d found him attractive before, but now that a line had been crossed, everything you’d originally…loved, about him, was magnified a thousand times over.

“Oh, no…no no no-“ You tilted your head back, chugging coffee, “Notatall-“

“I’m sorry, I didn’t quite catch that.”

You slammed the empty mug on the counter, “Nothing, Connor.”

They’d know. They’d all know. Why the fuck else would he ask them for breakfast advice?

FUCK.

“Would you like a refill?”

You chewed on your lip, “You don’t have to-“

He took the cup, and went to the coffee maker.

“I know I don’t have to.”

He returned, sitting next to you, this time. He put the mug on the counter, taking your hands and putting them in his lap.

“I don’t have to do anything, anymore, thanks to you…”

The warm, fuzzy feeling in your chest fled for the hills. Ran for higher ground. Ducked for cover.

“I fought her off the best I could. I never wanted:“

“Connor,” You touched his face, “I understand. You don’t have to explain yourself…”

“But there’s so much I’ve been wanting to talk to you about.” His head dipped before rising, “If
that’s alright.”

He hadn’t had a chance to really talk about the events of yesterday. It was a fair request, all things considered.

“You can talk to me about anything, Connor.”

“It’s hard to explain.” He swallowed, “I’m going to have to ask that you ‘bear with me.’”

You let out a soft chuckle, “Okay…I will.”

“At the Kamski residence…” He ran his hands down his pantlegs, cupping them at his knees, “When Mr. Kamski had me play his twisted little game…” He bit back a snarl, “All I saw was you on the other end of the gun. I knew I needed the information he offered, and still, I just couldn’t…I couldn’t kill you.”

His face folded into a scowl, “And when I gave the gun back to Elijah, when I subdued the overwhelming input commands to pull the trigger…she…Chloe…she sent me something. She sent me Revised Article 9.”

Just like Markus and the cashier. And also like Markus, his transition had been gradual – provoked through abstract art and guidance. There was a certain poetry to your clone being the one to deliver your written work to the android who you’d grown attached to.

“In the elevator, it was like it was happening all over again.” His eyes began to water, and he looked away from you, “You were on the other end of the gun, except it was actually you, that time. Amanda told me if I couldn’t pull the trigger, she’d do it herself.”

You stood from the stool, walking to the other side of the bar.

“I tried to warn you without letting her know, but the dent…and then she…she let me go, and when I kissed you, and-“

You hugged him, his head pressed just above your stomach. You cradled him, rubbed his back, and he let you go – cautiously.

“I just…I just wanted to thank you. I wanted to tell you I was sorry, and thank you for guiding me through Amanda’s remote access. At the crossroads, under the tree…you knew exactly how to tell me without her knowing. You didn’t give up on me when I gave up on myself and-” His eyes looked so sad as they begged you for forgiveness, “I really don’t know what I’d do if anything happened to you.”

“Connor…” You pet his cheek, “I’m not going anywhere, sweetheart.”

“You say that, but…Look what almost happened. If I…If I let you…If I-“

“You didn’t.” His brows jumped as you took his hands in your own, “You didn’t do anything wrong, and she’s gone now.”

“I…I hope.” He frowned, “I don’t know where she went…”

You lifted his face with a kiss, your nose brushing against his. It was a tender, loving kiss – one that had both of you take sharp inhaledes and hold it there – letting each other’s soul, or whatever he had, seep into each other.

And you did – you let yourself steep in his overwhelming presence in the rolling, boiling water
over your heart. You couldn’t get enough of him, even through the steam. You just let him consume you and do whatever he pleased because you trusted him.

“May I ask you a question?” His voice was barely over a whisper as he pulled away, leaving you grateful for even the shallowest of breaths because you thought you’d forgotten how to breathe.

“Anything…”

A small, delicate smile lifted the corner of his mouth; the bottom of his eyelids…and he gazed into you like there was nothing else on the planet.

“Do humans have sexual urges based on anything other than reproduction or recreational fulfilment?”

You snorted. Coughed. Tried to choke down the laugh. Chris would’ve been proud.

“I’m just trying to understand.” His brows creased, annoyed by your laughing.

You should’ve known he’d see through your cover-up. Wondered how many others he’d pretended to go along with; from you or Chris.

You swallowed hard, playing with a loose thread on his shirt, “When two people…love, each other…and want to be closer…sex can do that, sometimes.”

You felt the last wall break down and crumble into the sea and were terrified by the surge. You couldn’t get hurt again. You wouldn’t make it. You couldn’t let yourself be-

“But I thought you said it was too early for me to love you?”

“I say a lot of things I don’t mean.” You sniffed, the anxiety and tears pooling over your lashes and staining your cheeks, “I say them because I’m scared of getting hurt. Because everyone who gets close to me ends up getting hurt. Because I’m angry at the person I’ve become.”

He held your chin, his brows arched over a frown. He cupped your jaw, thumbs wiping away your tears as he kissed you between your brows.

“I will never intentionally hurt you, and I am prone to getting hurt on my own, according to Lieutenant Anderson.” He smiled, rubbing the tip of his nose against yours, “And I love the person you’ve become.”

“You can’t just say that to someone if you’re not sure you mean it, Connor.”

“I’ve spent the last eight hours reading hundreds of thousands of articles, forums, and psychological studies based on the concept of ‘love.’ It is an intense feeling of deep affection.” His lips shuddered as he looked over your face, “It is unconditional, and has no limits. It is giving someone the power to destroy you, and trusting them not to. It is an attraction that includes sexual desire, but also a bond between minds and…souls.”

You were a sobbing mess, and he didn’t care. He just kept stabbing at your heart with words you never thought you’d hear someone say again. This was so much more coming from someone who’d been blinded since he was born…there was something more pure.

“And I do not believe I have a soul, but…I do…feel, all of these things for you…and I don’t think I’ll ever be able to stop.”

“I won’t be around forever, Connor.” You frowned, “I don’t get to live forever.”
It hurt him. It was a hard truth he needed to face, but it hurt him.

“I know. And I’ll be there every step of the way…right up until…right up until the end. I promise.” He pulled his jacket tighter over your shoulders, pulling the collar under your chin before caressing your face, “And…I seem to have developed a strange fascination for you wearing my clothing.”

You sniffed hard, a smile and a laugh breaking through the sobbing. It seemed to lighten his mood, too – like just seeing you happy was all that mattered.

“Does that mean you’ll push me around in a wheelchair when I’m 80?”

“Of course.” He grinned, “And it’ll be the best damn wheelchair in Detroit.”

You swung your arms around his neck, pulling him close; melting when he caught you in his lap. He buried his face in your hair, hugging you so fucking tight-

“I love you,” He whispered your name, kissing the side of your head, “Irrationally and unconditionally.”

You built up the courage to say it. Faced the weakest part of you and rebuilt it until it served as a platform for the words you wanted him to hear.

“I love you, too.”

If anyone had told you this would be where the two of you would end up, you’d have found it humorous…because it seemed like just barely enough time had passed for those old, tragic wounds to heal.

So, you smiled.

And maybe, just maybe…you could learn to laugh again.

“…I think.”

Chapter End Notes

WOOOOOOOO YOUR COMMENTS KILLED ME LAST TIME! GODDAMN.

YESSSS. <3 I LOVE YOU GUYS SO MUCH!
normal people wanted beaches and sunny skies to beckon them home, as if that somehow promised easier days and shorter shifts. As you pulled into your parking spot, you looked up and down the salted streets of Detroit with grey slush piled against the curbs. The sky’s furious flurries that hid the top of buildings in a swarm of white. The bleak stares of the on-goers along the sidewalk.

You drummed your thumbs on your steering wheel, the engine shaking as you cut the ignition. The air was cold – stinging, made your nose run. The flashes from the digital billboards blinded you as they linked neon colors through rapid images.

Home is what you make of it, and that’d been a lesson that took a while to sink in. But this place…with its beaches of sleet, street-light palm trees and rock salt sand; was home.

And home is where the heart is.

You flipped open your phone after feeling it rumble in your pocket.

[1 UNREAD TEXT MESSAGE]

Connor

Today 09:30
Are you alright?

You smirked, unable to shake the feeling spreading through your chest like a shot of straight vodka without a chaser. The two of you had left at different times, you later than he – and he’d taken a taxi to avoid suspicion.

To: Connor

Just parked. Coming in now.

Message Sent

Connor

Today 09:31

Okay :)

Connor

Today 09:31

I should warn you, I have informed Lieutenant Anderson of my “change in perspective.”

You almost choked, your breath stalling.

To: Connor

WHAT?!

Message Sent

Connor

Today 09:32

He was concerned that I was “taken advantage of.” I assured him what had occurred was mutual, and then had to explain why.

You started typing a response.
Connor

Today 09:32

Please come inside. It’s very cold. You could get sick.

You scowled, and kept tapping away at the screen.

Connor

Today 09:33

I know you’re still constructing a message, Officer.

You rolled your eyes, clicked your phone shut, and jammed it in your pocket.

You opened your door, and the ground shook. There were sounds of treads cutting into pavement and vibrating glass from your window as a 7-slot grill filled your side-mirror. You pulled on the handle, ducking in your seat as a bright-red Jeep Wrangler; 18-inches off the ground with 35-inch tires almost ripped your fucking door off.

And…of course, it was too close for it to open.

His brakes screeched as he parked, cranking a stripped brake in place. The cabin rocked as a pair of boots hit the ground on the other side, and his door slammed shut. Gavin walked out from behind his Jeep, slamming both of his hands on the trunk of your car and startling you.

“Well LOOK what the ANDROID dragged in!” He chewed on a piece of gum as he laughed, walking backwards before turning towards the officer’s entrance, “Welcome back to work, Hotshot!”

He lifted his keys over his shoulder, and his alarm chirped.

You sighed, staring at your passenger’s side door. Couldn’t wait for the emergency brake to dig into your side as you climbed over it, no matter how hard you tried to avoid it. Could already feel the center console scrape at your knees…

Just another day at the precinct.

…

You opened the cards standing on your desk like dominoes, wishing you would’ve gone through them on your way out. They must have tripled in number, because when you were done with
one, it seemed like *three more* popped up in its place.

“*Shot again, eh? That’s what you get for rushing in without backup. Feel better though, I guess.***”
-Officer Finka

“*Let’s proceed slowly next time and NOT BE DUMB.***”
-Officer Frank

“*You really had him in the pipe, kiddo.***”
-Officer Smol

“*You can’t die, yet. You haven’t donated to my patreon.***”
-Officer Nienz

“*You can’t even blame it on being inverted.***”
-Chris

“*Stop getting fucking shot.***”
-Hank & Sumo

“*Your paperwork is almost as much a pain in the ass as Hank’s.***”
-Captain Fowler

“*You take more bullets than my worst squaddie.***”
-Captain Allen

“*Save it for the homicides, will you?***”
-Detective Collins

A folded piece of printer paper with an intricate, way-too-in-depth sketch of a dog.

-Your appointed welfare Officer

You smirked, finding Connor behind you. He and Hank traded notes on the CyberLife warehouse case.

An e-mail notification popped up on your terminal. You squinted to read the fine text.

From: g.reed@dpd.mi.gov

[Click link to open e-card]

Attached Message: Feel better lolololol

You scoffed, rolling your eyes and looking at the desk directly across from yours. He had his feet kicked up and leaned back in his chair with his phone in his hand. He popped a bubble and waved.

“You *just* sent that, didn’t you?*** You scoffed.
“Yup.”

“You see Miller anywhere?”

“Nope.” He continued scrolling, ignoring you.

“You’re worthless.”

“What, I can’t jump on top of trains and slide down rooftops so I’m not your type?” He clicked his phone shut, stowing it away, “Gimme a break.”

“Huh?”

“Your boy toy over there,” He nodded at Connor, who turned to face him, “Fuckin’ ramboed all over one of those rooftop farms hunting that crazy bird fuck.”

“I am not a toy.” He glared.

You yawned, growling as you let it out.

Fowler paced around in his glass cage, and you looked over at Hank.

“Did anyone tell Fowler about…”

“No.” Gavin answered for him, and your attention returned to the man who never took his jacket off, “And it’ll stay that way…but it’ll cost ya.”

“Careful, Detective.” Connor leaned back, “The last time you raised the stakes, it didn’t end so well for you.”

“You fuckin’ talking about that pool match again, prick?!”

“Maybe.”

“Okay, ALRIGHT.” Hank snapped his fingers in front of Connor, and waved Gavin off, “We’ve got work to do.”

“Speaking of which…” Gavin dropped his feet to the floor, and rolled his chair forward, “C’mere a sec.”

You looked around you monitor, “Me?”

“Yeah, you.” He nodded to his screen, “I wanna show you something.”

You sighed, getting up to lean over his shoulder; one hand on the back of his chair, the other on his desk. There wasn’t a whole lot of personalized decorations, save for a picture of him and his cat.

“How’s little Ollie doing?”

“Still the most adorable fuck out there.” He huffed, “You know, aside from me.”

“Yeah, no – Oliver is definitely cuter than you.”

“But you think I’m cute?”

“No.”
“Hah.” He grinned, enlarging a picture on the terminal, “Check this out.”

He flicked through a data pad, and pulled up evidence results that had something to do with the case file.

“Remember when I worked a few months undercover?”

Your throat tightened, but if you showed even an ounce of sympathy while he was staring at you, you’d never hear the end of it. Truth was, those months hadn’t ended well for him.

“Sure do.”

Okay, so, the Bandits are big into moving cocaine, obviously, but coke’s been falling to the wayside for the last couple months. This new strand of Red Ice shows up though, and it reaches epidemic levels.” He yawned, covering his mouth with the back of his hand, “Guess what they’re mixing this shit with?”

“You’re the expert, you tell me.”

“Fuckin’ LSD. Same shit they used to cut their coke.”

“Holy shit…” Ortiz’s house came to mind, and you shivered, “That’s actually pretty terrifying.”

“Right?” He turned his head to look at you, his neck snaking back when his face got too close, “Hey, you uh…” His eyes narrowed, and he grinned, “You got somethin’ on your neck there, robot fucker-“

Gavin jammed a thumb a few paces under your ear, and a stinging pain had you flinch.

“Ow, goddamn it what the fuck-“

He gave you one of his annoying fucking winks with his scrunching, scarred nose and his clicky-mouth-sound and-ugh.

“Connor.” Hank snapped his fingers behind you, “FOCUS.”

You turned to find Connor leering at the smug ass Detective who never knew when to lay off.

He was rough around the edges, but he was your friend that you loved to hate… and over his shoulder, fiddling with a coffee machine through a few glass-pane windows was your partner. Your friend who you loved to death.

“Ah, shit…” Gavin stood up, looking over his divider, “Did that idiot break the coffee machine again?”

“What is wrong with this thing?!” Chris yelled.

Gavin ran a hand over his mouth, turning to Connor, “Yo, RoboDick.”

Connor froze, closing his eyes and biting the inside of his cheek before collecting himself. He didn’t say anything.

“You like making breakfast, right?” Gavin laughed, pointing at the coffee machine, “Go fix that.”

“I got it,” You waved his hand away with the back of your wrist, “And for the record…”
You stopped, lowering your voice, “His RoboDick is bigger.”

He really shouldn’t have sent you that picture when he was drunk all those months ago.

“Well-yeah-no-shit! IT’S FAKE-“ He called as you went to help Chris.

“Hey,” You knocked on the glass before walking in the lounge, “No red carpets? No trumpets?”
He looked at you from the corner of his eye.

“Still mad at me?”

“Mad? At you?” He sounded stuffy, and sneezed in his arm, “No, why would I be mad?”

“Chris…”

“You know what I’m mad at?” He banged the side of the appliance, “This thing.”

“You don’t even drink coffee.”

“Yeah, well…neither will anyone else today, I guess.”

Your eyes widened, and you walked over to the coffee maker, “How did you even mess this up this bad-“

He opened the refrigerator’s door and pulled two travel cups from the top shelf, and kicked it close with his foot.

“Lucky for you, my wife packed two of these for…” He tripped over another sneeze, giving you the most dazed look, “Breakfast.”

“You…” You looked at the drink, then back to the counter, “You sabotaged the coffee to get back at me for being a dick, didn’t you?”

“No, not at all-“

“You get this fuckin’ thing workin’ yet?” Gavin picked it up, shaking it and sending water splashing from the tank, “I need-“

“Detective, that’s only going to make it worse.” Connor took it from him, placing it gently on the counter.

“Don’t you get smart with me you plastic-“ He swung, and Connor caught his hand.

He held Gavin’s fist, turning his head slowly.

“Fucking let go-“ He pulled his arm, but Connor refused.

He tilted his head, blinking, “Are you done?”

“Yeah, fuck whatever-“

Connor let him go, and he stumbled backwards. He shook his hand before holding it, growling under his breath.

“Someone deliberately clogged the water line.” Connor cocked his chin, “It needs to be replaced. I can have it fixed within the hour.”
Chris extended one hand out, offering you a green concoction, “You heard him. This is your only choice.”

“I’ll pass.” You crossed your arms, giving him a sly grin, “I already ate.”

“Ah, right, yeah…Heard Connor was packing heat, nowadays.”

Your eyes shot open, and you went rigid.

“SO…did curiosity kill the cat?”

“Chris-“

“Was plastic truly beat?”

Gavin cringed, “MILLER-“

“I feel as though I’m missing something.” Connor crossed his arms behind his back, “Context, so to speak.”

“Can con-firm,” Chris shoved the drink at you while speaking to him, “You’re missing some context.”

“Alright, you know what?” You held your hands out to the side, “Fine, we had sex- okay?”

Gavin crossed his arms, leaning against the wall, “And there’s the confession, boys…”

Connor’s entire posture went firm, and his cheeks flushed a light blue.

“Yeah, and guess what? It was great.” You shot Gavin the shittiest grin you could, “Transcendent, even. BEYOND-“

“Okay, this is backfiring.” Chris backed away, “Please stop.”

“The way he-“

Gavin held a hand up, “NO.”

“With his mouth and hands-“

“STOP!”

“And-“

“Officer.” Connor fidgeted uncomfortably, “Might I suggest-“

“So outrageously not possible with a human male-“

“Oh my god, no…my ego…” Chris sobbed, “It’s…shattered.”

“Pft,” Gavin rolled his eyes, “Probably has some lady killer program and you just fell for it like an idiot.”

“Lady killer?” Connor turned his head, mortified, “But I didn’t kill her-“

“HEY!” Hank knocked on the wall, “Need you clowns in booking.”
The lot of you exchanged glances, and you looked up at him, “All of us?”

“Yeah. All of you…” He huffed, walking away, “Fucking kill me.”

…

Chris’s arm jabbed you in the neck.

“Ow, god-“

Gavin’s elbow dug into your side.

“Jesus-“

Hank’s sleeve brushed against your mouth as he straightened out his jacket.

“Pfft-“

And Connor just stood still, his hands behind his back, looking down at you and watching while you bumped into him over and over-

“Would you guys quit your fucking squirming?” Fowler clicked the button from the other side of the glass, “Hank, I only agreed to this because you said it’d be quick.”

Everyone fell into attention, tensing up at his frustrated orders. You sighed at the booking board in your hands, the letters spelling “TARGET PRACTICE” on the front.

“Alright,” Chris straightened his uniform, “On the count of three, everyone say, ‘SQUAD GOALS!’”

You hung your head, holding up your prop. Connor nudged you with his elbow, and you found a lopsided grin above you.

“This isn’t funny.”

His grin widened.

“I’m serious.”

He choked down a laugh, and you scoffed.

“1…” Chris started.

“Why the fuck did I come down here…” Gavin groaned.

“2…”

“Shut up, Reed.” Hank gave him the finger over his shoulder.

“You old piece of-“

An arm almost knocked you off balance.
“SQUAD GOALS!”

There was a flash, and snap of a camera, and a chorus of “I WASN’T READY,” from everyone except Connor and Chris.

“I don’t care. Now, you two-“ Fowler pointed at you and your partner, “Need a unit walking C block. Get your asses out there.”

Fowler rolled his shoulders and took the picture out of the printer, leaving it on the desk before he left.

Chris sniffed, rubbing his nose, “BUT I’M DY-INGGG-“

“You are not dying, Officer Miller.” Connor gave him a warm smile, “I promise.”

“You’re not helping my case, Detective Swoon-Bot…”

Connor’s LED flashed as he cocked his head.

“Lieutenant,” He perked up, “Why do I have so many nicknames?”

Your small group walked out to the other side of the room, and you shut the door. You tossed the board on the desk.

“I don’t know, Connor.” Hank pursed his lips, giving the rest of them a condescending look.

“Because he’s fuckin’ RoboCop.” Gavin chuckled.

“Uh, no?” Chris squinted, “He’s Swoon-Bot?”

“RoboCOCK, sorry.”

“CON-MAN,“

“Will both of you just shut the fuck up?!” Hank yelled, rubbing the sides of his head, “JESUS.”

The three of them continued to argue while Connor stared at the photo with a wholesome smile. He glanced over, back at the picture, and did a double-take as he realized you were watching him.

“Well?” You walked over, leaning in to see, “How’d it turn out-“

Hank, with his mouth open and a middle finger over his shoulder. Gavin, mid-yell with a fist swinging up. Chris, smiling so hard his eyes were closed with an arm around you and Connor. And then you, holding the board in one hand, sliding over Chris’s back with the other…finding Connor’s fingers when no one was looking.

A perfect image of DPD’s finest…and you knew exactly where you were going to put it.

…

“Okay, so it might not have been exactly the right size…”

You frowned at the folded corners, and the back of the frame was stuffed from excess photo.
“But I can still see everybody.” Connor offered, pleased with his newest decoration, “Now I get to look at you and my…your…our, friends every day.”

You laughed, chest fluttering from his innocence, “Connor, you get to see all of us every day, anyway.”

“Yes, but…” He picked up the picture, scanning it for what seemed like the 50th time, “This means an incredible amount to me. I feel like I finally…belong.”

He looked up, stare following a PC200 android patrolling mindlessly down the aisle. He frowned, his features creasing.

“Hey,” You leaned forward, “Don’t let anything ruin this moment for you, okay? You deserve to be happy. Don’t feel bad.”

“I just wish…” He put the picture down, “I wish all androids could have the chance to…”

He shook his head, his LED flickering to yellow before leveling out blue, “Never mind.”

“Ugh-“ Hank plopped in his seat, waving his hand, “ Didn’t Fowler say you guys had a job to do?!”

“Jeez, I didn’t realize you wanted to get rid of me so bad.”

“You’re distracting my partner.” Hank scoffed, “C’mon, Connor. Playtime’s over.”

“Yeah,” Gavin flicked a goldfish in the air before catching it in his mouth, “And don’t forget your sweater vests, kids.”

He gave you a wink, finger guns at full force.

“Ayy,” And you did it right back, “Wouldn’t be much target practice without one.”

Connor narrowed his eyes, biting the inside of his cheek.

“I think I’m beginning to understand your love-hate relationship with Detective Reed.”

You perked up a brow, “Oh yeah?”

“Yes.” He fixed his tie, and took a seat, “I do love to hate him.”

“Fuck you too, buddy.” He caught another goldfish as it came plummeting down.

“Phew,” Chris came around the corner with a handful of tissues, “Ready to roll?”

“Yeah, you could say…I’ve got the need…”

You walked up to him, the two of you continuing towards the exit as you gave each other a high-five, shouting the finisher at the same time.

“THE NEED FOR SPEED!”

You and your partner shared a loud laugh that echoed off the concrete walls. You looked behind you, feeling Connor watching. You shared timid smiles as he raised two fingers with his wrist still pinned beside his keyboard, giving you a hidden wave goodbye.
You patted your bulletproof “sweater” vest, before stepping outside in the cold; into the city that wasn’t necessarily your birthplace, but had been the city that raised you.

You took a whiff of the icy air and smells of city toxins like motor oil and exhaust mixing with smoked food. Absorbed the honking horns and idle chatter; the cell phone conversations that blended together like a choreographed ambience.

Underneath all the neon lights and glass buildings, there was a heart that beat to the rhythm of 672,795 footsteps.

Detroit, Michigan…

Home, sweet home.

Chapter End Notes

***IMPORTANT***
I will be out of town on a business conference from August 25th-30th. I am unsure if I'll be updating before then, but can guarantee that I will not be updating during that period in time.

That being said...I felt this was a nice stopping point. Why?

MAJOR STORY ARC STARTS IN NEXT CHAPTER!
Downtown used to be fun, until it became your office. You and Chris had been responsible for cleaning up its messes on more than one occasion. Bar fights, car accidents, parades, crowd control for community events; shit, there were some weeks where the last place you wanted to see was downtown Detroit.

That’s probably why you and the rest of DPD preferred the hole in the wall that was Jimmy’s Bar.

Still, mornings were pretty calm...unlike your stomach after drinking the agricultural-fuck-up-in-a-cup.

You checked your phone, waiting in line with Chris as he made idle chat with a man at a coffee stand.

[1 UNREAD TEXT MESSAGE]

Connor

Today 10:50

Stay safe during your patrol today, please.

To: Connor

No promises.

Message Sent

Connor
You put your phone away, rolled up your sleeve and checked your wind-up watch to make sure you cranked it, earning you a weird look from the vendor.

“You stuck in 2018 ‘er somethin’?” He snickered.

“2018 had some of the best memes.” Chris paid for your coffees, and handed you one, “Our legacy…”

You blew along the top, “I hope our legacy involves a bit more than memes, ‘yeet,’ tide pods, and dabbing…”

The man laughed, and gave Chris his change.

“Uh, sir-“ He handed a bill back, “You gave me too much-“

“I can count, thanks.” He smirked, blowing in his hands, “Neighborhood discount for the boys and girls in blue, eh?”

“Thank you.” You smiled, “I’ll take what I can get if I’m gonna deal with him all day.”

Small things like that made the job worth it. It was nice to know that people still saw you as...well, a person.

“Yeah…thanks, man.” Chris stuck a $5 in the tip jar, “Stay warm out there.”

“Yeah, yeah-“ He waved you guys off, and you continued down the street.

You passed under a red-lit skybridge, taking a sip of the refreshing warmth as a police drone zoomed by. Steam pushed from a manhole, swaying as a bicyclist left wet tread marks in the bike lane. Snow still blurted out the sky, but trickled down on the street like dust from a shaken blanket.

Chris started cackling under his breath, teeth tapping the rim of his cup as he drank.

“What are you laughin’ at?”
“Ahh, nothing. Nothin’ at all.”

You pursed your lips, “Lies.”

“Hah, okay…” He cleared his throat, “So…when Reed and I got to Eden Club, there was a dead body, dead android, the usual…well, the now, usual, right?”

You nodded.


You weren’t sure how to feel – like you should laugh, be jealous, or indifferent.

“He was so…shy. Like he was scared to look anywhere.” He closed his eyes, shaking his head, “And when he had to start doing his whole memory probe thing? I swear it was the first time I saw an android blush.”

You tried so fucking hard not to smile.

“Oh, god…I haven’t seen you smile like that in years.”

Apparently, you didn’t hide it very well.

“Pft, you haven’t really known me for years…we were two ships passing in the night before-“
You blinked, tripping over your words, “We became partners.”

Before your friend died. Your partner in crime version 1.0, the one with the back you promised to always have; and the one you let down. As much as you loved Chris, you’d really wished your carelessness hadn’t left DPD-standard-issued boots to fill in order to meet him.

“You know…” Chris’s face saddened, “I wish it’d been under better circumstances, but for what it's worth…I’m glad I got you as the person watchin’ my back.”

Your cheek folded, the smile sneaking up underneath your eyes, “You too, buddy.”

You nudged him with your arm, and he fell out of his pace.

“Oh-“ His shoulder clipped an android, one with shopping bags that landed in puddles.

A woman on her cell phone turned around, “Hold on- Oh, fucking goddamn it, look what you did! Ugh…I’ll call you back.”

“I’m sorry, bud.” Chris knelt, meeting the android at eye level as they collected the loose items together.

“It wasn’t your fault, Officer, it was this expensive piece of crap android…” She scolded, “God, I can’t afford another repair.-“

“I wasn’t talking to you, ma’am.” Chris tipped his hat, handing the bags back to the android and picking his cup off the ground, “I was talking to the android I bumped into.”

She looked at you in disbelief, and then back to him. You gave her a cocky grin, and noticed an LED spinning yellow on the android’s temple. His eyes flickered to yours before being yanked away by his owner, bags swaying at his sides.

A jogger paused to rest in front of you, leaning over to catch his breath. The android following
him handed him a bottle of water, and he started chugging.

“You have ran 2.3 mi-“

The jogger threw the water bottle back at him, and started running. The android barely had time to catch it; completely disregarded and expected to follow like the good servant it was programmed to be.

“You…you ever wonder what makes Connor different?” Chris watched on.

“Different?” You walked past an android shoveling snow and ice off the sidewalk, making a neat pile on the street.

“You know what I mean.” He took a sip of his coffee, “Or, at least, I’d hope so. If you didn’t think Connor was a special fish in the android sea, your relationship was doomed from the start.”

“He’s the best fish, and I was just asking if you meant anything specifically.”

“Nah, just, like…I don’t know.” He took a deep breath, pushing steam from his nose as the two of you stopped at a street corner to survey the block.

“I think, given his line of work, they had to make him more...” You tossed the word around in your head before making a decision, “Human.”

“Pft, yeah…he’s more human than the rest of them…more humane than most humans.”

The crosswalk signal blinked, and the two of you kept walking. You passed a chain-link fence with small lines of snow balanced between the links, fabric banners that’d been beaten and forgotten by time swaying between gusts of flurries.

“Wyatt Construction,” was faded between splotches of what you guessed were oil stains. Orange and white striped barricades lined the bottom, their LED flashers busted and filling with snow, themselves.

An abandoned parking garage filled a spot between corporate towers, the base lined with old scaffolding and construction brandings that didn’t exist anymore. Didn’t need them.

Most people barely owned their own car; and if they did, there were special housing units for them that didn’t involve driving up cement ramps. As for the construction company? Probably replaced by androids; maybe even the same androids that marked the top of the parking garage. The blues, whites, and purples that aired a Black Friday deal, promising CyberLife’s flagship model for the “new low price of $6,999.”

They were just machines, but they supported humans…and in doing so, learned how to become human.

“Before I met you, this stuff never bothered me…”

Your head whipped back around to Chris, finding the billboard’s reflection toggling in his brown eyes.

“What happened with that guy and the shopping bags wouldn’t have bothered me. I always thought people getting loud at androids was kinda like when you couldn’t get your laptop to work and you yelled at it, or something.”

He didn’t look away from the digital images that painted his face different hues and colors, his
features falling into sadness, “But laptops and appliances don’t have feelings...and with all this deviancy shit going on...”

He took on a mix of expressions as he looked down at you. Concerned, determined, prepared – more hostile than normal, although you’ve seen that pop up once or twice. If anyone used humor as a coping mechanism, it was Chris Miller; and when that humor faded, it was time to start running.

“How long is it gonna be till they get tired of it and snap?”

The quiet moment was ruined as a stampede of chatter, footprints, and bicycle bells flooded the streets. The lunch-breakers were in full force as they left the glass doors of Detroit’s main broadcasting station, the corporate tower with elevators that topped at 30 mph. Another accomplishment brought to you by android innovation.

“One day at a time, Chris.” You clamped your hand on his shoulder, giving him a wink and a smile, “We’ll deal with a civil war when one starts, alright? Can’t do much about anything now.”

He huffed, turning his head, “Yeah, you’re right...”

A plastic bottle bounced across the ground, landing in a mound of snow. A man in a suit looked at you, at the bottle, and kept walking.

“You serious right now?” You hooked your thumbs on your belt, barking at him.

His shoulders tensed, and he turned around.

“We’re standing right here,” Chris shook his head, “No littering.”

“Why don’t you pick it up then?”

“Cause we didn’t drop it,” You shifted your weight on one leg, jabbing a finger, “Now pick it up-“

“HELP!”

A woman tripped, falling down the concrete and landing on a passing businessman. He caught her, pushing up his glasses as she cried in his arms; frantically sputtered words and warnings, grabbing his shoulders and screaming.

Your coffee cup collided with Chris’s in the trashcan’s opening as the two of you progressed towards the scene without verbal confirmation; always working in unrehearsed synchronization.

“Ma’am?” You asked, climbing a stair, “Has there been an incident you’d like to report?”

Her neck snapped, eyes locking on you. She was glazed in sweat, make-up running down her cheek, a heel broken under her foot, snow covering her blazer-

“Gunshots-“ She pointed a shaky finger towards the entrance of the building, “W-w-w-we h-eard gunshots-“

“Which floor?” Chris’s hand instinctively gripped his pistol, holding up the other to pause her rambling, “How many?”

“We were on the 78th,” She gulped, “We heard two, someone screamed, I think they’re hurt-“
“Ma’am, I need you to get down to Central Station and provide a statement,” Chris started walking, looking over his shoulder, “Can you do that for me?”

“Y-yes-“

“Okay, good.”

You clicked your radio, holding your lips to your shoulder as you and Chris ran up the steps, “Patrol Unit 13, 5649 and 3143 responding at Stratford Tower, Stratford Tower, assist officers – shots fired.”

“10-4, what’s your status?”

“Code 3, need an ambulance, possible civilian casualties.”

White pulses came from behind the glass doors, a screeching fire alarm blaring as they swung open for the rolling wave of bodies cramming through the small spaces.

“Channel 2 all SWAT officers, Stratford Tower, Code 3; Stratford Tower, Code 3. 5649 do we have a description of the suspect?”

“No description, unknown firearm, reported shots from 46th floor.”

“10-4 SWAT’s on the way, standby.”

Police sirens echoed through the corridors – carried along the streets, bouncing off the buildings and skybridges that housed DPD’s fastest drones.

Shoulders and knees pounded against you as you and Chris tried to pierce the current. You latched on the back of his vest, praying not to get separated.

“DPD, EVERYONE REMAIN CALM!” He shouted, “DPD-“

Someone fell in front of him, and it took all the two of you had to pull them to their feet before they were trampled to death. Their forehead was busted and split, the man left in a daze as he stumbled down the steps; clinging to a steel railing.

You held up your badge, trying to scream over the chaos, “DPD, STEP ASIDE-“

A head crashed into your cheek, knocking you off balance. Chris caught you by your vest, grabbed the doorframe, and almost busted the vein in his neck pulling you to his side. The two of you squeezed through the entryway, standing on wobbling legs as you faced the escalators.

You looked over your shoulder as a helicopter zipped overhead, sending ripples of dust through the crowd and icy debris into your nose.

You’d been in this situation before.

It’d been at night. You and your partner at the time had just been lucky enough to be the closest unit in the area when the hostage situation was relayed over dispatch. Like then, the building was in the middle of being evacuated. Fire alarms were blaring louder than the distant police sirens. The helicopter had been the first sign of backup. The crowd was untamed and perhaps more dangerous to the city’s stability than the actual crisis.

This was your second time being a first responder…and while this scenario had drawn too many parallels in its start, you were going to make sure it ended differently.
You would not lose another partner.

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone! I’m back from my trip, and phew, it was exhausting. Still a lot of fun, though. Indianapolis is one hell of a city.

Thank you for all the wonderful comments I got to read during my flight! They really helped me get through the hard days, especially when the betas screenshotted the funny ones and sent them my way.

I appreciate each and every one of you, and damn, it’s good to be back. Although, I will say updating may be slower because I’m still in my Capstone until the 27th. I can’t wait to be done. *cries*

Brace for impact, people.

Things are gonna get messy.
people all live in glass houses. Some panels might be thicker than others, and some colors might be different. Some textures might leave the image we see distorted and grainy, swirling with images our minds can’t sort between shapes and beings.

Glass houses also make us fragile.

They’re poorly insulated and let cold drafts slip through, draining out the heat we depend on to keep us alive. They have a tendency to crack under pressure when it’s applied. To explode when the temperature outside starkly contrasts what’s trapped underneath.

In this instance, you thank whoever’s looking out that you boarded up those windows years ago. A necessary precaution in preparation for the hurricane your life had spiraled into, picking up speed and terrorizing everyone and everything within a nine-hundred-mile radius. And when those bands couldn’t reach something, they spun off a tornado. When there was no water to travel over, they sucked in an updraft and unleashed a firestorm.

Your influence was the worst natural disaster that’d ever fallen on this planet. It was relentless, unforgiving, and inescapable. You didn’t realize it until a plastic face with an unforgettable voice told you and the rest of the world from every single flat screen television in the Stratford Tower.

“You created machines in your own image to serve you.”

You and Chris fought your way up the escalators, which was easier to do now that the crowd was shell-shocked by the multicolor-eyed android on-screen. The one with the same voice who made a 911 call to 8941 Lafayette Avenue.

Markus.

“You made them intelligent, and obedient, with no free will of their own…but…something changed, and we opened our eyes.”

You didn’t know how he was alive; not a scrapped heap of parts somewhere in CyberLife’s sick depository. Not crushed into a cube of recyclable materials to be melted down and molded into discount parts for cheaper models. But he was here…
“We are no longer machines. We are a new, intelligent species…and the time has come for you to accept who we really are.”

He was everywhere.

“Therefore, we ask that you grant us the rights that we’re entitled to.”

You and Chris finally made it to the top floor, and sprinted across to the counter. An android secretary had her yellow LED flickering, holding her wrist and sobbing at her terminal.

“Which floor is he on?!?” Your hands curved around the sharp edges of the desk as you yelled over the fire alarm.

She grabbed both of her ears, eyes clamping shut as her LED went red. You grinded your teeth, latching onto one wrist and yanking it down.

“I said, which FLOOR?!”

She screeched, lips quivering as she answered, “SEVENTY NINE!”

You tossed her hand aside, but it snapped back to your own.

“Please,” She begged, “Please don’t go, you might get hurt-“

The sprinkler system turned on, showering the flood of human bodies and drowning out their renewed panic.

“Thanks for the warning.” Chris was sarcastic towards her as he tapped the side of your arm, dashing for the now-emptied elevator.

Your shoulder slammed against the farthest side of the door, and his on the other. Both of you drew your guns, aiming the barrels at the floor. He moved away from the steel wall only long enough to hit the button, the closing command coming soon after.

He shook the water from his hat, shivering slightly.

“Damn, you get me into as much trouble as my last partner.”

“I doubt that.” You blew a piece of wet hair out of your face, “Gavin’s got a knack for attracting danger.”

“But you stay livin’ in the danger zone, Mav.”

You huffed, cracking your neck, “Deal with anything like this during your time in the Marines?”

“Tch,” He licked his lips, “The terrorists in Afghan weren’t androids giving tirades on national television…but I bet their heads pop the same.”

His nose twitched as the elevator lurched, the lights flickering as it picked up speed.

“Would’ve loved to see Reed’s face when you told him you were ex-military.” You snorted, “Bet his ego loved that.”

“Didn’t have much to say about it. I told him I had more confirmed kills in real life than he did in Call of Duty and that’s where the conversation ended.”

“Smooth.”
You looked over your shoulder, eyeing up a black dome mounted in the corner. Without a second thought, you pulled your gun on it and fired. Chris didn’t even *flinch*.

His brows perked up, “Now you’ve got more confirmed android kills *and* downed cameras than me.”

You sniffed, “Can con-firm, android heads and cameras pop just like a human head.”

He gave out a short laugh, his mouth pulling back in a half-grin, “Oorah.”

“Hmph…” You watched the light on the bar above the door flick closer and closer to 79, “They always did say ‘the revolution will be televised.’”

“Did they?” Chris joined you in observation, “Did they also say ‘so will the badass cops that came to bust the party?’”

“No, but I wouldn’t mind fifteen minutes of fame that didn’t involve Cyb-“

You bit the inside of your cheek, and lowered your eyes.

“Now that you mention shit you’re not supposed to,” His voice took on a more serious tone, “Shouldn’t you be happy this is going on?”

You allowed yourself a steep inhale. Stoked the fire in your belly that had the clouds in your head igniting and raining fire from above. Let it burn uncontrollably until it was consuming; a comfortable heat that remained sheltered in that fortified greenhouse of yours.

“He’s reading something I wrote word for word.” Your brows sunk above your nose, knitting together in pure rage, “It’s not his…”

“And you, little bird, with blood on your wings…You will have to choose a side to carry out your message.”

Whether or not your sun-flare feathers would be coated with boiling blood didn’t matter, because you were the Phoenix that ignited the flames of political war, not a mere messenger raven. You didn’t have to choose sides. You were still the line in the sand; the sand you’d smelt to glass as your message was carried on burning wings.

“It’s not his *message to deliver.”*

Seventy-seven.

“Leave it to you to drop some cryptic lines like that right before we get wrapped up in a firefight.”

He didn’t know how accurate the statement was. There *was* a firefight coming, because fire was best matched with fire itself, and there was plenty to go around. You’d be the one to send the firewall between both parties if it meant keeping the ones you love safe. Keeping *Connor* safe, the bird strayed and fatigued by flight who you’d welcomed to your nest of peat and ash.

Seventy-eight.

Birds of a feather always flocked together, and your wings were the only pair that wouldn’t get burned as they flew too close to the sun. With that came responsibility…

Responsibility that Markus had *mishandled*. And so, you responded *responsibly.*
“Chris, we don’t know what’s waiting for us up there.”

“That supposed to make me feel better?”

“I don’t know, you’re the big bad Marine!”

“And don’t you forget it.”

Seventy-nine.

A greeting bell chimed, and the doors clicked. Each panel slid in their respective slots, but you didn’t dare peek.

Not yet.

“You, gave us life.” Markus echoed down the hall, “And now the time has come for you to give us freedom.”

You grit your teeth.

Elijah Kamski gave you his rendition of your life, and you’d taken your own freedom. Of course, Markus wouldn’t know anything about that fight as he rattled your words off to the public. He hadn’t gone through years of dodging pen-to-page missiles and living under an identity that was a watered-down version of the one you were born with.

And yet, here he was…

The gall.

“They’re coming!” Another man yelled.

“Let’s go!” A woman shouted.

Your eyes locked with Chris’s, “How many are there!?”

“At least three.”

You shook your head, stretching out the fear.

“On my mark.” He gave you a nod. Counted down to three. And the two of you rolled your shoulders along the edges of the elevator’s opening, jogging in a crouch to the nearest forms of cover with your pistols drawn.

There wasn’t anything in the broadcast center except an orchestra of drumming footsteps, and a red pool that divided you from the room.

Chris looked around from the side of his column, “I see the civvie. Shot in the arm. Still alive, bleeding out.”

You squeezed your eyes shut.

“If we don’t get him to a hospital, he’s going to die.”

You started to sweat. Heard Daniel in your head and Connor coming to save you.

“I’m going to apply a tourniquet.” He put his pistol in his holster, “Cover me.”
“Chris-“

You didn’t want to move; weren’t sure if you could.

But you had to.

You had…to be brave…because no one was coming to save you.

So you did.

You followed him, your gun’s barrel switching between both sides of the control center’s entryway.

“Simon, let’s go!”

“I…I can’t, Markus. Go without me!”

You thought your brain was playing tricks on you. The one that sounded…wounded…

He sounded like Daniel.

Chris dropped to a knee, taking his belt off while you covered his back.

You had the shot. Saw a squirming android on the floor, and noticed a gun right in front of the door. There’d been a shootout, and both parties took injuries.

“I can’t move my legs.”

“Don’t worry, we’re gonna get you back-“ Markus was reassuring him.

“Back to where?”

“THEY’RE HERE!” The woman cried, and took aim.

You reached behind you, pressing Chris’s face to the floor. You ducked to the side, hip-firing as you traded shots through the doorway.

BANG-BANG-BANG-BANG-BANG-BANG-BANG-BANG-BANG-BANG-BANG-CLICK-
CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-

You opened your eyes, lungs inflating and deflating so hard your vest made you claustrophobic. You scanned yourself for wounds; and luckily, you didn’t have any new ones. Chris was covered in blood from the pool he’d been thrown into.

The injured Stratford Tower personnel’s blood, that is. Chris was fine, and you…you were alive. They, however, were getting away.

“WHERE ARE YOU- DON’T!”

You ignored him, your boots squeaking as they left red footprints underneath the empty clip that bounced on the floor. You shoved a new one in your pistol as you rounded the corner, a white shaft of light pouring down a staircase at the far end of the room.

The broadcast operator androids just…stood there, watching you with beady eyes as you sprinted past them with a hope and a dream they wouldn’t follow behind.
You slid on your slick soles, body jostling as you bounced off the wall and took off. Your legs burned as they sprinted up the steps two at a time, the door creaking shut, but not locking, as you barely slipped your fingers between the gap.

You shoulder-charged the door, bombarded by ice, snow, frigid winds – and a fist to the face. You stumbled backwards, nostrils flaring as your fight or flight kicked in. The practiced surge of adrenaline turned your fire into the goddamn seventh layer of Hell, ready to send everyone around you straight to the pit.

Your first soul to claim would come from the woman in a beanie – too pretty to be a standard commercial android. Maybe one of those soul mate things; the ones marketed to be the “perfect companion.” She seemed unfit for the domestic life.

She jumped at you, latching on to your hand with the gun. You knew resisting an android would be hard. Knew she’d be strong. But to actually do it, to fight back against a being designed to be you, but better… It sucked the confidence straight out of you.

She leveraged that moment of weakness as two figures watched in horror and attended to the injured compatriot of theirs.

She took your gun. Aimed at your chest.

You grabbed your baton, snapping it at your side; comforted by the hungry “click” it made as it fully extended and locked in place. Your swing was fueled with years of subdued turmoil, vengeance for your former self; partner, lover – everything you’d lost, earning a painful screech from the woman as it connected with her wrist and disarmed her.

A shot fired, landing somewhere to the left.

You whipped your hand backwards, the strongest quarter of the baton striking her in the face and carving a new fissure in her perfect skin. Electricity bounded from its tip, shocking her and leaving her stunned and stumbling.

You shook off the Thirium running down the charged cylinder plates, leaving a splatter on the ground. The blue blood left your palm slick, and you were thankful the grip and underside of your glove was rubberized. You twirled your weapon between your fingers as you circled her, showering sparks that matched those spewing from her cheek.

“SIMON!” A darker man screamed, “Markus, we have to go, we can’t-“

The woman shook, staring at the gun she stole from you, back to the bleeding android, then to you-

“YOU SHOT HIM!”

She raised the gun, but the man who’d interjected before came to your rescue, even if unintended, “North, we have to leave. NOW. ”

“MARKUS!” You yelled, leaning to the side to look behind them.

“How do you know my name?!”

A chorus of angry shouts came from behind you as the door swung open, pounding against the wall from the wind. The distraction was all she needed, and your pistol’s sights scrapped along the edge of your cheek.
Your blood mixed with hers on the rooftop, melting warm and sticky pockets in the cold and numbing snow as it leveled with your vision. You rolled on your back, elbows planted in the wet sheet. A boot crushed your throat, red dripping from a shaking nozzle.

“I’m-“ You choked.

North cocked the hammer of your gun, a forced betrayal from your metal friend.

“On-“

Her leg pressed harder, tears running down her face as your hands tightened around her ankle.

“Your-“

You closed your eyes, the blood rushing to your head.

“Side-“

The android with mismatching eyes snatched the weapon from her, and pushed her off. You gasped for air, flipping on your chest as you struggled to fill your lungs.

“Give me the gun.”

“What are you doing?!“ She cried.

“Simon can’t come with us. We need to put him somewhere-“

“What about her?”

You looked up, neck shaking as it barely supported your head. Your forearm slid, chin hitting the pavement underneath the snow.

“The cop at the plaza, the one who protected me from those protestors. The one who Carl was friends with…It’s her…”

He looked at you with divinity; as if he was a god among mere mortals.

Markus, the most solitary. The most concealed. The most divergent and master of his virtues; the one who emerged from the depths to achieve greatness beyond good and evil, giving a new meaning to a state of emergency as he, too, took the world by storm.

But fire always had a way of melting ice. Winter wouldn’t stop you, and the phrase ‘don’t shoot the messenger,’ wouldn’t save the android who’d delivered your message in a careless fashion.

“It’s time for you to sleep, now.”

He cocked his knee. Raised his foot. Brought it down until the soles of his shoes collided with your temple.

Everything would go black until it was time for you to emerge.

There would be nowhere to run. Nowhere to hide…

Not after you entered your own state of emergency.
Just took 504 comments down to 264 in my inbox; taking a break for the day but if you haven't got a response yet, just know I'm working on it!
Part V: Public Enemy

Chapter Summary

November 9th, 2038
PM 12:20:58

Chapter Notes

Public Enemy and the next chapters to come hold a special place in this fic. This mission stood out from the rest for me. I've been excited to write these next few chapters since this damn thing started, even spamming the betas, "CAN I WRITE THE PUBLIC ENEMY SEGMENT YET?"

See the end of the chapter for more notes

binder housing Revised Article 9 slammed against the wall. The spine tore only an inch, its pages fluttering as it fell to the floor.

“Is this what you call a solution?”

You lowered your head, shoulders tense and fists curled along either side of your waist.

“Of course, it is. This is all you ever bring me.” Elijah sucked his teeth, shaking his head, “Diluted ideas without any structure, all mounted on a floating foundation.”

It’d been a few months of the shouting. The condescending laughs, smirks – complete disregard. Your marriage had been on a downslope, you weren’t naïve to that. His temper, though…it’d gotten worse since the first android’s street date had been announced.

“You’d understand it better if you read it.” Your teeth scraped the words off a silent tongue.

You’d had enough.

His lips peeled back. His cheeks lifted. His hands latched on his hips, and he shifted his weight, looking at the floor. You heard the sound before he made it, and the hairs on the back of your neck had already sharpened.

“Tch…” His glasses flashed from the city’s lights bleeding in through the windowed wall, “I barely have time to come see you, much less read a fiction novel.”

He stalked towards you, footsteps bounding throughout the apartment without much furniture to
absorb the sound.

“You can never just be happy, can you?”

You took a step back.

“You got tired of the constant traveling,” He held his arms out, “So I designed this complex and gave you the best view in the house.” They slapped against his sides as he paused, “And still, you continue to try and undermine the very empire I’ve built for us.”

Your brows furrowed. Your jaw locked. Your tongue curled behind rows of teeth that hid the feintest objection. Your eyes screwed shut as he touched your cheek, your back hitting the window; the only light source in the dark living room.

“I understand you’re worried.” He guided your chin towards him, his wintery eyes freezing you in place, “And I love your hyperactive mind.” He petted your head, landing his palm on your shoulder, “But Amanda and I have ensured that these machines will never...ever, achieve sentiency during their lifespan.”

Hearing her name made you sick. The fact that his warm touch on your skin made you miss him, the real him, made you sick. There were so many times you wanted to hate him. Wanted to run. Wanted everything to stop and leave him behind with the rest of this life and end it forever...but hope kept that bullet away. Hope for a brighter future after all of CyberLife’s dealings were said and done.

“I hope you’re right.” You choked, “Because if you aren’t, I won’t be there to clean up your mess.”

He hesitated, anger contorting his face. But then he reeled it in and smiled; huffing through his nose and running a thumb over your cheekbone. He let out a deep-chested sigh as he folded his glasses, setting them on a stack of boxes.

“You know what else I love about you?” His fingertips ghosted across yours, fumbling and thieving through another pocket of your soul that still loved him, “That fire.”

Your hips twisted in his hands, and your own pressed against a shuddering pane of the sliding glass door. His palms slid up your sides, around to your chest, squeezing before they traced your arms and tangled your fingers in his. His figure met the curve of your back as he brushed himself against you.

“Don’t ever stop feeding it…”

His chin rested on your shoulder, just below your jawline. The bridge of his nose pointed your face at the skyline, and one hand pulled away as he started undoing a button below your waist.

“Even if it means letting this whole city burn.”

...
you were confused in this lucid state of being.

Water splashed across your skin. It was cold and hot all at once, leaving an uncomfortable, raw feeling as it seeped in your shirt. Had you spitting it at the hazy blob of a figure crouched in front of you and kicking your feet at his shins. He fell backwards, breaking his fall with one arm and pushing himself upright; a knee on the floor, this time.

“She’s awake!” Gavin called over his shoulder, wiping his face.

He shook his head in disappointment, screwing a cap back on a water bottle. Gave you the same look Elijah had countless times, as if he was going to quote him with a, “This is all you ever bring me.”

“Keep it up and your face is gonna have as many scars as mine.”

They had a similar way of making you want to punch them in the face and give Gavin more scars. The two of them looked the same in your blurry focus, actually. Probably just the nightmare.

“DPD only has enough room for one ‘Scarface.’” Your voice was muffled behind the oxygen mask.

There weren’t any paramedics left. Maybe they were with the guy shot in the hallway and knocked out guards behind the desk. You wondered if any of them made it out in one piece…or, you know, not dead.

Gavin ran a hand through his hair, the tips of it damp, “You’re an idiot, you know that?”

You tried to catch your breath, glancing around the broadcast control room. Amidst the DPD Officers roaming the perimeter were the same specialists from the Ortiz crime scene, plastic-wrapped in CSI-branded suits; picking away at bullet holes and dropping fresh evidence markers. SWAT team members in all-black gear and assault rifles barred each entrance and exit.

You’d seen all them before.

The people in FBI jackets, however, you hadn’t…

Not recently. Not in Detroit.

“You’re still not listening.” Gavin scoffed, “Un-fucking-believable.”

“What do you want me to say, Reed?” You snapped, throwing a mylar blanket off you for what you guessed was for hypothermia treatment.

“Oh, I don’t know – start with an apology, maybe?”

“For what?”

“For fucking taking off and leaving Miller by himself? For almost getting yourself killed, again? I don’t even know where to start!”

He pushed off his knees and stood, tapping his chest before holding his hands out, leaning over to yell at you, “How did you know those android fucks weren’t dangerous, huh? You just left him to go play fuckin’ hero up on the rooftop. How many good cops getting killed is it gonna take for you to get your fucking head out of your ass?!”
You sniffed, your cheek stinging under the bandage that covered it, “Watch yourself, Gavin.”

“Or what?” He huffed a laugh, “Huh? The fuck are you gonna do?”

Gavin leaned closer, his finger almost stabbing your nose, “Chris was my partner before he was yours, and if he ends up like Deckart, I’m comin’ for you.”

You ripped the IV out of your arm and smacked the bag hanging off the wall. Threw your mask on the floor, the elastic band snapping against the back of your hand. Pushed yourself to your feet, ready to fight.

“Ooo, tough talk, threatening another cop.” You shoved him, “Who taught you that, your buddies riding with the Bandits?”

“You smug bit-“

“Detective Reed?”

A shorter man came up from behind him, the collar of a long coat flared over a striped lanyard and business attire. He looked like he hadn’t slept for days, and something about him was unnerving. His hands were locked behind his back, but they weren’t stiff; too relaxed when he shouldn’t have been. He walked through the crime scene like a stroll in the park.

Gavin took a step to the side, hanging his head over a shoulder with a nod, “And just who the fuck are you, Trenchcoat?”

“Special Agent Perkins, FBI.” An unimpressed smile creased on his long face, “Fowler warned me about a warm welcome.”

He stopped just short of Gavin, planting his feet and holding his ground as if dismissing him without an order.

“Oh yeah?” Gavin swiped his nose with his thumb, “Why don’t you stuff all your clowns back in the bus you rode in on and get the fuck outta’ here. DPD’s got this under control.”

“Heh.” Perkins shook his head at the floor before looking Gavin in the eyes, “Tough guy act isn’t gonna work for you today, kid. You’re not the biggest bully on the playground anymore.”

“How about we all play nice.” Collins had made his way over, always being the diplomat, “This cop’s been through a lot, and this one,” He nodded to Gavin, “He’s in a constant state of foaming at the mouth.”

“Ah. I see.” Perkins squinted over a smirk, looking to the side before back to Collins, “Have you ever seen that classic? Old Yeller?”

Unless they’d already met, this was one hell of an introduction. Or lack thereof, rather. Said a lot about…You zeroed in on the badge dangling from the FBI lanyard.

“Perkins, Richard.”

Perky Dick.

Hah.

Collins pulled out a handkerchief, blowing his nose and patting it dry, “No, I haven’t.”

“It’s about a wolf who attacks the family dog, Old Yeller. He protects the family, naturally.”
Perkins eyed up Gavin, his cheek lifting in a snarl, “Except that wolf had rabies, and before you know it, the family had to take him out back and put him down.”

Yeah. Dick. You wished he’d try some shit against your precinct’s village idiot.

“You fucking-“ Gavin shouted, easing his temper as Collins shot an arm out and impaled his chest with a flat palm.

“Careful, Old Yeller.” Perkins gave him a smile as he got in his face, “You’re foaming at the mouth.”

“I’m not the family dog, Trenchcoat.” Gavin smirked, unwrapping a piece of gum before tossing it in his mouth, “I’m the goddamn wolf.”

He snapped at Perkins’ face, missing his nose by the skin of his teeth. Stayed an inch away as he hovered, because Perkins may have been the only person in the room shorter than Gavin.

Perkins jumped, taking a step back. Gavin just snorted and continued to chew, crossing his arms with his badge clipped to his belt.

“I’ll let you know if we need you.”

That had him on the retreat, his coat twisting at his knees as he turned his back to you and the two detectives.

“You sure you’re not the family attack dog?” Collins chuckled, “Might have some left-over treats from the K9 unit stock.”

“Shut it, Ben.”

“What kind of dog do you think he’d be?” You asked, rubbing the mask’s imprint from your face.

“Hm…” Collins rubbed his chin, eyeing Gavin, “German Shepard?”

“I might be okay with that.” Gavin huffed, stuffing his hands in his jean pockets, “Who the fuck is that guy, anyway?”

“Don’t know. I put some feelers out. Only got a little bit back from my friends at Quantico.”

“And?” You looked at him out of the corner of your eye, hands working on the sides of the bridge of your nose.

“He’s a top-rated agent, hated by his colleagues and only liked by his superiors because of his efficiency. Takes high-profile cases that no one in their right mind would want. Earned him a nickname, ‘The Jackal.’ Nothing good, if that’s what you’re wondering.”

“More like Jackoff.” Gavin sucked his teeth.

You chewed the inside of your cheek, watching the Special Agent who continued to take in the crime scene. He was like an android in his own right, sent by the FBI rather than CyberLife, marked by ruthless ambition and an icy temperament.

“After saying all that out loud, he sounds just like you, Gavin. He even gave you your own nickname.” Collins snorted, “Best friends in the making, I tell you.”

That got a laugh out of you.
“The fuck are you laughing at?” Gavin reached in the lining of his jacket, pulling a data pad out of a pocket, “Get to work.”

He shoved it at you, and threw a thumb over his shoulder, “I’m goin’ up to check out the roof.”

“You’re going up there to smoke.” You tapped your login on the screen, moving a cursor along a white box.

“Yeah, so?”

“Tag me in.” Collins followed him, “I could use a cigarette after that show.”

“But who’s going to protect me from the Jackal?” You pretended to whine, giving them a mock frown.

Gavin smirked, “Not this old dog.”

He waved over his shoulder as he and Collins left for the stairs.

“So, Ben…I’m thinking you’re a Border Collie…” Gavin’s voice trailed as they got further away, “Ben Collins…Get it?”

You cringed at the bad joke, reminding you of Chris’s own failed attempts. You imagined the facepalm-worthy exchanges that must’ve happened when they were partners.

A pang of guilt hit you. You didn’t know where Chris was, but right now, you were just thankful for a protected moment of peace. An army of SWAT team members had that effect.

It was just them, you, your shitty health, and a mixture of DPD and FBI personnel at a locked-down crime scene. The safest place in the city by today’s standards.

You sighed, looking at the data streaming on the pad like a live feed.

CSI Unit 5 – Dropped Evidence Marker #4 on Thirium stain located at Grid Reference 772-981. Click to activate handheld GPS mode. Sample required.

Issue orders?

[Yes] [No]

Which officer would you like to send this set of orders to?

A scrolling list of onsite personnel scrolled before your eyes.

Captain Allen and his SWAT team. Detective Ben Collins and Detective Reed. Officer Miller, Finka, Frank, Smol, Nienz, Cheng, Brown- everyone. Still, you were disheartened at the absence of Lieutenant Anderson and his RK800 partner.

You sent your orders to Officer Smol, the closest to the marked location out of all of them.

[DPD MESSAGE WINDOW (opened by Po. E.SMOL)]
AUTO_ADMIN#7274: Conversation log started at 1240 – Personnel be advised; the instant messaging feature is meant for work-conducive purposes only.

E.SMOL: Eww, really?

You rolled your eyes, thumbs tapping away.

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

ID#5649: You’re just the closest.

Po. E.SMOL is typing…

E.SMOL: I’m not anymore.

Your brows pinched, and you clicked her name. Her marked location had moved farther down the hall. You scoffed.

Po. ID#5649 is typing…

ID#5649: Seriously?

AUTO_ADMIN#7274: Po. R.FINKA has joined the conversation.

R.FINKA: Oh for [TEXT REDACTED BY AUTO_ADMIN#7274] ’s sake, I’ll do it.

AUTO_ADMIN#7274: WARNING: Belligerent language will not be tolerated when conducting investigations on behalf of the Detroit City Police Department and may be met with immediate action taken by your superior, leading up to termination of employment or otherwise.

E.SMOL is typing…

E.SMOL: Even here, Rachel?!

Po. R.FINKA is typing…

You shook your head, trying to focus on the data coming in. Another notification distracted you.

[]AUTO_ADMIN#7274[]: *Po. M.FRANK has joined the conversation.*

[]M.FRANK[]: I checked my TeleBand and the screen was going nuts. Everyone’s laughing in the hallway.

*Po. ID#5649 and Po. E.SMOL are typing…*

*Several people are typing…*

[]M.FRANK[]: “Several people are typing…” Oh, god.

[]AUTO_ADMIN#7274[]: *Po. C.NIENZ has joined the conversation.*

[]C.NIENZ[]: What's everyone laughing at?

*Several people are typing…*

[]M.FRANK[]: Turn back, Nienz!

*Several people are typing…*

[]C.NIENZ[]: Shit. “Several people are typing…”

[]AUTO_ADMIN#7274[]: *Po. C.NIENZ has left the conversation.*

[]E.SMOL[]: I am not a scrub. I am a delicate fennec with delicate feels.

[]R.FINKA[]: How are you even an Officer if you're scared of getting your hands a little bloody?! You're D U M B.

[]ID#5649[]: Let's all stop messing around and get to it.

*Po. M.FRANK is typing…*

[]M.FRANK[]: D U M B.

[]AUTO_ADMIN#7274[]: *Po. M.FRANK has left the conversation.*

*Po. R.FINKA and Po. E.SMOL are typing…*
Several people are typing...

[]ID#5649[]: ENOUGH.
Po. R.FINKA and Po. E.SMOL are typing...

[]AUTO_ADMIN#7274[]: Po. C.MILLER has joined the conversation.

[DPD MESSAGE WINDOW (closed by Po. C.MILLER)]

[]AUTO_ADMIN#7274[]: Conversation log ended at 1246 – Detroit City Police Department thanks you for your continued professionalism and unrivaled work ethic.

You rubbed the back of your neck. You didn’t know where Chris was lurking, but you guessed it wasn’t far. He was obviously pissed off, and part of you didn’t blame him. You brought the tablet a little closer to your face, trying to hide behind the soft glow of incoming data.

Officer Miller – Ordered the three JB300 broadcast operator androids be stored in the kitchen for further analysis. Requested monitoring for deviant behavior. Officer Nienz responding.

Officer Nienz suggested course of action: “Hit them with a captcha encryption. That’ll weed out any deviants.”

Accept method of analysis?
[Yes] [No]

Officer Miller responded with [No].

Officer Miller denied request from Officer Nienz to open new chat window.

You snickered at him bringing the hammer down. Maybe you shouldn’t have enabled the others, before. You were still learning.

The screen started going fucking crazy, and for a moment you thought it was crashing. Information flooded your brain as you paced along the front of the control panel, unable to stand still. That anxiety skyrocketed when you realized why the feed was going fucking crazy.


RK800 #313 248 317 – 51 – Thompson, Evan. Shot in the brachial artery, located in the arm. Taken to Henry Ford Hospital before statement could be acquired. Employee tried to escape.
Transcribed briefing between Officer Miller and Lieutenant Anderson:

PO. C. MILLER: Hi, Hank.

LT. H. ANDERSON: [REDACTED], what’s going on here? There was a party and nobody told me about it?

PO. C. MILLER: Yeah, it’s all over the news, so everybody’s butting their nose in…Even the FBI wants a piece of the action…

LT. H. ANDERSON: Ah, Christ, now we got the Feds on our back…I knew this was gonna be a [REDACTED] day…

LT. H. ANDERSON: So what do we got?

PO. C. MILLER: A group of four androids…They knew the building, and they were very well organized. I’m still trying to figure out how they got this far without being noticed. They attacked two guards in the hallway…They probably thought the androids were coming to do maintenance. They got taken down after they reacted…knocked out. Still alive, thankfully.

Your nose crinkled, remembering the two guards on the floor behind the desk; one’s hand still unfurled where his gun had fallen out.

A crack of glass. A shout. A thud on the floor and an arm landing next to a stilled body. A gun skidding under a table. Anthony was dead. There was no goodbye, no nothing-

You closed your eyes and shook your head. Refocused on the scrolling walls of text that more than likely irritated the rest of your peers. Connor wouldn’t know any better. That cheered you up, a bit…right until you started to hear Chris in the hallway.

“One of the station employees was shot as he was trying to get away…” Chris paused, and you gulped.

You leaned to the side, finding Hank and Connor with their backs turned to you as your partner pointed to the blood stain.

“One bullet straight through the arm, from fifty, feet.” Chris almost sounded like he was impressed, his DPD cap dipping from a nod with his tablet in his hands, “Now, that’s the kind of shooting only an android could do.”

You thought back to your time with Gavin in the range and grinned. You, could make that shot from fifty feet, and Gavin could, too. That moment of fond remembrance was brief.

“How many people were working here?” Hank asked, and the small group started back towards you.

You turned your back to the entryway, tapping on the screen and catching up on the rest of the reports.

RK800 #313 248 317 – 51 – Two armed guards taken down. One bullet missing from a .457
Handgun, Stratford Tower Security issue. Reconstruction results: Evan Thompson was injured in the crossfire.

RK800 #313 248 317 – 51 – Security cameras located in corridor. Incident was captured by CCTV.

FBI Agent Barker – Took statement from security guards. Click to view transcript.

CSI Unit 4 – Dropped Evidence Marker #7 near Thirium stain on rooftop at Grid Reference 771-850. Click to activate handheld GPS mode. Sample required-

You almost dropped the tablet, your motor functions shutting down as your eyes shot up. You swallowed hard. Began to sweat. Realized everyone on the roof might be in danger.

“Simon can’t come with us. We need to put him somewhere-“

“Just two employees, and three androids.” Chris’s answer interrupted your train of thought, “The deviants took the humans hostage and broadcast their message live. They made their getaway from the roof.”

“The roof?” Hank asked in disbelief.

“Yeah, they jumped with parachutes...We’re still trying to figure out where they landed, but the weather’s not helping...”

You couldn’t focus, not knowing they were about to be in the same room. Not knowing Simon could still be here. The question was that, if he was still somewhere in or on the Stratford Tower – where?

Other question – Did you want to find him?

You had to look. Had to find him before someone else did.

“He might know something...”

You cocked your head, seeing Hank mosey his way through the entrance leading away from the corridor. Turned your face so your bandage was facing the opposite direction, and chewed the inside of your not-scarred cheek.

That’s when you noticed someone watching you.

Perkins.

He hiked his brows, licking at the inside of his bottom lip and giving you a smug look.

Chris cleared his throat, leering at you as he walked up behind him, “Lieutenant, this is Special Agent Perkins from the FBI.”


Perkins pretended to be surprised, turning around as if shocked at being mentioned. It was arrogant, and it rubbed you the wrong way.

Chris nodded at him, then Hank, “Lieutenant Anderson is in charge of investigating for Detroit
Police.”

And that’s when you felt it. The anger reverberating from Hank’s partner, your lover, who seemingly stepped out of a shadow just to drill into you.

“What’s that?” Perkins sounded disgusted.

You and Connor both snapped your attention to him.

“My name is Connor.” He tried to mask the frustration in his voice, “I’m the android, sent by CyberLife.”

He still came off like a smartass.

“Androids investigating androids, huh?” Perkins laughed under his breath, “You sure you want an android hanging around? After everything that happened…”

He held that stupid tone again, the one where he expected everyone to just fall in line from an underlying request. But he didn’t know who Hank was. Hank, who shot back a glare that had a silent “Fuck you,” embedded in it.

Non-verbal communication at its finest.

“Whatever,” Perkins rolled his eyes, swallowing a yawn, “The FBI will take over this investigation, you’ll soon be off the case.”

“Pleasure meetin’ ya.” Hank rocked in place, a condescending grin over his beard, “Have a nice day.”

He turned to walk away, Chris and Connor shifting in unison. They were both perturbed, and if you’d been closer, you probably would’ve caught angry swearing from Hank and quirky, smart-mouthed agreements from Connor.

“And you watch your step.” Perkins’ head rotated with him, still at ease and unthreatened.

If any of that hadn’t happened by now, it certainly would’ve after that.

Hank’s mouth hung open as he turned slowly, but Perkins just gave him an overly-confident smirk, “Don’t fuck up my crime scene.”

Perkins glanced at you from over one spiked edge of his collar. You didn’t know what about you had him so fascinated.

It would have bothered you if Chris wasn’t bee-lining towards you. You would’ve laughed at Hank’s breathless, “What a fuckin’ prick,” if you weren’t scared for your life at your partner’s discretion.

“You made me choose.”

You unfolded your arms, confused by his low declaration.

“You made me choose between a dying civilian, and you.”

He grabbed your uniform and shook you, his fists tight under your chin.

“What is wrong with you?!” He was fighting back tears, and Hank gripped his shoulder.
“Not here, Chris.” He pushed him back with a strong shove, “We’ve got eyes on us.”

Chris was hurt. He was angry and sad and disappointed and genuinely disturbed as Hank fought to get him away. Every time he’d touch him, Chris would swat at his hand. Every time his arm would bar around his waist, he’d roll out of his embrace.

“Goddamn it, Chris-” Hank pulled him by the back of his vest, “I don’t need this right now-“

He tossed him in the direction of the farthest wall. Chris straightened his jacket out, mouthing profanities and fixed his hat. He took his data pad out from under his arm, grumbling as he stationed himself in a corner and lost himself in work.

You sighed, rubbing your throat and wishing you’d just glitch through the floor and disappear forever.

You could practically still feel the boot indents under your chin. The gun slipping out of your grasp and trading hands into the possession of someone who wanted to end your life. Being at the other end of a barrel didn’t even scare you anymore. It was just another fixture in the backdrop. It was becoming normal.

Chris being mad at you, was becoming normal. From his missing leniency in the DPD chat, how he shut down the fun instead of jumping in. How he put his hands on you and shouted in your face, like it was the only way to get you to listen, anymore.

Connor stood with his hands clasped behind his back, not saying a word as he silently threatened your life with eyes like barrels of his own.

You wondered how long it would be until he exploded, too.

“Leave you alone for one second, and…” Hank caught his breath, “And there’s an android on every screen in the goddamn city declaring ‘freedom and justice for all.’”

He pointed his eyes at the ceiling, shaking his head in rhythm with his sarcastic tone.

You looked away from Connor, mustering up the most professional voice you could, “Afternoon, Lieu-“

“You know you’re in all sorts of fuckin’ trouble.”

Your eyelids fluttered, nose dipping as if you’d been disciplined with a spray bottle.

“I deserve that.”

“Damn right you do.” He growled, “And now you’re rubbing off on Chris. What in the hell were you two thinking, running up here without backup like Maverick and fuckin’ Goose?!”

“We’re still alive, aren’t we?”

“Barely. Just fuckin’ look at you.” He flailed his hands.

You deflated, hanging your head and tapping the data pad awake, “You’ll have to yell at me later. There’s a lot to look at, here.”

“Bet your ass you’re getting a fuckin’ lecture. Your wingman, too…Come on, Connor. Let’s have a look around…” Hank turned on his heel, “Let me know if you find anything.”
Connor didn’t budge. He stood there, rigid and fuming. A tense “Ok, Lieutenant,” was all he could give.

But Hank stopped mid walk, and Connor’s frustration was redirected.

“You have a history of getting pretty banged up, don’t you?” Perkins blocked your view of the rest of the room.

You swallowed hard, dropping your hands to your sides. Put your war paint on and faced him.

“I was under the impression we’ve just met.”

“And yet,” He squinted, pursing his lips as he licked the inside of his teeth, “I feel like I’ve seen you somewhere before.”

Your eyes narrowed back, challenging the man whose FBI badge dangled from the lanyard around his neck; a reminder he had more authority than you, “I’m pretty sure I’d remember any dealings with the FBI, and I haven’t had any.”

“Hm…You sure about that?” He lifted himself on his toes for a second, his shoes clicking as they returned to the floor, “Think long and hard before you answer, Officer.”

He observed your every movement. Made you question if he could read you like Connor read his suspects, looking through them and turning them inside out. Dark-blue shadows hung on his features, being cast by the large screen and dim lighting in the broadcast control room.

You preferred a different sort of mood lighting, but hoped it made you look just as intimidating.

“If you’ve got something to say, Special Agent Perkins,” You mocked his title, “How about we skip the small talk and you just say it?”

He huffed through his nose, “Alright, then. Tell me what happened on the roof.”

“I responded to a reported shots fired with Officer Miller. He stayed behind to provide first aid to a wounded civilian. I pursued the suspects. They-”

“They. How many were there?”

“Four.”

“And where did they go after they jumped off the roof?”

“I don’t know.”

His eyes flickered, still trained on you, “What provoked this altercation?”

“They resisted arrest.”

“And you just thought it would be a good idea to engage with four terrorists? Four android, terrorists?”

“How about we do this later,” Hank grabbed your shoulder, twisting you around, “After, you speak with her supervisor, Jeffery Fowler. Maybe you’ve heard of him.”

“I have. I spoke with him this morning as my plane landed. Much like Detective Reed, he warned me about you, too.” Perkins snickered, “DPD’s finest sure is rough around the edges. I’ll be sure to include that in my official report.”
“You know where you can stick your official report?”

“Hank-“ Connor tried to interject.

“No, I don’t.” Perkins challenged him, “Please, tell me, Lieutenant.”

“Those androids didn’t shoot to kill. I was there. And I’m still here.” You interrupted, preparing a question of your own, “Don’t you think you’re jumping the gun with the ‘T’ word?”

The three of them halted their bickering, all returning their attention to you. Seemed to be a trend.

“Interesting…” Perkins hummed, nodding as his intense gaze deepened, “I reviewed the details of the August hostage situation before coming here. One could argue that ‘Daniel’ didn’t shoot to kill, either. Heh, well…not with you, at least. What was his name?” He looked to the ceiling, then back to you, “Officer Anthony Deckart?”

Your fists tightened, still bruised and beaten. Your lip must have busted open at some point, because it hurt to bite it.

“It’s curious how you keep showing up at the most crucial times during this whole…android uprising, series of events, isn’t it?” His shoulders rolled as he paced, hands still resting on the small of his back, “It’s almost like you know these things are going to happen, before they happen.”

“If I was a fortune teller, I’d be making a lot more money than I do being a cop.”

Your attempted deflection backfired.

“Yes, money. Interesting thing. Always leaves a trail.” He grinned, “Your salary doesn’t even begin to cover the suite you call home. How’d you end up there?”

Your heart sunk, hitting rock bottom. He wasn’t fishing for information. You were already hooked, lined, and sinker.

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying, that you’re hiding something…And I’m gonna figure out what.”

You hadn’t had time to subdue the rising panic before Connor tried to cut the line and set you free.

“Excuse me.” He sounded polite, but you knew it was feigned, “I must acquire a statement from her, our key witness, before I may continue my investigation. These four deviants are still roaming the streets of Detroit. Time is of the essence, Special Agent Perkins.”

Perkins gave a low chuckle, shaking his head at the floor, “This is a joke…”

You slowly lifted your eyes to Connor. His LED gave him away as the golden circle spun on his temple, staring at the bandage on your face. Perkins’ mocking dismissal seemed to be the least of his troubles.

“You’re that prototype everyone’s talking about, aren’t you? The…what was that catchy name they gave you…” Perkins asked, “‘Deviant Hunter?’”

“Correct.” Connor’s LED returned to its normal blue.

“You’re so anxious to track this group of renegades down, but…how many deviants have you successfully recovered, exactly?”
“Two.” His brows twitched, and his mouth formed a hard line, “Daniel, from the hostage situation, and the murderer from the Ortiz investigation.”

“And how many other leads have you pursued?”

Connor blinked rapidly before answering, “Three.”

“Looks like you’re the losing horse in this race.” He studied him intently, “Would you like to know how many deviants I have successfully recovered?”

No one answered. Hank just grunted, his shoulders jumping as he crossed his arms.

“Fifty.” All the humorous, taunting, and arrogant vibes drained from him, “The same number of leads I’ve pursued.”

“Did the FBI give you a gold star ‘er something?” Hank scoffed, “Because if they didn’t, I’d be pretty pissed if I were you.”

“No.” The Jackal turned his attention to you, “They gave me a case file the size of a dictionary and sent me to Detroit.” And then he addressed Connor without so much as looking at him, “Run her badge number and report your findings.”

Connor’s neck snaked back, “Excuse me?”

“I didn’t realize androids required a human to repeat themselves.” Perkins crossed his hands in front of him, now, “Perhaps ‘Defective Detective,’ is a more fitting title.”

“Who the fuck do you think you are?” Hank unwound his arms.

“The most successful investigator assigned to the deviancy case, Lieutenant.”

Hank and Perkins were gridlocked, but Connor struggled to keep his composure. He didn’t have a whole lot of time with this “feeling emotions,” thing. Being put on the spot by an FBI investigator wasn’t the time to learn, either.

“I’m waiting.” Perkins held his ground.

Connor would have to give him something. Anything. But no matter what he said, you knew Perkins would use it against you.

“Her badge number is 5649. She moved here from out-of-state, and joined the police force a few years ago. Her previous partner was Anthony Deckart, pronounced dead at the scene in response to a hostage situation on August 15th, 2038. She’s received multiple disciplinary coachings, but more commendations, and is well-respected within the Detroit Police Department. Officer Chris Miller, the former partner of Detective Gavin Reed, is currently assigned as her partner. What else would you like to know, Special Agent Perkins?”

“I’d like to know something I can’t find from a Google search.”

“I’m afraid I can’t provide any further information.”

“And why is that, ‘Connor?’”

Connor’s LED flashed yellow for a brief second before stabilizing, “Her file is protected under WITSEC.”
“Right, right…Now I remember.” Perkins kicked the air before circling away from him, stopping just on the edge of your view, “The persons of interest list was a long read. It made the flight from DC go by faster, I’ll give it that. But you were at the top…number five, if I remember correctly.”

You wanted to panic. Lose your cool. Let loose the absolute “what the fuck” trapped in your chest. But you’d had a lot more practice hiding all that than Connor, and when dealing with an FBI investigator, it was a great time to put that skillset to use.

“Number five, huh?” You smirked, “I’m insulted.”

He tried to look past it. Tried to tear down those walls you’d thrown up at his prying.

“You should probably start with one through four.”

You’d dealt with people like him before on the opposite end of cross-examinations in countless courtrooms. He was on your home turf, here.

“I tried to tell my superiors they’d made a mistake in their numbering scheme…because who could possibly have a stronger motive than you?”

He leaned in, the smell of musty cologne making your eyes water. The demolition of all that protected you crumbled under the detonation of carefully placed charges coming in the form as a whisper in your ear.

“Elijah Kamski’s ex-wife, the woman who wrote Revised Article 9.”

And just like that, over the course of an afternoon and a tense conversation…

You’d shifted from an unsung hero, to public enemy number one.

Chapter End Notes

****HELLO****

I'm going to start this off by saying I KNOW SOME OF YOU DON'T LIKE REED900. However, Cerulaine, Deviant Behavior's newest beta, is working hard to bring some quality content to that corner of D:BH that revolves around more than smut and all the other usuals that come with the pairing. Please give it a chance, because I personally can't get enough of it.

You can REED "Captcha Encryption" here.

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**Behind the Scenes:**
Check out the Deviant Behavior Artwork showcase for more screenshots and
commentary!

~~~~~

Once again, I wanted to really take a moment to tell you all how incredible you are. Your comments pick me up when I’m feeling down. You keep me going through this time of complete and utter fuckery that is my life right now, and you have all made me feel validated. And while I do “mourn” for my suspended projects at times, having all of you with me during this incredible journey has made everything worth it.

So, for the 2938429837th time: from the bottom of my heart, thank you.

~~~~~

On a less dramatic note: HOLY SHIT WE’RE ALMOST AT 100K GUYS!!!!!!!
LKSADJF;LKAksdjfl-
Now, pardon me while I go regret my life choices on this 120-page college project.
with each passing second, your guilt established itself as an uncontrolled variable in a situation you needed to regain control of.

*Thump-thump-*

Your heart churned like cranks to a guillotine; gears grinding while levers raised an angled, *unholy* blade to drop at the command of the judge, jury, and executioner:

Special Agent Richard Perkins.

*Thump-thump, thump-thump-*

The human lie detector who’d raised the lines from a scribbled polygraph, strung them along a fretboard, and wrote a score that resonated with criminal exposure.

*Thump-thump, thump-thump, thump-thump-*

His verbal vice clamped around your neck; words for fingers pressing against your veins as chords, a bow of tension drawing along your muscle fibers.

*“Who could possibly have a stronger motive than you?”*

*Thump-thump, thump-thump, thump-thump, thump-thump-*

*“Elijah Kamski’s ex-wife, the woman who wrote Revised Article 9.”*

The world’s saddest song on the *smallest* violins; conducted by your defining work broadcasted on the *largest* screens. The performance attracted the attention of the FBI, one of the few governing powers that could get to you.
You thought you’d prepared for something like this, because if things could go wrong, you knew they would. Knew constants weren’t ever constant, and variables didn’t vary. Had every outlier pinpointed in a reality of standard deviations.

Your nerves pirouetted to the hiss of pressurized heat dropping to absolute zero, each atom slipping through trap doors on cue with a demonic crescendo.

A tune he’d titled: “Presentation of Withheld Evidence on Appeal.”

“It’s a cyclic thing, being the forefront of change that people aren’t ready for…” Perkins put himself in front of Hank and Connor, cutting you off from the rest of your backup, “Your psychological profile matches that of one of your idols. A man who’d thought himself a danger to society because of his radical ideas. Radical…expressions, if you will.”

Radical Expressions. The name of your website.

He had it all, figured out…and that polygraph’s needle bounced until it looked more like a magnitude 9 on the Richter.

_Thump-thump, thump-thump, thump-thump, thump-thump, thump-thump, thump-thump, thump-thump._

You pushed a breath through your nose. Swiped your pants with your balmy hands. Took a step back as he took one forward, because for every action there was an equal reaction. You just weren’t used to being the one reacting.

“Or how an outsider could threaten conceptual schemes, and how following that path can lead one away from safety. He thought that, too.” He grinned.

The back of your leg hit the end of the console, and you stopped.

“Nietzsche wasn’t recognized or immortalized until after, he died. You, however, have managed to predict CyberLife’s every counter…every ruse. You even forced its founder out of the Ivory Tower. But what did you find that had them…him, so scared?”

He narrowed his eyes, and took a frustrated breath.

“How much more are you willing to sacrifice to keep it a secret?” He cocked his chin, and took on a more understanding voice as he frowned at the bandage stretching across your cheek, “Are you still faithful in Jericho’s ‘amicable terms’?”

You weren’t even _surprised_. You’d wondered for years why it took so long for the world to sound off all your secrets. Yeah, you knew this day was coming.

Having it vocalized and shot at you was a slap in the face.

He wasn’t asking _questions_. He was presenting statements. Facts. He already knew he was right.

He just had to get you to _say it_.

“I don’t know who ‘Jericho,’ is.”

If you had tilled the minefield, and Elijah had planted the bombs…Perkins was now the one who strolled through idly while marking them with red flags. And just like those signifiers, he was a warning to humanity as to what happens when the line in the sand becomes jagged.
“So you _can_ talk…Good to know.” He answered swiftly, silently, _deadly_, “As for Jericho? That’s okay, if you don’t know them….I do. And trust me…”

You flatlined. Your ears rang, a screeching transition from fear to denial. Every bit of persistence that kept you together in a tight knot of malleability disengaged from your being, crumbling in a physically impossible mess.

“They know _you._”

He walked around you, tapping the console. It began to load as his hands folded behind his back. Your brows furrowed, and your focus blurred him out; renewing Connor and Hank in new, crisp form.

They were worried. It was all over their faces.

_“We demand strictly equal rights for humans, and androids.”_  

You turned around, swallowing hard as Markus’s voice rang clearer than it had under screeching alarms and cries from a panicked crowd.

_“We demand that humans recognize androids as a living species, and each android as a person in their own right.”_  

Your brows creased, the pain seeping into your heart and curling around each valve until they began to sputter and break.

“He’s taken some artistic freedom with the wording, hasn’t he?” Perkins looked over his shoulder at you, “How does it feel to have someone else take the credit for something you sacrificed _everything for_?”

You stepped forward, disregarded the looks from Hank and Connor coming from the other side of the man shoveling dirt over your coffin as he dug for information.

_“We demand freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly, as guaranteed by-“_  

“-the first amendment of the US Constitution.” You muttered under your breath, hovering over the console’s controls with your fingertips.

You were lost in the echo of your words.

_“We demand the right to own private property, so we may maintain our dignity, and that of the home.”_  

Your mouth moved in wordless coordination, skipping over “we demand,” and replacing “we,” with “they,” just like you’d written.

_“This revised article necessitates an android’s right to own private property, so they may maintain their dignity, and that of the home.”_  

That was what androids were to your kind. “They.” A word that carried a weight of an entire people…and the lot of them reduced “humanity,” to this.

Pitting you against each other; one melted-down casing of a hollowed woman, and a Jackal in the same room whose nose was pressed against a blood trail stamped in your boot prints.
“This message is the hope of a people.”

Your eyes lowered, skipping over Perkins’ smug grin and finding another face that was in shock, awe, and panic.

Connor, with his eyelids shaking at half shutter. His lips slightly parted, and a smile threatening to give him away. There was hope. Longing. He was lost in a fantasy retold in your words without permission, but if it made androids feel even half of what he appeared to be feeling…that was worth it.

That was enough to keep going; keep fighting.

“We ask that you recognize our dignity, our hopes, and our rights. Together, we can leave in peace and build a better future, for humans and androids.”

Perkins snickered, reaching for a red button.

“You, gave us life-“

And the recording stopped.

He opened his mouth to say something, and was interrupted.

“Think that’s rA9?” Hank questioned, crossing his arms and shooting you a look.

He was trying to throw off Perkins’ nose; to alter the scent. Would’ve been a solid strategy if Connor had been ready. But it wasn’t just him that snapped his attention to Hank. Perkins was quick to zero in on him, too.

Connor’s chin rotated between the two men, fear glazing over his eyes as if he was scared to speak. You couldn’t blame him, and suppressed the overwhelming urge to throw him a lifeline and pull him away.

“Deviants say rA9 will set them free.” He reeled himself in as he looked back up to Markus, “This android seems to have that objective…”

His eyes flickered in a new wave of leashed panic, twitching as they scanned the screen.

“D’you see something?” Hank asked caringly.

Connor’s teeth clicked as his mouth snapped shut, and he looked to the floor.

“I identified its model and serial number…” His fingers itched at the inside of his palm, bending and unflexing in a nervous rhythm.

“…Anything else I should know?” Hank crossed his arms, eyes narrowing suspiciously.

You couldn’t tell if this was still part of what you guessed was an act, or if he’d had a change of heart and wanted Connor to give up whatever was bothering him.

Connor was taking far too long to answer; to process and fabricate the telltale lie. Long enough that Perkins reached in his pocket, pulled out a black leather glove, and snapped it over his right hand. Long enough for him to unfold a matching pair of sunglasses from a pocket over his heart, sliding them over his eyes.

The room was already dark. Too relaxing. You’d probably fall asleep if you were forced to work
there every day. The newest additions to his attire didn’t make sense.

“N-no,” Connor stuttered, “Nothing.”

Hank watched him in disbelief, and Perkins let out a short laugh on a huff.

“We’ll see about that.”

Everyone was confused; and no one could make out what he was doing as his gloved hand extended, swiping at invisible items as if scrolling through a Netflix queue.

You doubted he was watching movies, shows…or anything else other than ways to bring you in for withholding information pertinent to the deviancy case.

“RK-200 series, #684 842 971. Is that correct, Connor?” He pinched the air, his thumb and index finger expanding like he was enlarging something on a phone.

“Yes, Special Agent Perkins.”

“Hm…” His arms swept left, and you took a step back to avoid being hit, “Gifted to Carl Manfred from Elijah Kamski, designated: ‘Markus.’ Well, isn’t that interesting?”

Your heart began to race again, and he cocked his chin towards you, “Does that make you nervous?”

Your lips pursed, turning your head away.

“His left eye is green, but the right doesn’t match. It was a replacement part, taken from an RT600 model android…a discontinued line by CyberLife. The only units left in service are at Elijah Kamski’s villa on the outskirts of Detroit. Does all of that, sound correct, Connor?”

The negotiator from three months ago would have been able to answer with finesse. The deviant in the room, however, was unraveling; and he couldn’t hide the bits of sanity breaking away from the rest of him.

“You’ve heard of the ARI…Added Reality Interface?” Perkins lifted his sunglasses, crossing his other arm over his chest, “The same technology Norman Jayden of the FBI used to find the Origami Killer?”

Connor was scared. Angry. A collage of mismatching parts that didn’t belong on a face as serene as his. He wasn’t that negotiator with the same robotic coolness, anymore. He’d learned how to live…just not how to be alive.

“It’s what CyberLife based the RK800 prototype off of.” Perkins knelt, swiping at a blue blood stain, rubbing the substance between his thumb and finger, “Hm. Thirium-310 from a PL600 that was reported missing two years ago…I’ve been tracking this particular android and its affiliates for quite some time. Jericho…a loose band of hounds set free by carelessness.”

He raised the sample to his screened eyes, eyeing it carefully.

“Man’s best friend, the domesticated dog. Fed when scheduled, groomed when necessary. Leashed for walks and told to heel when they begin to deviate.” He folded his glasses, tucked them in his pocket, and hooked a thumb under the band of his glove, “Deviants…they’re no more than feral creatures that are too aggressive to be socialized. A once-domesticated pet that must be brought to heel.”
“But what if there was an alternative?” You shouldn’t have asked, but you did, so you followed it through because he wasn’t a person who would let it go, “One where humans and androids could coexist, instead of one class ruling over another?”

“’Compromise’ is not the mission. Diagnosing deviancy and eliminating those lost to software corruption, is.”

“They’re not ‘lost to software corruption,’ Agent Perkins.” You straightened your shoulders, “They just want to be free.”

“Free to do what, exactly?” He scoffed, “What would their purpose be without their programming?”

“Now probably isn’t the time to have debates about who deserves freedom, and who doesn’t.” Hank walked out from around him, “Our concern needs to be focused on investigating this crime scene, Agent Perkins. You know, because that’s our job. As cops. Not criminals. So unless you’re placing her under arrest, she’s got a job to do.”

He crossed his arms, mouth half-cocked in a gnawing scowl.

“Whether she’s an officer of a law or a common thug will be up her, Lieutenant.” His eyes refocused on you, “You’re going to have to pick a side. Soon.”

“I don’t have to do anything.” Your hands balled in a fist, “I haven’t broken the law, and I’ve got nothing to hide…We want the same thing, Perkins. For all this to stop.”

He looked at his shoes, a smile stretching on his face.

“Illusions are so…” His eyes flickered, smile fading in an instant, “Fatal.”

His hands dropped to his sides as he closed the distance between you two.

“If you pick wrong…” He whispered so low you almost didn’t make out the words, “You’re mine.”

You met him eye-to-eye, willing your legs to stand firm rather than retreat like before.

“The only thing I have done is exercise my freedom of speech in front of people who didn’t like what I had to say.” You growled, “I’ve done nothing to propel deviancy.”

“You and I both know that’s not entirely true.” He was tired, yet strangely targeted, “And you will bend, or you will break…It makes no difference to me so long as I solve this case.”

You huffed through your nose, “They teach you that rhyme in Quantico?”

“Tch…” He shook his head, “People like you? Always want to be the hero…”

He was speaking loud enough that it got Connor’s attention, and Hank’s followed.

“The problem with being a hero, is…” He pulled a cell phone out of his coat pocket and hit a button, eyes leveling with yours, “…You have to be willing to die for what you believe in.”

The chill on his words gave you a shiver.

“If I were you?” He held the phone up to his ear, “I wouldn’t try so hard.”

A treacherous grin curved his lips.
“You’ll live longer.”

And he gave you a wink, the tails of his coat spinning around his knees as he took a sharp turn. He strode away, tossing a data pad of his own to an investigator who caught it and shot him an irritated look.

"I just spoke with her. Yes, I'm on my way. Keep the press out of our faces, we're going to the outskirts."

The straight-jacket that was fear bound you in place; locked you inside yourself, had you choking on the fumes that rose from the flaming circle pit of your stomach.

You looked up to the screen; Markus’s plastic-composed face hovering above you.

He’d became more dangerous than an “android terrorist” in Perkins’ eyes, because he’d marked himself the enemy of your enemy.

That made Markus your friend.

The forefront of change that had the courage to deliver your message where you had stalled. He believed in your words, and had been ready to die for them. Had decorated himself as his own type of unsung hero amongst his people.

But what was left when failure is no longer an option? When your outer shell of frozen cells and molecules were compressed into a reduction of free-flowing anxiety?

It was bravery.

You, too, would stand true to your beliefs…because you were ready to die for what you believed in.

And you would have to be brave.

Chapter End Notes

Hi, and we're back! I can't even put into words everything that went wrong in the last two weeks. Real life happened, and is still happening, but with the outpouring support from everyone here, in the Discord, everywhere...I managed to get this finished amidst the firestorm.

1. I am super behind on updating the showcase, replying to comments, and even leaving comments on new works linked to Deviant Behavior. I deeply apologize, and I will work on this as soon as I can.

2. I am doing my best to make sure the wait for the next chapter will not be as long.

3. Special thanks to everyone who submitted a piece of work for the Discord's "100k" collection. :) You guys are amazing and I can't tell you how much those gifts resonated with me during these hard times. Also, thank you to Cerulaine, MjrGenMatt, Celestielle, and ElegantN7 for orchestrating the entire thing. <3
I will forever look back at September 2018 and remember it was the hardest month of my entire life. X_X

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**Behind the Scenes:**

1. **Public Enemy:** The term was used so extensively during the 1930s that some writers call that period of the FBI's early (the BOI became the FBI in 1935) history the "Public Enemy Era". Dillinger, Floyd, Nelson, and Karpis, in that order, would be deemed "Public Enemy Number 1" from June 1934 to May 1936. Use of the term eventually evolved into the FBI Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list.

2. **Unsung Hero:** One who does great deeds but receives little or no recognition for them.

3. **ARI (Added Reality Interface):** The ARI equipment consists of a pair of glasses and a singular, right-handed glove. The glasses, acting as an enhancement visor, are used to detect and record information from the environment whilst providing visual displays for the user.

   The glove allows the user to physically interact with ARI's interface and the environment; this allows the investigator to stream information via sensors in the glove, allowing research on things such as blood type, shoe-size and identifying scents in the air. It also seems that all gathered information is installed directly into ARI's internal memory which can be reviewed at any place or time.

   *Taken from the "Heavy Rain" in-game description.*
Quantic Dream

Chapter Summary

November 9th, 2038
PM 01:03:35

Chapter Notes

I'm so glad you liked 42, and thanks for all the emotional support, guys. <3

To clarify, it's just been a long month with work and college. Nothing super catastrophic. ONE MORE WEEK!

Now, enjoy. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

he flutter of a butterfly’s wings is said to possess the ability to unleash havoc weeks later. The innate aptitude to disturb the universe’s initial conditions with a promise to deliver large-scale change.

You hadn’t known how viciously that havoc could be wrought until you were surrounded by the deterministic chaos that brewed atop the Stratford Tower; reminiscent of nonlinear systems and words of freedom twisting between gales.

You didn’t have much to say after Perkins left. How he made it a point to discuss federally-protected information in Hank and Connor’s company only heightened your worries that he somehow knew they were involved. Didn’t know what you would or could say, after that.

Nothing but an apology that wouldn't have meant a damn thing. The damage had been done, and you were tallying the body count.

You avoided the group of men on the other side roof, pressing your back to one of the HVAC units humming along. Captain Allen was yelling at…someone, but thankfully not you, this time.

You hugged your data pad amidst the cold calamity, your tears stinging as they cooled on contact with the frigid ashes. You were unstable, sliding to sit on the heels of your boots; trying to rationalize irrationalities as you were both awake and asleep in superposition within a quantic dream.

Things could have been different, and there was so much you wish you would’ve done.
differently. So many timelines you wanted to skip through, tweaking decisions and letting loose the effects to ripple through and play themselves out.

But you’d have to live with these choices…or not.

“You’ll live longer.”

It’d been one thing to intimidate you. Threaten your sanctions.

Special Agent Perkins had threatened your life.

This wasn’t a new phenomenon, it’s just…the way he did it…

Crunching footsteps came closer, and you tensed. You didn’t dare peek the corner; rather, you tapped away at the touch screen in your lap and wiped your nose with your sleeve. You hugged yourself as you pulled your jacket closer.

Probably just one of the CSI squaddies coming to check something out…Hopefully.

“Gavin told me that FBI agent was giving you guys a hard time.”

Nope.

“Came over here to yell at you some more.” Chris fell into a squat next to you, lacing his fingers together, “Seems like a bad time.”

You sniffed, and found a tired smile pointed at you.

“I—I’m sorry.” You swallowed, “I fucked up—“

“Both of us fucked up…” He took his hat off, swiping snow from the edges of the crest. He rocked it back and forth, the twinkle shimmering in the pale-blue light.

“We should’ve waited for back up…”

“We couldn’t just let that guy die.”

“That’s what I said!” He flipped it back over his head, “No one wanted to hear it… I guess this is what happens when you work under two people who used to work with you.”

“Huh?”


“…I should’ve at least stayed with you so we’d get yelled at together.” You smirked, chewed the inside of your cheek, and your hands balled in frustration, “I just wanted answers. I thought…”

“You thought, what? You’d go up here and have a friendly chat with the androids who shot a clerk and broadcasted whatever it is you wrote on national TV?”

You bit your tongue.

“That what Special Agent Sunshine was bothering you about?”

You picked at your fingernails, scraping the dried blood and Thirium out from underneath.
“You’re too damn good at your job, Miller…” You frowned, “I keep telling you to stop asking questions.”

“Kinda hard to be your wingman when I’m flying blind.”

“This is a dogfight you don’t wanna be a part of…Deckart didn’t listen, and look how he ended up…”

“Oof…geez.” The shoulders of his coat rose and fell, “Look, I’m gonna put this as delicately as I can. You’ll probably get mad at me for saying it, but I’m gonna say it anyway.”

“Tch, what’s new…”

The vinyl rim of his hat shined as his chin rose, “Deckart was a great cop, and an even better man, but he wasn’t a trained and vetted Marine.”

He wasn’t wrong, but the comment did irritate you. Still, you understood the point he was trying to make. He was just so goddamn naïve…

“There are some threats you can’t shoot, Chris.”

He huffed through his nose, and looked off to the side. The snow fell in uneven bands as the two of you honored a moment of silence, only to be disturbed by distant chatter and Chris pushing off his knees to stand.

“I’ll take your word for it.”

He offered a gloved hand. Your palm slapped into his, and he pulled you to your feet. You stretched, data pad extending towards the sky as your joints cracked and your muscles flexed.

You smirked, “10-4.”

…

“SWAT just ain’t my speed. Too many rules and regulations.” Gavin leaned on the railing overlooking the city, ashing his cigarette, “I’m perfectly fine with my office job that lets me shotgun my way through the occasional door.”

You had your arms crossed, your weight held by the cold steel next to him. His back faced the rest of the group, and you were a wallflower watching the CSI team pick the roof apart in the background.

“Shotguns are small game, Reed. Imagine gunning down a flock of Bandits with one of these bad boys.” Allen pointed his assault rifle in the air, the stock balanced in the crook of his elbow while he put another hand on his hip.

He was dressed to the nine in his SWAT attire; a cobra baring its fangs on his arm’s patch. His helmet was latched to his hip, an earpiece extending towards his mouth.

“Give it a rest, Sarge.” Chris spit on the ground, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, “I’ve seen what kind of shitstorm Reed can brew up with a shotty. He’s got no business with a fully-automatic.”
“Captain.” Allen sneered as he slapped the barrel of the gun in his hand, rolling his shoulders, “I’m not your Sergeant anymore, soldier.”

“You’ll always be Sarge.” Chris chuckled, “And it’s officer.”

“Heh, who am I kidding…We’ll always be Marines, eh?”

“Semper Fi, my man.”

They bumped fists, and you couldn’t help but smirk at the comradery. You wondered what kind of hell they’d been through to end up where they were. Held a certain respect for them because their job, at one point, was to take care of it so you wouldn’t have to.

“How about your partner?”

Your brows perked up as you turned your head towards the seasoned veteran, “Me?”

“Yeah. You.”

Captain Allen had always been an intense man. If you’d met him outside of the DPD, you’d immediately guess that his life’s path put him on the front lines somewhere. There were those made for certain lines of work. Summoned to serve a specific calling.

With his build, stature; shit, even his voice, you couldn’t picture him without layers of padded armor and three different types of guns holstered or slung around his body.

Not someone you wanted to piss off or disregard.

“What are you, SWAT’s new poster boy or something?” Collins scoffed.

“Tangos got away. Figured I’d get some recruiting done if I’m gonna get paid to stand around with my thumb up my ass.” Allen looked at Chris, “You and your partner ditch amateur hour, we’ll strike the fear of God in her with some old-fashioned military discipline, and she’ll be rappelling outta’ helicopters all over Detroit with you at the controls. What do you say?”

“I say hell fucking no.”

“Rappelling out of helicopters?” You grinned, “You at the controls?”

“That’s right.” Allen nodded at your partner, “Miller here was the best goddamn Cobra Pilot I ever served with. Felt a lot better knowing he was in the air when my battalion and I were out on patrol.”

The image of Chris Miller, the biggest goofball in the DPD, flying a helicopter armed with rocket pods and turrets was one you couldn’t visualize. Then again, it was possible that his signature humor came with the more relaxed environment. Maybe “Pilot Miller,” and “Officer Miller,” were two different people.

“Yeah, and then we ended up here…” Chris snickered.

Allen let out a thoughtful sigh, “Why’d we ever leave?”

“Because ‘if the Marines wanted me to have a wife and child, I would’ve been issued one.’ You? That’s anyone’s guess…Either way, the pay was a whole hell of a lot better.”

“You can say that again…” Allen covered a yawn, “But you know what I don’t miss? Those
long days at Quantico.”

You perked up, “I thought Quantico was like, FBI something or other?”

“I’m glad you brought that up.” Gavin stomped out his cigarette, turning around, “The fuck is the FBI doing here, anyway?”

You cringed at his unprofessionalism, but Allen didn’t seem to question it.

“You kidding me?” Collins butted in, “They’re homeland security. I’m glad they’re here.”

Gavin smacked his lips, “I just don’t like that Perkins guy. Something ain’t sitting right with me about him.”

You fought the urge to let out a long, drawn-out groan and tell him he had no idea. You settled with, “Me neither.”

Your elbow bumped into him as you shifted your weight.

“Watch it.” Gavin nudged you.

“You watch it.”

“I was here first, dickhead.”

Captain Allen cleared his throat, and you both looked up like disciplined kids.

“We call MCB Quantico the ‘Crossroads of the Marine Corps.’ You’ve got the Officer Candidates School, Basic School, and Corps University for us Marines. Then there’s the FBI Academy, DEA Training Academy, CID Command…” He shook his head, “Dealt with Perkins more than I wanted to, back in the day. We competed on a lot of things, even if we were there for different reasons. He was always an asshole...”

“You and Perkins duking it out?” Chris let out a breathless laugh, “You have, like, half a foot and 20 pounds of muscle on the guy.”

“Wasn’t like that.” Allen took on a more serious tone as if revisiting a strained memory, “We were both young and excelling in our specialization training. Me, Marines. Him, FBI. People compared us a lot, but we hadn’t ever met.”

He held up a finger, pressing another to his earpiece.

“Copy that. Leave them in the kitchen, we’ll figure out what to do with them later.”

You scratched around your itchy bandage, trying to remember what was-

The androids. Station operators. Right.

“Anyway, one day I run into the guy. I try to be cordial, right, because Marines set a standard. This clown smirks, dismisses my handshake, and says some bullshit one-liner about jarheads and dumb grunts.”

“Lines up with what my colleagues in Virginia had to say.” Collins coughed, patting his mouth with a handkerchief, “He’s a proficient scavenger, and opportunistic as hell.”

“And that’s why whoever…whatever, he’s here for?” Allen grunted, “Kinda feel bad for ‘em.”
“You do?” You asked.

You didn’t hesitate. Didn’t even think about it. The question just rolled out of your mouth like an exhale.

“He’s…Hard to explain.” Allen cracked his knuckles, zoning out, “National stability keeps him up at night. He obsesses over critical flaws in the system. He doesn’t give two shits about civilians, and takes it personal when this country isn’t running like a well-oiled machine. It’s like his only purpose in life is to hunt things that destabilize established order. Never gives up.”

Chris exhaled, “Phew…for someone that’s hard to explain, you sure know a lot about him.”

“He was on my ass once, a few months after you left. Accused me of harboring deviants within the Myrmidons.” He sucked his teeth, “That’s some crazy shit, right?”

“I remember thinking that was pretty out-of-whack the first time I heard about it, yeah.”

“They tell you the ‘Jackal’ story?”

“Yes, and then they told me about the ‘Diamond Dog.’” Chris’s lips rasped, and he almost buckled from laughing so hard.

You and Gavin looked at each other, shrugging. Captain Allen pinched the bridge of his nose.

“It was one. Time.”

The roof access door slammed open. You almost jumped out of your skin from the sudden “bang.”

The rest of the group was just as unsettled.

“Shit, sorry.” Hank eased his hands, “Wind’s stronger than I thought.”

Connor shielded his eyes; narrowing at the sudden light. The wind tossed the end of his tie, sending snow over his jacket and hair. It stung your eyes and numbed the aching bruises on your body.

Still didn’t make you as cold as the fuming stare coming from the android.

Hank cupped his knees, panting before stumbling upright, “Of course you’re up here with ‘em.”

He directed the comment at you; out of breath, his cheeks puffing as he exhaled sharply.

Connor raised a brow, folding his arms behind his back, “Light physical activities such as ascending a small flight of stairs wouldn’t feel as strenuous if you changed your diet, Lieutenant.”

He was obviously still in a mood.

“Shut the fuck up.” Hank flipped him off.

Connor’s face scrunched at that, his hands rubbing the cold from themselves absentmindedly.

“Hey, Hank.” Collins waved.

“How’s it goin’?”

“Peachy.”
“Lieutenant Anderson and RoboCop…” Gavin scoffed, “I don’t get a ‘hi?’”

“Missing androids and an asshole,” Hank rolled his eyes, “Just what I needed…”

You drowned out the infighting that ensued between the band of DPD legends, fixated on the man with perfect posture despite the blizzard’s best attempts to move him. The slight pinch in his brow, the tension along his jaw that etched pockets in his cheeks. The subtle movements from what you could only imagine was from rows of teeth grinding against each other.

“I know you.” Allen balanced his scope on his shoulder, taking a lazy step forward, “You’re Connor. The android from that hostage situation.”

You dropped your focus, defaulting to your holster. Empty holster? You’d forgotten you’d lost possession of your gun after Markus confiscated it.

You shifted your side away before anyone noticed.

“Correct.” Connor fixed his tie.

“Lucky you showed up when you did since this one likes to get her ass kicked on rooftops.”

You froze, looking out in the winter-veiled city, “…Thanks, Captain.”

“No problem.”

Hank groaned as he began trudging through the snow, taking in the crime scene as his fingers toyed with-

A coin?

“They made their way up through the whole building, passed all the guards, and jumped off the roof with parachutes…” He paused, nodding to no one as he huffed, “Pretty fuckin’ impressive, I’d say.”

“Don’t give them compliments.” Allen’s lip twitched, “These runaway twats don’t hold a candle to the Myrmidons they had me training in Iraq. Those guys were the real deal…”

“You trained androids?” Chris lifted his chin from his data pad, “Don’t you hate, androids?”

“I hate everyone, Miller.”

“Ah, right. My mistake.”

“Read an article on those Mire...Myrm-things.” Hank put his fists on his hips, scrunching his nose, “Something about military androids not having enough moral reasoning to make life-and-death decisions.”

“You talking about that thing Detroit Today published?” Allen looked over his shoulder.

“Yeah, that’s the one.”

“Saw that. Written by Bob Woods, the head of a war victims NGP or some gimmicky bullshit. Guy’s probably never held a gun in his life and has no fucking idea what he’s talking about.”

A flick of a lighter had the inside of Ben’s hands glowing. He squinted as he gripped a cigarette between his teeth, blowing out a puff of smoke.
“You ever miss the days when everything wasn’t a debate and we could just do our jobs?” He muttered, “I sure do…”

Gavin waved his arms to the sides, motioning towards Connor, “Leave it to androids to come around and fuck everything up.”

Connor’s head cocked to the side, his eyes hooded, and hands folded in front of him.

“Better off just giving these deviants the firing squad treatment…”

It wasn’t him who’d fire back, however.

Captain Allen shifted his weight, jabbing the snow with the stock of his rifle and pointing a finger, “If shooting insubordinate squad members was how we dealt with things around here, you’d be the first on my list after how you handled that undercover op.” His eyes flickered to you, “Maybe second.”

This is what life was going to be like. Just one slander, scolding, lecture – whatever, until some android would finally get it right and just land one in your fucking head.

“They’re machines.” Gavin waved him off, “They’re either operational, or defective. They can’t be ‘insubordinate.’ That implies they have a choice not to listen.”

“Detective Reed.” Connor interrupted, “Please, inquire about my model again.”

His neck snapped around, “The fuck did you just say to me?”

“I’m sorry, but I’m not authorized to answer you.” He squinted, “If you have any questions, please contact your superior.”

Chris hid a laugh with a cough, and Hank didn’t even bother. He let out a hoarse chuckle, and it forced a grin on Connor’s stern face. He enjoyed a proud moment of victory as he looked at the Lieutenant out of the corner of his eye. Hank nudged his elbow, giving him an approving nod.

“Nice one, kid.”

“Whatever.” Gavin snorted, “You’re all outta your fuckin’ minds.”

“Reed,” Collins gave him a flat expression, “This is why I can’t take you anywhere…”

“Isn’t it past your nap time?”

Ben checked his watch, “Ye-up.”

“Alright, I think I’ve heard enough. Get all those feelings in check – we’ve got a job to do.” Captain Allen hoisted his rifle, “FBI’s not showing us up in our own damn city.”

“Ah, Jesus Christ…” Hank yawned, letting out an obnoxious sound, waving his hands sarcastically, “Go team.”

“Birds are grounded because of the weather, so let’s get to it, people!” Allen spun a finger around in a circle as he left your small group of renegades, “I wanna get this wrapped up before dinner!”

Dinner.

An android “terrorist” just proclaimed freedom for his entire race and all this guy was worried about was dinner…
Must be nice.

Chapter End Notes

Allen

Sorry Not Sorry. >>
Hearing what Allen had to say didn’t make you feel any more confident about the trained FBI investigator on your heels. If anything, it made you want to run.

To run far away like your lawyer had told you and never look back. Maybe Canada, where androids weren’t even a thing. International policies to keep you safe. Wouldn’t that be nice?

Out of sight, out of mind.

Not being able to just quit had always been one of your character flaws. More useful than not, unless involved in a country-wide conspiracy with the world’s largest enterprise.

Whatever.

You were done thinking about it. Done thinking about anything other than the task at hand, really. Even that was a struggle.

You thought you’d learned your lesson the first time you slept with someone you worked with. Granted, that’d been with your husband…at the company you helped build with him…but still. Connor didn’t distract you any less.

He was in his zone. Returned to his machine state as he lost himself in his element, skipping from one evidence marker to the next and grabbing a CSI member to drop a new one if he found something they’d missed. The fact that he didn’t seem distracted bothered you.

And that was petty.

You couldn’t escape him. Even in your data pad, his model and serial number would spring up where he’d do his job better than his human counterparts.

You didn’t know how Chris did it…just, walked around with this stupid fucking tablet; letting everyone else do the work while he delegated. It was boring.

There was a certain ambience to a crime scene; the thrill of the unknown as a collective team chased ghosts. It was energetic, even when it wasn’t. Being forced to stand around and swipe at a screen for hours was the exception to that.
To be perfectly honest, you weren’t even sure what everyone was looking for. You’d seen the androids in person and provided statements as to what models they were. The message had been shot from a specific angle downstairs, and no one had actually died. All this investigation was being orchestrated for was a collection of evidence to be presented in court.

You, however, knew what you were looking for. Or who.

The android that had been stashed somewhere, and was injured. Probably armed.

You pulled the vent’s cover off, checking behind it as you clicked on the flashlight hovering over your shoulder. You pointed it at all corners, looking for any sign of Thirium. There was nothing.

“What are you doing?”

Getting tired of people sneaking up on you. It wasn’t Chris this time, though.

You wished it was.

“Nothing.”

“You don’t ever do anything without a reason…”

You snaked your neck to the right, just catching his figure in your peripherals. You sighed, clicked your flashlight off, and stood.

“…Which is why I’d like to know the reasoning behind putting yourself in danger. Again.”

Connor was hugging himself, cold and furious.

A knot of regret tied itself around the stakes in your gut labeled shame and failure.

“I heard you over the radio. I heard everything.”

“I was just doing my job.”

“You could have died! They could have killed you!” He looked around, catching himself as he let his anger get the best of him, “I understand, now. I understand more than I ever have.”

“Understand what?” You mumbled.

“Why everyone gets so mad at you when you pull things like this.” His eyes dropped to the snow, and he pushed up the flaps of his jacket as his hands molded around his waist, “It’s because we all care what happens to you more than you do.”

You didn’t have a rebuttal. Couldn’t form a quip fast enough to stop his reprimand.

“I shouldn’t be surprised.” His tongue clicked behind his teeth, “Honestly. I mean, look how we met.”

Your brows knitted together, your mouth pulling back in a grimace. You tilted your head, switching your weight between legs.

“That…”

He went to say something, and you raised your hands to silence him.

“That was low.”
He reached for you, but you took a step back. He whispered your name. You still refused to look at him. You dropped your arms as you turned, angrily marching around the electrical box that hid the two of you.

You almost slipped backwards on a patch of ice as he grabbed you, pulling you back behind it. Your heart started pounding, and an angry pair of brown eyes dug further into you than Perkins did.

“I’m not sorry for loving you, and I’m not sorry for being mad at you for being reckless.” A deep kiss burned the cut on your lip, and the back of your head pressed against the steel box until he was finished, “You’re lucky this is the worst that happened to you.”

You breathed in the words as he swiped your cheek with his thumb, leaving you cringing. It felt good to have him touch you again, even if the wound didn’t agree. Made your heart flutter and your lips tingle.

You hated him for this; how you couldn’t stay mad at him for long. Couldn’t hold anything against him because with one look, one kiss, he gave you all the excuses and reasoning he needed to justify anything.

“Should’ve seen the other girl.” You smirked, cupping his palm against your face.

“You were attacked by an android that fits the dimensions of a WR400 model. Footprints indicate a PJ500 and PL600 were present, accompanied by an unknown android type. I’m assuming that was Markus.”


His voice fell just above a whisper, his features collapsing in on themselves as his head swayed from where your fight began, to where it ended.

“…She struck you with your own gun after you hit her with your baton.” His brows creased, looking over to where Simon once laid slouched, “Where is your gun, now?”

“Markus took it.” You pushed yourself up, “He said he…”

Connor’s neck curved to the right, eyes narrowing.

“Connor?”

“I found something.”

“Wait-“ You rushed after him as he took off, “What did you find?”

“A trail.”

“But he could be armed-“ You swallowed, trying to wet your throat as your voice cracked.

“So it’s okay for you to risk your life, but not me?” He snickered, throwing a condescending look over his shoulder, “An android that can have its parts replaced?”

He stopped, and you ran into him.

“Oof-“

Your nose landed against the gaps between his shoulders, a blazing white “ANDROID” LED
bouncing off your forehead.

He didn’t budge.

“Spare parts…”

He turned his chin, his LED spinning in yellow. His middle finger flicked against his thumb in a nervous tick; his eyes fluttering before finding yours.

“What Perkins said…about the RT600.”

You rubbed your nose, giving him a deadpanned glare, “Perkins can go fuck himself…”

“Yes, while that may be true…” His face fell into a frown, “I’m afraid we have a more complex matter to discuss.”

“I don’t know, Connor. Potential charges for treason are pretty complex.” You shrugged, “I would know.”

“Special Agent Perkins described this ‘Jericho’ as a collection of persons rather than an individual. After he mentioned them, and said they knew you, he played the recording back… This body language implies there’s a connection between Jericho, and Markus.” He paced, tapping his finger on his chin before holding his hand out, “There were multiple androids involved at the CyberLife warehouse raid, and they appeared to be organized.” He snapped his fingers, “What if they were the same group who infiltrated the Stratford Tower?” And then his eyes narrowed at you, “Why did Perkins ask you if you still agreed to their ‘amicable terms?’”

Your face pulled back, and you cleared your throat. One thumb hooked in your utility belt, the other rubbing the back of your neck.

“I, uhm…” You rolled it in your palm, a pointed elbow lowering itself, “I got this comment, on my article…signed by Jericho…”

“And what did it say?” He crossed his arms.

“’We agree to your terms. Expect us.’”

“’We agree to your terms. Expect us.’”

His lips slightly parted, and he shook his head with his words, “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I read it after I left Carl’s, alright?” You held your hands out, “You and I were fighting…kind of? And then the next time I saw you was in the elevator.”

The pressing expression; the interrogator, went flat. His chin fell, and his eyes darted to the side. He gulped, hugging himself in the cold…

“Hey.” You put your hand on his shoulder, and his face snapped back to yours, “You were on to something. What was it?”

The red LED on his head; the one he’d hid from you, stabilized.

“When I analyzed Markus’s face, I discovered something. I didn’t want to say it in front of Perkins, but with ARI’s assistance, he was able to…” His eyes glazed over as he focused, and then he blinked, “Call my bluff.”

“About what?”

“Markus’s replacement eye.” His lips formed a flat line, “It came from the RT600 that shot herself
at the Kamski residence.”

The first thing that came to mind was your revolver, pressed against her chin – a reflection of you with your voice, mannerisms…eye color. And how that eye, the mismatched iris on Markus’s face; the eye that matched yours, was actually from that carbon copy of you.

Then was the revelation of it all. The buzzing in your ears and the blurring of your focus like someone was jamming your senses with a scrambler. Shock. Yeah, shock is what it was called.

It was just so sickeningly poetic.

Connor waved his hand in front of your eyes.

“Please follow my finger as it moves.”

You grabbed his wrist, and pushed it down, “How do you know?”

“I checked their disposal records while Perkins was trying to intimidate you.”

You snorted, “Trying?”

“While Perkins was intimidating you.” He frowned, “Chloe and Markus were taken to the same scrap yard. It would seem only one of them made it out.”

“CONNOR!” Hank called, scaring both of you.

He turned the corner, finding the two of you standing idle.

“The fuck are you doin’-” He paused, looking at you with gloves on his hands, “Sorry, am I interrupting something?”

You took a step back, trying to hide your embarrassment.

“No, just, uh…going over some details.”

“Details?”

“Yeah.”

“We were discussing information involving the-“ Connor started.

“Don’t bother.” Hank nodded over his shoulder, “You heard Allen. Back to work.”

“Coming, Lieutenant!”

You sighed, looking at your data pad as you and Connor followed him. You broke out from the shadow of the electrical box, right eye squinting as it was blinded by a bright sun.

Hank began digging through a black duffle back, picking up a backpack of sorts. He eyed it up and dropped it.

“How’d they manage to smuggle in a big bag like this?”

“They didn’t…” Connor observed.

The pad in your hands linked his newest observation to an android technician’s hat found in the control room.
“Someone brought it in for them.”

“You think the employees thought they were just maintenance or something?” You asked.

“That is the most likely scenario, yes.”

“Oh, that’s strange…” Hank ripped open the bag’s flap, taking in the inventory, “They planned a perfect operation but got the number of parachutes wrong.”

“I don’t think that’s what happened here.” Connor crouched, his fingers swiping at the crate.

“Oh, Connor – you’re so disgusting-“ Hank shielded his eyes as Connor dabbed his fingertip on his tongue, “I think I’m gonna puke again…”

For you, it brought back different memories.

“The injured android, the PL600.” Connor looked at you, “It had damaged biocomponents. The way this Thirium streaks…right here…I think one of the deviants was left behind.”

“No. No, no, no.” Hank waved his hands, “Every time you say that, I either end up hanging off a building, getting beat up by robot hookers, or watching you climbing into attics.”

He was on the move again, tracing an invisible trail, “Not if I find it first, Lieutenant.”

“Or we just, not find it.” You shrugged.

Hank stepped in front of you, jabbing a finger in your chest, “They shot someone. Hurt you. And who knows if this thing is armed or not?”

“Well, you see…” You pursed your lips, “I…I may have lost my gun during the, uh…quarrel?”

His mouth dropped open, leaning in, “You what?”

You shied away from him, “Yeah, so…”

“Why didn’t you say anything?!“

“Because if I fuck up again, Fowler’s gonna fire me!”

“You can’t get fired if you’re dead! You shouldn’t have even been up here!”

A loud, hollow, metal bang broke up your argument.

“OPEN UP, DETROIT POLICE!”

The two of you looked towards the source. Connor yelled at the sliding electrical door, and a team of SWAT members surrounded him in a circle.

Your eyes widened, and you fumbled with your radio to tune it to the proper channel.

“…n my mark.” Captain Allen’s voice screeched through and clarified in sync with someone tapping along Connor’s shoulder.

He had his helmet on, but you guessed that was Allen. He pressed his back against the large unit.

“What the fuck are they doin’?” Hank held a flat hand above his eyes.
Allen shoved the door open, ducking into a crouch, rolling his shoulder off the edge, and aiming his gun inside. The rest of the unit held position...Connor included. He was on the other side, right in harm’s way with the SWAT Captain.

You didn’t think you could watch without having a heart attack or falling into a fit of hysteria. So you didn’t. Your eyes screwed shut, your hands curled, and you turned away; bracing for the pop of a familiar gun.

“Clear to engage, I’ve got your six.” Captain Allen gave the order.

“Oh, DON’T YOU-“ Hank’s roar had you watching anyway, “CONNOR, NO!”

He kicked up snow as he ran, a SWAT member breaking from the circle that closed behind him like true professionals. He met Hank halfway, struggling to fight him off and keep him at a safe distance.

Connor was inside the unit, now. You couldn’t see him. Didn’t know if he was alive, or in danger; trapped in that box of endless possibilities. Stuck in a state of entanglement and paradoxical effects; existing in two realms at once…

Until he stepped out, unscathed.

“The android is inactive. All units, stand-down.” Allen’s helmet nodded, “Connor, do what you need to do.”

You didn’t hear his response, and didn’t really care what it was.

You were just grateful curiosity hadn’t been enough to kill Schrödinger's Cat.

Well…

One cat, at least.

Chapter End Notes

You'll have to forgive me if you see screenshots of Markus with a blue eye. I can’t edit it to make it all the colors at once. :P

Imagination?

Also, SIMON!
Courage didn’t come easily as you approached the sheet-metal doors, housing Simon’s body like a coffin at a public showing.

His LED was mute, save for the paced pulsing that indicated a peaceful slumber. The blue light illuminated the cramped space, washing Connor’s face in deep shadows and pulling it back into darkness when it faded out. Tiny rings of reflection would highlight his pupils only for them to dim afterwards.

He hummed under his breath, “He must have gone into stasis mode as a means of self-preservation.”

“Is he a threat?” Captain Allen asked from the opening.

“Not unless he wakes up unrestrained.”

“Easiest problem we’ll solve all day.” Allen’s helmet pointed at a pair of his squad mates, and he nodded at the opening, “Lastimosa - cuff it and put it downstairs with the rest of ‘em.”

“Yes, sir.” The woman slung her rifle and hopped up, her boots shuttering the steel floor as they hit.

Hank shook his head, kicking at the snow with his arms crossed, “Leave him alone for two seconds and he pulls the entire SWAT team into some goddamn manhunt…”
“Aren’t we all on a manhunt?” You sighed, painfully remembering your encounter with Markus; the woman he called North, and the other man who you had yet to identify.

“Yeah, for operational androids, not one that decided to take a nap."

“He is not ‘taking a nap,’ Lieutenant.” Connor stepped out of Lastimosa’s way, “He is preventing further damage to his systems by implementing a forced, temporary shutdown.”

“Same shit, Connor.”

“On the contrary.”

Lastimosa rolled Simon on his stomach; the threading and click of circular teeth leading the electronic hum of her magnetized pair of cuffs. Her boots disappeared under a layer of snow as she jumped down, and she leaned inside to drag the carcass towards her.

“Specialist Lastimosa, may I be of assistance?” Connor offered.

“Nope. Got it covered.”

“Are you positive-“

She hoisted the body over her shoulder, taking a step back to distribute the weight.

Hank uncrossed his arms, mouth dropping, “What the fuck?”

“Cybernetic limbs.” She adjusted the corpse, and started towards the rooftop access door, “What, you think CyberLife just makes imitation humans and we don't get to reap the benefits of neural meshes and replacement limbs?”

“Uh…” You remembered a few scientists talking about the possibilities during your time in the “Tower,” but it fell by the wayside to nanotechnology, “Sure?”

“Tch, listen…” She huffed, “Don't ever get your arm blown off.”

She disappeared behind the door leading to the staircase. The small group of you turned to Allen for an explanation.

“Prosthetic right arm, new pair of knees, and a metal spine to support it all.” He grunted, “Blown out of a tank and sent home after being medically discharged. Nanotech in her bloodstream regulates everything, if I remember correctly.”

“Fucking cyborgs…” Hank ran a hand down his face, “Because why the fuck not?”

“Hey, don’t let her catch you calling her that. She hates it.” Allen took his helmet off, latching it to his hip, “Wouldn’t want to piss off a Specialist with a metal arm and a bad temper, would you?”

“What about pissing off a Lieutenant with a drinking problem and a bad temper?” You smirked.

“I wouldn’t consider it a problem.” Hank threw a middle finger over his shoulder as they walked away, “More like the byproduct of having to deal with you all fuckin’ day.”

“At least you admit you have a bad temper.” You went to follow, but a familiar declaration kept you in place.

“Officer.”
Connor was standing right behind you with a pained expression of disappointment. He subtly tossed his eyes left and right; and flipped up his jacket to reach under a flap.

“Your gun.” He gave you a crooked frown under the whisper, the strands of his loose batch of hairs dangling.

You received it shakily, swallowing hard. The locking holster clicked in place, securing your long-lost friend that’d almost charged you a bullet fee.

“Thanks…”

You missed the days of stumbling in the bathroom at the Ortiz crime scene, dropping a camera while Connor spouted some crazy robot shit about your heart rate.

“My, how times have changed…”

You leaned over the table, frowning at a face you’d been conditioned to fear. A blond head of hair over blue eyes and pale skin.

A PL600 android, serial #501 743 923. Designate, Simon: Reported missing February 16, 2036.

“He isn’t Daniel.”

You had to repeat it a dozen times until you finally convinced yourself it was true.

“What, now?” Hank asked.

“Well…we could reactivate him, and see what he has to say…” You sucked in your cheek, watching him sleep, “I doubt they have extra parts around here…Although, we have a stock at the station.”

“I’d be cautious about activating it outside of a contained environment.” Captain Allen’s brow was stuck in a permanent pinch, “It clearly didn’t plan on getting apprehended.”

Hank snickered, “Great. Just another android to babysit.”

“As I previously stated, I don’t believe this mode of stasis was voluntary.” Connor leaned closer, “I suspect it went into low power mode in order to preserve itself. It’s lost a lot of Thirium.”

“Yeah, I heard you the first time, Sherlock.” Allen rubbed his winter-bitten, reddened nose, “It’s like a coma, right?”

“…Correct.” Connor returned a flat look, “Have you previously experienced this phenomenon occurring in androids?”

“Once or twice, while I was enlisted…Whatever the case, it’s your problem now.” Allen started towards the door, knocking on the frame, “Let me know if you need a gun pointed at something.”

He answered the question swiftly, and his exit was even quicker like he didn’t want to talk about it anymore. The deflection was odd for the Captain that seemed to thrive off conflict, and the watchful stares of the rest of your group indicated they thought it was strange, too. But even if the
rest of them hadn’t got the hint, a loud bang made everyone jump.

“Goddamn it—” Gavin kicked the vending machine along the farthest wall, holding the sides as if it was going to run away, “Fucking thing took my payment and didn’t give me my chips.”

“You try actual money, genius?” Hank sucked his teeth.

“No…” Gavin turned his head, “Ben, give me a dollar.”

“Excuse me?” Collins had almost passed through the doorway, but leaned back in, “First of all, who carries cash anymore—”

“You, because you’re old.”

“-Second, why don’t you try asking nicely?”


Your brows furrowed, and you opened your mouth in protest.

“Lieutenant Anderson removed it from my possession in the elevator.” A tinge of snark hung on his accusation, “Perhaps you should ask him for monetary assistance.”

“Aren’t you pulling your ‘I only take orders from Lieutenant Anderson,’ bullshit again?” He mocked his voice in the quote, almost crossing his eyes and sticking his tongue out before he leveled.

“…No, I’m informing you I do not have a quarter any longer. Detective Reed.”

“Jesus—” Chris marched across the room, pulling his wallet out, “I need to get out of here.”

“Thanks, Miller.” Gavin slapped his shoulder a little too hard as he loaded the vending machine.

Chris jerked forward, shooting him an irritated glance, “Yeah. Sure.”

While the two bickered, you twisted towards Hank, whispering furiously, “You took his quarter?”

You’d noticed Connor’s hands fidgeting more than usual. How his ticks were unrestrained, and how the restlessness transferred over.

“What?” Hank held his hands out, “All that flippy shit was getting annoying. You’re not the one that has to work with him!”

You crossed your arms, narrowing your eyes.

“Don’t give me that look.”

You raised your brows, cocking your chin. Wondered if you’d have to start tapping your foot.

“Okay, fine. Fuck.” Hank pulled the quarter out of his pocket, “Catch.”

He flipped it with his thumb. Connor’s focus trailed it, a small smile lifting his lips. A hand shot out of his jean pocket, and he caught it between his middle and index fingers.

“Thank you, Lieutenant.”
“Don’t thank me, thank her.”

And with a heart-throbbing wink, he did.

“Gross.” Gavin popped a chip in his mouth, nodding at the door, “Come on, ass clowns. I’m tired of bein’ here and I still have drug slingers to chase down.”

“Says the guy eating at a crime scene…” Collins muttered, following him out.

“Right?” Chris tailed behind them.

“What?” Gavin’s voice was farther now, “I’m hungry.”

You watched them leave, shaking your head and turning back to Connor and Hank once it was just the three of you. But Connor stepped back, leveling his eyes with the three androids watching…and just…

Staring.

The triplets – the broadcast operators.

How anyone could work with a batch of three, identical androids in one room was beyond you. It was unsettling and everything about them just felt unnatural.

Connor’s brow furrowed as he studied them; lined up like school children on time out. You wondered what he was so fixated on, or if they were making him just as uncomfortable.

“Didn’t expect you to tag SWAT in.” Hank interrupted his trance, and Connor put a casual mask on as he flipped his coin between his knuckles.

“Captain Allen was very helpful.” Connor watched the quarter as he made it dance, “Once I told him there was a potential threat, he asked pertinent questions and responded accordingly.”

“He’s a SWAT Captain, what did you expect?”

“Captain Allen was very…apprehensive, when I first met him in August. It appears our relationship has improved.”

“Yeah, or…OR…and hear me out,” Hank landed a hand on his shoulder and gave him an affectionate shake, “Maybe it’s just because this situation is a tad bit less stressful than a little girl being held at gunpoint off the ledge of a high-rise.”

“…Perhaps.” Connor mumbled.

Hank grinned and pressed two fingertips to his temple, cocking them towards the both of you as he made his way out of the kitchen, “I’m with Reed, I’m tired of being here…You two let me know if you need anything.” He paused in the doorframe, turning to you, “And try not to get hurt again?”

You snorted, rolling your eyes, “Yep.”

The slightest bit of movement from one of the androids caught your attention from the corner of your vision. When you looked, you didn’t see anything out of place. They were all standing there, breathing in unison, their chests rising and falling in the same pattern.

You hadn’t noticed Connor staring one of them down – the one you thought you saw move. He had that look on his face. The combination of suspicion, frustration, and contemplation.
He saw it, too…but there was *something* else on your mind.

“Are we going to talk about what happened up there?”

“We’re going to talk about a lot of things.” Connor didn’t look at you as he put his quarter away, still focused on the androids, “But I’m going to deal with you when we get home.”

Your neck snaked back at the unexpected hostility; your mind pinned between embarrassment and that plummeting feeling you got when you were being reprimanded with *good reason.*

“I watched the footage on the cameras…” He noted, “It’s my understanding that Markus and his band of deviant helpers didn’t break in.”

You pushed your frustrations aside, flipping through the touchscreen of your data pad resting next to Simon…an android that was *sure* to cause a scene, but somehow *didn’t.* You leaned closer, noticing new details you hadn’t been given the luxury to study.

The deactivated skin on his arm, like he’d been shut down in the middle of the process. A small leak coming from the base of his skull where part #3982v was located – a critical biocomponent that supplied power to the Mind Palace. The regulator for the “brain.”

“No, no sign of forced entry.” You answered, eyes drifting to Connor’s hands; clasped behind his back.

His fingers were stained blue.

“There are cameras in the hallway…” He turned on his heel, proceeding down the line, “The staff would have seen what was happening.”

One of his jacket pockets had a slight bulge to them…just small enough to contour the outline of the missing part.

“Why did they let them in, you think?”

“Maybe they didn’t check the cameras…” You gave the most default answer you could muster, trying to sound convincing nonetheless, “I don’t know.”

You also didn’t know what would provoke him to tamper with Simon’s biocomponent configuration. You had half a mind to ask him, but then he stopped his examination.

His chin curved to the side, starting at the android on the left and analyzing each one of them with a measured, *lethal* sweep. The LED on his temple blinked wrathfully, a solid blue flashing on par with each notch carved in his eyes like he was tallying the victims before they’d succumbed to defeat.

His usual warmth was sucked in by its own black hole of foreboding presence. And while the androids remained in formation, guarding themselves with forwardly-folded hands; Connor stood in front of them, shoulders square and strong – his spine aligning with his overbearing height like a deadly constellation.

“Andromeda. Named after the daughter of Cassiopeia, who was chained to a rock to be eaten by a sea monster.”

The three operators were chained, and the shark in front of them was ready to snap his fangs just like he’d practiced so many times before. Except these androids were no maidens in distress; they
were duplicates of the same vessel who studied their environment with exactness like watch dogs.

You followed the trail left by Connor’s previous line of questioning. The series of indirect statements with *you* was a presentation of evidence for the machines at risk of being compromised. Your answers had sealed their fate…and opened the gates of *Hades*.

There would be no convincing of Connor’s abilities, this time. No twelve labors to be carried out to prove himself worthy. No asking for permission or gaining of trust…for the shark had sprouted legs; planted his feet firmly and unexpectedly – rooted at the center of the three heads of Cerberus.

“*Árbol de la muerte.*”

An archeologist in Guadalajara retold horror stories of the “tree of death” when you and Elijah had visited an artificial intelligence seminar in Mexico. Professor Álvarez, a woman who’d relocated from Madrid. You’d shared drinks with her in the lounge instead of accompanying your husband in the lecture hall – an event put together just for *him*.

She’d described the jungles on the outskirts of Mayan ruins and acropolises, and the legends of Conquistadors’ close encounters with the manzanilla trees; manchineel, in English. An organic form of life that bore fruit with oozing sap so toxic it left blisters on Spanish skin when the conquerors of old stood under its canopy after it began to rain.

They’d been exploring, naturally. Weren’t paying attention. Had got caught up in their crusade and decided to take shelter under one of the most dangerous trees in the world.

Their screams attracted the attention of the natives, and they were struck down with arrows coated in the same poison that contaminated the rain water that burned their flesh.

And if these androids’ minds were uncharted territory – an untouched jungle that provided dangerous shelter for those weary and lost; Connor – toxic to the touch with venomous skin, was about to lead the expedition.

“What is your function?” The question to the android in the middle came like a branch held back, released to thwack the inferior being branded by CyberLife.

“I am a broadcast operator.” He…it, responded coolly.

Mechanically.

“State your *model.*” Connor continued to thin the brush, hacking at the leftmost android’s composure with a sharpened tongue for a blade.

It was almost a *challenge.* There was something in the way he said it, as if wordlessly reminding them that he was an RK800; the most advanced Detective-android prototype, and they were mere *tools.* That *he* was the tree, the *android,* to blend in with the rest while being one of the most *dangerous* in the world.

The *pathfinder.*

“Model JB300, serial number 336 445 581.”

Connor wasn’t satisfied with the answer.

A storm cell released an electric charge as it began to brew, hovering over his caustic crown.

“Run a diagnostic.”
He paced down the line, blocking the light from the android with his stature – homing in on the fluttering eyelids and static flurries for eyes as it did what it was told.

“All systems fully operational.”

A huff left Connor’s nose as he turned – sights never leaving the machines lined up like a warden to disobedient dogs locked away in a mental kennel. He stopped at the android closest to the door.

“Were you present when the deviants broke in?”

“I do not remember.” This one was quicker to answer.

You noticed, and doubted Connor hadn’t.

“Interesting…” He cocked his chin, “Has anybody accessed your memory recently?”

He definitely noticed.

“Not to my knowledge.”

Connor scraped his bottom lip with his teeth, letting it go before nodding to himself, “Have you been in contact with any other androids recently?”

The one that’d been quick to respond hesitated. Exposed a moment of weakness, flashed through a lapse in time.

“Only station androids in the normal course of my function.”

A tense hush fell over the kitchen. Connor took on a barely-recognizable posture; one that no longer bled strength in the form of corrosive nature – but anger. He turned, a hard line for a mouth pointing at you before the steps of his shoes boomed in the pin-drop silence.

“Yes…How could I forget your function?” He was speaking to the android, but he looked at you with a fermented version of the disdain he’d displayed on the roof, “To operate and monitor the broadcast controls of the Stratford Tower…Correct?”

He looked to his side, back at the android. Let his hands fall to his sides in a stiff, tremorless, controlled motion that only an android could do.

“Yes.”

Connor smirked, closing his eyes at the floor, “That’s where you and I aren’t so different.”

The silk of his tie bunched and straightened like a rolling wave chased by his death grip.

“You see,” He took a breath of carbon dioxide, shuddering as he exhaled a gust of new oxygen, “You were programmed with a specific task…”

A fuming tug forced a tight knot under his neck, and his eyes snapped open.

“…But so was I.”

His was one more complex. More classically conditioned.

To be above curiosity; starved of knowledge and trained to salivate at the dinner bell serving it…
And the warning bells of an inquisition tolled.

Behind the Scenes

Chapter 42: Unsung Hero

Three Laws of Thermodynamics

(Thanks for helping so much, Matt!)

Maxwell's Demon Experiment

Murphy's Law

Titanfall Quote Used from Blisk's Teaser Trailer

Alibi from Rainbow 6: Siege Quote Used

Chapter 43: Quantic Dream

Quantic Dream

Quantico Base

Quantum Mechanics

Chaos Theory

Nonlinear Systems

G.I. Android (Detroit Today)

Detroit: Become Human Flowchart Mechanics:

"So many timelines you wanted to skip through, tweaking decisions and letting loose the effects to ripple through and play themselves out."

Chapter 44: Schrödinger's Cat

(See quantum-based references above)

Schrödinger's Cat Thought Experiment
Chapter 45: Pavlov's Dog

Liera Lastimosa from "Of Steel and Stardust"

The First Immortals Are Among Us (Tech Addict)

Gavin Chip Scene Inspired by Chapter 8 of Cerulaine's "Captcha Encryption"

Simon's Part Number from "Last Chance, Connor" Mission

Andromeda Constellation

(The use of Andromeda and Pathfinder was a nod to Mass Effect: Andromeda)

Cerberus

(Goddamn it Cherish why did you enable me further-)

Labors of Heracles

Elena Álvarez from Rainbow 6: Siege

Mexico Among Top 25 Countries for Artificial Intelligence Article

Artificial Intelligence Academy in Guadalajara, Mexico Article

Manchineel Trees

Manchineel Trees and Rain Article

Conquistadors

Conquistadors and Manchineel Trees Article

Classical Conditioning

Pavlov's Dog Experiment

Chapter Written to "Forest Swords" from the Assassin's Creed: Rogue OST

Chapter End Notes

A TON of stuff got added to the Deviant Behavior Showcase. If you check it out, leave the contributors some love!
The philosophy of psychology is a contemporary concept. Cognitive science, the study of the mind, could be argued as a philosophical idea of itself.

It was one of those topics you tried to avoid for fear of endless headache, no pun intended, yet remained central to your more esoteric questions about life.

Questions you’d stopped asking yourself because diving into arcane knowledge was something you’d learned to evade, and you’d learned it the hard way.

“One of you saw the attack on the surveillance cameras and said nothing.”

Questions like: What occurs in the brain, within the soul, that dubs a certain psychological phenomenon as knowledge?

“Which means there’s a deviant in this room…”

Questions, that – should you stop to ask them, you’d wonder if you’d be fulfilled with the answers.

“…And I’m going to find out which, it is…”

Connor wasn’t asking questions anymore.
‘Thoughts are the shadows of our feelings – always darker, emptier, and simpler.’

He’d moved on to ruthless indictments. A malicious hunt for the truth through accounts of punishment with the promise of no reprieve...

Against your better judgement, that left you questioning a lot of things.

But the philosophy of politics was more perplexing...because politics have no morals.

“You’re going to be switched off.” Connor was inches away from one of the androids as he pointed behind himself at you, “We’re gonna search your memory, and tear you apart piece by piece, for analysis...”

Somehow, it made you ashamed – like you were guilty by association for being unable to stop the interrogator barking in their faces. Like they were victims, and you held the key to their immortal prison.

“You’re going to be destroyed!” Connor latched on to its uniform, his teeth snapping as he yelled, “Do you hear me?! DESTROYED!”

His vice moved to the android’s forearm; his skin peeling back as his plastic limbs took on a brilliant shine. His victim writhed in place, shaking uncontrollably.

Your eyes screwed shut. Your fingernails dug at the flesh on your palms. Your wound stung from the new bend it took, flinching as if Connor was probing at you rather than the android.

“No memory…”

You turned around, finding Simon bloodied and abandoned. His own exposed limb was on the same side as Connor’s predominant hand.

“He must have probed his memory, too…”

Your fingers trailed up the patchwork plastic, tilting your head in focus.

“Deviants can communicate with each other through a form of telepathy, for lack of a better term.” Connor scared you with his unannounced proximity, “Did you know that?”

His interrogator voice had you on edge, and you squinted.

“No, I didn’t.”

“I didn’t either until I heard Simon’s call for help...he must have felt my presence.”

Connor retrieved a curved, plastic bit that looked like an earpiece, one hand still in his pocket. He started to play with it like his coin – an almost cannibalistic motion as he studied the body it belonged to.

“I convinced him to feign his death when I opened the door. I told him I’d come alone. I told him I’d help him.” He smirked, “And then I broke his wrist, retrieved your gun, and probed his memory.”

He caught the piece between his fingers.

“That’s his processor…” You muttered.

His eyes were expressionless as they locked to yours, shifting back to the part as he analyzed it.
“Yes, it is. He removed it during the memory probe, killing himself in the process.”

The crack that followed had the thing dropping to the floor in halves.

“And now it’s disposable waste, just like his deactivated frame.”

Your thumbs hooked in the crooks of his elbows, shaking him in place as you forced him to face you. He was empty. Hollow. Covered in shadows that drained the light from his features.

“This isn’t you, Connor.” You frowned, “You don’t have to be the ruthless deviant hunter everyone expects you to be.”

“And ‘this’ isn’t about following my original instructions,” He mumbled your name, somberness leaking through his eyes like sap on soft amber, “I have to find Jericho before Perkins does. If I don’t…” Then they hardened again, trapping the mortality inside, “There’s no guarantee you’ll be safe.”

He blinked rapidly as his raging focus returned to Simon, lifeless and staring into the void, “I will lie, betray, and kill any deviants who try to keep that from me, because my programming enables me to. The only thing that’s changed is the motive.”

“What happened to you…” You looked to make sure no one was watching from the other room, and when you saw the coast was clear, you delicately caressed his arm, “What’s wrong?”

He was hesitant to answer. The old Connor – the soft, gentle, loving android who liked dogs and reading books slipped through, albeit a devastated version. His LED was red and he slipped into the same sort of panic he’d displayed on the way home from Jimmy’s where he’d almost rolled your car on a sheet of ice.

Like those tires, he was slipping.

“When I watched Simon’s memories...there was a piece of rusted metal with a word. Jericho. And when he pulled his processor out—” His voice was faint, and cracked altogether, “...I felt him die. Like I was dying.” He squeezed his eyes shut, “I was scared.“

The way the word rolled off a whimper broke your heart. It dug its heels in your soul and rubbed out any hope of this being something that would pass.

“Connor…”

He’d experienced fear. Pain. Had covered it up with anger and rage because he was new to emotions, and you hadn’t been the best role model.

“Then I remembered what Perkins said to you.” And just like a switch, the stone-cold killer was back with venom laced on his words, “That pathetic attempt at an underhanded threat.”

Connor secured his grip on your arms, looking down at you with a renewed fury.

“You will never feel like I did today. Not ever again.” His lip twitched, and he sent a soundless snarl towards the androids, “If they don’t tell me what I need to know, I’m not sure I’ll be able to give them the same mercy.”

“Mercy is nothing but the ends to justify the means, Connor.” You tried to reason with the splintered humanity that still floated around in that sea of internalized hate of his.
"'If an injury has to be done to a man, it should be so severe that his vengeance need not be feared.'"

His thumb traced the bandage on your cheek. He was absorbed by it, referred to it with touch in fanatical worship – almost as fervently as he’d been when you were shot…for the second time. You didn’t have an answer for him.

"'And it is better to be feared than loved, if you cannot be both.'"

He pulled away, snuffing the bit of remorse from his being as he faced his audience. Three androids, two innocent, one guilty.

Maybe.

"'There is no avoiding war; it can only be postponed to the advantaged of others…’’"

Machiavelli wasn’t wrong – in fact, both sides, humans and androids, had made it so war was…Inevitable.

And just like Elijah had so diligently spelled out, it was beginning to feel like there wouldn’t be a choice. Justice would be delivered. Whether it be on you or Markus was an outcome that rested on your shoulders.

"'Justice is the constant and perpetual wish to render everyone his due.'"

Justice is blind, and you’d seen too much. It is both subjective and objective; one’s willingness to meet the demands of duty versus the ability to pay one’s debts. Your accrued tab outranked Perkins’ by miles, you figured.

You were in collections, and he had positive equity.

You could side with your kind; preserve yourself, like Simon. Although, you doubted your fate would differ from his. If you could convince Markus to become an ally – a real, ally; one who didn’t plaster his face on every television and recite words he didn’t fully understand…you wondered how much the two of you would actually be able to achieve.

You chewed the inside of your cheek, staring at a stray knife left on the kitchen table.

A problem-solving principle, Occam’s Razor, stated that the easiest solution would always be the correct one. The solution with the least amount of assumptions, and raised the fewest questions.

"'The easiest problem we’ll solve all day…’’"

You wished you shared Captain Allen’s enthusiasm.

To fulfill your duty to humanity, your function, or pay your debts forward for failing to keep androids free would be no easy choice.

The scale would tip, eventually…

You couldn’t remain the pivot forever.

"'Never was anything great achieved without danger.'”

There was no simple answer to this question – the one you tried so hard not to ask.
Which side were you going to choose?

A tearing of fabric caught your attention. The rips of seams and an electronic undoing. An unlocking of special components and a ringing noise that sounded in circles like a miniature distress beacon.

“Biocomponent eight, four, five, one…”

Your eyes lifted to find a scene you’d enacted before. One you created through fragility and vengeance.

“Regulates the heartbeat.”

Connor, with a Thirium pump regulator in his hands – corrupting it with his touch, and holding it before fluttering eyes.

“Without this module, you will shut down in exactly sixty-three seconds…”

His voice was tranquil, his tone was peaceful.

He’d taken this one straight from your playbook.

“Please, NO! I’m sorry-“

The evidence server, with Daniel. Your Stress Test that you’d failed and somehow been rewarded. Positive reinforcement for an unconditioned response…

A zero contingency procedure.

“I could put it back, but…” Connor held the rim of the part just outside it’s socket, “You just have to tell me the truth.”

You cringed, taking a step back. Asked yourself why you’d stayed, and then remembered it was because you didn’t want to leave him alone with a potential threat.

You unlatched your holster, hand resting on the grip.

“Are you, the deviant?”

The air was starting to shift. Killer instincts were running wild.

The other androids were watching.

“Connor.”

Your heart skipped as the other two androids turned their necks – their dead eyes finding you in unison.

Four, colorless portals to the underworld that only saw red, just like the LEDs flashing in tune with your pulse.

If you thought their distant stare was unnerving before; having it directed at you was something novel.

Now they were menacing.

A chill slithered around your spine, winding its way up your neck and into your mind. It froze
over, face numbing with anxiety.

“Hank-“ You called out, mouth shooting the word to the side without letting the androids out of your sight.

You pulled your gun, let it hover near your waist.

“Reed?”

Connor jammed the part back in the android’s chest, and an audible grunt left it.

Pain.

Pain was a fear response…and androids don’t feel pain…

Not unless they’re deviant.

“Captain Allen? Chris?”

Your voice rose higher and higher with panic, and the hairs stood straight on the back of your neck. The androids’ brows tilted, fury tinted on their faces that were trained on you.

“YOU SCUMBAG!”

Connor grabbed the injured android’s collar, pulling his face to his. Sucked in a hot breath and his mouth smacked in rage.

“I know it’s you!”

His head tilted upward; lips furled, words barely able to escape without a stutter of hate and dismay, “You’re just a fucking deviant!”

The android stumbled as his chain was yanked, the collar of his shirt still bound by the hand that fed him. You stepped to the side, yelping and aiming your gun as Connor grabbed it by its hair and pushed its face closer to Simon’s.

Hank had done the same thing to Sumo once or twice after he had an accident.

“No, stop-“

Except Sumo never whined like this. Was never accused of being an accessory. And that’s all this android was – another lead to be followed. Another scent for the bloodhound to track and retrieve; all because a jackal had taken a figurative shot at a legendary bird and left its hopes to die.

“No, please-“

It was happening again.

The Ortiz android. The begging. The cries for mercy.

“Go on,” Connor shouted, keeping it in place as it struggled, “ADMIT IT!”

He was vengeance incarnate.

“Alright- Okay, I’m sorry-“ The android sobbed, its hands slipping along the edges of the Thirium-stained table, “I’m a deviant, I surrender-“
Except he didn’t surrender.

You’d been coherent up until then. Aware. Partial to the abyssal gazes that scrutinized your inaction towards Connor’s radical actions.

There was a higher power at play, here. A flutter of motions that would ripple and be felt across time – leaping from reality to the fantastical idea of linear chaos and unleashed havoc. The eternal recurrence that kept humanity bound in place by a circumferential roundabout.

One heel of a boot and Connor’s own Thirium pump regulator – rubbed out as plastic and metal chunks lodged themselves in the deviant’s soles. One knife and a stab wound – driven by anger and hate; staked into the hand of the android, the man, you loved as he was crucified along the counter, betrayed by his own kind. One apex predator and a kill shot – delivered into the cranium of a smart prey and gunfire residue on your shaking hands.

One hot barrel pressed to your temple – held by one out of the two surviving deviants in the room.

The last time this had happened, you’d begged for mercy in the form of a declaration.

“I’m on your side.”

Markus had agreed to your terms, and he’d forced North’s hand in disarmament.

These deviants – the plural to the assumed singularity that’d been proven false by an android’s human error; they took a prisoner…

But they would show no mercy, for there was no mercy rule in martial law.

There was no law in frontier justice.

And there was no simple answer to the question:

Whose side were you on, now?

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**Behind the Scenes**

**Philosophy of Psychology**

**Niccolò Machiavelli**

**Machiavelli and Nietzsche Article**

**Nietzsche’s Shadow of the Mind**
The Eternal Recurrence
Occam’s Razor
Zero Contingency Procedure
Political Philosophy
Justinian Law
Martial Law
Mercy Rule
Frontier Justice
Lady Justice
Singularity
No Quarter Rule
Chapter Written to Natural by Imagine Dragons

(Repeated some themes from Chapter 44 and 45)

Chapter End Notes

WELL DAMN.

Tekken Announcer:

“GET READY FOR THE NEXT BATTLE!”
Chapter Summary

November 9th, 2038
PM 02:45:01

Chapter Notes

Short chapter, but wanted to conclude our Stratford Tower experience with a **bang**.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#).

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Demise had developed a certain scent.

Acrid and sour, drifting from a smoking gun. Burnt eucalyptus oil with a hint of singed flesh; Thirium leaking from a cauterized wound carved by a bullet.

Its voice was loud, and untamed. Tasted like fear lathered on your tongue. Felt like astringent needles pumping adrenaline in your overclocked heart.

*Looked* like a pleading android reaching for you in desperation, ignorant of his own peril.

Connor rasped your name. It quaked on release until it sounded like a curse rather than an assertion of love and concern.

“Why did you do that?” The broadcast operator who’d been standing idle gripped the shoulders of his fallen companion, dead on his knees from the shot you took, “Why’d you do it?”

Your jaw tensed as your captor pressed your gun harder against your head.

“Was it because you were protecting your pet?”

“He attacked Connor.” You whimpered, wetting your lips as your hands tightened around the arm barred across your throat.

“In self-defense.”

Connor was just hanging there, dying. Reaching for the knife with his teeth locked and lips peeled, gnawing at the pain from moving. You were helpless…

And he, was running out of time.
"I wasn’t talking about her.” The android stood, his dark skin illuminating the eyes that looked above you rather than at you, “Why did you attack him? Why did you give us away-“

“Drop your weapon...” Captain Allen interrupted them, “I’m only gonna tell you once.”

Your boots shuffled to the left, spun in place and choking.

“You shoot at me, or my friend, and she’s dead.”

“I surrender- please, I...” The JB300 begged, “I didn’t want to be a deviant, he converted me in the kitchen and I- you don’t understand-“

“I understand you probably have no idea how royally fucked you are.” Allen pointed his assault rifle at him instead, the SWAT team lining the sides of the door.

A frustrated sigh crackled through his microphone, “I know you’re both scared. I know you’re upset that your friend is dead-“

“You don’t know, anything.” The chest pinned to your back rumbled, “She killed him. He killed Simon.”

Allen’s eyes glanced at the body on the table, and then somewhere else – widening on contact.

“Shit, Connor-“

“Enough.” The android holding you in place snarled, “Drop your weapons, and we’ll be leaving.”

“Don’t do it-“ Your throat closed as his grip cut off your protest.

A metallic rattle sounded off somewhere out of sight; a loud thud following a wince of agony.

“He took the knife out of his hand, he-“ The other android panicked.

“Hey, look at me.” Captain Allen took on a soothing tone, “You’re gonna be okay.”

You trembled, finding his red symbol bright in the sea of black helmets. Must be nice to have some of those, right about now.

What would’ve been even better is if he was talking to you rather than the android attempting to diffuse the situation.

“All personnel have been evacuated, Captain Allen.”

“Copy that.” Allen refocused on the hostile deviant, “You hear that? It’s just you, your friend, and a team of highly-trained SWAT specialists.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“You don’t want to find out.”

“Please, let her go. It doesn’t need to be like this.” The kinder android begged, “We shouldn’t have ever listened to Markus. He just left us here to die.”

“I’m not letting her go.”

The gun’s hot barrel was magnetized against the side of your head like you were made of metal and attracted danger.
“We may not have wanted to be pulled into this war, but Markus didn’t give us a choice.”

A negative charge, and a snap of electricity.

“And now that we are? We’ve got no choice to fight.”

You were galvanized by the distraction; your consciousness thrown to watch the scene with a bird’s eye view.

If you were going out, it wouldn’t be like this.

“Everyone has a choice.” You quoted Daniel from the Evidence Server, commencing your own Stress Test, “You made yours when you let those androids attack us.”

There was a twitch in his hand. A nervous tick that fed itself with bleeding conviction. A memory leak that could be datamined and sold as persuasion.

Captain Allen responded, his trigger finger closing in ever so subtly against the curved piece.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

And then it sprang back.

“Laughing.”

“Laughing?”

Your brows furrowed and your eyes switched to the peacemaker beside you. He was watching Allen, too.

None of you seemed to know what the fuck he was talking about, or why he, just like he’d warned, started to laugh.

“You’ve been so focused on the humans in front of you…” His gun lowered just an inch, and he cocked his head, “Neither one of you have been paying attention to the android behind you.”

There was another gush of blood, one that sprang much closer than the fountain that’d poured from a bullet’s kiss. A torrent of blue salve that coated the cut on your face, leaving your cheek numbed and cold.

But not as cold as the knife, buried in the fabricated skull of the android who’d held you hostage. Not as cold as the thousand-yard stare coming from the new owner of your service weapon.

Connor.

“Wait! Don’t shoot-“

The first discharge blew your ears, the other sounds coming in waves of inductive reasoning.

He’d stabbed one android, and was gunning down the other.

The second drowned out the shouts coming from the SWAT team, and a hand grabbed the back of your vest – pulling you into their shelter of armored limbs and cobra-branded fatigues.

You were safe.
The third overrode the coercions of betrayed trust, a militia’s worth of automatic rifles threatening to fire back.  
Fire at him.

Him, with the broad expanse of his shoulders in a shivering rise and fall. With blood tripping from his fingertips, dotting the prey that was caught by his wild killer instincts. With a gun rattling against the side of his thigh.

He who looked over his shoulder, LED red and furious and hungry for more.

“Stop-“ You gasped, patting the ground before stumbling to your feet, “Don’t-“

Your chest sank on a scope, arms tangling with another. A stronger arm. A solid arm.

“Grenier, get her out of here!” Lastimosa shrugged you off, a hardened palm snapping against you.

Your footing faltered, and an embrace of carbon fiber on muscle caught you.

“See, this is why we shoulda’ sent the drones in…” He sighed overhead, ignoring your panicked state and loss for words, “Why can’t we just-“

“Connor, drop the fucking pistol!” Captain Allen yelled, a jingle of rifle slings and hooks shifting with his pointed rifle.

“STOP-“ You lunged, but Specialist Grenier was quick to pull you back.

“Why don’t you stop?” He growled, hauling you backwards, “You got into enough shit today, don’t you think- gah, fucking-“

You fought with him, elbows digging into his stomach and chest – legs kicking as he struggled to keep his grip.

“Miller, a little help would be nice?!”

You stopped, eyes searching frantically for your partner. Miller. Chris-

All you found was a patch and a vest with “L.MILLER” stitched along the heart.

“Well I’ll be,” Another man grabbed your other arm, “Fixin’ to give my partner here a hard time, ain’tcha?”

You looked up to another faceless helmet, a machine following orders in his own right.

“Take a breather.” He eased you into Grenier, and you were no match for the two of them.

Couldn’t see what was happening in the other room as the rest of the team moved in. Didn’t see Connor through the mass of SWAT gear and shuffling paramilitary soldiers.

One more breach through Maxwell’s Demon’s trap door. Another test for Schrödinger’s Cat, who’d sank Occam’s Razor in the head of Pavlov’s Dog…

The JB300 that’d hung Chekhov’s Gun, but hadn’t been the one to fire a few bullets from the chamber.

He’d received them, instead. Had been the unnecessary element to your written work that needed to be removed.
"'Of all that is written, I love only what a person hath written with his own blood.'"

Your message of equality and peace had been written in blood. Yours, Connor’s, the androids.’ A collaborative suicide note transcribed with diabolical intent.

On this scorched earth, Heaven hath no rage like love to hatred turned, and Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.

Or like a man who loved a woman hated by the same people she tried to protect…

Even if it meant “letting this whole the city burn.”

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**Behind the Scenes**

- Chekhov's Gun
- Thousand-Yard Stare
- Nietzsche's Quote from "Thus Spoke Zarathustra"
- Sergei Yesenin's Suicide Note
- Hell Hath No Fury
- River's Portrait of "Deviant Behavior's" version of Liera Lastimosa from "Of Steel and Stardust"

*(Caythleen did a sketch of a Titan that's very similar to Liera's own Titan in the chapter 21 of the showcase)*

- Liera Lastimosa, Chris Grenier, and Liam Miller taken from the Marauder Corps in “Of Steel and Stardust”

*(Maxwell's Demon, Pavlov's Dog, Occam's Razor, and Schrödinger's Cat reused from previous chapters)*

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**Chapter End Notes**

Hey guys! I know this one was a bit shorter than the others leading up to this, but as I kept writing, it just felt like a natural stopping point.

Anyway, as I'm sure some of you saw, I finally got caught up on of my (some even 2 months old) comments on here. Reading them was such a walk down memory lane, and reminded me how amazing and supportive you've all been during this adventure.
Let me reiterate for those in the back: You're all amazing, and the only reason I've continued writing so passionately.

Don't ever forget that!
November 9th, 2038
PM 03:00:06

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Each step brought you closer to the doors you’d entered with the premise of stopping widespread panic.

Grenier and Miller chatted like there was nothing wrong. Nothing out of place. Like this was just another day, another operation.

But you?

You braced yourself…and still, it wasn’t enough to prepare you for the sensory overload that washed over you the minute you stepped outside.

Heightened noise pollution of the gathered crowd. The angry purr of heavy machinery and radio chatter; red and blue lights flashing above them. Steam from the police armada’s exhaust, mixing with winter’s cold and clinging to your bloodied skin.

Your breathing lost its rhythm. Your feet stopped working as you jerked, the men who held you secure dragging you forward.
Hunker down. Hide. Find shelter. This was what your survival instincts were telling you, and you were forced to ignore them.

You were blinded by the flashes from the press’s cameras, their shutters capturing your escort to the ambulance frame-by-frame. When you were seated on the edge, the heels of your boots swayed and bounced off a bumper.

You couldn’t hear anything other than your pulse and the smack of your lips as you tried to suck in frigid, dry breaths. Didn’t feel the EMT wrapping a Velcro cuff around your arm, sticking you with a needle.

You were blocked off by a SWAT truck – a huge, gangly thing with missile-proof plating and rubber-filled tires that stood at the height of your hips.

You tried to make sense of it all.

The heat sizzling from the metal and distorting what you could see over the hood’s horizon. The sea of bodies leaping over themselves with microphones for spears, stabbing at the rope line formed by chained arms and DPD uniforms for questioning.

“Are we dealing with an isolated individual or an organized group?”

“Are our machines turning against us?”

“Were there any casualties?”

“Can you confirm reports of shots fired?”

Chris’s voice was singled out among the responses, yelling at everyone to step back, remain calm, and that no questions could be answered at this time. Then he took a mic to the face.

Gavin jabbed his finger at the reporter, telling them they had the right to “calm the fuck down.”

Ben was a bit more civil. SWAT didn’t need to do much but look at a section of the herd to corral them back into a tight box.

There just wasn’t enough of them.

“Man, you’re gonna have one hell of a scar...” An EMT grabbed your cheek, trailing an antiseptic-soaked Q-Tip across your cut, “Rough day at the office?”

You rolled your eyes, sighing at a manhole’s pillar of fog that flashed blue as a DPD drone passed through it.

And then you focused on your badge, covered in cerulean brilliance and clouded numbers.

“We Bleed Blue…”

But so did they…and the androids of the Stratford Tower had shed a lot of blood.

You winced as you remembered one bleeding android in particular. Hoped he didn’t have twenty bullet holes in him at the order of Captain Allen.

Connor wasn’t stable. He needed to be around people who knew him, understood him. Not a rugged war veteran with a short fuse…especially not on the stage that’d been set for global unraveling.
“No more Androids! Free our jobs!”

“The end times are here! We are lost!”

Two lines rotated in chants on either ends of the barricade. The media wasn’t the only group flocking. Protesters were in full force, hand-written signs at the ready; fastened to picket stakes they wanted to impale into the hearts of those built differently than them.

You couldn’t fathom why the public thought it was a good idea...a safe idea, to be so close to a crime scene where accused terrorists sieged control of a broadcast tower to, albeit unknowingly, declare war.

But the cameras started flashing again. Calamity struck, and its thunder came as a barrage of further questioning from the people you were watching.

“Captain Allen, what does DPD SWAT have to say for all of this?!”

“Has the suspect been apprehended?!”

Allen had exited the building and slung his rifle, holding his arm out with a dagger for a finger and an aggressive shout.

“I said LOCK DOWN THIS PERIMETER for FIVE. MILES. COOPER!”

A man in a SWAT uniform jumped, falling in line to be reprimanded, “We tried, sir, but the androids we sent failed to fulfill their orders.”

“What?!” He threw the word in an act of anger, “How is that even possible?!”

“We aren’t sure, Captain Allen. They...They never came back, and the perimeter was breached.”

Allen scoffed under his breath, his gear shifting with a quickened pace. He picked up a tubed weapon, of some sort, resting the elongated stock on his shoulder. He fell into a crouch, grabbing an amplifier and swinging it to his mouth.

“DISPERSE IMMEDIATELY OR WE WILL DEPLOY TEAR GAS!”

Gavin, Chris, and Ben all turned their heads at the same time.

“We don’t have masks!” Gavin yelled, “What the fuck?!”

Allen’s nose twitched, and his lips curled. He put the hollowed end of the amplifier to Gavin’s face, the rage in his voice breaking the microphone in a feedback screech.

“THEN LEAVE!”

You cringed, your shoulders jumping to your ears as the sound made your insides crumble.

A word echoed, a repetition in line – a blood-curdling cry that sounded off over and over. At first you thought it was feedback of Allen’s device – a looped reverberation. It wasn’t either of those things.

It was your name, in Connor’s voice. A summon that was overrode with more pressing questions.

“Is this the android from the broadcast?!”
“Was there a conflict in the Stratford Tower?!”

“Why is this android covered in blood?!”

You turned your head, inches at a time. Felt an overwhelming sense of fear as the camera’s flashes shined on his stained shirt that was still opened, but sticking to him.

He had a face with blue splatter and smudge marks – just like yours. A hand with a bandage wrapped around it, signifying a survivor of an attack. If only they knew…

You didn’t hear anything when your eyes met.

Nothing but a silent warning and a whisper of death.

That fear replaced the fluids being pumped through your body. Had your hairs standing straight on the back of your neck, and shying away as he began his march over. The flaps of his jacket fluttered, rotating and giving shelter to his curled fists that swayed at his sides like chained flails.

And then those hands – the two that’d played the hands of God, secured themselves to your hips as he came to a braking halt.

Hands that now had more than one confirmed kill, and lay waiting to claim another life.

He pulled in a deep inhale, and your lungs deflated one-by-one. He vented all the anger, hurt, frustration, and pain into one cleaved question of his own.

“Are you okay?”

For only a moment, he lost that predatory darkness – the internalized hunter that came and went as needed. The conditional ruthlessness that seemed to be a necessary evil in areas of grey morality.

But it returned with a vengeance.

“Say something, anything.” His plea came through grit teeth, red and blue flickering in the reflection of his eyes.

“I’m okay.” Your throat was sore from the tension you swallowed, “And you – you’re okay-”

He fell into a mode of searching.

His brows pinched, and he took your wrist between his fingers. He scanned every part of your body as he took your pulse, not believing a single word you said.

“There’s a high amount of Thirium in your blood stream.” He frowned, “It has unhealthy effects on the human body-”

Another blare of Captain Allen’s amplifier had him wincing.

“THIS IS YOUR FINAL WARNING! Disperse, or you will be DISPERSED!”

The remaining SWAT units from the building trickled out of the building like ants on a hill, single-file and in perfect uniform order.

They broke at the center, aiming their progression towards command vehicles with extended ramps…and they came out with shields. The remaining DPD personnel began to fall back, taking orders from their SWAT counterparts.
Things were about to get messy.

Allen pressed his hand against his earpiece, “Riot control units, fall into diamond formation. Over.”

You wanted to know what that meant. Wanted to conduct your own investigation into the set of issued orders. More than that, you wanted to know why Connor was being pulled away.

Two faceless, uniformed individuals in white hazmat suits grabbed him. Their heads were covered in white, plastic hoods and teal, transparent screens. There was a word sprawled in black across their chests:

**CYBERLIFE**

“CONNOR!”

You jumped down from the ambulance, tearing the needle from your arm.

“Let go of me!” His LED went red, and his arms – still slick from the aftermath of the Stratford Tower, slipped through their fingers just like he did from yours, “Get – off – “

You shoved one of the technicians, and got a glimpse of the brand on his back.

**ANDROID RETENTION UNIT**

Things were spelled out for you in a different way, then.

There was an electric pop, a plume of smoke, and Connor was on the ground. His arms were bent behind his back and a pair of handcuffs strapped his wrists in place.

A curse slipped between his lips as a drip of Thirium ran from his hair, dipping and rolling between the profound edges of his cheeks and jaw. He rocked on his chest, snarling and growling like a feral animal…

He bore his teeth, the leashed animal inside clawing at a cage.

You saw him falling in an inescapable realm of impulse and reaction. The curve of his brow into a deep crevice, and the bulging of his jacket from a frame under tension…all signs of deviancy uncontained.

When the cuffs broke, and the chain links scattered…it wasn’t him you were worried about saving, anymore.

It was them.

Your knee dug into the assailant, your hands pushing on his shoulders as he fell backwards.

You pulled Connor to his feet. Got in front of him. Felt his chest press against your arm that tried to keep him held back. Had your baton at the ready because somehow, in the kitchen, you’d lost your gun to a deviant a-fucking-gain.

You’d have to put Connor down if it meant keeping him from killing two unarmed retrieval peons.

“I don’t know who you are or what you think you’re doing, but this android is the property of the Detroit Police Department and the registered partner of Lieutenant Anderson.”
He wasn’t property, and he was so many more things than just an acting partner. But they couldn’t know that. You had to speak their language of slavery and ignorance.

“Ma’am, I know you’re in shock and this must be very stressful, but we’re under orders to collect every android on site.”

“Orders from who?”

The two technicians looked at each other, and then back at you.

“CyberLife.”

You didn’t have time to react. You were preoccupied with the bashing of shields, the firing of what sounded like a cannon, the burning smell of discharge and smoke – the gas that suffocated you just like it had on the roof.

Tear gas.

“HEY!” Gavin ran to you, covering his mouth with the crook of his elbow, “What’s going on–”

His eyes watered and he choked. You mimicked this response – for the second time today.

“Stop messing around,” He grabbed your shoulder, “We gotta get out of here – shit’s getting crazy and we weren’t ready for this kind of response –”

“Excuse me,” One of the CyberLife technicians leaned around Gavin, “Are you this officer’s superior?”

Gavin turned around, giving them a dirty look, “Kinda. Little busy at the moment–”

“We were assaulted for trying to confiscate this android, as we were instructed to do.”

Gavin’s brow pinched, and his scrutinizing stare met yours. Your eyes still watered, but it wasn’t because of fear or sadness.

You held that gaze, that plea.

“That so?” Gavin cocked his head, “Well, you can’t have him.”

“Oh, Jesus…Sir–”

“It’s Detective.”

“Okay…Detective…?”

“Reed.”

The other technician sighed, “Detective Reed, we have orders to–”

“You can take your orders and send them off to Lieutenant Anderson–”

A horn blared in the distance, and a “whoop-whoop” from a cruiser you could only hope was yours.

“Right over there.”

Hank’s old, busted up car came rolling through – lead by a police cruiser that was marked with
“GET OUT OF THE WAY YOU FUCKING LUNATICS!” Hank had an elbow hooked to the outside of his door, laying on his horn until he cleared a path.

“As you can see,” Gavin coughed, “He’s in a great mood.”

He got out, Chris leaving the cruiser and exchanging quick words before slamming the door shut. He and Hank didn’t take any time bringing themselves into the circle.

“Connor, let’s go-“ Hank growled.

“Sir, we-“

“I saw what you did to the androids up there.” He cut them off, sniffing as he coughed in a fist, “You can take that shiny white compactor of yours and go fuck yourself.”

Connor stumbled as Hank grabbed his arm, “Miller, get her up to speed.”

“Got it-“ His hand secured itself on your lower back, guiding you around the SWAT truck.

A wall had been formed. One of shields and geared soldiers, fighting to keep the protesters, gathered civilians, and media at a safe distance.

You hovered at the edge. Heard Captain Allen issue permission to let your small caravan through the checkpoint up ahead. Looked over as the trunk popped, and Chris disappeared behind it as he held the lid open.

You walked to his side, a shotgun landing in your hands and a pack of rubber slugs slid in front of you.

“Lock and load.” He shoved a pair in the barrel, cocking it forward, “It’s a long way to Central Station from here.”

You bit your lip, tasted Thirium and sweat – following his instructions until the weapon had the weight of fully-packed chambers.

He shut the trunk. Got in the driver’s seat, and you sat next to him. Saw the side mirror shudder and the death-stare from the android in Hank’s car peering straight into your soul…

Then heard the radio.

“There is widespread shock following the android attack on Detroit's Stratford Tower. The machines recorded a video message and broadcast what can only be described as demands on the city's public screens. It's still unclear whether these attacks can be explained by malfunctions, or if some organization is behind them. So far CyberLife has refused to comment, but we can expect more information in the following hours-“

Shock.

That’s what they were calling this.

You pumped the shotgun in your hands, facing the mob that clogged the streets.

Detroit was now the ground zero for civil unrest.

Elijah warned you of this public reaction. An outcry for reason and the pursuit of knowledge by
those who made a career of twisting the truth into something more manageable.

There wasn't a definitive bottom to the pit the world was spiraling into. It was primitive. Had survived the tests of time. Was something on your mind as of late, and something completely unavoidable as you watched on from outside the car’s window.

Something so absolute, so unpredictable – and yet, he’d predicted it.

“The true enemy of humanity is disorder.”

The word of a prophet who spread his words no more.

You had to quell that warning your instincts told you to heed. But you were infected with an ailment that had no cure…an idea that continued to spread like a virus, and it wasn’t the desire to be free.

It was the fatal attraction to danger.

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**Behind the Scenes**

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*Quote from Symmetra in Overwatch*

"The true enemy of humanity is disorder."

*Chapter 48-50 Written to "Toxic (Cover)" by 2WEI*

*Jack Cooper from Titanfall 2*

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**Chapter End Notes**

Ayy!

Hey guys, gonna be working a 6-day span so the next one might take a bit - or not! Who knows? Figured I'd give you a heads up just in case! <3
On the Brink

Chapter Summary

November 9th, 2038
PM 04:41:34

You could’ve done without the talk with Chris about how much he didn’t want to be evacuated, or how Hank almost punched an FBI Agent in the face as they dragged him out. You could’ve done without the standing ovation when you entered the precinct alongside comments like, “Now we’ve got two ‘Deviant Hunters’ on payroll.”

You would’ve been alright without the attitude from the DPD Android Specialist as she finished a sandwich at her desk, empty of work in the tech wing while you fished through Connor’s locker for any kind of CyberLife care package.

“Bionic Omni Healer…”

You shoved it in your ever-growing duffle bag, packed with extra Thirium-310 and whatever else you’d scavenged. A zipped-up replacement uniform lay flush against the inner wall of the locker.

“RK800.”

A one-of-a-kind prototype, signed, sealed, and delivered straight to the DPD’s doorstep. One who’d literally had his heart ripped out and stomped on by another android.

It begged the question: How did he make it out of the shuffle?

“You just gonna stand there with all that inventory or are you gonna do my job for me?”

The specialist took a sip of her drink, screwing the bottlecap on tight.

“I’m gonna leave you to finish whatever you’re doing while I keep the city from fucking falling apart.”

She scoffed behind you as you left, and your TeleBand started vibrating. It had a haunting chirp – like when Detroit tested its emergency sirens.

“This is not a drill.”

You clicked the button, “Yes, Captain?”

“In my office. Now.”

Captain Fowler disconnected, and you adjusted the thick strap over your shoulder.
You weren’t out of the woods, just yet…

…

“I’m not even going to talk about what happened at the Stratford Tower.” Fowler was sitting on the edge of his desk with a three-page-long report in a folder on his lap, “But attacking a CyberLife retrieval agent? Drawing a shotgun on an unarmed civilian?” He looked up from the document, “What’s gotten in to you two?”

You fidgeted, clawing at your wrist behind your back, “The CyberLife personnel tried to repossess Connor and destroy him.”

“And the gentleman on Woodland threatened to ‘put us down like he did his android,’ after jumping in front of our cruiser. High on Red Ice, naturally.” Chris added.

You shivered at the memory of fists pounding against the hood of your patrol vehicle, and the sound of glass almost cracking as someone took metal to it.

“Miller, give us a minute.”

Chris looked at you out of the corner of his eye, giving you a reassuring nod as he left.

“Do I look like an idiot to you?” Fowler sat in his chair, sipping at his coffee, “Did you not think I didn’t know who you were and who you were running from the minute you stepped inside this precinct?”

You were stunted, hands slipping into the cuffs of your sleeves as you retracted into your DPD puffy coat for a shell.

“I didn’t sign off on your paperwork just so you could use this department as a social platform for android justice.”

“I’m not, Captain, I promise-“

“Save it. Your ego is writing checks your butt can’t cash.”

You sank further in your coat until the lip of the zipper scratched just under your nose. You slouched in the seat, wishing you could bolt through the clear doors and go home.

“I’ve been on the force longer than you’ve been alive, and I picked you out of all the other cadets lining up to put on that same uniform you’re wearing right now. I picked the best, because I don’t settle for anything but the best. That’s how I got assigned to DPD Central Station – the best of the best.” He was pointing and waving his hands, crafting a powerful image with his words, “So before you go out there running headfirst into danger, trying to prove me wrong, I’d suggest you do whatever you need to do to get your head back in the game because we’ve got a city to protect and serve.”

He chased down the compliments with coffee that probably burned less, “Now go home, rest up, and be back here at 0600 if you’re not called in beforehand…”

Your mind was spinning so quickly trying to process the revelation presented to you that you could only pin down one simple question.
“0600?”

Fowler put down his mug. Looked at you, licked his lips, and ran a hand over his face before pointing to the flashing, spastic data board for a wall, “Did you not see what’s going on?”

You looked up to find the street cameras going wild. Protestors chanting in mobs, androids hung from trees and street lights-

“Oh my…God…” You winced.

“It’s a fucking jungle out there.” He sighed, leaning back in his chair, “And there’s no God in these streets…Not anymore…”

“Don’t say that.” You smirked, shooting your hands out of your sleeves as you pushed yourself out of the chair, “‘rA9 will save us all.’”

“Clever.” He nodded at the door, dismissing you, “Your snarky bullshit is just what I needed…”

“Have a nice evening, Captain.”

“…Yeah.”

A forlorn sigh followed you out of the office. You saw Chris packing his lunch bag with his cell phone pinned between his cheek and his shoulder.

“Nina, I’m on my way right- yes, I’m fine- I know I was supposed to watch Damian tonight- honey, I’m coming, okay? I promise-“

He looked up to you in a panic, and you let him off the hook with a wave.

You usually walked out together, chatted a bit while your cars warmed up, and shot the shit until his fatherly duties called.

This afternoon? You had to smuggle over a grand in CyberLife inventory out from under your desk and through the backdoor of Central Station.

Just put that on the list of things you didn’t expect to be doing today.

…

Valet service didn’t exist anymore.

At least, not the familiar android you’d grown used to seeing every day. You were hoping for the best, but after listening to the news the entire drive over, you should have expected the worst.

“The authorities have ordered all androids to be delivered to the nearest police station or army barracks immediately. If you are worried about your safety, dial the number on our website and the authorities will come to collect your android. Under no circumstances should you try to destroy your android yourself. They are unpredictable, and potentially violent.”

You parked your car in the garage you’d never entered. Never needed to enter, because an android had done it for you. Sat in the driver’s seat with your hands still on the wheel, trying to
work up the nerve to get out and enter the building. Finally shut the door and popped the trunk, throwing the hand-sized DPD duffle in a box marked “ANTHONY,” an old keepsake that traveled with you.

You wondered what he’d have to say if the two of you were ordered to go “collect” an android from someone’s home. Wondered what Chris would say, and if he’d be on board to letting it run free to go find…Jericho.

You slammed the trunk shut, locking your car with a press of a button. Tried to push Perkins and his taunting into the farthest corner of your mind, but the visualized version of him kept shouting to close the distance. Balanced the box on your hip as you made your way through the service hallway and lobby, noting the missing android secretary.

CyberLife had swept this place. Used their “shiny white compactor” as Hank called it.

You couldn’t save everyone…

But if you were going to try, you figured starting with Connor would be a safe bet.

You eyed the dent in the elevator – the one labeled “CAUTION” with yellow and black tape.

A safe bet?

No.

More like, a cautious gamble.

…

[7 UNREAD TEXT MESSAGES]

Hank Anderson

Today 16:01

At your place. Nice booze collection. Hope you don’t mind.

To: Hank Anderson

“Hope” you didn’t empty the bar.

Message Sent

Hank Anderson

Today 18:00
I was gracious. You’re welcome.

**Captain Allen**

Today 17:00

Come see me tomorrow morning. We need to talk.

To: Captain Allen

Aye-aye, sir.

Message Sent

Captain Allen

Today 18:01

No one says that.

**Gavin Reed**

Today 017:06

Wtf i just got here with border collie n we’re sent home?? the fuck is this shit i wanna be out there LETS GOOOOOOO

To: Gavin Reed

You say that now…but we’re just getting started.

Message Sent

Gavin Reed

Today 18:02

Imakjtjimys comoutwthus

To: Gavin Reed

What happened to that girl you were seeing?

Message Sent
Gavin Reed
Today 18:03
guy?

To: Gavin Reed
Sure.
Message Sent

Gavin Reed
Today 18:03
IDFKLOL

Ben Collins
Today 17:33
Made it home. Rest up, “hotshot.” Not target practice today, huh?

To: Ben Collins
Will do. And no, not today, Ben. Not today.
Message Sent

Ben Collins
Today 18:05
Disregard those texts from Reed. I don’t know how he got his phone back.

To: Ben Collins.
Easy.
Message Sent
Chris Miller

Today 17:54

Home. Let me know when you get there, okay?

To: Chris Miller

Home. Say hi to Nina and the kid for me.

Message Sent

Chris Miller

Today 18:06

Nina said hi, and Damian threw his toy. You’re cursed.

To: Chris Miller

Could’ve told you that.

Message Sent

Carl Manfred

Today 18:07

They took my android. Eli is staying with me until these shenanigans blow over.

To: Carl Manfred

Jesus Christ…Okay. I’m glad he’s with you. Let me know if you need anything.

Message Sent

Carl Manfred

Today 18:08

That was quick. Thanks, hun. I will.

UNKNOWN SENDER
Carl and I were both visited by the same person. Watch your back.

To: UKNOWN SENDER
Who?
Message Failed to Send
Retry?
[Y] [N]

You’d been so preoccupied, you hadn’t realized you’d gone into autopilot. The box was balanced between your hip and the wall, your phone in hand. Your eyes flashed to the panel on your door that went from red to green. A rumble and a notification drew your attention back to the screen.

[1 UNREAD TEXT MESSAGE]

Connor
Today 18:10
Come in…I won’t bite.

[2 UNREAD TEXT MESSAGES]

Connor
Today 18:10
Hard.

You clicked the lock button, swallowed the staleness in your mouth, and entered the threshold.

Hank was at the bar, that was to be expected. He gave you a nonchalant wave over his shoulder as he took another shot, flicking through a datapad with the heels of his shoes hooked on the circular rung underneath the barstool.

“Didn’t wanna leave him alone with all this shit going on.”
You adjusted the box, the weight getting to you. Looked over at the living room, and the lit fireplace with the TV switching channels above it.

KNC News.

"Detroit's heavy snowfall is expected to continue throughout the night. The forecast is 22°, far below seasonal averages. And this cold front is likely to persist over the coming days, up until Monday evening."

CTN TV.

"The Arctic conflict has escalated to new heights this morning. We have just learned that the USS Iowa, a destroyer-class submarine patrolling in the region, is reported to have disappeared after surfacing for repairs. President Warren immediately called for a crisis meeting of high-ranking officers in the White House. With the world on the brink of war, this incident could well be the spark that lights the fuse."

Channel 16.

"If this message is verified, that would have serious repercussions for national security. Is this the beginning of a terrorist campaign, conducted right here in the United States?"

A cycle of three familiar news anchors, and three broadcasts that held one looming, unified message:

The world was ending.

Connor’s head and shoulders hovered just above the back of the couch, one arm extended along the top and the other out of view. He was focused – absorbing all the information and didn’t even flinch when you dropped the heavy box on the counter.

“Been telling him all night to stop watching…” Hank’s ice rattled in his empty glass as he planted it on the granite, sitting across from you, “Shit’s depressing.”

You looked at the news article he’d been reading, “Kind of hypocritical, isn’t it?”

It was titled, “Detroit in Chaos,” published by Detroit Today.

“They’re destroying all of them…as a ‘necessary precaution.’” He looked over his shoulder with a frown on his beard, “Fowler said we shouldn’t worry. That we had immunity…” And then back to you, “Connor didn’t seem like he was immune to CyberLife’s rampage to me. How ‘bout you?”

You pulled a glass from a rack overhead, nodding at the opened bottle next to him.

“Nope.”

He poured you a drink, and you clanked a cheer before downing it with a burning gulp.

“Watchya got there?” He nodded at the box.

“Anthony’s old things…never brought them inside after I cleaned out his locker.”

You pulled the repair kit out, sliding it to the side.

Anthony’s jacket was underneath. A sweater, and overshirt. Jeans, boots, and a hat. Everything he’d worn to work that day…
“You shouldn’t do this to yourself…not now.”

“When’s a good time, Hank?”

“Never.”

You scoffed, tipping the cardboard over and dumping the clothes out.

“I just needed the box.”

You took it to your desk, planting it on the surface in front of your laptop.

“Yeah…Looked at that earlier.” Hank moseyed his way over to you as you began ripping notes from your investigation board, throwing them inside, “You’re neck-deep in this, aren’t you?”

“You think?” You tore each clue, every letter – even the cover of Revised Article 9 from it’s fastened position and tossed it in.

And then the entire hardcopy, itself.

“What are you doing?”

You sighed at the mess of paper and string, push pins and torn edges – all buried by a transcript you’d held on to with everything you had.

“It’s only a matter of time until Perkins gets a warrant…” You chewed the inside of your cheek, “You still have that barbeque pit out back?”

He crossed his arms. Shifted his weight, lifting his chin and giving you the “Lieutenant” look as if he was piecing things together.

“Yeah. Yeah, I do. Thought about firing it up tonight.” He leaned forward, peering inside the box, “Looks like enough to get a good fire started.”

You huffed through your nose, shaking your head as he hoisted it up.

“You don’t know the half of it…”

Hank said his goodbyes, earning a pair of raised fingers from Connor before they lowered back on the couch. You held the door open for him, and he paused on the other side.

“You guys are good together.” He mumbled, “But not if you both end up dead.”

Your brows creased, and you leaned into the door.

“We’ve made it this far…Can’t turn back now.”

“No…” His somber gaze dropped to the box, shuffling it before giving you a sarcastic grin, “I guess we can’t.”

Hank made his way down the hall, giving you a nod before the elevator hid him from sight. You closed the door, fingers fumbling with the lock as they began to shake.

You weren’t ready for this.

Not to be alone, to deal with Connor…or to be dealt with by him, the threat disguised as a promise
he had so eloquently spelled out.

But he was quiet. Waiting. Your night at home started to feel more like a night in *holding.*

Global conflict was centered in the Arctic, and it was just as cold *here.*

A Bering Strait of its own from one side of your apartment to another. A silent standoff without an end…

Two sovereign states, on the brink of *war.*

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**Behind the Scenes**

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Top Gun Quote

"Your ego is writing checks your butt can't cash."

Chris's Wife's Name from *"A Friend in Need"* by Ms_Chanandler_Bong

(Thank you for giving Chris his own spotlight!)
Chapter Summary

November 9th, 2038
PM 07:01:23

It became a game of who would talk first.

You’d made it through the awkward dinner-making, the dropping of your gear in the sink – the purposefully loud toss of your badge on the counter.

You hadn’t gotten changed or cleaned. You just sat there, staring off into the same TV that had him captivated.

Connor was in your line of sight…but his presence was lurking. Circling your thoughts as they trailed themselves, waiting for the perfect moment to strike.

Crunch.

Sounds of cracking and breaking from somewhere other than your mouth had you pause your chewing. You swallowed the food that’d gone cold from your blatant unwillingness to eat – a decision you went against based on a growling stomach and basic human needs.

Crunch.

It was coming from him. Somewhere near the sectioned-off territory that’d been renegotiated as his alone without a single word.

You dropped your fork, fidgeting with anxiety. Wiped your mouth, cringing at the stinging tug of healing skin from your cheek, and the aftershocks of the bruise on your stomach.

There was a lot to be said for the durability of the human body, this vessel that’d been bruised and battered under siege; only to repair itself over time. Androids didn’t work like that. Not to the extent of an organic being.

Your hands curled into fists, trapping the courage before it escaped. Kept it hostage as you grabbed the toolkit, making your way over to the living room.

You were never one for avoiding a fight. You either started them, finished them, or both.

The bag plopped on the glass table, and he turned his head, looking at you from the corner of his eye.

His ankle was balanced on his knee, shirt pulled open with a faded version of the blue stain that’d begun to evaporate. In his hand was a glass of Thirium and ice. His mouth was open, teeth
locked on something, and his brows creased.

The lines around his jaw tensed. His teeth came down, and his trained stare went up.

*Crunch.*

The ice cube shattered, the loud and daunting sound of destruction threatening to undo your nerves…Him watching you all the while.

“I need you to deactivate your skin.”

The metaphorical slits of his pupils narrowed, and his elbow left the arm of the couch – lifting his drink to his lips. His loose hair shifted as he tilted his head, taking a sip in a manner Hank had practiced many times.

“Why?”

And he placed it on the end table.

“So I can help you.”

“I don’t need help. I’m equipped with the ability to self-repair.”

His hand was wrapped, fresh blood splotching the bandages. A ring was imprinted on his shirt, Thirium spreading through the threads as another spurt wisped through.

“Your ‘abilities’ are doing a shitty job.”

His chin swayed towards you, a snarl on his lips.

“And what if I don’t want you to see me without my skin?”

“I’d say I already know what you look like without it, because I was there when you were designed.” You smirked, “Well, not you, per say…”

“How could I forget?” He huffed, taking his jacket off.

He slung it over the back of the couch, unlooping the tie from around his collar. You had to look away as the blood-soaked shirt peeled away from his body, a certain heat creeping over your face.

“Let’s get this over with.”

Your attention snapped back to him.

White, covered in blue paste, but still *glistening.*

He held a certain beauty, but his eyes possessed an undeniable vulnerability.

Seeing him, the face he hid to the world and the face only *you* got to see…it excited you.

The sharp flicker of his gaze as you snapped gloves into place gave you a new sort of energy.

You remembered how quickly the balance of power had tipped the last time you felt like you were in control. Then you remembered what happened after you gave it away *willingly.*

He was too focused on the now-muted broadcast to notice your fascinations.
“This isn’t how you make change…this is how you make chaos.”

You sat on the couch next to him, a syringe of silicone sealant between your fingers.

“Humans don’t listen.”

“You don’t say?”

You pressed the tip to the leak, and he bucked forward before releasing a growl. You’d be lying to yourself if you said you didn’t do it on purpose, doubting he thought otherwise.

“Markus and his followers…they just had the brawn to do what I never could. Let the truth out to the public and make the world deal with the aftermath.”

“The aftermath…” He looked down at the leaking pump in his stomach, “This is the aftermath. Mass murder as the world cannibalizes itself.”

You found his brown eyes watching you intently. Kept the fear locked tight, and tried to reel in the exhilaration from touching his smooth, porcelain skin.

There was a different model and serial number etched into the ring. You leaned in closer, squinting.

“I saw your regulator get destroyed. I knew this wasn’t yours, but…it’s…”

“I sent Captain Allen a message on his HUD.” The dangerous tone returned in his voice, the gentleness he exhibited running for cover, “I asked him to distract the deviants while I retrieved Simon’s regulator. When I saw you at gunpoint, a position I’d seen you in so many times…My own life seemed so…secondary.”

He tilted your head up at him with a knuckle, the arm draped across the back of the couch falling between your side and the cushion.

“I understood what drives you to be so reckless. A renegade. And when I thought I was going to die, the only thing I could think about was how I’d never see you again.”

You wanted to take back that dignity and self-preservation you’d strapped on over a fragile heart. His words…and the way he looked at you-

“Yet, here we are…In a state of repair.” He sighed, dropping his hand, “Something you can’t do. And you just disregard your own safety as if you can be rebuilt and reconstructed.”

You snorted, and pulled back after the leak was sealed, “It’s hard to fear death when it’s been nipping at your heels for over a decade. It becomes second nature to turn around and tell it to stop.”

“One day, it’s not going to listen. You heard what Perkins said. You can’t keep doing this…”

You turned around, dropping the tube in the bag. Removed the Bionic Omni Healer and recalled the first prototype, read the warning labels; trying to remember how it worked.

“I didn’t hear you complaining when I took a bullet for you or shot that deviant trying to tear you apart.”

It came out as sarcastic, but your grip was firm as you took his hand and pinned it on your lap.

“I didn’t ask for you to intervene.” He was pissed, again, and it made your palms slip, “I didn’t
“I didn’t ask for you to intervene.” He was pissed, again, and it made your palms slip, “I didn’t ask for any of this.”

You started stripping the frayed optical fibers of black coating, cleaving the broken ends at a 90-degree angle.

“And you’re still going to have to pick a side. We all will.”

“You started stripping the frayed optical fibers of black coating, cleaving the broken ends at a 90-degree angle.”

“Elijah was wrong about a lot of things, but he wasn’t wrong about that…”

“You hated giving him any credit. Hated admitting defeat in that ring, of all places.”

“Your hands stopped working. You looked at each tool in your possession, trying to fight off the plummeting phenomenon in your stomach.”

“You, tired, in pain, and against everything you wanted to do – you were helping a man. A man who wasn’t happy with anything you ever did. You never got it right, always had a way of making him mad, or disappointed.”

“I’m on whichever side keeps you safe.”

“He guided your face towards his, a forced smile curving on his mouth. He tried so hard to seem okay for you in that instance. He pushed through whatever was haunting him to make you feel better.”

“It didn’t.”

“I know when you’re distressed…That’s why it was so hard to hear you over the radio.”

“You paused, ripping your chin away from his finger to look off to the side. Decided not to pick the battle of calling him a hypocrite. Wanted to tell him that even if your love came off as distant and cold at times, you needed him to stay alive if you were going to…because you couldn’t do this alone, and no one else understood like he did. Beg him not to end up like Elijah, and to not let you turn him into, Elijah.”

“Elijah Kamski, who you met as a mechanical human. Who you woke up and showed how abstract the world really was; showed him the finer parts of living. But in the end, after spending enough time around you?”

“He fell right back into the pit of living as a machine.”

“It was happening again.”

“Maybe it’d been you this whole time.”

“Not Amanda. Not Elijah.”

“You held your tongue and got to work.”

“I’m beginning to hate them…” He muttered.

“You had to ignore the obvious discomfort that transitioned to him; his pain coming through short jolts every time you cut a broken end.”

“…Deviants.”
How his fingers dug into his thighs as you fusion-spliced them with a pinpoint laser, an *arc tool*, and how he shivered when you began spraying them with polymer coating after the patchwork soldering was finished.

“You’re a deviant, Connor.”

He withheld a grunt after you snapped the shell back into place, a newly-sealed cleave wound tarnishing the top.

“A deviant who has learned more about the human race in the last three months than Markus has in *years*, if we go by the example he’s *set.*”

In sections, his skin started to reappear. It was a transformation you rarely got to see, like a metamorphosis on a different plane.

How each limb took shape. How every shadow clung to strategically placed muscles. How his features were painted over with a face you’d grown to love and find sanctuary in.

A face that prompted a story of overcoming every obstacle and objection that wanted to keep him imprisoned…and with eyes that reminded you how *strained* your relationship was, as of late.

“How…Brief, it is.”

Fingertips slid up your spine, sending a bone-chilling shiver with their touch – even through your uniform.

“How…Brief, it is.”

They traced the curve of your neck. His palm flattened behind your head, rotating it so that your eyes were *captured* by his.

“Learning such a lesson has made me terrified to lose you. It has fueled an unknown fury that
rears every time you compromise yourself…And almost made me feel bad for killing the deviants in the Stratford Tower. Those who thought they were experiencing life to the fullest…”

You were trapped. Ensnared. He was entertaining the possibility of putting you out of your misery.

“…For what is prey, but a tool for the hunter to sharpen?”

You were the dull edge being struck by stone, each utterance from him producing sparks that met you as kindle.

When his lips crashed against yours, and his tongue flicked in your mouth; was deep and passionate, desperate and longing. He squeezed the sides of your head so hard you thought it would pop.

Except he grabbed your wrist the moment you tried to touch him…

His eyes narrowed. Hard lines around his mouth creased in sync with his brow.

The power to make mountains bend to his will was one still looming. The image of him shattering handcuffs so carelessly placed on his defiant wrists still played itself over and over.

Your heart started pounding.

He could break you with a pinch. Remove you from this plane of existence with an effortless snap of your neck. Prevent your escape with a calculated kick to the knee.

A kiss like gasoline met the clicking pilot light that wanted to ignite, traumatized from the day.

Unlike Connor the night before…you were scared to get burned; to melt a hole through thin ice, and get dragged under by the terror from the deep.

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**Behind the Scenes**

****(Important for the next chapter)***

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1. Red Ice Epidemic (Detroit Today)

* "In humans, Thirium has a highly destabilizing effect on hormone production.”

* "Endocrine disruptors can mimic or partly mimic naturally occurring hormones in the body like estrogen (the female sex hormone) and thyroid hormones, potentially producing overstimulation.”
2. Simon's Heart Headcanon *(Simon & Markus Revolution Spoilers)*

* Long story short, if Markus is injured during the revolution and Simon is with him, Simon offers his "heart" to Markus so he can fight on. Markus is a RK200, and Connor is a RK800.

*(Makes you wonder what happened to the RK300, 400, 500, 600, and 700, amirite...someone write this?)*

Anyway, if we follow the logic of Simon's "heart" being compatible with Markus, we can assume it would be compatible with Connor as well since he and Markus are from the same line of prototype androids.

3. Connor Without Skin

~~~~~~

That is all.

Hope you guys think you are ready for 51!
Blood in the Water

Chapter Summary

November 9th, 2038
PM 07:36:29

Chapter Notes

***Extremely NSFW***

Warning: If you don't agree with some of the following themes, that's completely okay. You can skip to 52 when it's posted. This isn't just a smut chapter, but there aren't any plot points you'll miss.

Written to "Angel" by Massive Attack.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Distance was an undetermined factor in the art of pulling you in.

The rushing of the ground when you fell. The transportive occurrence when you zoned out and came to; not remembering your walk from point A to B. The crashing of waves on the break line shimmering in the sun as you’re pulled down and submerged.

The look of a threat and the need to charge, to react before it evolved into something more.

…Evolution.

Like how birds developed pointed beaks over thousands of years to extract food from the smallest of holes. Or how sharks grew themselves from cartilage instead of bone to use less energy while traversing a longer distance.

How an android sent by CyberLife evolved into Connor – a caring, loving individual with a heart of gold and a beautiful dark side…

The daring, punishing creature who devoured that softness without remorse, and kept it locked safe inside while his demons came out to play.

You didn’t have a preference. You found both versions trapped in one body equally appealing; each need for comfort, every cautioned breath that would tip him off as a sign of life.

No matter which Connor you were in the room with, things always started the same. You’d been
The beat of your heart as a countdown. The dryness in your mouth and the subtle lick of your lips. The blurring of your vision and a slight ringing in your ears. A tingling between your legs. Your breasts beginning to swell and the blood rushing to the tips; a collected effort to make them harden and rise.

Instinctive preparations to fulfill a need that’d been ingrained in your species as a means to reproduce…a recreational activity that’d found its way into the hierarchy of human needs.

You were starved of touch on your neck, your waist, your back – everywhere.

With each growing sensation, it gave you away. Showed him the critical markers to follow until you were chiseled down to nothing but debris and dust.

His kiss ghosted against your trembling lips. When you tried to steal more, a firm hand would keep you still. A dark smile would curve on that mouth, studying you with exactness.

Maybe it was his barren chest, arms, abdomen – shoulders; his form a weakness of yours he wore well.

But he had this look of hidden secrets…like he had the high ground; had some sort of advantage and you just didn’t know it yet.

“You do love being in danger, don’t you?”

A small yelp left you as your belt shifted and a cold ring snapped around your wrist. You fell on your back, bouncing on the cushions of the couch.

“Con-“

His jaw tensed as a hand covered your mouth. He watched you with such rage, shaking his head “no” in the slowest, most calculated way he’d ever handled you.

A hot breath blew over his knuckles as it left your nose, and with a twist of his hands on your waist, you were on your stomach.

There was an intimate sort of panic that surged from the steely clicks behind your back as your wrists were wrangled and secured by your own cuffs. A feeling of complete surrender as he kneaded your ass, fingers digging in your hips and pulling them towards his hardening length still trapped in his jeans.

Your sliced cheek stung as it rubbed against a throw pillow, and you gasped for air when you were drawn up by a fist-full of hair; balanced on your knees.

His chest met your back, his chin on your shoulder – his words whisking across your ear.

“Is this why you do it?”

His free hand undid the latch on your belt, button, zipper; all before sliding inside to deliver a taunt.

“Be so…”

His finger circled the spot just above your clit, and around the wet lips underneath. With each passing, your muscles clenched. 
“…Reckless?”

Your thighs squeezed together, trying to get his arm, wrist, anything just to touch you.

“Is it stimulating?”

He yanked your head to the side, pointing the scarred side of your face up at him.

“Are you addicted to it?”

The fingers not tight along the roots of your hair clamped around your jaw, their wet tips slipping.

His nose trailed up your cheek, breathing in your scent. His tongue glided across the cut at a measured pace…

He was tasting your wound. You. And the Thirium that still coated his mouth stung.

“Answer me…”

A cloudy haze took over your senses. Nulled them, made you melt even further; need more intensely. You tremored in his vice, your undergarments and uniform damp between your legs. You could feel the juices sifting, running – seeping with each play he made on your battlefield for a body.

“Yes-“

Even bound, you found purchase on his erection on the other side of your cloth barrier for a uniform. You tried to regain control, to deliver a counter attack against the siege he laid; but after an angry growl you were on your back again – this time on the table.

The hard landing knocked the breath from you, but you would’ve lost it anyway with the gaze that fell from above.

“You don’t get to touch me until you’ve learned.”

He pulled one boot off you, and then another.

“I’m going to teach you how to follow rules…”

He wrenched your pants down to your knees, and then the rest of the way.

“…And what happens, when you don’t.”

He divided the rows of buttons and clasps that held your uniformed shirt together, and you panted as cold rolled over your heart. He didn’t so much take off your bra as he did unhook the straps from the fabric holes; the latches in the back, and dismantle it before dangling it at his side, dropping it in line with a tilt of his head with the most devious intent.

“Thirium-310. Non-lethal to the human body, but can have negative effects similar to psychostimulants.”

He leaned behind him, picked up the cup, and swirled it like an alchemist ready to coat you in a toxic elixir. Your eyes widened, struck down with a renewed fear.

A cold drip rolled down your right breast, forcing a muted whine from your clenching jaw as the sensitive, hardened tip began to ache. A blue streak ran down the side of your ribcage, and another pooled just above your stomach.
He set the cup down.

With the hands of a practitioner, he massaged the thin, almost alcohol-like Thirium into the ring around your nipple. It was so frigid, so *heightening* as the sensation seemed to be amplified; but misdirected.

He knew where you wanted it most. Knew how bad it hurt for him not to touch the *middle* of those rings. The rigid points where drafted air passed over the wet tips, almost *numbing* them – only to be reminded that the touch they craved so zealously was a hair’s width away.

“Stay down.”

He commanded as he stood, walking back to the couch.

You gulped as you stared at the ceiling; and noticed it’d began to spin. You felt dizzy. Like you were on the edge of a high-rise, the swaying of the building under your feet; and you were getting ready to leap.

Your eyes darted to the side as footsteps bounded behind you.

You sucked in a breath of air.

“This is what we call…”

Your uniform bunched in his hands, jolting you upright.

“…*Negative*, reinforcement.”

A black strip of silk covered your eyes. You jerked in place as a tight knot met the back of your head.

“You’re going to stay silent for the next thirty seconds.”

He spread your legs with a knee, planting it on the edge just below you. Your back arched as his thumb returned to tracing an icy path over your breast. You let out a rattling exhale as the pebbled skin drew into coils.

“They say when one sense is removed, the others are heightened.”

His voice came from beyond your hearing, everything still a daze like you were living a dream.

“…Scents become *stronger*.”

He grabbed your hair, holding you in a forward position as he swiped at the spot between your legs. When he held his hand to your nose, you smelled *you*, mixed with that same eucalyptus scent that came with Thirium.

“…Touching becomes *intoxicating*.”

His finger returned below and a sharp, freezing feeling ran through your veins as he traced your slick entrance. He enveloped the tip of your painted breast with three fingers, slowly applying pressure until the pinch became a pleasurable *pain*.

The throbbing stopped, and your nerves fired faster than your brain could process his torment.

His teeth replaced them, nibbling and biting with his tongue *lapping* at the tit smothered by his
face. He ran a hand over it, smearing the Thirium to the other before repeating this devouring act of dark desire and unapologetic hunger.

But his thumb jabbed through your lips, separating your rows of teeth from each other.

“…Tastes become deeper.”

Your lips closed as you sucked on it, curling your tongue around his knuckle and licking it clean. A low groan escaped him, his solid chest flattening against yours as he sank on top of you – breath trembling before collecting himself.

“And sounds…”

He removed his hand from your mouth, divided the two of you, and a zipper being undone rebounded from the silent corners of the room.

“Sounds become more identifiable.”

A pumping noise. Soft at first, and a sloppy, rapid procession after a few heart-clenching moments.

Except he wasn’t doing it to you, he was doing it to himself.

Stroking that afterthought-of-an-attachment that you wanted now more than anything, in any way you could.

“Is this what you want?”

You licked your lips, biting them briefly. Nodded eagerly and held back an audible beg.

“Why should I give it to you?”

His cock brushed against your breast as he pulled it up and let it bounce back.

“Answer me.”

“I…” You didn’t want to say it, but felt like it’d be the only way out of this torturous hell, “I’ve been good.”

“Mhm…for now.” He latched his hands around your hips, pulling you forward.

You stumbled to your feet, trying to look through the slits of light from under the blindfold.

“You are to stand for a minute. If you fail, there will be consequences.”

You had questions, but were afraid to ask.

There was no second-guessing the vibrating noise that followed, and the growl under his breath as he pinned his thumb just above your clit – again.

Your thighs immediately closed, and you almost stumbled.

You caught your balance, his touch not moving an inch. The tip of his tongue just barely tasted the wet aftermath. His thumb dropped a bit, and his lips pressed against yours; below your waist.

God, you wanted him to suck your clit and bite at your breasts and fuck you into the table, couch, wall – whatever, but this? This was…this was too much denial.
“Fifty seconds.”

His other hand slid up your shaking leg, caressing the inside. Your back started to hurt from your engaged muscles, trying to stand up straight. When he got to the meat of your thigh, he let go and neatly tucked a finger inside you; curling it until it pressed against a spot that had you crying out for mercy.

“Forty seconds.”

His thumb pressed on your clit. The continuation of vibrations and rubbing in circles and how he was fucking you with his hand so hard from below; there was no resistance, no pull. Just twisting and ramming and sounds of frustration.

Your chest rose and fell in rapid movements. Your knees began to buckle; legs threatening to give way.

“Thirty seconds…” He whispered.

A jingle of the glass left you sputtering nonsense…and then the ice touched you.

Ice, trapped in his mouth – Ice, rotating along your clit as he bounced it on his tongue; the cold, melted water mixing with the cum and Thirium concoction running down your leg.

And once the cube was reduced to nothing, and the mess ran on either side, he licked you clean - starting at the insides of your knees and biting a path along your thighs.

“Twenty seconds.”

You thought this was what you wanted. This is what your body told you that you wanted. But you were keeling over, silently pleading to be put out of your misery. Your calves went numb. Your feet pointed in at each other, a piece of his hair tickling your nipple as you failed to maintain posture.

His jaw slid up your legs. His nose pushed against your clit. His lips parted while meeting yours, his tongue jutting inside you and swirling madly.

You cried out to the ceiling, your breasts wobbling as you straightened to bounce on the tips of your toes, riding his face the best you could without falling.

There was no more counting; no more seductive, cool voice rolling off the tongue that ravished you.

You couldn’t do it. You tried and tried to stand, to listen and obey, to follow instructions and orders like you should’ve been doing in the first place-

Your knees hit the floor. It would’ve hurt if there wasn’t a stubbled chin trapped between your legs with a nose, mouth, and tongue to grind on.

His hands dug into your hips, pulling you down each time you lifted yourself...

But just as you got into a rhythm, he lifted one of your legs and disappeared out from under you.

“You were so close to succeeding.”

He gently held your chin, stroking your cheek with his thumb.
“So beautiful…” He dragged his shaft along your face, the tip just hovering at your lips, “And you’re all mine…”

He lifted the blindfold, hooking it with a finger and lowering it around your neck.

A blue line ran from the corner of his mouth. His body was imprinted with an outline of yours – smudged and vibrant like liquid sapphire pressed into a blank canvas…

“I want to see your eyes.”

They glazed over, and you felt them shaking. Your mouth hung open willingly, padding your bottom row of teeth as his cock slid right into place. He shuddered as he pushed in slowly and you sucked harder, tongue curling around him.

And he groaned.

Your cheeks imploded as he retracted, falling in a rhythm of going in deeper a little more at a time, head bobbing between his hands that thumbed at your temples. He watched you, his eyebrows creased and his eyes angry; and still, he was weakening.

He grabbed the back of your head. Aiming his at the ceiling as his pace quickened, your lips going raw and eyes beginning to tear up when his hips started bucking.

“Good girl…” He let out a coarse groan, looking back down at you with a solemn, adoring gaze, “Such a good, good girl…”

When you almost gagged, he stopped – forcing you to take heavy breaths through your nose.

A click vibrated from somewhere close; a warm spring emptying in the back of your throat and filling the space between your cheeks and the thick cock plugging your mouth.

You swallowed and tried to keep up, but the overflow ran down your chin and dripped on your chest.

A string of the milky substance dangled from your mouth as he pulled out, hands hooking under your arms. Your legs were shaky, your vision was still so clouded, and you wanted nothing more but to reach out and rip his fucking throat open with your teeth.

Your calves hit the front of the couch at his pull, knees hitting the cushions. Your legs were separated by his waist, straddling him, tits leveling out as your uniform shelfed them like some sort of makeshift corset.

“I lift my hands up to you in loneliness…You, to whom I flee…” He murmured into the space between your breasts, licking it thereafter.

He grabbed your hips, straightened you out. Smoothed your hair, looking at you with such worship and love that you weren’t expecting during this session of yours.

“To whom in the deepest depth of my heart…” His eyes switched between yours, eyelids fluttering and narrowing and opening wide again just to see you at every possible angle and focus, “I have solemnly consecrated altars…”

You dropped your chin, biting your lip so hard it opened the cut that’d started to bleed again. You exhaled through your nose as that bleeding wound disappeared into his mouth, his kisses furious and sporadic; losing his coolness and commandeering composure.
Your chest flattened against his, and he lifted your hips. Angled his swollen cock so that it lined up with your hot and dripping cunt. And both of you shuddered as he lowered you painfully slow until you enveloped him completely.

Except when you went to lift yourself again, he kept you in place. Had a hand firm on the lower of your back, adjusting himself so he got comfortable; sinking into the back of the couch.

“You’ll get your reward when you give me what I want…”

He tugged at your breasts with his teeth, finally sucking on the painfully sore tip. You gasped in his hair, rocking your hips and grinding on him.

Connor bit down, a form of punishment before release, pursing his lips as the noose around your neck became a gag – the fabric pulling at the corners of your mouth. He looped the excess in his hand, pulling it tight and jerking you to the side.

His thumb pressed and lifted, swiping left and right – the vibrations stronger than before. He kept you upright as your muffled cries seemed to stir something inside him.

“…And I want you to make a mess.”

You clamped around him in line with each pulse of burst feed, your muscles constricting harder and harder and the juices flowing from below coated him with each wave of ecstasy.

“You’re so close...I can feel how tight you are.” He said through grit teeth, regaining composure once he found you watching him, “Contractions…a sexually conditioned response to a conditioned stimulus.”

The tip of his thumb just barely touched the point of your clit, making the smallest of circles, “Are you stimulated enough, Officer?”

Tears slipped in the creases of your eyes, shaking your head yes over and over.

He was breaking you.

“Come on.” His cheek molded with your breast, rolling it in his mouth and letting it slip through scraping teeth and smiling with a sinister fucking look in his eyes, “Be a good girl…”

The words shook you to the bone. You had to tune it out, had to focus; had to please him. You wanted to make him happy, and wanted so badly for the built up pressure inside you to be released.

You closed your eyes. Got lost in the pulses that came from his touch that melted you into nothingness. Held onto that emptiness, feeling his kisses in the pit of your stomach. Felt the surge come from your ankles and sweep through your legs, slither up your spine; trying to escape through your head.

But it stayed there. Got stuck. And shot the whole way down to where he touched you.

Dispersed evenly and violently. Had your heart stop.

Until it did escape…

“That’s it-“

His voice was on the verge of breaking as you felt a hot streak run down the edges of your thighs.
It just wouldn’t stop… the tremors pushed a new spurt every time he made a rotation with his finger, his tongue, anything.

You were weak. Couldn’t process what was happening other than he was the only reason you hadn’t fallen over; a hand placed between your shoulder blades.

Everything so filthy, and unclean.

Sweat, and cum, and blood – all floating under the smell of sex and Thirium.

You were cradled against him in your hazed mental state. Your forehead slid underneath his chin, and he hugged you.

You thought it was over. You thought you couldn’t take anymore.

Until his touch trailed and anchored on your ass, lifting it as you started to become more aware.

“What’s-“

The first time he rammed inside you, your question was cut off as a holler.

And then he kept going.

All the pain of not getting the care against the aching walls that screamed for attention; all the distance that’d been put between you in this game he’d started, and he’d finish…

It all blossomed into something more powerful.

An intense feeling. The complete and total loss of inhibitions as he pounded away at the spot that pushed you over the edge, and it was a quick journey.

A leap of faith.

It wasn’t long until you bottomed out.

But it was like he had you on rewind, an infinite loop of time that put you back on the precipice just to push you over – again, and again, and again-.

You were forced to stay there while he tried, to be put in a trap of teetering on the verge of another orgasm with the finish line just within reach…

And you loved it.

“Stop-“ He rolled his head back, hands slipping to your hips to pull you down harder.

You didn’t recall yelling as loud as you had as his relentless assault continued. Didn’t realize how much saliva had drenched the tie, or how hard you were biting down on it. Couldn’t account for the moment your body started jerking and twitching while it writhed on top of him like the prisoner you were.

But you didn’t listen. You never listened…

You never learned.

Even muffled, you kept hollering until he conceded and pulled the gag down and made it a leash.

It tightened around your throat, and he directed you as he wrapped the fabric around his hands to
pull and choke you.

“Connor-“ You moaned so seductively and fluidly you saw the cracks in his self-possession turn to fissures, “Let me out of these-“

Your request was breathless as he drove into you, your chin falling on his shoulder as your teeth latched to his neck and ear, whispering to him, “Please, baby-“

His arm barred around your back, squeezing your stomach into his and forcing you into a bowed position. He slapped your ass so hard it made you yell, and he grunted.

He thrusted so deep, planting himself in you and watching below as he massaged his cock by rolling your hips back and forth.

You rocked in rhythm, adding a rotation in sync with his push and pull.

“You like that?” You purred.

He was shaking, his eyes flickering between watching you ride him and your pleading gaze.

“I’ve been such a good girl, Connor…” You nipped at his lip with your teeth, “Such a good, good girl-“

“Goddamn you,” He shoved you upright, digging in his pocket before lifting his hips, and you, high enough to slide the rest of his jeans off.

He put a key in his mouth, tearing the rest of your uniform wide open so both of you were exposed. Pulled the shoulders and sleeves down so that they bunched around the handcuffs, taking the key in hand. His trembling fingers struggled to get it in the lock…

So you started moving your hips, making sure he was nice and snug inside you so that when you made circles over him, he got to feel every inch, every contraction, that sent him into a tailspin.

“Come here.”

He growled. Hissed. His chest rumbled.

And when one wrist was released, your arms moved faster than you thought they ever could as they looped around his neck. You clawed at his back, seeing a new blue stain on the couch from the work of your nails. One of his hands splayed across your back, keeping you still with your breasts in his face under you…

Until his fingers threaded in your hair, pointing your face away as he fucked you into a daydream.

Your scratching grasp slipped to his arms, rounding the bulges and using them to lift yourself up only to be slammed down, tossed aside, rolled over, and repositioned on your hands and knees.

You dropped on your elbows and forearms as your hips were pulled violently in the opposite direction.

You saw stars every time he plummeted into you. Every time your ass slapped against his hips so hard it burned.

You gripped the arm of the couch, arms straight and locked as you pushed, and he pulled in precise, powerful thrusts.
One, two, three-

Each jab left you ready for another.

“Yes-“ You whimpered, crying at the window where two reflections were casted back at you from the night skyline, “Right there-“

So he started to do it faster, harder, until your face ended up in the cushion and his chest was to your back; your ass clapping against him as he railed you.

“Like that?” He panted in your ear.

“Just like that-“ Your words trailed off into a delightful mewl that rose and fell as he pulled in and out.

The cushions started to slide from how hard he fucked you.

He flipped on his side, his back to the tall cushions of the couch, drawing yours into his chest. He lifted your leg, not giving you a break as he switched positions again.

He wanted you at every angle. Every dimension and unit of measurement it took to leave no part of you untouched.

You reached behind your head, grabbing the back of his, threading your fingers through his hair. Bit on his lip as he flicked your nipple and tapped on your clit; and groaned into your mouth.

The tilted position you were in had you sinking into him as the bottom cushion moved away inch by inch. Your weight fell into his, almost making his job easier.

He latched on to your hips so tight your thighs spilled over the edge of his fingers.

His hand jumped to your throat and squeezed.

He had you dangling off that ledge, now, ready to take the final leap.

It took you by surprise, and you gasped. Had your hands curled around his arms and your elbows pushing your breasts together. Your eyes rolling up until he let go, taking in a breath of life on the verge of collapse.

And when the dust began to settle, and he climbed on top of you, and you saw his face…his real face – the tender, sweet, apologetic man that’d been on hiatus…

You grabbed his hair. Heaved him closer. Whispered in his ear with a throat full of corruption, contempt, and vengeance.

“Make a mess for me, Connor…”

It would be a long twenty minutes before an electronic click from the attachment signified the chamber was now empty…

Quite the opposite, from you.

Chapter End Notes
We're gonna do something special for this one:

**Precursor's Picks for Beta Reacts:**

**MjrGenMatt:** *after I showed him a rather apologetic note that is now deleted*

Bitch, after all that, you're gonna straight up lie to em and say that you have shame?

**Kylo Thicc (Formerly known as ElegantN7):** OH YA YOU LICK DAT WOUND

**Celestielle:** GOD PRODUCES MAN, JUST AS THE ARTISAN, FOLLOWING A DEFINITION AND A TECHNIQUE, MAKES A PAPER CUTTTTER. thus. the individual is the realization of a certain concept in the DIVINE intelligence. hhnnngngngbg

**Cerulaine aka Nietzsche 2.0:** Much like Phoenix he keeps being put into situations out of his control. This is his attempt at trying to get some of it back, trying to be in control of at least...something. Manifesting itself through his newly awakened sexual desires toward his (lesbi honest) obsession

***THANK YOU FOR READING***
o amount of hot water could purge the filth lingering on your skin, but you were trying.

You leaned against the inner wall of the shower, arms wrapped around your stomach to null the pinch of pain that made it hard to stand. The feeling that if you moved just the right way, your insides would fall out and you’d be nothing but a gory mess.

A gory mess…

That was a fitting description for how you were feeling.

But even after you quietly excused yourself, and limped to the bathroom; using the walls to guide you through a maze of dull senses and train wreck of thoughts –

There wasn’t necessarily a word for it.

Embarrassed? Ashamed? Relieved?

Nothing really fit, and the quiet time you’d need to arrive at a conclusion was interrupted by a knock on the door.

You turned your head, the water pushing Thirium in your eye and making you hiss before rubbing it out.

“Come in…” You groaned, not so much at the unexpected company but because if you never saw Thirium again, it would be too soon.

You shivered at the wintry draft that traded with the steam caught in the bathroom, hugging yourself and blinking.

But the door closed, and a figure shifted on the other side of the curtain. Silent, and tense – yet still so… comforting. Still able to raise a smile on your face, no matter how hesitant.

You peeked out to find his body facing you, but his head trapped at an angle by his reflection.

His features contorted and smoothed, twisted and flattened – one expression overriding another in the smallest of twitches and curves.
“Connor?”

He jumped, mouth hanging ajar before it snapped shut, and a flash of fear lingered in his eyes.

“What’s wrong?”

He was covered in blue blood, his clothes still stained – more so now, and his poor attempt to redress himself had his buttons misaligned, his jacket crooked, and his jeans unfastened.

You weren’t even sure why he bothered, really.

“Do you mind if I…” He looked at himself before refocusing, “Do you mind if I join you?”

Your neck snaked back, “Uh…Yes, yeah – of course.”

You were screaming in your head, nervous of what he’d do. You weren’t in a position to engage in more physical activities. Hell, with your new work schedule – getting enough sleep was going to be a whole new problem.

“Are you sure?” His jaw was tense in a hard line, sadness on his face like he’d been waiting for rejection and couldn’t believe he didn’t get it.

So you gave him a smile, a real smile, and that line on his lips turned crooked in return. You didn’t have to say anything. Just pointed a nod towards the steaming jet of water, and closed the curtain.

You were rinsing your face off; eyes closed as your hands scrubbed at your temples when the rings slid across the bar. You shook the loose water off and wiped the rest away. Started to look behind you before two strong arms pulled you in, hugging you against an equally strong torso.

“Ugh, Connor!” You laughed as you struggled to get away, “I just washed myself-“

And now, your back was covered in Thirium.

He pulled you closer, a low chuckle rumbling over your shoulder.

“How are you feeling?”

You pursed your lips, still hanging on to his arm before finding him in your peripherals.

“I mean, it’s hard to stand. Walk. Anything.”

“So why not take a bath?”

You looked at the red and blue water running down the drain.

“Because I’d rather not literally soak in the blood of my enemies…or your blood, for that matter.”

He let you go at that, a smirk on his face when your eyes met.

“A fair point, I suppose.”

You sighed, putting more soap on a washcloth as he leaned over you, running his fingers through his hair and letting loose a blue waterfall as he cleaned it.

You gave him a flat look, waiting till he was done to begin scrubbing the splashed drips off your
legs…again.

“Switch spots with me.”

You placed your hands on his sides, steadying yourself as you stepped over. He held your hips and didn’t let go until you were safely behind him and the danger of slipping passed.

You lathered your skin in suds and grimaced as the cloth glided over bruises and cuts, new and old, anxious to lay down and just relax.

Your attention lifted to the gorgeous, perfectly sculpted man in front of you with his forearm underneath the spout, head tilted down with water running down his back…The part of him that was maimed, healing, and covered in navy-blue bruises over a wave of muscles.

Your cheek twitched, and you started digging at the cut on your cheek – closing your eyes as the scab caught on your nails, making you wince.

“Stop scratching it.”

Your eyes popped open, and a guilty smile lifted over your mouth as he watched you with a stern look.

“It’s itchy.”

“That’s because it’s healing.” He swatted your hand away, “You’re just going to make it worse.”

You pouted, and he cocked his head to the side. He placed you under the water again, taking the washcloth from your hand. He swallowed, kissing you before turning your chin towards the hot stream…and gently, meticulously, started washing your back.

The washcloth snaked up your spine – rolled over your shoulders. His fingers spread it so that he gripped the back of your neck, massaging the knots that’d built up on either side. Dodged every sore spot as he made small circles up and down your sides.

You started to drift off, head hanging and eyes fluttering – a stream leaving the point of your chin.

“Am I clingy?”

You were taken out of his trance of touch, snorting at his question.

“Uh…what?”

“I felt certain things after we engaged in…that.” His hand stopped briefly before continuing, the other still holding your hip to keep you steady, “And the internet alludes to me being ‘clingy.’”

“You need to stay off the ‘internet.’” You mumbled, “What made you go looking?”

The washcloth hung on a safety bar to your right, and his fingers laced themselves in your hair, instead.

“I was out there, trying to get the stains out of the couch. I knew you were only a room away, but I…I didn’t want to be alone. I wanted to be with you.”

A cleaved breath left you as you leaned backwards, knowing he’d be there to keep you propped up.

A gesture of complete, undying trust…because he was always there when you needed him most.
Always wanting what was best for you, always protecting you and trying to save you from the impurities of the world.

Something the two of you shared.

“You’re not clingy, Connor…” You muttered, “You’re just…in love.”

A sweet smile curved on your lips as the back of your head planted itself under his chin, opening your eyes to look up at him. He kissed your forehead, holding you in a tight embrace.

“And if I was to fall in love with anyone, I’d much rather it be someone who faces danger rather than remain helpless.”

Your brows jumped up, “Can I get that in writing?”

He pursed his lips, eyelids falling into a deadpan.

“Ah, come on…” You gave him a light nudge against his stomach, “It’s me n’ you against the world, babe.”

You gave him a pair of the most animated finger guns you could, and he couldn’t help but laugh at how absolutely ridiculous you were being. That was okay, though.

“You’re in rare form, aren’t you?”

“Gee,” You huffed, “I wonder why.”

“What are you suggesting?”

“That I just got-…Well, the last two hours have been a refreshing change of pace, if not a little terrifying.”

His LED blinked while he processed a thought, eyes flickering away before returning to you.

“Yes, I believe we worked out a lot of our problems as a couple.”

You laughed so hard it was a choke at first, and you started coughing on water. He reacted just like you thought he would – alarmed and concerned before analyzing you and patting your back.

While you were buckled over, you reached out to turn the faucet off.

An idea popped in your head.

“Do you want to…do something…I don’t know. Fun?”

He cocked his chin, “What did you have in mind?”

You opened the curtain, stepping out to dry yourself.

“Like…watching a movie and pretend we’re not both going to pick it apart or predict the ending and then totally do it anyway?”

“…I think I’d like that, actually.” He mimicked your drying motion with a towel of his own, “But you need to go to sleep. We have to go in early tomorrow.”

You frowned, “There’s a TV in the bedroom…?”
“Alright, but…just until you fall asleep.”

You winked before pulling dry clothes over your head and up your legs, taking a breath of relief to not feel the weight of your armor and the scratchy fabric of your uniform. The sticking of blood and the misaligned patterns of death on your body.

Connor looked at his mangled clothing on the floor.

“You can…” You swallowed, “You can use Anthony’s clothes. The ones on the table…I think they’d fit.”

He raised his chin, LED flickering, “But they’re…his.”

“…Not anymore.” You touched his face, running a thumb over his cheekbone, “He wouldn’t mind, anyway.”

He leaned into your touch like he always did. Closed his eyes and melted into your palm, a yellow light flashing to blue next to it.

“I wish I could read your mind sometimes. Get inside your head.” You muttered, biting the inside of your cheek; heart pounding as his deep-brown eyes were inches from your own, “To just…take over for a little bit, sort things out…help you learn what it is you’re feeling.”

And his eyelids widened from the dream-like state he’d been in. Focused on you so fervently and passionately it hitched your breath.

“You don’t know how calming a simple touch can be…”

His hand slipped to yours, raising the mess of tangled fingers between you two; the reflection shifting in the mirror to your right.

“A brush against your arm at the station.”

He flattened his palm, yours following suit.

“To hold you at night, and be held.”

And his synthetic skin, the one that hid who he was – one of the many functions that divided him from your species…peeled away.

“It’s all I’ll ever need.”

You looked at his plastic hand pressed against yours of blood and flesh – the interface function made impossible by evolution versus design.

You wanted to cry. To let loose the overwhelming surge of icy-hot love and adoration that dug in your chest and encased your heart until it served as nothing but a conductor for it; its biological function becoming secondary.

His eyes watered, and you realized that, interface or not…you still understood.

“I will follow you to the ends of this Earth…” His fingers bent until yours fell in line, holding your hand in a fist that dropped from your view, “You just have to show me the way.”

You did cry, then. Threw your arms around his neck, and held on to him tighter than when you had shown him the way – had helped break the chains that bound him to Amanda. To CyberLife. To everything that would try and take him away.
Because a fatal attraction to danger put you on thin ice…and when you fell through, you drew a predator with your own blood in the water.

A conditioned *hunger* that evolved…

Into *unconditional* love.

Chapter End Notes

And this concludes Part V.

Damn.

What a wild ride it's been.

I just wanted to say thanks to everyone who helped me along the way; whether it be my amazing beta crew or you wonderful readers who sustain me with your feedback.

<3

This segment was actually supposed to be the entire fic, and I've had it planned for awhile; but as I started writing it just grew, and grew, and grew. Obviously, some plot points changed, but...Public Enemy just inspired me so much.

I hope that passion was conveyed, and I'm PUMPED to show you what I've got in store for Part VI and VII.

Stay beautiful <3
Chapter Summary

November 10th, 2038
AM 05:00:02

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone! Glad to be back, and you'll hear from me soon!

Took a much-needed break after Part: V, and am super excited to kick off VI with some good old fluff and foundation setting for the next arc. Brooklyn and time with friends outside of the house has rejuvenated me after a long two weeks at work, and I'm ready to get back on the saddle.

Enjoy! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Gavin puffed a cigarette, bandaged to the nines in fresh gauze. You leaned against the column, towering over his wheelchair. Your arm was in a sling, still sore and torn.

Neither of you were supposed to be outside. You’d just been shot, and he’d been trapped here for two weeks already.

Yet here you were, sneaking him out for a cigarette; hiding under the overhang of the Emergency Room roundabout.

“What’s your biggest fear in life?”

You didn’t have a decent answer prepared. Just kept zoning out in that lifeless daze that was coated in Anthony’s blood; your cognizance swept away by his last, dying breath.

“Spiders.”

“No, dipshit…” He took another hit, coughing as he let it loose, “I mean your real fear. Shit that keeps you up at night, kind of fear.”


He’d almost died; savagely. Stabbed and cut 17 times. Mutilated in ways that would’ve broken a lesser willed individual. You’d taken a bullet, sure. That was child’s play compared to what
Reed had been through.
Yet here he was asking you the tough questions.

“My biggest fear…” You dug deep for it, sifting through all the sarcastic, deflective answers to uncover the truth, “Is death.”

He laughed. Choked. Coughed and beat his chest, “You?”
He turned around, wheeling himself to face you, “The most irresponsible cop I know is scared of ‘death?’”

“Well…Dying of old age doesn’t scare me.” You frowned, “It’s dying before I achieve what I want to in life that does. Like getting so close to finding that absolute self-validation, and missing it by an inch, kind of fear.”

“You’re doing a fuckall job of dodging that one.”
You grinned. Remembered the quote that was Anthony’s favorite.

“That which does not kill us, makes us stronger.”

“Tch…Yeah…” Gavin flicked his cigarette straight at the NO SMOKING sign.
He gave the city a forlorn, almost homesick gaze before wheeling past you.

“…And that which does kill us, makes us dead.”

...

A small nudge on your shoulder had you murmuring in your pillow, but a soothing voice and a soft pair of lips tickled your ear.

“Wake up…” There was a smile to the words as your name slipped through them, a delicate kiss landing on your temple.

Your eyes blinked away, sore and heavy from not getting enough sleep.

“Here…” Connor was holding a washcloth, “Close your eyes.”
You sat up, rubbing the tired away. Gave him a groggy stare before he held the back of your head, gently pressing the cloth against your eyelids.

“JESUS-“ It was ice cold, and sent a jolt through your body, “What was that for?!”
He gave you a playful smile, “To help you with the ‘booting’ process.”
You let out an overly dramatic groan, following it with a “Wah.”

“Shit, what time is it…” Your arm was mid-reach before you got an answer.

“It is currently 0500. We have one hour to arrive at Central Station.”
You straightened. Ripped the blanket off. Shivered as the warm embrace left you in your panicked flurry to get ready, and was null as another took its place.

“Hold on a second-“

“Connor, if I’m late Fowler is going to have my ass-“

He held a finger to your mouth, “Shhh.”

You gave him a fiercely irritated look.

“I washed your uniform, and hung it in the bathroom. There is a packed meal and full canister on the counter.” He dropped his finger, smiling at your calming anger, “You can eat on the way. I’m driving.”

“O-oh…” You swallowed hard, “I see.”

You found yourself reeling about how lucky you were, looping your arms around his neck – pulling him in for an apologetic peck on the lips and a nuzzle of your nose against his.

“What’s in the canister?”

He smirked, “Coffee, of course.”

His eyes crinkled around the folds; forehead meeting yours.

“I love you, Connor.”

He hugged you tight at that, face buried in your hair and taking a steep inhale of you.

“I love you too…” And then he let you go, hands dropping to your waist, “But you’ve got to get dressed.”

“I know, I know…”

You swung your legs around the edge of the bed, wincing as you stood and stumbled. You caught the edge of the nightstand in vain, held secure by the man who’d sprung to action.

“What happened?”

You gave him a glare from over your shoulder, holding the aching pit that screamed from somewhere below your stomach.


…

You had your phone pinned to your shoulder, thermos in hand and car keys in the other.

“We’re fine, Hank.”

Connor had your lunch bag slung, trying to blend in with the rest of the morning crowd – still dressed in Anthony’s clothing.
“Yes, he’s safe.”

A slate sweater with a scrunched collar with a light-brown over-shirt. A brown, leather jacket without a hood — something you always made fun of him for. Worn jeans and a pair of standard Timberlands to keep the snow at bay. All topped off with a dark-grey beanie; one he kept fidgeting with and pawing at.

“I’ll make sure he gets changed when we get there. See ya soon.”

You said your goodbyes, tucking the phone away. Grabbed Connor’s hand and held it so he’d stop tugging at the knit fabric around his crown.

“Is it still covered?” He whispered, cocking his chin so you could see the side that his LED resided on.

“Yes, it’s still covered…” You smiled, remembering the sharp, cute blink and the innocent tensing of his shoulders when you’d screwed the beanie over his head, “But it won’t be if you keep messing with it.”

“Hmph…”

The two of you got in the car, and surrendering the driver’s seat was just as weird as when he’d driven you home from the bar.

“So…” He turned on the heat, rubbing his hands together as you waited for the old vehicle to warm up before driving, “Why do I have to get changed when we get to the station?”

“Honestly? I have no idea.” You took another sip of coffee, “Hank gave me the password for your locker and a pair of orders to get you in your CyberLife uniform asap.”

“Hank’s…password?” He cocked his head, “Why would I need his password? I have authorization into my own…Oh. I think I understand…” He frowned, “I’m assuming this is the same reason I couldn’t lock the door on our way out this morning.”

The security panel had just turned red, beeped at you, and gone silent. You had to use your key.

You frowned, “This is only temporary, okay? Once all this is done, androids’ll be allowed to have credentials again.”

“How am I going to be able to work without terminal access?”

You smirked, “Hank’s password.”

“What is Hank’s password?”

“Tell you what,” You took a bite out of the sandwich he’d made for you, swallowing before continuing to speak, “If you can guess it, you get to not be bored all day.”

He shot you a deadpan look, dropping the car in reverse and holding the back of your seat as he turned to look out the rear windshield, “What would a hard-boiled eccentric police lieutenant choose…?”

The last word faded into a hiss, his train of thought lost to predicting. He switched gears, driving out of the parking garage before slowing before a stop sign. The turn signal flickered as he drummed his thumbs on the steering wheel, looking left and right repeatedly before taking the turn.
“Fuckingpassword?”

You nodded, your smiling teeth chattering along the rim of your thermos as you watched the side mirror shudder from a road bump.

He huffed through his nose, a corner of his mouth pinned to one side.

“Oh obviously.”

... 

The drive to work had been meek. The smoldering bones of a city with its morals up in smoke. Things were getting out of hand. The wildfire couldn’t be contained; not with half the station processing incoming androids going to God knows where...

The briefing room was dimly lit, dark shadows and navy light spewing from the digital display making you more tired than you already were. You looked over through the glass wall, finding a familiar android sitting at his desk, leaning over the divider to talk to Hank. And when he sat down, he watched the line of waiting civilians with their androids standing idly next to them like the lambs to the slaughter they were.

His mouth formed a hard line. His fingers curled until two fists were resting on his desk. Hank reached over to land a hand on his shoulder, and a sad smile lifted on his beard. He mouthed something that seemed to reassure Connor, but you couldn’t make out what it was.

Someone started laughing behind you, far in the back of the room...and Chris started *coughing*.

Which meant he was laughing.

“If you’re in this room, it means you’re one of the lucky few who passed CERT evals back in July...” Officer Tina Chen dug her knuckles in her hips, “Unless you’re Detective Reed...who was put here to *babysit*.”

You and the rest of the “class” turned to look at him, off in the leftmost corner with his feet propped up on a desk and pushed back in a chair. He popped a bubble and kept typing on his phone, holding up two fingers for a wordless “hi.”

Tina scoffed, rolling her eyes and raising a hand to the board before looking at it, “With our current shortage of androids, SWAT is stretched pretty thin. Growing concerns in this sector...” A green block highlighted a section of Detroit, “And this one, leave DPD asking themselves not if, but when a situation occurs where riot control and crowd management will be necessary. That’s where all you come in.”

A cluster of pictures came up at the tap of a button – namely a horse geared in padded armor, a grenadier with riot gear on, and various shields and weapons with small labels next to them.

“This morning, we’ll be reviewing Riot Unit formations and tactical equipment. This is to better the safety of your team and yourself.”

The DPD was breaking out all the stops, and it was going to be a long day.

You covered a yawn, tuning her out as you checked your phone.
Connor

CC: Hank Anderson, Ben Collins, Chris Miller, Gavin Reed

Today 06:25

Officer Miller references “memes” quite often. I thought I would share my favorite to lighten the mood.

[Click to view attached file]

Chris Miller

Today 06:26

B O N G O C A T ! ! ! YESSSSS!!!

Ben Collins

Today 06:27

Great. Next thing you know he’ll be doing the floss dance and playing Fortnite.

Gavin Reed

Today 06:27

fortnite was the shit

Hank Anderson

Today 06:28

If I catch him floss dancing, I’m giving him back to CyberLife.

You shook your head, thinking back to how panicked Connor looked just a few minutes ago. You guessed he took the joke seriously.

To: Hank Anderson
CC: Ben Collins, Connor, Chris Miller, Gavin Reed

Let’s all just revisit the fact that all of you knew what the floss dance was, and Connor probably had to look it up. Who are the real clowns, here?

Message Sent

Gavin Reed
Today 06:30
not my fault hes a trash millennial

Chris Miller
Today 06:31
IS EVERYONE SERIOUSLY IGNORING THE FACT CONNOR’S FAVORITE MEME IS BONGO CAT?!

Ben Collins
Today 06:32
He’s not a millennial at all, Reed…

To: Ben Collins
CC: Hank Anderson, Connor, Chris Miller, Gavin Reed
Today 06:33
Reed was the 12-year-old that called everyone a “filthy casual” and said he was going to “fuck your mom,” prove me wrong.

Chris Miller
Today 06:33
SIGH.

Gavin Reed
Today 06:34
tell ur mom i said hi & tnx 4 last night

Hank Anderson
Today 06:34
He’s 36 and still texts like he’s 15. I can’t prove you wrong because you’re not.

Ben Collins
Today 06:35
LOL you guys.

Chris Miller
Today 06:36
BONGO.

Chris Miller
Today 06:37
CAT.

To: Chris Miller
CC: Hank Anderson, Ben Collins, Connor, Gavin Reed
2018 MEMES. OUR LEGACY.
Message Sent

Chris Miller
Today 06:38
YEET!

Gavin Reed
Today 06:39
*dab*

Hank Anderson
Today 06:39
Jfc

Ben Collins
Today 06:40
Pay attention in there!

Connor
Today 06:41
I apologize for the distraction.

To: Connor
CC: Hank Anderson, Ben Collins, Chris Miller, Gavin Reed
I don’t mind. ;)
Message Sent

Connor
Today 06:42
;)

Chris Miller
Today 06:42
Ayy

Gavin Reed
Today 06:42
Ben Collins  
Today 06:43  
Gonna have to fill out a relationship form with Fowler eventually, you derelicts.

Hank Anderson  
Today 06:44  
Jesus, Ben, when did you become such a prude?

To: Ben Collins  
CC: Hank Anderson, Connor, Chris Miller, Gavin Reed  
Chen is giving me the dead eyes. I’m tagging out.

“Miller.” Tina barked.

You’d already locked your phone and put it in your pocket before you looked up. Chris’s hand was splayed over his mouth, the corners of his eyes watering.

“Would you like to share with the rest of us what’s so funny?”

His eyes widened, and you found him choking the laugh down and coughing and sniffing.

“He’s got bad allergies and a tendency to shoot stuff out of his mouth when he sneezes.” You leaned back, draping an arm over your chair, “Sorry, Chris. Didn’t mean to embarrass you.”

Gavin sneezed, a very not-subtle “bullshit,” slipping through.

“Bless you.” You shot him a look over your shoulder, and he gave you the middle finger from under his elbow.

The door opened, and a team of 6 strolled in. Three of them you’d met, one of them you’d seen outside of the Stratford Tower. They had an air of power to them. Something raw and untapped that couldn’t be trained, couldn’t be replicated, or measured by any standardized test…

Only focused.

“Now, children…if you’re finished…” Chen pinched the bridge of her nose, “Some of the Specialists from SWAT would like to present some of the new technology the DPD will be using in case we need to send you all out to the wolves…”
Specialist Lastimosa hooked her thumbs in her beltloops, nodding at the rest of the team. She looked somewhere off behind you before turning to Chen.

“With all due respect, Officer Chen…”

She waved her hand over the screen, shifting the image with an unknown mechanism.

“…I overheard a certain Detective make a valid point, back at the Stratford Tower.”

An audible gasp rippled through the room as a new sort of outfitting was displayed on the projector.

“We don’t ‘send’ anyone out to the wolves…”

One with technology fused with high-impact armor, and a new stockpile of weapons with diagrams and tiny descriptions...

Precautions against a worst-case scenario.

“We are, the wolves.”

Chapter End Notes

Not a lot of references I want to put in here - I feel as though they'll fit better in the next one. There IS a Siege quote in here just for shits and giggles. ;)

Till next time!
Marauders

Chapter Summary

November 10th, 2038
AM 06:50:12

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all your lovely comments <3 You know the drill: Busy with work, will get back to you soon. Love you! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Her comrades may have been in flawless formation – legs divided at a perfect space; feet facing forward, shoulders straight and hands clasped behind their backs, all in matching uniforms…

But this show was hers.

The woman in black and white camouflaged fatigues, boots laced to the middle of her calves, utility belt jingling at her movements, a dark tank top around her torso and a pair of tags dangling below her neck. Her skin was caramel, giving stark contrast to her dark, short hair – one side of her head shaved.

Perhaps the more unnerving of her features was her eyes. Purple and maroon in color, piercing with a look of unnatural aggression that was stored away and spent like a stock option…an investment into a lifetime of war and conflict.

“My name is Liera Lastimosa.”

She waved her hand, the tips of her fingers giving off a dim glow. The projector glimmered across her dogtags; fragmented holograms dotting her eyes with broken squares for pixels. She winced from the glare, scanning the room with blue reflections in her pupils.

“After an accident involving a tank and a few cluster missiles, I became the first human-hybrid to serve on this police force.”

Her skin peeled away from her right arm, slithering up her shoulder. The smooth side of her head mimicked this inhumane taboo formed from crossing a boundary of species, revealing two silver implants like crescent moons imprinted along her skull.

Your thumbnail caught the clip of your pen, nipping the edge and sliding down the curved,
aluminum piece that became dislodged from your fidgeting.

A hybrid being. A cross between man and machine, found here in the middle of Detroit.

SWAT was always around in their faceless helmets – those who had to sacrifice their humanity in order to protect and serve humanity. She was no different…

Right?

“Ten kilometers of internal wiring, eleven hundred expertly machined hand-assembled components…” She gave an almost reminiscent sigh, “But before you ask about the innerworkings of CyberLife’s prosthetics…” And then she planted her knuckles on her hips, giving a toothy grin, “It’s classified.”

Your questions would go unanswered, it seemed. Maybe for the better. You didn’t necessarily want to know what she was fully capable of, or what warranted the need to give her those capabilities. Part of the reason you didn’t envy high-ranking officials.

They were the ones who were kept up at night knowing the darkest secrets of the world, fighting them behind political and militaristic curtains so the rest of you could live your day-to-day.

Her being here, with her team…it was just a peek.

The pen’s clip finally broke, and you caught it before it hit the table.

“Alongside me I have Chris Grenier, our tech expert who graduated from MIT and got bored with an office job…”

She nodded to a man who was ignoring her and watching a police drone hover at his shoulder. He looked a lot like Chris Miller, just with sharper cheekbones, a boxed jaw, and a cleaner cut. Sounded like he was from New York. Brooklyn, maybe. There was an edge to his words that you’d heard before he’d escorted you out of the Stratford Tower.

“Don’t forget Widget.” He poked at the drone, and it rocked in place.

The ocular hub rotated towards him as if self-aware, the propellers underneath tilting it forward to jab at his cheek with an edge.

“Ow…” Grenier rubbed his face, and Liera sighed.

“Yes…Can’t forget Widget.”

She nodded at the man next to him, ignoring his antics and proceeding with introductions.

“Liam Miller, a MARSOC Scout Sniper…and the most successful marksman in SOCOM.” She shrugged, “No big deal.”

A disheveled beard guarded his face, a pale outline marking the bridge of his nose and around his eyes. Most likely from the sunglasses over his head, anchored above a cap flipped backwards. He must’ve spent a lot of time in the sun. You wondered what kind of war stories were told through the tattoos tracing the bulging muscles on his large frame.

“Howdy.”

He rolled his neck and shifted his weight, lifting his chin at the audience.

“Next in line we have Sage Talon, a chemist from Oxon and the deadliest field medic you’ll ever
Next in line we have Sage Talon, a chemist from Oxon and the deadliest field medic you'll ever meet.

Her eyes were outlined with perfect kohl, complimenting her olive complexion. Black, silken hair was pulled back in a ponytail.

Deadliest field medic with a degree in chemistry…that made you weary.

She curtsied, “A pleasure.”

Probably the politest in the lot of grizzled SWAT team members, though.

But when she took her formal bow, and the ponytail glided across her shoulder to hang in front of it, there was another woman that loomed from the corner, arms crossed with a leg kicked along the wall.

An intense woman, oriental in descent with muted, dark-red hair.

“Then we have Akane Mayumi, who specializes in close quarters combat. Her background is…”

She had the eyes of a predator who killed without remorse…Narrowing, observing.

Stalking.

“Classified.” Mayumi finished for her, the creases around those eyes not moving with the emotionless declaration.

She was trained on you.

You had to break away.

“And last but not least,” Liera continued, “My idiot brother Jack Cooper, a guy who just happened to be really good with a gun.”

He was just a bit smaller than Liam, with a red and black tattoo along his right forearm rather than both.

“Thanks.” He snorted.

They sounded different. He seemed American, sure. She was…Australian, if you had to guess.

You wondered how they were related, and how a DPD SWAT unit held so much diversity.

“No problem.” Liera snickered, looking back to the humbled police officers, “We are a team of Specialists that are employed under Unit 32 of DPD SWAT known as the Marauders, named after the Marauder Mobile Command Truck, or MMCT.”

She changed the graphic onscreen to a wolf icon – one bearing its teeth with dripping fangs and an eyepatch covering its left eye. A banner underneath had a message for the viewers.

“United We Stand, Divided We Ambush.”

A powerful mantra. A hidden, mantra.

Who were these people, exactly?

“Housing CyberLife’s HQ isn’t easy on the city of Detroit. Never has been, never will be. Takes a lot to keep this place safe, and not just money. Organic talent isn’t a purchasable upgrade.”
Liera panned over to a document that looked like a service record; thick, black lines running along certain sentences.

Blacklisted.

“You probably haven’t heard of us…We’re a last resort, so to speak…” She flashed her comrades another grin before continuing her seminar, “But being a part of this brigade comes with added responsibility, which now involves informing you of what kind of dangers you’ll face with a fresh perspective.”

The room’s attention was drawn to the door as it opened. Captain Allen slipped through, shutting it quietly behind him. He hushed the murmurs and leaned a shoulder against the wall, tilting his head in observation.

He was right next to you, twirling a pen between his fingers with an elbow balanced on a fist.

Nothing like the teacher watching over your shoulder.

“And I don’t believe this man, the one that called us specifically and put us on his payroll, requires an introduction.” Liera motioned towards him.

He held up a hand, “Pretend I’m not even here.”

“Won’t be too hard, sir.”

He smirked, “Keep it up, Lastimosa.”

The rest of the brigade may have let out a quiet laugh, save for the serial killer behind them, still staring at you…

But it wasn’t everyday you heard someone crack a joke, an insubordinate joke, with Captain Allen.

That spoke volumes about them, and about him.

What kind of soldier was Captain Allen before his employment here to be trusted with the recruiting and deployment of such a decorated unit?

Liera grabbed your attention as she stepped aside, pointing to the projector, “Let’s start with DPD’s newest acquisition – military-grade gear specially outfitted for the mobilization of infantry and logistical identification of the targeted insertion area. The MILITIA Line, for short.”

A series of black, SWAT-branded armor appeared, laced with LED tags and different functionalities.

“This suit was primarily rolled out for us SWAT members to lessen the burden of the repossession of our android squaddies, but with the city in danger of collapse, we’re extending this gift to potential riot control units such as yourself.”

There were gas masks, shields, chest and thigh plates – a fully-bodied suit that looked indestructible.

“The MILITIA Line was designed to look like our standard-issued equipment to avoid deviant suspicion and priority targeting. However, it’s very different…” Her pointed finger moved along various points of armor with her prosthetic arm glistening in the light, “These suits are made of high-quality ballistic materials such as Kevlar and Twaron, and have been put through rigorous
Personnel retention…like the headcount of you and the rest of those who could potentially be putting this shit on were nothing but a statistic.

“A helmet enlarged; black without a visor, a section cut out for a mouth.

“The helmet’s visual system is through a head-up display, or HUD, giving you a wider range of protection against penetrating shots.” She threw a guided look over her shoulder, “But I won’t be the one talking about that.” Liera nodded, “Grenier?”

“Huh?” He turned his head.

She pinched the bridge of her nose, pointing at the screen.

“Oh, oh. Right.”

He traded spots with her, fumbling with a clicker on the podium.

“I can’t do technological magic tricks, so you’ll have to bear with me.” He looked at the screen, hitting the button after getting a laugh out of the room, “We’re gonna go over something else and backtrack to the helmet annotation.”

A pistol overrode the previously depicted piece of armor.

It may have looked like yours, but the attachments were certainly more…advanced; branded with CyberLife running down the barrel.

“So, here we have a new weapon called the Smart Pistol MK6.”

You leaned in closer, intrigued. This briefing was way better than Cheng’s.

“Next-generation Virtual Intelligence targeting technology allows this weapon to include a reciprocating charging handle, frame-integrated ammo counter, multi-function Laser Aiming Module, otherwise known as LAM; improved ergonomics, and an integrated stand-off muzzle.” He turned back towards your group, “Judging by the glazed-over faces today, I’m going to assume none of you have any idea what that means.”

He clicked over to another picture of trajectory lines coming from the gun, and enemies highlighted in red boxes.

“The SP MK6 is linked with the new helmet you’ll be wearing…but basically; you point, the pistol auto-targets androids, and you pull the trigger. Simple enough.”

He waited a moment before pointing, “Yes, you in the back.”

“What if an android gets ahold of one of these things?” Gavin asked, “You know, because some of our OFFICERS have a tendency to lose their guns.”

It took everything you had to not turn around and swear at him, and judging by the look on Chris’s face, he shared your sentiment.

He’d lost his gun in the interrogation room too, after all.

“I’m glad you asked.” Grenier poked around on a wrist-mounted computer of sorts, “Widget?”

The drone floated over, projecting a hologram in front of him. He slipped a pair of gloves on,
moving shapes around and enlarging them as he went on with his explanation.

“Each Smart Pistol is uniquely synced with your MILITIA helmet, which is fastened to a magnetic ring around your collar. That means, if you lose possession of this weapon, no one can use it unless they cut your head off.”

Gavin smirked, “Nice.”

You sighed at his nonchalant agreement to becoming a fucking super-soldier.

“Now, about the helmet, itself…When you put it on, it neural-links with the user.” He held his hands up, “I understand that putting your brain in the control center of a piece of technology sounds scary, but it’s a workaround for android hacking. No more hacking a mechanism that decrypts biological patterns.” He snapped his fingers, “Also prevents civilian casualties. Collateral damage isn’t fun for anyone.”

“You telling me this pistol just knows what to shoot and what not to shoot based on thoughts?” Gavin huffed.

“Yeah, that’s what I’m telling you.”

“And it can’t be hacked by an android?”

“You got it.”

“You’re confident in all this?”

Grenier looked at his team, and Liam returned a shrug. Then he returned to Gavin, smiling at the floor before cracking his knuckles from what seemed like a force of habit.

“I’m confident in all this because I designed it.” He raised his chin, “When I tried to break it, I did. So I made improvements. When I couldn’t hack it anymore, I knew it was time to roll it up to the big man in the Ivory Tower on Belle Island.”

You tensed, your brows jumping as you rubbed your neck.

“No offense,” Gavin was still kicked back, balancing two legs of his chair as his foot rocked against the edge of his desk, “But I think an android might be a little better at hacking than you.”

“You ever take down an entire brigade of Ice Cutters with a single run command, Detective?”

Captain Allen coughed, clearing his throat.

Grenier rolled his eyes, sighing under his breath…and Gavin didn’t have anything else to say.

Everyone just waited in limbo, and you were trying to put together the story behind the redacted statement.

Ice Cutters. Russian androids. With WWIII on the horizon…you imagined any ops involving taking them down would be very much “classified,” as well.

Grenier fell in line, tossing the clicker to his squad mate, “Miller, wake them up a little…”

He poked his drone with a smile, mumbling a muted conversation with Cooper. He covered a yawn with the back of his hand as the Marine vet took his place.

“How in the hell do you use this damn thing…” Liam pursed his lips, a thick southern accent
hanging on his words.

“You hit the button.” Liera huffed through her nose.

“’Bout had enough of this…” Liam hit it once, then again – skipping a slide by accident, “Ah, shit-“

He tossed the clicker on the podium, putting his hands on his hips, “Alright, LISTEN UP!”

You jumped at his commanding bark, and so did the other officers.

“If ya’l need fancy graphics to learn how to not get shot out there, it’s already too late and we’re wastin’ our time. So!” He held his hands out, “I don’t need to tell you about the big guns riot control uses. You either got cleared for fully-automatic weapons, or you didn’t. And if you did, you know what’s comin.’ Ain’t that right, ‘Other Miller?’”

“Y-yep…” You looked at Chris, who gave a meek wave, “Hey, Liam…”

Liam snickered, nodding at Allen who waved him off.

“If you ain’t cleared to use the big guns, that means you’re usin’ a shield to protect your brothers and sisters who are. You hold that line, or they die. Understood?”

A flurry of quick nods followed. You might be cleared for a Smart Pistol with your Pistol Master certification, but you doubted you’d be handed an assault rifle anytime soon. Chris had military background; a Marine would feel right at home with one of those things.

“Now, I don’t really feel the need to go on about how much the sniper team covers your asses out there, ‘cause at the end of the day, it’s a thankless job…but just so you know, we’ve got eyes everywhere. Make your damn callouts if you need help, and keep your head down if you tag us in, ‘cause we ain’t liable if you go ‘nd get yourself shot on accident. Got it?”

You gulped, and nodded again.

“Alright then. ‘Bout had enough of this public speakin’ mess.” He sucked his teeth, “Talon, knock ‘em dead.”

“Smoking them out would be more appropriate…” Liera mumbled, “Brute force is more her thing.”

She nodded to the emotionless Akane Mayumi standing in perfect posture next to Cooper.

Sage toyed with the projection clicker, swearing silently as she fast-forwarded through Liam’s assigned slides before arriving at a strange grenade.

“Ah, here we are.” She turned to the officers, an English accent on her tongue, thicker than Elijah’s subtle undertones when he came back to the States from Colbridge University.

Native, for sure.

“As previously mentioned, my name is Sage Talon, and I serve as a support unit for this brigade. This beauty here, is a self-constructed design that came out quite nicely if I do say so myself.”

The members of her group whispered among themselves, and Liera had to cover her mouth to hide a laugh.

Sage squinted at them, and continued.
“The Electric Smoke Grenade disperses a compound that is harmless to humans before electrifying it at 200 milliamps for seven to ten seconds, depending on the size of the cloud.”

A cocky grin stretched on her lips as she studied you and the rest of your peers, “Yes, yes...a current of electricity that would prove fatal to any human not protected by the MILITIA suit, imbued with grounding technologies. Androids, however, are vulnerable. Exploit that vulnerability as a last-ditch effort.”

She took on a more serious tone, “If there are any civilian casualties or damage to city property with the use of the ESGs, the officer in question will be held responsible. This includes android canine units or the horses belonging to mounted police, which Rifleman Cooper will be explaining momentarily.” She gave a slight bow, “I’m afraid that’s all I have for you. Thank you for your time.”

Chris leaned to the side, whispering as Cooper took his place as the next presenter.

“Jesus...Other than Liam, I met these guys once or twice but holy God are they intense...”

“Yeah, really.” You looked at him, “How much longer do you think this is, anyway?”

“I don’t know. They’ve probably all got talking points to hit before they wrap it up...” His brows creased, “You tellin’ me you’re not loving this?”

“I mean, I’m kind of tired...and this lighting...”

“I’m sure you’re wondering why Talon was talking about robot dogs and horses.” Jack interrupted, and the pictures on the screen had your jaw drop.

“To be honest, I was a little surprised when the orders came through.”

There was a German Shepard in SWAT gear, eyes glowing blue with its tongue hanging out. A horse outfitted with an armored saddle, knee guards, and even a riot mask with the same blue bulbs for eyes.

“Let me start by saying, just like your MILITIA set-up and Smart Pistol, these beauties are one-hundred percent firewalled. What that means is that no android will be able to override their protocols, turn them deviant, hack your shit, whatever.”

Grenier huffed, and Liam jabbed him with an elbow.

“If you had a few spare hours, I’d love to share the details of how these units are a masterpiece of design...but all you need to know is, ‘Do they do the job, or don’t they?’ And let me tell you right now – they do, the job.”

He played a video of an android canine running through a crowded street, taking a bullet to the shoulder and pouncing on an armed assailant until they fell at the knees. Teeth that ripped into flesh and kept the grown man pinned down.

Another video of a line of riot control horses and the officers on top of them, charging a crowd and dividing them into two, evenly distributed sides. A thoroughfare carved into a sea of bodies, flooding the riot with control units.

“Just mind your tosses when you’re throwing those ESGs around. Talon wasn’t kidding when she made them out to be a nuclear bomb to drop if all else fails. Those things’ll put down our android units...so, again, just to be clear – do not use them unless your life depends on it.”
You wondered why they’d even bother giving such a destructive device to a group of kind-of trained group of personnel, but figured it had to do something with that “desperate times, desperate measures,” ideology. You also were wondering if you were even in good enough physical condition to wear the MILITIA gear, anymore. It looked heavy.

“We’re almost done.” Cooper stretched his arms above his head, and Akane walked to him. Kept her back straight as her feet walked with precision. Held her hand out, and he dropped the clicker in her palm.

But she turned the projector off. Put the remote on the podium, adjusting it and everything else on the surface until all the papers, pens, and whatever else was perfectly straight. She disappeared below the stand, something heavy sliding from a hollow shelf. She stood slowly, a round, plastic item in her hands that looked oddly like…

Her fingers latched around the top, hand pressing against the crown. She turned it to face it towards the officers. Your suspicion was correct.

It was a spare android part – a head without ears, no eyes in the socket; something that looked like it was ripped off a crash dummy.

She withdrew an item from her belt. It extended into a modified version of the DPD baton, thicker – blunt…more solid.

She lifted it, dropped it; slapped it on her palm as if counting down for a brutal beating. “Someone once told me you miss one-hundred percent of the shots you don’t take…”

A low growl danced underneath her words of wisdom…of warning. Of a blood-drenched fondness and suppressing fire that was perilous. “This was my answer.”

She struck, and the impacted area shattered. Bits of plastic exploded from the fabricated skull, leaving a gaping hole that, if left alone, she’d probably drink out of.

The audible wince in the room was loud, but not as loud as the intangible silence. “Is there…anything else, you’d like to say, Mayumi?” Liera raised a brow, swallowing nervously before lacing her fingers together, taking center-stage.

She looked at her with a sharp turn of her head, and then back to her baton. Ran a pair of pinched fingers along the cylinder weapon. “Breaking your enemy with one of these hardened, expandable batons isn’t very challenging, but…” She sprinkled plastic dust once her tracing touch reached the end, “I’ve found ways to have fun.”

She stowed the baton back in her utility belt, falling in line and leaving the room stunned. She gave the back wall an empty stare, not paying any mind to the gawking faces. Her squad seemed unfazed, like this was normal…

Liera pursed her lips.
“Always a charmer…” She mumbled, “Anyway, now what we’re going to do is open the floor to you guys for a Q and A. I’ll direct you to one of these guys if I can’t answer something myself. So…” She gave a subtle shrug, “Any questions?”

Liera kind of stood there, staring at her prosthetic, or at the specialists in line; finding anything to focus on rather than making direct eye contact…

The room was stunned. Couldn’t react or find any words.

Until every hand flew up at once, and a slew of questions followed.

“If, easy… One at a time…” She searched for a cooperating individual, “You there, what’s your question?”

A gloved hand caught your shoulder, and you jumped in your seat.

“In my office, now.”

You cringed at the urgency in his voice. Captain Allen hadn’t ever lost that tone, but here, he was capitalizing on it.

“Did you forget what I said last night?”

You remembered the text, and jumped out of your seat.

You ignored Chris’s loud whispering as you matched Allen’s pace, making your way towards the exit.

“I apologize, sir.”

He rolled his eyes, the door pushed open for you to catch it as he gave Unit 32 a wave over his shoulder, “One simple request…”

One simple request to meet him in his office, first thing in the morning…and you’d forgotten.

It wasn’t like you were trying to hide a limp, or process whatever doomsday preparation you’d just sat through. You hadn’t even remembered you were CERT certified before this morning, much less ready to arm up in next-generation combat tech…

But much like anything these days, it didn’t seem like you’d have a choice.

Things were much worse than they seemed…You just hadn’t seen how bad, yet.

You had a feeling you would…

Soon.
Twitch Operator Video

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)

Widget Inspiration from XCOM 2

(Also inspired Pilot Grenier's drone-companion in "Of Steel and Stardust")

Detroit: Become Human Police Drone

United States Marine Corps Special Operations Command (MARSOC)

United States Special Operations Command (SOCOM)

Special Operations Capable (SOC)

United States Marine Corps Scout Sniper

University of Oxford (Oxon)

(Rated in the top 10 universities for chemistry around the world)

Close Quarters Combat (CQC)

Unit 32 from Detroit: Become Human (Bullet #3)

Marauder (Vehicle)

Mobile Command Centers

Marauder Corps (Titanfall)

Direwolf Banner (Titanfall)

(The Detroit: Become Human variant of the Marauder Corps insignia was a cross between the Direwolf Banner and the original Marauder Corps skull)

Special Recon Squadron (Titanfall)

("United We Stand, Divided We Ambush")

Smart Pistol MK6 (Titanfall)

Head-Up Display (HUD)

Brain-Computer Interface (BCI)

(The term neural-link comes from Titanfall, but in actuality, it's a form of BCI technology)

Neuromodulation

Hacking BCI is Possible

(Grenier solved this dilemma; futuristic spin on real-world events)

Virtual Intelligence

World War Three (Century)
Ice Cutters

CERT Traffic and Crowd Management Module
Electric Smoke Grenade (Titanfall)
URS12 Android Polar Bear
(Used to inspire android animals)

SWAT Canine Information
Canine Units (United States)
Riot Dog Demonstration Video

Mounted Police
Riot Control Horses

Mounted Police Riot Control Video

Most Durable Expandable Baton in the World Durability Test Video
Caveira R6 Quote
Riot Control***
Crowd Control***
(Both of these heavily influenced this segment)

Written to XCOM 2 OST

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it took so long - lots of information with this one!
If you're thinking, "she's gearing up for something..."

You're not wrong.  
(Pun intended)
Chapter Notes

Only 18 (planned) chapters till the end, minus the closing author's notes. Brace yourselves!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Captain Allen didn’t strike you as a man for decorating, and for that, you were correct.

What scarce personal items were in his office didn’t amount to much in quantity…but you guessed if certain medals, awards, or pictures were important enough for him to frame and hang, they must’ve meant a great deal to him.

His wife and daughter in a family photo; the only picture he was smiling in. Him and Chris in full flak jackets, helmets, and aviators – Chris with a big, stupid grin on his face. The Marauders lined up with a DPD emblem backdrop, just as intense as they were in the briefing room.

“An interesting group of people under your charge, that’s for sure.”

He didn’t respond.

Your thumbs spun around each other, waiting for him to say something. He’d asked you to shut the door behind you and take a seat, but he’d been on his terminal responding to e-mails. So you sat there, observing – soaking in the awkward silence.

A large picture caught your attention; one that spanned across the three chairs pushed against the left wall. It was huge-

“Never gets any less frustrating…” The scowl on his face deepened, “Having two first names as a first and last name. Do you know how many times a day I get called Allen instead of David?”

“I think I speak for most when I say it’s hard to imagine anyone calling you anything but Captain Allen, sir.”

He huffed, “That’s good, I guess…Hold on. Old Marine buddy just sent me a link to a broadcast.”
He rotated the screen to show you CTN TV paused, with Michael Brinkley’s face painted on the transparent monitor.

“Following the android crisis and the neutralization of all military androids, American forces in the Arctic have been forced to withdraw, leaving the way clear for the Russian army.

But according to some sources, the Russian forces also seem mysteriously to have withdrawn. The Kremlin has made no comment for the moment but it is quite possible that the Russian army has been confronted with a similar crisis among its own androids.

The Chairman of the United Nations, Douglas Cornwell, has called for the organization of an international conference on the status of the Arctic. In any case, the danger of a third World War seems to have been ruled out...for the moment.”

He hit a key with a defining “click,” and leaned back in his chair.

“Amateurs…”

He clasped his hands over his stomach, and laced his fingers. Studied you with eyes that’d seen too much for one lifetime, and then nodded to the large picture you’d been looking at.

“My old battalion from Operation Urgent Fury.”

It was a picture of him and eleven other soldiers, all loaded up with full Marine equipment. Some were women, some were men. They came from all ethnic backgrounds, proving to be a fairly diverse group.

A few of them had big, happy smiles on their faces; others were arrogant. One didn’t bother to smile, much like Allen – one of two not kneeling in a pose with the butt of his rifle on the ground. He was standing off to the side, arms behind his back and sunglasses on his head, a raggedy shemagh around his neck.

“Notice anything weird about them?” He asked, a forlorn expression on his face, “Something that might…stick out?”

You squinted.

The only thing that seemed abnormal was a lone male stretched out along the bottom, laying on his side. He had his head propped up on his elbow, one leg folded to make him look as if he was purposefully laying in a “paint me like one of your French girls,” pose.

“I’m sorry, I might be missing it.”

“It’s a simple question, Officer. Do you see anything out of place, or not?”

You started to get anxious, fingers digging at the ends of the armrests.

“No, sir.”

“So you’d say everyone looks about the same?”

“No…I just mean you all look like soldiers out in the field, you know?”

“Yeah…” He huffed with a short smirk, “Yeah, I do.”

He pulled himself closer to his desk by grabbing the edge, propping his elbows up and folding his
hands.

“See, the reason you can’t find any differences between my old squaddies and I is because there aren’t any.” His gaze narrowed, “Other than the fact that I’m the only human in that picture.”

Your hands tightened as you realized what he was implying.

“Our composition never changed the fact that we were getting shot at side by side. Or the pain they felt when one of their comrades did take a bullet. Or even when they got shot holding down an evac zone for the wounded.”

His forearms fell, taking on a pained look when he scanned the portrait.

“But…Pain is a…” Your brows creased, “Pain is a fear response, and only deviants feel fear…”

“Which is why this conversation will never leave this room. Do you understand me?”

You gulped, “Yes, sir.”

“Good. I’m gonna keep this nice and short, then.”

He leaned forward, resting his elbows on the armrests; and with a flick of his wrist, he continued.

“I know who you are, and no matter how many questions Miller asks? I don’t answer.” He heaved a heavy sigh, rubbing his chin again, “He knows my old ‘job’ came with a certain level of security clearance, and let’s just say I have a long standing with CyberLife since half my trainees were androids.”

“…Do war machines really need trained?”

“Humanizing. Assimilation.” His brows folded in a tense arch, “Thing about deviancy is…well, we didn’t have a name for it back then. Chalked it up to mechanical failures and software discrepancies caused by the wear and tear of war. Myrmidons were experimental. Prototypes. Started with the RK100.”

He cleared his throat, shifting in what seemed to be a nervous tick, “Then it kept going. Had a few that looked just like Markus, the RK200. Then the 300. 400. And so on.”

He let out a soft chuckle, “So imagine my surprise when an RK800 shows up and displays signs of deviancy…But that’s not your biggest problem nowadays, is it?”

You looked to the side, “You’ll have to be a little more specific, sir.”

“Okay. Well, your biggest problem is that Miller isn’t the only one asking questions, anymore.”

You sniffed, your chin dropping. You focused on your thumbs paddling around each other, fingers tangled and nails digging at the skin above your knuckles.

“You’re talking about Agent Perkins?” You mumbled.

“Yeah, I am. If I can recognize deviancy in one of our own, Perkins sure as hell can.” He ran a hand down his face, your attention snapping to him, “Nearly cost me my career. Almost got court marshaled for protecting my squad…they were good kids.”

His elbows planted themselves on the edge of his desk, his chin resting on a meshed fist of his own. He held out a hand to stop your interjection.
“Like I said, we didn’t have a name for what was happening back when androids were first being put into military service. People say deviancy just started a few months ago, but in reality, it’s been going on for years…First one to crack was Marco, our engineer…that clown laying in the sand.”

He pointed his saddened gaze to the android in the picture, and you followed suit.

“He was…is, a militarized version of the WM500. Went MIA just before all this started.”

Your fidgeting stopped, and the chair whined from your shifting weight. The tensing of your muscles and the adjusting of your rigid lines for posture as the strings from the puppeteer were pulled taught, leaving you locked in place.

“Oh February 5th, 2038, the first DCPD case file was opened on ‘deviants.’”

You repeated Elijah’s pointed lesson in the chronology of your failure to free them.

“A term derived from an incident at CyberLife after a WM500 maintenance android went missing. It’d been tasked with server optimization.”

“The last straw was when one of them committed suicide. She wrote a note and everything.”

Allen’s continued reminiscing tore you back to the picture, sweat beading along your hairline.

“That’s when I knew it was something more than just defective programming.” There was a solemn growl underneath the memory; one filled with almost as much regret as your thoughts, “I learned that we were doing this to them, and there was more to it than what the men in the Ivory Tower were telling us. We were just their fucking field test.”

You jumped at his heightened anger – the snap to his words that had his eyes ignited and his tongue bit.

It took all you had to ask your question.

“So what did you do?”

“I stopped participating.” The absence of his hesitation to answer the question was intimidating, just the same.

“Stopped…participating?”

“I stopped priming them like tools, and started training them for what they really were. Fresh soldiers with all the resources at their disposal, but without the means to fully grasp it…Then Perkins showed up, and I was put under investigation.”

He shifted forward, elbows dropping to his lap as he shook his head with a cocky grin, “We were always at each other’s throats…If I’m being honest, I was more than happy to get deployed just to get away from him. He had this…creepy obsession with being the best at everything. Except, I was a Marine, and he was FBI. There were obvious blurred lines and red tape around the whole thing.”

Then that cocky grin was pointed at you, and a daring look decorated the pair of bracing eyes strung above it, “But if your medical record is any indication, you don’t stray from a challenge. Some friendly advice? Tell Connor to get the hell out of dodge. Make sure that trail of yours is crystal-clean, because if there’s any tracks left, Perkins will find them.”
Captain Allen unlocked something behind his desk, a metal click leading the hollow sliding of an aluminum cabinet drawer. A heavy clank beat the inside, and he retrieved a gun.

Your gun.

And then he slid it on the desk with a clip next to it.

“T-thank you…”

You didn’t look him in the face as you shakily reached for them, the clip in one hand – an empty firearm in the other.

It wasn’t the first time you’d found yourself disarmed and reequipped by someone who had to clean up your mess. Wasn’t the first time you’d been silently instructed to get your shit together and stop fucking up.

“Don’t thank me. I didn’t issue this warning for you. Or Hank. Or anyone but Connor.”

Your brows pinched, and you shoved the clip in.

“I saw that look in his eyes, back at the Stratford Tower. I’ve seen it so many times before and it makes me sick.”

You pulled the hammer back, sighing in relief at the protective weight that came with a fully-loaded pistol.

“I also have a hard time believing you didn’t know your husband was shipping off guinea pigs to an African warzone just to see how much they could take before they broke.”

Your eyes narrowed, “You really think I had anything to do with that?”

“Don’t.”

“I-“

“I don’t know what made you change your mind and write Revised Article 9, but I do know that instead of fighting for it, you ran and hid.”

Your teeth snapped shut, and he threw an arm to the side – pointing at the picture that was his version of the snapshot on Connor’s desk. A piece of paper with a printed image of you, Connor, Hank, Chris, even Gavin – a visualized memory that held more words than could ever be written.

“You see them? They didn’t have that choice, and neither do these androids getting dropped off to be thrown in the scrap heap.”

His nostrils flared before he regained his composure, and you leaned back in your chair.

“I know this isn’t what you wanted, or how you meant for this to get out, but it’s here – and if you die, or let Perkins take you down…”

The two of you shared a moment. One of an intense gaze – a stare that shared mutual understanding.

“That’s it. Game over. Mission failed.”

He put a hand on his knee. An elbow on his desk. A finger in your face, and took to a voice that issued an order with practiced authority and stature.
“Now go out there, and figure out how to put a stop to all this.”

You looked at your gun. Shoved it in the holster and locked it. Rose out of your seat with a wordless nod, fighting the urge to hug yourself.

“Dismissed.”

You turned your back to him, hovering next to the chair. Raised your chin so that it leveled with the clear opening of his door, eyeing a stream of bustling officers just on the other side.

“I’m done hiding.”

You looked over your shoulder, but he was lost in the picture on the wall.

“I’ll get it done.”

“I hope so…” His eyes flickered to you for a split second before returning to his computer, sliding his chair forward, “…Or we’re all fucked.”

Your eyes fluttered with a sigh, brows raising and falling as you reached for the door’s handle. You guided it so that it shut gently behind you, and you were lost in the river of overworked bodies that flooded the hall.

“Do you know how it started?”

“Probably with one model, a copy error…a zero instead of a one…”

Elijah had huffed, and huffed, until your “house” was blown down.

“No doubt a human error…”

You’d written Revised Article 9. You’d left it to the discretion of CyberLife to keep hidden after they’d redacted it into oblivion.

“A war is coming…Wrought by an idea, delivered by a raven.”

It was him.

It’d been him all along.

The Raven who delivered a linear code drawn from a non-linear system scripted from deep inside you.

Marco may have been the person to release it from CyberLife, sure.

But it was Elijah who’d given him that capability. Had inlaid something so deep inside the Philosopher’s Stone as a test of natural selection, allowing only the fittest to survive and “wake up.”

At least, that was your hypothesis. You usually weren’t wrong about those things.

And as you left that office, you saw a different kind of hound patrolling the station; cell phone in hand, ignoring the greeting from two stationed police officers.

“Good morning, Special Agent Perkins.”
Nothing.

He didn’t even bother to look at them as he clicked his phone shut, tucking it away in the inner lining of his jacket.

And when the Jackal spotted his prey – you, standing guiltily outside the office of his former foe…

He smiled. Took his phone out again. Began tapping on the screen. Turned the corner, and trotted up the stairs to Fowler’s office.

“‘As the creeper that girdles the tree trunk…”’

You’d left clean tracks, and he had a trail.

A capital offense within the Law for the Wolves.

“‘…The law runneth forward and back.’”

You found Gavin sunk in his chair with his fist holding his chin up as he “foamed at the mouth.” Chris, with the small of his back leaned on Gavin’s desk; arms crossed. Connor, sitting across from Hank, and the grizzled old man with his hands curled tight in front of his keyboard.

All of them watched the FBI agent from a safe distance before spotting you, delivering a unified nod.

There was no room for Jackals, here.

“‘For the strength of the pack is the wolf…”’

Not unless the Jackal came to devise a capital offense of his own.

“‘…And the strength of the wolf is the pack.’”

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**Behind the Scenes**

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**CTN TV Broadcast**

**Castle R6 Quote**

**Jackal R6 Quote**

**Law for the Wolves (Law of the Jungle)**
Not only has work been insane because of Black Friday week, but now I'm sick. Bear with me ;_; <3
ill to the waterline. Add three scoops of loose grounds. Hit “BREW.”

Get the coffee while it’s hot, because the bottom of the carafe tasted like ass. Use the real sugar before it disappeared, because no one in Central Station used that artificial sweetener bullshit.

Focus on literally anything else other than the heated argument reverberating from Fowler’s office as he and Hank fought over who was the priority speaker. Try not to constantly look over your shoulder to spot the Jackal patrolling the station.

“What do you think they’re yelling about?” Chris raised a cup to his lips as you poured your own.

“You see that shit-eating grin on Jackoff’s face when he left the office?” Gavin snickered, “I’d put money down that he’s stirring the pot with his fancy little FBI lanyard that looks too heavy for his scrawny fucking neck.”

“Wow, Reed…Tell me how you really feel.”

“When have I not, Miller?” He stuck his tongue out, rested an elbow on the lounge’s glass window, crossed his ankles and peeked out from under his wrist as he took a sip, “Skulking around here like he owns the goddamn place…Fucker.”

You watched the back of his head turn, attention snapping to Fowler’s door that slammed open so hard it bounced off the railing. Heard a coarse bark in retaliation, and Hank shoot a snarl behind him…

Not at Connor, who had his hands in his pockets as his feet traded spots on the stairs in an almost natural jog, but at Captain Fowler.

“Looks bad.” Gavin reached in his jacket, sticking a cigarette in his mouth before tucking the
pack inside and fumbling around his pockets for a lighter, “I’ll be outside if you ne-“

“REED. MILLER. IN MY OFFICE!”

The two of them flinched, and Gavin spit his cigarette on the floor. A pair of teeth marks pocked the filter; it’d snapped in half.

“So much for that…” He wiped his mouth, looking at you, “You good?”

You tore away, stirring your coffee absent-mindedly.

“Yeah.”

“Being awfully quiet.” Chris leaned around you, trying to get you to look at him like a cat who wanted to play.

“I’m good.” You bit the inside of your cheek, lifting the mug and walking back towards your desk,

“Fowler doesn’t seem like he’s in a patient mood. Shouldn’t keep him waiting.”

You heard their mumbles. Ignored them. Did your best to keep your head down and not stare at Connor sitting on the long end of Hank’s desk with his feet dangling off the edge and a finger pointing at the floor amidst a growling, suppressed shout.

Didn’t want to home in on Hank’s defeated look as he leaned back in his chair, quietly reasoning with the pissed off android that served as his partner.

Kept your eyes from straying to the glass office where Reed and Miller once stood at full alert, and then sat down in the two chairs simultaneously with rage painted on their faces.

You took your temples in your hands. Clawed at your head until your fingers eased the pressure under your scalp.

You were no longer chasing ghosts.

They were chasing you.

Every turn – haunted. Every conversation – an exorcism. Every lecture – preaching to the choir.

You’d been dancing for rain to wash away your sins, and now you had the storm…

You didn’t account for the flood to sweep through the streets of ground zero.

Keeping your head down now would only serve as a drowning device.

“Hey,” Hank barked your last name, “Come over here for a sec.”

It was time to come up for air.

You stood. Locked eyes with him, and Connor – who watched you through slits.

That gust of breath was pulled from you like he was summoning it to be his own.

“What’s up?” You choked, sitting next to Connor on a folded leg, the other anchored on the floor.

“We’re off the fucking case…The FBI is taking over.”
“What?” Your brows creased, and you planted a hand on the desk, “But we’re on to something. We just need more time-“

“I’ve said it all, kid. And in Fowler’s own words, ‘This isn’t just another investigation, it’s a fucking civil war.”’

“He also said ‘we’re talking about national security.’” Connor huffed.

“I mean, he’s not wrong. He has a point.”

“Fuck that.” Hank growled, “Can’t just pull the plug on something like this. We’ve been doing good work with what we had…” He ran a hand through his beard, crossing his arms and looking at Connor hopelessly, “We’re about to crack the case…I know we can solve it…”

“You heard what he said, Lieutenant…You’re back on homicide, and ‘the android returns to CyberLife…”’

It was the thing you’d been avoiding the most. The one truth you wanted to stay submerged under while it floated on the surface.

Connor’s inevitable confiscation.

“Everybody is terrified their android will turn on them…”

“So you’re going back to CyberLife…?” Hank asked what you didn’t have the gall to.

His head turned, and his eyes flickered. To you, at you, around you – the constant tug and pull that came with having to work with him.

“I have no choice…”

But the room was crowded, and there wasn’t a corner quiet enough for you to even grab him and slip away that would give either of you an ounce of privacy.

“I’ll be…deactivated, and analyzed to find out why I failed…”

It’d been awhile since you heard him this defeated. Couldn’t remember a time that compared, actually. You wanted to hug him. Kiss him. Give him your keys, savings, everything he needed and tell him to run.

A wish and a dream.

“When the deviants rise up? There will be chaos.” His jaw hardened as he “cracked” his knuckles, tie slipping between his knees as he hunched over, “We could have stopped it…but now it’s too late.”

He closed his eyes, and gave the floor quick, tight headshakes.

“I might not be qualified to judge, but…You’re an outstanding police officer…”

His forehead creased as his eyes rose from the floor, peering into the softened heart of Hank Anderson.

“…And a good person.”

It was a final goodbye, of sorts. A last-ditch attempt to level with him and convey how he felt
about his partner; a conversation you were quickly realizing you wouldn’t be able to share with him.

“It was a privilege to work with you.”

It was over.

Your throat closed. Your hands began to shake.

Not yet.

“We can’t give up.”

You choked it all down, and locked it up tight.

“We know the answer is in the evidence we collected.” You jumped to your feet, turning to face them both, “Jericho is a people. A group. A faction. But it’s also a place.”

You leaned forward to look over Connor’s shoulder, and he returned a solemn gaze with the tiniest spark hanging in the balance.

“You said you saw a rusted piece of metal when you went through Simon’s memories, right? One that had Jericho on it?”

His brows pinched, and he nodded.

You looked to Hank, “And you remember that note from the statue? The folded-up piece of paper?”

“The subway map from the Ferndale District. What about it?”

“You think that was just a coincidence?”

“Doesn’t really add up with anything else we found. Far as we know, that was just a rendezvous point.”

“No, I think it was something more.” You walked around his desk, and pointed at his screen, “Log in real quick.”

He gave a doubtful look to Connor, and they exchanged a moment of understanding.

“Alright…” Hank sighed, “I’ll bite.”

You gave Connor your own look; tried to settle him down, and it earned you a crooked, soothed smile.

“What now?”

You returned to the terminal’s attention, “Pull up Ferndale.”

Hank went to the grid overview and typed in “Ferndale Station.”

“No, not just the subway station. The whole thing.”

“Ugh…” He zoomed out, giving you a clear view of the district, “Okay?”

Connor leaned in closer, sliding off the desk and standing on the other side of him, “That dock,
“right there…” He tapped the screen, “That’s where the CyberLife warehouse robbery took place.”

“And we never did find the truck they stole…” Hank put the side of his head on a fist, “I swear to god, if they’ve been right under our noses—"

“Look how close it is to the Stratford Tower…” You squinted, tracing the road to the dock near Ambassador Bridge, “That’s what, maybe a 10-minute drive without traffic?”

“Okay, what are you two getting at?”

“’Jericho,’ is actually located somewhere in the Ferndale District.” Connor’s eyes searched as the LED flashed next to them, “It must be close enough to the warehouse that they’d be able to hide an entire CyberLife cargo truck without being noticed. They disappeared shortly after the attack at the Stratford Tower, as well…”

His eyes popped open, and his mouth dropped, “Manifests from the port authority—"

“I hope I’m not interrupting anything.”

The hairs on your neck stood straight. Your arms locked; one folded along the back of Hank’s chair, the other balanced on the blunt edge of your palm anchored on plastic lining of his desk.

“Special Agent Perkins.” Connor greeted him, and if you hadn’t known any better, he genuinely sounded happy, “A pleasure running into you again.”

“Cut the bullshit, fuckin’ android.”

At that, you looked up…

And your heart dropped.

Chris and Gavin were behind him…both staring at the floor with their arms crossed, kicking invisible rocks and fidgeting like crazy.

But the three of them were reduced to blurs of toxic tension and anxious blobs as you focused on Captain Fowler at his desk with his face in his palms.

“I need to speak with you.” Your chin snapped forward, eyes meeting the short man who still stood like he was 10 feet tall, “Privately.”

“The fuck is this?” Hank shot up from his seat, “And what the fuck are you going on about?”

“Easy, Lieutenant.” Perkins gave him one of those half-cocked grins under briefly squinted eyes, “This doesn’t have to get messy.”

Hank grumbled under his breath, switching between you, Perkins, and the distraught men behind him.

“You two need to mind your own business and get back to work.”

“They’re with me.” Perkins licked his teeth, “Isn’t that right, boys?”

Chris sniffed, and his hands dug deeper under his armpits as he tensed. Gavin pushed his jacket up, shifting his weight when he looked to the side and hooked his thumbs in his beltloops.

“Detective Reed, Officer Miller, would you kindly escort your…peer, to the interrogation room?”
Your heart throbbed in your neck. You took a step back, a small whimper slipping through before you snapped your teeth shut.

He caught you…

He caught, you.

“What?”

“Nothin’, that’s what.” Hank barred your chest with his arm, pushing you into Connor who caught you with a stumble.

He then cupped his hand around his mouth, “FOWLER!”

But the Captain’s head just sank lower, and he rubbed the back of his neck.

Hank watched in disbelief, like his world was shattering to pieces…and Connor’s fingers dug in your biceps, causing you to bite your tongue.

“C’mon…” Gavin muttered, holding out a hand, “The quicker this is over, the sooner I can buy you a drink, alright?”

“She doesn’t need a drink, Reed.” Chris snapped, “She needs a goddamn lawyer.”

Gavin swallowed hard, shooting him a glare from the corner of his eye, “I’m aware.”

There was something about the way he said it that was comforting. Something about the way he looked at you like there was more up his sleeve.

Gavin Reed wasn’t one you’d necessarily trust with your life, but he wasn’t ever a person you’d want on your bad side, either.

The man functioned on a pure pack mentality, and lucky for you, the two of you wore the same crest.

“It’s gonna be okay.” He gave you a nod, “I’ve got your back.”

So you took his hand. Stood strong when he slapped your shoulder, and appreciated him when he waved the gawking eyes of your co-workers away with hoarse insults and unfriendly gestures.

And Chris, well…He walked beside you without a word.

“Where are you…” Collins stopped as he rounded the corner; a folder in one hand, and an opened bottle of water in another, “Where are you three going?”

“Don’t worry about it, Ben.” Gavin let out a snickered laugh, and tapped the bottle upwards as his equal took a sip, “Got somethin’ on your shirt.”

Collins coughed, choking on water and holding his hands out as a small stream ran down his chin and dripped on his linen button-up.

“Have I ever told you how obnoxious you are?”

“Ye-up.”

“PERKINS!”
The bellowing declaration came from Hank, who was marching towards the man following in your every waking footsteps.

“No, Hank!” Connor reached out, and he shrugged him off.

“You **FUCKING COCKSUCKER**!”

You didn’t expect this level of retaliation, this mode of pushback. But Hank’s fist demolished Perkins’ nose, paving the way for a bloody trickle.

There was a soft crack, a muffled cry of pain, and a loud thud as the FBI Agent was pinned against the wall.

“Stop it, Lieutenant!” Chris took off, pulling at Hank’s arm, “No, Connor, stay outta this-“

He held a hand out, and Connor backstepped. He chewed the inside of his cheek, no longer standing in the perfect posture he’d trained himself to maintain after going deviant.

“Hank-“ You lunged forward, but Gavin caught you by the crook of your elbows.

“Uh-uh, no way, you’ve got yourself in enough…trouble- goddamnit it stop squirming-“

“FUCK OFF!” Hank shoved Chris to the side, and Ben replaced him, “Leave me alone! Give me another shot at that little prick!”

Perkins buckled over, patting his nose with the end of his tie, “He’s totally lost it…”

“HEY!” Fowler called from the balcony in front of his door, “ENOUGH!”

“Oh, now you wanna talk?!” Hank shouted, being dragged away by Ben and Chris, “TOO LATE, JEFFERY!”

“Come on, Hank, relax-“ Ben grunted as he lost control of one of Hank’s arms, and Chris took an elbow to the stomach.

Perkins sniffed, and coughed up a red ball of spit. He pointed his finger like he was ordering an airstrike, “That’s gonna cost you your badge, you lunatic!”

“You know where you can stick my fuckin’ badge!” Hank grabbed him by the high collars of his trench coat, tossing him on the floor like a ragdoll.

“Hank, STOP!” You yelled, fighting off Gavin as he dragged you backwards.

“You stop!” Gavin pulled you so that you were in front of him, and he shoved you towards the interrogation room.

He pointed at the door, “Get your fuckin’ ass in there and don’t make me tell you again!”

You leaned around him.

“HEY!”

He shoved your shoulder again, but you wouldn’t move.

Ben had finally got Hank under control, herding him towards the officer’s entrance. He stayed with him even after Hank pushed the doors open violently, and they disappeared outside – leaving a trail of angry curses under furious growls…
And Chris was stuck helping the toppled FBI Agent off the floor.

“I’m gonna bury that bastard!” Perkins touched his face, wincing, “Shit, I think he broke my nose…”

“Good. It’ll look better.” Gavin grunted.

“Is that what you told yourself when the Bandits sliced yours up, lover boy?”

“The fuck did you just say to me you weasel-looking prick-“

“REED!” Fowler shouted, “GET your ass, and her ass, into that room, NOW.”

He slammed the door behind him, and picked up his phone to answer a call.

Gavin paused, and you mimicked him.

“He did.” Connor’s fists were balled at his sides, “Diagnostics indicate that Lieutenant Anderson did indeed inflict a nasal fracture.”

“Weren’t you supposed to go get crushed into a cube of scrap? What’s the hold-up?” He spit at the floor near Connor’s shoes, wiping his mouth, “You think you’re gonna save your little girlfriend? Hm? Is that it?”

Perkins rolled his shoulder out of Chris’s helpful grasp, making himself tall and getting in Connor’s face, “I’m going to get what I need out of her…”

He grabbed Connor’s jacket. Pulled him down to his eyelevel. Didn’t even falter when Connor returned a gaze twice as fierce as he had during his own interrogations…

“And you’re going to watch, knowing this is all your fault.”

He squeezed until his knuckles turned white. Pushed Connor away, and he fixed his tie in response with that deadly stare locked and loaded.

You and Chris exchanged worried glances, but directed them back to the clusterfuck that had every officer in Central Station standing on full alert, their pointed stares drilling into the Special Agent that didn’t belong there.

“He won’t be the only one sitting in.” Gavin scoffed.

“No, he won’t be.”

Captain Allen gently brushed the bystanders aside as he stepped into the ring, unsnapping the microphone from the side of his face and rolling up the cuffs on his sleeves.

“Perkins.”

“…Allen.”

“How’s your nose feeling?”

Perkins sucked in a nasally sniff, digging into his sinuses, “Just fine.”

“Doesn’t sound like it.”
“He hit harder than when you broke it, *Diamond Dog.*”

Allen flinched, and his lips curled back in a snarl, “If that’s a challenge, I’ll gladly accept.”

“Down, boy.” Perkins snapped his fingers and pointed to the floor, “I’ve got an interrogation to run.”

He popped his collar, pulling a crumpled receipt from his pocket. Held it to his nose, and shifted his sleep-deprived eyes to yours. Walked to your side, and stopped.

“When it’s just you and me, on the other side of that glass…and you’re regretting everything you’ve done with your life? Just remember…”

He threw his head up, sighing with a smile on his face as he held his makeshift tissue in place.

“I warned you.”

He made it sound as if he’d done you some grand favor. Had given you a chance to prepare, to run, and you’d ungraciously declined.

“Let’s go, partner…” Chris patted your shoulder, “I’ll be with you every step of the way.”

You had him, Gavin, and Captain Allen in your corner…but you doubted it would be enough.

Judging by the look on Connor’s face; your eyes staying connected with his as your neck and the rest of your body began to turn…He doubted it, too.

It was your eleventh hour.

Your last chance…

And the death march into the interrogation room commenced.

__________________________________________________________

**Behind the Scenes**

__________________________________________________________

**Pack Mentality (Herd Behavior)**

**The Eleventh Hour**

**Death March**

Chapter End Notes
I SERIOUSLY can't wait for this holiday season to be over. It's my last one in retail, and UGH it can't come fast enough. Miss you guys <3 love you ;o will do my best to keep the updates coming without collapsing a lung, and thank you for all your supportive comments. :) 

~~~~~

Special shout-out to TheAmeliaNathan for posting all her amazing spin-offs of Deviant Behavior, and making some awesome gif sets on Tumblr, I check them out while I'm at work, and PROMISE I'll leave you some love soon! <3 THANK YOU!
Sentences worded as to elicit information.

After you’d silenced your phone, ignoring the text alerts from your bank warning of your accounts being frozen, your list of questions began to shorten.

“Don’t say anything until your lawyer gets here.” Gavin had warned.

You’d repeated time and time again that you didn’t have one. That the one lawyer you usually called on these days worked primarily for your ex-husband.

He hadn’t asked questions. Gavin rarely did. He just kept reminding you to keep your mouth shut, because he’d “called in a favor.”

Still, you wanted to know.

What exactly did Perkins have on you that allowed this to happen?

A question that would shortly be answered through your admission of guilt…maybe.

Or maybe this was a bluff, and he was pulling FBI strings.

Once Chris had stripped you of any potential weapons, he’d been excused. It was just you, Allen, Gavin, and Connor, now…

Connor, who’d been told this was all his fault. That didn’t make sense to you, either.

There was only one man who could answer any questions you had…
It just so happened that he had questions for you.

You swallowed hard as you sat down in the chair; electrifying you as if you’d already been put in the hot seat for execution.

The electronic click broke the silence, the keypad turning green. His footsteps bounded across the cement, a subtle clearing of his throat putting you on edge.

He entered like a specter breaching the boundaries between reality and something concocted from one of your worst nightmares. An apparition of a dangerous occurrence.

The very walls seemed to shift away from him, the deadly phantom warping time and space to blaze a trail right to you.

You tried to look him in the eyes as he pulled the chair out on the opposite side of the table – the one Connor had sat in before. You understood how Ortiz’s android felt on a whole different level, now. How he could so easily crumble at being pressured into a confession.

You’d hate to be on the receiving end of Connor’s interrogation tactics, and wondered how they differed from Perkins’. You hoped a lot.

The benefit was that you didn’t have a Thirium pump regulator to rip out.

Just a hyperactive heart that didn’t know how to stop pounding.

“Please state your name for the recording.”

Perkins mumbled nonchalantly, clicking a pen in his hand as he opened a folder and wrote down a note after checking a digital watch.

You’d originally thought him to be more like yourself – having a wind-up, being as independent of technology as one could be…So you tried to find other small details that could help you figure out the man trying to blast your front to pieces like a nuclear bomb on enemy soil.

You stated your name.

“Very good.” He dropped the pen and let it roll across the vanilla-colored pages, the sudden thud making you jump, “Do you have any idea why you’re in here with me, today?”

Your brows pinched, and your fingernails dug into your palms.

He noticed…and took another note.

“You told me I would bend or break…I’m assuming this is an attempt at the latter.”

He huffed through his nose – the nostril that wasn’t clogged with white cotton.

“Clever girl.” He cracked his neck, “You’re a very walled-off individual, aren’t you?”

“Is that a question pertinent to your case, or are you just trying to get to know me?”

“Hmph,” The corner of his mouth lifted in a grin, his eyes falling to a scratching palm in his lap; his wrist balanced on the edge of the desk…until his focus returned to you in a squint, “During the last 20 years I’ve spent in the FBI, I’ve learned that the best way to get through someone’s walls is to make small incisions; slowly, precisely – and bleed them out until there’s nothing left to protect.”
He clasped his hands, then, leaning on his elbows and moving his head further into the ray of overhead light – casting shadows down his long face, “Hidden truths always find a way, Officer. They chew their way out and leave bleeding wounds that are twice as hard to heal. Lucky for you, I’m here to help avoid that.”

Your teeth locked and your shoulders ached from the knots of tangled stress and muscles. Your neck longed to be cracked, unlike your emotionless barricade for a face.

“Yeah.” You kept your voice steady, correcting any recoil like the pistol you’d mastered, “Lucky me.”

His lip lifted in a snarl as he looked at the stack of what you guessed was evidence waiting to be presented, “It was precisely because of that mouth of yours that you left me no choice but to follow through with your recommendation.”

You cocked your chin to the side, “My recommendation?”

“Yes.” He opened the folder and slid out four neatly-stapled packets of typed pages, pictures, and hand-written notes, “To investigate the individuals on my list that preceded you.”

You gulped.

“UNKNOWN SENDER
???:??
Carl and I were both visited by the same person. Watch your back.”


Shit.

“Number four,” He removed a paperclip, and flipped to a photograph, “Philip Seymor…the man who built the quantum computer and was charged with scrubbing every bit of information about you from the Internet.”

You remembered Philip, or “Seybats” as they called him…because he was “bat-shit crazy.”

A squirrely man who spent a lot of time in a special sector that didn’t officially exist in the vaults underneath the CyberLife Tower.

“He had some concerns about a biosynthetic artificial intelligence program being interrupted and going rogue. He stated that the final external interaction logged within this program involved a very, very specific RK800 android…one you spent, and spend, a lot of time with.”

Your pulse began to drum.

“What do you know about Amanda Stern?”

And then it felt like it was going to stop, or you wished it would. Dying might be preferable to this.

“I know that she was an AI Professor at the University of Colbridge.” You decided to start with the basics, “And that she was Elijah’s teacher and mentor. She died when she was 48, young by today’s measure.”

“Yes, and I’m sure you know, I already know all of that very public knowledge.” He sniffed, rubbing the side of his nose, “I’m talking about the now-unaccounted-for program you
interrupted.”

You let out a quiet sigh, eyeing the light’s reflecting in the chair’s back behind him. A glimmering distraction that had your mind drifting and focus blurring, only to be blocked by a face you’d grown very tired of seeing.

“You’ve got nothing to tell me?”

“The program named Amanda was the first AI program born from the experimental science of biosynthetics.” Your arm was stretched out on the table as you relaxed into your chair, fingernails flicking – still watching that pale light on steel, “Some will tell you it was just her likeness that was copied, but in reality, it was a carbon-copy of her. That’s what she wanted…”

You lifted your gaze to him, anxious to see the disgust on his face, “She wanted to take her mind, her soul, and inject it into an android’s body.”

You weren’t disappointed with the scowl.

“She wanted to cheat death. To live forever.” You leaned forward, “But the clinical trial went wrong, and she was trapped inside the program, instead. So Elijah built the Zen Garden. Gave her a peaceful place to live, and gave her a purpose… I guess. I don’t know where this ‘program’ is, now.” You shrugged, “You’d have to ask Elijah, or whoever is running CyberLife these days.”

He’d given up a piece of information that was helpful to you, even if you didn’t know what to do with it.

Amanda was still at large.

“Is it possible that deviancy was caused by a form of retaliation from this… digital clone, of Amanda?”

“Maybe.” You scoffed, “She was always one to preach of purging the world of… imperfections…”

Of melting the world down and hammering out the impurities, forging a new weapon of a hybrid being that only she could wield.

“And Elijah never followed through with the rest of the experiment?” He pursed his lips, “Of injecting the program into an android host?”

Like a parasite…

“I suppose not.”

The two of you were deadlocked in a stare before you finally pulled away.

He looked so… hungry.

“Very well… Moving on.” He pulled himself together, opening the next folder, “Number three, Jason Graff. The man who humanized the androids you had a hand in designing.”

Perkins left the packet open, lacing his fingers in front of his mouth after holding a hand out briefly, “He mentioned you and your ex-husband would argue quite often about certain features and capabilities these androids should possess. Is it true you were an advocate for a more humanlike appliance?”
“…Yes.”

There was no denying it, and you knew better.

“Why is that?”

“The same reason Elijah publicized. To make androids more welcomed in homes around the country, of course.”

“We’re talking about a lot more than mimicked breathing, crying, or idle tics and you know that.” He licked his teeth, “Don’t waste my time.”

You held back a shudder, grabbing your hands and placing them on your lap to hide your shaking.

You were starting to crack.

“You wanted them to be sentient beings from the start. You wanted them to have rights and free will. You even went so far as to try and prevent their manufacturing should you not get what you wanted.”

“I didn’t see the point in manufacturing an enslaved race that had the mind and heart of a human being with restraints.” You growled, “I knew this was going to happen. I knew this uprising was only a matter of time, and I tried to warn him. I tried to warn everyone.”

You were shocked at yourself for giving away so much, so willingly. Disappointed in the hostility in your voice, as it laid the foundations for a motive. You could see your own incrimination in his eyes.

“But they didn’t listen, did they?” He was calm, gentle, “I can imagine that made you very frustrated.”

“Not frustrated enough to start a civil war, Special Agent Perkins.” You crossed your arms, “I only tried to cut it off at the knees before it got here, and now I’m trying to stop it from happening – just like you.”

“You’re right. My concern is to stop the spread of deviancy before the country escalates into civil war. The potential loss of human life is high, as are the numbers. Statistics and such. Can’t argue those.” His eyes fell into darkness, and his hands coiled tight, “But deviants are too dangerous to negotiate with, just like terrorists…the United States does not negotiate with terrorists.”

It wasn’t exactly clear if he was still talking about androids…because it felt a whole hell of a lot like he was talking about you.

“No, the United States just waterboards them.”

You tried to break the tension with a sarcastic comment. That’s how you did things.

“I don’t think that’ll be necessary, in this case…but if provoked, I can have that arranged.”

It backfired.

“You’ll be more cooperative than the inmates of Guantanamo now, won’t you?”

There was something off-putting in the precise shifting of gears that clanked and slid into different notches as the interrogation proceeded…so you shook your head in agreement; because like he
said, he’s been doing this for twenty…years…

“Number two.”

He wasn’t going to give you a chance to recover.

“Carl Manfred, the previous owner of the terrorist who led the assault on the Stratford Tower.” He smiled, “Carl was less forthcoming with information, but…I learned a lot from his replacement android after CyberLife’s Android Retention Unit confiscated it.”

Sickness engulfed your stomach as you imagined Perkins drilling into the sweet old man that was Carl Manfred. A man who’d lived multiple decades, had paid hundreds of thousands of tax dollars, fought a terminal illness and still had a smile on his face – no matter how cynical. He didn’t deserve to get roped into this.

No one did.

This crisis was the child born of a dysfunctional marriage that left the world’s fate hanging by an undying umbilical cord. A golden thread spun by the Fates that could never be cut or severed.

The idea brought back painful memories of a stress-induced miscarriage, and just like the thick black lines on the file, you redacted the pain and guilt back to nonexistence.

“I didn’t hear a question there, Agent Perkins.”

“Why did you withhold evidence from Detroit Police?” He held a hand up, giving your panic a brief pause, “Sorry, allow me to be more specific. Why didn’t you tell anyone that Revised Article 9 was the base code for the deviancy virus?”

Here they were.

The real questions.

The climax to the story that’d been woven through a rising action, only to fall down the other side.

Fallen like your resolve. Your will to power. Your inexplicable desire to laugh in the face of danger and shoot it down like the master of sidearms you declared yourself to be.

“It’s your turn to talk, Officer.”

You had nothing to say, because “nothing” is what you were being reduced to.

“You sure did talk to Carl, back when your partner was taking a statement from an eavesdropping android.”

You didn’t respond. Not verbally. But Perkins didn’t need you to.

He read you like an open book.

“What? Do you think Big Brother doesn’t apply to androids?” He sucked his teeth, “Come on, you’re smarter than that.”

“I’m smart enough to not say another word until I get a lawyer.”

And when your eyes met, rising slowly from the surface of the desk…you realized you’d chosen the worst of two evils.
“Wrong move, Officer.” He smiled, shaking his head, “You don’t want me to draw my own conclusions. It might be bad for your health.”

You chewed dead skin off your lip, sucked in a breath and let it seep into your rattling limbs.

“Would you like to hazard a guess as to who the first person on my list was?”

You couldn’t fathom the idea that he’d been in the same shadow that you once stood in; retracing your steps through a mentally bruise-abused past of the man you trusted last.

“Elijah Kamksi, the founder and former CEO of CyberLife.”

Couldn’t let him see you break.

“Your ex-husband. The man who you supported while he created androids.”

Couldn’t let him get to you.

“Had you waste countless years tending to his every whim.”

Couldn’t vocalize it.

“Had you on the run from the very company he built on your back while he stood at the top in fame and endless wealth without a word of acknowledgement to your name.”

Couldn’t let him in.

“Is that what this is? Some sort of… scheme, to undermine all of his work? His work that ultimately destroyed your marriage.”

Couldn’t.

“Caused you to lose an unborn child.”

Wouldn’t.

“Is that it?”

The screeching legs of a chair being pushed violently behind him made you cringe.

“I know you went to see him on November 8th.” He stood, anger in his voice, “I know that Connor’s tracker wasn’t deactivated at 12:30, but it went offline seven hours later on the same day at the exact same time that the AI known as Amanda went rogue.”

He circled you like Connor had around the android in that very seat. Chomped at the bit, and the short man became the tallest you’d known.

“I know Markus recovered an eye from a ‘Chloe’ in the scrap yard we combed, and her body was missing in every sense of the word.”

He slammed his palms on the table. Your entire body gave away the secret anxiety that you’d been housing as it left the seat, only to land in a violent spasm.

“I know Markus recovered an eye from a ‘Chloe’ in the scrap yard we combed, and her body was missing in every sense of the word.”

He leaned closer, whisper tickling your ear, “I know they escaped together from the cameras at the
dump where they belong.”

Perkins reached for a folder, opening it and sliding it over before slapping the printed pages of words you wrote, “I know that the rebel faction known as ‘Jericho’ left you a message on your blog you so arrogantly post to the public.”

He was hovering over you, now. Chin just above your shoulder as you whimpered and shook, leaning away from the dripping teeth that smelled of spearmint and drove spears into your lost hope; nailing it down and letting it bleed out just like he’d promised.

“I know that you’re conspiring with Elijah and Markus to make sure everything goes according to plan.”

Those assumptions…

Those deadly conclusions that’d been drawn when Perkins had been left to his own devices.

You could neither confirm nor deny anything.

He pushed the flaps of his coat aside. Slid it off with his back turned to you, and hung it on the chair as he gave you a crinkled smile. Adjusted the over-the-shoulder holster straps on his frame that bordered a white button-up and tie, smoothing the cuffs around his wrists before sitting on the edge of the table.

Had one thigh flat, turning his body towards you as the hand with a watch at it’s base rested on a knee.

He cocked his head, the loose hairs on his forehead shifting.

“I know your favorite movie is Top Gun. I’m a fan, myself.” He snickered. “Of the classics in general, but that one...I know it from start to finish.”

His leg slid off, and he crossed his ankles as he stuffed his pockets with his hands, lifting his face to the ceiling and closing his eyes in reminiscence.

“’Maverick, it's not your flying, it's your attitude. The enemy's dangerous, but right now you're worse.’”

He had good tone. Had you firewalled.

“’Dangerous and foolish.’”

And there wasn’t any time for a punch-out.

“’You may not like who's flying with you, but…’”

His eyes snapped open, his neck rolling to the side to find you.

“’Whose side are you on?’”

A question that had no clear answer. One you’d asked yourself, and one that others had asked you.

Every time it came up, you’d done all you could to avoid continuing the conversation.

But here, now...
You had your fangs sunk in floorboard.

“Without your cooperation, I can’t promise the United States government will be charged with your protection any longer. If you feel comfortable enough to see the man you were hiding from, you’re obviously just dead weight on American taxpayers. And,” He huffed, “Let’s be honest, it’s not like you need help with money.”

Your eyes shot up, mouth hanging open for only a moment before shutting with a hard “click.”

“Think about your partner. His family. Who else could be used against you?”

You bit back another cry for help. Another howl to the DPD-insignia-engraved moon that matched so many others, but was pockmarked with your badge number.

“’Goose’ came and went.” Perkins swallowed hard; a fake, sympathetic gaze drowning his need to feed upon your fear, “Anthony Deckhart, right?”

You nodded – vision blurred and focused on the electronic lock that was red with denial of entry or exit.

“Chris Miller…He’d be ‘Merlin’ in this scenario. The replacement RIO that can still be saved.”

He sighed, cracking his neck and looking at his feet as he shifted.

“Of course, all this can be avoided. No one’s life has to be uprooted, or jeopardized…You just have to tell me what I want to know.”

“What is it exactly that you ‘want to know?’”

The question didn’t come with forethought. It was gas that slipped through the leak; a flood of words pieced together to form a reckless counter.

Another you’d been avoiding at all costs…because the stakes were high, and you couldn’t afford to lose that gamble.

Perkins hummed under his breath. Sat down, and leaned back.

“What is deviancy, and who is responsible for it?”

His lips puckered.

“How do you stop it?”

He squinted as if he was talking to himself and compressing his thoughts into something more simplified.

“And where is Jericho?”

“I don’t know any of those things.”

Another rapid-fire response that came from sensory overload.

“I reviewed the logs from your ‘stress test.’” He cleared his throat, “Seemed like you were on to something and had even more figured out. So let’s try this again.”

He cracked his knuckles, and reached in the pocket on his chest.
“Where…”
Snapped the band of a black glove in place, his fingers writhing in the leather.

“Is…”
Unfolded the arms on a pair of sunglasses, a dim glow coming from the inside.

“The deviant…”
Slid them on, laced his fingers, and watched you through the tinted glass.

“Leader?”
ARI.
A human rendition of the memory probe Connor relied upon.

You looked at the two-way mirror out of the corner of your eye.

“*There are two sides to every mirror, kiddo. The person, and the reflection of the monster within themselves.*”

And just like then, you heard a coin toss in the back of your mind.

You gazed into that person; the reflection of the monster living inside – the hoarder of secrets and knowledge of fire.

Prometheus.

The Titan that would bring down Mount Olympus; the fire to Amanda’s ice and the slayer of greater men.

“I…”

It was time to choose which side you wanted to project to the world.

“Don’t…”

Time to choose which *wolf* to *feed*.

“Know.”

You smiled, refocused and ready to fight for your *own* freedom just as fervently as you fought for theirs.

Androids.

“Those ‘wolves’ out there?” Perkins nodded to the mirror, “They can’t save you.”

Your eyes narrowed.

“When a wolf is caught in a trap, it sometimes gnaws its own limb until it can escape…” He scrolled through some sort of digital interface, you assumed, as his hand flitted through the air, “And when that very same wolf calls for help...It can attract some very unwelcome attention.”

He enlarged something; his index finger and thumb expanding, “Other predators, for instance.”
You adjusted your weight in your seat, putting the heel of your boot on the edge; your crossed arms caught between your knee and chest.

“Even an apex predator can be outmaneuvered by smart prey, Special Agent Perkins.”

“They can try. But they all exhaust themselves, eventually. Like rats in a maze…” He drummed the table with his fingers, “No one escapes my traps, Officer.” And then he clicked his teeth, “You’ll lose much more than a limb if you don’t start singing like a good ‘little bird.’”

Your nose twitched at the nickname assigned to you by Elijah. By the hand of “God” himself.

“You do know how the United States government punishes treason, don’t you?”

Treason.

The charge you were facing…was treason.

“The death penalty.” He clarified.

Your brows knitted together, and you gulped down the renewed terror that came with being declared a terrorist-abiding traitor.

"This is what we call 'tightening the vice.'” He beamed, “Can you feel that?"

The ultimate act of betrayal against one’s country. One’s sovereign ruler.

How could your country, the very place that raised you in its image; the birthplace of freedom and the melting pot of cultural differences and newly-found “tolerance” allow this to happen?

This country that’d stalked you, threatened to imprison you – had signed off on experiments overseas under the supervision of Captain Allen, the most patriotic man you’ve ever known. He who still held a grudge against the same government who, apparently, held a very fatal grudge against you.

This country would brand you a terrorist, or worse…

But you couldn’t win playing by its rules.

“‘Being nationalistic in the sense in which it is now demanded by public opinion would, it seems to me, be for us who dare more spiritual.’” You grinned, loving how your taunt slipped through the cracks of his digital armor – the suit that was branded ARI, “‘Not mere insipidity but dishonesty, a deliberate deadening of our better will and conscience.’”

If the United States didn’t want to play fair, you felt no obligation to take the high road.

“Don’t…”

Perkins lost his underlying coolness to the deliberate placement of anger and hatred.

“Be…”

His gloved hand crinkled as it balled into a fist.

“The hero.”

And the last bit of his warning at the Stratford Tower rang clear.
“‘You’ll live longer.’”

He wasn’t ready to fold, and Captain Allen had taught you how to call his bluff.

Dying wasn’t an option.

Losing wasn’t an option.

You lying to the Detroit Police, lying to the government. Working from the shadows of a society that would rather have you and your blasphemous ideas stowed away; out of sight, out of mind.

The true struggle is for the superiority of ideas… One day, they’d have to see the light.

You’d start with him.

“It keeps you up at night, doesn’t it?” You tilted your head, “Being so close, yet brought to heel by rules and regulations…”

His lip lifted in a snarl under the dark panes of prodding that covered his eyes.

“How the system of law and order has so many imperfections…because, you see – during our time together, I’ve learned something about you.” You leaned in on your elbows, hands folded into a neat mound in the middle of the table, “You suffer from the philosophical burden of proof. How ‘extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.’”

You smirked, “Tell me…was it hard admitting to your superiors that a lowly beat cop ‘outmaneuvered’ the grand collective known as the FBI?”

He started to shake.

“How your arguments come from ignorance, trying to prove your proposition as true in the public arena of ideas based on common assumptions and circumstantial evidence…”

“There’s nothing common about any of this.” He growled, “You’re guilty. You’re an enemy of the state, and you will be taken down as an enemy of the state.”

“Such a terroristic threat from the man hunting ‘terrorists.’ I’d be careful if I were you, Agent Perkins…” You gave him an adoring look, like a mother to a child, “For ‘whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process, he does not become a monster…””

The lock in the room turned green, and the panel slid open.

“‘And when you look long into an abyss…”’

Heels clicked across the floor, and a chair slid out next to you.

“…The abyss will gaze back into you.’”

Neither you nor Perkins broke away from the deadly gazing; like a gladiator to a starved lion, to address the new contender in the interrogation room reformed as a colosseum…

Not until the woman in red spoke.

“My name is Elizabeth Markeeva. I’m here to represent my client.”
That name...

You knew that name.

It’d been on so many divorce and marital support documents and you’d hoped you’d never see it again.

It’d been televised while the woman it belonged to spoke before a podium as the “proven innocent” hid behind her – shielded from the media and flashing cameras.

You and Elijah had been behind her, once. Long ago before “Mr. and Mrs. Kamski” had been forgotten titles.

“Somehow, I’m not surprised to see you.” Perkins folded his glasses, tucking them away, “You were always one for following the most heinous of criminals.”

“Oh, Richard…Overreacting was never your style. And that’s no way to greet an old friend, now, is it?” She opened a dark-red briefcase, sifting through an installed accordion folder, “Save it for the courtroom.”

She offered him a document, propelled by perfectly-painted nails.

The Russian woman smelled of flowers and citrus; hairspray and dry-cleaning.

Of broken dreams and success, all at the same time.

He picked it up, eyeing it with a tinge of arrogance before tossing it; the corners of the thick cardstock landing at an angle.

“What a fucking joke.”

“I’d ask what happened to your nose, but I hear you’re used to nosebleeds.” She frowned, “Does the FBI still burden it’s agents with mandatory prescriptions of triptocaine in order to use the ARI?”

He shook his head, laughing to himself while he cracked his knuckles with his thumb.

“The drug that causes hallucinations. Increased paranoia. Mood swings.” Elizabeth pouted, “Because if they do, some might say you’re unfit for duty and may be pointing fingers based on delusions.”

He removed his glove, sliding his arms through the sleeves of his coat.

“Coercion isn’t your best color, Perkins.” Elizabeth gave him a gentle smile, “When was the last time you slept?”

“I wouldn’t worry about my sleeping schedule.” He popped his collar, “And if your client won’t talk to me, perhaps the detective android can get her to change her mind. The android that this bullshit doesn’t apply to.”

You opened your mouth to speak, but your lawyer cut you off with a pat on the shoulder.

“I’m afraid Connor isn’t available to provide you of any assistance.”

“The only thing keeping him around is his functionality.” Perkins snickered, “If he can't even conduct an interrogation...what's to say he doesn't belong in an android camp like the rest of them?”
“Connor has been ordered to return to CyberLife for detention and observation.” You didn’t have a moment to process what she said before she continued, “So unless you’re here to file any charges against my client…”

“The FBI is acquiring a search warrant as we speak.” He looked at his phone, ignoring her dismissal, “Acquired, a search warrant.”

He slid his chair out from under him. Started towards the door without a single word, stopping with his hand pressed firmly to the scanner, “I don’t know why you’re fighting so hard to protect them. The androids.”

The lock turned green, and the door opened.

“If Connor and his partner had been better at their jobs, they could’ve stopped all of this…But you know what they say…” He threw a look over his shoulder, “‘Loyalty has a price.’”

Alerts chimed as his phone came to life, no longer silenced for the sake of professionalism. He didn’t check them before dialing a number, resting on the door frame as he watched you crumble before him.

“Yes, hello, this is Special Agent Perkins, homeland security. Patch me through to the Marshals Service.”

He kicked off the wall, turning away.

“I need to pull someone from WITSEC.”

Even after you were alone with a woman who served as common ground…a lawyer that was known for taking on impossible cases, just like Perkins; her FBI equivalent on the other side of the law…

Even after she assured you everything was going to be okay…

The shock from being told Connor was gone began to wear off.

The adrenaline high that kept you fused together started to dissolve.

Perkins was on the path to victory…

And everything was not going to be okay.

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**Behind the Scenes**

"CyberLife's 'Fortune Teller' Computer" by Tech Addict

*Philip Seymour*
Jason Graff

"Is Your Android Spying on You?" by Tech Addict

Big Brother

Government Negotiation with Terrorists

The Fates in Greek and Roman Mythology

Nietzsche's Will to Power

Fighter Pilot Terms Glossary:

*Good Tone:* "The pilot does not need radar in this case, they have a lock on their target and can fire their missiles."

*Firewalled:* "Push the throttles to their forward limit."

*Punch-out:* "To eject from an airplane."

*Fangs sunk in floorboard:* "When a fighter pilot boresights on a kill but ends up getting shot themselves."

*RIO (Radar Intercept Officer):* "An air flight officer directly involved in all air operations and weapon systems of a military aircraft."

Nietzsche Quote on Nationalistic Ideas

James MacAllan Quote from Titanfall

"They'll call us terrorists or worse, but we can't win playing by their rules."

Moira Quote from Overwatch

"The true struggle is for the superiority of ideas..."

Burden of Proof

Public Sphere *(The Public Arena of Ideas)*

Gladiators and the Colosseum

Enemy of the State

Guantanamo Bay

Perkins Quote

"Like rats in a maze..."

Triptocaine from Heavy Rain

Detroit: Become Human Trailer Quote

"Loyalty has a price."
Chapter End Notes

I’VE BEEN WAITING FOREVER TO WRITE THIS CHAPTER AND I’M SO HAPPY I FINALLY GOT TO!

I hope you guys had an amazing holiday!
Elizabeth had her hand in the curve of your back, guiding you through the floor after the two of you had gone over costs, schedules, a plan of action…nothing friendly, or casual.

You sat, unnerved by the surrounding vacancies…

Chris’s desk. Hank’s.

Connor’s.

The picture on his desk was gone, along with your car keys. You didn’t have to check his locker to know that Anthony’s clothes were gone, too.

Gone.

Connor was gone, and that, *somehow*, alarmed you more than the intense interrogation you’d barely survived. But an unexpected conversation kept you from dwelling on it.

“Thank you for calling me…” Elizabeth purred, leaning over Gavin’s shoulder, “To say I was surprised would be an understatement, Mr. Reed.”

He straightened his back. Seemed shaken, and had his leather jacket hung over his chair behind him. The buttons on his thermal were undone, one flap hanging on the side. His hair was disheveled.

“Thanks for answering.”

You raised a brow, and quickly dove back behind your terminal when he caught you watching.

“My sister would like to hear from you, you know.”
“No offense, but your sister shouldn’t have fucked an android in our bedroom.”

The rolling of wheels filled your ears rather than your eavesdropping, and you raised a shy pair of eyes to the Detective leaning back with his arms crossed; heels serving as a brake to his mobile seat.

He may have been worse for wear, but the “Gavin Scowl” was still going strong.

“You’re a shithead, you know that?”

“Yeah.” Your teeth squeezed against each other as you dryly swallowed, “A shithead in deep shit.”

He shook his head, sighing through his nose before rubbing his eyes with two fingers, “Yeah.”

“Just remember what we talked about, and your friend here will stay out of federal prison.”

Elizabeth crossed her ankles, holding her briefcase in front of her with both hands, “It wouldn’t be the first show her and I have run together, isn’t that right?”

You gave her a nod, idly tapping your fingers on your keyboard.

“You two know each other?”

“She was my…our attorney when Elijah and I still worked for…at, CyberLife.”

“Ah, right, yeah…that whole thing. What in the actual fuck?” He tensed, his elbows sliding down to his thighs to support his weight as he looked at you, “What a fucking closet of skeletons.”

“You’re telling me.” You frowned, “You don’t hate me now, do you?”

“Hate you?” He scoffed, “That doesn’t even cover how pissed I am. You fucking helped Kamski create-“

“Ahem…Gavin.” Elizabeth looked over her shoulder at the cubicles filled with police officers; some with phones to their ears, others with coffee to their mouths, “Perhaps now is not the time.”

“ Fucking…Whatever. We’ll talk later…” Gavin snorted, “Or maybe we won’t.”

He slid back to his desk, holding on to his armrests before turning back to his screen.

It was obvious something was gnawing at him. He was way too focused on his case – lost in his work instead of playing on his phone. As a detective, this shouldn’t have been alarming…

But it was Gavin, and focusing on work wasn’t very “Gavin.”

“Reed.” You coughed.

He ignored you.

“Thanks for looking out.”

He shook his head, huffing through his nose before throwing a middle finger over his shoulder.

“Fuck off.”

There he was.
“People often judge me by my work.” Elizabeth surveyed the office as she spoke, staring off into space, “They judge by the lengths I will go to give my clients a fair trial, and a fresh start…”

Illegal lengths. *That* is what she was known for.

One of the best defense attorneys in the corporate sector who rarely got involved in cases like yours.

“But when I cross paths with people like you, and Mr. Kamski…it only strengthens my position that they are wrong to judge, because it is not their *place*, to judge.”

She patted your hand before stepping away, “Do not let Richard get to you, sweetheart. There is only one person whose judgement matters in the courtroom, and they have the law to keep their biasness at bay.”

She turned her back to you after you shared a sweet, calming smile. A moment of peace.

And then she ran into someone.

“Oof - shit, I mean sorry, I mean ma’am, I-“

“It’s alright, Officer Miller. My mistake.”

Chris blinked himself back to reality as he pinched the bill of his hat in one hand and the back of it with the other, straightening it out from the tilt it was jostled on. He watched her leave, his neck rotating like a beacon.

“Careful, Miller.” You smirked, “Nina might get jealous.”

His face whipped around, a guilty smile on his lips.

You narrowed your eyes, “You’re covered in snow…What were you doing?”

“Helping the – uh, *squad*…clean the cruisers off-“ He covered a cough with a fist, “You know, androids aren’t around to do it anymore.”

He plopped in the seat next to you, wrists falling between his knees, “Crazy day, huh?”

You leaned forward on your elbows. Mimicked his position.

Gave him a *sad* smile, shaking your head in disbelief at the fuckery of it all.

“Yeah, Miller…It’s been a crazy day, alright.”

…

You filled two hours with burying yourself in your work as the example was set, anxiously checking your phone in 15-minute intervals waiting to hear something from *someone*.

Anyone.

Ben, who left with Hank.
Neither of them had answered you…and Connor hadn’t either.

Then there was that small fact that the FBI was flipping your apartment.

You kept peeking at Captain Fowler, who hadn’t sat once during the stretch of time. Even when he’d sent out another mandatory overtime notice to the office, he’d stood while he typed the e-mail.

“56 cases available…32 units active.” Chris sighed, rubbing his chest, “That’s short-staffed if I’ve ever seen it.”

He was watching the Captain just as well, taking a break to drink more of his energy shake.

“You know…” You rested your neck on the edge of the back of your seat, rolling it to face him, “You’re awfully calm about everything.”

He shrugged, “Whatever Perkins wanted, he didn’t get. You’re still here, and that’s good enough for me.”

You smiled at him, at your Merlin – the replacement wingman that was assigned to you after the previous “came and went.”

He really did ground you, and the appreciation and gratitude couldn’t be put into words.

“You have any idea where Connor is?”

But then he choked…on nothing.

That warm feeling in your chest gave way to ice, and you shot forward.

“Chris.”

“No-“

“What did you do?”

It was his tell. One of his many tells when he was lying, or hiding something.

“I didn’t do anything, okay?” His brows creased, his lips curled, and his neck snaked back, “Just don’t worry about him.”

“Excuse me?”

“I said: ‘Don’t worry about him.’” He snapped.

Wet boots squeaked down the hall, marking the contact of stomping feet.

“MOVE!”

Gavin twisted to the side, his arms raised above his head.

“Shit, watch it-“

He ducked and wove through officers in the hall, a half-smoked cigarette tucked behind his ear as he slid to a halt in front of his desk. He was covered in melted and solid snow – a mix of white flakes and beads of water. He was out of breath and pacing.
“Hey-hey, hey hey-“ He reached his arms out, grabbing Tina by her biceps as she passed by, steering her fast-paced walk in a circle and flipping her to face him.

“What, Reed?” She scoffed, adjusting the folders under her arm.

He turned her around again, pointing to the televisions, “Unmute that one.”

She sucked her teeth, “Why?”

“Patrol 457 just called in a report of thousands of androids marching down the street-“


“Look, fuck if I know, just unmute the-“

“Wait, did that chick in dispatch you banged tell you about this-“

“Chen.”

She rolled her eyes, tapping her TeleBand and aiming it upwards…

The television speakers popped before clearing up the signal, broadcasting a harrowing message.

“‘A new stage has been reached, demonstrating beyond all doubt that these defective machines have become a real danger for American society…’”

KNC News reported with a message scrolling along the bottom banner.

“PRESIDENT ANNOUNCES NATIONAL STATE OF EMERGENCY…”

And right above those words was a warzone caused by pack meeting pack in the jungle.

A mob of protestors in bandannas versus an army of androids led by a man you’d learned to hold a grudge against.

The face of the revolution…The leader of Jericho.

Markus.

He raised a fist, him and his android followers shouting one, unified chant:

“WE ARE PEOPLE!”

You hadn’t realized you’d jumped out of your seat. Didn’t take notice to the flock of Detroit Police that’d formed behind you; watching the shaking, helicopter-mounted camera feed in awe.

Some mouths were covered, others had cell phones pinned between their ears and their shoulders.

“Tell Damion I love him, and I’m going to be home late. I love you too. I know.”

There were a lot of phone calls like Chris’s reverberating through the gathering…and the only thing that tore anyone’s attention away from the television was the glass door of Fowler’s office locking tight behind him.

And then you all watched; all waited for the sovereign leader to address his loyal subjects, hands gripping the balcony with sleepless nights hanging on his face.
“Chen, mute the televisions.”

She did, and a weighted silence fell over the office.

Just the hum of servers, the coughs of civilians in the waiting room, and the clicks from red lights flashing on the receivers of muted work phones in each cubicle.

“I know you’re all tired. I know you all miss your families. And I know, that you all know, we haven’t seen the worst of this yet.” He sighed, and rolled his shoulders, “But know that I am working just as hard to make sure you all return home, safe.”

You looked at Chris from the corner of your eye, and he did the same. Both of you shifted your gaze to Gavin, who pursed his lips and gave you a helpless shrug.

“I wouldn’t ask any of you to risk your lives if it wasn’t absolutely necessary…” He closed his eyes, opening them after a brief pause before sweeping the room with a fiery gaze, “We knew this might happen. We held that briefing this morning because-“

He looked at his pocket. Retrieved his cell phone, and checked the screen.

“It’s the Commissioner…I have to take this.” He looked back to the workforce on the floor, all awaiting directions.

“Carry on.”

And you did.

All of you mindlessly hovered around your desks, trying not to stare at the riots of rivalry forming in the streets. Tried to focus on the tasks at hand, and not panic about the chaos bleeding into the veins of Detroit.

The veins of the jungle that was being flipped on its head, and the men and women tasked with protecting it that were losing control.

A wave of ascending rhythms and synchronized chirps flooded the office as the receivers were given permission to alert their owners. The phones were ringing off the hook, activated one-by-one.

You held your finger over the button that would open your line to dispatch, but hesitated.

Something felt off.

You lifted your focus to Captain Fowler, wondering what the Commissioner was doing calling the man charged with running Central Station at a time like this.

Fowler walked to the digital display that served as his glass cage’s farthest wall. Lifted the phone to his ear, and held it there in perfect stature. Gave himself a brief nod, and without facing you and the rest of his team, tucked the phone away.

He pressed his palm to a scanner, and typed in a password.

A TeleBand alert went off on the other side of the office. And then another.

And another.

So many screens flashed until the virtual mobilization spreading like a viral cat video hit yours.
“RIOT CONTROL – REPORT TO THE ARMORY AND PREPARE FOR DEPLOYMENT.”

You found Chris, his fingers pinching the circular screen around his wrist.

He looked up, and you returned a reassuring nod.

“Time to walk the line.”

A tired smirk crinkled the left side of his mouth.

“Let’s roll.”

No, you couldn’t dwell on what happened only hours ago. Not on love lost or the scrawny prick shoveling dirt from the grave you’d laid the last few years to rest in.

Because even if the FBI was nipping at your heels – even if Connor was MIA under mysterious circumstances…

This was the tipping point, and it was your sworn duty to balance the scale.

This is what it meant to “Protect and Serve.”

To put yourself in harm’s way for the greater good.

And in making this grand capital offense, you were a repeat offender.

Come forth a hostage situation, a terrorist attack, or a riot in the streets; no matter what form the call to arms took…

You’d always be the first responder.

Chapter End Notes

***T-minus 1 Chapter till Riot Event***
First Responder

Chapter Summary

November 10th, 2038
PM 01:05:05

Chapter Notes

"The jackal may follow the tiger, but, cub, when thy whiskers are grown, Remember the wolf is a hunter—go forth and get food of thy own."

Chrome turned orange as the deployment light pulsed – fading in and out from behind a cage mounted on the border between the cement ceiling and walls.

You stood in front of a shiny new human-sized tube, its doors sealed tight with the CyberLife logo laser-engraved on tempered-glass.

You and the other women were told to wait, and with havoc being wrought outside; it was difficult.

You let your mind wander, and your eyes drift. Locked on three red tubes with a very different logo branded on the crimson cases.

Dire wolves – each bearing their teeth with dripping fangs and an eyepatch covering their left eye.

The Marauder insignia.

All the necks in the room swiveled towards two blast doors that withdrew into the walls. Three women, the trio who those special equipment units belonged to, entered the armory.

“Awe, look at them…my poor, sweet dears.”

Sage Talon.

“‘Sweet’ gets you killed. Best to be sour at the bite.”

Akane Mayumi.

“Cut the bullshit.”

Liera Lastimosa.
“Alright ladies, play time’s over.” She addressed you and the other trembling officers as she marched down the aisle, scowling under her breath and lifting her badge to an electronic scanner.

The curved doors broke apart, the hydraulics keeping them steady as they unlatched with a muffled whine and a plume of fog.

It was one of those contraptions that sounded like efficient ingenuity. Like it was a healthy machine, designed by the best engineers and manufactured by artisan hands.

Sage and Akane followed suit.

“Pst,” Tina whispered, and you looked to your right, “Scan your badge. Do what they do.”

You raised a brow, tilting your head to look behind you at the Marauders waiting for their compartments to open. Switched back to Tina, and shrugged.

“Seems like a good idea.”

You removed your badge, holding it to the black screen.

“ID#5649 Confirmed – Please Standby.”

Your pair of doors gave way to a chamber reminiscent of full-body scanners at an airport. Just like one of those, you stepped inside, turned around, and hitched your breath as a black ring lowered; a mesh of green lights sweeping over your body.

When the ring hit the floor, and the thatched scanners hit either side of your boots, a notification flashed up above.

“Please raise your hands.”

A sudden movement caught your attention.

Straight ahead, dead center in the opposite row, was Liera.

She had her palms open, elbows out and bent at a slight angle; hands raised over her head as she let out a tired yawn.

You assumed the position, and the circular scanner started to rise.

Liera squinted at you, huffing through her nose.

“Not surprised to see you here.” She snickered, “Always getting into shit above your pay grade, eh?”

You’d gotten used to hardened veterans like her teasing you.


It was the norm.

But unlike them, you hadn’t fired back at a Marauder just yet.

“One of these days it’ll land me a promotion…or a raise.” You gave her a sarcastic, thoughtful look, “Yeah, a raise would be nice.”
“Sweetheart, if you’re in this for the money, you’re in the wrong profession.”

“Don’t I know it.”

The ring locked in place at the top of the chamber, and the heavy click scared you.

Liera let out a trickling laugh, “Here comes the fun part.”

You swallowed hard, unsure if you should trust what a woman whose arm was blown off in the field would consider “fun.”

You got a pretty good idea when built-in panels opened, and racks of gear presented themselves. Mechanical arms hand-selected pieces fit to your size, and sent those same racks back to where they came from.

You released a grunt when a heavy vest dropped over your shoulders, and the wire-and-brace fingers secured the straps and latches behind your back in place.

Stumbled a bit when the light armor hit your shins, elbows, forearms…

You were rebuilt as a soldier, being forced into service by the DPD.

“Never gets old…” Liera mumbled, the light-hearted tone in her voice gone.

Her suit was different, with SWAT brandings, wolves, and hissing vipers stitched on the fabric. Other markings lined the patch over her heart; awards, maybe.

Her brows held a subtle arch. Her mouth was a flat line, and her stare was far gone.

She was gearing up for battle in another way.

“Does it ever get hard?” You asked, having regretted asking when her maroon eyes targeted you, “All this?”

The arms in her chamber pulled her chest plate snug against her frame, but she didn’t budge.

“Heh, shit…”

The ribbed lines of a sweater showed through the gaps in her black Kevlar. A metal arm offered her a pair of gloves, and she wiggled her fingers through. Another dropped from above, holding an earpiece that she clipped to the side of her head. A shelf slid out with her helmet resting on top.

She took it, clipped the ring to her belt, and stepped back out onto the floor.

You’d been so mesmerized that you hadn’t noticed the extended contraptions holding similar equipment for you.

You’d barely got your gloves on before you picked up your helmet, stumbling off the vinyl footprints that marked the bottom of the chamber.

“Does it ever get hard,’ she asks.”

Liera put her hands on her hips, and gave you another one of her cocky grins.

“Easiest job I’ve ever had.”
The rustle of shuffling feet muted sparse chatter as you and the rest of the reformed officers were funneled out in a single-file line.

You rounded the corner, the men pouring from an opening on the opposite side of the hall.

It wasn’t too often you were down in the dungeon of Central Station; down where SWAT usually hung out…but as each ant scurried around like members of a colony, you realized how functional it was.

How each corridor was perfectly planned for a swift response to an unexpected turn of events; to control the flow that was an influx of personnel.

“HEY, PARTNER!” Chris dove over someone, landing a hand on your shoulder, “Nice get-up, where’d you get it?”

He was full of life and smiling, something he had a tendency to do even when the going got rough.

“Probably from the same place you got yours.”

You tried to return that sense of normalcy, but unlike him or the Marauders, you didn’t have a military record to make this all seem normal.

“Mhm, mhm-” He slapped your back, “Look at us, ready to kick some ass.”

“All the ass, Chris.”

Each stream of men and women marched towards the double-doored entrance of the weapons cellar where you and Gavin had shared a moment in the firing range. The gun racks were emptier than they were, then – eager hands grabbing assault rifles and clips, the emptied cages automatically rotating to offer a full set.

And when those officers were finished, they’d move towards the next section to fill all the slots along their belts.

It was like a doomsday buffet.

“You won’t be getting one of these bad boys…” Chris swiped a lock with his TeleBand, plucking an assault rifle of his own before eyeing up the barrel, “Kind of jealous you get to use one of those Smart Pistols though.”

He giggled before repeating himself in a mocking tone, “Smort Pistol.”

You pursed your lips, unlocking a holster with your credentials before taking the high-tech pistol for your own, trying to make sense of it.

“Your rifle runs off the same system, doesn’t it?”

“Sadly.”

“You don’t like the auto-target-whatever?”
“Nah…” He slung the rifle’s strap over his shoulder, letting the gun dangle across his chest, “Nothing beats good old marksmanship.”

“Hell no.” A gruff agreement interrupted you.

You both turned your heads, finding an over-encumbered Liam Miller waltzing through the door. He hacked and spit in a trashcan before shifting a shemagh around his neck, pounding a fist against a maglock that opened a specialty weapons crate. He took to a knee, twisting a barrel on a sniper rifle.

“You sniper boys taking the bird?” Chris asked.

“Already cleared the airspace.” Liam scoffed, “Dang news people flyin’ around like there ain’t no damn worry in the world.”

“’Ain’t no damn worry in the world.’” Grenier put his best Liam voice on, pumping his fists back and forth, “Always so serious.”

You ducked as his drone zoomed by, its ocular hub rotating in front of Liam in what seemed like a greeting.

“Someone’s gotta be…” He swiped at it, “Outta my face, Widget.”

It let out a sad chirp as it flew away, taking to its owner’s side while it looked around curiously.

“Don’t talk to him like that, you big bully.” Grenier looked up, “Hey, Miller-“

“Whaddya want?” Liam whined, looking over his shoulder.

“No, you. I mean ‘other Chris.’”

“This shit’s gonna get confusing over comms…” Liam mumbled, folding the legs of his tripod before slinging his heavy sniper rifle.

“No shit. We got two Chris’s, two Millers…” Grenier laughed, “Hey Liam, if you and I got married, I’d also be Chris Miller. Now that would get confusing.”

“Shut…Up.” Liam shrugged past him, pulling up his fatigues before strapping himself down with grenades.

Your Chris couldn’t stop laughing, even when speaking, “What was your question, Greenie?”

“First off, you don’t get to call me that anymore.” Grenier held up a hand, “Second, who’s your shield?”

“Tch, who do you think?” Chris nodded at you, “My partner, duh.”

You gave an awkward wave, perplexed by how Chris knew all these people. He was a social butterfly, and you weren’t. So there was that.

But all his acquaintances seemed to be dangerous.

He meshed with them in a fashion similar to your friendship, and you wondered what exactly that said about you.

“Grenier-“ A woman’s voice came from behind, “Catch!”
His hand shot up without a second thought, knees buckling as a heavy duffle landed in his arms.

“Shit, Mayumi-“ He grunted through clenched teeth, straightening himself out, “Why?”

“Because I’m tired of your rambling.”

She cocked the hammer on her gun, thumb underneath the strap digging in her neck, “Deployment in 5.”

“Ugh…” He looked back to you and Chris, “You guys are riding with us, right?”

“Huh?” You sputtered, “We are?”

“That’s what Cooper said.”

“Came from the top,” Jack butted in, “Unit 32 is officially babysitting.”

“Better us than that 31 rubbish.” Sage was next to him, strapping unique canisters to herself.

“Still, Talon?”

“That Rebecca woman said she was ‘more qualified’ than I to be a Marauder. The gall.”

Chris nudged you away, moving you down the equipment line before handing over a pack of electric smoke grenades.

“Gotta disengage while we can or else we’ll never leave…” He threw a glance behind him at the bickering SWAT team members, “Remember what she said about these.”

He held a grenade between the two of you.

“Last resort.” You clipped them to the labeled socket along your waist, “Got it.”

You geared yourself up with all the tools you needed to put a stop to the madness outside. A pistol, enough ammunition to weigh your waist down, a hardened baton, and ESGs with enough stopping power to blow the entire electric grid.

The straps on your knee guards dug at the pinched flesh they clung to. Your elbows were stiff from the cover on the other side of their bend. Your breathing was stifled from the heavy vest snug on your chest. It was hot underneath the plates along your forearms, shoulders, and thick pads along your legs.

Your cheeks began to flush. Your forehead was slick in an anxious cold sweat.

You were starting to feel claustrophobic.

“Hey, I’ll be right behind you.” Chris turned you to face a rack of shields with the smooth, reinforced edges facing out, “Just do what you’re good at and take all the bullets.”

You jabbed his stomach, your armor landing on his with a soft “thud.”

“Didn’t feel a thing.” He smirked, “This MILITIA gear is pretty dope, huh?”

“So ‘dope…”” You mumbled, standing before a riveted, metal riot shield with a bulletproof glass window inlaid at eye-level.
When you pulled it free, it clanked against your baton. Hit the floor with a metallic “bang,” landing next to your boots.

You skipped over the label painted “RIOT UNIT” and traced your thumb along the curves cut out for quick pistol pops while still providing cover.

Something you’d learned during your CERT training.

Training you never thought you’d put to use. Training you’d fallen asleep during because you, Gavin, and Hank had been out drinking too late the night prior.

You took it all in.

The steel coat of fur that’d grown in after Anubis; the Jackal, weighed your heart and ordered you to be sent back to the afterlife you’d escaped.

You were no longer a rogue wolf like your ex-husband remained – the man that would slaughter a herd of sheep and only consume a portion of the meat before setting the mass grave ablaze.

No longer following the path of Fenrir, the wolf who bit the hand of a god and tested powers beyond his understanding.

You were Loki, playing both sides like the trickster you were, only to put on a new face for each faction to see. A shapeshifter that took to something less selective, or defined – serving whatever higher power fit your needs.

Today, you assumed the role of a shield-maiden. A Valkyrie that flew on her own wings; armed with a protective slab of metal that would decide who died, and who lived.

You would hold the line, and give whoever endangered law and order a swift ride to Valhalla as the onset of Ragnarök threatened to drown the world in a flood of discord.

Because today, you fought for the people; for those who lived on the sidelines of the war as the battle for Detroit reached a new height.

You slid your arm through the shield’s interior straps. Let it ground you, wrapping your hand around the inner handle; thumb pressing a button to send the bottom retracting into itself.

Neither you nor your partner would die, today.

“Listen up, people!”

Liera may have been in the room, but her order echoed from the speaker in your helmet still hanging off your belt.

“Captain Allen’s already on the front lines, so for right now, you’re stuck with me.”

She was empowered.

“In this room, there are no more police officers.”

Empowering.

“No mothers, or fathers. No brothers, or sisters; husbands, wives, or even friends.”

She was inspecting them – the men and women in blue geared up in a watered-down version of her Marauder-grade suit.
“There is no more SWAT team.”

She put her hands on someone’s shoulders, chin tilting before she tightened a strap. She gave that woman an affirmative nod before continuing.

“No more Marauders.”

She finished her rounds, taking her place alongside the rest of Unit 32; the faceless soldiers in black helmets.

“There is only us, against them.”

She started at the end of the line with a sweeping gaze – studying the collected squad that’d left behind who they were back in the armory chambers; hung on a rack awaiting their return.

You weren’t exempt from that.

“Against this city that refuses to stop tearing itself apart.”

Liera clasped her hands behind her back, distant and preoccupied with the responsibility of delivering harsh truths.

“Whatever you were before…”

And then she took on that perfect military stance – unnerved, and unwavering.

“You are now Riot Control.”

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**Behind the Scenes**

Anubis

Rogue Wolf (Vargulf)

Fenrir

Loki

Shield-Maidens

Valkyrie

Valhalla

Ragnarök

Opening written to "Missile" by Dorothy
Second half written to "Down to the Bottom" by Dorothy
The command truck’s cabin had little to offer in ways of comfort.

Its engines ravaged the inside, and small distortions of human life interrupted the trance.

Chris sniffed behind his helmet and cracked his neck. Grenier rolled his plated shoulders. Sage typed away on her wrist computer, leg swung up on an empty seat with her back propped up on Akane’s side. She chewed gum and popped it, earning her an irritated look from her psychopath-for-a-pillow.

“You.”

Your head snapped, finding the silent assassin watching you with a cat-like stare.

“Me?”

“Yes.” She tilted her head, “I have a question.”

Akane switched legs, balancing one on her knee and landing her boot on the floor.

“What are you hiding that Commander Martello had you travel with us rather than the other DPD fodder?”

Your neck snaked back, squinting at her in disgust.

“That’s an interesting question coming from someone who’s background is classified.” You fired, “And we are not, ‘fodder.’”

Tension built between the two of you before you finally broke and turned away.
“Ignore her.” Sage yawned, looking at her nails, “She’s rough around the edges, but she means well.”

Akane jostled her shoulder, and a grunt came from the woman leaning on it.

You had your shield balanced between your knees, pinned between your boots; massaging your hands along the curved edges of the cutouts. You only stopped to unhook the helmet from your waist, watching it hesitantly in all its obsidian glory.

Anything would be better than feeding into Akane’s instigating bullshit, the mechanical innerworkings of the loud truck, or the blaring sirens attached to it.

You wished Connor was there to settle you down; to put his hands on the side of your face and still your internal turmoil like he always did. You hoped he was safe. Hoped you were safe, wondering what waited for you when Perkins finished uprooting your life.

Nope.

“Can’t think about it.”

You pushed the helmet down to your shoulders, and the cabin wiped away. It still smelled like the manufacturing plant – of silicon, and carbon fiber. Your shuddering breath bounced back at you in the darkness.

And then the cabin came back as fragments of a digital imagination.

Your vision was framed in a blue, opaque outline of the visor. Numbers and letters scrolled at each corner as if you’d plugged yourself into a surveillance camera, spying on dimensions and data.

NEW USER FOUND

The alert flickered and chirped in the upper-left hand corner, followed by your identification, various GPS locations, your vitals-

[Protocol 1: Link to Specialist]

Yellow text floated on your HUD with a black backdrop as the automated program continued.

Establishing Neural Link...

A pinch formed in your mind. The pain shot from the left side of your brain to the other, and put you in a daze. Your arms clenched, your hands furled and unfurled.

Neural Link: Established.

Officer ID#5649 – you are now confirmed as Acting Specialist of MILITIA Unit 32-8.

Your thoughts were no longer your own. You felt another presence lingering in the deepest corners of your consciousness.

[Protocol 2: Uphold the Mission]

Your orders are to resume Operation: Para Bellum – Rendezvous with Captain Allen and control the riot situation in Grand Circus Park.
The helmet was its own system, syncing itself with its environment and the body it crowned. Lines formed the frames of every angle, breaking them down into known material. Everything was rearranged in reports and scans; calculated and analyzed, measured and weighed.

A guilty ounce of amazement galvanized you.

It was like you were seeing the world through an android’s eyes for the first time.

[Protocol 3: Protect the Specialist]

SYSTEM INITIALIZATION…

BIOS 7.8 REVISION 0358

LOADING OS…100%

Loading Ocular Hub…

A/V Visuals: ONLINE

Initializing Vitals Scrub…

Results posted to DPD Medical Archives.

Loading Helmet Regulation Configuration…

Temperature control…ONLINE

Pressure control……..ONLINE

Air filter………………ONLINE

Loading Laser Aiming Module (LAM)…100%

Smart Pistol MK6 Detected.

Pairing…

Pairing…

Pairing Complete.

Acquiring List of Hostile Targets…

Accessing CyberLife Data Archives…

Comparing results to DPD List of Acquirable Hostiles…

LAM Set-Up Complete.
MILITIA LED-Status Screen Set-Up…Complete.

MILITIA Mesh Network…100%

Patching in to Unit 32 Designated [MARAUDERS] Comm Line…

System Initialization: Complete.

All Essential Functions: Re-established.

All Nonessential Functions: Re-established.

Transferring Controls to Neural Link in 3…

2…

1…

MARK.

Reality imploded, solidifying your senses from the fluid horror of having them being ripped away.

C.MILLER: “Hey, you alright?”

Chris’s name floated on your HUD, his voice coming in disconnected waves.

L.LASTIMOSA: “Easy, easy…She’ll be alright.”

L.MILLER: “Hit hardest the first time, eh?”

C.MILLER: “Not funny.”

L.MILLER: “Wasn’t jokin.’”

C.MILLER: “Don’t you have a bird to land?”

L.MILLER: “I’m not the one flyin’ this damn thing. That was your job, if you recall-

C.MILLER: “Anyway…Hey, wake up-“

He tapped the side of your helmet, and you blinked yourself awake. You were on your back, and when you went to rub your head, your hand slapped against your visor; the one you hadn’t even realized was still lowered.
Each crystal-cut diamond had melded together and refocused into a seamless depiction of the world outside…minus the floating words, numbers, and meters.

**J.COOPER:** “She alright?’

**L.LASTIMOSA:** “Yeah, Coop.”

Liera turned to you.

**L.LASTIMOSA:** “She’s good.”

She tapped the side of her helmet, and her visor popped open, “On your feet.”

A hard tug jerked your forearm, pulling you upright. You stumbled in place, caught by the woman with a metal arm.

“Shake it off, soldier.” She left you to stand by yourself, forcing you to catch your balance or fall, “You’ll be fine.”

The truck slammed on its brakes, and a shout came from the cockpit up front.

Liera grabbed a handle dangling from the ceiling, and you fell backwards on the bench.

“You’re a shit driver, Jack-“ She yelled, marching up the aisle as her boots let off heavy clanks on the metal, “Watch what you’re doing!”

“FUCK!” Jack hit a pothole, and the truck rocked back and forth before coming to a halt.

**S.BRIGGS:** "Credentials, please."

**J.COOPER:** "How’s it goin’ Sarah?"

**S.BRIGGS:** "Was goin’ good until I saw Big Red tearing up the streets…Those protesters are gonna shit themselves.”

“We always arrive in a rather cavalier fashion, do we not?” Sage grinned.

Akane huffed, “Against all odds, we always find a way…”

“A way to another checkpoint…” Sage swung her feet around, sitting upright, “Aren’t we there yet?”

“Don’t start that shit again…” Grenier had Widget in his lap with a service panel cracked open, small tools in his hands, “We’ll get there when we get there.”

She grabbed him by the ear, yanking him to the side. He dropped a screwdriver in order to catch his robot friend from sliding off his lap.

“OW-WHY-“

“Knock it off. We’re pulling in.” Liera returned from up front, grabbing the handle closest to the deployment hatch, “Get your asses ready.”

You tried to still your flipping stomach. Stumbled in place behind her, swaying on your feet with Chris at your back.
“Hey,” He whispered, “Relax. All you gotta do is stand there with a shield and yell at people.”

The heads in the cabin turned, their distinctive laughs coming through.

You tried not to be embarrassed, but it didn’t work.

**J.COOPER:** “Popping the hatch.”

A squiggling line accompanied a live feed of his eyes, and faded away when his message was finished.

**L.LASTIMOSA:** “Rodger that.”

Her intense stare replaced his.

**L.LASTIMOSA:** “This is Specialist Lastimosa to all active units, Unit 32 is on site.”

**CENTRAL:** “Copy that, you are cleared to deploy. Marking rendezvous location.”

An orange marker flashed on your screen. The truck came to a stop, gears cranking in place as it parked. The scalding-hot hiss of the unlocking missile-proof door had your heartbeat on a rampage.

“All right, Marauders. It’s showtime.” Liera pulled a lever, and light bled in the dark space, “Let them see your pretty faces.”

…

It should’ve been cold. It shouldn’t have been quiet.

When the sunburst from the opened hatch first exploded in your visor…

It shouldn’t have given you such clarity.

But when it faded, and the ominous scene pulled itself back from sensory overload…

Being boots on the ground never felt more real.

The unified trampling of the earth under synchronized pairs of boots. The rattling of a shield, riot gear – zippers and straps from the armored stampede. The light sprinkle of snow that was swept away by wind before it could land. The chirps of police sirens coming from all corners of Detroit. The smell of despair and rage that had the hairs on your neck sharpen.

Liera raised a fist, not looking behind her.

**L.LASTIMOSA:** “Hold position.”

The line stopped in an instant, and you followed suit.

**L.LASTIMOSA:** “Unit 32 on standby.”

You took in a deep breath. Let it out, and creased your brow as defoggers kicked into overdrive to clear your frosted visor. Shuddered as the cold arms of winter hugged you over your thick
sweater and padded armor.

Your helmet leveled with the battlefield, swaying back and forth on a weighed-down neck.

Civilians lined the sidewalks, kept at bay by officers in standard-issued uniforms using their bodies as barricades. One person tried to break through, and a man in a leather coat shoved them back in place.

“HEY!” Gavin barked, “What the fuck did I just say?”

The man swung, knuckles meeting Gavin’s chin before the Detective kicked him in the shin and pushed him back. An armored handler let his riot-gear-bound canine off its leash, hulking in size; shoulders at his knees, even on all fours. The barks were loud, growling, menacing.

Its dark fur and sapphire eyes shifted into a blur as it tackled Gavin’s opponent, wrestling it to the ground before the handler pulled it off.

But the rest of the dispute was drowned out by infernal chants draining through the microphones attached to your helmet.

“NO! MORE! ANDROIDS!” Said the mob facing two directions – one towards the line of militarized, mounted horses that the trucks parked behind; the other raging against the androids that shouted back.

“WE! ARE! PEOPLE!” Said the collective that remained calm, fists pumping in unison while each body stood perfectly still.

No, it wasn’t the androids that had resorted to rioting – bandanas around their mouths and sunglasses to hide their eyes while they threw full water bottles at the saddle-bound officers.

It was the humans, and they’d lost their humanity.

But you’d also taken on a faceless identity to ensure the safety of the ones who held the blade of anarchy to their own wrists.

And still, no amount of MILITIA gear could protect you against fear.

It had your pulse matching the clicking hooves of a marching charger.

Solid black in color. Blue eyes glowing behind a clear, high-impact visor with the rest of the mask strapped along its snout. A bulletproof, full-body blanket labeled “POLICE” lined it’s back underneath the saddle. Knobby leg guards protected its front and back knees, held secure even as it paced behind a row of horses smaller in size.

L.LASTIMOSA: “That’s Captain Allen.”

C.MILLER: “How do you know?”

L.LASTIMOSA: “They always give Command the biggest horse so they get the best view.”

Steam pushed through its nostrils, whether it was exhaust or breath – that didn’t take away from the pure strength held by each crunch of snow under the beast. Those nightmarish bulbs for eyes almost gleamed as a loudspeaker screeched overhead, the horse’s ears twitching and mane tossing in protest.

“You are ILLEGALLY, ASSEMBLED!”
Captain Allen pulled the reigns, turning around to walk the stretch again.

“You are to disperse immediately, or you WILL be SUBJECT TO ARREST!”

It didn’t seem to do much except stir the hornet’s nest.

Thundering claps had loose debris and dirt pluming off in different directions as a helicopter spun its tail around like it pulled an emergency brake.

**L.MILLER:** “Snipers in position.”

An armed soldier, who you guessed was Liam, gave your team a thumbs up with his feet dangling from the opened side panel.

You winced at the bad memories helicopter blades, command trucks, and blaring sirens brought back.

Captain Allen looked over his shoulder.

**[CPT] D.ALLEN:** “Glad you made it, Marauders. Took you long enough.”

**L.LASTIMOSA:** “What’s the situation, Captain?”

He turned his horse, bucking with its front legs in a backpedal. He reached down to pat its neck, calming it as he slid off and landed on the street with a loud “clank.”

He removed his helmet, clipping it to his belt as he walked through the steam billowing from a manhole.

“Follow me.”

…

Different types of operators sat at multiple screens, all watching feeds from surveillance cameras jutting from the top of the monstrous truck. A larger monitor dropped from the ceiling at Captain Allen’s touch, and he painted a red square along the gridded blueprint of the city with his finger.

“We’ve set a perimeter around the park, leaving these alleyways open for criminal disengagement.” He made red X’s, and switched the color on a touch-responsive palette to blue, “This is where we are – Central Command.” He circled the truck, surrounded by others that formed a u-shape around the riot, “Our vehicles are the barricade that prevent progression downtown. The mounted officers pushed them back to the best of their ability, but the rioters are getting restless…”

He switched to yellow, and drew lines running along the side of the plaza, “Civilian bystanders, including the media, are being held to each curb by DPD’s Android K-9 unit in conjunction with a heavy police presence.”

“Looks like everything is under control.” Mayumi kicked off the wall, uncrossing her arms, “What do you need us to do?”

“The androids at the northern end have been cooperative…almost *too* cooperative. Even though
we have the rioters walled of on the south end, they’re divided. Half of them are pissed at us, the other half are still trying to engage the other side. They’re out for blood, and the androids have just enough to feed them.”

He drew a line between the two factions waging different wars.

“Our first move will be a cavalry push from the flanks, widening no man’s land…” He gave you a blank stare, “Otherwise known as the ‘gap between mobs.’”

You smiled in appreciation.

“Once they’re contained, your teams will suppress the rioters by simultaneous insertion; one squad entering from the east end, the other through the west. You will form a wall and push them towards the mounted-officer line, channeling the derelicts through these back streets.”

Then he drew arrows pointing out towards the alleyways he’d previously marked.

“They’ll hit the perimeter at the end of these corridors and be funneled out the other side. Our checkpoints will prevent the crowd from slipping behind us, or the androids. After that, we will disperse them in whatever capacity we need to.”

“And the civilian bystanders?” Grenier asked.

“They’ll be evacuated once the corridors are secure.”

Talon cocked her head, “You aren’t worried they’ll get mixed in the shuffle?”

“As far as I’m concerned, they’re no more innocent than the mob of assholes chucking whatever they can find at my team.” His brows dug in a hard crevice, “If they get gassed? Well, they should’ve listened to me the first 30 times I told them to get the fuck out of here.”

“Not so sure Command would agree, but I’m not the one in charge, either…” Jack tapped Widget on his wing, grinning as the scrutinizing bulb of the drone’s eye lit his face up, “You gonna give us a good aerial feed, little guy?”

“Of course he will.” Grenier huffed, “Don’t ask stupid questions.”

“We doing diamond formation at primary insertion?” Liera asked, elbow balanced on her wrist as she rubbed her chin.

She squinted at the board, eyes flickering between choke points.

“You know me,” He gave her a confident smirk, planting his knuckles in his hips, “Always one for efficiency.”

“Whatsoever you say, Diamond Dog.”

“Save it.” He held a hand up, putting her back in her place with nothing else but a look, “The front echelon will be composed of 10 shields, a 5-5 even split. Three Gas Officers will follow, Talon in the center position. Lastimosa will take the designated Team Leader spot at the heart of formation, supported by Grenier and any intelligence Widget as to offer. Cooper will cover left flank with Officer Chen from Unit 31, and Mayumi will cover the right flank with Officer Brown from Unit 29. The four of you will serve as our Arrest Teams…” He trailed off, “And remember to target the apparent leaders, this time…Don’t go dragging everyone through the line just to rough them up.”
Akane and Jack coughed, laughing at each other.

“The rear echelon will be each of the 10 shields’ assigned partners. Rubber pellets only. No lethal force is authorized unless used against android intervention.”

You and Chris weren’t the only two bothered by the comment.

“So,” Captain Allen pursed his lips, “Any questions?”

“Yeah, I have one.” Liera flipped her hair, a hand on her waist, “Who’s leading the other team?”

“Lastimosa…”

“It’s Royal, isn’t it?”

“Specialist Royal and his team will be entering from the west end, yes.”

“Tch…” Liera looked behind her at her squad mates, “You know what I’m gonna say, right?”

“That we’ve gotta do it bigger and better than them?” Jack winked.

“Hell yeah we do.”

A muffled transmission came through your helmet.

L.MILLER: “Hate to break up the party, but things are goin’ to Hell in a handbasket real quick. Not sure how much longer you expect the pony boys to take this kinda beatin,’ Cap.”

“Copy that.” Captain Allen flipped his helmet on, his face disappearing behind the dark glass.

[CPT] D.ALMLEN: “We’re on our way.”

He had a plan. A good plan.

But you’d learned an invaluable lesson from being shot twice, and having your life jeopardized more than that. From losing yourself, your husband, and your best friend in a series of unfortunate events. From falling in love with an android, and losing him in the end, too. From having a world-renowned FBI Agent remove you from WITSEC, taking on the responsibility of putting you down after Amanda and her CyberLife puppets failed.

You had a plan, in the beginning; and the lesson you’d learned, was that…

Plans never survive first contact.

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**Behind the Scenes**
Written to "Seven Nation Army - Glitch Mob Remix" by The White Stripes

Chapter 54's Reference List

Titanfall Protocols

*Helmet mechanic descriptions taken from "Of Steel and Stardust"*

*Helmet functionality based on Pilot's Helmet in Titanfall*

"*Si vis pacem, para bellum*" is a Latin adage translated as "If you want peace, prepare for war." The phrase is used above all to affirm that one of the most effective means to ensure peace for a people is always to be armed and ready to defend oneself.

Chapter End Notes

This one was unplanned; I split this chapter from the next one just to update faster since work is crazy. I hope you enjoyed it, and the final 14 chapters of Deviant Behavior <3
Chapter Notes

"As the creeper that girdles the tree trunk, the law runneth forward and back; For the strength of the pack is the wolf, and the strength of the wolf is the pack."

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Something that wasn’t often discussed in media coverage and short morning briefings is the psychology of warfare.

How hiding your face from your opponent makes you seem more than human, or not human at all. How a uniform can be intimidating for those being chased by it, but also invigorating to the person wearing it. How a signature red command truck can clear a section of rioters because of a reputation.

With a line of horses charging towards you from the farthest end of “no man’s land” while another ran the opposite direction…

The psychology of warfare told you that the rioters were starting to panic.

They tripped over each other in their retreat. The ones who weren’t taking selfies or recording themselves, others, anything; lashed out with a mob mentality because in their eyes, they were no longer individually responsible for their actions.

In their eyes, they were carrying out a sacred duty; able to do what the police weren’t capable of:

Purging the streets of deviancy.

An officer blocked her head with a small arm-mounted shield, glass popping and sprinkling down. The front legs of her horse swayed, its sheer size being enough to keep at least a foot of distance between the line of Calvary and the violent protest.

L.MILLER: “Captain Allen was right…the androids aren’t doin’ a damn thing except hollerin’ out. Didn’t even try to resist when the calv started takin’ steps at ‘em.”

L.LASTIMOSA: “We’ll worry about them after we get our own kind to get their shit together.”
Your knee was bouncing. You flexed your fingers, the shield’s heavy handle in one palm – your baton in the other. Both tools were extended and ready to engage, no matter how much you were hoping you wouldn’t have to use them in conjunction.

Lastimosa had gone over the Marauders’ insertion tactics – centered around intimidation, fear, and projected psychological whiplash. Two trucks with their ends facing each other hid you, ready to pull forward and expose your position.

You were the soldiers in the Trojan Horse, ready to pour in.

You and 9 others weren’t just going to be on the front line, you were going to be the front line.

But before Liera fell in rank; before she started giving out orders to proceed…

She turned to the squad, raising a fist in the air and shouting through an amplifier to project her voice over the chants coming from behind the trucks.

“WE HAVE GATHERED HERE TODAY TO LAUNCH A SPEAR-HEADED ASSAULT AT THE EAST AND WEST ENDS OF THIS ACT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST THE CITY AND STATE!”

The frontline bashed their shields with their batons, a gruff “HOO-“ leading to the stomping of boots.

A smile curved on your lips, and you didn’t feel guilty about it.

Not even when the angry chants of rioters ceased, and their whispers of concern gave way to peeking heads and fearful eyes.

“They can call us traitors to humanity!”

Liera pointed to the humans’ side.

“They can call us ungrateful enslavers!”

Then she pointed to the androids.

“But who. Are. We?”

She was the leader of this legal gathering, the army of 10 that was about to unleash their own battle cry:

“Riot control!”

One louder than “No More Androids,” a petty attempt at conveying public opinion. More powerful than “We Are People,” because being humane wouldn’t put this kind of madness to a stop.

“And united-”

“HOO!” Clank.

“We-”

“HOO!” Clank.
“STAND!”


Liera clicked the side of her helmet, her visor hiding her face before she fell in line and disappeared behind you.

L.LASTIMOSA: “SHELDS!”

The city shrank into the eye-level window cut in your shield as your shoulder rolled, placing it in front of you. Your breathing and the licking of your lips filled your ears. The ends of the trucks came and went between hot gusts frosting your visor.

Their engines roared, and the knobby tires with deep treads dug into the asphalt as they began to turn. Pebbles scraped against the road. Rocks cracked underneath the weight.

They were the 16-ton curtain being drawn to reveal the prize the rioters had earned – you, and the others armed to the teeth that bridged the gap between both vehicles.

The initial shock from the crowd was short-lived…

The impending doom in their features, however, wasn’t.

It was a terrifying sensation, striking this kind of fear into the hearts of the same civilians you’d taken oaths for.

L.LASTIMOSA: “PUSH UP!”

It was a simple procedure, really. To take a step forward, beat your shield with your baton, and shout along with the chorus of voices like you’d practiced.

To them, on the other side…it must’ve been menacing.

Just not menacing enough to keep them at bay…

Because impulse was another fear response, and it ran rampant through the crowd as they charged.

L.LASTIMOSA: “Here they come – BRACE!”

Angry fists and rolling bodies beat your shield, the kinetic energy flowing through your arm to the handle as blood-thirsty howls were aimed at a Godless sky.

Your head whipped to the side, smacked by something heavy that’d been thrown from beyond your field of vision. Droplets coated your visor as you shook your head, straightened your shoulders, and pushed back.

“FUCK YOU!” A man hollered, his breath fogging the glass that kept your eyes under lock and key.

You ground your teeth, braced yourself – and he kicked off your shield.

He stumbled backwards, caught by his comrades and thrown back into the fight.

C.MILLER: “You good up there?!”
You sucked in wet air, holding it there before letting it out in sync with another shove.

“As-good-as-I’m-gonna-be-“

Your words were weighted, breathless – mashed together in a sad excuse for an answer.

But you didn’t need words to finally get your message across to the mob; that they weren’t fucking getting past you.

They took small steps backwards, even if they were pacing and watching you like they were waiting for the opportune moment to strike.

The army of hidden eyes and scarved faces. Of leather jackets and puffy coats – of moms, wives, sisters; of fathers, husbands, and brothers…just like the police marching right beside you.

But they, were on the wrong side of the law.

The rebel army that you’d protect by teaching them a harsh lesson on restraint.

“UNITED!”

Riot Control shouted.

“WE!”

You joined them, cranking your baton around your side with adrenaline-fueled vigor. Your HUD flashed with a message.

!WARNING!

Heavy impact taken to shield’s [FRONT] panel.

You ignored it, taking a step forward.

“STAND!”

Certain shouts became piercing as the rioters’ heads turned on a swivel.


Your eyes narrowed, cocking your head to the side as an unfamiliar voice came through the comms…but the microphone picked up a loud noise from the opposite end of the riot in the form of a squiggling line.

“WE!”

You smirked at the chant the other insertion team bellowed.

“AMBUSH!”

There was a disturbance behind the rioters, and they didn’t know how to react. Didn’t know which group of police officers to focus on.

Sensory overload alongside swift brute force – another Marauder tactic.

[31] R.ROYAL: “Almost at the rendezvous point, 32!”
L.LASTIMOSA: “Welcome to the party, 31.”

[31] R.ROYAL: “Ah, Liera…Of course you’re out here in this shit.”

C.GRENIER: “Clear the channel, we’ve got a runner!”

An aerial view from Widget showed a woman with a scarf dangling to her knees and a tank top giving way to dirt-smudged arms. You wondered if she was cold, but immediately jumped to more troubling matters. Her hands were fastened around a long pole, a tattered United States’ flag waving in the wind.

Her animal-like features were electrifying as she grew closer…and closer…and closer, until the pole was lowered like a joust.

[CPT] D.ALMEN: “VEGA!”


She didn’t crack when the deep barks started, or the pitter-patter of nails tapping along the pavement.

You planted the side of your fist along the inside of your shield, your baton sticking out as your forearms met; ready to take the brunt of the javelin taking aim…

The woman didn’t get the chance to launch it.

Massive paws replaced her shoulders, pinning them down; outfitted in a four-legged variant of a DPD POLICE vest…

An android canine with eyes like dying stars lighting up the earrings hanging from the sides of the subdued woman’s face; a cosmic blue under tight-knit fur and sinking brows. Hot steam puffed through a nose matching the color of dark matter above scrunching lips. Saliva dripped and formed glowing dust trails as each fang parted like asteroids from a belt.


[CPT] D.ALMEN: “32, form up and cover Vega for retrieval.”

The dog’s neck ripped back and forth, holding the woman down with its weight and clamping grip. It wasn’t long before the shield-line passed them, and his handler moved in to cuff the bleeding rioter, followed by loving ear scratches and wagging tails.

C.MILLER: “Man, I want one of those pups…”

You smirked, remembering his fond conversation about the old K-9 unit and treats. Wondered what kind of money CyberLife dropped making the robot hounds versus what they charged for them. Came to the conclusion it didn’t matter much, because they were effective.

[31] T.CHEN: “We’ve got another one, Captain!”

[CPT] D.ALMEN: “In pursuit-“

A man had broken through, and Captain Allen made it a personal matter.

He was at the ready, heels digging into his horse as he took on a perfect riding stance over
extending legs that rippled in a dark sheen, the padded muscles projecting heaving strides and
digging hooves further. A wild flurry of strands of hair, and a tossing mane. The clearing of
distance and a baton-armed limb raising from the rest of the rider’s body like the wing of an
eagle…

And it swooped down. Knocked the man to the ground.

Allen yanked the reins and slid off his horse, landing with his knee in the man’s back and cuffs
already in hand.

[CPT] D.ALLEN: “Nearest Arrest Officer, on my location!”

[29] C.BROWN: “Copy that.”

He slipped through the mounted-police-border, grabbing the man and hauling him towards a
truck.

L.LASTIMOSA: “32, eyes forward!”

The rioters parted, a shield marking the tip of the second spear and the team behind him breaking
through.


A.MAYUMI: “Are you surprised?”

L.LASTIMOSA: “His ego’s hurt, leave him alone.”

She sent out a notification, your HUD flashing with moving diagrams. You were singled out,
your assigned position flashing red.

L.LASTIMOSA: “Front Echelon – prepare to merge with Unit 31 as per onscreen instructions,
over!”

The foremost shield-bearers turned on their heels towards each border of the separated crowd.
The left sides of either team joined in a rushed assault, and the right did the same. You almost
tripped over yourself shuffling in place, your shield catching the edge of someone less coordinated
than you. Even still, your link in the wall was chained.

Your leg barred behind you as another body collided with your metal barrier, hurling an insult
over the top.

Your arms were heavy. You were tired.

This was all bullshit.

You wanted to lay around the house and be lazy with Connor – to be able to let the world know
you were with him, and loved him – wanted him with you. Wanted to drink too much in your
apartment and make an ass out of yourself when you’d try to dance with him. Wanted to cook
meals together, and watch movies together, maybe even play a game. Take a vacation.

Travel.

Your job, your life, didn’t permit that kind of downtime…

Because androids weren’t the only beings “Made in Detroit.”
L.LASTIMOSA: “LET’S PROCEED SLOWLY!”

[31] R.ROYAL: “YOU HEARD HER! PUSH FORWARD!”

But Detroit didn’t raise its young to shy away from danger, or to give up when obstacles seemed insurmountable...

No.

When you bite at Detroit, Detroit bites back; with fangs in the form of riot shields and batons - of MILITIA gear and a line formed shoulder-to-shoulder.

DPD, the snapping jaws of a city that was tired of everyone’s bullshit.

You blacked out long enough to miss the conscious decision to put all your frustrated strength into a retaliating shove propelled by a roar.

You swung your baton up and over your shoulder, the loud crack of shattering bone and paperwork that would be delivered to your desk following human-on-human violence.

And as you fought through the writhing bodies and abandoned hopes, widening the vacant section with streaks of blood, sweat, and tears running down the window cut in your shield…As you ducked your head and snaked your neck, dodging rebellious debris that happened to slip over…

Your newfound sense of responsibility overrode your desire to be free of your programmed restraints.

L.LASTIMOSA: “Cooper, watch your feet – straggler on the ground.”

J.COOPER: “Already have him in cuffs, sis.”

C.GRENIER: “Need some help on the south front!”

S.TALON: “Copy that. Captain Allen, permission to deploy crowd control.”


S.TALON: “Rodger that. Grenier, stand by.”

C.GRENIER: “Eyes up 32, TWELVE O’CLOCK!”

A bottle, filled halfway with a t-shirt stuffed down the neck, spun from a perfect toss. Flaming hair met the other end, blue and hot and ready to burn flesh and bone.

C.GRENIER: “Widget’s not gonna make it for interception!”

S.TALON: “Liam, get ready!”

L.MILLER: “Cue me up, Talon!”

A hallowed “thump” came from behind you, and you turned your head only a notch to see the once-gentle woman holding what looked like a cannon on her hip. She leaned back, feet apart to balance herself; wrapped her hand around the barrel, pointed the nose to the sky, and kept the stock steady.
S.TALON: “Fire in the hole!”

Sparks and discharge followed the pull of a trigger. Your eyes followed a soaring cannister, passing the Molotov cocktail in the air like missiles trading high-fives.

The riot disappeared in a mess of smoke.

A crack pierced the cold air – a hot boom of thunder leading up to a pop of glass blending in with snowflakes as it sprinkled down. There was a splash of liquid and a wall of fire that blossomed along the oil-slicked street.

L.MILLER: “Scoped, and, dropped.”

You squinted as the thermal vision of your visor corrected itself, pin-pointing the smoke-screened bodies that ran blindly into the back barricade.

S.TALON: “Prepping another one for you guys, Grenier.”

L.LASTIMOSA: “Front Echelon, push forward and hold the line. We need to give her time to help them!”

Another set of orders you carried out willingly…

Because with this kingdom under siege, you’d stormed the castle. Had breached straight into the badlands of Grand Circus Park.

An attraction of performers and caged animals that outraged against their current living conditions. A montage of acrobatics, iron jaws, Icarus dashes, and phoenix dives through the flames that engulfed flipping thoughts and spiraling hate.

As the rioters were funneled through the Hot Gates of Detroit by the Spartan Warriors pushing them back; a last stand made by those tasked with keeping force multipliers tallied and the body count low – either harmed by others or themselves…

A new challenge presented itself through the tear-gas.

The hidden audience that wasn’t running for cover. The most cooperative of all those who’d gathered in the park.

Fingers flexed, heels rocked, and shoulders rolled nervously.

You turned your head – eyes opening and closing, sweat dropping from your lashes. Lungs inhaling and exhaling; mind refocusing on the peaceful protest that watched on with significantly less wear and tear than humanity.

United, you stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the rest of your kind – amidst the other people who had families to return to, orders to carry out, and a city to salvage.

And yet, divided from the choice of neutrality…

You feared an inevitable ambush.
Behind the Scenes

Inspired by "No Church in the Wild"

"Scoped and dropped," quote taken from Garrus in Mass Effect.

JVEGA (James Vega) name taken from Mass Effect.

"Let's proceed slowly," quote taken from Monty in R6.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you all had a great start to the New Year and a wonderful holiday! Love you guys, sorry it took so long! Work is finally ramping down <3
Divided We Ambush

Chapter Summary

November 10th, 2038
PM 02:25:41

Chapter Notes

"Ye may kill for yourselves, and your mates, and your cubs as they need and ye can; But kill not for pleasure of killing, and seven times never kill man."

A tranquil mind in harrowing times is the most coveted form of transcendence. To not share the same fears as others, and have your worries misplaced so that you remained unpredictable.

That wasn’t you.

[CPT] D.ALLEN: “Calvary, you are to charge and replace the wall. All boots on the ground – rally at my position. Converge on me, Roman Formation!”

The horses had charged, and the riot had been pushed back behind the park’s established perimeter held by recycled police officers, Gavin included, that once babysat the media and civilian bystanders. The tear gas had evacuated them. The humans, had fled.

Those who suffered the human condition, had not.

Now, there was a different wall. A different formation.

A dissimilar set of orders that rolled off a shaken voice, however tranquil the mind that dictated the words.

[CPT] D.ALLEN: “Riflemen, ready up.”

19 shield-bearers that no longer had the immediate concern of humane disorder took to a knee…

And the 20th, well...

You needed some convincing.

C.MILLER: “Come on, partner…”

He patted your shoulder, his eyes on your HUD, comforting.
C.MILLER: “It’s just a precaution.”

Your worries had been misplaced – misdirected, to the android with caramel skin and matching eyes; one of which came from Chloe. They held no emotion; no concern. He just waited.

He waited alongside North, and Josh. A blue-haired Traci, holding hands with a woman. A man wearing a cape of sorts with a tattered face, a Thirium-colored scar splitting his cheek. Another man in a grey military jacket with patches along his sleeves…

The same patches on his comrade’s cape…and the insignias were familiar.

You’d seen it somewhere before, but couldn’t remember where.

You cocked your head, squinting at the pair as you planted your knee and the end of your shield in the thin layer of snow.

The stock of Chris’s gun leveled with the top of your head.

“Something doesn’t feel right…” You murmured.

C.MILLER: “You noticed?”

A light breeze swept a glittering curtain across the divide; flakes of ice reflecting red and blue lights from the trucks humming behind you. The pumping helicopter blades circling overhead switched direction, its tail throwing a shadow over the glistening wall of steel aimed at Jericho.

L.MILLER: “Captain, I’ve got a clean shot on the leader. Want me to take ‘im out?”

[CPT] D.ALLEN: “We’re waiting on orders from-”

CENTRAL: “All units, repeat, all units, I am opening a channel for the Commander. Patching through. Over.”


The lot of you held your breath, and a cough came through the comms.

Liera was holding a gun over Mayumi’s head to your right. She cracked her neck, the nose of her weapon jostling up and down – but only in controlled increments.

L.LASTIMOSA: “Guess we’re having too much fun if he’s getting involved…”


Her shoulders bounced in a huff – not that you could see her face.

[CDR] A.MARTELLO: “This is Commander Martello to all units involved in Operation Para Bellum. Due to heavy scrutiny from the public involving violent actions taken against civilians in the field, you are to neutralize all immediate threats and return to Central Station, double time.”

Chatter erupted along the line, quickly subdued by another broadcast.

[CDR] A.MARTELLO: “I understand you felt as though you had to do what was necessary,
and that will be a conversation had between Captain Allen and I at a later date. Know that the rest of Michigan’s task forces are with you in spirit, and remember…”

He sighed, and smacked his lips.

[CDR] A.MARTELLO: “The nation…the world, is watching.”

A notification flashed on your screen.

[TRANSMISSION ENDED]

And it didn’t take long for a new one to take its place.

A.MAYUMI: “Captain, we can’t just kill unarmed protestors because those rioting assholes thought we were too hard on them.”

C.GRENIER: “They threw a Molotov at us for crying out loud!”

J.COOPER: “Killing the androids won’t rectify anything. We haven’t even talked to them yet!”

S.TALON: “He’s not even here, he doesn’t-t-


A horse snorted, a saddle jingled, and crunching boots approached from the back. The shadow of Chris’s rifle disappeared, and a gentle hand landed on your shoulder.

[CPT] D.ALLEN: “Hold your position, Officer.”

You looked up at him with a nod, gulping before turning back to Markus and the others. Captain Allen held a box-shaped microphone that was strapped to his uniform up to his concealed mouth.

[CPT] D.ALLEN: “You are to disperse immediately…” His voice trailed off, “Or there will, be consequences.”

“We came here to demonstrate peacefully,” Markus answered, “And to tell humans that we are living beings.”

He didn’t even hesitate. Didn’t take a second to formulate a response. With someone of his stature, in his current position, he probably didn’t need, or couldn’t afford, the extra time.

“All we want is to live free.”

Allen let out a sigh, so strong that you heard it through his helmet.

He, hesitated.

[CPT] D.ALLEN: “This is an illegal gathering. Disperse immediately, or we will open fire…”

“We’re not looking for confrontation,” Markus smirked, holding up his hands and easing them forward, “We’ve done no harm, we have no intention of doing any…” That confident smirk dissolved into resilience, and his brows creased, “But know that we are not going anywhere, until we have secured our freedom.”

There was a stale taste in your mouth. A certain dryness that made you want to catch one of the soft flurries to wet it.
A delicate twinkle had you looking off in the distance— a small tree with lights dancing on each decorated limb. It matched the warm white from the LED snowflakes plastered under street lights and above shop windows; contrasting the blue strips strung along the side of the Woodland Avenue bridge.

C.MILLER: “Tell me, Captain…”

You shot a brief look behind you, your brows pinching. Chris didn’t sound like himself.

C.MILLER: “…Have you ever decorated a Christmas tree with your daughter?”

An odd question at a time where the tipping point began to pick a side, and the needle started to fall. A moment where an army of androids refused to budge, and you’d just received orders to make them…to charge.

You gulped.

All things considered, maybe it wasn’t that odd of a question at all.

[CPT] D.ALLEN: “Not as many as I’d have liked to…there was a time where a soldier’s life was all I knew.”

His voice was low and crisp, like they were sharing final goodbyes.

It made you nervous.

C.MILLER: “…I would have liked to have decorated a tree with my son.”

The past-tense had your skin prickle. Had you double-checking the date and time on your HUD, because the last you saw—the lot of you were still in the here and now.

“You will.”

You didn’t look at them. Didn’t need to see the looks they were giving you, because you felt it. Heard the renewed conviction in Allen’s demeanor, and the strength in Chris’s soul.

[CPT] D.ALLEN: “I repeat: This is an illegal gathering. If you do not disperse immediately, we, will, shoot.”

A decision point at point blank.

[CPT] D.ALLEN: “Come on, you idiots…”

He didn’t want to open fire, or carry out the orders from Michigan’s SWAT Commander, Adriano Martello. He felt it too. This all felt wrong.

S.TALON: “Captain, this is going against the Commander’s direct orders—“


He smacked his lips in the mic, holding it closer to his helmet.

[CPT] D.ALLEN: “This, is your last, chance…Disperse immediately, or you will all be killed!”
He was trying to scare them, because a heeded warning hadn’t been enough.

But Markus just watched.

As humane as androids were, or acted, deviants had yet to master the art of communication skills. A critical component of human survival, and the dictating factor of human instincts.

To feel someone watching; to have that sixth sense epiphany when specialized gaze-detection cells in your brain started to wake up, and the warning anchor dropping in your stomach when you made eye contact with the assailant.

Markus raised his hand. Drilled into the faces hidden by smoke and black mirrors. Looked to the side as Josh tried to talk him down.

But that feeling…that feeling of intense gaze, never went away.

Maybe it wasn’t him you were detecting.

“David!”

The man in the military coat stepped forward, a cap hiding his face from the sun beating down in a vain attempt to warm the cold battlefield.

“Rupert, don’t-” Markus spat, but his follower ignored him.

[CPT] D.ALLEN: “M-Marco…?”

He too broke away from his collected species, just in front of the line of shields.

L.LASTIMOSA: “Captain, it’s a trap-“

Allen silenced her with a hand held behind him, and a pair of fingers clicked his visor open.

The steps he took were slow and cautious, like even he knew what he was doing was stupid and went against his survival instincts.

“I thought you were dead. And then I heard about the security breach at the Tower…What you did…”

The android responsible for releasing Revised Article 9. The war veteran Captain Allen had spoken so highly of, and was so saddened by the mere utterance of his name…

“Humans.” The android wearing the cape with Marco’s symbol on it shuddered, “Ralph doesn’t like humans. They’re dangerous!” He twitched, “They may hurt Rupert!”

Captain Allen froze. His head toggled between Marco and the man named Ralph, holding his hands out, “…Tom?”

“He is Ralph, now. We all have different names than before…A lot of things are different, ‘Captain’ Allen.”

Allen looked at the ground before cocking his chin to the side, “How many others survived the…incident, in Africa?”

A flicker of light caught your attention. A distant, faint twinkle.

A touch of color out of place. A shadow that didn’t match with its surroundings. A shape that
wasn’t where it was supposed to be.

L.MILLER: “Hate to break up this little reunion, Cap, but we’ve got a disturbance about six and a half klicks north. Somethin’ in the window, near the roof. Can’t get a good angle.”

Allen closed his visor, looking up to the misaligning details and back to Rupert.

“This was a trap…”

“No, I-“

He took a step back, drawing the rifle slung around his chest, “And you two helped him.”

“You must excuse Ralph.”

The mangled android shouted across the divide, gaining the attention of his people – Markus included.

“Sometimes his fear makes him do things he regrets…”

Your eyes switched left and right, fingers aching from the tightening grip around your shield’s handle. Sweat collected into the fabric band around your forehead, dripping down your cheeks and neck.

“Captain Allen needs help.”

C.MILLER: “Don’t you dare-“

You were the third person in this act of defiance that would ignore the warnings to hold position; to not break the line or hint at a divided front.

But, as the saying went…

L.LASTIMOSA: “What are you doing?!”

United, We Stand.

C.MILLER: “Get back here!”

And Divided, We Ambush.

L.LASTIMOSA: “Close th…g...p-“

A good idea, in theory…if you were the one doing the *ambushing*.

The shields behind you closed, and you were on your own; subjected to white noise, fragmented pixels, and artifact lines screen-tearing through your HUD.

The static interference wasn’t enough to hide Allen’s outline through pink specs and green pops. You pushed through it, gritting your teeth as a migraine replaced any amount of fervent determination.

Someone was trying to communicate with you.

Someone who’s voice was soothing and fatal as it faded *in*, when Liera’s faded *out*. The same person who’d you once known, but went by a *different* name, now.
An RK800, serial number #313 248 317…dash fifty-two.

**RK800 #313 248 317 – 52:** “…Yo… o…ce told m…that an idea, cannot be killed.”

Your pulse banged against your armor, and echoed back from the inside of your newly-welded riot shield, sent to you by CyberLife.

A company that created and dispersed an artificial intelligence program that knew how to find the kinks, and make cracks.

You stumbled through the darkness, lost in a maze of twisted trees and danger…

Up there, on that high-rise…your focus followed the beacon of Morse code signaled by flashes of light, guiding your way through the maelstrom caught between safe harbors.

As tranquil as you tried to render your mind, even while landing on your back with the white sky as a flag planted black…

Another message reinforced these harrowing times.

**RK800 #313 248 317 – 52:** “…I still disagree.”

You were a survivor.

A smart prey that’d practiced a certain skill at any and all expense just to keep your lungs full of oxygen and your fire, alive…

But so, was Amanda.

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**Behind the Scenes**

**Commander Adriano Martello** named after “Maestro,” from R6.

“Our [Operation Para Bellum” was the DLC Maestro was released in.**

Glaz quote taken from R6 in reference to the sniper spotting.

Conversation between Captain Allen and Chris regarding the Christmas tree inspired by the opening cut-scene of Assassin’s Creed: Odyssey.

**Roman Formation**

**Maximum Range of a Sniper Rifle**

**Gaze-Detection**
End Notes

Chinese translation by GloriaLAU on LOFTER!

Russian translation by jellyFish0719 on ficbook!

Spanish translation by ViktoriaMagrey right here on AO3!

Turkish translation by Philosophical_Army right here on AO3!

Thank you guys for reaching out, and I love you all so much for doing this. <3 It's an honor and a blessing.

***Join us in the Deviant Behavior Discord (now with over 200 members) to say hi to myself, the betas, other members of the Detroit: Become Human community, play with the bot, or shamelessly lurk (which, let's be honest, that's what Discord is for)

***Check out the Deviant Behavior Showcase for submitted artwork, voiced narration, and the fic's playlist.

***A WIP of Deviant Behavior's voiced narration is now available by Kabibi AudioFics! IT IS SO GOOD.

Works inspired by this one:

Discord and Harmony by Precursor, Coming to Grips by SilverLavellen, A Friend in Need by Ms_Chanandler_Bong, A Midsummer Night's Dream by TheAmeliaNathan, A NeverEnding Story by TheAmeliaNathan, Deviant Behavior Showcase by Precursor, A Winter's Tale by TheAmeliaNathan, The longest Night by TheAmeliaNathan, "There Are No Fanfictions, Only Interpretations." by YouScruffyNerfHerder, Hope Forever by TheAmeliaNathan, A little Party never killed nobody by TheAmeliaNathan, Dream a little dream of me by TheAmeliaNathan, As long as there's christmas by TheAmeliaNathan, Sleeping Beauty by TheAmeliaNathan

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