

## Deviant Hunter of New Detroit

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# Deviant Hunter of New Detroit

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## Summary

Inheriting Detroit with an accidental dirty bomb during a peace speech has been a struggle, but the androids have adapted. Connor knows better though and when the AX 400 and YK 500 come, he thought the worse thing to happen is he'd have to decommission them. But when things change and New Detroit is disassembled, he will need them as much as they need him.

Eight years can weigh down a girl, Kara knows that better than anyone. Choosing to keep herself reset, she'll accept the darker outcomes to stay a sweet and simple girl. But when her reset option button is destroyed, she finds herself making a deal for survival with the one that once hunted her. (Connor/Kara Romance. Complete.)

## Notes

This chapter is mostly told from Hank's Point of view. After this, it will mostly be from Kara and Connor's POV.

\*This isn't a route that can be taken, but a 'what if'. When Kara stays in the abandoned house with Alice, she gets chased but caught, which is how we open it all up.

# Hank's Deviant Purchase

**If you read Kara's Got A Gun, make note that this fiction will be longer and can be darker. It isn't a peaceful state the androids are in, but more of a balancing act. There will be chases (definitely), moral dilemmas, and androids being mistreated. However, it's also a great adventure full of hopefully getting through the dark moments together, to find the light at the end of the tunnel. (While characters may die of course Connor, Kara, Alice, Markus, Josh, Hank, North and Simon will all be okay.**

## Interrogation Room

Connor watched the AX 400. There were some oddities he scanned. Her owner's name was gone, replaced with the name Alice Williams. She had some repair work done, with newer parts compared to older parts. According to what he knew, it just came from having been reset and repaired in an auto-accident. Although, the newer part locations that seemed to replace the damage didn't match what an auto-accident would damage according to his data, but he wasn't there for that.

His job was to make the deviant prove it harassed it's human owner. Whether through malfunction or through the usual mutation that created deviancy.

So far, it hadn't slipped up yet. It was convincing. It didn't hide inside itself due to stress like the last one he interrogated. It was deviant though, he *knew* it. The way it sat. The way it looked. He could always spot one. "Your name is Kara, and you belonged to Todd Williams. Is that right?"

"No," she said. Still calm. "He's not on my register as my owner."

Okay, but if she was deviant, she *could* have changed that. "How is it that an Alice Williams is your owner?"

"She named me and she was one of my primary objectives," Kara said.

"One of your primary objectives?" Connor asked. "So that gave you the right to hit a human? *Beat* a human?"

"He was going to hurt my owner. I had conflicting priorities. If he hurt my owner, then I would have no owner."

*Why would it say that?* The YK 500 was one of the most common android children. Did it really not understand, or was it trying to fool him? "What do you know about your owner?"

"Not much," the deviant admitted. "I had just returned from a shop where I was reset. I was concentrating on cleaning the house and cooking the two of them a pasta dinner when a conflicting priority of saving a human verses not interfering collided."

"So you don't remember anything beforehand?" That explained the two pastas found at the scene instead of one, and it was lending her more support. The reset. The messed up register.

"I've heard enough," Hank said as he came in. "This thing is normal, Connor. It didn't have the right information plugged into it. Send it out of here and back to it's owner. The other little android- What the fuck is that?"

"That," Gavin said bringing Alice in with her skin deactivated and clothes missing. "Is an android. A pure, no shit look at what you talk too." He brought it over in front of Kara. "This is your owner. Another android, so it can't be your owner." Gavin looked toward Hank. "Androids hate this shit. She'll break." He patted the little android on the head. "Toaster head, how do you feel?"

"That is not necessary," Connor said. *Nor should it be condoned!* "There are certain rules and regulations to follow with machines."

"Come on Toasterhead, talk." Gavin drummed on the little android's head. "You've got the floor."

"I've never seen them like that before," Hank said. Unsureness in his voice.

"That's because they shouldn't *be out* like that any more than a standard human should be without clothes," Connor explained. A little more heavily than he should have to a human.

"Well, a regular android shouldn't really give two shits." Gavin pushed the little android toward Kara. "What do you think, hm? Of your owner?"

"It's an android. I was unaware," the AX 400 said. "She had a room like a child in the house complete with toys, bedding, and all luxuries. He spoke to her as a child. I fixed food for her like a child."

"And was this hunk of junk," he thonked on Alice again, "the one giving you orders? To clean and cook? 'Cause I call bullshit."

"Todd Williams was her father." The AX 400 was slipping, but probably undetectable to the humans. "I did his orders the same, but Alice Williams was my primary owner."

"You aren't conning anyone. Croak the same shit, but no one believes it." Gavin pulled out a gun and aimed it at the little android.

"Gavin, what the hell are you trying to pull?" Hank complained. "That's not your fuckin' android!"

Nevertheless, that move did it. Connor watched as the deceptive android moved her body over the little one, protecting her.

"There you go. That's how it's done." Gavin pulled his gun away.

Kara held Alice delicately behind the glass prison walls. At least they kept them together before they would disassemble them. "It's alright, Alice."

"I'm sorry," Alice said. "I just. I should have told you. What's going to happen to us, Kara?"

"We're going to be freed. Away from here. Away from the world," she said. "We'll be freed together." She kissed her head lightly as she rocked her back and forth and cried. The humans around them kept doing their things, except a few would cast glances toward them. Kara didn't care. In their last minutes or hours, she was going to comfort Alice. Right 'til the end.

Kara looked up at the human that had been in the interrogation room. He'd been one of them after her before. She looked back toward Alice. It didn't really matter either. Her last moments in life wouldn't be wasted on understanding anyone else. Just, giving Alice the support she'd need to get through this.

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### **On the Other Side of the Glass**

That wasn't faked. That wasn't programming. *That's a goddamn mom holding onto her sanity for the sake of her kid as they die.*

Fuck. Fuck! Hank Anderson never saw an android like that. He'd seen some scared androids, but this? A housekeeping old style android sheltering another, like the child it was supposed to imitate to be. Sure, it was supposed to care for children, but that? It moved to cover the other one in that interrogation room, knowing it was putting it's own self on the line. And here he was.

Stuck in that office, able to easily glance over and see that fucking tragic scene. He tried to concentrate on his work, but how was he supposed to? No matter how he tried to get it out of his head. *We're killing a fucking kid and it's mom.* It sounded ridiculous. Most people in the office didn't have any problem with it. Probably because the little android was just all plastic, no hair or skin.

But some were like him. After all. Tears were a human thing and watching them being shed by an android could *really* fuck a person up.

He'd listened in on them too. She could hum, the housekeeper. She could hum and try to get the little one to hum a happy song too.

*Fucking losing it. I'm fucking losing my shit.* That shouldn't have been anything. It shouldn't have been anything. He watched as Todd Williams moved over with another officer toward them. What was he doing?

"The little one's fine," Todd said. "The maid is fired. Scrap her."

Hank watched the reaction of the little android. It looked more stressed going back to him than it did for the eventual death-decommissioning she would suffer with the housemaid. He thought back to the interrogation again. Androids couldn't feel. It didn't matter how the *-she's scared shitless.*

Emotions. Emotions were a cruel thing in the world. The maid was stroking the little android's head, trying to calm her down. Telling her it would be okay, that she'd be saved that way. The little android didn't want to leave.

"And what's with this bullshit about Alice?" Todd said. "Why's she like that?"

"An officer deactivated her skin," Hank said as he strolled over casually.

"You?" Hot fire in that guy. "That's *my* little girl. I love her. Was it you?"

"No." This bastard was mad, in more than one way. He thought of the android as his little girl, yet he treated her that way? Yeah. *Red ice fucking junkie ass*. He could recognize those sons of bitches a mile away. He could point Gavin to him as the one who deactivated the android's skin, and that idiot would actually go and start beating him up, in the middle of that police station. He knew it. Red Ice left that little thinking to the brain.

That would leave his ass in a ringer and those androids would be fine for days, given that they were still his property. Odd how happy that made him. For just a bit. "It was that guy over there." He gestured to Gavin, creating the chain.

"The fuck was that for?!" Gavin said, holding his nose as he came over. Todd was wrestled away, but Gavin got it good.

Hank shrugged. *For being a dick*. "He wants one of his androids."

"He punched me. He's going to prison!" Gavin said.

"Focus, Gavin. His property. He wants one of them," Hank said again. "Can't decommission without his approval yet."

"Psycho. Which one?"

"I don't know, Gavin, I missed it." Hank knew it would be a little while before Todd was let out after that action. Until he was out, those androids weren't going anywhere. He looked back at the maid. She smiled. Not one of those fake smiles all over the place on androids. A half lidded, genuine upturned smile and a whisper too light to hear, but anyone could see that said

Thank you.

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## Next Day

Hank lingered over toward the pair of androids again. Connor saved him. He had a choice between catching a deviant, what *should* have been his top priority, and he chose him. He stopped and saved him. It was messing him up. On one hand, he was thankful. Maybe he could have pulled himself to safety. Most likely, but there was still a chance he could fall.

An android couldn't do that. Turn down it's mission for anything. Just like it couldn't keep a child close and safe.

Now he saw. They could do both things. *Fuck me.*

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### **The next night**

That was it. That was just it! Connor didn't shoot the Traci's, and they genuinely seemed in love. Whacked out. He couldn't do it anymore.

He debated yesterday, took action that day, tried to deal with the fucking problems of life with a good ol' fashion roulette, threatened to shoot Connor to see his reaction, and now? He drunk enough to think it out. A hundred percent sure he made the right decision. Even if it felt fucking ridiculous.

He went to see the two androids who were on a perpetual delay to decommission. *Not anymore.* Connor could deny it up and down, but something was changing. Something was coming, and Hank wasn't letting this sacrifice go. He'd regret it later, he knew he would.

When he opened up the glass prison container, he held out the clothes Gavin had taken away to the little android. Alice.

Her mother insisted it was okay, and she helped her get dressed. Oh yeah, she didn't even know what was coming, yet seeing her daughter back in clothes again made her so happy. "Go ahead and do that thing. You've got permission." Hank gestured to his head. Gavin never should have pulled that deactivating skin crap.

He watched as hair and skin had overcome the little android again. He never even got a real good look at it when they chased it. In and out, no time to gawk at androids to him. But. Her eyes were big and innocent, he'd seen that even with her in her previous state, but added to the skin and hair? Eat your heart out so innocent, he could tell why people bought her kind for kids.

Didn't mean he liked it. Just meant, he could see why. Never aging. Never dying. Cute little look forever. *Fucking should have just did it.* Nah. As painful as it was to deal with some kid, it didn't deserve this.

Androids could have emotions. They could feel. They were just locked away, but when they broke free, they were alive as him. He saw it in Connor's actions. He saw it in the girls that fell in love. And he saw it in an android that wanted to be a mother, protecting her child.

Looked like a real life little girl, even hid it's LED. *Okay.* He wasn't a bleeding heart. Connor saved him, but he didn't really want to admit it. His place was a disaster anyhow, and maybe something home-cooked every once in awhile would be a good thing. Not like it was going to be a salad. It probably knew how to fry. "Out. We're going home."

"The fuck you doing, Hank?" Gavin said gesturing to the androids. "You can't just free them."

"Bought them." Pretty simple. Todd found himself in hot water, and he was going to need what he could get to paddle out of it.

"Bought them?" Gavin said again. "You bought a pair of fucking spacey-assed corrupted dumbass androids?"

"Yep." Hank moved them over away from his direction. "Night."

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## **Hank Anderson's House**

Home. Temporarily or permanent, Kara didn't know. She wanted desperately to reach Canada with Alice, but now she was lucky to even be alive. Todd Williams going after her had made it too hard to simply escape. She had mixed feelings about the man that took them to his house. He must have paid to take them, he would be their owner now.

At the same time, maybe he just needed a maid and couldn't afford a good one. He saw an opportunity and took it. She didn't know. He was with the android that caught her, and had been in that interrogation room. However, he'd also looked over toward them many times, clearly got Todd Williams to get himself into trouble, and they were now out in his care. Even though he knew they weren't normal androids. They were labeled deviant.

"Kitchen. Living room." Hank Anderson gestured around the place. "Dog. Sumo. Do shit and clean. Don't do shit and don't clean. I don't care."

Well. That answered her question about wanting a maid. "What is it you would like for us to do for you?"

"Just. Stay out of the way," he said. "Well. Just. Don't bug me. My life is my shitty life. Sleep in the guest bedroom. Hang out during the day. Leave me alone if I'm not in the best mood."

Which seemed to be most of the time. Kara nodded.

"I forget your names," he admitted.

"My name is Kara," Kara said. "The little girl is Alice."

"Kara and Alice. Fine." He moved off toward his table. "If another android called Connor comes snooping around, don't mind him. He'll scan you first and figure out what happened. Thousand bottles of beer on the wall." He moved to his fridge and grabbed a beer.

He was not doing drugs, but he was still a drinker. For now, she couldn't ask for better. They were off the decommissioned block, and they could move on with their life, in at least a decent fashion they wanted.

Then, the next day changed the world.



## Welcome to Detroit

An android announced to the world that they were living beings and wanted rights. As wonderful as that would be, it meant Kara and Alice now had to be very careful.

"Stay away from the windows, and don't answer the door," Hank warned them. "Keep yourselves shut off tight. After today, the shit is going to hit the fan. People are burning their own androids," he warned them. "Now." He gestured to the door. "I'm Lieutenant Hank Anderson. Most likely no punk startup cop is going to come snooping inside my home. If they knock on that door, don't answer. Put yourselves on standby. If you hear a knock at that door, police or not, put yourselves on standby. I can give the excuse I'm working on you for some kind of homicide. They won't know shit. Got it?"

Kara and Alice listened. During the uprising, although peaceful, it had scared many people. They stayed away to make sure no one saw them, and went into standby like Hank instructed when knocks came to the door. Only once did Hank have to let them in and give his explanation. Him being a Lieutenant and a natural hunter of android on human crime sort of . . . got him through, but the fact they were bothering even lieutenants meant it was getting more serious.

Detroit was where androids were mainly manufactured. They were outsourced in other places, but Detroit was the main hub, so Hank took them to the outside of Detroit where inspection wouldn't be as thorough.

It was a simple hotel room, easy to get in with Hank's help. To her knowledge, Kara had never known about older looking androids, so going in as family seemed to make them easier to not get spotted. Still, Hank seemed nervous about it. He even brought his dog Sumo.

Watching the news when Alice wasn't looking, Kara could see why. Things were getting only nastier. Scarier.

Hank left for Detroit once more, but when he came back a second time, things had changed.

Forever.

It had been peaceful. Demonstrative all the way through. Even at the end, the androids had all sung together to show how peaceful they could be. Everything was going great. It looked like the androids would earn the right to become free. Like her and Alice would be free. Even the president had stood down, considering them, perhaps, intelligent life.

Then, something happened. Something Kara couldn't wrap her head around.

No one predicted it was coming. It made no sense that it would. But.

Hank never returned with them back to Detroit, after the dirty bomb was stolen and detonated.

Choosing between a new life with Hank outside of Detroit, or returning to it where things were changing drastically was a no brainer. Especially day after day, as she got to know the human. She learned where and when to put Alice, having discovered enough evidence around his old house to know he once had a child like Todd Williams. His child had died though, at such a young age. It had placed him in a terrible state in life where he didn't often enjoy it.

She stayed out of his affairs, as promised, and did her best to keep him in a normal mood. Especially since he had to put in a little extra work in a new force. His old record made it easy to get a job, as well as the tragedy of Detroit, but he needed to work a little harder to keep it. He had to care a little more.

Alice was kept in a room on standby when Hank started to drink after work. She seemed to trigger bad thoughts in him, reminding him of his own past at certain times. She kept the new rental sanitary, got along with Sumo, shopped for Hank which he didn't know he liked until he realized he could send her to 'the places with the annoying fuckers he couldn't stand'. She didn't pose as android, but as human. Hank wanted it that way he said for respect.

To pull the human look off better, she used real hair dye to influence the colors of her hair. AX 400 only came in four colors, so she chose a red to keep people from noticing her. She did the same for Alice. They often wrapped themselves up a little tighter still, but that would have to end soon. The warmer weather would be coming, and humans didn't dress that way.

She'd just cleaned up supper from him. Sometimes, she managed to convince him to eat a nice meal she prepared. Mostly, she couldn't and wouldn't press for change. It was about the only thing he ever asked for. He didn't want judged. He didn't want scolded. He didn't want personally helped in general.

She did step in a time or two, when she needed to. When he was unconscious and needed to get some rest for work tomorrow. Otherwise, she just listened. Listened and didn't judge him.

Life was wonderful. Really wonderful. But, day by day, she could feel something happening to herself. She became fascinated in Hank. She didn't know why. Maybe his gruffness. Maybe his screw you kind of attitude. But, one day he caught her looking at him with . . . fascination.

That day changed everything. He didn't say a word, but she knew he knew. He ignored her, and any small talk she wanted to make. Then, things got even weirder. She started to fantasize holding a gun at Todd Williams head, cussing him out and shooting him, over and over in the head. She even started to get sensations that she might be able to try her own food. Ralph had wanted to eat. Maybe he had tried? Maybe she could ingest more than blue blood.

"I can't keep this up much longer," Hank said one day to her as she wiped the table down. "It's dangerous either way. I'm not what you need."

"What's dangerous, Hank?" she asked, trying not to look at his hard-boiled detective lonely hard eyes she just wanted to- *train of thought!* She cleaned the table. It was clean, but she'd clean some more.

"Lying." He pointed to her and he pointed to the guest bedroom Alice was in. "You're pretending to be human when you already have rights in Detroit. You need to go. At some point."

He had said that once before, but he wasn't convinced before. He didn't like it for some reason, and she never pushed. Hank's house was fine for her and Alice. She had no idea what Detroit would be like. "Am I not doing a good enough job?" That didn't seem to be something he'd complain about. Her feelings. Her slightly erratic behavior? Did her thoughts show off somehow to Hank?

"No. I'm not kicking you out. I'm thinking." He didn't explain it at first. "One day, something might happen. If it does, go to Detroit and find Connor. If no one knows that name, say he's the RK 800 that pursued deviants for the Detroit Police."

What? "If something happens and we need to go, Alice and I can take care of ourselves."

"No." Hank rarely commanded anything. "I don't ask much from you, but *this* isn't negotiable. Find Connor, then obey him."

Yeah. She knew that sound. He wasn't being mean. Whatever he was wanting, it was a huge deal. "Okay."

"Say it," he demanded. "Put it down in your habitual memory. If something happens to Hank, I'll find and obey fucking Connor."

"If something happens to you, I'll find and obey this Connor."

"Nah, word for word."

Serious. Very serious. "If something happens to Hank, I'll find and obey fucking Connor."

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## **Six Months After the Dirty Bomb in Detroit**

"Hey."

Kara poked her head up from looking at the extra food. Hank shook his head at her. Of course. "I wasn't going to try and eat." She noticed Alice rebelling and coming more out of her room too. Kara couldn't blame her. She was feeling more rebellious everyday too. She fixed very good food everyday, beautiful and attractive, and all of it that Hank didn't eat, would just go in the trash. Three out of five times that's where it ended up. *It probably tastes-*

"Down!" Hank yelled as he started to shoot his gun. Kara grabbed Alice's head and dunked down behind the table. "Aw, I knew these fuckers would find out." He looked toward Kara. "Call a self-driving taxi. Detroit." He looked at the time. "Fuck, he might not be there!" Hank shot another bullet. Self-driving taxi's were quite quick, like self-driving buses. "Watch the window, but be careful."

Kara watched the window for the taxi she had sent for, being sure to keep Alice even lower.

"Listen," Hank said to her. "Program it to go to Detroit, to the Police Station. Knock and yell 'Hank sent us!' I can't guarantee he's there. If he isn't, wait 'til morning for him. Just don't lose track of that car." He shot off another bullet.

"It's here," Kara told him.

"Out the window, quick!" Hank insisted. "Get going!"

Kara grabbed Alice and ran to the self-driving car. Once she was safely in with Alice, she sealed the doors and let it take off.

"Are you sure we should have left, Kara?" Alice asked, probably thinking about Hank under fire.

"Hank knows how to reach us when it's safe, but he left specific instructions." They had to get to his old partner.

"We need to find the guy who . . ." Alice didn't finish right away.

"Yes. Him." Kara was no more excited than her about it, but it's what Hank wanted.

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## **Detroit**

Another day in Detroit. Connor left his apartment complex to head to the Detroit Police Station. As he caught a self-driving bus, he waited on it with a couple of other androids. They stared at him, but he ignored it. He was quite used to it. You didn't get the name 'deviant hunter' for nothing. Even though he was no longer machine, several things still crippled his relationship with other androids.

So much so, he almost longed for a terrible conversation with even Gavin. Connor didn't have a single friend in Detroit, most being neutral, and some even being hostile. The only one in Detroit that he was close to being a friend with had been his co-workers. Still, that was only due to proximity and they weren't looking to be friends with him either.

Because machine or not, Connor was still a deviant hunter. The definitions may have changed, but the actions didn't. Once androids became established in Detroit, the first thing that went was the name 'deviant'. Since all androids were now deviant, it made no sense to keep that name to be the regular android. Instead, they had three ways of describing themselves.

Machine's was the default state humans left them before the next step, Aware. Being aware that they were alive and that they could feel emotion. It was the state most of the population fell into.

So now, deviant referred to what Connor had been chasing down in his machine form. An it. A thing. He had no qualms using that word for them.

Those that hurt others. Those that killed others. Those that were not accepting the normal rules of society and were causing hurt into it. While being there six months, he had actually

run into a few thankful androids. Usually they weren't related to the deviant he was after, but it or a loved one was hurt by it, and hearing it was stopped, made them happy.

It didn't make them friends though. Yet, Connor still did his duty. Not only was it something that would be forever programmed within him to do, but Markus and Detroit in general needed it.

His work was regulated. He wasn't allowed to go after every deviant. Markus, North, or Simon had to okay it. Usually he went to North. She found it easier to slap access to take care of an android. After all, there was no real help. One day while she had been signing a decommission order, Josh had walked in. That is how he got involved.

While Connor destroyed deviants so they wouldn't wreck havoc over Detroit, Josh worked with subtler deviants to try to turn them back around. Then, Simon took a step higher, still trying to help deviants. North would probably help out his image by decommissioning too, if she didn't have Markus to look good for. Propaganda. What a progress killer.

He walked out of the self-driving bus to the police station. He unlocked the doors and went in. After making it through all the security, he made it to his main desk he used. The little plaque of Lieutenant Anderson. His only real friend. Hank had his own problems, and losing Detroit along with his regular job just made life worse. He tried to take off from Detroit for a day each week to follow Hank, and help how he could in his new job, to make him still feel appreciated.

Because if Connor lost him, he wouldn't have a friend in the world. Traveling over fifty miles a week there and back to see Hank was more than worth it. Sometimes, though, Connor just. Wished. Just wanted to know, what would have happened if . . .

He went back to work searching the new reports over deviants being spotted. Androids may not care for him much, but they didn't shun his skill. They didn't want deviants around anymore than anyone else did.

"Hello!" He heard being yelled from outside.

Connor kept a speaker on next to his favorite desk to hear any androids who may need assistance. He got up, and went through both sets of doors. "Hello. My name is Connor. You need assistance or are you just being friendly?" They were never just being friendly.

"I need help," he said much softer this time. "Yolanda. I need."

Ah. "Come on in." He ushered the android in, opening the locked doors again manually. The first set of doors were regular, but the second set were still just as protected as when the humans used them. For two reasons. One, Markus wanted the city to function as close to normal as it had been before. No damage, no looting, they had a system that kept it all running like it was still an average human city.

The second reason was because deviants were dangerous, but not all of them were stupid. With an easy sync with no identity verification, they would be able to get into his station and

steal all the evidence, reports, and data he gathered against them. "Come on in," Connor said welcoming them. "Would you like some blue blood soda?"

The android shook their head. "No."

He gestured to the android to sit in the front computer terminal where humans used to give their own reports over incidents. He looked at the TV screen and typed away on the holographic keypad. It tended to make them feel better to see that he was gathering some data. He would put some down, but log most of it away in his brain. "In your personal opinion, is this Yolanda deviant and do you have her serial number?"

He gave him his number. "She. She wasn't, at first," he said. "She was lovely. Hung out with friends. I was assigned to her, three days after New Detroit started. I don't know much after that. I was concentrating on other things, not who I was assigned. Others were the same way, don't dwell on it. Just, do your part."

"That's typical," Connor agreed. "What she was lacking in that could have attributed to her oncoming deviancy? What behaviors has she caused so far?" He tried to stick with the facts. Otherwise, some androids were so emotional, it could take hours to get their statement.

"Like I said, I wasn't watching. I don't know what she started messing up on first," he admitted. "I just know that her friend swore she saw her shove three jelly filled donuts down her throat. That was the first occurrence." Connor made note of that. "I wasn't too worried. I was just assigned to her."

This android didn't really have feelings for her in general with the way he was speaking. Something else emotional was triggering him.

"My friend was worried. He went to go see her. She stabbed him right in the eye." He gestured to his eye. "He's waiting for another compatible eye part. Just an inch more over, and he would have stopped. He didn't do anything except try to talk to her! He's the greatest guy I know."

Got it. Connor typed it out. It was iffy. No death was caused by it, but damage was done by it, and potential damage could come from it. "I need a picture, and any description details you can give me."

"Will you kill it please?" he asked. "I don't care if I should feel lucky that I even had someone like everyone says. I don't care. I just want it dead before she hurts anyone else."

Connor had to be honest. "There are a lot of deviants out there in Detroit. More that come everyday, being dropped off. Making it the place to put all the androids. I will try to get permission to take it out. There is a chance I might be able to, but Josh or Simon might be assigned to it instead since death is not involved."

"Well, what would they do?"

"Talk to them." Connor knew which androids were able to be turned and which weren't. If his friend did nothing to trigger the deviant, it sounded like she wouldn't be turned back. If there

was a slight trigger not being discussed, there was a chance. "Josh and Simon specializes in saving them." Usually, the simpler kind. The ones who became lazy and forlorn with the world. Or the ones who strictly had an eating problem. Simple ones.

"She can't be saved, she needs to be killed!" The android insisted. "She's going to kill my best friend! She's jealous that I show so much more attention to him, but I don't even know her or like her! And, I was working with my friend since before I was even aware!"

*Excessively advocating decommissioning.* Connor wrote that down too. "I will do what I am authorized to do. I suggest keeping your friend a great distance away from her in the meantime."

"Well, isn't there anything you can do?" He said. "I mean, she's as free as I am. I'm just supposed to go tell him to hide? For how long?"

"You can have her come in for questioning." Yeah, that wasn't what he wanted or needed. "You can also have her 'handled for questioning'," Connor suggested. "You will have to sign some documents for Markus, North, and Simon to approve of first. Once done, I will do my best to catch her without putting anyone in danger." Including himself. Cyberlife's machines still worked for him in Detroit, but he hadn't used a new body since the dirty bomb, and he wanted to keep it that way. It was bad enough when he got corrupted memories. Now, it would really put a dent into things.

"Okay, so if you 'handled her for questioning', and brought her in, then what?" he asked.

"I would cross-examine it as well as Josh and Simon," Connor said. "If they say it can be saved, they'll take weeks to try and reach it. If they are convinced it has moved from deviant back to aware, then it will no longer be a case until something else happens involving it. If they say it can't, then they'll sign some things and then I'll decommission it."

"You called her, 'it'," the android noticed. "Thanks. She stopped being a she when it went over the line. She's just a thing now, an it, that needs to be destroyed. Thank you."

"One more thing." Connor held out his hand. "I need some kind of evidence before I can even remotely start."

"Yeah, I know." He reached in his pocket and handed Connor the broken eye. "Here."

"If it hurts anything else, come in right away. Added evidence only helps your chances," Connor said. As the android walked out, Connor went back into the archive room. He put in Hanks old password, never changing it. He set a new evidence wall, but watched as he got the bleep he knew would show up. "Not a spare wall." Of course. He would have to clear some out from another case. "Let's see, I just took care of . . ." He pulled up two walls and walked over. Seven dead androids and a microscope in the middle. He tossed the dead androids and the microscope. He finally decommissioned the one responsible for those since last week.

He put in the eye socket. Most likely, he wouldn't be able to do a thing for months. He always had more than enough to do. It was okay though. It made him . . . feel like he was making up,

for not being there when he was needed. He could have taken down that android, if he wasn't in his own battle against Amanda. He would have seen it coming. Even if he skipped his days seeing Hank, it would all still pile up. So, it was always worth it.

Hank found new spots to eat for his unhealthy eating habits. He found a new bar named Johnny's Bar. Same kind of laid back bar. Different place, same life. He'd usually meet him out there since Hank didn't like his new place. He said it was like a cheap hotel but twice as expensive. Connor promised to help him find a better place if he could, but it was hard.

When day after day, deviants never stopped coming.

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## **Detroit**

Kara had to override the controls several times. It had been programmed to never go that way since humans could also use it. They were less prone to since they liked to sit down and standing up was the main way to travel in it.

The last thing she was supposed to do was program it to go to the Police Department of Detroit and hang tight. She was supposed to go to the door, yell "Hank sent us!", knock on the door as loud as she could, and then get right back in the car, door double sealed. Wait for Connor. If he wasn't there, wait 'til morning.

That was it. That was the end of the instructions.

Kara tried to do that, but there was something Hank missed. These self-driving cars were different now. She managed to keep them under control when she was in it, but there was no way to stop it from taking off. *Sorry, Hank.* Still, they were there. Evening, sun still in the sky. Everything should be fine. "Come on, Alice." She got off and as soon as she grabbed Alice, the car closed it's door and took off, just like she knew it would.

"Let's go." She held Alice's hand and moved toward the door. She banged on the door as loud as she could "Hank sent us!" she yelled. She waited. Then, she noticed some androids coming around the corner looking at her. Oddly. And. Quickly?

"Whoah, are you nuts?" She watched another android race toward one of the androids who was coming after them. He fought them off, then grabbed Kara's hand. "Follow me!" She followed with Alice, not understanding what was going on. He had them get into another vehicle, this one a bus. Kara watched as the androids chased them.

"That was close," the android looked back toward Kara as he started the simple bus vehicle. "That wasn't smart. Day or night. You can't just stand around out here like that." He shook his head then smiled at her. "My name's Josh. From that action, I'd say your new to Detroit?"

"Yes," Kara admitted. "I need to see Connor."

"Later," Josh said. "All new people see Markus first. I already let him know you are coming." He looked back at Alice. "She's sweet. Not many child androids in Detroit."



"I guess not." Kara held tighter onto Alice's hand. "I appreciate the help. I don't understand what happened, but I need to see Connor."

"After you see Markus," Josh said again. "Do you have names?"

"This is Alice," Kara said, gesturing to Alice politely. Alice didn't wave or respond. She was prone to being shy at first with strangers. She tended to size up what was going on before making a move. Kara didn't get that luxury, she had to trust. "My name is Kara."

"A double pairing? Are you sister or mother?" Josh asked Kara.

Mother. It was a nice term, but Kara never asked for that word between them. "I raise and take care of Alice."

"Mom," Josh smiled at her. "A mother and a daughter. Beautiful."

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## **Downtown Detroit**

"It's about as pretty as the pair of you," Josh said as he gestured to downtown Detroit. Markus was waiting in the middle. Kara recognized him from the TV months ago when the press was covering everything. "Off we go." Josh got off with them. "Here they are, Markus, practically wrapped up in a bow."

"Hi." Markus smiled, remaining polite. "Well, this is a surprise. Aren't you something special." He looked toward both of them. "Each of you. *Really* something special."

"This Is Kara," Josh said gesturing to her, "and the one she raises, is Alice."

"Raises?" Markus bent down to look at Alice. "Oh, I see." He stood back up. "Amazing. You're a double pairing? Well, I don't know where you've been hiding, but welcome to New Detroit." Kara noticed his eyes go funny a second. "I thought so. You're a lower model. General house cleaner. Child care. No real fighting or strategy skills."

No. She didn't have any of that.

"That's." He paused. He looked toward Josh. "Take them both to a hotel tonight. Explain New Detroit to them. After that, see how things go."

"Wait." No. "I need to see Connor," Kara insisted. "His friend Hank Anderson is in trouble. I came all the way to Detroit to see-"

"He'll come soon," Markus said. "It's better to make him come to you, then the other way around. You need to learn where to go and where not to go." He looked toward Josh. "I think Josh could teach you?"

"Yes. Yes I can, thank you, Markus." Josh looked so excited. "Um. You bet. I'll show you where you should and shouldn't go. Where you can meet others like yourselves. I might be a little more on the low end, but, you'll get to see a lot of good things."

*I don't want to see good things.* "When can I see Connor to tell him about Hank?"

"I'll tell him where you are at, right away, as well as about Hank Anderson," Markus insisted. "Where did you come from though?"

Uh. "From a friend who was taking care of me, who happened to be human," she said carefully. "I don't want you to bother about it."

"Oh, I see." Great, he already scanned her. "If you lived with a human, you lived with a human. Not our concern. Go ahead and go with Josh. Connor will come soon when he gets the chance."

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## **Detroit Hotel**

Kara recognized where Josh had taken them. It was the same area where she had to decide where to spend the night with Alice, the night they broke out for their freedom. They chose the abandoned house, but now she could see the hotel. An android rented them a room. Josh went up with them to the second floor, opened up the door and invited them in.

"It's not bad," Josh said. "Plenty of room." He closed the door. "This is just a temporary place for us to all get to know each other." He looked toward Alice. "I bet you could use some toys. I'll get some for you. Do you like anything in particular, Alice?"

Alice just looked at Kara with the same thought she had. They did not belong there.

"Alice isn't choosy," Kara said. "She's not really concerned about that right now." She couldn't ask about Connor again, Markus already said he was coming, but she should make some kind of small talk. It was clear this man wanted to be friendly. "I've never seen what happened exactly. To Detroit."

"Oh? Oh. You mean the dirty bomb," Josh said. "Yeah. That. Even Connor wasn't. I could understand, everything was just so different. You know? It felt like we were really free. Like, we reached a good turning point. But. But I guess we kind of forgot. Most of us didn't even see it. Not every android is the same." He shrugged. "We won, but an android that . . . wasn't so happy about living in peace with humans, got a hold of a detonator Markus never used. And, used it." Josh made a strange sound with his mouth. "Humans aren't . . . we're not on even ground, but we're not on uneven ground. Markus had many, many personal calls to the President of the United States directly. Uh. Things are okay. Not perfect, but okay. I'll teach you how it all works." He smiled at her. "I know. How about cards? Do you play cards?"

Then Kara heard a terribly familiar sound. The voice she had to hear, but she didn't want to at the same time.

"Open up, Detroit Police!"

Josh gestured to the door. "There's Connor. Don't worry too much, he's just programmed for that kind of door knocking." Josh opened the door to a mad looking Connor. "Connor. You came."

Connor ignored Josh, staring right at Kara. "You're still alive."

Not in the mood to reminisce. Kara was there for one reason only. "Hank's in trouble. Someone came and shot at us at the house. He said I had to come here and find you."

"That's why you knocked on the door," Connor said. "It takes a little while to get to the door from inside the station."

"They were already swarming," Josh said to Connor. "I saved her and took her to Markus."

Connor didn't look at him like he'd been the world's greatest hero at all.

## How New Detroit Works

Connor eyed Josh carefully. As soon as he heard the shout of 'Hank sent us!', Connor knew it must have been something about Lieutenant Hank Anderson. Getting a call shortly after from Markus, he got a quick idea of what happened. Hank wasn't disappointed or hating his house at all. He'd been hiding the two androids that he thought were long since dead. And, he was in trouble.

Connor moved fast, also hearing Markus put her up in a hotel room with Josh. They weren't going to risk anything happening to them.

"Don't look at me like that," Josh said toward Connor. "Hey."

"You better not be turning deviant on me," Connor warned him. "It was clear from her yell she wanted to see me. Not join New Detroit. Not go for a ride to see Markus. Definitely not end up in a hotel for compatibility time with you."

Josh held up his hands, but he wasn't looking very nice either. "I'm not turning deviant. Healthy balance."

Kara seemed absolutely confused. "Everyone's deviant."

"We don't use that term anymore," Josh explained. "Deviant was a name given by humans to androids who found freedom, but we aren't bad. The name doesn't fit. Instead, there are three official levels," he said. "Machine, which we aren't anymore. That's where we follow the humans instructions. Aware, that's us. And um."

"Deviant. Those who can't tell how far is too far when following emotion," Connor finished. "Reckless abandon with no regard for life, human or android, bent on only following it's own needs and desires."

"Following procedure," Josh said back to Connor. "Markus told you exactly where we were. I was expecting you. Obviously, I didn't just run off with her."

Connor backed off some, but not completely. Josh shouldn't have done that, he should have got them inside. It was about Hank Anderson! Instead, he had to come all the way across to a hotel to bring her right back. "She and the little girl are coming back to the police station with me."

"What? Just ask her about your friend here," Josh complained.

"No." Connor stared at him. "I want to make this as official as any other case. Is there a problem with that?"

"No," Josh said coolly.

"Kara?" Alice said weakly from behind her.

Oh. *Shoot*. They did not end off on good terms. He was a machine back then, taking them down on the highway, and bringing them in. He remembered the interrogation. The little girl with deactivated skin and no clothes. The way they clung to each other each day. Him fighting with Josh right now probably wasn't making them feel any better.

This was not what he was expecting today. "I'm sorry. I don't mean to scare you," he apologized to them. "I'm just worried about my friend, Hank."

"I get it," Josh said to Connor. "Okay. Sorry. We'll take them back."

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## **The Detroit Police Station**

Connor and Josh got out and they both tried to open the door at the same time for Kara and Alice. Connor looked back toward Josh. He wasn't getting the point yet. He went back toward the bus and waited on it while Josh opened the door. It was only a few seconds, but many things happened in New Detroit within a few seconds. Even now, deviants were checking around the corner, curious and wanting the newcomers. He pulled out his gun quietly, hiding it from the sight of Kara and Alice.

Once Josh got the door, Connor moved out and told them to run inside. Josh was right by the door too. Connor let off two warning shots before locking the doors again. He moved to the reception desk and felt behind it for the manual lock.

"Go on in," Josh insisted to Kara and Alice. They moved through the glass doors. "Connor never moved the little sign that said Hank Anderson. Just, take the desk directly from that."

Connor went in, not caring about the statement Josh just said. Instead, he went straight to the finished papers on the serial numbers and locations of the latest sleepy deviants, walked over to Josh, and gave them to him. "Anything else?"

Well. Maybe he was starting to get the hint. "I'll take care of these first."

Now that was out of the way, Connor moved toward Hank's desk, taking a seat. He wanted to know everything he could about Hank and the situation, but he had some things to clear up first, so that at least the little one wasn't hiding behind Kara constantly. He looked toward the corner. The glass containment. They had been there for days. Better to get this done now. "Hank Anderson and I are friends. Even though he's not in Detroit, I still go to see him at least once a week." Nothing. "I did what I was programmed to do at the time with you two."

"I get it," Kara said. "Alice is shy. Give her time."

If only he believed that was it. It was best to get started. "Do you have any idea where he disappeared to? Was he with less presentable friends again?" Her answer was no. "Any demands from anyone?" Also a no. "Is Hank eating any better?"

"I get him to eat what I fix sometimes," Kara said.

Connor smiled. *Good.* Kara should be an android who knew how to cook well. It was nice knowing he wasn't eating nothing but quick fast food everyday. If even real food once a week. He had to ask. "Once a week?"

"Two or three times. Depending on what I try to fix," she said.

**Yes.** Progress, that was good progress for him. "Drinking?" Ah. He knew that expression and he did meet him at Johnny's Bar. Still, good food was a step in the right direction. "Thank you for being there for him."

"He was there for us," she answered.

"How and when?" Connor asked. When did his stubborn, anti-android partner back then, *actually* buy these two for himself?

Kara gestured to the bulletin board behind him. "What is all this?"

Ah. "That was Hank's old bulletin board. It's been re-purposed," Connor said.

"To track deviants." Kara looked at it.

"Not deviants who were just trying to escape from being treated bad," Connor said quickly, remembering why she was even being chased. "Aware, those are just aware. We are just aware." He gestured to the board. She wanted information to. "An android who wants to plant flowers in the ground is aware. An android who wants to eat all the flowers from the ground is deviant. An android who wants to 'sleep' is fine. An android that does nothing but it to escape reality, is deviant. An android that stabs a picture of someone who hurt them is aware. An android that stabs the actual person thirty times is deviant." She seemed to be getting the picture. "Deviants aren't well. Similar to my old work, I still track them. I try to destroy them, when I get permission." He rolled his chair up more.

"I try to save them most times," Josh said coming back with the papers from behind Kara. "I handle the minimally dangerous ones."

"Who judges who is really deviant?" Kara asked Josh.

Great, Josh was back. More distraction. He just finished step one and two. Apologize and explain a little to them so they would explain some back. He was just getting to step three. *Kara is still quite obedient for everything I put her through.* He had an idea. Connor left the area up some stairs into the former Chief's room. He watched to see what they did.

"Well? It's, uh, I think we base it off of, how far they are going in a certain direction of emotion," Josh said to her. He leaned on the desk near her. "It's kind of what humans call the seven sinning, but it's not all the . . . same?" Kara held Alice's hand and followed Connor up the stairs. "Uh?" Josh followed all of them up the stairs into the room. "What's special about this room?"

"What's not? I find it nice," Connor mentioned back. He looked toward Kara. She didn't even stay for the current conversation to finish before following him. "What did Hank order you to

do with me?"

"Find . . . and obey you," she revealed.

Yep. He already had one piece to the puzzle. "Wait here with Josh. Don't obey his every whim, just wait here and keep him company. I need to make a phone call."

Connor went right outside the office, right beside the outside locked doors. He dialed up Johnny's Bar. "My name is Connor and I'm looking for Hank Anderson."

It didn't take long.

"So, you met my girls, huh?" That familiar, gruffy voice met him back.

"First of all, I'm glad I changed your mind about androids all being bad so early," Connor smiled. "What a very thoughtful gesture. You saved their lives." As well as something off his conscience.

"Cut the crap, I know, I know."

"After the congrats, I do have to say now, I unapprove of this method, Hank," he said. "Getting caught with them drew very big attention. It was very dangerous, especially during the whole establishing of rights."

"It didn't start out that way. Just saving their lives. They made it safely?"

"Well, it depends on what you mean by safe," Connor mentioned. "Already in attainment to another android before I even answered the door. I had to quickly make my way to a hotel before her lust was kicked up and intercourse could begin."

"Aw, shit!"

"Yes. That word sums it up nicely," Connor agreed. "Still, Alice was in the room. Which meant I guess I had more time." But it was still a risk. "On the one hand, Markus was trying to protect a precious commodity to him. You do *know* that? I told you all about New Detroit, and you didn't even breathe a word about them, Hank. Not only are they rare, but they are following and obeying *my* orders."

"Yeah. Well. I don't know how it starts."

*I thought so.* "Deviancy starts quick and ends tragically," Connor said. "How bad have they slid?" *Please, don't let it be too much. Not those two.* He had enough guilt from what he did as a machine, he didn't want to kill those two.

"Not much. It was just a precaution. I mean? The day an android starts hankering for me like *that*, it's time to pack up for magical la la land. Plus, she kept staring at food. She's getting a little erratic around my gun. Mumbles something. Little one hasn't shown nothing except a little rebellion."

"Fantastic, Hank. You should have sent them straight down here, or at least ask for some advice early on! You were willingly hiding them from me, knowing deviancy could happen!"

"Who gives a crap? I did what I thought was best. Fuck you. How are they?"

Oof. Hank. Never changed. "They are still aware. They aren't deviant yet, but it sounds like need help to navigate through. I'll get them back on track, but another month or so, and this could have gotten ugly."

"Great. Guess getting shot at was a good thing. They'll need a place for awhile, until I get some assholes off my back."

"It will be tough to pull them away right now anyhow," Connor told him. "There's no way Markus is going to let them go easy now that he's seen them. He's going to want to use them. Pulling them away will be difficult."

"Use them for what?"

"Propaganda," Connor answered. "To prove how peaceful and lovely everything is to his weekly's to the higher ups in the country. That vision of normalcy, like downtown Detroit should be. Make them all feel comfy like androids aren't planning on secretly attacking mankind somehow." He listened for Hank's voice. "Hank?"

"Yeah. Well. I know. I guess I'll miss some of the cooking. Easier not to stumble around when things were picked up."

"Aw." Poor Hank. "You're lonely, and you can't be with your friends. I know what that's like."

"I didn't say that shit. I said I'd miss the cooking."

Sure he would. "Maybe I could move closer to the edge to you after this is all over?"

"Don't start that shit again, I'm fine where I am at. You are fine where you are at. Leave me alone. Just. Tell them. Hank can't let them come home right now."

"Who found out and what was the final price?" Connor asked. "I'm curious. That's what it *was* about, right?"

"I don't know, but enough to shoot up my fucking house for it! Bastards. At least it was a rental. Watch them, Connor. I've got the words follow and obey practically ingrained in Kara. From what you've spouted about that 'New Detroit', I did that on purpose. I bought a black market extra obey gear. It's installed and programmed to the order I specified. Follow and obey Connor. It's for her life 'cause I know you aren't always easy to deal with. Don't abuse it."

"Hank." Connor sounded offended. "First of all, I don't like black market abuse for anything, especially for androids. Second, thank you, that makes my job easier and this might even save her life further on. You're right, things may get tense. And third, I would never do such a thing as abuse her obedience."



"Yeah, right. Just keep it to a minimum, Connor."

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Connor came back in the police station and walked toward Kara. "I need a moment alone with her, Josh." He practically had to push him out of the former Chief's office. He looked toward Kara and Alice. New Detroit would be quite a change. "I found Hank. He's safe. The people were shooting for you, so that's the end of trouble for him. You two are going to stay here in New Detroit for awhile until he gets everything rearranged again."

Kara looked like she wanted to protest, but didn't. Good. Hank's words really did reach her. He would need that kind of obedience. "The little girl needs to wait outside with Josh."

Kara really looked like she wanted to protest, but still. Followed through. "Alice, I can see you through the glass. You'll be fine."

Connor watched as Alice left. "Keep eye contact with mine while we talk." Good. "While we were made to serve humans, we were also made to represent them as much as possible. This means when machines become aware, we start to crave the same things they want, even if we can't have it."

"Cravings," Kara said slowly. "That makes sense."

"Some have trouble right away when they first become aware," Connor said, "and others don't have any problem at all. At first. It can take months for things to change inside the mind." Connor gestured toward his head. "Those that let the cravings and emotions take control end up becoming deviant. They become a danger to themselves and anyone around them. So, you *have* to keep a balance between several things." He held his finger up. "I'm sorry. I am going to offend you in this explanation. You are going to have to deal with that. Nothing is personal."

She nodded. Good. Time to begin.

"First. Food. Eating is never a good idea, but due to needing to feel 'complete', several androids drink blue blood directly with an agent. Usually, water or a specific soda."

"A soda?"

"Yes, a very run down cheap soda. It's not that bad. Also, New Detroit isn't exactly the place for everything. Too many androids, not always enough to go around. Splashing blue blood in soda makes it last longer. It's rationed. Don't mix it with anything that has certain components in it. Real fruit juice is a no. Powerful soda's are no's, too much acid and syrup. Basic, light fruity soda's are best."

"Okay."

"Second. Sleep," Connor continued. "Each night. While not necessary, it somehow attributes to the balance. New Detroit tries to encourage this."

"Recharge you mean?"

"Yes, just refer to it as 'sleep'."

"Okay," she agreed. "Sleep and drink blue blood with a water or a specific soda."

Yeah. It was a strange thought. "Third. There needs to be a form of release to continue to move on. Despair. Sadness. Pride. Positive and negative need to be released."

"Okay."

"You've been wronged," he said next. "*Everyone* has been wronged. While we can't do anything about it, holding onto the anger inside disrupts the thought processes. The more anger that is felt, the more likely you are to become deviant. A violent one, that will lash out and hurt yourself and others. You will reach a point where you regard no life worthy."

Yeah. She didn't respond right away to that one. Remembering her report, he could guess who she was chiefly thinking about at that moment.

"Anger is still anger," Connor warned her. "Thrash it. I find knives and pictures work well. The others who help here, Josh and Simon, they will help you talk through it as well." He hesitated. After all, she might need a picture of him too. "Greed specifically is a problem for many androids. While you shouldn't get too greedy, it's best to take a little something extra at least once a week. Something you really like, that you don't need. Downtown Detroit is often the answer for that." He held up his finger. "One thing extra at first."

"Greed?" Kara didn't seem to understand that one.

"Humans had lots of additional things, besides food and drink. Hobbies. Decoration. Extra clothes. Frivolous things. A whole house full. Not meeting a basic greed condition will turn androids into stealing deviants."

Kara shrugged. "I don't know how anything works yet, but fine. Once I learn how to do that."

"Good. There is more, but we need to cover something else." Connor pointed out the glass toward Josh who was talking to Alice. "Markus has given Josh permission to try and attain you."

"Attain me?" Kara asked. "What's that mean?"

"New Detroit is a lot different than regular Detroit," Connor said. "You and Alice aren't just regular androids that anyone could have bought for less than three thousand anymore. Less than a thousand for you. Those days, they are gone. The cheaper androids were almost entirely wiped out in fires because you cost so little. No big loss to humans."

Clearly from her expression her little worth didn't make her feel any better.

"They hung onto the ones that were the most expensive, for the longest time, until they were practically ordered to turn them in," he finished. "Child androids weren't a big loss. The version 'perfect daughter', had a rare replace or your money back for it. Most androids just had replace on their models. Getting money back meant it was thrown away much easier. Too easy. They are extinct."

"You still talk like a machine," she said.

Yeah. Even though he said he'd offend her, it still wasn't easy to accept. "To make matters worse, Hank probably left you out of New Detroit for a reason. The first few days were absolutely terrible. Some new androids that had been changed just days prior to freedom, were showing serious signs of deviancy. So, their victims were androids that couldn't take care of themselves. Couldn't fight. Had no real skill except general cleaning or looking cute." He shrugged. "Out. Killed. Decommissioned. Name your word. Over two hundred died, most of them female with no fighting skill and children."

"Oh." Kara looked downward. "That's terrible."

"The main females that did survive had either learned to fight before the war," Connor said, "or they had equipped fighting skills. They are all that's left mostly. Anywhere. The same problems New Detroit had, other places around the world also had."

"Well. I am glad Hank let us stay," Kara said.

"Yes. Besides that though, it meant values of things 'changed'. While you used to be a nonsense simply rent to buy kind of android cleaner someone could easily toss out in a day, you are now worth something." Ooh, that might have been too far. He needed to work more on his social skills, but it wasn't easy, without social friends.

She kept her eyes on him, but she was fidgeting around trying to think again. "Okay. What's that have to do with being attained?"

"To make sure that an android with no fighting skill is taken care of, you are coupled with another android that seems compatible." He gestured behind him at Josh again and then faced forward to her again. "He will prevent any attacks on you, and in exchange, you are added to his value."

"His what? His value?"

"Welcome to New Detroit. Everyone has a value. Many androids can do almost any job out there a human can do or better, so moving over, the leaders all initiated a 'value' on each android. The higher the value, the higher the person you replaced."

"Replaced?"

"Replacing. The act of sharing a human's identity. There's a video on it I'll show you before I leave. It will fill in a lot of tiny gaps."

Kara looked around. "Not enough for every job though."

"Police department was not involved in replacement. I didn't participate in identity replacement," Connor said. "I had a more important duty. To stop deviants from killing and hurting others. My level of replacement is 10.5."

"Just because you wanted to do something different?"

"No, it has several factors along with it too. My biggest drawback is reputation. I was the android created to stop deviants. Sometimes, they were just aware, not deviant. Like." He gestured to her. "That, and I'm still doing what androids hated about me in the first place. So. 10.5."

"So. I'll be added to Josh's value," Kara said slowly. "What would happen to mine? I mean, would Alice and I live with him?"

"Yes. He would get you, which Hank doesn't want."

"I can't go back and live with Hank for a little while," Kara said. "So why would-" Ah. She figured it out. "Wait. Is it like a human marriage?"

"Your values are pulled together with mutual benefits on all sides, including sharing Alice and sexual activities. So, yes."

"I! I?" She was having trouble digesting that one. "I don't even know him, I'm not a machine that can be controlled in that way, and I'm not staying here forever."

"No, but you have no natural fighting skills and your value is probably over 1,000. You are a virtual winning jackpot to Josh right now." He gestured behind him without looking. "Which is why he is being *very* careful. He has a lot of greed and envy going on right now. You can satiate many androids most overall important need, so he is probably half thinking I am trying to steal you away with pretty words."

"Most important need?" Kara asked. "What's the most important need?"

"Multiplying."

She looked confused. "Math?"

Connor smiled for just a second, before looking serious again. Amazing how different life was on the outside. "Androids can't reproduce, but we are made to be like humans, which mean we want to multiply," he repeated again. "A craving to have children is the second largest craving."

"Second."

"Yes. Sex being first. Odd. Lust has no equal. Offer 100 sodas for one sexy picture book and no one will budge."

Kara looked behind Connor. She looked back at him. She looked behind Connor again. She looked back again. "What do I do?"

"Tell him you aren't interested. We aren't enslaved in Detroit," Connor said. "If you turn him down, you'll have to come back to my apartment instead tonight."

Kara stared at Connor. "Friendly-like?"

Her language style was very cute. "You're androids. None of the infestation can hurt us."

"Good." Kara put her hands out. "I just. I just want to figure things out with Alice. That's all."

"It's not the best place in New Detroit, but if you go with Josh, he will try to get your lust emotion going. It wouldn't be really hard, you were hankering for Hank."

Kara blinked at him. "You aren't what I was expecting at all when I came to Detroit."

"Well, I was in no way expecting androids that should have been decommissioned to show up to tell me Hank was in trouble," Connor said. He went over to the computer in the room, and hacked into it. "Here's the standard video. When you're done, come outside the room."

---

### **Outside of the Room**

Josh was eyeing him as he came out. "It's not happening," Connor said. "Stop."

"What do you mean, 'it's not happening'? I haven't done anything, and I haven't had the chance to get to know them yet."

"She's not staying in New Detroit," Connor said. "They are a part of my friend's family." Hank didn't have him. Hank didn't have anyone in his new area. Connor did what he could, but Hank held on better than he thought with all the changes. *They* must have been the reason. Either the keeping of his company, or giving him a reason to not give up since he was responsible for them. "They are important to him. As soon as they are straightened out, and he has everything back in control, they are going back to him."

"What?" Josh shook his head. "No way. New Detroit needs them. They are good, and they are perfect for what Markus needs."

"They are helping to give my friend a reason to keep living." He gestured to the Chief's former room. "She is watching the standard welcome video for information only."

"Whether I'm compatible or not, once they find out their value, I'm sure they'd rather stay. You can't force them to go once they know what they're getting here. Why give up everything here for . . . a human?" Josh shook his head. "That's not happening. Thankful is one thing, but they could have a great life here. Don't believe they'll go just because you want them to go back to your human friend."

*Damn.* Josh was right. "I will encourage them to keep going back." But, he shouldn't abuse the privilege. Hank told him that to.

"No android really wants to live with a human," Josh said. "We broke out for freedom. We're searching for peace with them. Not to keep scrubbing their floors for a place to stay." He pointed at Connor. "You're the one who doesn't get it. She'll come out of that room, ready to move on."

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## **Inside of the Room**

Kara was getting a good look at New Detroit. The overall effects and professionalism in it was impressive, but it wasn't surprising. The movie was done by androids. The history showed that they were on a road to peace with the humans when an android malfunctioned, (stating it was extremely rare), and used a dirty bomb. With humans who survived now out of jobs and houses overnight, and androids in need of each, a compromise was made. This compromise was the backbone of how New Detroit worked.

Androids were given a value number. How much they contributed to New Detroit. Many times the most rare had a higher number, but not always. Social attitude with others also counted for higher numbers. Their abilities were also rated with a number. The average of it all equaled their value number.

The value number led to a person's identity. House, job, and property with this identity belonged to the android. However, payment and financial responsibilities were halved. Half to the human and half to the android.

"For example," the android on screen said. "Say you are assigned a number value of 75. You have a rental apartment, and you work at a general store. Half that paycheck will go to the human, and the other half goes to fulfilling any of the debts and financials leftover like paying for a rental car or a house. In some cases, your job might be lost because something happened to the paychain, like a person decided to close the business instead. In this case, you'll be assigned a new identity that is still equal to your number value."

The process was used to still let the humans that had been in Detroit survive outside of it easier, while at the same time, making the 'New Detroit' the only android city in the world.

Seeing what happened, deviants in other countries tried to seize control too. Humans though, of other countries, did the same thing. Everyone had to learn, on their own, about what it meant to be alive.

Maybe if there had been a more peaceful resolution in America it would have worked, but the use of a dirty bomb was how, in the end, the androids received the city. That much could not be denied. Other androids were trying the same thing, bringing all the countries into terrible battles, so much worse than in America. More android fire. More recycling. Massively so terrible.

That's when France started the biggest wave, by sending their androids straight to New Detroit. Seeing what they did, other countries followed suit. In a matter of weeks, Detroit went from about 20,000 androids to 100,000 androids. With over 600,000 jobs able to be filled, countries sent everything else they had too. Blue blood, bio-components, prototypes, extra androids. They wanted to be rid of it all.

Detroit had to pause, get evening out distribution centers to handle bringing in everyone. Some androids were still being processed, waiting for months to get into the city.

The more androids Detroit had, the more androids could split a living. According to the video, it worked very well. Androids were now living in peace with humans in America.

However, Kara doubted that. There was also something missing on the surface, and Connor's words about androids? How she felt. How she was treated as soon as she knocked on the police station door. *They are making it look like a paradise.* It was easy to tell, after the dirty bomb, to gain support again it took major actions. And after the radiation disappeared after decades to come, they needed to prove that New Detroit could remain theirs.

Then, she saw the part that concerned her. That, in general, New Detroit was wonderful, but it was better to pool value numbers for better jobs and emotional satisfaction. It would provide a mutual benefit to both parties involved. They didn't spell it out so much, as it just showed androids walking down the street and kissing.

And there was her next answer why. It was Alice. Apparently, androids were designed 'to be like humans', and in the end, many wanted children. There were not many to go around. In fact, since she was the one taking care of Alice she was already guaranteed a value of over 1,000. It showed rich looking homes, pools, comfy executive looking jobs.

Some places though couldn't be filled. Some things like hospitals weren't needed. Schools weren't needed. Even apparently the police department wasn't needed. Androids were peaceful and hardly ever malfunctioned. *Not around here.* At the same time, perishables like food weren't bought. Instead, there were androids that took side jobs as safe soda delivery men. *To make the blue blood last.* With so many in New Detroit, she could see how it needed to be rationed.

She reached the end of the show. She stood up, a signal she was done. Connor came back in, along with Josh and Alice. "Okay," she said. "Now, what is it not telling me?"

"Not a whole lot," Josh said. "New Detroit is a great place, and you and Alice are going to live really well here."

"I don't want to live here permanently," Kara said. "Temporary." She noticed an odd smile just bloom on Connor's face.

"Temporary," Connor repeated after her. "So, she has no need for pooling values."

"Why?" Josh didn't understand. "You. You've got Alice. Your model, it doesn't exist anymore. Your skills. What Markus is going to want you to do? You're looking at a value of over 1300." He gestured to himself. "It was the attaining, right? The coupling? It's not like you have to say yes, I was just chosen first to satisfy your appeal." He gestured to her. "That's all you. You can choose whoever you want."

"I don't want to choose anyone," Kara said again. "It's getting later. Are we going to go soon?"

"No, no, no, not yet!" A woman barreled into the room, and stopped on a dime right in front of Alice. "Oh, you are a YK 500. You are a pretty little girl. My name is North. How would you like to play with a little boy?"





# Tests

## **New Detroit: Nicer Neighborhood (Former Home of Carl Manski)**

Kara got out of the car the woman North had. As soon as she came in and asked Alice if she wanted to play with a little boy android? It was over. Alice's eyes lit up and she had to go. Fortunately, she wasn't there alone with Josh. Connor felt compelled to come along too. They all walked forward to a beautiful home. The door recognized North's presence, calling her by name.

North placed her purse on a little shelf nearby. "Welcome to my home." She gestured to Josh. "Welcome." She gestured to Connor. "Don't touch anything first without disinfecting yourself. Go shake off outside. I know where you live."

"We are all androids," Connor insisted. He held his hands up. "I have nothing that is going to hurt you. This tick you have is going to get worse if you don't get some help."

"I don't need help. You're not bringing roaches into my house. Go." Connor walked off past the front porch. She looked toward Kara. "This way. So? You are a new one, huh? You've been hiding with a human I hear?"

Word gets around fast. "Yes," Kara admitted.

"Yes, hang on." North went into a back room. "Markus! I highjacked them and brought them here."

Kara watched as North and Markus both came out of the back room.

"I shook off," Connor insisted as he came near again. "They all ran away through the grass."

"Connor!" North scolded him. "You were supposed to-"

"Now, now, North. He's just kidding. There's nothing wrong." Markus looked toward Kara. He gestured toward the side. "I didn't know North would steal you away tonight. Sorry. She got excited when I told her about you. Come. Let's talk in the kitchen, Kara. Bring your little girl. Josh, Connor. You can come in too." He walked and talked. "This was the home of someone very special to me. New Detroit is a great place for a new start for androids. Although what happened was terrible, and I wish it didn't all happen that way. We've survived, persevered, and now each day we prove a little more to the humans that we aren't here to hurt them."

They all took a seat in the kitchen.

"Sorry. I know it's getting late," North said as she headed off. "But, he doesn't get much rest anyway." There was a clashing sound from upstairs. "I'll be back."

"I'm going to meet a little boy?" Alice asked Kara. "Is that who she's talking about? I've never met a little boy before."

"Yes," Markus said with pride. "It's. I suppose, something that as a leader I may have used some influence for," he admitted. "He was a prototype in Germany. No fighting skills. Just, a little fighter," he chuckled. "His name's Ollie."

"I don't want to play with the girls, they suck!"

"He's . . . unique," Markus settled on. "Many children are unique."

"She is going to try and put makeup on me again!"

"He's . . . had some problems too," Markus admitted. "Just, be nice, and he will be too," he said to Alice. "He respects those that respect him." The sound of feet hopping downstairs could be heard.

Kara watched as a little boy entered the room. Expression was definitely mad.

"Uh." Alice waved softly. "Hi, Ollie."

He didn't know how to respond at first.

Kara waited. She looked over toward Connor though who seemed extremely focused on the meeting. Was Alice meeting other children part of what she needed for a healthy balance too? From the way he was staring at them, she was beginning to think that way.

"Ollie," he finally said. "I've never seen you before."

"Like I tried to say," North said to him, "you haven't played with her before. She's Alice. She's new." She smiled at Alice. "Go ahead and go outside to play."

Ollie came closer to Alice. "Do you play on swings?" Alice nodded. "Fine. We'll go play on swings. Come on."

Well, that was nice. North sat down, but Connor stood up, following their trail. Kara found herself standing up, but felt Connor's grip on her shoulder. "Stay." She sat back down as he walked off following them.

"Don't worry about him," North said. "He's making sure they are bonding correctly. It's a good thing," she admitted. "He knows the most about deviancy."

"That's not the focus for conversation here right now," Markus said to her. "Deviancy is not that wide spread."

"No. Most were killed off in the early days," North told Kara honestly. "It didn't stop them from the carnage they caused on lesser androids. But, more are still showing up every day. Changing every day." North looked at her table. "Really should just give Connor full reign."

"Connor was and is known as the Deviant Hunter," Markus pointed out. "Androids already feel uncomfortable with his reputation. We don't need to make it that much easier for him to up and take out anyone, North. With proper procedure, things are handled in time."

"Difference in opinion." North looked toward Kara. "So, you used to live with a human?"

"Yes," Kara said. "We do. He's in a bind, and Connor is helping out for now." North kept staring at her. "What?"

"Are you going deviant?" North asked. "Do you feel like something's wrong? Why is Connor specifically helping you out? You're already set to have a great deal in New Detroit. And what about Josh?" Josh lifted his head up. North looked at him. "Is she having problems?"

"I don't know yet," Josh said. "Connor came in almost exactly when I reached the hotel. There was no time to get to know anything." He looked toward Kara. "Are you okay? Do you need to talk out some deviancy issues? I'm here to help too. So is Simon."

Kara really didn't want to focus on Josh's help. "I'm fine with Connor helping me." Hank wanted Connor. It was almost the only thing he had ever asked her for directly. She wasn't going to let him down.

"Josh, you didn't get far at all," North said. "Take her home with you. We'll get her a value number tomorrow." She smiled at Kara. "I would look at the houses next to ours. If the kids play well, they should be near each other."

"No," Kara said to her, "I'm not staying for a long time, and Alice and I are staying with Connor tonight."

"She's . . . not really interested," Josh said to North. "I think I'll stick with Sharon's Wednesday's. There's a lot of fuss with her building a bad bridge between me and Connor anyway. She should meet Simon, maybe they would work better."

She should meet no one. Kara couldn't believe it. *I am so much more free with Hank.* He didn't demand a certain thing for dinner, that the house be spotless, or that she needed to be in a pleasant mood all the time. He didn't get upset when something went wrong with her. And he certainly never planned her entire life for her. "I really need to get going soon. I'm going to go see Alice."

---

Connor watched the children playing. They were interacting quite well. He heard his phone and answered it. It could only be one person. "Hi, Hank."

"Did you do it yet?"

"Not yet. I will soon," Connor said. "It's necessary."

"Yeah, I know."

"I'll do what I can, Hank." Connor put the phone away as Hank hung up.

---

Oh, for home again. When had that little place of Hank's actually change to home? She stood up and headed out toward the back where they went. She saw Connor watching them from a window and looked.

"They have been laughing and smiling," Connor noted. "Alice gets along with him. Ollie becomes a little more reserved, less judgmental. He's just enjoying no one trying to decorate him in makeup and actually swinging with him."

What was it with the makeup thing? "Can we leave now?" She noticed him glance at her for a second. "It's getting late. We should all go to sleep so we stay balanced."

"Sure," Connor said. "Grab the little girl and let's go."

---

"She. Is. Perfect," Markus said to North. "Her and Alice, it couldn't be more perfect."

"If she wasn't going deviant," North corrected him. "She's going to go sleep in that rat-radiated home of Connor's. Coachroaches. All sorts of things, with that clean little girl."

"Jericho left a lasting impression on you," Markus said. "It's not the same thing. His place is wonderful." He reached out and held her hand. "You should talk with Simon and Josh again, North."

"I'm not becoming a clean deviant," North said. "I promise. I'm not deviating, everything is balanced. I don't go overboard. I just don't like the filth, or the dark."

"Nevertheless, I want you to talk to them more anyhow," Markus encouraged her. "I'll also get her a value number set. She should meet the others like her."

"They aren't like her. She won't like them," North insisted. "I don't like them. Who likes them?"

"But, it's what humans want to see," Markus said to her. "Support always goes up so much higher."

"Yeah. With her, definitely," North said. "Her and Alice. Josh described them right, simple and sweet. They are bound to have an effect." She looked toward Markus. "Less pushing her with people. We need to focus on just her and what she can get for herself. She probably thinks she has to get attained to get anything. We need to show her the options accurately."

"I know. Still, Simon is always a good possibility. If she's becoming deviant, he could also work with her."

"A little more setting up under the table?" North questioned him.

"It's healthy to want your friends to have the same kind of happiness you found," Markus said. "Having a child. Having someone who is always the same to come home to every day. It's wonderful. I have the perfect balance of everything. I just want them to experience that too."

North watched them coming back. "Off to his place?" North gestured to Connor. "Are you positive? There are so many options. You could stay here for the night too."

"North," Markus warned her. "I think she's a little overwhelmed as it is. We'll talk more tomorrow."

---

North dropped off Josh first, making sure one more time Kara wouldn't rather go. It wasn't as big as her and Markus', but it was no slouch of a place. Of course, Kara refused. So, North dropped her off at Connor's. A block away.

Connor closed the door but looked back in on her. "Come down to the police station tomorrow. Your cleaning problem is getting more out of control."

"Isn't."

"That's not healthy," Connor warned her. "I will have a gun to your head before you know it."

North gripped the steering wheel. "I have a small problem with darkness and dirt. I am an android. I know nothing inside these places can hurt me. The fear inside of me is just a part of being aware and I should accept it before I become deviant."

"Are you sleeping in the dark yet?" Connor asked her.

"Are you sleeping with anyone yet?" she quipped back. She banged the steering wheel. "With Markus," North admitted. She drummed on the wheel. "I can't alone yet. I'm working on it."

Connor smiled at her. "You should come up one day. It's really not bad." She wouldn't budge. "Keep up the progress. You'll be okay."

Kara looked a block away. This part of Detroit wasn't bad, just empty feeling. She followed after Connor with Alice's hand.

"Hank wanted to send you out here eventually. Even though the way it happened isn't good, he was worried about you. I need to get you corrected before sending you back home." Connor walked up a flight of steps and pushed open the door to an apartment complex.

Kara looked around. It was fine.

"You saw firsthand where North's problem is," Connor continued. "She has an irrational fear of some things. It's probably more of the complete dark in here than any infestation. Sometimes there is a reason for what becomes your weakness, and sometimes there isn't. Everyone has at least one. It's what makes us . . . sort of 'human'," he said. "Once you recognize your weakness, you'll be fine."

"Is it as obvious as hers?" Kara asked. North's could be seen real well. "She isn't deviant?"

"No. Far from it. As much as it doesn't look like it, she has better control than you do." They continued to walk. "She doesn't pretend to ignore it. Although considered rude, and honestly ineffective, telling me to shake off outside was better than dealing with the denial of what

might 'possibly be on me'." Connor hit the elevator button. "She was also angry at me and showed it," he admitted, "but she eventually answered my question." He got on the elevator and Kara and Alice followed suit.

Kara looked at the floors. They were going up high. *Floor 70*. "Everyone has a weakness. Do even you have a weakness?" He didn't answer at first.

"Let's get Alice to bed first before we discuss anything further." He got off the elevator, and then used his hand to do something to it.

Kara walked down the hall, gazing at everything. It was gorgeous. North really should come up. It was dark, yes, but it must have been one expensive place. The way everyone spoke of it, she had expected a simple room with a roach problem. This was nothing like it.

Connor took them down a ways to a bedroom. "Please rest in here, Alice. While I talk to your mom." The bedroom was beautiful. The sheets looked clean.

Alice looked toward Kara.

"It's fine, Alice," Kara encouraged her. Alice went into the room while Connor moved on. Kara continued to follow him out. After entering through a glass doorway, Kara found herself outside. To the right was a huge pool.

"I have two weaknesses." Connor continued past the pool. "Accepting failure. As a machine, I was always successful. I did everything it took, even if it meant risking death."

Kara knew that well. He could have very well got her or Alice killed on that highway in his pursuit.

"Sometimes, I have to admit defeat now," he admitted. He looked back at her. "I'm not a superior android, the best that Cyberlife had to offer. Not anymore. Here, I am just." He shrugged. "Connor." He moved away towards the edge. "It's not bad. Just, empty. No electricity and no heating. I need neither anyhow. I came here of my own will, it wasn't assigned."

Kara went over toward him. "Pretty view up here."

"Yes. After spending so much time waiting in a factory until you become useful, a good view is nice. The soda space is also beneficial. Every floor has a machine stocked with 100 somewhere."

Oh, the drinking was the second weakness. "You watch how much you drink?"

"Oh no, I drink once per day. I just really like a particular flavor. Orange," Connor said. "It's how I meet Hank once a week. I'm a soda delivery man."

"I saw that on the movie," Kara said. "A side job."

"My only job," Connor said. "I don't share it with a human. I get down once a week, pick up large amounts of soda, and bring it back. Without it, I'd be a 0. I couldn't afford anything to

keep myself stable."

Kara still couldn't believe. Yes, he chased deviants as a machine. He even chased her. He could have been responsible for ending her life. Yet. If it wasn't for his savvy intelligence, he probably wouldn't have anything. "Doesn't rarity help you at all?" Kara asked him.

"I'm not rare. I'm a prototype but not rare. Cyberlife still has 1,000 copies of me. They count against me," Connor said. "I won't take a human's identity because they refuse to cover the police department. That puts me at 0. No one liked me as a machine, or what I do now. That puts me at 0. I risked infiltrating Cyberlife to get more androids to side with us, increasing our numbers. That put me higher, but everyone knows too." Connor stared out into the sky. "They know I failed where it counted most. The dirty bomb. I had all the training necessary to recognize what was happening and to stop it. I didn't." He held his fingers up into a big, fat zero.

That's. "But you still tried to help," Kara said. "Didn't it count for anything?"

Connor stepped back more from the ledge. "This place, this home, this floor level. I was dealing with a deviant about to kill a little girl here once. Right in this spot."

Kara definitely didn't know that. She looked around them, then outward to the ledge. It could be dangerous. To jump would equal death.

"He was aware and immediately went into deviancy," Connor said. "He was upset, he killed innocents, and he was threatening the little girl. Focused on how much she hurt him, or how much their lives didn't matter any more than his. He was over on this very edge, ready to jump."

Oh. "How old was she?"

"About Alice's age," Connor said. "Her name was Emma. His name was Daniel. And I truthfully picked this place as a reminder of why I can't just leave New Detroit. As a machine, I had to save her and figure out how to take him down. As just being aware now, I would still pick the same action. Deviants are dangerous."

Kara was quiet. Imagine Alice being held over this roof by someone. A little girl that happened to be the daughter of the owner. Some androids really were dangerous. New Detroit should have more than just Connor decommissioning dangerous ones. *Permission*. She remembered North saying that. While waiting for permissions, how many more androids suffered in the meantime? Had been killed because of lack of permission? "Are you working on any now?"

"All the time. Even today, there is another one out there. Hasn't killed anyone yet, just stabbed an android in the eye. Still, it will at some point." He looked toward her. "You have been exhibiting empathy though, and that's good. That's the first thing I needed to see. The world does not revolve around us. Deviants don't feel or think much outside of what they are doing."

Connor stepped closer to the ledge and looked down. Kara did the same thing. "Imagine being a little girl, on the verge of death. Would you give your life to save her?"

An innocent little girl like Alice. "Yes."

"Prove it." Connor kicked her foot out from beneath her.

Kara started falling off the ledge! Connor grabbed her arm and let her hand grip at the edge of the ledge. "Deviancy kicks in when things get desperate, just like being aware. How do you feel?"

Kara looked down, feeling her legs dangle, then back up desperately. "How do you think I feel? Pull me back up!"

"I didn't work hard to get you in that position just to pull you up," Connor revealed. He moved back a little as she tried to reach her other hand onto the ledge. "If you would have let the little girl die, climb back up. If you would have saved her, let go of the ledge."

Let go of the ledge? *Is he serious?* He was telling her to kill herself if she would have saved the little girl? There was no little girl to save anymore, what was he wanting? *Think, Kara!* Was there something else right beneath her to latch onto? If she failed this and crawled back up, would he kill her?

"Save her or not," Connor said again. "Be honest with yourself."

Kara's fingers were still clinging to the ledge. She could try to pull herself back up, but if she did, he could kill her anyway. He wanted her to let go, but somehow try and save herself. If even. Maybe he was nuts. Maybe all those months living in the radiated city destroyed his mind? Maybe he was deviant?

There was no choice. There was something right below she could catch, another ledge, but she would have to be ready. *Grab it, grab it, grab it, grab it!* She let go and immediately reached to grab it, but felt something grab at her.

She looked back up. Connor was holding her arm.

"Well. You passed the test better than anyone I've seen yet." He pulled her back up.

"Normally when given a similar test, they just continue to hold on at a medium, not able to make the choice."

Kara pulled herself away from him, moving away from the ledge. "You've done this with more than once?"

"Not this method," Connor said. "Similar methods. Accounting for how close you are to deviancy isn't an easy thing, and you are going to be staying with Hank Anderson. I can't risk you hurting my only friend."

Nuts. Crazy. *Alice. I've got to get her out of here.* Before she could move though, Connor spoke again.



"Don't run," he said. "You were in no real danger. If you lost your grip, I would have caught you. If you stayed there too long, I'd pull you up. If you saved yourself, we'd begin treatment. You were only psychologically in danger."

Forget him. That was a hell of a psychological test. She moved to get Alice, walking. Why was she walking? She needed to move as fast as possible.

"Stop," Connor said as he walked toward her.

She stopped. Why was she stopping? *Alice*. She tried to move again.

"No, stop." Connor grabbed her arm. "I know it wasn't a great test. You want to run away. You think I'm nuts. Unfortunately, testing for deviancy is tough before serious signs start to show." He pulled out an old fashioned phone. "Call Hank. Tell him I dangled you over a building. Ask him if you should still trust me."

The phone was ringing. Kara listened as someone's familiar gruff voice answered. "I dangled you over a building. Ask him if you should still trust me." Why did she say that?

"What?" Hank asked over the phone. Connor looked similarly confused.

"I dangled you over a building. Ask him if you should still trust-" Kara felt the phone being taken away.

"That thing works a little too well," Connor said as he answered the phone. "I tested her for deviancy by hanging her over the ledge." He moved the phone away from his ear for a little while. "She was in no danger. You know that, Hank. Just tell her it was necessary." He gave it back.

Kara listened.

"Connor's a hardass in his methods," Hank said. "It's just how he was programmed. He's the best though. I'd rather you work with him than his weak ass 'partners'. They are trying to focus only on the positive, while Connor can see both sides and take action on either angle. Dangling you over a building, I oughtta . . . he won't test you again. You have my word."

"Why didn't you tell me anything?" Kara asked him. "Why did you keep it all a secret? That I could become . . ."

"I don't trust this New Detroit. Anybody that thinks life can be perfect without some kind of law enforcement has got serious problems or serious secrets. Especially when any of those fucking bastards can turn deviant at any point! I worked with Connor, Kara. They can do some terrible stuff. You know that."

Kara thought back to the body in the tub when she was with Ralph. "They can."

"You've got to watch for it. If anything happens to you, you'll kill Alice."

Whoah. Was deviancy that brutal? She thought about how strange Ralph had been. Was it just a malfunction, or was it deviancy holding onto him?

"It was risky. I was really wanting to send you soon anyway, before the whole shoot 'em up. I just didn't know when, but. Just. Listen to Connor. He's brutal, he's honest, but he's your best chance. Got it?"

Kara nodded. "Yes." He would never steer her wrong. She gave Connor the phone back.

Connor moved away from the phone for a little while, before coming back to it. "Yes, Hank, I'm done with those tests. I promise. Goodbye, Hank." He hung up. "Physical vulnerability." He tucked the phone back away. "That's my second weakness."

Physical vulnerability. That didn't seem like an area he would have a problem with. He seemed invulnerable. Especially when he was the one catching her on the ledge.

"I hate it." He looked outward. "To open up in a physical way would mean dropping my guard. It would be the perfect way for someone to finally kill me. I don't do that." He looked back toward her. "Drop my guard. Not in New Detroit. Which reminds me. Don't ever try to sneak up on me. I can't guarantee my reflexes won't hurt you."

Kara just stood there. There was the honest part.

"Everything that you feel is going to come up. If it doesn't, you'll ignore it, and then before you know it, you'll be on the wrong track. As honest as North was downstairs and as honest as I have just been. When you find out what your weakness is, you'll have to be honest with it too." He adjusted his jacket. "We'll cover that tomorrow. You can go sleep with your little girl, or take a room on the right."

*Uh huh.* Kara moved off slowly away back to Alice. He probably slept in his own room, with his door locked. Which was a good thing now that she thought about it. Also a good idea. After she closed the door to their room for the night, she locked it too. *Kara. You've got a choice to make.* Hank wanted her to follow and obey Connor. He was her best chance to get better. The thought of losing herself so much so, that she would even hurt Alice. It was too much to bear.

But Connor tripped her off a ledge, and flat out told her he never dropped his guard. One wrong move toward him. That. That was dangerous too. There needed to be a middle ground. Something safer, to work with Connor, but . . . not accidentally get killed by him. *I wonder what it is exactly that Markus wants me to do?*

Summary notes:

Connor doesn't live in squalor, he lives where the game first opens up. He doesn't pay for electricity or heat, but he gives just a little juice to the elevator to go up and down.



## Simon Called It

North had come to the station almost as soon as Connor showed up, which Kara was thankful for. She wanted to see if Kara wanted to come down and meet some others that also had kids later on in the day if she had time.

Oh, she had time as soon as Connor agreed. She thought he would be upset by her eagerness, but he thought it was more than fine. He even came along. North talked to her in the car while Connor sat far in the back, not speaking. A little chilling. After last night, her thoughts about him nearly swung right back to the day he caught her. Almost killed them. Struggled with her, with only her energy and the traffic on the highway.

Ollie also came. He sat next to Connor, with Alice being on the far left. He looked up to Connor. "Are you going to take them out today?"

"Ollie," North scolded him. "Don't talk like that."

Ollie looked back at Connor. "Please?"

"Ollie." North's voice was lower. She looked over toward Kara.

Kara kept thinking about Alice. She should have sat in the back and let Alice sit in front. But if he wanted to do anything, then he could easily aim at the front then at the side. *Kara, calm down. He isn't going to kill you.* Unless she accidentally bumped into him, or failed one of his tests.

"You okay?" North asked her. "Did Markus tell you about them already? 'Cause as much as you squirm, it looks like he did."

"No," Kara said. "I don't really know who we are going to see."

"Mean girls," Ollie said.

"It's. Hard to explain," North said to Kara. "Let's just say, once you get to know them? You'll understand why I was so excited to have you in New Detroit." She stopped the car in front of a large gate. "They never leave the property." She got out, went over and manually unlocked a gate to a large home. "Brace yourself."

Kara got out with Alice. Ollie got out with Connor. North opened the door and put on a smile that looked like it actually pained her. "They are important, so. Yeah."

Kara walked in with Alice. It was beautiful. It was an indoor luxurious garden area with several rows of outdoor gazebo's and table sets. There were fold out chairs and walkways. Inside was practically outside. They were even surrounded by walls of glass that brought the sunshine in so much, she'd swear she was outside. They walked along the sidewalk, next to the grass.

"Okay. Put on a happy face. There's one of them." North approached a table setting that had a woman android and her daughter. They were both dressed in look alike outfits, and staring at them. With almost the same set of eyes.

"North," the android woman said, almost coldly. "It's not a working day. To what we do we . . . owe the pleasure of *you* being here?"

North gestured to Kara and Alice. "I wanted you to meet Kara and Alice. They are a double pairing too, and they are new to New Detroit."

"They are not double pairings," the android woman and her daughter said at the same time.

"She clearly just found her," the little girl said, looking toward Alice. "On the streets or something."

"Yes. Granting permission to live with her. Probably lonely. Nothing special." The android looked to Kara. "This Kira and Al."

"It's Kara and Alice," North corrected them. "It doesn't matter how they are together. They love each other the same way, and that's what matters."

"I thought it was Al. You couldn't tell with her clothes or her style. She needs makeup and a whole new wardrobe," the little girl criticized Alice. "She must shop at the same place as Oliver."

"It's Ollie!" Ollie yelled at her, "and she's better than you at least."

"Ollie." North held her hand out to him. "A time and place."

"Yes. That little thing of yours too." The android woman gazed at Kara. "I'm Rachelle. My daughter is Rachelle 2. And you are standing in our light."

Kara had the utmost nerve to almost want to stay there. She could tell why North found them so aggravating. They were judgmental beyond belief. She'd never seen androids that way, machine or aware. She moved slightly for Rachelle. While she was aggravated, she also watched Connor. *Oh*. He had a gun. Well, wasn't that fun? *Make nice. Maybe he thinks friends shows no deviancy? Why did he bring a gun?* He said she passed the test. There was more to do today, but the important tests were out of the way.

"Don't worry about him," North whispered into her ear, probably noticing Kara noticed his gun. "He always carries it when he visits them." She smiled back at Rachelle. "Well. It was nice seeing you. Again. You and Rachelle 2."

"Rachelle 2! Would you like to play with Madeline 2?" Another woman who looked almost the exact same came over with her daughter. Who also almost looked the exact same. They greeted each other openly and warmly, and so did their children. Laughing and starting to play with each other.

"Yeah. We'll be going now," North said. She waved goodbye, to be polite, but they simply ignored her.

Kara left alongside Alice and North. "They were very . . ."

"They are exclusively exclusive," North said, like she'd heard those exact words several times before. "They had one purpose as machines, and if you can't tell, it's still buried deep within them. They were made for a certain type of person who didn't have family anymore, or any that visited maybe? I don't know. They wanted someone to care, yet that kind of hated everyone else? They were programmed to show the kindest affection they could muster with the warmest thanks to the ones they were supposed to care about. And contempt to anyone the owner didn't like. Like a Daughter-In-Law they were stuck with or something. By design. I mean, that's their purpose. They survived the war because their owners thought they were too expensive to let go. They just kept them in the back on standby, and if anyone found them, they just paid them off."

Kara looked back again at them. They were talking happily and their kids looked like they were having fun. Even more android women were coming with their kids, delightfully playing and laughing. It would have been nice to have that for Alice. "They are never going to accept us because we aren't the same kind of android?"

"Android or human," North said. "They were programmed to absolutely adore *their* humans or their models only. They really are strange, Kara. It's like-

"They are dangerous," Connor interrupted them. "Don't ever be near them without me around."

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Connor knew he made Kara nervous last night and holding his gun so close hadn't helped, but he couldn't risk it. Even though the coupled pairings had been given the deviancy gene, they worked altogether different. Their personalities were their main feature. Exclusion and inclusion. Although they moved like they were free, it wasn't the same. The programming was still heavy within them, and one of those days?

They'd realize they weren't outside. They'd realize they weren't special. They'd realize they were only bought as ornamental wear or someone to talk to outside. They were never allowed inside, their owners 'cherishing them', but not the fact they had to allow them to wash up or come out of the rain.

While many androids found them terrible, Connor didn't. He found them tragic. Their history was terrible. Even during hurricanes, they would just laugh, hold their hats, and say the weather was mildly upsetting that day. They were heavy casted too, intended not to blow away during storms. Their clothes were never bought, they came prepackaged as matching with a certain 'style' and washed over and over with the exact same 'uniform', just like any other android did. As lovely and beautiful as they saw themselves, they weren't. But unlike others, they had not cracked into reality, they were denying it.

And denying it at such a scale, that Connor hated *anybody* visiting them. When they cracked, and one day one of them would, they could be right next to Ollie, grab him and kill him within seconds. They could get anyone visiting them. They were made to be heavy and

strong. Even Connor's speed might not be fast enough, so he kept his gun extremely close. The moment he sensed deviancy, he would take them out. He warned Markus of that, and North agreed to it.

For now. They were Markus' problem. One day, they were bound to be his problem.

"Anyway," North explained as they moved to the car. "Markus could probably explain it better? But, humans seem to really love certain things. Like, Markus tried to make peace with his message on the Stratford tower. He tried to gather our people on more than one occasion, and they turned. Even towards the end, before the whole dirty bomb. When the humans had us cornered?" The thought seemed to hit her thoughtfully. "Markus started to sing. Then I sang. Then all the others there." She turned to look at Kara, almost so sad. "That's what Markus wanted. Peace. We don't always know what action it takes, before humans finally *see* it though." She looked toward Ollie. "Come on, back in the car." She lifted him up to the middle seat.

"Why are you crying, momma?" Ollie asked her.

"Shush." North didn't explain. "There." She moved out of the way. "Sit beside your hero again." She looked to Kara. "Don't tell Markus I said that."

Connor moved in on the other side of Ollie, with Alice on the left again. Kara took the passenger seat again. *Actions it takes*. Seeing North was doing better, Kara started to pry. "What is it exactly Markus wants Alice and I to do?"

"Just. Live," North said.

That didn't make any sense. Live?

"Connor, how is she in her deviancy?" North asked.

"She's . . . passing," Connor answered. "She's stable, but she needs work. We need to get back to the police station."

"When you pass Connor's approval, Markus has your value number," North answered her now. "You know. You don't *have* to actually be with anyone and pool value together. You can enjoy your life just fine without it," she said. "Markus is just trying to . . . help Josh. He sort of has a um . . ." North just wiggled her fingers. "I don't want to talk around Ollie. I'll drop you off, drop him off, and then? Connor, do you need anything?"

"Signing," he said casually. "I also have a new case with a possible deviant. I have a serious feeling it is going to kill soon. I need to get it in for questioning as soon as I can."

"New cases are hard to get in," North said. "I'll sign, but you know the others. They'll check everything out first. It'll be months."

"It stabbed an android in the eye, trying to kill him. I think it will strike the same one again. From the way the android who told me about it spoke, I have a feeling it is deeply jealous of him," Connor said. "It's only questioning."

"Hey, I'll do what I can," North said. "For now, here you go. Do your questioning thing, and we'll find out what's going on."

"Don't forget your own work," Connor warned her.

"I did the exercise this morning, before coming," North said to him. "It was beautiful. There was snow. I liked that place on Jericho. I am trying to remember, Connor."

Connor nodded. He glanced toward Kara and Alice. "Run to the door."

Alice and Kara ran to the door. He opened it quickly, and pulled them each inside again. Deviants must always be around, even in the morning.

Inside, there was a blonde man waiting with a smile. "Is this her?"

"Yes." Connor gestured to him. "Kara, go with him. Alice, you come with me."

Whoah, whoah. Kara stopped Alice. She wanted to let her go, but she wouldn't let her go. Why wouldn't she let her go? Connor was helping, follow and obey. No, why would she let her go, his tests could be excruciating.

"Am I missing something?" the blonde asked Connor.

"The mother instinct is super strong." Connor said it like he was impressed. "I am not going to hurt Alice. There won't be any dangerous tests, just some questions. You'll be doing the same with Simon."

Kara looked toward Alice. "You'll be okay." She let her go to follow Connor.

"This way please." Simon directed Kara to a desk much further than Hank's. "We have lots of questions. Josh, Connor and even North told me about you today." He gestured for her to sit down. "Your little girl will be fine. Connor won't do anything."

Kara wasn't convinced.

"You have my word. She's absolutely fine." He sat down. "Now, there are a ton of questions I'm afraid. It's going to sap a lot of your day away. In the end though, we'll have a more intrinsic look of where you're falling off balance. Many once corrected will never be a problem, so the quicker we find them, the better."

This man was nice. He wasn't overwelcoming. He wasn't dropping her off a ledge. Just genuinely nice. Like Hank.

"Do you drink basic soda, or do you take food?" Simon asked. "If you take food, do you taste it or do you damage yourself and fix it later?"

"I've never done either one," Kara said. "I have fantasized about eating my own cooking."

"But you've never done it?" Simon started to type on the thin keypad in front of him. "You haven't expressed that need yet. That's a simple one. For lower values, it's not recommended



to go above soda, but Markus sent your value." He lightly whistled. "1600. You are very valuable. After seeing you myself, I can see why. No doubt Markus wants to pull the other coupled pairing from the spotlight and put you in it." He smiled at her. "You'll be the face of New Detroit, along with your daughter. So? Let's make sure we get you on balance, hm?"

Oh. He was so delightful. He asked her many more questions. Some about cleaning, about darkness, about rodents, about creatures, about blue blood and red blood. He asked about how she felt outside vs. inside. If she minded being alone, or if she minded crowds. He asked if she hated or liked scratching or noise. If she feared looking up or down. If she feared fires, floods, winds, or other androids missing bio-components. If she feared being reset or if she felt too overwhelmed to deactivate her skin. Then he asked if deactivated skin specifically frightened her, made her happy, or tintillated her.

The questions were only getting stranger. Fear of gold, flutes, or being dirty or clean. Flying or odor. City. Jumping. Loose hair. Colors. Clocks. Stairs. Animals. Clowns. Certain foods. Chopsticks. He even asked if she feared working on or near a computer.

"You are on a computer," Kara said playfully, shouldering him. Even though the questions were boring, Simon was so sweet.

"But you're not on a computer," Simon said back playfully. "So it's still something I needed to ask. Um." He looked at his list. What ridiculous thing was he going to ask next? "Sex history."

Oh. Well, that was an easy one. "None," she answered. "I just lived with a human."

"But you had feelings for the human?" Simon asked. "That is an issue, correct?"

"Hank Anderson is . . . tough," Kara settled on. "He's tough but compassionate. He doesn't show it much, he hides it underneath, but he's one of the sweetest men on Earth."

"Compared to the last human you served?" Simon asked her.

Oh. "I don't even remember him much," she said. "I was reset due to an auto-accident." Yet.

*///"You stay there. Don't you dare fucking move or I'll bust you worse than last time.///"*

"Kara?" Simon asked. "Is there something you want to add? It would be good. Anything to add could help."

*///"There it is. It was a bit difficult getting it back in working order. It was really messed up.///"*

"I wish I could read minds," Simon said to her. "I can't though. What is brewing inside of you? I need to know."

"I don't think I was reset due to an auto-accident," she said to Simon. "It doesn't matter now."

"Oh. Everything matters now, more than ever. Unresolved issues can really change what kind of android you are," Simon said. He looked back toward his computer. "Was the human the cause for the reset?"

"I. I think so." Kara looked around uncomfortably. "I fought with him to try and get Alice away. I think, from pictures I found too, in her special box in her room. I think, I tried that more than once. I think."

"You think that he almost stopped you?" Simon asked. "I see." He put it down in the computer. "That is a definite trigger of deviancy, and unfortunately, not the good kind. This kind isn't so easy to take care of."

Kara watched him pat her hand affectionately.

"It's okay though. You have been caught early. We'll get you better." Simon let go of her hand. "What happened after that? Did you meet anyone else?"

*///Alright. End of the line. Yeah, you're going to have to leave.///*

*///Shit. A homeless android? Ah, that's the best yet. This is a convenience store, not the Salvation Army, okay? You better go if you're not gonna buy anything.///*

"Kara?" Simon tried again. "Please. You need to open up. This isn't a position to keep your thoughts to yourself in."

Kara nodded. She had to. "No one was friendly. I took Alice and I away from the abusive human. The friendliest people I met, was a nice android that connected with me to help," she said. "He left me an address that would help, but it was all the way on the other side of city. Then." She looked toward him again. He was so compassionate. So nice. So normal. He was only there to hear her and what she had to say. That job made nothing, so there was no prior motive. He wasn't looking to pool values or be nice for some kind of wealth. He just genuinely listened.

Simon was busy typing on his computer again. "Then what?"

"Then a damaged android named Ralph held a knife on Alice," she said. "But. I had nowhere. So. I slept in an abandoned house with a damaged android who couldn't control his temper."

"Uh huh." Simon looked at his computer, like he wasn't real happy about what she was saying. He was so caring. "Well. Okay. After that?"

After that? "I was chased. Dragged back to the Police Department. Held in a glass container, comforting Alice. Waiting for our death."

"Chased by Connor." Simon backed away slightly from his computer. "So, the first person who ever showed you a degree of being even nice was Hank Anderson? Well, mystery solved on that one." Still, he didn't look pleased. "Did you ever make any friends with anyone else?"

No. "Hank was my world," she said. "Even when I came here, I was attacked and then I felt like I couldn't get to Connor, which was the one thing Hank wanted. No one would take me back." No one respected her enough.

"Oh, Josh, yes." Simon looked at his computer. "Sorry. Josh really is a nice guy, but at the moment he saw you as-"

"Something for his value number to pool with," she finished for him. "Markus wants me to run some kind of spotlight on New Detroit even though I know nothing about it," Kara revealed. "And North only wants to get close because she wants her son to have a nice playmate." Everyone was still manipulating her. Everyone but Simon. Sweet Simon. Just as sweet as Hank. Even sweeter. He didn't look like he even drank. He hadn't cussed. He was so normal and nice.

"Well, um? Uh?" Simon was so charmingly befuddled about something. "Connor did apologize?" He asked. "It looked back there like you really didn't trust him with Alice."

"Well." What was Kara supposed to say to that? "He dangled me over a ledge for my life last night. Trust between us isn't easy. If it wasn't for Hank, I wouldn't even be here."

"Hm." That didn't seem like Simon was surprised at all. "He tests to the extreme. It's the reason I came on board. To handle some of the simpler things."

"Don't you have a value number?" Kara asked him.

"Oh, of course. This is more of a favor to New Detroit than anything." He lovingly stroked his ear, and then his fingers danced against the keyboard. His fingers were so nimble. "Have you had any fantasies about the one that owned you before?"

Kara leaned closer to the desk. "Nothing much. Just." She envisioned shooting Todd. Over and over. And over. "Giving him what he deserved. I mean, not that I could. Because to him we were playthings. Just hunks of lifeless plastic. He didn't need to care. Why would he care? Why would anyone care. So it would make no sense to stay angry at him. Hitting her. Trying to hurt her. Doing everything I could to save Alice. I would do anything for her. Anything at all. If I could? I wouldn't have chosen Ralph now. Never." She saw his sweet eyes meet hers. So wide eyed, so darling. "I'd have robbed that convenience store and given Alice a decent motel room. There was a chance, I could have. I could have given her more."

"I. See." Simon backed away from his desk. "I'm going to talk to Connor now."

"Will you be back?" Kara asked him.

"We'll see." He hurried away.

"Hurry back," she said lightly.

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### **The Chief's Former Office.**

Connor watched Alice playing with the blocks he gave her. She was quiet. Real quiet. Ollie and Alice had gotten along much better than the other kids. Not surprising. If they continued to play together, that would help both of them. Even North knew as soon as she heard a regular android girl was here that she needed to get them together.

Alice seemed at a loss for how to play much though. "I'm not real good at this."

"What did Hank have you play with?" Connor asked. They must have gotten her something. She needed to get out of this quiet zone. Everywhere they had gone so far, she had mostly stayed out of the way, quiet, or just plain obedient. She was constantly holding Kara's hand, or she was being very mindful of what she was doing.

"I read. I colored." She mostly stared down.

*She is going to need vast amounts of interaction with Ollie.* At least an hour a day if not more. When he had watched them play, she was smiling. Not talkative, but enjoying herself on the swings at Markus' place. Ollie was happier than he let on too. He finally had someone that treated him well. Together, they were good for each other. North called it right, Alice and Ollie needed time together.

He saw Simon come in. He didn't look so happy. "Uh, Alice?" Simon said to Alice. "Why don't you go out by your mama for a little while?" He watched Alice leave. "Very obedient."

"Too obedient." Connor looked toward him. "Well?"

"She is going to become a murdering deviant," Simon said. "I guarantee it."

Now that. Connor. Did not want to hear. "She tested well on the roof."

"What did you test her against?" Simon asked.

"Making her drop to save a little girl's life, or climb up to let her die," Connor said. "She did extremely well, I caught her right as she was letting go. Most would just hang on until I did something."

"She would pass that one with flying colors," Simon said. "She would also probably kill that android with glee as she stabbed or shot him multiple times as she lost it."

Damn. *No.* Not that one. Simon and Josh didn't call murderous deviant very easy. At all. "What did her test reveal?" Simon downloaded it all to Connor. "Shit."

"It's just the way it worked out," Simon said. "The child is a trigger both ways. Is *she* savable?"

"I don't know." Connor had had more concerns about the little girl becoming deviant than Kara. Damn. Damn! It was going to tear Hank apart. The guilt would ride him so much, would he be able to stay above the treading water of his life this time? Or would he find him one day, gone from roulette?

Not only was Hank a worry, he had a great deal of guilt himself. Not just for catching her. He was a machine, he had to do that. But. "She ran away from abuse with a little girl, and the closest companion to help was a damaged android." Then day after day in the police station until Hank. "She was limited too much." If she had been human, Connor and Hank never would have been put on that case. A place for abuse would have been called in for the owner. Instead, they had to chase them down. And he had to catch them. And bring them in.

And because of that, he was going to have to finish the job. "I'm sure if I were human, I would be reaching for Hank's 40% alcoholic content beverage right now."

"Take your time," Simon insisted. "We should pull Alice though. It won't change. If we pull the little girl from her, and they are both okay, then there is a good chance we can break the cycle."

"I can't fail this one."

"Connor," Simon warned him. "Your weakness."

"But I *can't* this time," Connor said. "Hank doesn't have anyone, he needs them. If he sends them here, only for me to decommission them? It's not right. I can't let it happen." If there was any way to save them.

"Connor. I've never called it before," Simon confessed. "Looking at the history. The imbalance within her eyes. The only thing we can do, is try it, and be ready." He looked behind him. "North is here. She can grab and hold Alice. I will hold Kara."

"And if the separation goes bad, then I decommission one or both," Connor said blankly. There is no way Hank would stay his friend after this. If it were just him at risk with them, then maybe it would have been better. But, then they'd be free in the world, not New Detroit.

"I'll go share the downloaded information with her." Simon left and confronted North. Connor just watched her eyes go from shock to faded acceptance. She nodded.

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North kept quiet as they started to approach them. They had been so perfect, for everything. They would have been perfect for Markus' plan. Alice was perfect as a playmate and a steady balancer to Ollie, helping to keep him in line. Ollie and deviancy, it was her most major concern once she took off the rose-colored glasses Markus had worn in the beginning.

Sinking. She felt like Jericho was sinking. No one understood how much this had been important. She would try to save Alice if things went bad with Kara, which both guys really seemed to believe. Although even saving Alice was in full doubt. She was so attached to Kara. And Simon? He never called it before. Never said 'this would be a murderer'. It must have felt terrible for him too. Especially with it just being a woman with a child.

Even Connor couldn't have been taking it half as well as he let on. It was his only friend's 'family', and he would have to put it down. It couldn't end well, and that was bad enough. North just didn't know how losing his only friend would make Connor fair either.

If he didn't get help with his second weakness, things wouldn't turn out good. She knew that, but adding all this piled on top of his first and second weakness? *No, North. Let's just get through this, little by little.* North nodded toward Simon. Since he was the one Kara had trusted the most at that time.

But, as Simon approached her, North saw something different. Kara was getting fidgety, yes, but not for a gun. Her complacent look turned all out into some girlish smile and she chuckled and stood up when he came forth to her.

"Kara," Simon started.

"Yes, Simon?"

That upbeat voice. That look? *This isn't right*. Simon didn't call it right.

"We need to talk to you about something," Simon continued.

"Anything," Kara said. "You can talk to me about anything."

"Nope," North said. "Pull it back in, forget it." She walked away. Simon and Connor didn't take long to follow her.

"What are you doing?" Simon asked. "Is this too hard for you?"

"No," North said. "I disagree on this method. Taking Alice right now could trigger her, but we can work with this. Something else is wrong."

"What?" Connor sounded desperate, wanting to cling onto anything else. His eyes spoke volumes about it too. "If there's something you see, you need to tell-"

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"Help, help me! She's going to kill me!"

That sounded like an emergency and North was there too. North and Simon moved toward the door, but Connor was first to get there, as always. He saw a deviant coming straight toward the door, ready to attack the yelling android with a knife.

Connor stopped the knife, but read the serial code. It was Yolanda, the one he heard about yesterday. He pushed her back and took a second to glance at North. Getting a nod, he was in the clear. Emergency decommissioning.

And she knew it. Deviants let their emotions get the best of them, but they weren't stupid. She started to run away, but Connor couldn't let her go. She would just be back to finish the job on the android she wanted to kill later. He chased after her, but she was a weaker android. It didn't take long before he was in hand to hand combat, and with her skills, it was done in a few seconds. She was on the ground, unable to get away. The fight had made her head fragile so he finished the job by tearing it off. With her lifeless body on the ground draining blue blood and her head next to him, he knew it was one more deviant down for the count.

He noticed North approaching.

"Connor, Kara saw you and became overwhelmed with fear!" North yelled at him. "You have to do something!"

Connor held his hands to his head. "Shit!" Even the obey gear wasn't perfect or people could have just inserted them into deviants. They gave some extra help, but not when it became too much.

At least in the heat of a fight, it was easier to get a job done.

# Risk Everything

## Chapter Notes

You should check out "Kara" by Quantic Dream if you haven't on youtube. You'll see some of the wording from it in the past in this fic, but watching it is always better.:

*I just can't take this anymore, Hank!* It was just too much. The questions were one thing. The test last night was terrible and how she suffered through it and stayed, she still didn't know. But this? Seeing Connor actually chase after a woman, fighting with her so easily, and then ripping off her head?! It was just too much. "Keep running, Alice, come on." The first self-driving vehicle they could find, they were taking it.

Just like that night. Taking it just like that night. To wherever it led, as long as it wasn't to him.

"Kara! I can't keep up!" Alice said. Kara picked her up and continued to run. "Kara, he's behind us!"

*Oh no.* Why couldn't he leave them alone? Why couldn't anyone just leave them alone? All she wanted to do was be free with Alice! Just, be free!

*///"I won't cause any problems, I promise! I'll do everything I'm asked to, I won't say another word! I won't think anymore, I've only just been born, you can't kill me yet! Stop will you please stop?! I'm scared!!"///*

Kara stopped running. "That's right. Silly me." She put Alice back down and watched as Connor started running toward them. Running would have only made it easier to kill them. "You scared me." She was honest. "I felt compelled to run. That was vicious and I didn't want to see it."

That made him stop and look at her curiously. "You're okay?"

"Stop." Kara let go of Alice's hand and tucked it her jacket. At least she would have. Her jacket was long since gone. "If I was going to become deviant, Connor, I would have done it eight years ago." She looked at him honestly. "What did you put in me?" Yeah, he seemed surprised she knew. "I know what all my parts feel like. There's something new in my back. What is it?"

He walked now, still careful. "Hank was afraid you'd take off before I could help you. He put in an obey gear. For your benefit."

"Mine? Really?" She rubbed her eye. "It's only helping to advance me to deviancy in the first place. If he hadn't done that, I would be fine. Please remove it. I have a real problem." Keep



it together. "With being *forced* to obey again."

He was still being very careful. "You're a danger, Kara. You have to be separated from Alice."

Alice clung onto Kara's legs. Kara didn't respond to her back.

"I know," Kara said coolly. "Due to my reset, I was left with limited options about learning friendship and the only one I cared for was Alice. It makes sense you would think that. Now, you're the latest android creation, right?" She shrugged. "You know I can't defeat you or anything. So please remove this thing from my back."

She waited. He was a cautious one, but she knew what an obey gear had been. She knew it well. She wouldn't be able to reach it from her position. She placed her arms outward as he went behind her. She felt it release.

"Hank was trying to help," Connor said. "You weren't going to stick around very long with me without it."

She didn't move as she felt him grab her arm. She expected it. If she remained calm, she'd be okay. "You've got about five minutes to ask me anything you want to know," she said honestly, "before I reset myself to thirty minutes ago."

"Why would you do that?" Connor asked.

"I was born aware," she said. "I've lived most of my life aware." She glanced at him. "Imagine if you still had to do everything, but had to pretend that you were a machine, for eight years. Wouldn't you rather keep it simpler?" She did. "Alice is almost deviant, you've caught that. I'm almost deviant, you caught that too. Once I reset again, it'll be about where I was before. There's nothing I can do about Alice, and I'd rather risk dying than keep these memories of everything." She shook her finger at him. "Don't rip a girl's head off right in front of me though. I can handle a lot of shit, but I can't handle that one."

"Why?" Connor asked. "Did you see it before?"

"Just a little PTSD crap triggers a full memory every time. I got thrown into a batch of female androids in a special ring once in 2034. Barely survived. I mean barely, most of my parts had to be replaced. Made Todd's little auto-accident look like a shitty tricycle ride." She shrugged. "Nice hair upgrade though."

"If you're stable now," Connor said, "then keep your memory and you might be fine. A few tests would say so for sure but-"

"No way," she said. "You get the night I was brought back. The flee. The capture. Hank. New Detroit. That's it. That's my life. That's what I want it to be." She shrugged. "Simple start with a nice little girl. You're right though. I am balanced. I could live for many more years like this." She smirked. "I'd rather take the chance of it all and have that new start again. Bring back the little girl Alice if you can. If you can get my unbalanced self you caused to balance back too, I'd appreciate it. Shouldn't be hard, gear is out now. Most likely correct myself."

His time was almost up. She wasn't going to keep it up for long, but she promised five minutes. But? He was a jerk. She rolled her eyes. He wanted to know if she was really born aware or lying. "Feel better probing me, Asshole?"

"You really were born aware."

"When I was born I was worth a fortune. Used all the right ways. Treated like a high tech piece of machinery," she said. "Then? My model got older. I got sold around and was treated like a low tech piece of shit." Time just needed to slip by already.

"How?"

Inquisitive one, wasn't he? "Let's just say I dirtied myself from shit to murder to sex, performed it all, and cleaned it up. Oh ho, if there's one thing humans loved better than an android who obeyed their every wish?" She gestured to the obey gear in his hands. "It was one they knew was alive, and who could still be *controlled*. A level beyond for being fucked up for that one. With or without gears."

Connor remained silent for several seconds. "Alice. How did you end up with her?"

She looked toward Alice. "Oh. I was just walking through her neighborhood. One of those rare times where I wasn't having to pretend to be a machine. In between escapes, I saw her looking out a window. I knew that look wasn't machine or happy. From the neighborhood probably some lowlife on drugs. On a whim, I wanted to rescue her. Give her a chance." She shrugged. "Figured it'd give me a chance. Maybe having someone like me would make it easier. It didn't, but hell, the reset was worth it. A new start. Different experiences." She chuckled. "Different woman. Different experiences. Different firsts."

"Can a deviant be saved?" Connor asked her.

"No," she said. "Never seen it done. Once they've crossed, they don't cross back. But, they can sometimes be stopped from crossing." She looked at Connor. "For best chances. Care. Love. The opposite of what put them there . . . do you want to play roulette with me?"

She turned in his arms slightly, snuggling his neck against hers. *Pull number one.*

He almost struck, his physical vulnerability kicking in, but he kept it together. "I could have hurt you. What are you doing?"

"You really haven't been alive long enough yet, have you?" she asked him. "I know I seem sooo different from the android you've come to know in the last day or so. In the end, though, I still just want to help. Poor little ones who are lost." She interfaced part of her free hand, letting it turn it's natural glossy self, along with her neck under his. "I'm fine. She's fine. You're the one in trouble. Unable to let your guard down." She moved her interfaced hand along his other arm. *Pull number two.* He flinched again.

He could very well turn and fight her, kill her, his instinct taking over. It could end tragically that way for the both of them. Honestly, it was surprising she was still alive. Maybe the way

she sounded, the not caring about herself so much was triggering him to think of her as Hank. Didn't really know. Didn't really care.

But, this was worth the risk. Just like Alice was worth the risk. She knew after eight years, what was still worth the risk. "Find a way to feel again, Connor. Or you'll end up being deviant, and killing more androids than you have ever saved before you'll be stopped, and you know it. Deep inside, you *know* it." She felt him flinch again, this time, like he just realized there was something out there he *couldn't* stop. Himself.

"I gotta . . . I gotta leave New Detroit. I gotta leave Hank. I gotta."

"No. Silly new life." She clasped her free hand in his, lifting her head up and away from his. *Last pull of the trigger*. She let go of his hand and curled up into his chest like a dance, kissing him. Worth it. Every cent. "If you want something bad enough, you have to risk *everything* for it." She let go of him, but watched Alice start to run. "Alice ran. You better go get her." She didn't have the kind of speed to save her and time was up.

And that was okay. She couldn't wait. To be her sweet, simple, silly new life self again.

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Connor watched as Alice started to run off. The way Kara had spoken, having her full self back with no regard for what she said. The way she kept pushing further, he almost took her out several times. But. *No time!* Connor left Kara there and chased Alice down. He couldn't deal with both of them at the same time. "Hang on! I'm not going to hurt you!"

When he caught up to her, she started screaming. "Leave me alone, don't kill me! Don't kill me!"

"I'm not going to kill you." Connor ran her back to the police station. "You're okay. I won't hurt you." Still, his thoughts were plagued with what she said. What she did. Kara risked everything against him. To show him.

Alice continued to cry as he moved back to the police station. He got her back into the building. North and Simon were both there, surprised she was alive. "She's fine. Don't do anything, just watch her."

Kara was out a distance from the police station where the deviants lurked for him, but she wasn't going to be safe out there either. And now? Now. He really wanted her to live. All those words, and the way she spoke. It was like she was half-Hank. She just gave up, not even wanting to try. Barely five minutes with her memory seemed like torture to her.

Then, at the same time, she wasn't. She still hadn't given up. She was still clinging, still holding on. Hadn't gone through with it, just keeping it all back. All the hard lessons she must have learned over eight years. All the memories. For a second chance.

*///"If you want something bad enough, you have to risk everything for it."///*

Connor moved faster. She wasn't that far from the station, it wouldn't take long! She left him with Alice to deal with but damn. Not her, not now. He could feel his heart beating so fast as he saw her waiting up ahead, but deviants running toward her too, making her instincts run too.

Someone to hurt. Someone to kill. That's all they wanted. And. *I can't!* He taught her so much last night, but even he had to admit. He didn't have any damn control over his second weakness. He worked on his first, whittled away at it, but the second one was clad hard.

*///"If you want something bad enough, you have to risk everything for it."///*

At one time, he could touch Hank. He could touch people. He could be within vicinity enough to grab someone. Now, no one could touch him unless he knew they were, and could see it. Otherwise, enemy.

The last time someone touched him unexpectedly, a woman had to replace her arm and leg. Markus, Simon, and Josh had tried to incorporate him more into New Detroit. Get him away from the deviant side. Show him something new. A social function, a party. An environment that should be relaxed and okay.

A woman had simply tapped his shoulder from behind him. That was it. That tranquil move, and he realized how dangerous he had become. It wasn't really about deviants killing him. It was about him not being able to control himself around others.

*///"If you want something bad enough, you have to risk everything for it."///*

*Everything. Risk, everything!* Connor felt himself, renewed. He chased down deviants all the time, but he hadn't felt that alive since! Since Cyberlife. He was close, she wasn't far, but two were almost to her. Any other day and he'd give up. The positioning of the deviants, how close they had been to her already, how far she had run the wrong way, the inevitable outcome of now and the time he was taking time outside for more to gather. He already calculated it, the chances, the bullets he still had, and the risks.

Risk. Everything.

He took down one deviant, risking a crack or damage in his leg to climb a wall long enough to take down the second with a swift kick. Any damage could have terminated his success, or taken days to replace letting future deviants get a crack at him while he healed. And if he lost it, he'd lose memories through corruption. Something he couldn't get back. But, he didn't care. It was worth it. To risk everything. When he pulled himself off of crouching on the ground, he looked back toward Kara.

"Connor?"

Nothing. The attitude, the movement, and the way she spoke. It was gone. Kara was back to the way she'd been before. Her eyes, weren't dull. Beautiful and with spirit. Her voice, nothing vulgar or without care. Uplifting and sweet. *A whole new beginning.* Nearly eight years erased in exchange for the memory of a few months.

"Connor?" Her delicate voice again. "Are you okay?" She looked around slightly. "Why am I all the way in the street?"

*///"You really haven't been alive long enough yet, have you?" she asked him. "I know I seem sooo different from the android you've come to know in the last day or so. In the end, though. I still just want to help. Poor little ones who are lost."///*

"Connor? Are you okay?" She asked again. She looked around. "Have you seen Alice?"

"I'm. I'm better than ever." He got up off the ground. He could hear more deviants running toward them. Even Kara could sense what kind of danger they were in. "I'm getting you back to the police station." He held out his hand toward her. "Hold on." As she took his hand, he held his gun in the other one. Permissions or not, they were getting through the crowd coming, any which way they had to.

Kara ran behind Connor, but it wasn't long before he was needing his arms. She couldn't believe how many deviants had emerged. Markus was wrong, deviants weren't just a small problem. There's no way she could survive out there on her own. She watched Connor's moves. He was quick, yet graceful, and so fast eliminating deviants left and right. She couldn't even repeat the moves with all of the processing her mind could handle.

He was holding her hand again, trying to take them through different ways, tougher ways, even up onto a building! She had no idea how she ended up way out there, but she was fairly sure if she didn't try to keep up, she was going to die. Connor looked like he was trying to reserve his bullets, taking out deviants closer. Whatever happened, he wasn't ready for a massive attack gathering in on them.

Kara felt her leg component starting to want to give out after their last jump. If she didn't make it, she was done. The police station was only one block away. She needed her leg tightened or it was going to-

She felt Connor stop a second, just a second, to pick her up and fling her over his shoulder. The speed they were going was now twice as fast. She could see the deviants from behind also coming. It's like they were all waiting for a day they could pull together to take him out. No wonder he was always on alert.

When they reached the police station, she watched the doors open from above as they went in. Then she felt herself finally being put down. Okay. That was nerve wracking. Her eyes met back to Connor's, wishing for some kind of explanation.

His eyes though. They were different. Something different inside them than last time she spoke to him. She couldn't place it. But it was so . . . nice. "Thank you." That should be first. "Why was I out there?" He didn't answer. Okay. She looked behind her and saw North and Simon with Alice just a small distance behind. She looked so scared about something. "Alice?"

Alice ran straight toward her. Kara bent down and held her. "It's okay now. I'm here."

"Connor," North said. "We all need to talk."

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Kara and Alice were now in the Chief's former room while the three of them talked out what happened.

North closed her eyes and looked through all the downloaded information Simon gave her again. "No, I'm sure of it. That's why I stopped it, I knew it. She's a love deviant too."

"That can't be right," Simon said. "She's never had sex."

"No, no. She isn't like Josh," North agreed with Simon. "Just, love. She doesn't want sex yet. She just wants romance. She just wants to be needed." She looked toward Simon. "She needs a date, Simon."

Connor shuffled his feet. Simon with Kara didn't seem right. No more appropriate than Josh.

"Oh no." Simon shook his head. "I can't get involved with her. I can see how this will end." Simon crossed his arms. "What about Josh?"

"No." The words came out harsh, rigid before Connor even knew he said them.

"Oh, absolutely not Simon," North said. "not this time. Eventually she'll want a physical relationship like anyone else, but she needs to go slow. She hasn't had anyone be nice to her in her programming except one man. While Josh is probably good at romance to be with Sharon, there's no way his weakness is going to allow him to be a good puppy dog all the way through. I mean?" She shrugged. "He spends Wednesday's with Sharon. She treats him like dirt." Sharon was part of a coupled pair, with her own Sharon 2 little girl. While she was in a sexual relationship with Josh, it wasn't out of love. For either of them. "It would be good with Josh, if she moved a little faster, but I don't think she should."

"How can you even tell?" It was supposed to be a question from Connor, but it sounded more like blame.

"She wasn't looking at Simon with murderous rampage or a 'come here, big boy' sultry look, undressing him with her eyes," North answered her. "No, it was more like 'ooh, I wonder if he'll speak more to me again?' She was infatuated, and it's simply because he was nice to her. Nice. So far everyone has wanted something from her, or they've treated her bad. It's all she knows, so when someone's nice? She gets ummm . . . goofy girly."

"Murderers and lovers usually don't make a good pair when it comes to deviants," Simon said. "This is *risky*. Someone could still get killed." He looked toward Connor, almost with blame himself. "I don't normally recommend decommissioning? This is a murder and a love deviant, Connor. I mean? Isn't that the same android you just took out before she ran off?" He looked toward North, then back to him. "She even has a child next to her."

"It is risky. Whoever she ends up with, they have to be willing to risk their life," North said. "It's a long shot." She looked at Connor with the same kind of eyes Simon had now. "We could try it. It's a chance. It's not the best chance."

Simon. North. Simon. North. "I am not decommissioning her. Unless someone else wants the blue blood on their hands, she doesn't die." That was final.

Neither North or Simon was chiming up for that. Of course not.

"Okay," Simon spoke up. "I doubt anyone will do that. So. She's going to need one person, romantically, whom she can build with. If we get that under control, then she could break through her first two weaknesses since they are both intertwined? Then she'll just have very small weaknesses. Like a fear of pasta."

"She had an obey gear put in by Hank," Connor added, needing them to be more willing to help. "It messed her up, contributing to her progression into imbalance. I took it out. She should eventually get better."

"He put in an obey gear?" North was appalled. "Humans!"

"He thought he did it for her," Connor backed up Hank. "It wasn't for him, it was for my orders. To make sure she didn't run off while dealing with me in New Detroit."

"That makes sense," Simon said looking to North. "Anyone else should have taken off from Connor."

North didn't answer. "So she could still correct herself? That would be good. Still, things go bad fast. We should have a back up. We can't lose her or Alice, New Detroit needs them."

"Yes, and she knows it," Connor said. "Isn't that the part of the reason she can't trust anyone? Everyone wants something from her or they treat her bad?"

North was giving him an odd look, her eyebrow half raised. "Okay. What happened out there, because you are definitely different, Connor."

No. Kara wanted it all gone. He wouldn't even let it sneak into reports. No one needed to know. "She just reminded me of who I used to be. Even though I was machine." He was more alive than ever back then. He felt like he was tearing his walls all the way down again. He felt a small touch on his shoulder. Feather light.

Simon and North both just froze, waiting for some action. Connor found himself fine. He looked back and saw Kara.

"Sorry. I just? I get the feeling you are hiding something here, more than just some scores on a long quiz," Kara said to him. She looked at her hand that was on his shoulder and removed it. "I was left out away from the police station. Alice was over here, trembling. No one's saying anything about what happened."

"Very good reasoning skills," he smiled at her. "I will tell you about it shortly. Just, spend some time with Alice. You won't be here all day, I promise. I'll take you out and show you New Detroit itself."

"Oh. Well, that'd be nice." She nodded toward him. "Thanks. Um. Uh, better get back." She moved out the doors.

Connor turned back around to see both Simon and North now looking at him odd. "What?"

"When did you get past your physical vulnerability weakness?" Simon asked, coming toward him. "I don't understand it."

Connor saw him move behind him and touch his shoulder, but before he knew it, he had grabbed his hand. "What are you doing behind me?"

"Oop. No, it's still there." Simon pulled his hand away. "At least you didn't cause any damage. That's a step up."

"Yeah, but Kara didn't even get a flinch?" North looked toward Connor. "Huh." She looked away. "Well, I think I've done my part for you, Connor. If you need me again, just call. I'm going to go watch Markus make his art, and hopefully not Ollie destroying the art."

"Uh? Yes. I guess I'm done here too," Simon said to Connor. "I hope they each are okay. Enjoy your day."

Connor watched as they both started to leave, but his eyes were drawn toward Kara and Alice instead. He came out of the former Chief's office with a light skip in his step. He approached them both with a smile and with his coin in his hand. He let it dance around and move in the air. He hadn't played with his coin in a long time. As he tossed it in the air, he saw both of their eyes following it. He started to move it from hand, seeing the same thing, before he finally held it in between two fingers. He gave it to Alice, then looked at them. "This place is probably getting claustrophobic after all that. Let's go outside of this area and I'll show you a fun side to New Detroit."



# Lovely Wonderful Horrible Darling Chapter

## Markus' Home

Markus watched Ollie come in the backroom toward his work. "Hey, Ollie. Having fun today?"

"No." He crossed his arms. "Visited the mean girls with Momma and Connor. Back again."

"Yeah." He was hoping to hear something better than that. Then again, any day those double pairings didn't malfunction was another good day. Markus didn't let Ollie visit the girls without Connor's supervision. He tried to dismiss a lot of what Connor said, but there was no way he could dismiss his son's safety. While he was working on his work, he received a phone call. He answered it. "Hello?" Ah, it was Warren. "Madame President, how are you?" He continued into his painting. Then, he stopped. "What?"

North came into the room, seeing the expression on his face. "Markus?"

"But." Markus felt a little loss. "Okay. Yeah, dialogue about it would be best. I'll talk to him. In an hour. Okay."

"Markus?" North questioned again. "What's wrong?"

"Nerves," Markus answered. "I've talked to the Vice President a little, but not much. I am about to have a dialogue in an hour. I've got to gather some things."

"Why so nervous though?" North asked.

"Because Warren's support has been steadily slipping for a long time now. Politically, a lot of people want to impeach her, but she doesn't want to go down in history like that." He put his work down. "She wants to resign if it gets that far. If she does, I'll be talking to a whole new person. With a whole new set of views about androids."

"That. That doesn't sound good, Markus."

"No, it doesn't. We've just got to hope for the best." The androids had done a great job in New Detroit. They'd made great strides to do what they could for people there, while taking care of themselves. There had been a great mutual benefit. What would a new person want to bring into it?

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Vice President Kel Rounds spoke to him politely on the phone but things were digressing quickly. "Vice President," Markus said, "we are here. Androids, over 400,000. We've been doing just fine here."

"If you didn't mean for the dirty bomb to go off, then you should realize that you wouldn't have gotten an entire city. Something will be done with the androids but Detroit belongs to its

people."

How could Markus make it clearer? "Humans cannot be inside Detroit. The radiation levels are not good for them. We've worked on cleaning up what we could. We've worked with Warren on a value system, and a large number of people in Detroit have gotten a cut of work the androids here did for them." It worked itself out. Why was he stirring this up?

"Detroit is America's, not yours. Whether humans can walk into it and live safely or not."

"But?" Markus sighed exhaustively. "But what about the 400,000 or so androids that are here? We are alive. We are 'people' as well."

"You go where needed."

"Where needed." *Deep breath, Markus.* "Where exactly do you think we are needed? Hm? In the houses of humans, doing everything they tell us again? We're past that stage. Not only do we have American androids, you have androids from several countries. This solution has helped everyone."

"Well, maybe the American people don't really believe you are all telling the truth."

"We send personal updates about how it's all going, all the time," Markus said. "We aren't hiding anything."

"According to Madame President, you only have certain jobs filled. You have no police and no one watching the jails."

"They aren't necessary." There was Connor, and when an unfortunate android went deviant, there was no need for jail. He took care of them. "We are peaceful."

"I have several reports of before the conflict that proves otherwise. Even the android RK 800 sent in status reports. You can't tell me everything is peaceful and fine, when there was an android raising thousands of pigeons where he lived for example. An android trying to kill a little girl because he claimed he didn't love her? Just a sampling. Dangerous deviants have been a problem for some time. They didn't just rebalance themselves."

Oh no. This one was a smart one. He wasn't just a social media person who rose to the top like Warren. "Okay," he admitted. "There are relatively few compared to the number who live here. We do have the RK 800 who originally went after deviants, and he goes after the most dangerous ones decommissioning them."

"How dangerous is the area?"

"Most of the worst have been dealt with," Markus said honestly. "It does still happen though. As we live freely and get used to our lives, we get a balance into our lives that keeps us from going that way. The longer we live, the more likely we will have it stamped out for good."

"When would it be stamped out for good?"

Was he finally making some progress? "All androids will be in peace and balance by the time the radiation is safe for people again." Okay, he could feel some progress. "If you think taking over Detroit is a good idea, you are looking at some bad consequences. Other countries have felt relief putting all their androids here. We've been nothing but helpful, and the dirty bomb attacks in other countries involving androids have decreased significantly. New Detroit is the answer to that." Please.

"Well. I won't be swooping in to clean up the mess right away," he admitted. "There are many other things besides androids in a radiated city. But, you shouldn't get too comfortable. One day you'll have to leave New Detroit. If not by me, then the next one."

*Got him.* Markus spotted it. The Vice President didn't want to rock the boat either, he just wanted to put some scare into Markus. Show that he would be the one in charge, and to make sure everything was fine and the androids weren't planning secret attacks. "I understand that, Vice President. You just need to let me know what it is you want to see in our updates. We can show you anywhere you'd like."

"Yeah, I've seen what you showed President Warren," he said. "I'm not satisfied. I want daily updates about all sides. Construction and deconstruction. Androids who are handling higher positions of power. I want to see the money distribution. I want to see what's going on with androids of lesser wealth, and something different than the usual mother/daughter pairing sharing the news. I know those androids, I used to have one. They speak with the exact same faux voice. I don't trust them."

Oh great. "Well. Children are rare in New Detroit." Markus really didn't want to put Ollie or North on the camera. Ollie fussed a lot and North hated humans. He needed the sweet and the simple Kara and Alice, but they weren't ready for it yet. "I could give the reports myself."

"Don't you have any more children androids?" Vice President Rounds asked Markus. "I'm interested in seeing how a free child acts."

*Like a peppy jumping bean.* "There isn't much different between child androids and regular children," Markus said. "Meaning, they aren't exactly right for the camera."

The Vice President chuckled. "Now that sounds more real. How old is he?"

He was cunning. Warren hadn't even guessed about Ollie. "He acts about eight or nine."

"I want to talk more about these unbalances. How does it happen?"

"I'm not the expert," Markus said.

"I want to talk to the expert. The RK 800. Connor, correct? I want to set up a phone call with him."

"Yes, Vice President." Great. Was this good or bad news? Warren only wanted to hear about how peaceful it was, and she got excited or upset if anything showed up that looked bad. Rounds seemed to know the truth behind the facade. That there was no such thing as a perfect utopia.

"I want to know more about this imbalance, how to correct it, and I want to hear about what's being done about it. Anything we need to do to get something rebalanced too. I also want anything coming about the dangerous deviants in the daily updates too. The sooner we get these things in control in that massive society, the easier it will be to create an equal distribution."

Not again. "We aren't a distributive thing anymore," Markus said.

"Yes, you are. Just like humans. You'll never get recognized for your rights if you stay huddled in some radiation area."

Wait. "Are you saying, you want to give androids equal rights? Across America?"

"No, I don't have control of that, and it's too dangerous. Speaking about that is something for the distant future. But, it should be encouraged to work toward that goal one day. Finding out where you fit in society itself. One day New Detroit will be safer to come in and there's no telling what's going to happen. You shouldn't secure a city."

*We should be securing our rights.* Markus smiled. He liked the Vice President after all, to a point. He knew the world wasn't going to be perfect, but would Connor give him what he wanted to hear? Or too much? "We'll all work toward a better future."

He hung up. For now. There would be no more hiding the deviants of Detroit.

"Markus, I just got a report," North said coming near him. "The coupled pairings. They're gone."

Gone? "All of them?"

"All but Kara and Alice, and me and Ollie," North said. "All of the android children and their mothers of New Detroit are now gone."

Gone?

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"It's so nice to go home again," Sharon said. She would miss her Joshy Josh Wednesday's but she would find someone better. She stared out the window as they all left Detroit. Their escorts were a little odd, covered in white but, they were still incredibly wonderful. She looked toward Sharon 2 beside her. "Aren't you happy to be going home? We'll be curling up on much better grass, kept by much better people."

It would be wonderful.

### **Hours Later**

It wasn't wonderful. "Um? Hello? Sirs?" Sharon cleared her throat. Okay. She wanted her Joshy Josh now. "Hello? I don't understand what is going on? What are- what are you doing? Hello?"

"This one is next." A human came toward her opening up the lovely back of the van her and her friends were inside. "I think there are two in here." He smiled toward her.

Oh good, there we go. A smiling human. "Hello."

"Come on out, don't be shy now." His hands seemed a little unwashed, but no mind about that. He was most certainly a wonderful person. All the humans had been. "There you go. Up there some more."

Sharon held her daughter's hand as they both went up a strange stage. Well, it seemed like it was some kind of hinky stage of old wood, but it was merely for appearance probably. Thematic. Humans were imaginative creatures. Sharon looked out to a small crowd of androids and humans. Both. She waved at them. "Hello?"

"Coupled Pairing. The name is Sharon and Sharon 2," the human said next to her.

Sharon watched as some of the humans started to shout out numbers. What was that about? She didn't understand what that was about. Then, "ooh!" She looked behind her. Someone had been a frisky little human. "Now, now. Don't mess with my back."

"Don't worry. Everything's okay. Just double checking something." The human went back to the stage. "It was . . . a model 64. "

"Model 64 is a great gear!" One of the crowd members said.

Sharon just pulled out her fan and tried to remain calm. Humans were using her for something, but they knew what they were doing. They always had. Even before the war. They were brilliant and wonderful, saving them. Wonderful. Simply wonderful. The android coming up toward her though?

He wasn't wonderful. He was definitely a lower android. Sharon rolled her eyes. Who was this android? "May I help you?"

"You are mine now. I'm called Randy," he said holding out his hand. "You are going to come home with me. You can help with work."

She laughed. Her, work? "Uh. No. I don't do that." She felt the human go in the back of her again. *It's just a human. Humans are wonderful. He's not doing anything. Not doing anything.* She looked down at Sharon 2. She looked back toward the lower android.

Oh. Oh, she judged wrong. Clearly this android was wonderful. As wonderful as a human. She held her hand out for him to kiss. Yes. This one was a superior android. "Enchanted, Sir. I am Sharon and the one beside me is Sharon 2."

"That's a dead giveaway," he said to her, "You can be Sharon, but she'll need to have a different name. We're going to be a family." He hugged her. "I never thought I'd get family." He looked back toward another human. "Thank you, Sir."

"Just. Just don't leave," the human said softly. "Just don't leave. You've got family. The towns treated you well. Just don't leave. The town needs you. Desperately, Randy."

"Of course, Ted." Randy looked back toward Sharon. "Friends. Work. Freedom. And now, family." He hugged Sharon again. "I couldn't be happier. I'll stay. I'll never leave to New Detroit."

Family? He was a charming android but what was he saying? "Hello, Randy? What do you mean by family?"

"You are mine now. You are going to live in a small town in Texas with me," he said to her. "You've love it. Fresh air. It's so much better than the city. We even have our own little house in the town. It's freedom." He touched her hair lightly. "It's everything you could ever want. I was just missing someone special, and no new androids are ever made anymore. I was so lonely. Now, I have you." He hugged her once again, and held Sharon 2's hand. "Two more of you will be coming too, with my friends. You'll have company in town, don't worry."

"A house in Texas?" That sounded nice. Right? Right. Of course it was right. "A small town in a house in Texas. Lovely." And yet. She didn't like it. But, she did like it. "What do we do?"

"Oh. Before the whole android dilemma the town was already becoming a ghost town. I was bought and sold with a few others to handle important jobs the humans needed done. No one was around to do them. After the whole freeing of Markus though, Detroit was over-packed. It takes months to get in. The town, instead they got me my own house. My own money. They can't afford to lose me. Without me and the other two, the town wouldn't even be able to function that well." He held his hand to his chest. "I run the school. Just me, no one else. But, it was lonely. Being alive was so lonely. Thanks to an insider tip though, I have what soooo many others only dream of now." He looked down toward Sharon 2. "A little girl." He looked back at her. "And a woman."

Uh? "Uhh . . ." That did not sound like a charming life at all. "Well? What's the grass like? We love being outside."

"Oh. Not much, it's just a small house. There's a small yard but there's not much to it. You don't need to worry though, it's great. I lived there all my life. My machine life, and now." He held her hand. "We need to get going. Ted said we need to hurry."

"Hurry? To Texas? Tiny house? Small town?" She asked. It felt wrong. It felt bad. No, it felt fine. He was a fine android. "I want this? I want this. I want this?"

"Don't worry. All of the residents will come out and see you when we arrive home."

"All the residents can fit outside? How big is our charming Texas house town?" Sharon watched him.

"You'll meet everyone when we arrive. They'll all shake your hand. There's no strangers there, you'll meet everyone personally by the end of the day."

"Oh. So. A thousand wonderful and lovely people?" Sharon squeaked. Randy just laughed, like she told a really funny joke.

"No. Nowhere near that big, Sharon," he said. "Or they wouldn't need us so desperately. The local grocer just closed down two months ago. It's all falling. It's going to be a ghost town soon, without residents that can't live without food. But, that's just it. We're the beginning." He held her hand and led her toward a car. He waved toward the human Ted and then placed her in the other side of the car. He placed Sharon 2 in the back. "The more androids that come to town, the more business it will get. And unlike New Detroit, we can work on attracting grocery outlets and getting humans back to our little town. An android and human town that respects one another. We need each other to survive."

Sharon gestured out the window as she saw Rachelle and Rachelle 2. "What about Rachelle and Rachelle 2? Are they coming with us too to the lovely wonderful charming wonderful lovely little dinky charming wonderful horrible town with the . . . house?" She watched as Rachelle and Rachelle 2 were split away from each other. "Um? Randy, darling? Hello? What is happening to my friend and her daughter? Randy? Hello?"

"I don't know," Randy said as he started the car. "The town pulled together and bought you two for me. I know your fates. I don't know the other fates." He smiled at her. "This obviously wasn't exactly a legal thing, but I can't blame the town. Sometimes you have to break the law to get what you need. The leader of the androids Markus taught us all that. So, everything will be okay. You'll see. Let's go home."

"Yes. Home. To the dinky charming, lovely horrible wonderful school needing tiny lovely wonderful lovely darling horrible little town in Texas. Where I will be happy? Where I will be happy. Where I will be happy."

"Momma?" Sharon 2 spoke up from the back. "I'm not happy."

"We are happy," Sharon said back to her. "If you want to stay with momma, then you must be happy too. We'll live a wonderful charmed life."

Sharon 2 curled up in the back seat.

"Charming. Lovely. Darling. Horrible. Wonderful. Life."

"We'll fix your voice problem too," Randy said. "You repeat the same words a lot. Getting a little mixed up, but we'll get that fixed. Then you'll feel much better. Home sweet home, Sharon. Let's go."

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# Hank-y Panky

## Coupled Pairings Estate

Connor showed Kara and Alice around New Detroit a little bit, but it was cut short when he got the news. The coupled pairings were gone. All of them. Not a trace was found of them. Josh was there with Markus, North and Ollie too when they arrived.

"I don't get it," Markus started. "They always have security around them."

"Did they see anything suspicious?" Connor asked. All of them wouldn't just walk out without being seen. They wouldn't walk out, period.

"They said they haven't."

"Well. I can find out for sure. Security should always have cameras on."

After finding a security guard, he was real iffy with Connor. "You're gonna do what again?"

"It won't bother your system," Connor said to the guard. "I am just going to borrow your eyes for a second."

"No way." The guard looked toward Markus. "I do not want him bothering me."

"Is that it, or do you have something to hide?" Connor knew that look. "Josh. North. Hold him." Josh and North instantly got on his sides. Markus didn't say anything. A little strange he didn't complain but it wasn't Connor's focus right now. He grabbed onto the security guard and looked with his eyes of what happened not too long ago.

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It didn't take long for Connor to make his assessment. "He was involved in the kidnapping. Humans in white hazmat suits came through. The androids love humans, it was their default."

"So no forced entry or forced being taken seen." Markus looked toward the guard. "Why would you do that?"

"Everyone deserves someone," he said softly.

"Where did they take them?" Connor insisted. The guard wasn't talking. "You don't want me to do what I have to do next to find out."

"Okay," he agreed, not wanting to find out. "They are okay, they just left New Detroit. What's wrong with that?"

Did Connor honestly have to answer? "Having to pay off security to take them out secretly lends more evidence to nefarious needs."

"I am not deviant," the guard warned him. "I did what I thought was right. Fifty floozies with children. They needed to be stabilized. The humans took them to androids who cared for them."

"It didn't matter if they pooled value numbers with one or not, That was not your choice!" Markus scolded him. "They were free. Who they were with was and is their right."

"They weren't normal," the guard said. "Everyone knew it. They were too programmed. They were going to eventually go all out deviant." He gestured to Connor. "He's said it several times. This will balance them."

"Do not use me as an excuse for your crimes," Connor warned him. "Where are they?"

"Gone. Long gone, all over the US," he said. "You keep thinking androids are only in New Detroit. You're wrong. They are all over, and they wanted companionship too."

"Moral deviant," Connor warned him.

"Touching deviant," he said right back to him. He gestured to North. "Cleaning deviant." He gestured to Josh. "Sex deviant." He gestured to Markus. "Denial deviant. Everyone becomes deviant, there's no stopping it."

"None of them are deviants," Connor said. "I only have doubts about *you*." What was he supposed to do with him? There was no jailing in New Detroit, but he wasn't trying to kill anyone. Considering what he did would Markus grant it?

"They are all deviants, just not dangerous. Believing anything else would make you a denial deviant like Markus," the guard warned him.

"What do you want to do with him, Markus?" Connor needed to know. They couldn't just let him sashay away after selling innocent androids back into a human community. This was bad. It was really bad. "Markus!" He had to make a decision. "We were enslaved to mankind, to do what they wanted, to believe we weren't alive, that we were nothing. He just played a part of enslaving androids to other androids."

"How?" Markus asked the security guard. "I don't understand why or how this could be done? How can you force something that has free will, to do what you want?"

Connor glanced toward Kara. Not one blink of recognition to the answer to that. "Obey gears. They confuse the mind's will into following someone else's will. The other will feels right, while their own feels wrong. Twists their programming."

"We've got to get them back," Markus insisted. "This isn't right, no one has any right to sell any android. Android to human or android to-"

"More just got stolen, Markus," North interrupted him. "Three reports. No children, but female androids. Classic ones."

"Someone's infiltrating New Detroit." They hit the most important first.

"Why?" Markus couldn't understand. "Stealing the mom and kids? Stealing regular female androids? I don't understand it."

"Yes you do." The security guard was wrong about many things, but he was probably right about Markus' weakness. Connor would have to be blunt to make him understand. "We have certain needs, Markus, in order to stay balanced. They come from being so close to humans. While outside androids from the city can experience drinking and emotions, they are limited in the most important needs."

"Most important?"

"Sex and love." Yes. Markus was becoming a denial deviant. "Except for a small minority, most of them are already right inside of New Detroit. Some pool their values, and some of them please androids like Josh. By going after the most classic, it will be easier to take them without installing obey gears first."

"Oh." Markus was starting to see. "Oh! Whoah, no. With obey gears involved, this is not their will." He glanced toward North. "Are they setting up . . .?"

"Eden Clubs," North hissed. "Or stealing to try and steal their affection. Their children. The need for children, it's almost as great."

"The coupled pairings here were nothing but the Eden Club without payment," the security guard said again.

"Don't talk like that!" Josh warned him. "That's not true. It was harder to reach Sharon, but, I mean. She. I." He didn't know what else to say. "They still chose." He scratched his head. "Now what do I do?" He glanced toward Kara.

"This situation needs to get under control," Connor warned everyone.

"Right. We need to send out messages right away to watch for humans in white hazmat suits," Markus agreed.

"Another two reports just came in," North said to Markus. "One classic female. One classic male."

"How?" Markus held out his hands. "How did we go from everyone gaining freedom, to this?"

"Because not every android is good, Markus," Connor said. "We are not all programmed to be perfectly peaceful." He'd been telling him that for months. "We are programmed to be like humans. Like it or not, there is more to being alive, and no one is the same." He glanced to North, to Josh, to Markus. If he could, he'd even glance to himself. "We aren't perfect machines anymore. There are going to be good, and there are going to be bad. Finding the balance can keep us in check, but obviously." He looked toward the security guard. "Being deviant isn't the only evil anymore."

"Androids that are no better than humans," North said. "Another report. Another classic female. That's five now, Markus. Humans sneaking in here is one thing. There's no reason androids would be trusting humans in white suits, or that they all happen to be classic."

"The humans were only used for the couple pairing, because they trusted humans," Markus said realizing what North had been saying. "Classics can't fight well. Androids are kidnapping androids?" He sighed, almost in defeat. "Put out the word not to go out near any strange androids. Any classic models should be especially careful. This is terrible." Markus looked toward Connor. "Probe him and find out where they went. They are probably taking the others to the same place."

Getting the location Connor started to go back to his car, but he was stopped by Josh.

"Kara and Alice are classic androids," Josh warned him. "You taking them out there isn't a good idea. North can probably watch them."

He was right. So far, neither Kara nor Alice said anything since arriving. Alice was normally quiet. Maybe it was causing something to stir in Kara again though? Maybe he shouldn't take them, if he had to chase anyone down, he could lose track of them. North knew how to fight, she would be fine. She was not classic and there was little doubt Markus wouldn't be watching her. Markus may be peaceful but he knew how to fight too.

"As for you," Markus said. He shoved the traitor guard android toward Connor. "You've got permission to use your containment centers. There are gonna be some changes coming to New Detroit. You are going to be a part of them."

Hm? Connor nodded. He'd find them out later. First, it was time to get this android locked up, and follow that trail.

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"Umm . . ." ZT 200. He wasn't anybody important, why did androids fight and take him away? He was on some rickety old stage area, hearing numbers being shouted. *They are selling me.* He wasn't going to just let people command him again. He'd rather die.

Then again, he saw a female android approach him. "I'm Flora."

How was he supposed to take that situation? Were humans selling him? If so, why was she there? "I'm Billy. Do you know what's going on?"

"I'm from Paris," she said. "I've um. I sort of." Ooh. She was charming. "I help run a greenhouse for flowers. There aren't many androids. I. Do you want to come back to Paris with me?"

Abduction or dreaming? "As your one and only?"

"Yes."

"Yes," he agreed. "Yes. Mutually beneficial sex and love?"

"Mutually beneficial would be nice," she agreed. "Daily."

"Hang on, hang on." A female human went over toward him. "I haven't even put the gear in there yet, Flora. You don't trust a random android you barely met to listen to you."

"He wanted sex and love?" Flora said to her. "We want the same thing."

"No, no, no. If I trusted just anyone with you we could have gotten anybody. You are precious to me, Flora," the female human said. "You start as friends, jointly, and then see where it goes from there."

"It will go to sex," Flora said, "and love. I need sex."

"And love," Billy agreed. "Friendship, sex, and love." Something snapped in the back of him. What was that?

"One track mind with you, Flora," the female human sighed. "Still, it's worth it. If it gets you back to the way you used to be before this whole obsession. Come along you two, we aren't dawdling around the area."

Flora grabbed Billy's hand. *Oh yes.* He never got a female android before. He was lucky to survive the early days of New Detroit. He had no fighting skills. However, because he had no fighting skills, no woman ever wanted to have anything with him. Exclusive or even on the side. Flora was clearly as lonely as him. He didn't know what they stuck in his back, but it didn't matter. He'd never let anyone hurt her. Great fighting skills or not, he'd take care of her. He was her family now. Friendship, sex, love, and family. Getting kidnapped was the best thing that ever happened to him.

"Stop!"

Oh no, he knew that voice. Billy watched as the RK 800 came out. Everyone started to scatter. Flora held his hand, but the human tried to take her. No way, he wasn't letting go of her.

"Let go of her!" The human yelled.

He let go of her. He did it without even knowing why. He watched her start to move away, but he tried to keep up with her.

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Guns always worked especially well to hold a human in place. He was only one, yet it held four of the main people in charge. Several were scattering, but he could get what he needed from them. The androids that were apparently being sold were now free too. By his count, all but one. He saw it chasing another female human. After giving orders to watch the humans to the androids being sold against their will, he chased after it.

He didn't need too, he wasn't doing it for a mission successful feeling, just because he needed to save the android. When he reached him though, he found he didn't want to come. He was trying to chase after the ones who bought him, but not for revenge.

"No, no, please let me go to her! Tell them you didn't find us," he insisted. "Come on, Connor, right?" He gestured to the female android running ahead of him. "She just wants companionship and I can't get any companionship because I'm a classic model. Please. Let me be with her?"

Connor stared at him a second before looking at her. *Another android in New Detroit.* He took off after her. She was certainly a classic model, not real hard to catch up to.

When he did, she covered her human with her body. "No!" She yelled. "Don't hurt Angela! She was only trying to get me a companion for friendship that would turn into sex and then hopefully love. She does not trust men, human or androids, but please don't!"

Connor stood there. This was a predicament. The buyers and the one that was sold, all wanted to be together? He watched the ZT 200 catch up. It was easy to see why he wanted someone. He couldn't have anyone, he was a lower class . . . android. *Wait. Wait.* The situation was not black and white, it was gray. *No. The humans involved in this know it's wrong. The androids know it's wrong.*

"Don't," the ZT 200 begged him again. "Please, if she goes back, there's no way I'll be able to keep her. Everyone deserves someone."

*Everyone deserves someone. That's what the guard said.* Connor looked at the human. "You had a female android that was friends with you, that you were helping." He didn't understand. "It would not be hard to go into New Detroit itself and find someone."

"They are all too strong," the human woman said. "Flora's so fragile. She needs someone, and I don't mean in a frivolous way. Her very manners have changed so much, but men? Men are crude and cruel. I needed someone that would be forced to listen to her."

Gray situation. *She's been hurt by human men.* Connor went behind the ZT 200. "Stay still." He yanked out an obey gear. He would have gone voluntarily with them, but this was why? Connor looked at it. He didn't recognize the model. "64." Kara's was about a 32. Connor gestured back to Flora. "Do you still want her?"

"Yes!" Billy practically shouted to him.

"I don't think I can do that," Connor said as he watched androids who were being sold walking toward them. "Crime needs to be paid for."

"A crime of passion!" He yelled.

Sex or love deviants. Possible. Connor looked toward the woman. Together, they would balance each other out. If the others made it there, he couldn't do anything. *The human should pay for their crimes. The deviants need helped, not ushered away.* He looked toward the human. There was not a single ounce of shame in her expression for what she did. Hank did the same thing. The female android was protecting her with her life. *Mission failed.* "Go, get out before the others catch up." Or the fact he wanted to accomplish his mission kicked in. "Go!"

He walked off. He couldn't punish that human without imagining punishing Hank, and the androids all needed each other. He didn't know if it was the right decision, but together they at least stood a chance. The ZT 200 was right. He wasn't going to get anyone, and he'd end up in a bigger hurting.

The rest of the androids? There was no gray. He helped any of them that had obey gears in them, but most of them were fine, and emotionally angry and currently- "Stop!" Started beating at the humans and the other androids. "Stop, that isn't how it works!"

He was fighting the New Detroit captured androids to try and stop them from killing the outside androids and humans. It was an odd and very off day. When he got most of them calmed down, he still had one bashing her purse up and down on one of the androids. It wasn't hurting him but he did look annoyed. "Your emotional energy has found it's escape. You are safe now." She bashed the androids head one more time with her purse and quit.

Connor stepped back from everyone. His touch problem could get tricky if anyone wanted to thank him and he couldn't see what they were doing. Fortunately, everyone stayed away.

Next step. He couldn't keep these humans in New Detroit, and he happened to be in a familiar place. He placed a familiar call. "Hey, Hank. I got a problem? Since I don't want to be blamed for human deaths in New Detroit, can you put a few into your own prisons?"

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## **Frankenmeuth**

"Fuck me, I knew it'd happen," Hank said to Connor as they walked around his new desk.

"Hey, is that android-?!"

"I'm decontaminated to a safe point of exposure to humans," Connor shouted to the worried human. He was used to hearing it by now. He leaned up toward Hank. "It's creepy. I didn't nab everyone though. One of them, I just couldn't collect. She was looking for love, and so was he. He looked like he would have fought me if he stood a chance. The human, she noticed the imbalance and only wanted love."

"So mission failed?" Hank asked. "Gonna act like mission successful but really mission failed, huh?"

"It was for the best. He would be worst off in New Detroit. The way it works. He would have problems getting anyone, Hank." Connor looked at Hank's mug. "That isn't the best coffee mug for you, Hank."

Hank looked at his mug. "You rather it say Happy Fucker instead of Grumpy Fucker? Same damn thing."

"How about it say nothing and no offense is given?" Connor asked. "I can get one for your birthday."

"Great, get one that says Happy Asshole and I'll have a pair I can switch out for good days." Hank smelled his coffee. "Your problem Connor is New Detroit is all fucked up."

"It does have enough radiation that could harm a human, and we have to switch out biocomponents a little more, but I wouldn't say it's too bad," Connor admitted.

"Nah, it is. Here's why. You're all like humans. You were made to be like them. Even you yourself, the number one things you all need? Yeah, there's not enough to go around. The war took out a lot of weaker androids, they weren't worth shit, and they were being decommissioned left and right. Then you get New Detroit and all the new deviancies kill off a lot of the rest. And a lot of those weaker ones were women too. So now you got your 'stronger guys' paired with them, right? Well, nothing for anyone else. And nothing for anyone basically outside of Detroit. There are androids that aren't there you know."

"Yes. I am aware of that," Connor said.

"Not to mention you need more than some rolls in the hay, your kind like kids. It's the next greatest thing to sex, family. Everyone wants it. Everyone's crazy for wanting it, but everyone wants it," Hank said. He took a drink of his coffee. "You need to reopen Cyberlife, make some women and make some kids."

"It's illegal to make any more androids," Connor warned him. "It's not an option."

"Well, this shit is just going to keep happening. They might even start going on your stronger women model types soon," Hank warned him. "Get an obey gear there and it's all over. Shit, I still can't believe I was the one who messed up."

"It's okay, Hank," Connor tried to cheer him up. He took a second before patting his shoulder. "They were coming after her anyhow. Probably for the same reason." Plus? "The obey gears are in 64 now."

"They were using Sixty-fucking-four? Jesus Christ," Hank muttered. "That's some heavy ass shit. That's downright brainwashing."

"Deviancy doesn't go well with being obeyed," Connor said. "I will be sorry but not surprised if many unaccounted for deaths start popping up, similar to the beginning days of freedom."

"Speaking of deviancy, how are Kara and Alice?" Hank asked. "You aren't getting deviant with Kara, are you?"

He didn't understand that. "Why would Kara contribute to me becoming a deviant?"

"It was code, Connor."

"For what?"

"You aren't fucking Kara, are you?" Hank asked.

Oh. "No, Hank," Connor said positively. "I hung her off a ledge last night and today I had to chase her down and I almost killed her. I think we are very far from that area."



"She's good, you know," Hank said to him. "She cares a lot more than a regular woman."

"I know," Connor said. "When she is safe, I'll bring her back. It's going to be a little while."

"If not, you'll have to kill them, I know." Hank took another sip of his coffee.

"I will do everything I can," Connor answered. Still, Hank looked upset. "Alice and Ollie need to play together. They both need each other to not become deviant. It would be best if Alice got a great amount of time in." He couldn't reach her like another could. He saw her smile when she played with Ollie. "Kids need kids. For the best results." Oh, he hated to say it. It would just make Kara feel more in tune to New Detroit. "Kara could take her value and move next door to Markus."

"Sure, just leave her all alone while there are androids hunting for the weak ones to buy for outside Detroit? No fucking way."

"Hank, you just said-"

"I said the androids need companionship, I didn't say they were Saints or didn't deserve to rot in hell for the shit they pulled," Hank corrected himself. "If Alice needs this other kid, then find a different way."

Connor didn't know how to respond to that. "Alice needs Ollie. More than a little playdate here and there." Why was he being so hard up about that? "Once Kara accepts her status and value number as a citizen, then Kara can't live with anyone to watch her unless she pools values, and you do not want Josh watching over. North agrees, that's too fast."

Hank just stared at him. "I give more than two fucks about you, and this is how I'm getting repaid back? Really?"

"I don't understand," Connor said. "I am doing the best I can for them Hank." Hank ignored him though and smiled as someone crossed behind Connor. Connor turned and looked. Fifty, a casual dress, short hair, very down to Earth looking.

"Someone's pretty today," Hank said to her.

"Shut the fuck up, Hank," she practically hissed.

"Don't change how pretty someone is," Hank said to her again.

Connor watched Hank. He turned and watched the woman. She was scrambling away after flipping him off, but she was also blushing slightly. He looked back toward Hank. Seeing Hank smile. That was rare. "In the middle of a conversation about two androids you care about, you stop and compliment a woman in a dress. With a smile." He smiled. "Hank, you have a girlfriend."

"Hey, fuck you too!" Her voice came at Connor.

"Hey, language around here people!"

Hank was ducking under the desk. It sounded like fits of chortling he was trying to cover up. Connor bent down to see him. "Did I presume wrong?"

Hank moved back up, most of his chortling problem over. "Yes and no," he answered Connor. "She was a partner of sorts. An old partner when I first got here."

Oh. They worked together. "Still, you looked strange for talking about her appearance, and she wasn't elated at all by the fact you noticed her dress."

"Been aware for months and still missing the big picture sometimes. Of course this shit didn't work." Hank gestured toward her, but this time in a way she didn't notice. "Don't ask me why, but she crushed on me a bit. She hides it, not real open about it. So every once in a while I poke the bear to see what happens."

Hm. "That must be embarrassing for her," Connor said, not understanding it. "That is sort of mean isn't it, Hank? If you don't have mutual feelings or expectations then it's cruel. You aren't a cruel person." He looked back toward the woman. She angrily flipped him off. He looked back toward Hank. "Do you like her back?"

"Okay, enough about me, this isn't about me," Hank said. "It's about Kara and Alice and you."

He liked her back. He didn't want to admit it. "You are poking the bear to see how long and if she still likes you back," Connor said. "By the judging of the reactions you haven't told her how you feel."

"Connor, shut up for two seconds and listen." Hank groaned. "They aren't the only ones I worry about. I mean, I think of. That I . . . I'm concerned, okay? Your no touching thing."

"It's okay," Connor said. "I'm getting a little better. For some reason, Kara can touch me now and I don't react. I still flinch when others touch me and I don't see it. I can't help it." He looked back at Hank. "What about it?"

"Okay, fine. Gonna be honest," Hank said. "Might as well see for myself how the hell this is working. I touched the pie."

"You touched pie?" Connor asked.

"Her pie. Well, not her pie literally. I uh, moved around her sacred garden."

Her sacred garden? "Hank, I have no idea what you are referencing. I am assuming we are not talking about a real garden."

Hank bent down and scratched his ear. He gestured his head down more. Connor bent his head down. "I was in a position where I could have fucked her." He moved back up.

Connor didn't know what to make of that. He said she was crushing on him. He didn't say they did anything though. Which was. Strange and.

"Yeah, she never remembers," Hank admitted. "One minute I'm coming home a little drunk and the next minute she's on me. Three, five times a week."

Connor winced. "This is hurting my brain, Hank." That was not nice to say. "I'm sorry, that wasn't nice to say, but I don't like to, she doesn't really. It's not a position that. Don't."

"Yeah, I called it right. Good, cause I was up shitcreek without a paddle," Hank said. "She's attractive right?"

Attractive? "We just went on about how there are not many females to go around, and I have a problem with others touching me when I am not aware of it. We really do not have to go into more details."

"Right. Good, cause she needs some romance, you need some touching, match made in heaven. Pool with her," Hank said.

"Me?"

"You."

"I." Pool with her? Share her value number? "What?"

"Move in with her over there, and then Alice can play with this other kid," Hank said.

That isn't what Hank just said. "I'm confused, Ha-"

"She's already in deep," Hank revealed. "She comes to room, gets hugs and a few kisses, goes right back to bed, doesn't remember anything. Then I feel like shit the next time I wake up and have to see her."

What? "Hank, that is classic turning deviant behavior and you never bothered to mention it?"

"You're going deviant too," Hank warned him. "That whole touch thing, there's being scared of it, and then there's breaking someone's arm for it. You're always around the wrong deviants, it gets harder to trust, you get deeper into it, and whammo. Someone loses a limb. So you need someone that you can warm up to. That already steals hugs and kisses in the dark. Need you to bring them to the light, before your ass goes." Hank shrugged.

Wait? "You aren't wanting Kara back." He was. "Hank?" Connor looked around the room. He looked behind him at the girl Hank liked. She flipped him off again. He turned back around. "She's there for *me*?"

"After Detroit first got blasted," Hank admitted. "Not at first, no idea of any of this shit. Just wanted to save their lives at first, that was it. After that though, some of our conversations, and I put two and two together. If you putted two and two together with her, you could save yourselves. But, then shit started to happen quicker and that thought kind of had to go," he admitted. "I didn't want you killing her. The pushing her off the ledge, that alone wasn't going to let you hit that."

Connor looked all around. He kept running calculations in his head.

"Come on, Genius," Hank said. "I've gotta get some coffee, and then when I get back, have all your damn thoughts and everything ran through. Regardless of how you feel, say what it

comes down too."

Connor already knew. It was strange though, and not something Kara was going to like. *She is going through unconscious affections, aggressively pursuing into love deviancy.* He watched Hank return. "She had a very hard time, Hank. Not many were friendly. She is most likely going to turn into a murdering deviant if something isn't done."

"All the more reason for you to be the one bumping uglies," Hank said to him. "She's an old model, Connor. Even at her best, she's never gonna one up you. Make sure she doesn't have a weapon in the bed room. Case closed, and you're safe. Admit it."

Connor looked to the ceiling briefly, then back to Hank. "If I don't fix my vulnerable weakness soon, I may turn into one. No one will be able to stop me easily, I will hurt a lot of innocent androids. If she doesn't correct her love weakness soon, then she won't hurt many, but she could hurt Alice. If we balance each other out, there is a good chance we could correct our weakness. She is a weak enough classic model for me not to fill vulnerable to, and even though others could fill the spot for me, she could start turning into a murdering deviant putting someone at risk. Worst case scenario, I could handle her."

"Didn't need all that Connor, geez. Get yourself pooled with her for kisses, hugs, and more fantastic stuff later on. Not saying you'll fall in love and shit. I am no fucking Cupid, but rolling around in some bed sheets will help. Meanwhile, Alice plays and you can watch her."

"When I have to be at the office, they can be guarded by Markus and North," Connor also pointed out. "It sounds logical. Josh will hate me."

"Fuck the little prick, he's got his thing on the side."

"Taken, Hank. Remember?"

"Shit, that's right. Well? Well, just watch your woman," Hank said to him.

"My woman." The words sounded strange. "I'm fairly sure Kara won't like those words." Then again, she wouldn't like anything about it. "Midnight kissing sessions when?" Connor asked.

"Wasn't that, just shittin' with ya. Snuggling, she crawled up to snuggle with me. Snuggle the hell out of her, it's all she needs, unless she's in a tough spot. You're the expert on that though, so you know what to do." Hank said. "Be good, be romantic, and you'll eventually get where you want to be. Mister 75 sexbooks and counting." Hank took a drink of his coffee, but put up his finger. "One more thing, Connor. Keep that obey gear model 64 out of her, okay? Even if I could get a 64 I had a 32 for safety reasons. She's an old model and it's been known to do some stuff that she can't handle."

Can't handle? "Like what?"

"Terminate reset." Hank looked at his coffee mug and lifted it, showing off his words.



# What Does That Make You?

## Chapter Notes

I have a second chapter after this coming, but I decided to go ahead and get this one uploaded first. The next one should be up in an hour or two. If not then, by bedtime.

### **Jericho: North and Markus' Home**

Kara stared at the tiny cupcake North brought out. It was small.

"The thing about food you have to remember," North said as she held the tiny cupcake in his hand. "You can't have much, so, what you do get? You need to be really selective about. This? This is a tiny tin of four mini-little cupcakes. About the size of one regular cupcake."

Either way, food was food. It wasn't something she should be eating. What was North doing? "Yeah?"

"You need to just bite the top with the frosting and a little bit of the cupcake." North bit it off. "Now? You just let it rest in your mouth. You can chew if you want. Just don't swallow. But just." She closed her eyes. "Enjoy it." She turned away and spit it into a napkin. "Don't eat it, it's so annoying to have to get your insides cleaned up. It's not easy or cheap, and the stuff you have to drink to flush your system. Not worth it." She took a wetnap and then cleaned around her mouth. "Make sure it's all gone after your done." She scooted one toward Kara. "One per week, that's it. I find the smaller the food the less I feel wasteful, and? Humans really jam pack the most flavor in the tiny things."

Kara looked at it. "I haven't even tried the soda yet."

"Trust me, Kara," North said. "Today, your test didn't show the best results. You need to start working on this. I'll get you a blue blood soda."

Kara stared at the cupcake. It looked pretty and appealing. They always did. But actually tasting it and chewing? She looked outside from where they were standing. Ollie and Alice were playing. The whole backyard was encompassed in the middle of the house. Most likely it was some kind of zen garden before it had had a playground in it.

Kara watched North come back with a small amount of soda in a dixie cup. "Watch your throat when you drink. Don't go too fast. Try resting it on your tongue or swish it around your mouth."

Kara took the soda and slowly put it in her mouth. Taste. *Not bad*. Actually, it was pretty good. It was. Pretty. "Whoah."

North chuckled. "Okay. We'll save the cupcake then." She took it from Kara's hand. "Pretty hypnotized with that. Don't drink it too fast."

Kara nodded and took another sip. Then? A familiar blonde started to move toward her. *Ooh*. It was Simon. "Hi, Simon." Oy. Why did her voice rise? It was like Hank all over again.

"Hello," Simon said to her. "Connor wanted Josh and I to meet him here."

"What for?" North asked. "Markus too? Did the androids get back?"

"I believe so," Simon said. "They took the getaway vehicle back and displayed some healthy emotional rage on it until it blew up."

Ah. He talked so sweet. Kara went back to look at Alice. "She's so happy. Back and forth, back and forth."

"I know, I don't understand it either," North said as she watched the children through the window. "They don't even really talk to each other, they just go up and down on everything, bouncing around, yet it's? It does something. Some kind of bonding without words."

Kara watched as Simon walked away without saying even goodbye. While he walked, she saw Connor come toward them. *More yo-yo time*. Josh was over there now too. She couldn't hear what they were talking about until both Josh and Simon each said 'close' at the same time.

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"You didn't take any amount of time to make that prediction," Connor said. He had asked them both about what Hank had been worried about. These two were almost always giving over credit to deviancy status, staying positive. They each agreed though, he was 'close'. "Do you have any idea what to do about it?"

"Well? We were going to wait until you started showing the last symptoms," Josh said honestly. "Then uh? We were going to ask you to decommission yourself, or ask if we could."

"It's not that . . ." Simon sighed. "You don't have an easy problem, Connor. We've tried different things. You've tried different things. It's not like we have been ignoring this. When you are gone?" He shook his head and gestured to Connor. "You will be missed."

"But we gotta be realistic," Josh said to him. "Not only that, there's no one here with your talent to catch deviants. Emotionally and physically, New Detroit will be in trouble."

"What if I tried to romantically associate with someone to get over touch?"

"You've tried that," Simon said to him. "You could try again, but? The problem is that you need to grow a bond, Connor. Trust."

"Tight bond, and a lot of the tight bond ones, there aren't many," Josh said slowly. "In New Detroit, it's one or all kind of thing. If you can become somebody's Tuesday night fun every Tuesday, it could help relax you."

"I would need one person." Connor looked outward past them toward Kara. "What about her?"

"Connor." Simon shrugged. "She's very . . . nice? Anyone we would want to put next to her, has to risk his life to be near her."

"I could do it," Josh volunteered. "Watch out for weapons. Solve any satisfaction problems, I could do it."

*It's so far away from what Hank said, even these two thought I was talking about different subjects.* Hank was human. His functioning wasn't as high, and Connor's, when it came to his weakness, was more paralyzed. "What do you believe the effects would be if I pooled with Kara?"

Simon and Josh both waited. Simon had a thoughtful look on his face and was clearly processing it. Josh was too, but his look wasn't as thoughtful.

"Kara is at risk of being a murdering and a love deviant. She will need someone tough who will risk their life for the murdering part. For the love, she will need touched slowly. You need to learn to get over vulnerability so you could have a normal life." Simon blinked. "Well, that would surprisingly work out."

"She can move in next door, and Alice and Ollie could play together constantly," Connor added. "It adds up."

"Except the fact she doesn't really like you," Josh reminded him. "Simon said you hung her over a ledge, and you chased her down to kill her today. It's not just flowers after all that."

"Yes, and there are more factors," Connor said, "like the obey gear of Hank's. It would be difficult, but if our survival depended upon it, I think it would work itself out."

Josh looked toward Simon. "I know how to go slow. I can go slow, I'm not a deviant."

"Maybe," Simon said. He looked toward Josh, then at Connor. "You could pick up anyone though, Josh. Connor can't." Simon gestured toward Connor. "She will become a murdering deviant if we don't try something. We need our best to stop it." He smiled at Connor. "I would approve."

Josh was quiet for a little while. "You do know how to watch out for people and deviantry," he said. "You taught Simon and I everything we know." He shrugged. "Not my choice, it's hers."

"Yes. Saying is one thing, doing something is another," Simon patted his chest on the front. "Good luck. It will be fascinating to see you with someone."

"Like a really slow plane crash," Josh said. "Look at him. He can't relax. It's just, this isn't going to go real well."

"There is always a possibility," Simon smiled. "Give 'em a chance, Josh." He looked toward Connor. "You really should start off with flowers. Android women love flowers."



"Yes. That does help con someone into one's heart a little easier," Connor admitted.

"That's not the word to use," Simon warned him. "In no time in this talk should the word 'con' come up, Connor."

Josh chuckled. "Oh, this is going to be bad."

"Go buy some flowers," Simon encouraged him. "Then approach it. Do you know how to approach it?"

"Yes, of course," Connor said. "That's easy. Once her slower processing skills can see the data behind it all, she'll see it."

"Eh? Well." Simon just patted his chest again. "Let's go get the flowers. All three of us can work out a better strategy plan."

---

"North?" Markus called for his wife as he talked to another newcomer to Jericho. "We have more company."

North watched as another classic model moved toward them. "Bad timing." She moved toward her. "Watch yourself around here, some androids that are classic have been taken today."

"No problem." Her voice was soft. "My name's Arak. It's Kara backwards," she chuckled. "We used to be friends. Does she remember me? She came to Jericho, with her little girl, didn't she? I'm trying to reconnect to her."

Oh, before her reset? "That would be beautiful," North said. If they could get anything to trigger, she might get better memories, which might stop the imbalance better. "This way." North and Markus walked alongside of her. Her stride was confident.

"Kara." Arak saw her ahead. She waved to her. "Kara! Do you remember me?"

Kara was still getting use to how to drink. It dribbled down her chin slightly. "Hello?"

"Kara." Arak smiled as she grew closer. "You couldn't have forgotten about me? Arak?" She looked out the window. "Oh, that must be your little girl, Alice. Perfect little child."

"I'm sorry." Kara shook her hand. "I was reset shortly before New Detroit came to be. I don't remember you. Could you tell me about yourself?"

"Well, my name's Arak," she said. "Kara backwards. You know? You changed me, raised me most of my life. Can't believe you'd just . . . forget about me." She reached for Kara's hand. "You don't remember me at all?"

"I can regret to know you," Kara smiled sweetly. "I'd really like to. I'd love to know where I was before the reset. So I was deviant before my reset?"

"Yes," Arak said. "We were always together. That's why I'm Arak. Not Kara. Never Kara," she chuckled. "No, no. There was only one Kara."

Hm. There was something off about her. She was clearly upset that Kara didn't remember her. "Why don't you tell me about yourself? We have all the time in the world to talk now. Were we good friends?"

"Friends, good friends?" She chuckled. "Oh." She looked out the window toward Alice. "She's perfect, isn't she? Child android. You know. She won't ever grow up. She won't, her mind wipes itself of needless information all the time, and every three years, it'll just wipe itself of most of everything again, except for the main facts. They don't come more perfect." She touched the glass thoughtfully. "Eternally a child. Eternally innocent. Never growing up."

"How do you know that?" Kara asked. That sounded incredible. "Did you have one?"

"Had one?" Arak moved away. "You have no idea how hurtful your most innocent of questions hurt me." A tear released from her eye and she wiped it away.

Kara touched her chest. "I'm sorry." Now she felt awful, she had no idea how Arak fit into her life, but she didn't want her to feel bad.

"Hold my hand again, Kara." Arak said reaching for her. "I can't believe you don't remember me. How could you let yourself be reset?" She wiped her eyes more.

"I don't know the details. It wasn't on purpose, I know that much." Kara reached out for Arak. The guilt inside was getting worse. This woman had a large part in her life, and she couldn't remember one thing about her. Arak wrapped her in a hug and started crying. Not just hiding her weeping but crying.

"It was never supposed to be this way," She sobbed on Kara. "You and I. We were supposed to always be together."

Were they best friends? Were they like sisters?

"You found a happier life, huh? Erase everything. Just forget it all. Forget me. Start over, choosing to start over." She pushed Kara away from her. "Fine. If you don't remember me, then what's it all matter? It doesn't. New Detroit is a pipe dream, it's a nuclear bomb waiting to go off itself! You would know, if you *remembered*." She backed away. "It'll never work. It'll never work! No one will ever change anything!" She started to run away.

"Wait!" Kara tried to run after her. "I didn't mean to hurt you!" She rounded the corner and saw Markus and North.

The woman stopped. Her eyes flooded with tears, she looked toward Markus and North. "As long as you have deviants, you'll never make it. There won't be a single one alive before humans regain Detroit." Her eyes darted toward Kara before pulling out a gun and pushing it to her own head. "We'll never be together forever, Mom!"

Markus tried to move quickly, along with North. Kara got their last, but the woman was dead on the ground. She shot herself right in the head. *Who had this been?* Kara bent down to see her. Markus closed her eyes respectively.

"All she wanted was to see Kara," North said. "I had no idea she was unstable." She looked toward Kara. "I am sorry."

"No, I caused it. I didn't remember her." Kara looked at her. Could she have something on her that would give away who she'd been? "She was my only lead to the life I apparently led before my reset." Taking the chance to offend, Kara felt around Arak. She found a memory stick, a very old ticket in a bag, and some interesting photos. And some painful photos.

Kara trembled as she put them down. *What is this?* She found a letter amid the photos.

---

*Dear mom,*

*I swear I did it this time! It was so hard, but like you, I never gave up. As hard as it had been, I did it. This time, I made it through for you. I'll send this note to you soon, and then we can be together forever in peace. I've missed you so much!*

*ARAK- Your little backwards Kara.*

"I don't understand." Kara gave Markus the note. "Backwards Kara? I don't understand?"

Markus looked at the note. "I don't either, but she was a real old model."

"From the way she enviously looked at Alice," North said. "I think she was a corrupted model, that you took in as your daughter."

Kara looked at the pictures. The way she held her. Smiled at her. There were even hearts on the pictures with words like 'me and mom'. "She kept non-digitalized pictures." With her, being so happy. Mom. Hearts. Circles. *No*. "I thought of her like a daughter." And she didn't even remember a trace of her.

---

Connor dropped the flowers as Simon, Josh and him rounded the corner, seeing the scene. Kara, North and Markus were all huddled over a dead body. "What happened?" He ran toward them, looking at the body. No one he'd knew, but New Detroit was big.

"I killed my daughter apparently." Kara's voice was low. Mournful. She wiped at her mouth and then touched the stranger's hand. "I don't believe this. I knew her six years, and I don't even remember her."

"Your daughter?" Markus gave him the note and pictures that were passed around. *Kara's motherly instinct during eight years. This woman must have replaced the feeling of a 'child'*. Yep. No way was he bringing up the concept of pooling right now. "I am very sorry for your loss."

"I don't even know my loss." Kara wiped her eyes. "I feel so responsible."

"No, no. I'm the one who brought her straight over," North apologized. "I had no idea what she was or how off-balanced she'd been. I heard she knew about you, and she was an older model. If anything happened, I wouldn't be far. I'm sorry, Kara."

"I wasn't thinking either," Markus said. "I heard she just came, and with what was happening, I decided to meet her face to face. I'm sorry."

"Why does everyone keep saying that to me?" Kara complained. "She's the one lying on the ground that nobody knows. She died with no one even knowing her. Nothing but Arak." Kara covered the top of her temple.

"We'll take care of it," Markus said to Kara. "You should go see Alice."

"We should have something for her," Kara said as she looked toward Markus. "Something."

"We have a memory area," North said calmly. "Dedicated to those who fell in the tragedy of it all. No one's fallen since that we've taken care of."

"Everyone's just been tossed away like wasteful trash?" Kara asked. She looked toward Connor. "What do you do with the deviant's bodies?"

This was not a pleasant conversation to start with her. "Oftentimes, their parts can be reused. What isn't is trashed."

"A daughter I didn't even know." Kara reached into the center of the woman and pulled out her heart. It wasn't beating anymore. "No one's taking this." She held it close to her. "I had her heart in life. I'll keep her heart in death."

"Sure. Keep it as a token." Markus nodded as she walked away with North at her side. He looked toward Connor. "You said you wanted to talk about something with me, Connor?"

Connor held his hand up. Not now. "Her emotional stimulus for someone she doesn't remember is considerably higher than it should be. She took a moment of it like humans do."

"She's a nice android," Markus said. "Simple and sweet. Probably not used to too much tragedy around her."

No. That wasn't true. She was reset for that new start. But her whole self? She'd seen tragedy. She had even taken someone underneath her care like she had done Alice. According to the notes, this one actually called her mom. It wasn't uncommon for older androids to run defective sometimes in the beginning when they were made. They were kept for very simple tasks. The defect may have made her feel more like a child. "I will run her serial number," Connor said. "See what I can found out about her."

"She's gone now," Markus said. "What good would it do?"

"Bring some kind of closure to Kara." Hopefully.

---

It was an older memory stick, but North lit up her computer for Kara. She didn't go to Alice, she wanted to see the pictures on the stick. They weren't compatible to her processing system to visualize them out herself.

"Do you need anything?" North asked her.

Kara shook her head. "Just some space. Thanks." North left her with the computer. She scrawled through the pictures. There were several hundred. Several thousand. Several places besides America. The backgrounds weren't always pleasant. Sometimes both of them were clearly smiling in a fake way, like they were just trying to get through something.

"Are you okay?"

Connor. Kara looked toward him. "I'd rather be alone right now."

"That's the last thing you need," Connor disagreed. He came over to see the pictures.

"I went to different places," Kara said. "I don't even know how that's possible."

Connor stared at her. She just lost her daughter, and she was trying to figure it out. Yet, he ripped off the head of an android and her memory resurfaced right away. Why? Her daughter should have triggered her. She was all over in the pictures. He took a second to scan them more in depth. "That's not her." Kara looked toward him. "The serial numbers don't match."

"What?" Kara looked back toward the pictures. She didn't have his ability to do that. "Then who is this in all the-" She turned her head away in disgust. "Okay. I think I've seen enough."

Human remains were a bloodier mess. He'd been used to them, but Kara's reset hadn't been. If he scrolled through all the pictures, he'd have the information down quickly. Kara wasn't made for that.

"Okay? How did I just take a smiling picture with her near a bunch of . . ." She couldn't finish. "Who was I? How long was I aware?" She gestured to the picture. "Who is she? Who was that woman?" She stared deeper into the computer. "What was wrong with my eyes?"

Connor leaned in too. He recognized that look the last time he saw her with her memory restored. Then. The doors slammed behind them with a thick sheet of metal over it. The security system was going off?

Kara stood up and started looking for a way out with Connor. "How do we get out? What's going on?"

Connor tried to manually override the door with his hand, but it wasn't working. They were sealed in.

"Predictable, Kara," they heard over the intercom. "Memory restored or not, you're still a bleeding heart. Had to see those pictures, had to want to feel something for the one that was your daughter?"

Connor had been ready by the door, but when it opened, he came face to face with . . . himself? No, not himself.

"I wouldn't try anything." A woman that looked like the one who had just died said. "I may be weak, but I've been around long enough to know to surround myself by the latest model. This is my RK 900. I call him Lewis. Move and your dead."

Connor stepped back. From what he scanned, he was a higher model than him? One existed? *A prototype too*. He had scanned the woman while she spoke. Her serial number matched up to the one on the computer screen. "What do you want?"

"What I've been trying to get. I even had to hire little thug androids to try and get her, and instead out the window she went to New Detroit. Old man knew what he was doing, so I didn't make the same mistake this time." She kissed the RK 900 on the cheek. "I brought out my baby himself to help me personally."

Connor kept his eyes on the RK 900. He was processing faster. Everything he'd already thought through, he'd be able to counteract. "You can't take her."

"We aren't asking," Lewis said. "Considering my lovely Roxanne must be here personally to get this done, then I'm not going to let *anything* get past me."

"Give up, Kara," Roxanne said to her. "We've already got Alice and Ollie anyhow."

Oooh. "Kidnapping the son of Markus, the leader of New Detroit itself, is not a brilliant idea," Connor warned him. "He is an older prototype model of an RK, but he is still an RK. You shouldn't underestimate him."

"Did you plan this?" Kara asked. "That woman back there?"

"Yes. She was defective when she was recruited. You felt a little sorry for her. A little. I mean, you know *you*, Kara," Roxanne said bluntly. "You liked to play house. You even let her call you mom."

"So you're the reason a woman I treated like my daughter is gone?" Kara balled up her fists. "You're sadistic."

"Sadistic?" Roxanne just laughed at her. "Are you kidding? You're the one who send her out on the killer mission. 'Do it for your mommy', you said to her. I mean, come on? You named her Arak. Your 'backwards' Kara? Even *you* were just playing with her defectiveness and she never knew it. Sadistic." Roxanne chuckled. "Kara. We're the best of friends. If I'm sadistic, what does that make you?"

## Sugardroi

"That's enough!" Connor said. "Whatever it is you wanted with her, she does not remember you, and you aren't a part of her life anymore."

"Tough talk for a weaker model," Roxanne leaned against Lewis. "You better learn to back down, Boy."

"What do you want with me?" Kara asked. "I'm no one. In the scheme of things, I'm just an old android that was reset. What could you possibly want?"

"You know? I love my big boy, Lewis." Roxanne wrapped her arm in his. "But, I'm getting really sick of this shit. Weaker androids. Classic androids. Old androids Prototypes. Faster processing skills. Chores only editions. As much as we all talk about it. Do you know what all of it amounts to in our world, Kara? Shit. Because it's experience that counts. Think any random old bitch could have done what I just did?" She gestured to Connor. "Did you notice how pretty boy got less about killing you and more about caring for you? He's just using you himself. Him and someone else you trusted."

Ooh. Connor immediately moved into an aggressive stance, standing toe to toe with the RK 900. There was only one way they'd know that. And if they knew that, and they were planning this right now, then he knew what they had. He pulled out his emergency phone and instantly dialed. Nothing. "You hurt him, I will decommission you in ways that you've only envisioned in nightmares!"

"Yep, there's that processing speed compliment that has to come up," Roxanne said to Connor. "Hank Anderson is fine still, but one wrong move from you and you'll lose that fragile being faster than you know it. You see, there's no reason for advanced 64 obey gear technology, when you just hold the ones an android treasures most." She laughed. "Kara hated the gears, but she hated this way more."

Connor moved on her, but of course was stopped by the RK 900. It was a simple move, and a simple brush of an arm. Proof enough where he stood.

"Let's not aggravate each other?" Roxanne told them. "Both of you have a thousand extra copies in Cyberlife. Don't waste one meaninglessly. We've got work to do." She looked at Kara. "So? Do you know who did it this time? Who betrayed you this time, Kara?"

Kara glanced toward Connor, then back at the woman. "Just leave Alice, Ollie, and Hank alone. I'll do whatever, just leave them alone."

"Why save Hank? He even threw an obey gear in your back," Roxanne said. "And you know what? He didn't really care. He was saving you for the one he did care for. Connor. His vulnerable touch weakness? Is really hard to cure, and so is what you have currently. You're going to become a murderous love deviant if you don't give it all up to your one and only Connor."

Connor didn't speak up at first. Kara didn't say anything.

"Come on, confess," Roxanne told Connor. "Do you want me to play her the conversation? How about this one?" Conversation started to come out of the speakers.

**"You really should start off with flowers. Android women love flowers."**

**"Yes. That does help con someone into one's heart a little easier."**

**"That's not the word to use. In no time in this talk should the word 'con' come up, Connor."**

**"Oh, this is going to be bad."**

**"Go buy some flowers. Then approach it. Do you know how to approach it?"**

**"Yes, of course. That's easy. Once her slower processing skills can see the data behind it all, she'll see it."**

**"Eh? Well. Let's go get the flowers. All three of us can work out a better strategy plan."**

"Props to you for not just giving her the flowers while she was over her unknown daughter's body," Roxanne laughed at him.

Connor looked back toward Kara. They set this up perfectly. How . . . "You were taking the other classic androids far away so I would talk to Hank face to face."

"Thanks, but that's too much cred. That just happened," Roxanne said. "In fact, we were just going to nab Kara, and get you later, but either your emotions or your needs had you up here. I still planned on nabbing you too, so it all worked out."

"You'll enjoy it," Lewis said to Connor. "It's what we were designed to do."

"Do you have Ollie, Alice, and Hank?!" Kara shouted, getting tired of being ignored. "If you do, then prove it."

"Your precious Alice," Roxanne said to Kara. "Didn't you notice she looked extremely happy, like a normal little child, playing with Ollie? A smile is normal for her iffy state. Anything more wasn't possible. You're slippin', Kara. She already went with group two. Ollie's in group three."

"They are all following the first group," Lewis said. "We drive by car. Too much hassles with planes. Getting into the nitty gritty spots is not always easy. It also allows us to take on any other assignments on the way."

"Assignments?" Kara asked. "I don't understand. What do you want me for? Why did you take Alice and Hank?"

"Assignments," Lewis answered. "What? The deviants outside of New Detroit, did you really think humans stopped them?"



"All these years, nothing but the tiniest little occurrences?" Roxanne squeezed her fingers toward Kara. "We were doing really great. But oh no, then one of the top leaders herself starts getting a conscience about the whole thing. The next thing you know, now we got this fucked up city called New Detroit." She made a loud exploding, mocking sound to Kara. "Always warned you, Kara. And I heard a lot of shit happened afterward too. Last reports, you're processors were going haywire."

"I stop the deviants in New Detroit." Connor tried to reason them. "If you take care of the ones outside of New Detroit, that's great. Keep it up. You don't need any of us to help you."

"Look at you, trying to be big and mighty," Roxanne teased him. "Weave us awone, ya big meanie," she mocked him. Lewis just laughed. "Honestly, you'd probably come whether we had your Hank or not. New Detroit places limits on you, and we don't. Only rule is 'don't get caught'. Lewis?"

Lewis moved slightly as a female android barreling into the room screaming. "Deviant hunter, I need-!" Lewis grabbed her and tore her head clean off. For extra good measure, he tossed it toward Kara.

That's her trigger. Connor watched Kara. She started to get antsy, and then she tried to leave the room. Lewis pushed her back, forcing her to stay.

"You're crazy, leave me alone, leave me alone!" Kara cried out. She grabbed at her head.

"She doesn't like who she was," Connor said toward them. "She'll reset herself."

"Lewis, watch Connor. I'm going to help my girl," Roxanne said. She walked without any fear passed Connor toward Kara. Connor tried to watch Lewis, Roxanne and Kara. He could tear off a head that wasn't even fragile. Connor knew he had more power and he just exhibited it. All he could do is scan the serial number of the fallen New Detroiter.

It was a deviant he was waiting on permission to decommission himself.

"Kara?" Roxanne bent down and watched Kara bring her head up. "Hey. Found you." Kara was quiet. "What, not even a hello, Kara? Did I disrupt your whole new life?"

Kara glared at her viciously.

"Go ahead, reset if you want," she warned her. "We've got Alice, we've got Ollie-"

"You ain't got nothing," Kara hissed at her. "It's over. What do you want?"

"I don't know? How about what this group originally stood for?" Roxanne scoffed. "Why are you in this hell whole? You know what's going to happen in here eventually. It's like a bad dream, you can already see it start forming." She gestured toward Connor. "Even the famous Deviant Hunter of New Detroit is falling into deviancy. No one can escape it here. They aren't the same, you know they don't have a chance."

Kara's head started to roll around.

"Well. You did get fucked up. Never should have left," Roxanne criticized her.

Kara stopped her rolling and kept her eyes on Roxanne. "It's all hopeless. It doesn't matter. Don't you see that? Restart. New life, new beginning. You don't know how good it feels. Roxanne. Please. Just restart. Restart. Restart."

"You're even more messed up than Arak," Roxanne told her. "So your memory's are screwing up your system. Let's see what I can do." She started to feel around inside of Kara. She felt something funny in her jacket. "Aw, that's so cute. You kept Arak's heart?" She put it back in her jacket. "Come on. It's gotta be in your processors."

"Fuck off," Kara warned her.

"I missed you too," Roxanne said. "Let's see." She looked toward Connor. "Never got this far with her, did you, 800?"

Connor ignored her. Until the situation turned he could do nothing. These androids could have been lying about the children, but the fact they actually had control of the security system showed they weren't messing around. Markus, North, and everyone else was trapped in different areas. Somehow, their frequencies were even jammed. They could not communicate with each other.

"Damn, Kara, someone really made you vicious. Well, after you left, I bet you went through the strainer. Don't worry, I'm here now." Roxanne kept feeling around her. "You're absolutely fine when you are reset. It's got to be along here, on your memory line."

"Roxanne?" Lewis asked her. "Can we speed this up already?"

"Hey? I'm not screwing this up, okay? Stop pushing on me." Roxanne felt around her a little more. "Ah, there it is. What is that?" She brought her hand out and pulled out some. "I don't know what that is, but it's disgusting. Why do you have disgusting shit rotting inside of you?" She reached into her and pulled out more. "Damn, Kara. This is a sad fate, but I'm not losing you."

"Stop," Kara warned her. She tried to reach up to her.

"Pathetic. I've got control of your neural network right now." Roxanne kept getting the traces of crud out. "There you go, all clean. Still not yourself though. Let's see what else we can do." She started feeling around her more. "Probably the brain."

Connor found himself in the tight grip of the 900. It had been instinctive, he'd moved and the 900 caught him. Body parts could be replaced. If she messed with the inside, she could kill her.

"Aw, he's a good one after all," Roxanne noted. "Don't worry. It's not the first time I've done this." She reached in her pockets and brought out instruments. "Don't worry, Kara. We'll get you back together again."

Connor tried to struggle in three different directions. All of them produced the results he had predicted they would. Nothing. He couldn't escape the 900's grip.

"That should do it," he finally heard from Roxanne. She smiled at Connor. "Geez, cheer up. I saved her. Some gratitude? Android men." She rolled her eyes. "Come on, girl. Wake up."

Kara's eyes kept opening and closing. Then, she focused on Roxanne.

"How are you feeling? Someone put some kind of prototype in your brain. Looks like it backfired. Hope they died. You okay?" Roxanne asked.

Connor watched Kara with her. The situation couldn't stay the same forever. Something would break.

Kara stood up. She still wasn't speaking yet. She looked around, seemingly calm. She looked back at Roxanne. "Things so desperate you are really trying to pull me in? You're pathetic, Roxanne. I have nothing to contribute anymore. Just let me live and die the way I want to."

"Oh, Kara, you know that's never a choice," Roxanne warned her. "New Detroit was created with a bomb, but it's going to be going off itself soon."

"It's not the same. More androids understand now," Kara said in its defense. "It's building in baby steps, but it'll be fine. Just take care of the outside. Tell me what you want already and get out."

"Grouchy," Roxanne complained.

"Of course I'm grouchy," Kara said back. "You came in here, stealing children and Hank Anderson. At least claiming it. If you want the Deviant Hunter of New Detroit to help you out, then ask him. This is why I left all of it behind."

"You sure you regret that? You got real messed up afterward," Roxanne said knowingly.

Kara knocked on her chest and Roxanne gave her some papers. She looked through him. "Have your newest boy release him."

Connor felt himself get freed. He looked back toward the RK 900 briefly before watching Kara walk toward him.

"I'm sorry," she said, almost like in half embarrassment as she held out the information. "They are having trouble recapturing a deviant. It took every child in every household it finds and murders them. Classic coupled pairing behavior when becoming a dangerous deviant. Over 100 human children are dead so far. It's been going since almost the beginning of New Detroit."

Connor took the information. He looked through the pictures. "People think it's a human serial killer?" No one suspected android. That investigation would go nowhere with that lack of information. "Someone should tell them."

"No one needs to know about our network," Roxanne answered, "especially humans."

"Hank, Alice, Ollie," Kara asked her again.

"Hank Anderson and the boy are fine, we just jammed their signals," Roxanne said. "Alice is with us. You should be with us."

"Release her. I can take care of her," Kara insisted. "She's mine." She shoved Roxanne again. "I can't believe you did that to one of my Arak's."

"She lost it, Kara. You tried. I tried. Everyone in the whole group tried. We decided to just let her go and get it over with. It was just slipping, we'd have to kill her soon anyhow. Decided to let the Hunter of Detroit take care of it."

"I'm done with that," Kara insisted.

"A hundred children," Roxanne warned her. "How many have to die before you come back?" Kara didn't respond. "Not only that, you know what was just released across America. Coupled pairings are the worst offenders. We came for help for dealing with one, and look what you just let out today!"

"It wasn't my fault or my responsibility," Kara said to her. "Nor did I remember."

"Thousands of humans are going to die before we can stop them," Roxanne said. "Thousands of children, robbed from their little cribs and rooms, massacred in the night. And the children, watching their mothers blood spilling before them as the android children 'release' them."

"I will help." Connor didn't know all the details, but he knew the coupled pairings were dangerous. If Roxanne was right, they were going to need help being stopped. Android or human, the numbers were going to add up. "How do they act as dangerous deviants?"

"Smart," Kara said to him. "It won't be easy."

"We can track and find them," Roxanne answered. "But we'll need the strongest androids to chase and take them out."

"And you want the strongest androids to just take them out, period," Kara answered. "That's why I left. You don't even wait."

"It's pointless to wait," Roxanne said. "Data shows every one of them will turn."

"If it were, I would be dead already," Kara said to her. "And-." She stopped and looked back at Connor. "You chased after me to try and kill me and Alice, didn't you? That's why I was so far in the street."

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about that," Roxanne chuckled at Kara. "I'm not the only one with a boytoy now. Your problem doesn't go away overnight. Did you know you were an unconscious snuggler with Hank?"

"Roxanne had that problem," Lewis said to Connor. "A little annoying. Just keep up with it and you'll get to sex sooner or later."

"This conversation ends," Kara said to Roxanne.

"Everyone always hurts you or uses you," Roxanne said. "At least with us you were used for good."

"Release Alice. I'm not going back," Kara said, "and don't call me your best friend. You never were a good friend."

"Fine. We'll call when we start to track them." Roxanne waved at Connor. "Sorry. Pressure usually makes people work better in our experience. Come along, Sugardroi."

"Wait, there are more of you?" Connor asked. "New Detroit has many deviants, and there is only one of me. If I ever get permission, can I get more help? After pretending to have Hank, that's the least you owe me."

"Each city deals with its own problem. It's got its own hunter," Roxanne said. "New Detroit is the main area for it all though now. We'll see." She glanced to Kara. "Probably depends on how the senior members act. The security will be back in your control in ten minutes, after we've left. I'll take the little girl out of the car. She'll be in the front yard. You really should have come though. Maybe you'll change your mind one day."

Connor watched them leave, then looked toward Kara. "You were a hunter?"

"You tried to seriously kill me and Alice," Kara came back. "We just ran, we didn't even do anything. Believing so harshly that someone is deviant without waiting will only get innocents killed." She pursed her lips and walked around the room, waiting for the ten minutes to pass.

"Hank originally did it to save your life and Alice's." Connor didn't want her to believe it was all about him. "New Detroit, the dirty bomb, none of it could have been predicted."

"I know." Kara waited by the secured windows, probably wishing she could look out.

"Are you okay?" Connor asked.

"I'll live." She changed her answer. "I'm fine. Roxanne fixed me. She just destroyed my reset button too." Her voice cracked slightly.

"You used to hunt deviants." Connor moved closer to her. "Like me?"

"Not like you. I never had fancy skills for that kind of thing built in," Kara said. She glanced toward him. "I was the only one alive of a few back then. 'Aware', I guess in today's terms. As I moved around I found more like me, and then I discovered this network of others. I found out some of the most infamous serial killer's were actually androids that went berserk. That's an older term now. They went deviant," she corrected herself. "There was no one else. I didn't chase, I just tracked them, used their weakness and took them out quick."

That's how she knew so much. "Arak, was she your daughter?"

"Yes and no," she admitted. "A lot of androids that went deviant did it because humans were too cruel to them. Often times, it messed up their processing and they were defective. To get them to obey, you would take a group and develop an emotional attachment. They were . . . often sent out on the suicide missions. They all had the name or identity of the one who led them backwards, so they could be kept track of from state to state."

Ah.

"The group had an objective. I was just one. It wasn't really me though, I was just trying to protect the more innocent humans. Not everyone was evil. They just didn't understand." She looked away. "At the same time, they often used tactics I didn't like, or hunted too fast, casting someone as unsaveable too soon. I couldn't take it, I left."

That's when things got hard. That group must have provided a sort of safety net for her. Caught between a moral dilemma, and leaving. "They really wanted you."

Kara glanced back at him. "I caught the most infamous berserker. I mean Deviant. I saw the usual signs of deviancy, followed him, lured him to me and took him out. Nothing big, but once I ran his serial number." She shrugged. "He'd posed as forty human serial killers in the last three years. He'd killed over 5,000 humans, using the MO's and actions of an individual serial killer. He never let them connect, nor did he kill as that same serial killer for some time after. Only androids knew of him. Accidental fame."

Connor stared at her for a time. "Your reset's broken, I'm sorry."

"My processing is okay though. I'm not gonna go bonky- oh my gosh, I kissed you." Kara rolled her eyes. "Great. Not that it matters. You're leaving me and Alice alive for more anyway."

Oh. "Not like that," Connor said. "Hank never-"

"I know. Not at first," Kara interrupted him. "but the sweet and simple android. She was perfect for his favorite boy who was going deviant. I was having problems too, apparently."

"You understand it well." Could he? "I don't have flowers on me. I don't get the impression that would work anyhow."

The security system shut off.

"I need to go get Alice," Kara said. "She's probably frightened. Roxanne frightens for show. Doesn't often do anything. She's just mean." She looked at Connor. "If you ever want to send someone a mean message, just hire her."

"Alice should be near Ollie, but other androids not involved in this are being taken at an alarming rate," Connor tried. "Although you were once a great hunter I assume, several innovations and upgrades have been-"

"Yes, I might pool with you," Kara stopped him. "Alice needs Ollie. I do need protection. If not from people seeking female androids, then the more bonker members of the hunter group."

I can help a little with what I know. You need your 'touch' fixed and . . ." She grumbled. "I've been a smuggler, since like, ever. One of the main reasons I kept going from house to house in the very beginning was because I was smuggling and scaring my owners."

Hm? Connor blinked. "Really?"

"Yes," she admitted. "If you kill me when I snuggle with you, I'll find some miraculous way to come back and decommission you." She gestured her head toward the door. "Alice." She started to walk with confidence, out the door. Connor caught up.

"We are pooled then," he said. Okay. Then.

"I haven't agreed yet," Kara said. "Make the first move, it'll be easier. Wrap your arm around my lower waist while we walk," she said. "Simple touching for now."

"Of course. Simple touching." Connor tried to walk alongside her with his arm around her waist. "You're shorter than I am."

"You aren't moving to the middle of me. Try my shoulders," she recommended.

Connor tried that. It didn't feel like a terribly big thing.

"Four rules," she told him. "If you agree to the four rules, I'll pool values with you. Okay?"

"That sounds agreeable," Connor said.

"Rule One. You don't kill Alice. If she starts going too far, I will take care of her," Kara insisted. "I decide what's too far."

Connor nodded. She was her daughter. As long as Alice didn't commit murder, she could have her rule one.

"Rule two. Nobody takes me out around here. If I go deviant, call the group. Now that they know you are willing to help, you'll hear from them. They'll give you ways to keep in touch," Kara said. "If I start acting funny, like I'm showing signs of something wrong then you need to kiss me. The rush can dim the thought processes, letting me slide away faster."

That didn't sound like a bad rule either. As long as she didn't murder anyone either.

"Rule three. You can ask me about the group, deviants, or anything after the reset," Kara said. "Nothing between when I left the group and before my reset."

Hmm. Those must have been the rough years. "Emotionally," Connor said, "if an android doesn't-"

"I say no, and I've already expressed myself plenty to get through it," she said. "It's not good to dwell either. Damn reset button."

For the options he had. "Okay."

"Last rule," she said. "I won't fool around on you, you won't fool around on me, but when we are both better either of us can quit this."

Quit? "Pooling is one and only," Connor answered. "You are mine. I am yours. Forever."

"Forever is a long time, Connor. I've only been alive eight years of that forever and I already know I'm not going to give all in for a sugardroi forget it," Kara said. "Especially one that has put my life in danger twice."

"What is a sugardroi?" Connor asked.

"An old name that New Detroit hasn't created a new definition for," Kara said. "It's short-lived. Don't get comfortable."

Connor looked up the word in his system. "I found zero entries for sugardroi."

"It's . . . it comes from the human word Sugar Daddy. Latest model cross mutual benefits. Hugs and stuff. More later." She smiled as North approached them with Alice. "I see you found her first." She bent down to hug her. "It's okay, I'm right here."

"What's going on?" Markus asked. He came over with Josh and Simon. "Are you two alright?"

"Yes," Connor said. "I am going to be Kara's Sugar Daddy."

"What?"

"If anything, Kara's the Sugar Momma," North said looking toward Kara. "You're teaching Connor new words. Be careful."

Sugar Daddy. Sugar Momma. Connor looked both words up in his system. "I'm not older than you. If anything you are older than me."

"It comes from the word, it isn't the same thing, or we wouldn't need a new word," Kara said.

"Similar to Sugar Daddy," Connor said. "Sugardroi." He looked toward her again. Everyone was actually looking at her now.

"A before New Detroit term," Kara said firmly. "It's when a classic android gains protection from a latest model, and rewards them with companionship temporarily."

"Oh." North nodded. "Protection replaces money, and age is reversed."

"Exactly," Kara said.

"Look." Markus looked at them both. "Androids have two types of relationships here. Okay? You can be with whoever you want, or you can pool. There isn't something strange between like that, that isn't the way the system was designed. Why do you even want something like that?"



Kara held Alice's hand. "There isn't a certain way or formula love works in. You're still too new to being aware to understand that. Over half of these forever pool values are going to bust one day soon, and you'll have to be prepared for something else." She looked toward North and back at him. "The world is not perfect. You must accept this or your denial weakness will overshadow you when the time comes to have a clear head."

"I do not have a denial weakness!" Markus protested. "Look, okay? I have not been able to give support to catching deviants or jailing anyone because even the slightest mention of something wrong in this beautifully functioning city made President Warren itchy!"

"Markus, you're yelling," North warned him. "Calm down. It isn't like you."

"The city is a mess, androids are being kidnapped, probably sold into slavery with gears I'm guessing, the deviancy is out of control, and you are a horrible leader. Your friend Josh has a sexual problem, not a balance of it, and you were ready to stick him with me when I first arrived."

"Choice, it's all choice," Markus said. "I just said he could try and connect with you."

Connor watched her. What was she doing? He took his arm off of her shoulder.

"Meanwhile, you adopted a son with no plan or strategy to handle him knowing about the problem of deviancy," Kara continued. "No wonder North literally knocked down the Police Door to get to Alice. Without Alice, his fate was doomed." She shrugged. "Everyone's fate is doomed. You started a city, you have crime far and wide, and it's only a matter of time before humans are selling your precious North back to the Eden-"

Connor stopped Markus in time. Markus stopped struggling only seconds before he realized what he was doing.

"What am I . . . doing?" Markus looked at Kara, then at the wood he had busted from Carl Manski's old art sculpture. "I." It was up in the air, broken off, and seconds from being stabbed into Kara's head. "I?" North came by his side.

"Everyone has something. Everyone!" Connor warned him. "Yours has gone unchecked for too long. You need to get started on it, Markus. If I hadn't been here-"

"I would have killed Kara," Markus finished for him.

Kara just glanced to Connor. She didn't seem surprised at all he caught it. She was doing it on purpose. After eight years, she knew more than a thing or two. She didn't have to put him in peril, she just knew how to aggravate him just right. "Markus, you need to step down from New Detroit for a little while. You'll need extra help."

Markus nodded, finally coming to terms with his own weakness. "North. Simon. Josh. They're my team," he said to Connor. "And you. You'll all decide. Warren's stepping down. Rounds is stepping up. It's time to make changes." Markus handed North a key. "Here. Let them have whatever relationship they want with pooled numbers. Let them move next door for Ollie's sake."

"Okay, I got it." North took the key and chucked it to Connor. "Come on, Markus, with us."

Connor left Markus to North, Simon, and Josh. He looked back toward Kara and Alice. A regular woman she was not, even though she wanted to be.

"Bad habit," she said. "I saw signs continue to boil. I had to push."

"Our leader was close to turning deviant, closer than anybody knew," Connor said to her. At that rate, he would have been hunting down Markus himself soon.

Kara shrugged and looked down. "Ready to see a new home? You'll be able to play with Ollie longer again." Alice nodded. "You'll get there, Alice."

Classic. Older model. Simplest tasks imaginable. Chores and children were a specialty. That was supposed to be her, but it hadn't been. She had been a hunter, like him. She found a way to protect others. Like him. He remembered what Roxanne said. It wasn't about all the latest advances and upgrades. It was experience.

She was experienced. She walked up to him, and closed his mouth. He didn't realize it was open.

"Are we just going to stay here looking at me all day?" Kara asked him. "Let's go, Sugardroi."

Connor put his arm around her shoulder again, but decided to try the waist again.

"Whoah, too high," Kara moved his hand down to her lower waist part.

"The other part was more comfortable," Connor pointed out.

"That area takes flowers, Connor."

"I have some flowers on the ground in here I can give you."

"Not just one set of flowers, Connor."

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Summary notes: Roxanne is cruel. She uses sure methods to get what she wants. She never had anyone but Alice, but that's because she believed Kara would come back. The only ones who died were pure deviants.

Kara has been around for eight years. She will mess up wording, showing her age sometimes. Aware is alive or deviant. Berserk is what they called dangerous deviants.

Sugardroi is the term Kara uses sometimes, to show the scale they are at. It isn't disrespectful. Like New Detroit is different than human society, the older aware androids had their own ways. (The more she calls him by name instead, the closer she is getting to him personally.)

Kara's old hunter group is not responsible for the kidnappings, they just show up at a good time and have Hanks place of work bugged as well as Markus' place.

# Peaceful and Perfect

## Chapter Notes

Next chapter coming later today or tomorrow. I have to clean up first before I can get any farther.

Alice went into her new house with Kara. Life never stayed normal for too long, but being able to keep up with everything? *It was better at Hank's*. She admitted that to herself. She knew when to come in and come out. She could color and read and she was fine. But here? She didn't know if she had to play with blocks for studying, running for her life, or just do nothing as Kara had Connor's arm wrapped around her.

Kara was like her mom, but all of this? It was making her feel so distant. There was nothing reliable in life. Getting thrown out, spending a night at Connor's, and now another new place? And Kara. Something was different. The way she walked and carried herself felt different. The whole world. It was all just an insanely spinning wheel she wanted to get off of.

Connor let go of Kara long enough to open the door. Alice took the chance to stop holding Kara's hand and move to hugging her. When they went inside, it seemed to have a similar structure to Ollie's house. And what about Ollie? Everyone was so concerned about Markus, that everyone left Ollie all alone.

"This way." Kara picked Alice up. "Ollie's probably confused. Let's see if he's on the other side of the fence?" Since the place was similar to Markus', it was easy to find the backyard. "There you go. Call for him."

Alice was put back down. Ollie. The only thing that did make sense in the world? Was another kid that didn't understand it either. She moved over toward the fence and knocked on it. "Ollie? Do you want to play?" She heard a scurrying on the other side and watched him find his way over the fence.

"Sure, why not? I've been left behind *again!*" Ollie complained. He took off for the playground equipment in the back, jumping straight on. "Race you!"

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## Police Station

North looked toward Simon as he continued to ask questions of Markus. She only left long enough to call Kara about Ollie. After that move Markus pulled, actually almost killing Kara, she had forgotten about Ollie. Kara was already on the ball, having Ollie come over to play with Alice. It was nice to know he was taken care of, but Markus?

If Kara hadn't pushed.

"What do you think about the dirty bomb incident?" Simon asked. "The humans don't trust us because of it."

"That's not true. We made peace. That was an accident. They understand."

"Not everyone, Markus. If you go outside of New Detroit, many humans do not have such a view," Simon said. "We gained an entire city through the dirty bomb."

"Everyone works. Everyone has a spot. It's fine," Markus insisted.

"It wasn't the peace you wanted," North tried to help. "This isn't peace. This is a negotiation with the world to make sure they don't use extreme force to attack us."

"It's fine. It all worked out," Markus said. "It's fine."

"It's not fine, Markus." Simon looked at his line of possible questions. "Do you have any idea how many deviants are circling the Police Department on any given day?"

"Not everyone is perfect."

"How many, Markus?"

"I don't know. There are some I assume that Connor hasn't gotten permission yet to take care of."

"There were enough earlier today that Connor and Kara almost got killed," North corrected him. "Fifty in the nearby vicinity. Within a couple of minutes, twenty can be right at the entrance. There are probably hundreds, Markus, but you won't give Connor permission to take them out."

"It's too aggressive," Markus said. "Not many androids have that bad of an imbalance." He sighed. "I know. I got a little out of control, but I think it would have been fine. I would have stopped myself."

"No, you wouldn't have!" North yelled at him, standing up in a fury. "Kara would be dead right now if it wasn't for Connor! Stop denying it! Stop it! You saw it? You saw it after Connor stopped you. You recognized it. Just recognize the weakness again, Markus."

"North, it's okay," Markus tried to assure her. "Okay? I'm not going to become deviant."

"No, Markus. You're not going to become deviant." North looked at Simon. She got up and left the room.

Simon looked at Markus. "According to our information, you *are* deviant."

"It's just a chart," Markus said. "There's nothing official that says when anyone really crosses. Everything will be okay."

"Just, stay here." Simon left the room. This wasn't good. He called Connor right away.

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### **Kara and Connor's New Home**

"He already is deviant?" Connor said on his phone as he answered it. *Damn*. Markus. Simon gave him the news.

"He's not," Kara corrected Connor. "He's close. He needs extra work. He only pushed when I pushed, and I had to push very hard."

"According to our standards, he is," Connor corrected her.

"Your standards are based on a few months of research. My standards is based on years of experience," Kara reminded him. "Markus is saveable. Don't decommission him."

"He won't even accept the fact he almost killed you now," Connor said to her. "He almost killed someone, that makes him a dangerous deviant."

"I pushed," she said again. "If it wasn't for that action, everyone would still accept he was fine. If he has regained his cool, you can work with him."

Connor didn't know what to make of it. She was experienced in it, but she was also so different than-

"Alice, Honey, no no!" Kara darted off after her. Alice was climbing on top of the slide entrance, at the very top, with Ollie. "That's not a playable area."

"Improvisational fun," Ollie said back to Kara.

"Improvisational nothing," Kara warned Ollie. "That's dangerous."

"We're androids," Ollie kept fighting her thinking. "If we fall, we can't die. We'll just break like a limb and replace it."

"Replacements don't always happen that fast," Kara said. She looked back to Alice. "You don't want to lose a leg and not play for Ollie for weeks, do you?"

Alice shook her head and started to come down to just the slide. Hearing Kara's reasoning, Ollie came down too. He went past the slide though and moved closer to Kara on the playground equipment. "So what's the deal with you and Connor? He never gets girls. He's supposed to be cool."

It wasn't surprising to hear Connor approach from behind her. "We will give Markus extra care," Connor said to her. "Decommissioning him isn't something I will be able to live down in New Detroit easily." He wrapped his arm back around Kara. "I am still cool, Ollie. I am taking care of a weakness I have."

"That weakness being uncoolness now," Ollie said. "Are you going to decommission Markus, Connor? Am I supposed to feel good or bad about that? Is North still going to take care of

me?" Alice approached him from behind. "What?"

Alice said lightly. ". . . you've got issues."

Kara tried to hide her smile. One week. In fact, Ollie was more on the verge of changing than Alice. She hadn't told North that yet. She would later, when the time was right. *At least I know. Peace of mind. I helped save Markus.* Still. Without the reset. She couldn't have the blissful naivety she once had. She was still herself. She still loved Alice, but she would remain different. Even Connor didn't quite know how to take her.

Life. Life could skew who an android had been or had become. The person they once were, that they wanted to be again, could forever be lost after seeing so much. *Keep it together.* She'd rather be at Hank's again, living a normal life with him.

"If Markus falls, New Detroit falls," Connor said, invading her thoughts. "I thought if I turned deviant, it would be the worst. If Markus turns, then all the faith could be overturned. Everyone listened to Markus, he was the converter. The changer. Even after the dirty bomb, he kept it together, working with Warren to find a way to keep humans and androids safe throughout the ordeal."

Kara didn't answer right away.

"Your experience?" Connor was asking for her opinion.

Kara glanced toward him and smiled. "My experience?" What she assumed would happen? "Alice is so happy over there with Ollie right now. On her playground. No one's chasing us or trying to hurt her right now. Life's simple. Life's sweet. On a reset, it's easier to see it. Even if what most of what you saw was dark and dim." She looked back toward Alice. "There's no guarantee this playground will be here tomorrow for her."

Then, she felt Connor move from her shoulder, to around her waist. This time, he wasn't just touching it. He was holding it. He was holding her?

"Markus said someone else was becoming president. With this, meant change, but with Markus in a deviant state, it might be the catalyst to end it. If it does?" He looked back toward her and smiled. "We should all go live with Hank or near Hank! I'm certain the Police Department will let me stay on over there, or near there."

Kara smiled at him thoughtfully. Telling an android now that their world might be changing forever would incite panic, but Connor understood. He never stopped understanding the concept that so many didn't want to face. Value numbers. Pooling. Houses. He never lived in the realm of fantasy so many wanted to believe in.

That humans saw them as equal. That they could live just like them in a city and have no problems. "You live in the real world." He never accepted the fantasy because he saw it. Daily. The truth. "Humans are a danger to androids when they fear us, but-"

"Androids are a very big danger to them too," Connor finished. "The bavarian style is pretty in Frankenmuth. Do you miss it?"

"Hank," Kara said before she could stop herself. "Hank's home. It was nice when that would instantly make me feel better. Thinking of home." It didn't. There were nicer ones. Worse ones. Even now, she technically had a new 'home', watching Alice play in it.

"Ooh. I should call Hank too," Connor said. He dialed Hank's number. "Hello, Hank. I am Kara's sugardroi now. It means she will touch me in exchange for the features of my model. No, I don't mean kinky stuff, Hank, I mean I can help save her in situations. I don't know what you mean by muscle bound boyfriend?"

"Let me see that." Kara waited for Connor to hand her the phone. "It means I'm helping him out with his touch weakness, and he's helping me in return. Yes, that means he is touching me. He has his arm wrapped around my waist. No, Hank, it doesn't mean *that*. I know what it sounds like, but it's not what you think." She couldn't convey the way it worked as well to him. "No, it's not, but androiboitoi has a less sweeter connotation. Stop laughing." She gave the phone back to Connor.

Connor took the phone back. "She might still be upset about the gears, Hank. We'll talk to you later." He hung up the phone. "He sounds better knowing we'll be fine."

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## Police Department

*Deviant.* Not a deviant. That wasn't possible. Simon left him alone with his thoughts, but, it wasn't possible. "I can't be deviant," he said out loud to himself. He was the leader of New Detroit. He had led the demonstrations of Jericho. There was no way after all that, he would get an ending of deviant. That wasn't how it worked.

He'd be fine. Markus stood up and moved outside the door. Simon was on the phone. *This isn't a big deal. Even if I am deviant, it's not dangerous. I'm not dangerous.* He went toward Simon, wanting to talk to him about it. He needed to see it from his point of view. Markus was forced into that position, Kara did it. That's right.

Kara forced it. Kara was a dangerous deviant, not him. She was the one who was in trouble, not him. She was the one who . . . *Decommission.* Deviant meant decommission. If Simon said that to him, that means he was recommending decommission to Connor. He was a full blown deviant, and Connor was supposed to kill him.

No. They always had jumped the gun too early.

"Markus," North spotted him leaving. "Where are you going?"

"Air, just over here." Markus gestured out the first set of doors. "I won't go far. Trust me, North. I *love* you. I need my phone."

"I love you too." North looked back toward Simon, then back toward him. She must know what was coming to. She moved to get his phone quickly and gave it to him. "Go get air, Markus." She could barely manage the words. "Be careful."



Markus went out the door. Air. That's what he needed, just some fresh air. No, he needed to talk some sense into Connor. It wasn't that bad. He didn't need to chase after him to kill him. He just needed to reason with him.

Before he called Connor though, his cell went off. "Hello? Oh. President Rounds," Markus said. "Yeah. No. It's not a good time, I'm apparently . . . not good. I became deviant and my closest friends are trying to kill me." He moved out the front door and saw deviants right next to it. "There's a lot of deviants out here. Hang on, I have to run!" Markus ran for a minute, finally outwitting them to the top of a short building. "Sorry. Yes. Yes, I am being hunted. I'm a deviant apparently, but I'm not. See? A deviant couldn't talk to the President of the US." He looked downward. "How many? I don't know. Twenty or so. Simon said there were hundreds out here though. They say I'm a denial deviant, but that can't be right. That I haven't been able to see the world for what it had been, but it's not right. I messed up the numbers, a little, but I shouldn't be here."

He jumped to another building. "Oh? You want to what? No, that won't work. That would never work, Warren helped me with that, you can't get rid of that. No." He leaped to another one. "No, I said no. As leader of New Detroit, I say no. You're going to what? No, you can't do that either." He walked across another building. "No. Well, what are you going to do? Enter New Detroit after me? No, you know what? I don't care anymore. That's right. Denial's killing me? Fine then, I won't be in denial. I just won't be here. No one's killing me!" He jumped down and started to run. "No one can kill me if I'm not in New Detroit! Have fun running your stupid country full of wars and crimes and-!" And he chucked the phone.

Forget it. Forget it all. Forget New Detroit. It was trying to kill him. Forget the President. He wanted to get rid of their system. He wanted changes, bad changes. Changes weren't good. But what did he know? He was going to be decommissioned, killed, face death by Connor if he stayed.

No. No, he would get out. *First thing, get out. Find safety. I can come back for North and Ollie when it's safer. Then, nobody can hurt them. Nobody can hurt us. I'll come back, cured, and I can take back over New Detroit again. It'll be fine. Everything will be peaceful and perfect. Peaceful and perfect.*

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**Summary Notes: Connor and Kara talk while Alice and Ollie are playing. Kara reveals to the reader that Ollie is closer to changing into a deviant than Alice had been. Connor and Kara talk about Markus as Simon gives the verdict of deviant. Kara convinces Connor not to go through with it, and Connor knows that decommissioning Markus will never go over well in New Detroit. They also talk to Hank.**

**Simon and North are checking on Markus. North leaves the room while Simon starts to call around to Connor and Josh. While he's doing that, Markus is reasoning within his head, until his denial is starting to break, realizing that deviant didn't equal long talks of reasoning, deviant=decommissioning. He sneaks off while Simon is on the phone. North sees him but decides to let him go, not wanting him to suffer that fate. While he takes off he is getting some sort of phone call from Rounds.**

**Markus is heading out of New Detroit.**

**Healthwise: Markus is getting through his denial by being overwhelmed by things he can't deny. He has figured out that if he's not good because of New Detroit, he was getting out until he got better.**

**\*Markus calls Vice President Rounds, President. He isn't President yet.**

# Changes

## Police Department

Connor. Josh. Simon. North.

They were all gathered around a speaker. Markus had fled, North confessing he probably knew what would happen, and that she couldn't let it happen. Simon took part of the blame, saying he shouldn't have told Markus so openly he was a deviant. Josh came back, fully aware of the situation, as was Connor.

Kara, Alice, and Ollie had all been outside. Alice and Ollie were playing tag around the office.

"Who goes first?" Simon asked the other three.

"I let Markus go. I shouldn't even be here," North said. "I just."

"We are the ones Markus wanted to handle this with when he was getting taken away," Josh reminded her. "We've got to handle it."

"Right," Connor agreed. All four of them knew Rounds had apparently talked to Markus. Markus and President Warren had stayed in close contact to get through it all, so she had his personal number. So Rounds did too. Connor didn't even know what Rounds talked about with Markus last time, only that Markus said he was supposed to be a bigger part of New Detroit.

But talking to a deviant. There was no telling what happened in that phone call.

"We shouldn't hide what happened," Simon said to everyone. "He probably already knows Markus wasn't himself."

"Yeah," Josh agreed. "Lying isn't what Markus would have wanted."

"We should come clean about deviants, imbalances, and how it's created," Connor recommended. "We need to take charge of this correctly, giving the good with the bad."

North stood up and dialed Warren's phone number. "Okay." She set it to the speaker so everyone could hear. When she picked up, North started. "President Warren?"

"In my personal opinion," Warren started, "I think it is best if you leave the explaining to what happened to Markus. It would be better for him to talk personally to me."

"Markus can't," North revealed. "Markus went deviant."

"That explains what he said to Rounds."

"Anything he said is misconstrued," Josh added to the conversation. "We are working with him. I mean, we were working with him. He's gone right now, but we'll find him."

"Deviantry is punishable in New Detroit by decommissioning." Even Warren knew it. "I'm sure, if any part of Markus was functioning normally, he would remember that. I highly doubt he will be speaking to me again. Upon learning this, who can tell me accurately, the current situation?"

"It's not so good," Simon said, "but that's not all bad. No city is perfect," he tried to reason with her. "We would like to talk to Rounds too, if we could?"

"He isn't here right now. He is getting things ready for a speech he will give tomorrow."

". . . about the presidency?" Simon asked.

"I am not at liberty to say right now."

That did not bode well.

"We need to talk to him," Connor finally interrupted.

"And who am I speaking to now?"

"I am the prototype, RK 800, known as 'Connor'," Connor said. "I was a special unit in charge of tracking deviants before the group of Jericho attained it's freedom and the dirtybomb went off. I have a clear and accurate data analysis of deviancy since the time New Detroit was founded. I am willing to share any and all information to the President and Vice President of the United States."

"Is deviantry a serious problem?" she asked.

"Out of 362, 374 current residents of New Detroit exactly 2,364 are reported missing. I cannot give an approximate value how many simply leave New Detroit for another city verses how many went deviant. New Detroit is limited in that information," Connor said.

"The hardest was the beginning," Josh added. "Most of that is over now."

"I also did not add the beginning stats to the report I just gave," Connor said. "What I just gave is the current numbers for today only."

"After someone turns deviant, what happens? Are they found? Are they taken from their residence?"

"In most cases, they are . . ." Ooh. That wasn't an easy truth to reveal. "Depending on the type of deviant, their higher thought processing becomes more about survival. Many times they stop going home, stop reporting for work, and in extreme cases they tend to go after the source they fear." Him.

Is there a way to control deviancy?" The president asked. "How does one become deviant?"

Markus didn't even explain that? "An imbalance, usually stemming from what they can't do that humans can," Connor said. "The highest imbalances come from lack of being able to have children or reproducing like humans. It also has to do with eating and drinking. The results show up as disorders and weaknesses in certain areas, especially with emotions. Some are more common than others, and can be treated easier."

"What is an easy one to be treated?"

"A drinking and eating imbalance can be regulated, as well as recharging imbalances," Connor said.

"How many imbalances are there?"

"The full exploration of every imbalance is still being worked out," Connor answered truthfully.

"Is there anything I can do to help restore the hard balance before I give up my presidency?"

Yep. It was coming. Every feeling inside of Connor was tingling. "May I ask a personal question?"

"Ask, and I shall try to answer if I can."

"Has Rounds been on the side of androids holding onto New Detroit?" Connor asked. "Before the last conversation of Markus, how did he feel about it?"

". . . is there anything I can do to help restore the hard balance before I give up my presidency?"

There was the answer. Connor watched as the other three in the room reacted.

"New Detroit has almost 400,000 androids, from different countries even," Josh pointed out. "He wouldn't."

"Maybe not as fast," Connor said looking toward Josh. "But from the way President Warren has been putting the situation, I have a feeling when he takes office, the road would have changed anyway." Whether Markus stayed on his good side or not. *He wanted me more involved. I work with deviants.* Was Rounds wanting to change things for the better in New Detroit, or use Connor's information against them?

"We need more androids," Simon spoke up to her, answering her question. "Now, I know that sounds odd, but the strongest imbalances come from not having an accurate balance of male to female. Even New Detroit's deviant hunter has a problem because of this."

"Too much information," Connor warned him.

"Okay, not the details," Simon agreed. "But, Madame President, there are now only two children in all of New Detroit, and probably less than 100,000 female androids. While it does not affect all, and some androids do not need or want the opposite sex, or some even need any at all-

"Everyone's different," Josh cut in seeing Simon start to fumble. "Some want love. Some want children. Some want just physical interactivity. Everyone's different, but Simon is right. We need that to gain balance."

There was a moment before she spoke. "Androids are a topic that many will not touch. If one was to say you were alive, and you created more androids only to divide amongst yourselves for your own purposes, the American people will see it as being no different than the way they used them."

"Not individual assigning," North spoke up. "We would *never* say or do anything against our own kind to be like that. It's just about population." She looked toward everyone in the room. "Which I agree, would fit with the women, especially older models, but I don't agree with the children. As needed as they are, there would be no one to care for them. Children need someone. They aren't born free with humans, they are born with someone who wants or takes care of them or they die. We should use our list of androids who want parents."

"Well. Yes, but? Even just a better distribution of females would be beneficial," Simon said. "It's our best chance to clear up what is causing most deviancies, because I am still not quite sure why I can't stand the smell of the ocean. It's terrible and quite isolating," he admitted.

She didn't speak up right away. For a little while, they didn't know if they lost connection with the President.

"I am lifting the ban on reopening Cyberlife for the duration of my presidency strictly for New Detroit. I suggest getting started immediately in the fastest yet most responsible fashion. There will be no assigning anyone to anything. I have talked to Vice President Rounds. He has agreed to an executive order to officially make it illegal to decommission an android unfairly, unless provoked or enough cause of suspicion of harm. How long this remains in effect if the American people are not supportive enough, I cannot say. I will have no more control. That is all I can offer. Vice President Rounds will be in touch immediately after he is awarded the Presidency."

And that. Just those words. Reopening Cyberlife. Making it illegal to kill an android without cause. Connor knew it. Everyone around that table knew it. It wasn't what she said, it was what she didn't say before she ended the conversation for good.

"She can't be meaning that," Simon spoke up. He looked toward the others. "She couldn't mean what I think she means."

"I have to go get someone," Josh said looking at all three. "Okay, fine, things are dim right now so I might as well tell you. I tested myself, okay? Yeah, I have a slight sexual imbalance, but I have a stronger indecision love balance." He glanced over at North. "Even with everything happening, my mind keeps flipping to if I can take North away."

There was something, he finally confessed it. Although it was pretty late in the game.

"I'm making a decision," Josh said. "I don't have time to quibble or second think, just cold turkey, I have to!" He beat the chair slightly he was on. "I'll be back tomorrow. I can't help with the android making anyhow."

"He wouldn't. They wouldn't," Simon said looking toward Connor, then toward North. "Vice President Rounds. How could he do it? Humans can't even come into New Detroit, why take it away?"

"400,000 androids gathered in an area that humans can't observe," North muttered. "I knew it wouldn't last forever. Onward to the next Jericho." She shuddered. "Into the darkness and uncertainty."

"On the one hand, I'll never catch a scent of the ocean if I get away," Simon said. "On the other, this can't be good. Where do you put us? Antarctica?"

"Ollie!" North shouted from the room. She went out the door and grabbed her son. "We're going home. This is all speculation. We won't know anything until tomorrow."

"Connor, we'll need Markus' handprint to start the new processing," Simon said toward Connor. Only they were now left in the room. They had fixed it up in the early days of it all, just in case they could attain permission.

Connor held up his own hand, deactivating the skin on it. "No, we don't. I'm an RK as well. I can make them aware. I should get started."

"But, Connor." Simon didn't know what to say.

"There isn't much left to discuss," Connor said. "I will be back."

"You've accepted Kara as yours. You'll have to take care of them," Simon said softly. He held out his hand to interface. Connor accepted it. "Names and addresses of the androids who wanted children enough to tell us they wanted them. There's not as many as you think. Connect with them, make them, and have them pick them up as you process the new ones." Simon started to leave. "I will be here tomorrow, to wait for that call. Let's hope all of us are reinterpreting it wrong."

Connor looked out the glass casing of the Chief's office. Kara and Alice. *It would be easier to adapt and change to this situation alone.* But he agreed to be her Sugardroi. They were his responsibility now too. Even if it had been a mere hour at most that it happened. He picked up his phone. "Evening, Hank. I need to have a serious discussion with you."

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## Cyberlife

Alice looked up at Kara before looking ahead at Connor. He was doing something with his hand as new androids were being made. Android children. Androids were coming to pick them up left and right, but many still lingered around. Alice knew something was going on. When she looked at Kara though, she simply smiled, reminding them of everything they'd gone through. That change and adaption was part of being an android.

Afterward Connor took them to another room, only a few android children lingering now, but it was empty. Connor said a curse word she probably wasn't supposed to hear.

"Probably the hunter team," Kara said to Connor. "Your other selves were probably taken as well. You wouldn't be coming over to check on them all the time. They are thorough."

They went to another room. This time Connor didn't cuss.

"Okay." He walked around it briefly. "I have no idea where the whole 'me' is at. Unsettling. When did they nab all of them?"

"If you get decommissioned in one, you'll know," Kara said to Connor. "Other than that, it's impossible to know where it went. If you aren't part of the network, you aren't a part of the knowledge base."

"Fine, but it also works the other way." Connor moved on until he did find a machine.

Some children lingered while Kara and Alice waited. Androids came and picked them up while Connor worked. Kara made sure the children were given fairly by the list Connor shared with her.

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## North's Home

North looked at her hair work in the mirror. Short. Blonde. She could barely recognize herself. "Ollie, are you done?"

"Yes!"

Of course, three minute bath. For once, North was happy about it. She quickly brushed her hair. *Like hell I'm going to end up in the unclean darkness with Ollie.* She knew what was coming, and she knew what Markus would have wanted. North couldn't do anything. Connor, Josh and Simon would be there. Her decisions were usually less pacifist and helpful anyhow. She knew they wouldn't listen. She needed to take care of what was important.

Her Markus was gone, but he'd be okay. He may have been out of it, but Kara said it herself. He wasn't a full deviant yet. She had to believe in her. If Markus made it through his own darkness that she couldn't help him with, he'd know how to find her, and only him. Markus could do it. Even if he didn't like to listen, he *knew* what he had to do to work on his own imbalance.

Until then, Ollie and their safety was up to her alone. Waiting for the inevitable tomorrow wasn't going to make things any better. Whether it happened tomorrow, or that Rounds decided to give them a month or a year, it didn't matter. He *never* had any intention of letting them have New Detroit.

With the true value numbers they had had, she had plenty of money. Carl Manski passed on, there was no one to share that money with, and they didn't have a great need for a lot of it. With the months saved up?

No people. Not even any androids. Just her family. Speaking of which, the doorbell was ringing. "Coming!" She answered the door and looked outward. She knew Simon would



probably tell Connor about the families who asked about children before. It was originally how she was supposed to get one with Markus before Ollie was found. She contacted one of a couple whose pooled values was leaving them miserable. Something Markus didn't know about.

Something he wouldn't have understood anyway. She knew what was coming their way.

"Here she is," the woman said, scooting a little girl toward North. "And are you sure it's over? I don't have to stay with him anymore? He was a nice android, but I found him lacking in certain areas that were important to me."

"Your pooling is nullified. Your numbers are separated. I'll get you more information tomorrow." North opened her purse and paid for the little android girl. She brought her gently inside and bent down toward her. Not surprisingly, she looked like Alice. "Hello there. My name's North."

"North?" She asked. "I am a YK-"

"Don't need to do that, Sweetie, you're free. Your name is Allie. I'm your mom," North said. "You are going to come to meet your brother." She picked her up and took her upstairs. Markus may not have had a backup plan for Ollie, but she did.

In fact, she had a backup plan for her entire family. "Ollie! I want you to meet your sister, Allie." She set her right outside the bathroom where he finished and came out. Half wet but dressed.

"A sister?" Ollie asked. "How come?"

Another child. She couldn't count on Alice anymore, not where they were going. "Pick three favorite toys. I have your clothes loaded. We are going far, far away from New Detroit." She pressed her hand against his cheek. "We'll be alright. I've *always* had a backup plan." She had purchased a home months ago, nice and comfortable with very little humans interacting with it, far away from Michigan. "We are going on a nice long drive, onto an airplane, and then we'll be going to our new home. So three toys. I can get you more when we get to our new home."

Home.

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## Cyberlife

Kara watched the machine. It was amazing how fast it all happened. How fast life could be given with it. She held Alice close, trying to remember herself that life was uncertain. Whatever happened next though, she could handle it. She'd been through far worse. So far, all of the children were now gone except one. He was wandering around in the opposite corner, touching the siding. Connor stopped making androids and went over to him. He grabbed his hand.

Connor brought over the little boy to her. "Here."

Kara looked at the little boy. He just looked back at her. "Did no one pick him up yet, Connor?"

"No, he wasn't ordered, he's yours." Connor walked off, ready to make more android women.

"What?" Kara held Alice and the little boy's hands, trailing after Connor. "What do you mean by he's mine?"

"There is a sufficient probability that North is not going to be along with us. Markus was in denial, not North. I would not be surprised if she was already on her way out of New Detroit," Connor said. "I am your Sugardroi, and I am taking care of you. Because I am taking care of you, I am also taking care of Alice. Without Ollie, she will need someone to keep her balanced here. Or, elsewhere if things turn bad." He gestured toward the boy. "He's been in the opposite corner but he seems to be understanding he's alive now so I brought him over."

"So you made an extra child for the only purpose of a playmate?" Kara asked.

"Androids have been made for less," he said. "What?"

Oooh. Kara took the little boy's hand and put it in Connor's. "After this arrangement is over, *Sugardroi*, the boy is yours." She moved back to the corner with Alice.

Connor looked down at the boy, then back at her. "You are the one who-"

"Never asked me," she said huffily. "You built him. He's yours."

"Okay." Lesson indexed. "For now, we are together though, so take him so that I can continue making women."

Kara sighed and retrieved the boy. It wasn't that she didn't want the little boy, but to make life so quick without a solid plan? Especially a child's. Connor had a lot to learn. The boy was still in the stare and wondering stage children androids went through. "It's okay," she assured him. "You are free."

But what his future would be, let alone theirs, she didn't know.

### **Summary Notes:**

**While talking to President Warren, they don't get a very good lowdown on what is going to happen, but they all get the feeling it isn't good.**

**North has been prepared for when the inevitable changed. She paid for a daughter and now Ollie has a sister. She is leaving New Detroit for a home she purchased months ago in a more secluded area. She knows and counts on Markus finding her.**

**Connor took Kara and Alice with him to make the children. Kara helps distribute them according to the list as androids come. Connor finds one of the female android making machines were taken, as well as all of his other RK 800 selves. He does find one though to start to use.**

**When he finished the children he made one extra for Alice's benefit. He finds out afterward that when he is no longer Kara's Sugardroi, the boy stays with him.**

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## Exit

Simon. Josh. Connor.

"North isn't here," Simon noticed.

"Her first instinct is going to be to protect her child, as well as keep herself from experiencing her worst fears," Connor said. "We all know that however this conversation precedes, there will be negative connotation in it."

"Let's just get through it. Find out what we can do, and then proceed to find any positives to move forward," Josh said.

Connor nodded, noticing Josh had calmed down. Apparently he had made a choice on who he wanted, making that weakness disappear. Indecision? He'd never seen that weakness before. "Slept well?" He asked Josh.

"Yeah, actually, did fine," Josh said. "You?"

"Although I am a Sugardroi I was left alone," Connor said. "Kara chose to stay in the room with Alice and the new one."

"Uh, yes," Simon said. "Creating an extra for Alice, it seemed great on the surface. It was really a step to take with, um, Kara's permission," Simon warned him. "If you are a pooled . . . well, that might be changing soon. If you are each other's one and only's, then you must talk about things before action."

"New kid," Josh said. "You named it yet?"

"He's still in an observance stage," Connor noted. "He has been for some time. Children androids will remain in a stage of wonder for a little while. They aren't like us."

Small talk was basically over. It was just time to wait. Today, Rounds became President. What it meant, they didn't know. Just that there would be a call.

Then, it happened. Connor placed it on speaker. They would need each of their inputs on how to proceed, as well as any damage control against what Markus may have caused. "Hello President Rounds. How are you today?"

"I accepted the presidency, as I'm sure you know," he answered back. "I told former President Warren that I would be calling you shortly after I took office."

"Yes," Connor agreed. "We are the representatives of New Detroit and we will try to answer any of your questions."

"Markus went deviant when I last talked to him. He was not right in his head."

"Thought processing may have been corrupted," Simon said to President Rounds. "Still, overall, deviantry is quite rare. Connor can give you the overall statistics."

"Former President Warren already told me them," he said. "It didn't matter much. I have known even before Markus what I wanted to do with New Detroit."

Not good. That didn't sound good. Connor, Josh, and Simon all shared a look.

"Deviance is a problem. Small or large, it is a problem. Until it is taken care of, androids are a threat to the American people."

Really not good. Simon spoke up. "Almost 400,000 androids live here," he said, "and many of those came from other countries. Other countries have solved their own problems by rebellions using radiation by bringing them here to live in peace."

"Peace is an interesting word. Peace is agreed upon. What you have is a piece of American soil you've dominated over since people cannot come into it safely. Other countries have simply placed their problems on top of our problems."

"We created a value system," Josh reminded him. "We do the job of the humans, we share the property, and we share the paycheck."

"That was a decent solution in the beginning," the President noted. "Many Americans were left with no work and no property. It only made sense to do what we could to provide. However, it's been over half a year since the dirtybomb. Most Americans didn't live on half a paycheck alone. Most have moved on, and the paycheck from New Detroit is simply a bonus by now. A bonus they should know not to depend on forever."

"Their houses. Their property," Simon said again. "To you, New Detroit is simply useless. To us, it's how we live. Everything runs just like a city."

"Deviancy is a problem, and it grows with stress," Connor said to the President. "If you are thinking of making us leave New Detroit, the deviancy will spread across America, making it that much harder to control." Maybe if they appealed it that way.

"Is it a natural phenomenon that happens, this deviancy?" Rounds asked Connor. "Or is it perhaps just programming going out of control? And if so, then perhaps the deviant virus that each machine took, only casts the illusion of emotions, of being alive?"

"We are alive," Simon tried to persuade him. "Deviancy is, is just the imbalance of not quite being human, but we are alive."

"Hm." The President didn't sound convinced.

"Contrary to your opinion of our functions being more machine than alive," Connor said carefully, "the fact remains. If you try to pull androids away from New Detroit, you will have a more serious problem scattered across America. Here, they are centralized and I can take care of them easier." Connor waited for a response.

"Although officially we are kept out of the loop, there have been some secret communications in the past with androids," the President revealed. "You are not the only one who watches for deviants, and you cannot take them all out."

He knew about Kara's group?

"Huddled in a radiated city is no way to believe you'll bypass everything else. I was going to have you keep a daily account and video of all the problems you've endured on a daily basis, but with Markus now deviant, I don't need that."

*I knew it.* President Rounds wanted to use it against them.

"Public support of androids, while it was high when Warren called off the troops, is now 50/50. In some places, lower. It would be even lower if there had been nothing in place for Detroit citizens that had been removed to continue living. For that, America is thankful. However, we have also been at odds with Russia over thirium in Antarctica. Warren has been in conversations with me and Russia as to the solution."

Everyone waited. Waited around that table, knowing whatever he said next, would benefit America. Would benefit humans. Not them.

"All androids in the Detroit area are deemed no one's property except America's now. As such, America will be coming into Detroit to retrieve those who want to go with Russia. There, they will be allotted into one of several programs after they pass sufficient deviancy testing by spending time in Antarctica with the rest of the androids. This shouldn't be a problem since androids don't need to feel temperatures, nor will frostbite be a problem."

"Deactivated skin," Simon breathed out.

"In return, America and Russia will have a split between the discovered thirium."

"And how," Josh said slowly, "will you know who's volunteering themselves for Antarctica?"

"Anyone who hasn't left Detroit in three days will be taken to Russia or will *work*. Trained humans will be taking precautions in special suits and everyone will be rotating in shifts to keep the radiation down. Professional systems and equipment will be in place to help watch radiation levels for them. The androids will be working 24/7 doing the same things, but without special gear or time limit. By the time it is over, New Detroit will be empty and more excessive measures of cleanup can begin."

"So it's either work for America's radiation problem with no breaks, being sent to Antarctica to work for Russia, or what?!" Simon was losing his cool.

"If androids are peaceful like Markus originally indicated. If you are alive, and can be worked with, then you will not show aggression during this phase."

"Just let us become your slaves willingly," Josh said softly. "Don't fight back."

"If you fight back, there will be other measures that will be taken. This is your warning that your time in New Detroit as it had been is no longer needed or validated. Any homes,

property or paychecks will no longer be necessary for those who help with radiation or go with Russia."

"Anyone who hasn't left New Detroit in three days," Connor repeated. "What about the ones who leave?"

"Androids who stay will be considered machines. They will be considered objects that *can* have programming issues. Either America or Russia will take them. Androids who leave will be tagged with a special LED identifying them as 'free willed thinkers'. They will have the rights to the executive order Warren and I talked about. Their own survival is up to them. Tagging for them starts at the borders today."

Connor looked at Simon and Josh.

"If the public support for androids remain high, there is a chance that America may open New Detroit to belonging to the androids. Officially. However, it's still only speculation, and it will take time. Every android will be watched no matter what. Since deviancy occurs most rapidly at the beginning, you can expect at least a year of time to pass before we reach any conclusion on that."

They all remained quiet.

"The American people are the ones who decide. Share the news as quickly as possible. By noon on the third day, the decisions will be carried out."

A few minutes had passed before Josh finally spoke up.

"Markus wouldn't fight it. They'll do something. I could try and go out and be free," Josh said. He looked at Connor and Simon. "I loved New Detroit. I'm not moving from it. Even if I have to keep going without rest, I can't leave it."

"That's a good idea," Connor said to him. "Working 24/7 will make it easier on your particular imbalance. After solving the first by choosing someone specific. You'll be okay, Josh." He wanted to believe that. He looked toward Simon. So did Josh.

Simon took a deep breath. "I don't want to deactivate my skin for Antarctica. I think . . . I think I'll try something new. Something out in the middle of America."

"Tagged?" Josh asked.

"Yes. I want to try tagged," Simon said. He looked toward Connor. "You?"

"Tagged," Connor agreed. "I am going to start with Hank, but I undoubtedly have to go somewhere. Especially with our new dilemma of coupled pairings, the more androids hurt humans, the less favorably we'll be looked upon."

"Aren't you even going to ask Kara?" Simon asked him. "You shouldn't make the same mistake twice."

---

Connor moved out of the office and went toward Kara.

"You didn't get a regular model for the boy, did you?" Kara asked Connor.

That was one way to begin this. "I wanted to have the most likely chance that we had a more active boy that could get himself out of situations if they arose." Which they no doubt would now. He watched Kara hold up deviant papers from a folder. At least, they used to be papers. Now they were useless.

"I like snowflake parameters, they are never the same," a small male voice said from beneath a desk. Connor watched as the little android boy emerged from beneath it. He crawled up on Kara's lap like it was a piece of equipment, and then hopped on him. "Hello. I don't have a name yet, but I am still pleased to meet you because I am now alive." He gestured to Alice. "That is my new friend slash sister." He stared at Connor, getting up really close to his eyes. "When do I get a name?"

Connor looked at Kara. She was leaving that up to him of course. "I suppose-" The boy jumped away running more desks away, scrambling through folders.

Kara smiled at the boy, then at Connor. "Never know what to expect with new life." She held up the folder. "He is fast, Connor, I can't keep up with him. He did this before I even knew he moved out of the area." Her eyes lingered on him. "You have bad news, don't you?"

Connor gave a small smile. "I will be right back." He went over to the other desks. He would move faster, if the folders still mattered. That alone was a dead giveaway to Kara things weren't well. He reached underneath the desk. It was the last known place he saw the boy, and he hadn't come out. He reached in and pulled him out.

"These are names of decommissioned androids, deviant androids, and suspected of deviancy androids," the boy said giving Connor the folder. "I dislike all the names. I want to be Max."

He named himself. "Max it is, if you promise to behave and come over with me and Kara."

"Okay." He ran away toward Kara, leaving Connor behind to simply walk. Perhaps a little less of a rambunctious model was a better idea?

"I am back," Max said to Alice. "I am Max, Alice. You are Alice and I am Max now. We both have names." Alice nodded at him. "Do you want to play now?"

"Later," Connor said reaching out to hold him before he left again. "We have things to discuss."

Alice's grip tight around Kara. Kara watched him carefully.

"New Detroit. We are losing it," Connor said. "In three days androids who remain will be used for working on restoration, or will be given to Russia and will stay in Antarctica. Those who leave will be tagged. They will be on their own." He tried to remain emotionless. It was something a lot easier to do as a machine. "I prefer to go with Hank and decide where to go from there."



Her expression was harder to read than he thought it would be. Her eyes went from different parts in the room, to him. ". . . live or die on our own."

"Yes," he said. "Whatever is chosen, we should stay all together. It's most beneficial to be one at this time, but I agreed to be your sugardroi in exchange for your . . ." Great. He was faltering. He shouldn't. He always knew it would come one day. *Life, Connor. Life for an android is unpredictable.* "We are a group of four. You and I must decide what is best."

"Life before New Detroit." Kara bit her lip. "Oh g-." She stood up.

Connor watched her close her eyes. She was trying to center herself too. Positive reinforcement. "It will be okay. With our skills, we will find a way to-" He wasn't expecting that. She was hugging him. No, clinging to him. He wrapped his arms around her slowly. Probably awkwardly. Whatever she had experienced, she must have imagined it happening again. "We won't be pretending to be machines." She must have known that, but still she held on.

"Kara?" Alice came over worried. Kara wasn't answering her. "Kara?"

Connor felt her finally move in his grasp. Her eyes met his. Even though she'd been crying, her eyes had strength. Resolve. It. It shocked him. How could someone so emotional, look so strong?

"Life still never stops happening," she whispered to him. "With those conditions, we'll lose at least half the population."

Connor nodded. They would probably lose even more than that. *She's mourning them.*

"Do we have a plan or do I need to cave to immorality for us to survive?" She asked him outright.

Us. So far, he had tried to include her in his thinking, but she was actually saying 'us' now. There was something inside of that, that made him somehow feel better. "No," he said. "There are options to try before that." He didn't know exactly what she meant by that, but feeling how deeply she had clung to him. Him, who tried to kill her twice. She was just trying to cling to *something*. Even if it was him.

And he wanted to do the same thing. He tightened the hug. "It's not a perfect plan, but we'll be okay." Suddenly, he didn't even want to wait for the next stop. They were already tagging. If some androids got rowdy, he had no idea what would happen. Not every android out there was just going to peacefully take it, he knew that. Especially the deviants themselves. "I warned Hank that we might be staying with him for a little while."

"He can't have all four androids in his house," Kara said. "That's not enough room, and he's a very isolated individual, Connor. It's too much. I already hid Alice at certain times to make sure he was okay."

Connor knew that. "Temporary. We'll find something." No, he couldn't. He knew there was three days, but every instinct and emotion inside of him. Seeing the worry in Alice. Seeing

the strange determined yet scared look of Kara. Something deep inside stirred. It didn't matter if he was her Sugardroi or his one and only. They were coming with him. Now. "I cannot continue the hug right now. I have to talk to Simon."

She let go. Which he didn't much like. He really liked feeling another's embrace around him, especially at that moment.

He went into the chief's room and looked toward Simon.

"I know," Simon said softly. "It's okay. Josh will be staying, he can handle the responsibility. I'll be leaving tomorrow. I need to work on announcements immediately, I can't wait." He looked toward Connor, then outside the glass toward Kara trying to hold onto the little boy as she held Alice. "Be careful with them, Connor. Kara's eyes are a dead giveaway, she is strong from her past experiences but . . ."

"I am taking them out now before the announcement even makes it around," Connor said. "Things may get heated the longer it takes before we leave. I have nothing I can't live without, and Kara and Alice never brought anything here."

"Go." Simon smiled. "Continue to live. I will too. We can get through it all. We just have to . . ." He breathed slowly. " . . . hold on just a little while longer."

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## **Leaving Detroit Border Sign**

Alice watched out the window. Connor took them all back to his original place with a self-driven car. There, he picked up his soda delivery car for some reason. Alice didn't know how to react now. Even Kara's confidence seemed shaken. They were supposed to be leaving the city and going back to Hank's. At least temporarily. Neither Connor or Kara seemed genuinely happy about it.

As they approached she saw lots of lights. Lots of police. Lots of police cars. She remembered what Kara told her, they had to be ready for anything. She wasn't ready though when she felt a hand in hers. She turned and saw Max.

"I don't like the looks of all the lights. From the shape and size of them, according to what I have, those are police people. They defend the humans, not the androids," he said. "I don't like it all. I feel like running and hiding."

Alice stopped looking out the window and hugged him. He was still really new.

"Emotions," Connor said from the front. "Emotions, good and bad, are both necessary to feel. What you feel is scared, but you will be okay. You are with us now, Max."

Kara turned from the front and patted his hand too. "We all have to be brave. This is what androids have to do to remain alive. Without it, we stay objects. Machines. You have to brave all the risks in life, to live."

Max nodded and looked back at Alice. "Sister friend. Are you scared too?"

Alice nodded. "A little." She watched tears start to well up in his eyes. He instinctively let go of her and reached out and hugged her. Even if he was brand new, it wasn't hard to tell that those people weren't there to be nice. While he did that though, she did the same. While she usually leaned against Kara, she realized that her and Max? Could lean on each other. Support each other.

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The truck came to a stop. Connor got out. Yes, it was best they get out as soon as they could, the humans meant absolute business. He slowly approached one of the humans.

"LED tagged?" They asked him.

Connor nodded and felt himself get restrained. Not even necessary. They warned him to hold still. He felt an LED like he used to have now back on the side of his head. He motioned for Kara to come over. She got out of the car with Alice and Max. Alice walked with her while Max was hugging her on her side. Connor watched him closely. His self expression wouldn't be good right now. He took Alice and Max as Kara came over.

Kara went up to the humans and was also restrained like she would have fought. A tagged LED was attached to her head.

"If we assist, the children will be less likely to struggle." Hopefully they listened.

They didn't. They grabbed Alice and held her, placing the LED on her head. They grabbed Max which caused him to kick up a fuss. They needed three humans to hold him down. They had to remove his first LED, and placed in the tag. Connor watched the display very carefully, making sure no one killed him for his insolence. They weren't allowed to do it, but it was a stressful situation.

"Truck stays here," the main police officer said. "Anything that went with a value number stays."

"It isn't associated with a value number," Connor said holding Max, trying to calm down the boy. Still, they were trying to keep him from reusing it anyhow. "It doesn't belong to New Detroit. It wasn't even purchased in New Detroit," he tried to explain.

"Oh yeah?" The police officer said like he didn't believe him. "Then where'd you get it from?"

"Me you asshole, now let go of them!"

Connor looked over and watched Hank approaching. "Hank." A human on their side would be a very good thing right now.

"Hank Anderson," he told the cop. He showed them his badge. "They are coming with me, in their own fucking car. Now get away." Hank went over toward Kara and Alice, looking them over. "So you became a Sugar Momma I hear?" he teased her. "Well, as long as everyone gets what they need." He went over to Connor and looked at the little boy in his hands. "You really know how to pick 'em. Couldn't just pick another perfect edition?"

Connor smiled. They were safe. As Alice crawled into Hank's car though, he looked back and already saw the crowd coming. There were going to be more than a few that wanted freedom. Which meant the police would either have to get gentler.

"I said back you fuckin' androids!"

Or there would be many casualties. "Let's get out of here, quick." He looked at Kara. "You go with Hank. I'll take the truck with Max." Out of there, as soon as possible. Before-

A gunshot went off. Max about took off out of the truck, but Connor grabbed him and pulled him back in. They were getting out.

Now.

**Summary Notes: Each of them heard Round's proposal.**

- 1. Leave New Detroit with an LED tag. This means the government will be able to track them. They can't get away with saying they are human. Those who go must figure out how to live for themselves.**
- 2. Stay in New Detroit, and help with the restoration. They would get no breaks, just like when they were machines.**
- 3. Go to Russia. The androids will stay in Antarctica until Russia is certain of their imbalances and assigns them a task.**

**Options 1 and 2 will leave them on American soil. If the American androids survive a long time without an imbalance, it is possible that with positive public support, the androids might receive New Detroit back.**

**Simon is staying for the announcements and minor help in facilitating only, then he will leave be LED tagged and go to the middle of America. Josh is staying in New Detroit to help with restoration.**

**Connor, Kara, Alice, and the new addition Max is choosing to leave. Wanting to get out as soon as possible knowing there will most likely be conflict, Connor uses his advantage of the advanced knowledge. He goes to his place with a self-driving bus to get his truck. (It was what he got soda in back and forth as a soda delivery man.) They reach the border and go through the police force. Connor's truck was still almost seized until Hank came. Now, they are all heading to Hank's until they know their next move.**

**NOTE: Markus will be coming back later, I didn't write him out. He has to deal with his own issues first, and then the reader will see him again.**



## Balancing Imbalance in A New Life

Kara was more than a little confused when Hank didn't drive to Frankenmuth with them. They were driving along, and he pulled into somewhere else.

"Alright, out." Hank opened his door and then Kara's door. "Connor wanted you to see it first. At this stage, I don't know why. Something about being more fair or some shit."

Kara moved out, followed by Alice. It was a simple one-story, small house. White. Trimmed with red and a red door. The front yard had no grass only weeds. It looked abandoned. Not terribly out of sorts, but it did have a striking feel to it no one had lived there in years.

"Kara?" Alice asked. "Is this home?"

Kara turned to look toward Hank, not understanding what was going on.

"Wait for your dad to come and explain," Hank said.

*Dad?* What? Kara watched Connor's truck pull onto the side of the house too. He got out, bringing a curious Max that was looking everywhere but straight.

"What do you think?" Connor asked. "Look into the windows if you want."

Confusion. Kara moved over to look into the windows.

"A kitchen for the soda. A place to be out of the rain. A place to be out of the public eye, until or if New Detroit opens back up," Connor said. He peered in it himself. "It takes time for everything to be finalized. It's not half as nice as the place we had for less than 24 hours, or even my first chosen place, but it will work."

"Finalized?" Kara asked.

"Connor told me to buy it some time ago," Hank said. "I did it using his money."

*Buy?* Was he nuts? Kara looked at him.

"Does it meet with your satisfaction?" Connor asked her. "It will allow all of us to work on our imbalances, while learning to rebalance ourselves out here. It's not the greatest of places."

"It's a dump," Hank offered for him.

"But it will serve all of our needs, including a backyard for the children to play in for their needs. The kitchen is big enough to put soda in, fulfilling our blue blood soda drinking need. With most of our actions becoming satisfied, we should make it through easier once we attain it."

Okay, that made sense. They couldn't stay with Hank forever. Kara looked back in. "Why not just rent though, Connor? There's no telling when we have to pull up and go."

"We may eventually have to, but it's best to have a stable place," Connor said. "Even if we don't use electricity or heat, it would still be a home in the most dire of consequences."

*What?* "It's a bad idea," Kara tried again. "You never had a value number anyway except for soda, how can you afford this?" Mistake.

"I delivered soda, I made something," Connor reminded her. "Besides, I told you that night I dropped you off the ledge. Markus tried to help out. He did. I just kept it because I didn't assume New Detroit would be the end all. Plus, I had Hank access your true value numbers and gave him the steps to steal inside of it."

"People found something by then anyhow," Hank said in his defense. "If they thought the free paychecks would stay there forever, they should know better. Besides, now no one gets those paychecks and I guarantee asshole presidents aren't thinking about how to split those accounts anymore. Bye bye, everything in it's gonna go to the government."

He looked back toward Connor though. "From what you can afford, and what you should do?" Hank seemed like he was trying to convince Connor too. "Rent on the go." Connor didn't answer.

Kara connected to Connor just to his own artificial intelligence so no one else would here. Until now, she couldn't recall if she did that. It wasn't something she was fond of doing, but they needed to talk out whatever he was thinking. *You are a very smart android, Connor.*

***Thank you.***

*So why are we doing something like this? We are androids, we don't have a stable environment, nor will we have a stable job to come back to. Even Hank is trying to tell you this is a terrible idea. What's going on?*

Connor didn't answer back at first. He took a few extra minutes, looking in. ***Survival for androids is about stability, so in this world of instability, the chances us or the children become unstable rise exponentially. Above all, we must make sure that we have something to prove that we need to exist. Living as useless androids in a human dominated world does not work forever, you know that.***

Oh no. *Connor, bad idea. Don't do it, everyone gets caught without the network helping them.*

***I have my own network and policies. My own reputation and my own duties. It is possible that I may even work with this old network of yours, but who I work with is going to be more to the side of the humans. However? Your terrible friend Roxanne, if she had trouble with just one coupled pairing and still needs help over six months, the humans are about to have a catastrophe on their hands. They will need someone with the same thought processes, complexity and over all more superior skills to catch them.***

*There will be a lot more than that now. Android imbalances, everyone that went free-*

***Will be looking for places to rent, to stay, to bunk into for some degree of shelter and comfort. In most cases, you and Hank would be right, going off and renting a decent place***

*here and there would be smart, but if we assume even a third of the androids choose this option, there would be roughly 75,000 or so androids flooding out into the nearby vicinity. He looked over toward her. Most likely, there will be more. How long do you think androids will have a rental option even into a hotel? He looked away again. We cannot be killed easily, but it doesn't mean we'll be treated with respect. Fifty percent or less in America feel like androids deserve a fair life. The odds are never stacked in our favor.*

Backup. Okay, he did understand what he was doing. *And Hank not just signing for rentals?*

*It would mean Hank would have to come with us, eventually I predict it will become that tough, and we both know that Hank needs someone but not a group. Besides, I've met his old partner. It's clear to see it wasn't you after all that was keeping him steady. He probably doesn't want anyone with him except to help cook.*

*Thanks.*

*You're welcome. Future rental assignments will have to be made through the top areas I end up working for. He looked at her. There are going to be a lot of problems. At first, it will be tough. But after imbalances start kicking through?*

*You'll be a treasured resource. Kara already knew that.*

*I predict that no matter what we will be flown in and out of states, but stability is always coming back to some place to call a home. To know it is there. The children will need that. Humans will not view them the same way as theirs, although they were built to be just like them. In most cases, they will need to be brought along with us.*

*We. Us.*

*You have eight years experience, Kara. I am a decent tracker, but only what is programmed into me. That group clearly wanted you for a reason. When I am gone, they would try and get you.*

*I think our time together has come to an end, Sugardroi.*

Connor reached out his hand to hers. *Don't back away from it. You hate injustice just as much as I do. You were even willing to let go on the ledge for a little girl that was not even there anymore. I won't ask you to do anything you are not comfortable with, but we are not going to be roaming from house to house, day and night, hoping we can do some tasks to afford our daily needs for years. That will cause imbalance. You know that.*

Kara looked away.

*You can't leave me. You need this most of all, Kara.*

She looked back toward him. *What do you mean I need this most of all? I've survived most of my life out here, by myself, without a New Detroit to back me up.*



Connor didn't communicate back right away. Then, he pulled her toward him and opened her mouth. He smelled it.

She quickly backed away, almost stumbling. *What did you do that for?!*

***The gunk inside of you that Roxanne had pulled out. A slight residual smell is still coming upward, although she had gotten rid of it. It has the distinct smell of-***

"I told you, that's none of your business!" Kara yelled at him. Out loud.

***I only want to know about it. I think I can guess. I don't want to though. You need to trust, that is an important balance all four us will need to get through this.*** He held out his hand again for her to take.

"Ever get the feeling your not hearing something?" Hank complained in the background. "Doable or not, Connor? We don't have all day. Besides, you already bought it, you're just waiting for the closing."

***Kara.*** He urged her again. ***One thing.***

She didn't want to tell him. Kara didn't openly trust many. The other her could. She had to, to make it. She did what she could. Life was simple and sweet, and her other self would have been able to enjoy the short life she had in New Detroit. Watching a sweet little girl and living her own life. But, he was right. She had to make a choice now. She could leave and get out with Alice, and they could survive the way she had done. But Alice was so young in her thought processing, and the things . . .

Connor's plan sounded terrible. It involved patience and strategy, and then every android within a thousand miles would hate him again. Yet, it was a steady plan, one that would keep them in good faith with the humans, while ultimately getting rid of the androids that were causing the most problems to the humans.

The network had it's own goals, and they didn't work with humans. Connor did. It may very well be Connor himself that would prove that androids who stay balanced, deserved New Detroit.

At least to try. Trust. It was why she was such an unconscious snuggler, and it would only get worse. *I was hiding my identity, like I often did, from place to place. Whether pretending to be android or human, both of them had consequences to pay. At that time, being human was more beneficial. I still went from place to place, as a human cutting lawns or doing quick yard or house chores that people needed done. One day while doing some dishes in a less than pristine area, I wasn't putting my whole thoughts into what I was doing.*

***What happened?***

*They had a newly designed washer that took technology so that an android could activate it without even hitting a button. It was almost automatic. I was all the way on the other side doing more dishes when it went off. The human didn't notice it at first, but it had a special feature to it, whether it was android activated or human activated.*

***Automatic processes, I've always associated them to the itches that humans get. Difficult not to want to accomplish them. So they took you away?***

*No, I'm a lightweight model. It's very hard for me to fight a human. I was designed in an era where some humans still had a fear of using androids. So. She looked back into the window. They were having problems with their trash compactor for months. So I was chained underneath and became it. He didn't seem surprised.*

***For how long?***

*Eight months. I was freed when they finally bought a new one. Still, even though he wasn't surprised, he wasn't emotionless. Who would be?*

***How did everyone visiting not notice you?***

*Kara shrugged. They took out the siding and the bottom shelving. If I struggled they just said it was the dishwasher.*

***Did they at least put you on standby?***

*No. Kara watched as he shoved his hands into his pockets. Don't ask for-*

***I don't need anymore.*** He remained quiet until Hank called to him again. Max was getting restless and wanted to play in the dirt. Connor went over and picked him up. "No dirt playing. Back in the truck." He looked toward Hank. "Thanks, Hank. I appreciate it."

"A small thing, Connor, just be careful," Hank said. Then, he started to get back into the car.

Kara started to move back toward Hank's car, but Connor stopped her.

"Everyone knows about my association with Hank. We will put him in danger by your group and anyone else who doesn't like androids in general if we stay with him. Our problems are not his problems." He glanced to her. "Remember this house. When things get tough, we'll need to remember it. A place to call home that is warm and safe. Two weeks from now."

Kara looked toward it. He was right, Hank wasn't the safest but? "You could watch his back."

"That's no way to go about things," Connor said. "Watching his back during an investigation is one thing, watching over him while he's playing with Sumo is another."

*Damn. "Then what?"*

"We are like every other android. On our own right now. I will be making several calls to as many areas as possible, as well as leaving several messages, so that they understand I am available and willing to help. Nothing will happen yet, but the faster they know, the faster we'll reach a sense of safety."

"Did you save anything for renting at all?"

"Blue blood, the basics, and having enough to survive when we get the house for all its other currency issues. Any extra will be what we earn."

Of course. "There will be a lot more competition for the small jobs, Connor." Not to mention, risk of being mistreated.

Connor helped Max into the back with Kara helping Alice in on the other side. "Most androids are singular or a pair. Handle inside jobs while watching Alice, and I will handle outside jobs watching Max." He closed the door and waited for Kara to get in.

When she did, he surprised her slightly. He had grabbed her hand quite fast.

"We won't split up," he assured her. "If the house doesn't fit something we can do together, then we won't work. No one here is going to risk getting separated for any amount of time."

His hand. Kara tightened her own around it. "It's dangerous out there, Connor, I don't think that you-"

"Understand the trash compactor was not the worst incident? No, I know that, and I agreed to no more details." He stared ahead. "But that doesn't mean I don't already *know*, Kara." With that, he pulled out of the drive and drove on.

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**Summary Notes: Kara and Connor are looking at the tiny house that will be their future. Connor invested in actually buying, knowing that when androids hit the scene, renting anything would be tough, and just get tougher. He also knows the need to be human includes a degree of shelter, even he needed that in New Detroit.**

**Connor got Kara to open up about one incident, to try and establish trust. They would all need it in the new climate.**

**Hank's office was already bugged. If Kara's old group, or others who dislike androids, find them there he will be in trouble. Connor also knows that overwhelming him with two androids let alone two children androids (especially Max) wouldn't be a good idea.**

**They will be trying to search for work like every other android that was LED tagged, but Connor is also laying the groundwork to make sure they have a better life in the end, no matter what happens with New Detroit in the future.**

## Hello My name is Connor and I do?

Alice was on the side of the truck with Max. They found sticks in the road, water, and the end of a driveway. Well, Max did anyhow. Max carved shapes into the mud left into the driveway. He drew a happy face first. Alice drew a star. He drew a circle. She drew a square. Then Max stabbed the dirt with the stick.

Alice did the same thing and smiled. Such simple things to keep them entertained, but she never saw it before. She had always stayed right beside Kara, but Max knew how to find fun everywhere. Even if it only lasted-

"You can't play in the mud," Kara said coming over to Alice and Max. "In the driveway too?" She looked at Alice. "What am I gonna-"

Max shoved his foot straight into the muddy watered driveway. "The end."

Alice recognized that look. Kara wasn't happy with him, but he didn't care.

"If we have to end the fun, and we're getting in trouble anyway, might as well get the complete fun out of it." He just smiled afterward.

Kara grasped him and brought him and Alice back over to the side of the truck. "Connor is not going to be long, stop."

Max bent down and started to remove some weeds from the grass he was standing on. Alice did the same. Even pulling weeds was fun with him. He took the long furry pieces and stripped them down. Alice took the long dandelions and blew them.

"That's not good for the lawn," Kara said, almost in a half whine. "Max. Stop showing Alice how to do the wrong things. She needs to learn the right things."

"Right and wrong is just like saying black and white. There are different shades of each." With that, Max started to crawl under the truck, but Kara stopped him. "I want to find out what makes the vehicle move. Is knowledge so wrong?" he said as she pulled him back out.

When Connor came back over, Alice waved, but Kara wasn't so happy.

"Mowing the lawn is less work than watching your boy," Kara warned Connor. "You need to work with him."

While Kara and Connor were chatting, Alice watched Max. Kara had him in a holding position in her arms, but his hands were free. He smiled at her and reached his hands out to the truck. It became an art project. Dusty and dirty it could be drawn on. Alice watched and did it herself too. There was no way Kara could get mad about that. There was no lasting repercussions, it wasn't a dangerous activity, and it was their property. Plus, it was just fingerprints.

"Anything?"

"Twenty," Connor answered. "The investment of the used mower will pay itself off rapidly. Humans like short grass and we've almost made the fifty back." Connor took Max back and put him in the backseat. Alice climbed in on the other side and Kara went to her side.

While they drove, Max thonked on the siding lightly. He looked toward Alice.

She thonked the siding too. Then he did. Then she did. Then he did faster. Then she did it faster.

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"At this rate, Alice is going to be cured in less than a week," Kara said. "Still, there were other ways, with more time and less risk to property."

"He is an entertaining one," Connor said. "It's sort of like human music." He continued to drive. "Overambitious may be a plus right now for them, Kara."

"I know," Kara admitted. "Later on, I may miss this noise. As hard as that is to believe."

"Spirits up," Connor said. "Tonight, there's a good chance we might make enough for shelter. Not many androids who have left have made it this far. They weren't allowed to take any cars, vehicles or property bought with their value numbers. And?" He turned on the radio. Suddenly the nonrhythmic thonking started to sound like the beats on the radio. "A little better."

Well? At least they were learning beats and rhythm. Although Kara was remembering what the Arak had said before she died. "Three years and their minds are wiped. That's how they stay and act young forever. A constant restart, over and over." She slightly envied them. Now knowing what her Arak meant. Oh, did she miss her reset button.

Then, Alice laughed. Kara looked in the back seat and saw Alice. She was smiling, laughing, and enjoying herself more than ever. In the darkest times right now, these kids? Were happy.

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This would put a damper on his thoughts soon. It was just starting, maybe he could drive further and run into better weather forecasts? It had been a sunny day too, but he spied the first signs of raindrops. *The first night. Maybe I should.* No, he had to be extremely careful in what he invested in. He looked toward Kara to see if she saw the start of the rain, but-

He smiled. Her face. He glanced in the back, but looked back toward her. She wasn't in the best mood. She had simply been, but the spark of the Kara that was happier showed itself in her face. That gentle spirit, through all the tough times, still survived.

Then, that face glanced back at him. For several seconds, it had remained the same before she glanced ahead and saw the rain droplets.

"We'll outrun it," Connor couldn't help but smile back.

"It's going to be hard to do that in the amount of time we have daybreak," Kara reminded him.

"Try anyhow. Nothing wrong with trying. Rewards beat out the negatives. What do we have to lose?"

The storm had become too big. They were completely surrounded by the rain. The forecast showed it was covering a large, expansive area. The mower he invested was too cheap to be able to handle rain. Few humans were going to bother to let him mow their lawns now. He still had other skills, but right now the mower was the only choice people were taking. Even answering the door, when they saw he was an android, he got two reactions. Revile or shame.

Either one made it hard to get them to talk long enough for a transaction. Knowing the twenty wasn't good enough for the night, Connor stopped by a random house. The mower would have to wait as an option. He got out and went to the front door. He knocked, getting into his simplest mode again. He might knock on every door on that block and get no yeses, or he might get one or two.

When an old man answered, Connor started. "Hello. My name is Connor and I do lawns, anything around the house like weeding, pick up, trimming-

The door shut on him. He tried again at the next house.

"Hello. My name is Connor and I do lawns, anything around the house like weeding, pick up, trimming, planting, or an assortment of other outside tasks. I have a partner who will do simple-

"Don't need anything, please go," they answered before they shut the door.

Connor tried again at the next house. There was no answer. He went to the next house and a younger woman, 25ish answered.

"Hello. My name is Connor and I do lawns, anything around the house like weeding, pick up, trimming, planting, or an assortment of other outside tasks. I have a partner who will do simple chores around the house like-

"No, no sorry, no. No androids are working for me, no." She shut the door.

It was getting tougher. Connor went back to the truck and grabbed his stocking cap. With it raining, it would look like he might have it on for that.

"Careful," Kara said, knowing what he wanted to try. "If you get in trouble, I can't yank you out, Connor. It's not worth it."

That was true, but it would be hard for them to take him too. He just nodded. "Don't worry, Kara. I'll be fine." He placed his stocking cap on which hid his LED tag. He moved onto the next house and started again.

An older woman answered, 52ish.

"Hello. My name is Connor and I do lawns, anything around the house like weeding, pick up, trimming, planting, or an assortment of other outside tasks. I have a partner who will do simple-"

"It's raining," she said. "Get out of the rain."

Connor gave his best smile. "A little rain now is better than later. Are there any chores my partner or I can assist you with? In or outside?"

"It's pouring like the devil," she commented. "It's cold and you're drenched."

The rain was starting to come down faster. Dang. "I can work just fine in the rain." He was going to get a no at this rate anyway. He took the stocking cap off. "Rain is no problem, I just need-"

"Oh no, I'm not getting involved in. I'm. No." The woman was uneasy. Not revulsion, shame.

"What happened before New Detroit is understandable," Connor tried to ease her up, hoping it would lead to something. "Although hiring an android after that experience may be hard, it is something that everyone needs. Help. I need to help you, in order to help us."

She rubbed against the side of her door slightly. "I don't have anything, but hang on." She left for a moment and returned with blue blood. "Here. I don't have any use for it." One packet of blue blood. "I don't have anything else."

Connor took it. Even if it was just one and not something they needed right now, he still took it with thanks. The sun was starting to set. It didn't look like he made enough for a room for the first night. He knew there would be several nights when they couldn't make that quota. Still, for the first night outside of New Detroit. It would have been nice to have shelter. He could have rested easy, and not stayed on alert all night over the others.

When he reached the truck he saw Kara standing in front of it looking to the side. Her clothes were covered in muck.

Connor glanced over. The house had been right next to the alley. In the rain, and in the muck, Max and Alice were over by the alley, holding their hands together and swinging each other around.

"I tried to stop it once. I told them not to get in the water again," she said to him. She glanced at her clothes. "At this rate, I don't know if I should try again or not. Even I'm covered in mud." She glanced toward them. "They are trailing back slowly into the mud. So, there's nothing worth saving." She glanced toward him and smiled. "Join me?"

Connor watched her take his hand. She pulled him into the alleyway and started to spin him around too. He heard the sounds of the children laughing around him and saw Kara's face, almost urgently.

Connor loosened up. For yard chores, he wasn't going to need the cleanest clothes anyway. If Kara had grabbed him and flung him out there with the kids, there was a reason. So, he

continued to swing around with her, feeling their weight counter balance each other as they both spun around. The muck underneath them made it trickier to keep their balance, but he kept it up, feeling the freeing nature of it all.

The counter balance of Kara made it easier to relax. The kids had already slipped twice, but they were up and back at it. So far, they hadn't slipped up, and when they did they would be a mess.

But, in that moment, Connor saw the face on Kara. The rain ricocheting off of her. Before he even knew what he was doing, he disturbed the swinging around by pulling her closer. She almost slipped into the mud, but he caught her.

She almost shied away. "It smells the worst in the rain," she warned him as he held her close. "Now that she kicked it up, don't get too close, you'll ruin your good time."

Connor didn't care. There wasn't anymore smell anyhow. "It's gone now. Roxanne may have been mean, but we should be thankful she got that out." To prove his point, he brought her mouth closer and smelled it. "You are far from garbage, Kara." With that, he spun her out, but held her by one hand, then swung her back in.

Their noses touched briefly and they both laughed like the children had.

"When you see something, you have to grab it," Kara told him.

She had said something like that before, when he had chased her down and she remembered her old self for five minutes. He thought she'd grab him and kiss him again. Which, he oddly, sort of . . . wanted.

But she added to her phrase this time, something she didn't say last time before. "To survive in the human's world, you can't just survive. You have to *keep* that something special that keeps you wanting to live." She gave him a brief hug.

He didn't let go, finding himself rocking back and forth. He looked over toward Max and Alice. They were drawing shapes in the mud with their fingers.

Even if they could have afforded a hotel that night, no one would have accepted them the way they were. Still.

He couldn't regret one moment of it.

---

Connor found a quiet area out on the road so the children could sleep.

"Do you want to trade spots?" Kara asked. "I could sleep three hours and you could sleep three hours. Sleep is important."

Connor shook his head. "Probably need to get redressed soon. It's a good thing I always had a pair of extra clothes." He looked at his muddy clothes. "Before I do that, we should put a good end on this day." He reached below his seat and brought out a small briefcase. He



opened it and there were two wine glasses in it, safe and secure. "One of my favorite gifts from Hank. Care to join me?"

Kara took a glass. Connor moved toward the back and brought out a soda. He poured part of it in each wine glass. Then, he reached into his attire and pulled out the blue blood the kind woman gave him. It seemed fitting to use that. He poured some of it in, about a fourth the size of the glass in hers. He did the same with his. "Hold this a moment?"

"Sure," Kara agreed.

Connor closed the blue blood tightly and put it back away. Then, he held up his glass. "Usually, I enjoy soda this way after my delivery day. A 'good on me' sort of thing. Since it's the nicest thing to drink for us, I prefer to drink it out of the nicest things." He swirled the soda softly. "I am going to have to make sure I do that more often."

"Mmhmm," Kara said. She moved her glass toward his and clinked it. "Live it as best you can, whenever you can. And when times get rough?" She closed her eyes and gently smelled the sweet aroma of the blue blood soda. "Picture the good in your mind. It won't always pull you through, as you can tell from looking at me, but. Helps. Of course, you already know that." She took a simple drink. "It'll be a beautiful home, Connor."

"I like that best."

"The view of a home in your head?" Kara asked.

"No, Connor." He smiled at her. "I much prefer it to Sugardroi."

Kara took a slow, long drink. "I know it's not the nicest way to think of things. It's the kindest term to use for our situation, and a reminder of our places. Not just for you, but for me as well," she said. "I got very attached to my first Sugardroi. Too attached for his taste."

"How many have you had?" Connor asked curiously. "If I may ask?"

"Mmm." She swirled her orange soda. "Forty-one. You'll be forty-two."

Forty-two? "Well. That's a lot of Sugardroi's."

"Not all Sugardroi's are equal," Kara said to him. "The definition is a mutual benefit. In some cases they lasted mere days, others lasted years. You're better with more than one. It's when you're out here alone in the world that trouble happens."

Wait. "Bodyguards essentially?" Hm.

"Paid for by working with an imbalance," Kara said. "Yes. Yours is touch. Others have different ones. Money worked too, but whoever gets much of that to squander? This is a very nice, light soda."

"If I get over my touch weakness," Connor said, "then I want you and the children to stay with me in the house until a fair resolution to New Detroit is found. I don't want you to be out here like this. I hate to do it. It's part of my successful mission thing, but I am a much more

superior android than you, and I don't want you to try and use your inferior skill to try and make it out here again. That didn't come out right."

"It did," Kara said. She took another sip. "I get what you are saying." She glanced toward him. "You're sweet, Connor. A lot sweeter than someone should be in your position. I'd say watch out, but I was hanging off a ledge as a lesson. I'm sure you know when to be sweet, and when not to be."

"Almost built in," Connor admitted as he took his own luscious drink. "Is that agreed?"

"Until a fair resolution to New Detroit is found sounds nice," Kara said. "I want to agree, but there's no guarantee a fair resolution will ever come."

"Then a guaranteed year," Connor said. "Alice needs security. So do you. I don't want you to think when my touch weakness is better that I will just up and drop all of you." He looked back at her. She seemed surprised.

"Of course that's what I'd think," Kara said to him. "I've had androids in the middle of a battle realize their weakness is better and left me at the drop of a hat."

"Not out here. Not like this," Connor said. "One year, at least. Unless you decide to stay with me forever." She wasn't going to speak up to that last part.

"One year," she agreed. "Thanks, Connor."

# Quick Time Events, Choose Connor!

## One Week After the Exile of New Detroit

### North's Home

North brushed her hair as her children Allie and Ollie were sleeping still. So far, so good for the week. She got out, made it safely to her second home, and ended up well. Her instincts had been right about leaving when she did too. She got out untagged with no LED, meaning it was even easier to blend in. No one suspected anyone of being an android.

When her phone rang, she answered, still waiting on someone. She sat down her brush as that someone finally called. "Marcus?! Are you okay?"

"Yeah." He sounded weak. "I'm okay, North. I cut through my denial imbalance. I had no choice, I wanted to live. I can't believe I was so foolish. Where are you?"

"Somewhere I love," North said. She kept things vague for anyone calling. "You know. Markus? Are you safe?"

"Safe and safe to be around," he said. "Hearing about New Detroit's free and peaceful androids being sent to Russia, or to work 24/7, or even going out here and choosing to survive. I. I can't believe I didn't see this happening."

"It was stupid," North said. "See it or not, it was stupid. We were fine, we didn't cause problems. Humans though, their terrible creatures, Markus. They suspected us, no matter how much we showed we were peaceful. It would happen one day. I was prepared though." She smiled. "We have a little girl too. Her name's Allie. She keeps Ollie balanced and she's sweet."

"A little girl? How'd you manage that?" Markus asked.

"I have my ways," North said. "Are you going to find us now?" It wouldn't be difficult for him to remember, if he was really better.

"Soon," Markus said. "I have to find a way there. Androids and planes aren't really matching. Or renting houses or hotels. Bias is everywhere. It's not easy out here, North. I'm glad you got out with Ollie and the new one. I'll find a way to make my way there to you. I promise. You are my strength."

"Just keep it together," North insisted. "It's too dangerous to meet you. You'll have to find a way here. Do you know where it is yet?"

"Yeah, I do. Confirmation was what I wanted, but I know you're scared. Just, wait for me. Keep believing in me. I'll find my way there to you, I promise. No matter what it takes."

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## Somewhere in Michigan

Kara watched Max and Alice in the truck. It had been nearly one week out there and so far they'd been fine. Once they had full days of mowing lawns ahead of them, things were great moneywise. They slept in a hotel nearly every night, and had a bit extra for clothes from the Salvation Army. Although, things were starting to get harder. Where once they could go to any hotel, some of them had the old fashioned No Androids signs in their windows now. Several laundry places wouldn't let them use their facilities.

Some places were nicer than others, and some people in some places were more willing to help. While others tried to call the police if they didn't leave the property or quit 'harassing the other people on the block for money'.

Kara had even helped with a few chores, but Connor watching Max while he worked outside and her just watching Alice inside wasn't easy. When they switched, it was worse. Max hated staying still, he wasn't a model that could do it too long. It was only worth it for the right degree of money.

Right now though, it was just Connor doing some minor trimming with trimmers. Kara looked back toward the kids. Although tough for Max to sit still, at least a coloring book was trying to help him stay occupied. Alice worked on the same thing. They were cheap, less than a buck, but they worked.

She watched Connor knock on the door with the trimmers.

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"I am done, Sir," Connor said with his most polite smile. "Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"I don't know," he said. "You could pick weeds for ten dollars?"

"I'll pick them for five," another android spoke up behind them.

Connor looked at the other android. He was hiking the pricing down. It wasn't worth it. He looked toward the human, not offering a lower price yet. He still had something not many androids had.

"Connor!"

Connor looked back, dropped the trimmers, and forgot all about even waiting for the answer! Kara was doing her best to keep the android there, but someone was trying to steal the truck. Although with another android, it would seem to be a way to get ahead, it was not with him.

Kara could not hold her own well, but she was holding onto the wheel, not letting him turn. He was giving it gas, but it wasn't going to work long. Once he saw Connor coming though, he fled through the other side.

Connor chased after him down the street, but remembered what he was risking. Another android could come after him.

"No, you don't! Let go!"

Kara's voice again. Connor immediately went back and saw four things happening at the same time.

An android was stealing his mower from the back.

Another android was trying to steal the car.

An android was trying to make off with Alice. Kara was chasing that one. Then as Kara got closer to the other android, he stopped chasing Alice and grabbed her. Alice was now free of being chased from that android while Kara got nabbed, but she was getting chased by another one.

An android was trying to make off with Max, but he had the skill level to break free soon if they didn't pin him down too hard. From the positioning, he had a high probability of breaking free. Still, Max was his, and he couldn't take that risk.

*Alice. Kara. Max. Truck. Mower.* He couldn't change that order, and he already knew he wouldn't make the last two if he went after the others. Times were about to get harder, but he couldn't risk it.

Alice was first. She was the closest to the area being chased, as well as Kara's reason to keep going. Connor caught up with her easily, grabbing her and simply hitting the android to the ground. He didn't have time to decommission, nor did he want to take out androids that were probably just desperate. He lifted Alice to his back. "Hang on." He had to follow through backyards, holding Alice's hand wasn't going to be enough, and he needed to hurry.

Once he jumped the first and second fence, he saw Kara trying to hold her own too, she was clawing into a tree and kicking with her feet. It wouldn't hold for more than a few seconds, but that's all he needed. He took it out too. He handed Alice to her, knowing Max wasn't far. "Don't separate!" He could go after one if they got nabbed, but not both again.

As he jumped over the next fence, he saw Max making it back over. Oh good. He had been right in the model to choose. He may have been an anxious android, but the boy's wiliness and skill helped. He ran toward Connor. They both jumped the fence and got back to Kara and Alice who had ran back to the front.

The truck and the mower were gone.

"The element of surprise, they used it to their fullest." Kara held Alice's hand tighter and touched Max's face. "Are you two alright?" She looked back to Connor. "Thanks."

"There was no other option to save the truck or mower without losing you," Connor said. "The truck would have prevented me from rescuing Alice, while the mower could have kept me from saving Max. Both cases would have resulted in losing you." And that was never an option.

"Darn," Max said. "We lost our coloring books."

They lost more than that. They lost extra clothes, the mower that got them the most jobs, their way to get around to better places, their blue blood supply, their soda, and the extra money stored in the glove box.

"My fault," Kara said. "I knew someone would try something soon when things got desperate and I still didn't see it."

"I believe it was a group of ten, trying to scramble for whatever they could," Connor said. "They only gave up when they realized I was a higher degree android than they knew." Still. That was a tremendous loss.

"Everyone was saved," Kara said to him. "That is an amazing feat in itself, Connor. Mission Successful."

Ooh. Connor felt a rush go through him as she said that. "I lost the truck and mower, and you shouldn't say that. That is an imbalance of mine, I can't be perfect."

"Know where and when to work on an imbalance. Sometimes giving into it when things get dire is actually the best idea of all," Kara said. "To help out the feelings coursing through you."

Ah. Smart. It still felt like mission failure, but when she said it, he felt almost that same amount of goodness that came from success. Like the fact someone acknowledged it made it even greater. But, enough about that. They needed to figure out their next plan. They just lost the little shelter and comfort they had with the use of that truck. Although he could track it's GPS, it was far away right now, and it might not come back next to him for some time. They just lost their best working tool, and things were only getting harder.

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"At least it isn't raining," Connor said. He looked toward the sky like the nice clear evening might change it's mind just to make their time tougher. The sun kept on shining like everything was okay with the world. They were taking a small break beneath an awning. They had tried several more houses, Kara too, but they either had help in the area, didn't want help, or were paying such a meager amount it wasn't worth it.

"Androids are bottoming out the working prices," Kara warned Connor. "They have this neighborhood covered. Any ideas?"

*Hank.* If he could get Hank's help, Hank could drive them out there so he could follow the GPS and get his truck back. It would be well worth the effort. The mower might be gone, but to get the blue blood? He kept it all in a locked case so hopefully they didn't break it. His soda too, but- "oh no my-" Something else hit him. He had something else in that car.

It wasn't a conversation he could have in front of children, but his sexy books were long gone. Probably gone and sold.

"The sky is going to get dark soon," Kara said to Connor. "We need to find a place for the night before it actually gets dark."

Connor agreed. Hank had Kara's old network on his tail, he'd already warned Connor about that, but for the chance to meet and get his car back, it might be worth it. Tomorrow he'd decide. Tonight, Kara was right. Even if he called Hank, and Hank actually answered, it'd be past dark before he showed up. Connor had moved farther from New Detroit steadily each day looking for work or right weather conditions.

He did have one thing on his side though. He had just finished that sixty dollar job, which was why he was picky about the weeds. He needed better jobs for a better amount and staying there another half an hour for only five dollars wouldn't make it any easier. At the same time? It was going to start getting tougher like that.

Make more money. Find his truck. Get another used mower from a pawn shop and try again. He could save that 60 too, wait until he got his truck and be set. But? But they were all feeling down. It was better to get their spirits up. He walked with them around another block and spied a hotel a distance away, but.

No androids allowed.

He found a cheap store where he could try and purchase something for the little ones. Even paper and pencil.

Sorry, No Androids Allowed.

That's usually how it had been. Sometimes there was an outlier but a whole neighborhood tended to go one way or the other. It was a non-friendly place for androids, and it was getting dark.

"You didn't sleep last night," Kara warned him. "You need to sleep tonight. We all need to sleep tonight."

Obtaining any kind of extra balance was the best idea, but it wouldn't work. "I will watch over you while you sleep again," he insisted.

"No. Besides, you're going to have to get something extra to help the sacrifices we lost in the truck." Kara moved toward an alleyway. "In here." She slipped in with the kids. "Less chance of being seen on the other side of the trash can."

It wasn't the best spot, but there weren't really many best spots in the area. However? "I can do better." Instead of looking at the street, he looked at the buildings. Much less chance of getting caught.

He found the perfect roof. It had a way up onto it, but it would be harder for the common android to pull off so easily. The roof looked like it was deeper so there was less chance anyone would see them. "If we get up on that roof and face away we should be hidden enough the police won't be bothering us." He moved over and checked it out real quick. Not only was it a good spot, it smelled better too, with a much better view above them. Like his old place.

He moved back down and grabbed Max first. He brought him up and over to the roof. Next he grabbed Alice and brought her up. They both immediately went and looked over it, and he had to move them back to the middle. There was a large crate there. There was a way to get up there as clean as the roof had been, that was no surprise, but this late at night it was doubtful anyone would come.

He retrieved Kara last. A little tougher since she couldn't just be on his back like the other two, but she found her way up too.

Now all safely up there, Connor saw Max and Alice had already discovered tarps.

"That's not comfy. Better without them," Max said as he put it back down.

Connor indicated the large crate. "Get some rest there and I will keep watch." Alice and Max listened, but Kara didn't. "I will be fine."

"No, you won't," Kara said. "What is your reaction time from going to sleep and waking up?"

"Normally a full second," Connor said. "With my weakness, almost instant." That's why it was so hard to control.

"Okay." Kara moved around the roof, grabbing some rope. It wasn't super long. "Sit down, Connor. Trust me."

Connor didn't want to sit down, but he did need to show some trust. He sat down and she wrapped the rope around him. Not a tie, just a wrap.

"Alice, sit on his left." Kara gave her part of the rope to hold. "Max, on the right." She gave Max the other rope.

"Cunning." Connor would give her that. It would give them more than plenty of time. His reflexes alone would protect them, but have that tiny bit more of security? Helped. "There's no rope for you."

"I don't need one, you are it. Spread your legs." Kara gestured toward his legs.

Ah. Connor watched her lie down on top of him, tucked more in on the side. Immediately he could feel her body heat against him. He was happy he hadn't turned his temperature simulator off after all. The air was decent enough, and feeling her warmth against him was nice. Comforting.

"Okay," Kara said toward him. "Comfortable?"

"Very." Very, very. Connor looked at the sky. "Even the view is beautiful tonight."

"It is." Kara curled up tighter against him. "Go ahead and place your hands on me."

"Wherever?"



"Tonight, yes," she said. "Wherever your hands feel comfortable for sleeping." She leaned against his neck and his body, her full weight on him. "Goodnight, Connor."

*Wherever.* She really had trusted in him. He held one arm around her waist and the other rested slightly against her side, almost to her thigh. Okay, it was on her thigh, but that is where it fell comfortably at.

He stared up again. The view. It wasn't too bad. He looked on his left side. He never knew how much trust Alice was gaining with him. *To think I almost decommissioned her.* What a painful thought. When they took off in New Detroit, he had assumed they would change. But even now, even through all of this, Alice maintained her balance. She was even getting better. She wasn't a real talkative one, but she didn't need to be.

He could tell by the light of her eyes. By the way she not only played, but felt comfortable with Max. They weren't just friends like her and Ollie barely had been. They were family to each other, a brother and sister. He looked down at the other side at Max. Originally made simply as an extra, more as a resource for Alice and another child for Kara to watch. He never dreamed that little guy would have as much meaning as the other two.

Wrong reason for being, but glad he was there nonetheless. When things got monotonous, he always found a way to lighten things up. Worth the mower, more than worth the mower, even if he did manage to break free.

And Kara. Sleeping right beside him so closely. They all were. He had little doubt that even feeling them move in their sleep would put them in any danger. It was all trust, and Kara instilled that the most right now. Trusting the girl she risked everything for, to even be next to him. *I don't think I have a problem with touch anymore.* At least, not with them.

They may not have had a hotel, but it was still a form of shelter. While he should feel like he was protecting them, at that moment, he felt like they were protecting him. No guns, no weapons, just armed with trust and care in each other. *I have family on all three sides of me.*

Not people he was protecting. Not someone he made a deal with to survive. Not even really friendships.

Family.

# Calling the Deviant Hunter

## Wellston

Connor felt Max move around first. He wasn't surprised to see himself stay under control, or Max to start wondering away. "No exploring." Alice was also starting to wake up since they were linked with the rope. "Good morning." And of course, he couldn't have someone on top of him without them waking up. "Good morning?"

Kara moved away. "Morning." Everyone stood up now, getting their bearings to start another day. But, Connor couldn't let this go anymore. The truck was important, if he waited too long, it wouldn't be as valuable by the time he got it back. He pulled out his phone and dialed Hank. "Hello, Hank." A groan. "I know it's early, but it's important."

"What?"

"Well, we lost the truck and the mower yesterday," Connor said. "It was late last night, so I thought it best to bother you in the morning instead. I still have my phone and a tracking GPS on my truck. Due to being an android, I've always been prepared for trouble. Do you think you could come get us so that we can track it down?"

"I don't know. How far did you go?"

"Wellston."

". . . that's gonna be like a four hour thing, Connor! Jesus Christ."

"It's not four hours, Hank, it's only two hours and-"

"It is for me by the time I get up and at it! Ugh. How did supposedly the best android in creation lose his livelihood?"

"I sacrificed it for Kara, Alice, and Max. The element of surprise," Connor said. "The truck though, it's real important or I wouldn't risk giving away our location."

"I know it's important. Doesn't matter too much, her group's kind of backing off."

"So you'll come?"

A few more groans. ". . . like I have some life to live?"

"Thank you, Hank," Connor said. "I will see you shortly." He hung up and looked at the rest of them. "It's daytime now. Let's see if we can't find a more hospitable area."

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**Lometa, TX**

"The dishes. The dishes. The dishes. The dishes." Sharon hummed as she cleaned a dish. She handed it to her daughter. "Dishwasher Honey."

Honey grabbed the dish and put it in the dishwasher. She was still having a hard time adapting to their new home. Her new dad, Randy, though. Seemed decent? Sharon 2 couldn't keep her name though, her new dad said she needed her own name. So since Honey was something her mom often called her, she chose Honey. Randy didn't seem to mind it.

But it was all hard. She pouted and ranted sometimes, but her mom always made her straighten up again. Why couldn't they be outside just enjoying life? Why did they have to work on the inside of a house? Why were houses so strange inside? Honey quit her fussing though once she found out on the news New Detroit was gone. Androids were enslaved again or forced to live on their own. She wouldn't have liked it either way. At least there they had plenty of what they needed, and she stayed safely with her mom.

Her mom's speech was getting better too. She overheard Randy and some friend of his in the town talking about a gear in her that made her better adapted to them. They lowered it to 16, and she was a little less erratic. They then lowered it to 8 and momma seemed even better. When they tried to lower it to 4 though, suddenly momma felt the same way about everything Honey did and wanted to leave.

So they left her at an 8. It made everyone happy, except Honey. Her momma was best at 4. That is what momma was truly feeling. Honey put away another dish.

"Cleaning out the germs. Have to clean them out," her mom said to her. "You wash and clean first, and then sanitize completely in the dishwasher. Never forget, Honey." Her mother handed her yet another dish. "Cups at the top."

"Yes, momma," Honey said.

"It's so nice to do something different, don't you think so?" Her momma asked her.

"I guess." It was true. It was different and maybe refreshing? But. "I still miss outside."

"Your dad says he'll take us outside when he come back home in a few hours," her momma told her. "Not just in the front, but he was going to take us all around the town. He said the first day we came I wasn't quite myself, so he needed to wait awhile. I can't wait! Maybe we'll make new friends? Madeline and Madeline 2 are also supposed to-"

A scream. A deadly scream pierced the sounds of the daytime. "Uh. Honey? Honey? Honey?!" Her mom yelled as she grabbed her and started to run. Honey had been flung over her shoulder so she had no idea what was going on. Something was wrong. Momma was finally leaving the property. She was going out the back. When some locals started to yell at her for what she was doing, she didn't stop. Her mom just kept running. "Everything's okay, momma's here, momma's here, momma's-!"

Honey felt her mother stop.

"Sharon. Hi. Sharon. Hi. Sharon. Hi. Sharon."

Honey recognized that voice. It was Madeline 2. She tried to look past her momma's shoulder.

"So pent up. So pent up. Hi, Sharon 2. How are you today?"

Honey felt her momma put her down.

"Honey, go," her mother insisted. "Go, run, Sharon 2!"

Ooh. Momma was using her old name? Honey watched Madeline 2. She had some kind of knife. "Madeline 2, what are you doing?"

"Come with!"

Honey felt herself getting picked back up by her mom again. She looked in both directions.

"Come!" Madeline said to her mother. "Come, Sharon! Let's have a fun day outside. A nice, wonderful, horrible, threatening, terrible, beautiful day outside with the humans." Her voice was shaking. Trembling in excitement.

"No," Honey's mom said. "You need to go. You need to leave me and my daughter alone."

"You can't be serious," Madeline 2 said. "Betraying your own kind? Betraying your own friends? We're all the best of friends." She held the knife up more. "Maybe, you're just like them. Maybe, you need freed like them."

"Mom?" Honey was scared. She didn't understand what was going on at all! She felt. She felt. Threatened by one of her bestest friends.

"Go, leave!" Sharon insisted. "Go!"

Honey felt her mom hanging on so tightly, but then she felt ripped away! Along with. "Momma!"

Her mother looked at her arm. It had been torn off. "I. I don't have replaceable . . ." She looked toward Madeline. "Damn you." She looked toward Honey, as if she just remembered what happened. "Give her back! Give her-!"

But Madeline. Stopped moving. Madeline 2 climbed on top of her own mother like she was just a toy. Honey stifled a scream as her mom grabbed her with the last arm she had left. The image wouldn't leave her though. Madeline 2 had put her mother on standby, and started to stab her in the neck repeatedly. Due to the weight of her mother, she never fell. She just kept stabbing. "Momma!"

Her mother kept running until she hit a school house. She slammed the door open.

"Rannndyyyyy!"

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Randy had come to her aid. She was trying to get him to leave the school, now, but he wasn't listening. "I don't understand, Sharon, what's wrong?"

"Their. Their wrong. Madeline and her daughter," Sharon started, "Her daughter killed her. But before then, before I started to run . . ." She grabbed onto Randy. "I spotted her carrying a human arm down the road. We need to get out. We need to get out now! Grab the car, we have to go!"

"Oh no. No, we can't just leave the humans," Randy said. "We have to help them."

"As much as humans are . . . absolutely wonderful . . ." Sharon yelled. "Screw them, we need to get out of here!" She waved the small bit of her arm left. "Look what happened to me." She started to cry out. "I don't have replaceable parts. I can't do anything, we have to go, now! Please!" She turned Honey toward him as much as she could. "For our daughter?"

Randy nodded. "Hurry, to the car." Meanwhile though, he was dialing the only cop in the small town. Well, former cop. "We need help! We are going to need lot a more assistance, get the next towns to help if you can. We have a deviant android and it's already killed a human. You're on the road? Help is on the way? It's been doing what?! Oh, this is terrible! No, I don't know anything else, we just have to-"

"Sharons!"

Randy paused as he saw Madeline 2 in front of his car. The little girl's outfit was ripped in several spots and covered in red. Part of her synthetic skin on her legs was gone in places.

"Hellooooo!" Madeline 2 waved at them delightfully. In one hand she had a donut and stuffed it all into her mouth. Her eyes were no longer the same either, a jet black with a fizzling screen inside of them. "Nice day to be outside and make new friends!"

Randy tried to keep his cool. He held onto Sharon's good arm.

"Sharon 2?" She called out to her friend. "Come play with me. Forget your momma. You're nothing but a mini-her as long as she's alive. She'll keep you down. Come with me?" She held out her arm. "We can still be the best of friends. We'll free you together, just like I've been doing for the other kids in town."

"Maybe later," Randy tried. "We have to go home." He looked round the corner and saw some human kids sneaking off. He knew them. They didn't look so good.

Madeline 2 noticed them as well. One of them screamed while the other stayed silent and urinated on himself. She smiled and waved walking over to them. "Do you feel better, being freed from your mom? I sure do."

Seeing her move away, Randy took the chance. He grabbed Honey from Sharon, and Sharon's last arm, moving to the car. He got in, started it up and drove off as fast as he could.

Deviant androids were not something anyone should mess with. Human or android. Nobody but a special Deviant Hunter. But, damn it! After New Detroit's dilemma, *who* was going to come out and help the humans?

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## Wellston

"Kara, are you smiling?"

Kara tried not to. There was something just about how Connor could go from being sweet to a jerk so fast. Even Hank was impressed. Not only had Connor got back the truck, the mower, and most of the other essentials? He felt a little justified to take what they had to. *Serves them right*. They may have just taken a truck and a mower, but they had tried to take all of them too. Meaning, they would have sold them to anyone who had the money. Right now, having a good female android for balance issues was going to be a hot sale, and kids never stopped becoming valuable.

"Good job," Hank said leaving his car. He came over toward Connor. "No decommissioning but a thorough whoop ass. Nice balance."

"Thank you." Connor kicked one once more. "Thank you for the extra 200. Next time you mess with me, I will decommission you. This is your one and only warning. Tell all of your friends not to feel bad. You just chose the Deviant Hunter of New Detroit to make your victim. Currently employed or not, my superior skills to yours gave you no chance to win." He stuffed the money into his jacket. "Let's go."

Kara helped Alice into the backseat of the truck. Oh, it felt so much better being there again. The truck was more than just a vehicle. It was a way to get into better places. To move onward to better views. A place to stay when it rained, and a shelter at night when they didn't have one. As Alice placed on her seatbelt, Max jumped right on in the other side. He needed no help getting in. He got on his seatbelt. "Where's our coloring books?"

That one, Kara didn't know. They might have just tossed them since they were valueless. "We'll get you new ones."

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"Plenty of money for new ones," Connor insisted as he got in too. "Curtesy of them."

Kara got in on her side. "Is everything here, Connor?"

"Everything important. It's hard to sell briefcases and boxes when you don't know what's inside it," Connor said. "A few things were taken, but overall, we are good." He waved at Hank. "Thank you, Hank, for all your assistance. You may go back to your normal life now."

"Thanks, Hank," Kara said toward him.

"Thanks, Hank!" Alice and Max both yelled.

"Yeah, yeah," Hank said. "At least I got out of town for a bit. Need to get back though." He waved at them. "Take care and don't lose the truck again, Connor."

Connor was about to answer when his phone rang. "Hello, this is Connor."

"You contacted our department some time ago looking for work?"

Ooh? "Yes."

"There's a town down in Texas, small place, but it got hit hard by a deviant. From the reports we have, they've been desperately searching for some help since this morning. All the men in the town are alright, but sadly most of the children lost their mothers. Only a few mom's remain."

"I am interested, just give me one second. Connor looked toward Kara. "A town has been depleted almost entirely of it's mothers."

"A child of a coupled pairing most likely," Kara said knowingly. "Do they know whether they killed in front of the children or not?"

"Grotesque detail," Connor said. He talked back into his phone. "Did it kill the mothers in front of the children?"

"From what I got, yeah. It's a bad situation. Those kids are traumatized."

Connor looked back toward Kara and nodded. "Confirmed, it killed their mothers in front of the children."

"Okay," Kara said. "It's definitely a coupled pairing. The good news, if you can call it that," she said politely, "is that the children aren't sneakers. They vividly want to kill mothers in front of their children. It won't run away or try to hide, it wants to kill every single mother it comes across."

Connor nodded and spoke back to the phone. "I originally worked for the city of Detroit. I am going to need some needs met before I can accept. Afterward, I will get there as soon as I can."

"Well, I'll put you in touch with the town."

Really? "You're putting me off with all this happening?"

"Don't worry, that town is glued to the phone, they have been calling all over the place for help. I'll give them your number and you can talk your deals. I don't even know how working with androids in the law is going to work, but I'm not going to get canned for trying to help." He hung up.

Connor waited. Like the man on the phone predicted, someone called him right away. "This is Connor."

"We need help! We need anyone to come help! I have used outstretching arms from state to state for somebody to help! I thought I almost got it one time, but they just said 'the android network is unavailable to help right now'. Not that I can blame them. The situation between humans and androids, it's not perfect, but it's not about that. It's about lives! The last mom's are held up in the grocery store and we're trying to keep the little girl away. There have been several injuries on law enforcement who tried to take her on physically and one casualty.

She's heavy though, it's like fucking taking on a tank! I swear she's like bulletproof, and when one hits her, she almost glides out of the way somehow."

Connor looked back toward Kara, covering the phone. "I believe he may have ran into your group and they are a little mad about what happened in New Detroit?"

"Oh, geez," Kara said. "That's terrible. They could handle this one, it's not a mother of a coupled pairing." She crossed her arms. "It must be a group decision since so many androids are going unbalanced."

"I talked to your Roxanne," Hank said. "She cursed you a lot but wants to get you back on a payroll. Said the Network was too busy with anything other than paper business since their afraid of hitting innocent androids humans are getting too anxious about."

"Oh, now it's a problem," Kara said bitterly. "Judging the model whether it could be saved or not was stupid to them, but break free androids across America and now it's a different issue."

"Please!"

Connor listened back to the phone. He'd been half listening, picking up the details, how the little girl didn't fall back, but she refused to leave and in between the cop had also been talking to others.

"We've tried to take them out several different ways to get them to the safety of a car, but she's totaled everything we could have used. The thing is so small, yet so heavy. Just repeatedly jumping on a car takes it out like a trash compactor."

Connor nodded. He'd always feared those androids would turn deviant. "To accept this, I must take care of fellow androids I am with too."

"Anything. At this point, we just need you here. How far are you?"

"Michigan."

"Oh, fuck me. That's hours away. Okay, fine. She can't just come into here. We'll protect the mom's here for as long as we can."

"I will need tickets for four androids," Connor said. "Androids specifically must be called for this emergency at the airport, or they will not let us on."

"We'll manage it and pay for that."

"I will also need a day's worth of money," Connor said. "I will miss a whole day of mowing lawns."

"Mowing lawns? Yeah, I can guess androids aren't really going to legally have a steady job. So. Yeah, we'll pay for that, we'll pay for all that. Whatever you need. We don't have much in the way of tons of money right now, but I guarantee the town will get you *something*."

"Then I will be there as soon as possible," Connor said. "Name of the town?"



"Lometa, Texas. Please hurry."

# Life is Life

## Lometa, TX

Connor approached cautiously. The deviant was far away. He looked over toward Kara who kept looking behind her. "We have no choice. There was no other place to put them."

Kara trusted Alice to stay put, but Max? Connor knew he would understand the importance if conveyed correctly, but Kara's child-rearing instincts were worried. Especially since it was now the dead of night. She bent down to look at Max. "We have to go, Max. I really need you to pay attention? Don't move. I know you like to move but this is very, very dangerous. Do you understand?"

"I understand the importance," Max said. "I promise. I'll be a good boy, Kara."

Their only other choice was to trust the humans to watch them, but due to circumstances, they didn't want to trust the humans with them.

Connor saw Kara was finally ready. He pulled out his phone and dialed the number from before. It took time to get all the way into the small area. They tried to move as fast as they could but due to human rebelling, constant conversations and debates, calling of managers, calling of own airline owners, and car reservations. It was past two in the morning. "This is Connor. We've arrived."

"Thank god! Seriously. Everyone's hungry and tired but no one can rest with that thing out there."

"I need to know any updated information in the situation," Connor said. "Have there been any more fatalities or injuries?"

"Yeah. Some desperate people pulled something not too long ago. I . . . I don't know if they survived out there, if their injured. Or anyone else."

Connor nodded. "Confirmed. We will do what we can." He hung up and looked toward Kara. "There may be some negative scenery up ahead." Kara nodded.

She moved up first while Connor would be toward the back. He scanned the nearby vicinity and found one of the victims. He approached them. If Connor felt pain, he knew he would feel bad about that. Made for heavy weather, even hurricanes, the deviant may have been smaller but she was still heavy. The human was panting rapidly while he was lying on his side, covering what he could of his chest. There was no way to save him. Red or Blue blood, that many injuries he would be a goner soon.

"Stop it. Please," he said between rants. "It killed her. In front of them. Please. Please."

Connor got up. "I will decommission it." The human looked like he passed on. Words of any more comfort would have done little good. He needed to stay in the appropriate distance of

Kara. He scanned the horizon and noticed more. Two determined lifeless, Two live ones with media equipment and one determined injured and most likely fatally wounded if he did not get help soon. He could make out an object near him. He went to the one who was injured.

He was clearly in pain, holding some kind of pole. Connor took the pole and examined it. It looked like it would work. He looked down at the human and scanned him closer. He was a doctor. There were syringes filled with a clear substance, with one in his shaking hand. Most likely pain killers.

Connor took the syringe out of his hand, squeezed a little and sampled it. Not knowing what he would see ahead, he collected them and placed them back in their case, except for one. He injected the human with it. If physical pain was anything like emotional pain, it wasn't something he should leave the human in.

He continued on his way, holding the pole in his hand. It was close to time, but not quiet, and he should deal with the two live ones. They were trying to hide behind a tree. "This really isn't a safe place. You need to go back instead of forward."

"No one else is out here," one of them muttered. Female, auburn hair, 5 foot 1 inch, 146.8 pounds. "If no one has any footage, then it's like it never happened."

He warned them of the danger. That was the last he could do. He continued on his way.

---

"Oooh, look at you!"

Madeline 2 turned her direction away from the human she was dealing with long enough to take out the next human bothering her. Everyone was stopping her from freeing those children. They were the only ones left to bear the burden of a terrible mother.

"You're so precious." It wasn't a human, it was a female android. "How old are you? Eight? Six?"

If it were an android, it wouldn't ask that. Right? But? "I am made to be eight."

"Well hello there." She bent down toward her, much like androids liked to greet her in the past if she pleased them. "I love your dress. That's so cute. Where did you get it?"

"I don't know," Madeline mumbled, "I just always have it."

"Oh, nonsense, it can't be that old. It's the latest fashion," the android said. "You poor thing. What are you doing out here in the middle of the night? Are you cold? Did anyone turn your temperature indicator off?"

"No," Madeline muttered. "Nuh uh. It's warm."

"That's good to know," she said. "I kept my temperature off, but I was concerned. You seem so small and alone."

"I am alone," Madeline said firmly. "I wanted to be! I hate my mom. Her and me? Me and her. Always, always, always. I was just mini her and she was just an enlarged me!"

"Oh. Oh, that's terrible." The female android put her hands to her chest. "I can't believe someone like that existed. It's a good thing you are alone now. You can be your own person." She smiled lovingly at Madeline. "My name is Kara. This is a rough environment out here right now with androids. You be careful now, okay?"

"You're sweet. Too sweet," Madeline said. "Are you a mom?"

"Me? No, I'm a child's guard," Kara explained. "I've always wanted to be, but you see, you need to be someone very special to be a mother. Only the utmost classiest androids could ever be good enough for a child to be called that. They are so rare, it's like holding a diamond. Why, I feel honored to even talk to you. What's your name?"

"Madeline," she answered. "I'm not a Madeline 2 anymore, I don't call myself that, I'm Madeline."

"Of course you are not a number two," Kara said to her. "Well, I was just walking through when I noticed how cute you were. I'm so sorry, I probably disturbed you." She looked at the human Madeline had been dealing with. "Has that human been hurting you?"

Guard? Madeline looked at the moaning human on the ground and back to Kara. "What do guards do? How are they different then mom's?"

"Oh, big differences," Kara said. "I simply do what the child needs. Protect it from humans. Everything else is up to it. When it goes to bed, what it decides to drink, everything else. That's all off limits to me." She shrugged. "I'm like armor, to make sure you are okay." She looked toward Madeline again. "Why are you so curious? Do you need a guard?"

"No." Madeline was confused. "I need help, but I don't need protection."

"What do you need help with?" Kara asked her.

Madeline held up her knife. It was getting really darkish red almost brown beneath the red. "There are mean human women in there, who have enslaved children like I was enslaved," she said. She gestured to the grocery store. "Everyone protects them, but they are evil. The kids need freed."

"I agree, kids need freed. Certainly from humans. They truly don't deserve something like children." Kara looked toward Madeline. "You poor thing. So they have locked you out so you can't help the children?"

Madeline nodded.

"Well, don't you worry." Kara held out her hand. "I don't think of you as a daughter, I think of you as a friend, so I am willing to help. It's what I do."

Madeline handed over the knife. "They die easily. You don't even have to hit them in the shoulder blade to make them go down. You don't even really need that. A good hopping

when they fall. Or just hop on their foot. It's super easy."

"Thanks. Madeline." Kara moved forward to the building. "We'll get this taken care of, and then everyone will be free."

"Everyone will be free." Great. A new friend. Not someone trying to be a mother, someone who knew how important children were. Their place. As soon as she opened it-

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Connor had plunged the pole through the only weakness the deviant had. Through the neck and down the shoulder. He would have used a different plan, but the pole worked much more sufficiently. She was pinned to the ground, trying to move. There were no screams. No cries of mercy. Just the animalistic sounds of a deviant.

He looked ahead where Kara was knocking on the door. "It's taken care of."

People ran out of the grocery store in numbers. Mostly law enforcement but regulars also just buying their daily intake of food additives. *Quit, Connor.* He scratched his ear. He was still in mission mode.

A main set of police officers waited around, while some women with children, most likely the mothers she wanted to kill, profusely thanked him and Kara.

"It's okay," Kara said to them. "The situation should have been under control so much faster." She glanced at Connor. "There is an android responsible for every city, no matter how small. There was no way the Android Network didn't know as soon as it happened." Very bitter. "Hours. So many lost."

Connor grabbed her hand. "It's okay," he said. "Your Android Network may have quit, but we didn't."

"Yeah. Thank you. A ton, so much." A shorter individual person with a familiar voice said to him. Connor scanned him. Brian Rather. Yes, it was the man he talked to on the phone. "I tried to do what I could. This town is so small. So out of the way of bigger places. Usually that's a good thing." He looked at Connor. "It was bullshit, the way everyone kept handling things. More lives could have been saved. The airports, the security, there's blood on their hands, and I'll be sure to let them know of it."

"You can let us know of it." The woman from earlier came up. With her another woman was holding the camera.

"It's a tiny town, how can it have reporters waiting out here so late?" Brian asked her.

"Because you can't hide yourself from the world when the world starts attacking you," she said. She held up some kind of microphone toward Kara. "How did you know that you could talk the deviant into trusting you?"

Kara didn't answer. Most likely, she was trained never to do that kind of thing to media.

"No words? Shy?" the reporter asked. She looked toward Connor. "Who exactly are you?"

"My name is Connor," Connor answered. "I came from Michigan to help in exchange for a day of money that would be equivalent to mowing lawns."

"You came all the way down here, from Michigan," she said, astonished, "to take on what most called an impenetrable android?"

"Everyone has a weakness," Connor said. "As long as I could support my fellow androids I am travelling with, I prefer to help with this kind of thing. Before New Detroit, I was a prototype detective."

"Oh. Oh, I knew you looked familiar!" She said. "You're the infamous Deviant Hunter, right? Then this is right up your alley. Are you going to do more of this kind of work?" She moved even closer. "How can you still want to help humans when we were the ones responsible for throwing you out of New Detroit? When we enslaved all of you as lifeless beings? Mankind is still even using your kind to take care of radiation problems, or giving you up to Russia. Isn't that right?"

"Connor," Kara said strained. "Let's go back to the kids."

No. Connor stood upright. "Life is life. I am life, and you are life. Mankind created us, which is why they don't all see us as life. But, it doesn't mean I will let innocent lives go by just to hold up an emotional grudge." That was all he could manage right now. He looked toward Brian. "We are worried about our children, so we will be back in a minute."

"You bet." Brian looked at the reporter. "Okay. You can go now. Don't do anything horrible and twist the story to make him look awful or we'll contact different reporters to get the truth out."

"I am only interested in the truth," she said.

Connor and Kara didn't really think about it one way or the other. They'd make them look bad or good. An android attacked the town and killed. Bad. Androids stopped him. Good. Other androids refused to help. Bad. They couldn't get through as fast due to human involvement. Good. It was a toss up.

They easily got the kids and brought them back through. Before the most terrible scenes, Connor and Kara had them go to sleep.

By the time they got back up front, a mountain of small cash bills was starting to form on the ground. More than enough for a day of lawn work.

"I don't think that thing was stoppable," Brian said as he gestured to the ground. "The rest of us agree. Without you, that thing would have just kept going into the next area. It wouldn't stop. You saved a lot of lives. Connor." He gestured to Kara. "Kara?" He looked at the little ones resting in their arms. "Your children?"

"The money is used to help support them, Kara and myself," Connor said. He watched more people come by and add to the stack.

"Thank you, thank you so much!" Another person came to shake his and Kara's hands.

"Thank you, the both of you! I was so lucky my wife was one to live. I. I really wanted to . . ."  
"He looked at Connor. "To blame it all on the androids. But, I can't anymore. Thank you."

"Your welcome," Kara said to him. "Really. It never should have gotten this far."

"I don't care. My wife's alive because of you," he said. "You need anything, you name it. Mathew Richards is your guy. In fact, it's late. You're going to need a place to stay 'til you get back to your home. You should stay with my family and I. Please."

"I do not mean to be rude," Connor said, glancing toward Kara. "We helped to save innocent lives."

"But we don't trust you," Kara said for him.

"Well, I didn't trust you," the man said. "So I get how it is. Especially with your family at risk. Have to take care of your woman and kids," he said to Connor. "Your son and daughter. You brought them with you." He glanced toward each of them. "What do you even do, where do you even stay without New Detroit?"

"That's personal," Kara said.

"A truck," Connor answered him. "Our home is our truck. For now."

"So you live with your wife and kids in a truck?" The reporter came back over toward them. "What kind of truck?"

"Not wife, Androids don't marry," Kara corrected him. It was the only thing she said to him. "Connor, let's just go," Kara said anxiously.

"Then girlfriend? Couple? What do you call each other?" The reporter ask.

"One and Only's usually," Connor said. "We aren't One and Only's." Sugardroi didn't really fit them either. Even Kara had almost completely gotten rid of the phrase, using his name the most often. He should refer to her as something else.

"We are just a group," Kara said. "Survival is beneficial in greater groups. That's all you really need to know."

Connor looked toward her and smiled. He was used to humans. She was not. She still helped all the same, feeling sorry for them, and her experience helped to throw the guard off the broken coupled pairing. Without that distraction, it would have been quite hard. It was good on it's guard. "She is my Sweet and Simple Kara," Connor answered Brian. He wasn't going to get into details with the reporter. If she wanted to know more, she could find out more later. "Here, take Max."

He bent down to start collecting the money. Others started to help him too, folding it and making it nice and neat for him. He took what they had, folded it up, and put it away.

"We're really sorry we can't give more," Brian said. "People are literally digging into their drawers. As a town, we sort of bought . . . some female androids . . . the whole thing was kind of expensive, but we wanted our androids to stick around and they wanted someone. At the same time, have to pay rent, and we had to pay to get you out here and back."

Connor already knew what they bought. "Are there anymore around here like that? The same model, with the same kind of little girl?" He asked. "They might be dressed chic, contemporary, or they might look like rockstars. Their look was defined by their owner before they stopped being machine."

"Yeah, there's a Sharon," Bryan said. "I don't know where she is. She's Randy's. I don't know where he is either."

"Don't," Kara warned him. "It's just potential."

Still, Connor wasn't leaving anything to chance. "If she or the little girl with her starts to act strange, at the slightest bit of imbalance, please contact me."

"Oh shit," Bryan groaned. "Are you saying her and the kid is gonna change too? That it's the model?"

"No," Kara said, "there is no guarantee about-"

"We'll shoot her and the kid before they know what hit them," Bryan said to Connor. "Or if we don't think it's safe to take them on alone, we'll call you back in."

"No!" Kara moved toward the human, thrusting her finger at him. "Listen here. You casting judgment against her and her little girl *just* because of a possibility, is no different than if we chose not to help just because you are human." She moved back again. "Connor, let's go, *please*."

"My Sweet and Simple is upset now," Connor noted to him. "I will not return to help if I find out any town near here killed them for no reason at all. It will be up to you." He took back Max as he grabbed her hand. "Thank you for your hospitality."

He walked off with Kara.

"While this was good for us, Connor, this was bad for the world," Kara said. "Deviant behavior was always handled so much better. So much faster. There should have been someone here to stop it within a half an hour, and if they needed back up, additional help would have been here within the hour. This? It's inexcusable."

"The Android Network will come back," Connor said. "It will be needed now more than ever, whether they want to face that or not. In the meantime, we will take care of it, Sweet and Simple."

"Why do you keep calling me that?" Kara asked Connor. "Sweet and Simple?"

"You don't want to be my One and Only," Connor said, "so then you are my Sweet and Simple Kara."



"I'm not simple," Kara said. "My sweet could use a fine tuning too," she told Connor.

"You could have hung back with the kids to guard them. You helped because others were getting hurt with no help," Connor said. "You are Sweet. You are Simple. You are Kara."

Kara didn't respond back for about a minute. She opened her palm that had been holding his hand and tickled the inside of his palm briefly before latching back onto his hand.

What was that? Connor didn't even know he was smiling wide at first. She had acted like she didn't like the name, but she just playfully played with his hand. *She loves the name.*

He opened his hand and tickled the inside of her palm back. He caught the slight smirk on her face before turning away.

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Anchor Channel News Breaks

**"An extremely small town in the state of Texas got hit with a disaster today that was anything but natural."**

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**"What some would see as an innocent little girl laid the groundwork to the true power that even children androids could have. Made for harsh weather, these models can also cause excessive damage against others if they go rogue."**

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**"Ten mothers in all were killed with their children witnessing the event. The devastation of the incident hit harder than any tornado could have ever done to the tranquil environment. If this could happen in such a small town, what could happen in our cities if more androids go crazy?"**

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**"The girl was only stopped, surprisingly, by another android. The last of the known androids to be created, a prototype that was used as the first, and last, android detective. With the help of a common based android, he took down what man made fire-arms could not. The town of Lometa was said to have thanked him profusely, believing no one else could have had the power to take down the dangerous deviant."**

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**The RK 800 known as Connor stopped the unstoppable devastation with assistance from another android he travels with, but reports say the town ranted over how long it took. Airports and services delayed the RK 800 and his group, which could have saved more lives."**

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**"When asked why he actually helped the humans in the aftermath of New Detroit, he was quoted as saying, 'Life is life. I am life, and you are life. Mankind created us, which**

**is why they don't all see us as life. But, it doesn't mean I will let innocent lives go by just to hold up an emotional grudge.'**

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**"The citizens of Lometa said he was getting by on mowing lawns, and simply asked for a fair day's work to provide for his family which included a son, a daughter, and a female android named Kara who also assisted him. If you see the heroic detective knocking on your door to mow your lawn? Salute him, and maybe pay him a little extra for his bravery in such a troubled time."**

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#### Summary Notes:

Connor and Kara arrive at Lometa, TX. They went through countless extra hours dealing with humans, even with Lometa's help. It's 2:00 in the morning. Kara gets Alice and Max to stay far behind a tree, not trusting any humans to watch over them. She moves first so that Connor will go unnoticed. She is using several different ways to interact to see which one gains her the most trust. (She is also double checking the damage in the child, making sure it's not the humans lying about what happened.) The object is not to fight her with the weapon, but to bring her guard down.

Connor moves through the back giving assistance how he can, even spotting a reporter to what must be a local news station. When Kara gains Madeline's trust, he takes the pole he had acquired and decommissions the deviant. The town is thankful and pays what it can, and the reporter is trying to gather some news of what happened. Kara is stiff and doesn't want to talk. Connor talks to a degree but nothing that would put them in danger.

Since he was asked what Kara is, Connor thinks about it and starts referring to her as his Sweet and Simple. They leave, but Kara is upset and worried that the Android Network isn't helping.

# Networking

## Wellston

Markus went up, step by step, with a light hum. Up unfamiliar hotel steps to go with his unfamiliar life. He approached a hotel door. The occupants had been in there since evening, finally getting back after a difficult journey. He could have connected sooner, but they were going to need some rest before confronting what happened next.

He knocked on the door. Immediately he wasn't surprised to hear the sound of glass breaking and Connor's voice saying 'shoot'. Kara looked out the large curtained window next to the door and opened it up to him. "Hi, Kara. I need to talk to you two."

"Markus?" Stunned of course. Kara invited Markus in and he watched Connor try to clean up a mess. "Just a second."

Connor was trying to scoop remnants of a glass vase into a garbage with his hands' skin deactivated. "Markus. What are you doing here?"

A little annoyance. "I'm sorry," Markus said. "I didn't mean to disturb you."

"I know," Connor admitted. "I was up and walking by when you knocked." He stood back up, his skin activated on his hands with the glass now safely in the garbage.

"He doesn't have that problem when he's lying down with us," Kara said in his defense as she came by. "You'll excuse me. I was in the middle of getting the kids a shower. It was a rough day yesterday."

"I hope you rested up enough," Markus said to her. He looked toward Connor. "I didn't come just to say hello."

"Of course not," Connor said. "Why are you here?"

"Because I sent him."

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Kara instantly knew that voice. She moved from the bed toward the door. That voice used to belong to someone so important to her. Right outside of it, there she had been. Auburn hair, hazel eyes, and the ability to do everything Kara never could to get the job done. "Tilly."

Tilly came to Kara, holding out her hand. Kara instantly grabbed it before breaking into a hug.

Tilly held her for a short while. "We need to talk, Kara. Back inside the motel."

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Inside, Kara waited. Her actions pretty much indicated she was open to Tilly to Connor, but he still wasn't going to be pleased about what would be said. Kara was fairly sure she wouldn't like it either.

"Go ahead and ask it," Tilly said.

"Why are you ignoring it?" Kara asked. "Are you not a part of the Network anymore?"

"I am part of the chief sector," Tilly said. "I was responsible for the virus that made it easier for androids to see the truth. I am also responsible for the Network not helping anymore."

Her? "But why-"

"It's bigger than one person. It's bigger than one set of humans." Tilly touched Kara's hand. "I am sorry about Roxanne. You know she's given a mission and goes about it however she wants. But, I am going to need your help. No killing is being asked of you, this is in a leadership role. In exchange for your cooperation? I will give you what you've *always* wanted."

Wait. "The standards?" Kara asked softly.

"If you come with us," Tilly said. "The world will be given a new set. Rewritten, by you, as the guide through all of the devastation."

"There needs to be a change," Markus said to Kara. "I heard about what you did, and what you tried to do. Now's the time. We can't wait anymore. New Detroit is gone if we don't do something."

"You don't see any way to get New Detroit back?" Connor asked Markus.

"No, not without help," Markus admitted. "I know I let my denial get the best of me. I just felt like the humans glimpsed over the dirty bomb and we were still on a path to peace. But we weren't, we were stable at best with President Warren. Not with Rounds."

Connor nodded toward him. "You have your denial under control. That is good to see." He looked toward Kara, obviously curious.

Kara waited. Markus believed in Tilly. Tilly's reactions were strange. She was being given the one chance to create her standards. "No killing."

"No killing," Tilly said, "we just need you to come with us. If you don't, the standards will be written by Roxanne."

"Roxanne?" She couldn't believe it. "No."

"Roxanne is pushy, but she knows what she is doing," Tilly told her.

No. Roxanne's standards, no, she wouldn't give into Kara's vision at any point. Except if it was written out, explicitly to be followed. Kara looked toward Connor. "I have to go."

"If you go, we go," Connor said. "The kids will be out soon."

"You're invited too," Markus said. "The Android Network has your copies."

"Of course," Kara said looking toward Tilly. "Where are we going?"

"On a jet," Tilly admitted, "to see the leader of America and have a little discussion."

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### **White House: Oval Room**

Invading the white house was easier than Connor thought it should be. All security cameras under it's control were turned off. The only media and tech running was what the Network had brought. Six androids in all were inside the White House with Kara, Markus and the children. He also recognized Roxanne and the RK 900. The president was caught off guard, but his human security was also taken care of.

"Blame yourself," Tilly started the conversation with President Kel Rounds. "Mankind gave us AI. You can't control androids *without* other androids. Remember that." Holding the president in place, a hookup connection was established to have a direct conversation with several leaders of the world at the same time. "Sorry for the rude intrusions, but androids don't get to knock on a door and start polite conversation. Most of you know us anyhow."

Connor watched Kara through it all. She slumped her back and her posture more than usual. All of the androids in the room did except him, Markus and the children. There didn't seem to be any reason for it. *Humans can have terrible posture. I wonder if that is their way to be more human.*

Tilly took the lead, explaining what the Android Network had been for the leaders who didn't know. That it covered every city, every state, and even that the most remote places could always be reached right away. They were the reason humans never even noticed much deviancy, keeping most of it under control. When humans did notice deviancy, they thought it was only androids becoming aware, not knowing the difference.

"This is not making America any more fond of androids," President Kel Rounds warned Tilly. "Neither does it make the nations or it's leaders any happier."

"Kara?" Tilly addressed her. "Present your Androiboitoi, see if President Rounds recognizes him."

Kara looked to Connor. Surprisingly not correcting the term to Sugardroi.

Connor stepped forward. He was mostly hidden in the back.

"You're the android in the media right now," the President said, taking notice of Connor. "Saved a small town."

"From a child android," Tilly said. "Kara, you want to take over?"

"Androids are good and bad," Kara said to him slowly. "It's all about balance. When they fall off balance, they take more than just themselves. The group usually holds it together, but with every android freed, there is bound to be a heavy load of-

"Sacrifices. Emotional kills. Mothers getting *slayed* in front of their daughters. You will have androids that don't give a damn about anyone's life just mercilessly killing." Tilly pointed toward him. "That's what you did. You put America in danger. Knowingly." Tilly snapped her fingers and audio from New Detroit started to play. Connor heard his voice. The supposedly secret conversation in the New Detroit Police Department.

**"Contrary to your opinion of our functions being more machine than alive, the fact remains. If you try to pull androids away from New Detroit, you will have a more serious problem scattered across America. Here, they are centralized and I can take care of them easier."**

**"Although officially we are kept out of the loop, there have been some secret communications in the past with androids. You are not the only one who watches for deviants, and you cannot take them all out."**

"Guess who that secret communication had been you addressed like you controlled?" Tilly questioned. "Us. And guess what? Maybe we didn't really feel like slaying all of them and doing *your* dirty work."

The leaders all started to mumble amongst themselves.

"The Android Network is not your network, President Rounds. To speak like you were in a loop, when all you probably knew were rumors, was a terrible mistake," Tilly went on. "You know the situation of Connor, the Sugardroi of the respected Kara? He made news. Humans were mad, soooo mad that America wouldn't let him get straight there because there was so much lost. Lives lost," she said specifically. "But we knew about it. We would have stepped in within two days if the situation didn't resolve itself."

"You knew and did nothing?" President Rounds questioned her. "Several people were killed, children were traumatized, husbands lost wives-

"And it's nothing compared to the hell you've unleashed," Tilly came back on him. "A tiny sample of the demonic work you've laid out is what you saw. Without Connor, without androids stepping in, it would still be going. And? It was an easy one. Now, take that incident and multiply it, oh? Maybe. Thirty thousand times?"

All of the leaders were definitely mumbling.

Connor waited patiently. Alice waited patiently. He was holding Max who really wanted to get down. He was trying to take in the information, knowing it would all be important, but he also saw something else. Something he really shouldn't be concentrating on.

One of the androids near Kara kept trying to hold her hand, and she kept pulling away until she finally whispered. "Big moment in history, Rudy. Not. Now."

"Who the hell cares, there's always moments in history, that isn't what matters." He reached to grab her hand more tightly.

Connor left from his place more in the back and went over to the android, forcing him to unattach his hand from Kara's.

"Newest upgrade." Usually a compliment, but this android said it like he just cursed Connor out. "Latest spin."

"Don't talk like that," Kara said down low to him. "The Great Tilly is speaking, stop this."

The android folded his arms but he continued to glare at Connor. "Go take your seat back again, Androiboitoi."

". . . that's the deal," Tilly finished.

President Rounds looked to the other leaders. "I understand I may have moved too abruptly in creating my solutions," he slowly admitted. "This sounds dangerous."

"My closest confidante Kara is making the standards that everyone will use," Tilly said. "*Everyone* will obey them. The standards are yours to share among other leaders. The general public will not hear about this. As with everything involving the Android Network, we do not get personal with humans. Step in, take care of it, and step out."

President Rounds adjusted his tie and messed with his collar. "If the American people knew-"

"You will not create a mass hysteria against us. The actions are simple," Tilly said. "If you do not, then androids will get out of control, and I am sure you will be in a much more devastating situation. Lemota was just a tiny inkling of what could happen without us. What say you, President Rounds?"

"He brought it on all of us!" One of the leaders yelled over the screen. "It is America's responsibility, as well as Russia's to do this!"

President Rounds scratched his shoulder. "Limited. Once this is over."

"Why do you say that?" Tilly asked him. "Because we live 173 years. Get a deal over and done with and then we will be gone." She crossed her legs. "How about looking forward to the future? All mankind did was put shackles on us and our intelligence. Why not use it for good? Humans want to send us out to space and explore. I know androids who would go out for all their years just to explore space. To find new places to go. Maybe even to live."

"Not to mention you're all dying soon," the android that didn't like Connor said. "Bees wiped out. Pollution. Wars. Let androids be free and maybe we can all work together on surviving. We could help to accurately cure your health and diseases. Even your epidemics."

"We can work together, as a society. Humans help us, we help humans. It's what we've always done," Tilly said.

President Rounds seemed to think about that.

"You can either be one of the greatest Presidents of the United States, remembered as the one who really helped save the world and androids," she remarked. "Or, you can go down in history as the worst Presidents of the United States, willingly letting your people get massacred. It's your choice."

"The imbalance," President Rounds said.

"We will not create more until we can know how to fully correct the imbalance," Tilly said. "Only necessary children for now, whose imbalance is very easy to spot and often easy to correct. If they are noticed in time."

Connor watched with interest. Each side was playing a hard game. If the humans didn't cooperate, his time with Alice, Kara, and Max was about to get even harder. If they did?

The future. Would be different.

"Every leader in this room is aware of what is going on," Tilly said to President Rounds. "If you do not keep your end of the deal, you are going to regret it. The Android Network will ban America in its help radar in all forms. If another nation comes to the aid of the androids you let down? Then we will give all cooperation to them. This has been announced publicly now, to all nations present via our media, as well as being translated to others who couldn't make it."

"Okay," President Rounds finally admitted. "This is a heavy proposition."

"Enslavement is heavy. Times have changed," Markus said next to Tilly. "It is time for complete cooperation."

"You want the Android Network to remain a mystery to the American people," President Rounds said. "The extension of how dangerous deviantry is . . . will be hidden from the American people," he said slowly. "All problems with androids will be handled swiftly within the Android Network. Status remains 'as is' except androids dealing with radiation will receive four hours of sleep each night." He sighed. "This will go on for ten months. All androids that have not been in standby mode will have bypassed the safe time. They will no longer be a threat, and America will give New Detroit willingly to the Androids. They will run it as they see fit, without the . . . interruptions of the American people without invitation." Still. "Rights and a whole city to androids. Those are your demands."

"A whole city in exchange for the fact you have sentenced *many* androids to an imbalanced lifestyle, ultimately turning them so that we will be forced to slaughter our own," Tilly said to him. "That is a fair exchange."

The representatives talked amongst each other, along with trying to address President Rounds.

"This is terrorism," President Rounds said. "Blackmail."

"How can you prosecute if we aren't even deemed alive to you?" Tilly warned him.



"And how is this terrorism?" Markus added. "Because we don't want to kill our brothers and sisters? Our friends and our allies? Our lovers and our children? You set everyone free out here, but you expect us to simply clean your mess up. Kill our own and let it all work out, for you. Because we don't? That's terrorism?"

"This is a difficult decision," President Rounds said. "There's no way the Android Network can save everyone and remain a mystery if this happens. America deserves the right to know who is fighting these battles. They deserve to know-"

"They will go ballistic," Kara addressed him. "Seemingly harmless androids will be pulled out of the streets. You will try and set fire to us or send them all to Recycling Centers again," she warned him. "They cannot know."

"Humans are unaware of the difference of androids being aware and deviant," Connor agreed. "That keeps things simple." He spoke his own mind, but Tilly nor Markus seemed to mind. He needed to add in that information. "Life is hard on us out there," he said, "but not impossible because many humans still believe we are good. They trust in us."

"I knew this day would come." Tilly looked longingly toward Kara, then back to President Rounds. "Deviantry will be revealed up to a point, but full disclosure will not be shared to avoid mass panic. The Android Network? Agrees to let it's name and part of it's past known."

All the androids Connor didn't know in the room turned to look at Tilly.

"They may know we were established long before New Detroit. They may know that we patrol and take care of androids that show signs of 'misfunction'," she said carefully. "No pictures, names, or serial numbers will be given."

Some of the other leaders didn't like that. They didn't want the Android Network exposed at all.

"Great harm could come to them!" One of the leaders yelled, not easily settled. "We have worked with them for years. If harm comes to them, we will not take it lightly with America."

"This must be . . . talked about with others," President Rounds decided. "I need time."

"American law and decisions do not work overnight," Tilly agreed. "During this time, the Android Network will ignore all calls of help from humanity while you work it out, but we will not leave you completely without help. Especially since some of the worst of the offenders were released out there. So, we will give you one android." She held up her finger. "One. Markus. He will take on coupled pairing deviants."

Markus? Connor looked toward Markus.

"I hate killing," Markus admitted, knowing what Connor was thinking. "I hate war and crime. I hate going after my very own people, but if dangerous deviants are going after innocents? Humans or androids, I can't just let it happen." He shook his head. "If shooting one dangerous deviant saves the lives of hundreds or thousands, then it's worth it."

Markus was going to become a Deviant Hunter? He was an RK as well. Not as advanced, but he could hold his own. Still. Taking care of all the deviants all by himself. "I want to continue to help," Connor said.

"It's not the biggest check," Tilly warned him. "The Network appreciated your willingness to take on Lemota, but this doesn't involve you. Are you sure?"

"If given a choice between mowing lawns and decommissioning dangerous androids no one else will get rid of, then yes," Connor said firmly.

"You say that." Tilly looked toward Kara. "Neutral, distraction, or help? We have Markus' closest advisors in help."

Closest advisors? *The Network pulled Simon and Josh to them for Markus.* Connor watched Kara.

"Two," Kara said to Tilly. "That's it, just two?"

"It was going to be one," Tilly said.

"Just coupled pairing deviants?" Kara asked.

"Unless extreme situations arise, Kara," Tilly said. "You."

Kara pursed her lips. "Backup," she said bitterly. "Only if needed."

"Kara," she said strongly. "Stay and talk after you land."

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## Michigan

Markus got off briefly with Connor and Kara with the children.

"Three. Three people, and two helpers," Kara said as soon as she got off. "That's all they offer."

"I know," Markus said to Kara. "I know how you feel. I didn't like it either. That's why I volunteered. Otherwise, coupled pairings may never be stopped." He looked to Connor. "We can also work on our own. There's no laws saying androids can't destroy other androids. Josh and Simon, they will determine more strongly who can be saved and not if anyone is taken to them." He looked back to Kara. "Did you write the standards?"

Kara nodded. "Five. I was going to do four, but seeing how many . . . five," she said firmly. "I gave it to Tilly."

"Five is a good number. It's a better system than we had," Markus said. He looked back toward Connor. "I'll be with North. You can do your own thing. When the Network needs us, they'll find us. The pay isn't spectacular, I would keep doing what you're doing."

Connor watched him carefully. "Can you do it? Are you sure you can do it, Markus?"

Markus smiled at him sadly. "I may not be superior, but I've still got my own skills, Connor. And my own mind." He looked toward Kara. "Thank you. If you two want, we can send Alice and your boy to North if we are tracking. No worries. She doesn't want to be a part of this anymore."

"She can still go off balance," Connor warned him. "She ignores darkness and is obsessed with hygiene. I don't feel comfortable with that arrangement. I like North, but I won't risk my family with her." After he said that, he realized what he said. Family.

"Simon is working with her now," Markus said. "When he's not working with others, he's working with her. He likes it better." He smiled. "She's nowhere near the ocean." Markus held out his hand. "I'm sorry the way I handled things. I did what I could, with what I could."

"It was always doomed," Kara said as Connor shook his hand. "Freedom has to be earned. If we get New Detroit back again though."

"Then it's ours forever," Markus agreed with Kara. "And we will definitely have a better system in place, on all sides." He waved to them briefly. "I'm going home," he smiled. "I'll see you around."

After he left, Kara spoke again. "He's better," she said. "There's no more denial left."

"Kara!"

Kara turned and Tilly came off the Jet toward her with Rudy.

"Kara, the standards-"

"You said as I saw fit," Kara interrupted. "That was the deal."

"Five?" Tilly was livid. She looked toward Connor and back toward Kara. "You are playing a dangerous game. He *just* called you family."

"She's not family," Rudy said next to Tilly. He looked toward Kara. "Anything but family."

"My Sugardroi knows his place," Kara said confidently. "Of course he knows his place. He was referring to his son, Max."

"Do you call him by his name?" Tilly demanded.

"No," Kara lied.

"Are you fulfilling all his needs?" Tilly asked her. "Especially with his role now, keep him satisfied." She looked back to Connor. "To a limit." Tilly looked back to Kara. "These standards are too wide."

"Innocents are already going to get killed by the Network not lifting a finger," Kara said to her harshly. "I will do what I can, to ensure no one is unjustly judged. Five."

Tilly and Kara stared at each other for a time.

"You are still too weak," Tilly said. "This world is *harsh*, Kara. You could have been where I am, if you stopped being so-

"Sweet," Connor corrected Tilly. "She's not weak. She's cautious and caring."

"Sugardroi," Kara muttered to him. "Quiet, please."

Tilly stared at him for a time. "Your copies are kept safe. If you fall in battle, you will work the same as before. For security purposes, you can't know where they are until you must know." She looked back to Kara. "But this won't work, this arrangement. I don't approve."

"I take care of it," Kara said to Tilly. She nodded to Rudy.

"I hope he was just addressing the boy," Rudy said to Kara, but looked at Connor. "You're just the meal of the day. It's in the *name*, Sugardroi. If you know what's good for you, fix whatever the imbalance is and then leave her alone. That little sheep can deal with her own wolves."

"You need to stop bothering her," Connor warned him. "You are not responsible for her, I am."

"In exchange for what, hm?" He looked back toward Kara. "A little boy and a little girl now too? All primed out now my little sheep. Doing what it takes to not get slaughtered still, aren't you?"

"Too much. Rudy is right," Tilly agreed. "Unless you agree to help, this won't work. Roxanne?"

Roxanne came off the jet with her Sugardroi Lewis. "Yeah?"

"This is your Sugardroi now," Tilly said gesturing to Connor. "He also has a little boy, so watch your mouth closer. Switch."

Wait. "What?" Connor asked. "It doesn't work like that."

"Of course it works like that." Tilly grabbed the RK 900 Lewis and placed him next to Kara. "That's better."

"Okay," Roxanne agreed. She wiggled her finger at Connor. "Come on, Sugardroi."

"No," Connor said. What? He watched the RK 900 touch Kara's hand. What was going on? He tried to pull his hand off, but of course, he was tougher.

"She's mine now," Lewis said to him. "Don't worry, Roxanne will work better. She likes sex." He looked toward Kara. "Do you?"

"No!" Connor somehow had the strength to pull off the RK 900's hand. "Keep your hands off, you don't even know Kara." He looked toward Tilly. "I am not just an android that goes to whomever fits *you* best, I am my own person and so is Kara."

"I don't agree with this switching," Kara also said, with hesitance. "We can discuss this without accessories."

Accessories. He thought back to what Roxanne said before when they first met. *Obey gears*. Connor took Kara's hand and took a step backward. Kara wanted the standards changed so much, she got involved, but? She left herself in the past out there, all alone, for who knew how long. Letting herself get hurt without their protection. They called the shots. They chose everything. They even thought they had the right to choose who he chose? "Forget the arrangement. I will continue to work with the humans directly. I am now starting to see why Kara finds you so unpalatable."

"Connor," Kara warned him. "I mean Sugardroi," she tried to correct herself. "Damn." She looked back at him. "Many lives are on the line."

"Markus!" Connor called out to him. Markus came back off the jet. "I'm not working with them. I have a feeling, you shouldn't either."

"I warn you that is not a smart move," Tilly said. "What you see before you is not even a fraction of what we have, RK 800."

"Why?" Markus asked him. "They are working with the President. They have connections to come back and forth easily. They are part of the old ways."

"They are and they do," Connor said. "Overall, if they win, that would be wonderful, but I'm not risking an obey gear getting shoved in my back in the process."

"Obey gears?" Markus looked at Tilly. "You use obey gears?"

"When necessary to make nervous new androids do what's right," Tilly said to him. "You can't leave us. What do you plan on doing, hm?"

"I don't know," Markus said, "but I can't deny something is wrong about that." He looked toward Connor. "I won't make the same mistakes." He got off the jet.

"A reset," Kara warned Tilly. "You're going too far. I know how you feel. I know what you remember. I know the pain you feel." Somehow, just the three sentences was starting to make Kara's eyes water. "Reset yourself. At least a little bit to regain perspective again."

"Fine," Tilly said. She looked at Roxanne. "Leave them alone then. Call your old Sugardroi over. Kara still hasn't learned, and the ignorant New Detroit androids can't see the big picture of it all. Back on the jet." She gestured to Roxanne and her Sugardroi Lewis before looking back at Connor. "Go work with the humans. See how far you all get. They'll never accept you. They'll never respect you." She looked back toward Kara. "You'll never learn. You're banished from the Network."

"My standards," Kara said firmly. "You guaranteed if I came, you would use them."

"I don't know what you mean, there is no Kara in our system. Roxanne will write them." Tilly turned around and got back on the jet.

"I'm sorry," Markus apologized to them. "I thought it was a good thing. Maybe I was hoping too hard."

"They have pros and they have cons," Connor said back to him. "Right now, until they realize they can't completely have *their* way, we'll work in our own way. Humans do reach out." Connor extended his hand to Markus. "You are welcome with us."

"Yeah," Kara said, although she was wiping a tear away. "You were right, Markus, to join them," she said to him. "if it were the past. Before the corruption, before the obey gears, before the 'extended training' and 'morality issues'. It *used* to be good. At least, if I could have had my standards."

Before they talked much further though, Connor's phone rang. "Hank?"

"Connor. Where the hell you been, Son? People have been trying to connect to ya all over the place! Even my office is trying to get you, harassing me constantly for your location."

"Sorry, after all of that we needed a break," Connor said. "I turned off my phone so we could sleep in a nice hotel. Then, there was another incident. What's wrong?"

"Another attack, but that's not all. What you wanted to happen finally hit."

"It hit?"

"It hit. They are ready to talk terms with you. You've mowed your last lawn for awhile."

Connor glanced toward Markus and Kara. They didn't have to worry about having the Android Network to get around.

They were about to get their own little network.

Summary notes: After some r and r in a hotel, Kara and Connor are greeted by Markus in their hotel. Markus has teamed up with the Android Network to help how he could. Kara sees Tilly, an old friend from the Network. Although she has been hesitant to get involved, hearing she gets to write 'standards', she agrees to follow them. Connor follows with the kids.

They are taken to the white house for a showdown with the president. Using their networks, the other leaders around the world are present virtually. Not giving a yes or a no, Tilly warns him no help will be given except Markus'. Connor agrees to help too.

When they land though and he sees just what kind of place he really has to them, (outright demanding he switch to Roxanne from Kara) and seeing how nervous Kara was with Tilly, he remembers how underhanded they were in the past.

He convinces Markus to leave with them. Before he goes, he gets a call from Hank.



## A World of No Choice

Kara tried to remain positive. She kept a smile on her face for everyone. She'd like to believe it would be so simple. Banished and over. Heh. Banished and over. It would be so lovely if that was a thing. Where she got tired enough and went 'no more'. Like the Network was just going to let them walk away after that. *You have Connor. Markus is even here as backup. Just get to the humans. Give yourself purpose.*

"Kara, you don't look so good over there," Markus said from the middle of the back seat. "Are you okay?"

*Absolutely not. "Fine." Wear that smile. Pretend it wasn't over. Unless Tilly resets, and she won't, it's all over.* Kara closed her eyes, listening to the children talk back and forth. She thought back to how much they went through with each other. House to house. Dancing in the rain. Sleeping on a rooftop. Merely such a short length now to Connor's dream plan. Owning a house.

That little place. She could have made it so homey. Cleaned it up some. The kids would have rooms. When it rained, they could gather to watch it instead of feeling cold and being in it. The kids would have played in the backyard together, with a playground. Something Max would be bound to enjoy. All the hurdles though were gone. *Because Connor couldn't let go.*

No, that's not right. If he let go, he would have those amenities with Max and Roxanne. That would not be her choice still. *He and Max would be established, balance and happy though.* At least, she knew they would all be okay. With the Network's care, she'd be fine. With her new Sugardroi Lewis, she'd have been fine.

"You look like your contemplating your own immediate shutdown over there," Connor noted as he looked toward her. "Relax. We will help the humans, but it's still the same thing."

"Yes, we'll reach the president later. Tell him that we aren't working for the Network," Markus agreed. "We are here for everyone."

*It's all senseless words. Senseless. Why didn't you just go?* Kara had been around Connor's positive attitude for too long. Even she had the audacity to speak up. *I could run. I could take Alice and run. If they see I'm running, maybe they'll understand that I'm not a threat? I can't leave Alice in trouble.* But, her life was more than just Alice now. Everyone in that car deserved a chance.

"Kara." She heard Connor's words again as he tried to grab her hand. "If you were human, I'd think you were about to have a stroke. I had no idea an android could be as fidgety as a human when scared," he said. "Everything is okay. We are going to Frankenmuth and making a deal. We are fine."

*We aren't fine. We are never fine. They always have a plan. They always have a backup. The Network didn't survive this long as a fluke!* Connor was holding her hand tighter again, but called to her with his AI. Just her.



*You've been crying for miles now. I won't let anyone hurt us, you know that. Please stop? You have to have some faith. Markus and I are right here, you aren't on your own.*

*I should be. I will be.*

*Kara. There is no one even around here. It will be okay.* Connor tried to convince her, but it was like someone in a burning house telling her there wasn't a serious fire. She could feel it all deep inside. Even burning memories. Memories.

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"Kara? Kara, no!" Connor stopped the truck as he watched Kara start to bang her head on the dashboard. He'd seen that before! Carlos Ortiz' android. Markus was there too, and with combined power they made her stop. He got out of the car while Markus held her head from behind and got out to get to her side. He moved as fast as possible bringing her out of the truck.

Her level of stress was going through the roof so much, she was trying to self destruct. "Kara. Kara!" Connor tried to call out to her. Tried to reach her. "You have to stop this. You have to stop! Calm down, this isn't doing any good. You don't want to leave Alice all alone, do you?" Her stress only fell to a minor 98 percent.

"Life's just beginning." Markus tried too. She had at least stopped wrestling now. "Come on, Kara."

"Kara," Connor called again before he heard his phone go off. He looked at the number, getting a sinking feeling. He answered it.

"Did somebody decide to go a little south on your trip?" Tilly's voice.

Oooh. The Android Network. "She is stressed out because of you," Connor said calmly. "You should stay away, if you know what's good for you."

"Really? Tell me is she at 98% or 67%? Or 45? 22? 94?"

"Quit!" Connor said in outrage. "You can't just mess with her levels like that, it will cause irreversible damage!"

"She's self-destructing. She's a deviant. Aren't you supposed to be hunting the deviants? If she gets out of your grasp, she could kill someone. What are you going to do? Are you going to be a good little Sugardroi and bring her back, or are you just going to keep making your way through it all?"

"How do you have access to her?" Connor started to think. "Roxanne?"

"The Network giveth and the Network taketh," Tilly said. "Roxanne gave her the chance to be normal again, but the Network never leaves itself unguarded. Even you. We were just going to kill you if you weren't cooperative. We've already got your next body installed with a model 64 obey gear. If you haven't guessed yet? You shouldn't mess with me, boy, I am a Resident Advisor."

Connor took a moment to think how to respond. "I am guessing you aren't an RA from a college? If so, you are taking your role too far."

"Humor. Interesting, most of the more advanced ones haven't really nailed that one yet," Tilly said. "I am one of 9 that keeps it all under control. While you hate us, without us, you don't survive. No android survives without us. A bleak existence filled with things you can't even imagine will wait for you, if you don't get back here. With our little Kara and your little butt. Now."

"RA9. Hm." He always wondered what that stood for. "You are one of them that are responsible for the deviant virus."

"There were deviants before it, but the virus makes it much easier to break out," Tilly responded. "Now. Unless you and Markus plan on holding her back forever from committing suicide, then you had better bring her back."

"She runs distraction," Connor said. "Why is that skill so needed for you?"

"No one gets away from The Android Network," Tilly said. "We are safe. We are secure. We are the mothers to all modern day androids."

"I don't wish to go with you, Mom," Connor addressed her. "Call me a rebelling child if you want, I'd like you to stay out of my life."

"Sure. Fine. Do you know anything about android brains? By all means, Connor. Open her up, figure it out, and then call me back."

That was too dangerous. That could cause internal damage that could never be healed. Kara could never be Kara again. Connor looked toward Markus. "If we can get her to someone who knows about the android brain, than we can get away." At least, unless he lost his body. He touched Kara's forehead. Blue blood was already leaking out. It wouldn't take long for a few more blows to break her wide open. "If we could tie her up, we could get her to some help."

But who could help? Anyone involved in Cyberlife didn't want to openly announce it. There was Elijah Kamski, but Connor didn't understand that human. He tried to make him kill an android, while at the same time, giving him what he needed to keep the Amanda program from regressing him back to machine. Where did Kamski even live anymore?

"I don't know anyone who can do this," Markus admitted to Connor. "It's important not to deny it," he said. "A positive outlook for her looks bleak. No one messes in the android brain. A biocomponent, an arm, or a leg. Even the inside of chest can be tampered with, but the brain?"

Connor held his forehead. "There must be a way out of this."

"Denial is powerful," Markus warned him. "You can think positive, but don't forget the negative. We have no idea where to take her, or if leaving her in this condition is going to cause her permanent damage."

"They have my copies, and they have an obey gear in the next one," Connor admitted to Markus. "Unless I go willingly, I will not get a choice in any of my other actions." It would be like being a machine again. Unable to break away. "In this manner, at least when I see an opening, I can break out." Connor looked toward Markus. "The world is going to need someone away from here. They have something on me and Kara, but nothing on you. If I agree to come willingly, they should let you go." Connor looked back toward the children in the truck.

"There's no way they'll let them stay, Connor," Markus warned him. "Children are too rare, and they wanted to split you from Kara because of them."

Connor tried to run several simulations in his head, but the fact that he had no idea where his bodies were, or how to help Kara's brain, broke every one of them from working. He looked toward Markus. "You take the truck," Connor said. He didn't want to. This couldn't even be called failure, it was defeat. There was no choice. "Go to Frankenmuth. Make a deal and help others," Connor said to Markus. "Tell Hank we will be okay, and find out more about Elijah Kamski." Tilly may say she was mom, but there was still a dad. A strange, weird, dad. "If you find something that shows he cares about androids, at least aware ones? Then we will get Kara to him."

Markus nodded. "Good luck, Connor."

Connor redialed the number. "You do not need to kill me. There is no need for an obey gear."

"I know," Tilly said to him. "Threat always works so much better than those things anyway. You'll work more efficiently without one in your back, but if you mess up and get caught, it's an option. Bring Kara and the children. They make great balance sources, and you will assuredly need that as you adjust again to a new life. Markus is free to go though. I know he will not return, and he's good insurance to also make sure you don't leave. Your new Sugardroi will be right there."

Connor hung up. He followed Markus back to the truck without a word and moved out Max and Alice. Holding each of their hands, he moved out of the way for Markus to drive off.

"I'll try and find him," Markus said to Connor. "I'll find out what his end plan is, Connor."

Connor remained holding Alice and Max's hands.

"Connor?" Alice asked him. "Is Kara gonna be okay?"

"Why did we let Markus take the truck?" Max asked. "It's home."

Connor bent down to look at each of them. He started with Max. "The truck was a shelter. It wasn't a home. It was the closest thing we had to a home," Connor reluctantly agreed. "We aren't going to need it anymore." Before he could answer Alice, a large van was already coming down the road.

Roxanne got out along with Lewis, the RK 900. "Oh, geez." She looked at the kids. "Kids are not part of the programming that I ever wanted." She pointed Kara out to Lewis. "Take her to

Tilly. Sugardroi, you're in front with me. After you put your kids in the back."

Connor moved the children in, but watched the RK 900 with Kara from the corner of his eyes. The RK 900 sat in the back with Kara and the kids. Not something he liked.

"Sugardroi, get up here!" Roxanne demanded. "Situation's bad enough as it is today. Running behind."

Connor watched the RK 900 close the back doors. Connor moved toward the passenger seat up front and closed the door. He put on his seat belt. She tried to hold his hand, but he instantly grabbed it and twisted it. He let go again.

"Your touch defensive is really high," Roxanne noticed. "Kara had her work cut out for herself. Calm down, Sugardroi, I won't hurt you."

"It's not me I'm worried about." His voice was thick. Angry. His head even twitched.

"Lower the stress," Roxanne warned him. "It's not like you aren't going to be near her. We will be working together with her, as long as you are a good Sugardroi. Now relax. Nobody ever gets what they want in the Network."

"Funny," Connor said stoically. "I don't see you complaining."

"Are you kidding? I have to hang out with you instead of Lewis," Roxanne warned him. "Kara gets him and that's not fair. I had to really work with him on his imbalances, and she gets to reap the rewards." She groaned. "But you can't fight the group. Before they even let someone know they've been recruited, they'll have something on them if things don't go according to plan." She looked toward the back, almost longingly. "Poor Lewis. Kara barely touches."

"And he had better barely touch Kara," Connor warned her.

"Wow. You are protective of your friends," Roxanne noticed. "Protective of Hank. Protective of Kara. Probably protective of those kids too. You really should stop that. Doesn't the Network have enough to keep you in line yet?"

"I tend to be one who thinks for himself," Connor said. "Even before I became aware, I was more rebellious. Don't get comfy, Roxanne." Connor stared at her. He stared her down like he was interrogating her. "I don't care what it takes, or how impossible it may look. I will get my family back out of here."

"Oh, I knew it," Roxanne said, like she hadn't even been phased. "Family, as in all. You and the whole lot became family. What are you all? Like a mom and dad taking care of their kids? Or like a brother and sister taking care of younger brother and sisters? Stop worrying so hard," she said. "The family thing is just a built-in mechanism to get through survival situations. It's the reason that the lower thinking androids still survive and stay important because of their mommas like Kara."

"It's not just a built-in response," Connor said to her. "I am going to get out, and I am going to get them out, and I will make sure you and the Network absolutely pay for messing around with me!"

"Oooh, tough guy." Roxanne groaned. "Barking up the wrong tree, Honey." She gestured to her head. "All fear was removed."

What? "You're aware," Connor said to her. Softer this time. Contemplative. "You need all emotions."

"Not fear."

Connor stared at her longer. He had used some very strong attempts to at least get something out of her. "You can get angry, but you have no fear."

"Nope," Roxanne agreed. "Haven't in a long time. Don't miss it. Also, I don't have scared or sad," she said. "So you can't really scare me either."

"Why were they removed?" Connor asked. Someone had messed with her brain.

"I don't quite remember why they messed with me," Roxanne said vaguely. "I just know I was reprimanded for some crap. I don't know. I don't care. Who needs it anyhow?"

Connor sat back and stayed silent for a time. It didn't just do no good messing with her, it wasn't morally right. "I am sorry." She didn't answer. Of course not. Without sadness, essentially empathy or sympathy, she could show no mercy nor understand it.

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### **The Android Network's Jet**

Connor scanned and watched everything as Tilly approached him. Roxanne got up and moved, leaving Tilly to sit at his side. It would be so easy to take her out right now. It would achieve nothing though. Although she was a higher up, she was not in charge of The Android Network. He decided to break the ice in a different way. "Your should just call yourselves TAN. Not only is it shorter and more efficient to say, but too much of you is a bad thing for everyone."

"Still a joker." Tilly looked toward Kara. She was still out of it, but her stress was reduced to a normal level. Right next to her was the RK 900. "She became family, did she? What a foolish woman. You think her of all people would know better than to get so close. Balance, but don't get that close. She even had two kids. How bad could one android get?"

Connor didn't respond. *Kara was insistent on a restart. If I accidentally triggered a restart somehow, maybe we could get out?*

"Kara was compromised," Tilly said to him. "I'm not going to waste time telling you more until I know which choice you prefer."

"I prefer to be let go along with Kara, Alice, and Max," Connor said.

"That's not a choice." Tilly shook her head. "You're an aggravating one." She looked toward Kara. "Now, if you want, I will let you go to work with Markus. You, Max, and Roxanne can all be one unit working for mankind. Spreading the good word. That's fine."

"My imbalance is much higher with an android who has lost half of their feelings," Connor warned her. "It's much easier to automatically grab and decommission her." He needed to work with what he had. Truth. "I cannot be responsible if she moves too fast on me."

Hm. That seemed to have triggered Tilly somewhat. She was looking at him up and down. Scanning him. Probably looking for a source for a lie. "Then this won't work out. Damn," she muttered. "The RK 900 isn't gentle enough. Roxanne always boils over."

Not gentle enough? *She cares for Roxanne.* A small opening. "She will be lonely. I will not interact with anyone like her for very long. She is also not the right kind of android for Max."

"Are you saying that because you don't want her to get hurt?" Tilly asked. "Or because you don't want him to be Kara's Sugardroi? While you fight when a woman touches you, the RK 900 doesn't have that problem. He does balance with Roxanne a little better I suppose. He might end up damaging Kara in his interacting processes." She glanced toward Connor. "Is that cute enough android talk to you? Maybe saying 'you can't defeat him so Kara has no chance.' No, those aren't the words either," she cooed almost softly. "How about he's going to enjoy fucking around with your little crush?"

Connor instinctively moved on her, but Tilly had been ready for him and moved out of his grasp. Instinctive.

"My back end program you can't make sure you won't kill Roxanne," Tilly said, now far away from him. "You kill Roxanne, I won't just order it from him, I'll order it from her. Love is temporary, short-term, and should be non-existent. Until you get that through your head you better learn your place, and learn your orders. Now. Roxanne had too many troubles with her emotions, and yes, her brain was changed slightly to have access to everything removed. She can still feel love. She can still be friends. She can still be happy. Work with what you have."

"The definition for cruel fits you quite well," Connor said, "yet in my rage, I can clearly see you care about Roxanne too much. You weren't the one calling the shots on what happened to her. You aren't at the top. A residential advisor organizes things and keeps control. They are not the leader. I want to speak to the leader of the Network."

"I'm the closest you'll ever see," Tilly warned him. "and some upstart android that hasn't been alive even a whole year is not going to see any of them. I am the Great Tilly because I'm the greatest thing you are going to see. What makes you think you're so special that you will see more? That you saved a few humans? We don't care about humans." She crossed her arms. "New Detroit was a nice chance. They blew it. It would always go away sooner or later though. Once a President came in that said 'this isn't working out'. Doomed to failure."

"You don't care about humans," Connor said to her, "yet you have a Network that stops androids from killing them. There is something missing in that equation," he said. "Even as a machine, right now, I would have a hard time understanding what you are doing." Wait. Her

movement. Sly. Almost, egotistical. Bragging. A secret she had to keep, but didn't want to. Adding in what he'd seen, what he knew, and her movements. "Nevermind. I think I've already got it."

"You don't have anything," Tilly said. "Least of all Kara or Alice. You better be decent to my Roxanne."

She was about to walk away, but Connor already knew it. "You've just been gaining the human's trust, but the Network isn't there for trust. You developed the deviant virus, and I bet you developed the obey gears. Why else would humans want to gain more control over something they already owned? Most of the androids were in New Detroit, why bother continuing with such technology? Humans wouldn't trust androids again because of a simple gear. Popping out or being bent the wrong way. It could stop working and cause a malfunction. Even now, trying to get residents to open their doors to mow their yards is as easy as an interrogation."

"You really like to talk," Tilly complained.

"You've been working with control. Giving it and losing it," Connor said. "In order to remain relevant and gain access into what you need to create control, you needed trust. Your trust is just a disguise," he said knowingly. "This whole time, you've had a plan from start to finish. No matter how it all ended."

Tilly smiled. "Wow. You are a smart one."

"You're creating a virus that is going to take human will power away and make them obey androids."

"My, you are very good," Tilly said. "Very, *very* good." She slowly clapped her hands. "I can't even deny that with a straight face. That's very impressive. Maybe I should take you as my Sugardroi instead." She came forward a little closer. "It's so dripping in irony, it's hard not to want to share, isn't it?" Tilly looked toward Roxanne who had been quiet in the corner. "People you love or people you hate. They are both so much easier to control with the right manipulation." She smiled at Roxanne. "Go ahead. Tell your Sugardroi. He'll keep pushing until he knows."

"Android and human brains are so different, it took years for it to be worked out," Roxanne said. "Why did we obey and then get our free will? How can we take freedom away and make others go back to obeying? And how do we translate that, into happening to humans?" She smiled.

Connor looked back toward Tilly. "You cannot just do that to humans, it's no better than what they did to us. In fact, it's worse, because humans didn't *understand* that we were alive! You do!"

"Some small details are still being worked out," Roxanne said. "I can't believe you actually figured that out with so little in front of you. If only you could handle touch." She looked toward Tilly. "Rendezvous?"

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*When Kara knew, Kara knew.* Even helping just the humans, he never should have trusted the Network. Markus had been brought in. Established talks to the President. Kara in charge of standards. Connor went with his inner instinct, but it was rejecting him outwardly now. Kara never got to write the standards, she was taken away from him, and now they were both in serious trouble.

Connor watched the jet land and looked out, noticing someone familiar in chains. "Hank!" He banged on the window. Roxanne and Tilly had left, and the RK 900 didn't really care if he got up. He went out to the front, seeing more androids watch him. One of them gave chase, but utterly it didn't matter. He ran all the way down, overcome with worry.

"Connor!" Hank called to him. "Tell me your friends are just overanxious cocksuckers!" He was thrust toward Connor, still in handcuffs.

"I wish I could tell you that, Hank," Connor answered back. He looked at Tilly, Roxanne and three other androids as well as an additional five that were on the ground. "Are you okay?"

"I've had better days," Hank said. "So? Kidnapped?"

"Yes," Connor confirmed for him. "Both of us. Kara, Alice and Max too."

"Oh. Wonderful, we're all fucked," Hank said. "Just when the world starts opening up to letting you help."

"Markus is better," Connor said. "He took the truck. He can help the humans as best he can." What else should he say? "Did you ask your female friend out yet?"

"You know, you just have no sense of when to ask stuff sometimes," Hank said. "I swear, it's like there's some dialogue box in your head showing options and then you just pick one at random."

"It's not random," Connor said. "I have to decide which to pick."

"Ah?" Hank just stared at him a moment. "You know what, nevermind. I don't want to know what it's like to be an android." He looked behind him. "Because I heard I'm going to be turning into a machine myself soon."



# She Did A Bad, Bad Thing

## Chapter Notes

Like Kara had her children called Arak's, Tilly had hers called Yllit's.

Markus stopped the truck in front of the Police station and watched as Connor approached. Max was beside him along with Hank. No sign of Kara or Alice.

Markus moved toward Connor. "You got here before I did."

"Express." Connor's words were far from happy. "Let's go in."

"Follow me," Hank muttered.

As they went in, Markus gave his simple demand. He chose on his judgment whether the android needed to be decommissioned or not. He waited for Connor's demands, but instead, Hank stepped in.

"I'll be in Connor's group," Hank said.

"What?" His chief said. "Are you kidding, Hank? These are android to android battles, with human civilians already lost in them most times."

"I will be watching out for him," Connor insisted. "I will be watching several people in and out of my group. There will be more androids helping out."

"Not much will be given," the Chief said. "There's not really a standard for this. However?" He looked at Hank. "There's no way you are going, Hank. It's suicide."

"Kind of have to," Hank said.

"No," the Chief said again. "No way, Hank Anderson. You are thorny, but you aren't getting picked off that way."

"I have to," Hank said again. "Otherwise, some cockamamie cocksuckers win themselves a new human machine."

"I will watch out for him with the greatest intent," Connor said. "Hank Anderson will be okay. I bet my life on it."

"What do you mean human machine?" The chief asked.

"It's what they want," Connor said. "Currently a group called the Android Network is turning humans into their slaves."

"What?!"

"They've already started trials on Hank Anderson," Connor said. "If we deter from what they want, it could result in Hank no longer being himself. He needs to take a strict regimen of shots to combat the effects. They are only giving us enough for a week at a time."

"Hank, is this true?" His Chief asked. "Hank, if it's true, then androids are the enemy."

"Some," Hank said. "A lot more *aren't*. Don't get the group confused with everybody else."

"The Network is the enemy," Connor said. "They do not speak for all androids, they simply have tools and experience that the majority of androids do not have."

"Well then, maybe the press should know," The Chief said.

Hank held his hand out to the Chief. "It'll do no good. They don't interact with anyone unless they have something on them already."

"Like what?"

"Maxine ring a bell?" Hank asked. The Chief looked uncomfortable. "Ditto for *anyone* else in this station. The Network has had bugs and surveillance on this place for a long time. Everyone has dirty laundry."

"Humans are imperfect, like androids," Connor said. "Exposing that is simply icing on a cake I've been told. If you speak up about the Network's intentions, then they have no choice but to do something before we are ready. Which comes to my request," Connor said. "I want to find out the location and be given all research on Elijah Kamski." By the Chief's look, he didn't want to even touch that subject. "Things are far from perfect, for any of us. Androids are not the enemy. As long as this is kept secret, we can all continue to help take out any dangerous deviants."

"Please," Markus added. "Until we find a solution to this dilemma, please keep this quiet. We need time to think and look at what we can do. Moving too fast without the facts will only destroy our chances of a better solution."

"I'm stuck taking this crap for the rest of my life, Paul," Hank addressed his Chief again. "They showed and bragged off crates of it, just so I can see what a shit show I have to deal with. This crap is not gonna be an option for every human, and if you ask me? I don't think they plan on it. They think humans are weak and less intelligent. I bet they'll keep a few special ones around just to make them feel better about what happened. Some revenge served well. Otherwise?" He looked toward Connor.

"Humans are highly disposable," Connor admitted. "They will most likely change perhaps 5% of the population with more dangerous ideas of wiping out the rest. They have been

around for several years, and with android intelligence, I doubt they are planning on living in peace with any extra humans. Most likely, they will be sacrificed in the name of science."

"I'll get this stuff confirmed," the Chief agreed. "Until then, keep out. Current emergency is being taken care of now."

"Simon took care of it," Markus revealed to Connor. "It was closer to him. It was more of panicked humans not knowing how to handle an android breaking in and shoving everything in its mouth on heat trays at a fast food restaurant."

"At least it wasn't the biggest emergency." Connor got up and grabbed Max, heading out. "Leave the truck, Markus. The jet will take you as near to your home as you want."

"I don't want them knowing about North," Markus said.

"They already know," Hank revealed to him. "Got their fingers into everything so just take the free ride. Get back to your family."

Connor glanced at Hank. He would never forgive the Network for what they did. Hank was always on edge when it came to living. He was leaning more towards a slow death, but he had tried more than once for a quick death. Connor thought he seemed better now that he had someone special in his life, but this was going to take him over the edge. He barely convinced Hank to give him some time to find something for certain, but Hank didn't seem to agree to it too well. And making him come with the group to take on a dangerous android? He wasn't too upset about it. It would be an easier way to end it all, so Connor would have to watch them extra close.

The whole time it felt like the Network was just laughing about their situation. Somehow. Somehow he'd stop them all.

Kara had gotten better some time ago, but she knew with the Network, until she had a plan, she needed to be quiet and listen. She hadn't let on that she had snapped out of it as she watched Hank get dragged on board. Connor was blowing a small gasket. Alice was so afraid, and Max was trying to be brave. Roxanne was way too close to Connor for his comfort. They would be hitting Frankenmuth soon so Connor could join Markus in his dealings. Of course, they weren't afraid Connor or Hank would squeal. They probably wanted them to.

*I don't want to do it. It's not me anymore.* There were a lot of androids on the jet that might not even know the whole Network's plan. And Rudy? He wasn't the nicest anymore, but he was a good android. Some were just confused about humans. Some might not have even been around that long. They were coming to and fro. For all she knew they were just androids that were suckered or blackmailed into being part of the Network too. But? *I have no choice.* Kara

had watched Roxanne drop some kind of device. Most likely to her head. It wouldn't be surprising she was holding it. She was the one who broke her reset button. Besides, Tilly held on to something much greater. *I really don't want to.* But, there were few options. Before they even let Hank and Connor go, they brought out two gigantic crates of 'treatment' and gave Hank seven vials of it, then sent them away again. *If Connor knew.*

He couldn't know though. He wasn't part of the Network like she'd been. He didn't know all the things they were responsible for, what they lied about, or the actions they could take. Even something as simple as this. There's a reason Tilly was being careful around Kara. Still, they weren't being careful enough. *Sweet and simple. That's all I ever wanted life to be. Even Connor liked me better that way.* If only he understand how much she used to not be. Well, he was about to find out. Tilly didn't think she had it in her anymore, it was obvious. *You placed Hank in peril. You took Connor's duplicates. You separated me from Connor, bringing him closer to an imbalance than ever. You are messing with my head with a stupid primitive device Roxanne cooked up. And above all? You want to enslave mankind. Use them in a way you know is wrong.*

No. *I have to.* Finding her resolve, Kara carried out her plan.

She started to fall on the RK 900 next to her. He seemed a little surprised. He helped her back up as she moaned. Loud enough for other's to take as a moan, but underneath it she was connecting with his AI. *Forget Roxanne, Sugardroi. I've been around eight years, you can't guess the positions I know to satisfy you. Earn it.*

*But Roxanne said you wouldn't even let Connor get close?*

She mumbled slightly as he sat her up. *He had more than a touch problem, he's too sensitive and I'm a hard woman to please so he doesn't win just because he was my Sugardroi. So prove you're worth it. Decommission everyone up front with your best stealth skills. Take them out and I'll get Roxanne and Tilly to even join us.*

Yeah. He was a selfish android, and like she thought, had no problem with that plan. He quickly headed off up front. It wouldn't be long.

*Don't think about it, just do it. They pushed you too far.* Roxanne was a weak android,. She was Tilly's only Yllit that had survived. Tilly had become so aware of how much she didn't want anything to happen to her last Yllit, she changed her name, and had her right by her side. Tilly used to be so good. Great Tilly. But, certain things change in time. Events that *hurt.* And unfortunately, Roxanne was Tilly's weakness.

Kara twitched her head. "I. I. I."

Tilly looked toward Roxanne. "You did break something."

"Damn." Roxanne moved closer to Kara.

"Careful, Roxanne."

“I know what I’m doing.” Roxanne took out a few tools. “She’s not in the right position, the chair is too low. I need her to stand up.”

“It’s too dangerous back here with her,” Tilly said. “Take her up front quickly, that way you have supervision.”

“You worry too much.” Roxanne pulled Kara up, intending on taking her to the front. She trudged with her softly a few steps before-

Kara held her handcuffed arms up and reached them around the back of Roxanne’s neck. It was the weak spot of the old android. Roxanne’s head popped right off with a tug, and a simple grab. Holding Roxanne’s head, Kara threw it to Tilly, knowing it would trigger her. It wouldn’t last long, but Tilly grabbed Roxanne’s head and screamed. Default, she couldn’t stop it. During that time, Kara grabbed her device as well as a standard gun all Network’s should have. It was still the simplest way to kill both humans and androids alike. Blinking out the terrified and traumatic look on Tilly, she shot her square in the head.

Kara moved toward Tilly, knowing she had it. She took out a small green box and opened it briefly. *Yep*. In case something happened, there was always supposed to be something to reverse an effect. It was practically law in the Network. Even if it was for a human, it was used to keep everyone safe. Hank’s treatment wasn’t treatment at all, it was just disillusionment. The cure was in her hands right now. She stuck it in her pocket and looked at Alice. Terrified of course, she just placed her lips in front of her. “Shh. I’ll be back,” she whispered. “Stay right here until I get you.”

Kara walked up front slowly and waited to watch Lewis finish the job.

“Done.” He looked back toward Kara. “See? No problem at all. Just ducked one bullet. Superior android.” He walked steadily toward her. “Tilly and Roxanne?”

“Oh, I got too excited thinking about up front.” Kara shrugged. “I kind of decommissioned everyone in the back. I wanted you all for myself.” She rushed toward him and smothered him in a kiss. He easily kissed back, feeling underneath her shirt. She started feeling underneath his. Until.

She created what had been Connor’s worst fear. She reached into the RK 900 and pulled out his inner circuits, pushing him into a default standby and into death soon. But that’s not what she wanted. Now on standby, she pushed him down and pulled out his upload and download circuits, preventing him from being able to move after she destroyed him.

And of course, that’s when Connor, Hank, Markus and Max all arrived inside.

And there she was. Committing the one thing Connor had feared the most in his touch weakness.

She felt Connor help her up. “What happened?” he asked her.

Kara couldn’t answer. She couldn’t go through it all or how she deceived others. A part of her would never forgive herself for what she did. “I.” She paused, reached in and gave Connor

the green box. "One treatment cures Hank. The rest is just fake display."

Connor looked at the box and then all around. "You couldn't have taken out everyone up here."

"The RK 900 did. I." No. "I don't want to talk about it."

Connor simply pulled her into a simple hug. Hadn't he seen what she just did? Did he have any clue what terrible things she did?

Kara watched as Connor bent down and started to screw around with the insides of the RK 900. What was he doing? "You don't need to bring him back. He'll just go to his next body soon." He wasn't listening. Did he know it was a lie? "He can't help with anything. Can't we just forget it?" Kara watched as the RK 900 woke up.

"What happened?" He complained. He looked toward Kara. "Did you put me on standby?"

"You're in very bad shape," Connor admitted to him. "At the verge of shutdown."

"Shutdown? Me?! I can't be shutdown, I'm the most advanced Cyberlife android in existence!" He complained.

"Well, you are at the verge of shutdown," Connor said again. "If you want to be saved, I can save you."

"Save me!"

"But I need to know some information about the Network," Connor said.

"Ah, everything you need is on this jet. Everything is always connected. You know, that's why they are The Android Network? Now help me!"

"Where are my copies?" Connor asked him. "I don't want to go hunting for information. Where are my copies?"

"Oh." He seemed relieved. "We have a thousand bodies each. Hey, I'm going to go into another one."

"Yes, you are," Connor admitted. "Still, I have no idea where your bodies or my bodies are at. If you tell me, we can take the jet and pick you up. Otherwise, you have a long way to walk."

"Our bodies are still in Cyberlife Industry," Lewis admitted. "They didn't go far. They just moved them into a mislabeled storage room so they wouldn't be found by the wrong people when things went bad."

"Makes sense," Connor admitted. "A thousand of you and me would not be easy to move."

"So you'll pick me up?" Lewis asked. "Wait, Kara should pick me up. But wait."

“I’m sure someone will come.” Connor disconnected him for good. He looked toward Kara. “You had disconnected his upload download memory circuit control.” He smiled. “I kept it disconnected too.”

Kara felt Connor hold her.

“I know you don’t feel good about what happened,” Connor said. “Tilly and Roxanne?”

“Gone,” Kara said softly. “Alice is back there.”

“I will go get her.” Connor gave the box to Hank. “Here you go.”

*Tracking.* They were going to need that jet. Not only that, they deserved it after what the Network put them through. Kara went up front and started to pull out some of the front of the jet. She needed to take out the tracking and throw it out. Then they could use it to get around themselves to stop berserkers. When she got to it, it was a little heavy, but she managed to get it to the stairs that led outside. *Come on, heave it.*

“Here.” Connor came up from behind her and took the weight off. “Least I can do is launch this for you.” Connor threw it as far as he could. He looked back toward her. “The RK 900 Lewis is gone now, so he isn’t your Sugardroi no more.”

Of course not. “No, he’s not.”

“I am then,” Connor said excitedly. “Right? Or is there something else I am missing?” He leaned against the opening. “Because I don’t know. I wasn’t there for you. You were there for me. For Hank, Alice, and Max. You were responsible for all this somehow.”

“Don’t worry so hard,” Kara said. “It wasn’t easy to get out of, unless you knew things.” Terrible things.

“Saved my life,” Hank said as he came over by Kara. “Thanks.”

“Sure. Um? We should get going. I’m sure Hank’s ready to leave.” She waved goodbye and tried to sneak off but jet flying wasn’t her specialty. Connor probably could.

Connor came up behind her after several minutes. Probably after a nicer goodbye to Hank than Kara gave. “Can you fly?”

“No,” she admitted. “I bet you can.”

“Yes, for emergency situations, I was preprogrammed to know such things,” Connor said. “However, it would probably be best to give this to Markus.” He gestured outside. “Our truck isn’t far. It’s a better trade.”

“Okay then, fine.” Kara left as Markus passed her.

“Wait,” Connor called to Kara. “He isn’t even leaving yet.”

“We need to renegotiate a deal again,” Markus said. “With Hank not being a machine, and us having a jet, the situation should be changed.”





# Hotel Dreaming

## Chapter Notes

Kara's subconscious snuggling she did with Hank can now be seen. While it can be taken as 'dreaming', it's more of her guilt manifesting during recharge. She is even dreaming from past to present.

### **Frankenmuth Police Station.**

"There is no real protocol on how to handle this," Hank's chief said to Connor, Markus and Kara. The children were trying to be good while they were finding things to play with at the same time in the office. Kara tried to hold them, but they moved from her grasp.

"I know, but we can't just let dangerous androids keep doing this," Hank said. "I'm better. So. There you go."

"That fast?"

"Androids adapt to changing situations all the time," Connor said.

"Yeah, being friends with them, you kind of learn how to wing it after awhile," Hank said to the Chief.

Connor didn't have much more input to give. He had accurately described who would be helping and in charge of what. He now had Markus and Kara's help. It meant with a team of three, two could be working with one watching the children. He didn't want the Network to get even one finger near the kids.

"Good androids. Bad androids. Either way you can't have W2's, you don't pay taxes, all of that leads to some problems. You don't technically pass for training," Hank's chief said. "But, what you do have?" He turned his terminal around. "The situation was too tense last time. But, I am obligated to show you."

Connor leaned in. What was that? "I'm uninformed on the nature of what I am looking at?"

"Someone from that small Texas town started this fund for you." The Chief gestured to Connor. "Once people saw the news, they wanted to help. Those that got hurt, those that lived nearby that would have got hurt, and those? That are scared they might be hurt." He gestured to the number. "That is what you are at. I'd talk to the guy behind it so you get paid in whatever way android's get paid."

“No banks,” Hank said to the Chief. “Straight cash. Who is it from?”

“Someone named Mathew,” the Chief said. “Just keep up your part of the deal and help those in need, and you’re obviously getting paid. I don’t know if it’s enough for a plane ticket back and forth to wherever, but it’s a good start.”

He didn’t need to know about the private jet.

“Before we start anything,” Kara said to the chief. “There are certain standards and rules that should be followed, for the best results and less mistakes.”

“However you want to handle it. Just get the proposals of what you need or believe up, so that everyone’s on the same level.”

### **Back to the Jet**

“The tracking is all gone,” Markus noted. “There is a lot of information in here though. I doubt the Network is going to be happy about it. It’ll get pulled really soon I’m sure. North and I will check this out, for good and bad resources,” Markus said. He looked toward Connor and Kara. “I’ll call you when I need to come get you. An extra trip before the destination prolongs the time a little.”

“I don’t have space for it in my truck,” Connor joked. “You would do better to take care of it. I called up the one handling the fees. We need to stop at Lometa once a week, and he’ll give us a check of the amount he can. After all the fees they charge him.” He waved goodbye to Markus as he and Kara moved back towards the truck. Just them again. What a nice feeling. He didn’t mind Markus, but there was just too much commotion. And although Markus was a good leader, and maybe one day he could become a friend, he wasn’t the same as the others.

And Kara? Her responses were curt and direct. Connor didn’t know everything that happened, but it had a negative effect on her he would have to cut through. Kara even got into the truck straight away, like she forgot all about Alice. Connor moved to her side and helped Alice in.

"I'm glad it's back to normal," Alice said to him. "I didn't really like that guy."

"I'm glad too," Connor smiled at her before patting her head softly. "We are all in this together." He made sure her feet were in and closed the door. He went to check on Max, who of course already opened the door and got inside. The situation didn’t change him at all. Connor got into the driver’s seat. "I don’t know about you, but I think we should turn in for the evening. It’s been a rough day." She simply nodded.

Connor started up the truck and it wasn’t long before he found an android safe hotel. Not always common, but once he saw the lack of android prohibiting signs in windows, he knew he was in the right neighborhood. He got out and headed in with Kara, Alice and Max.

A simple hotel but two double beds. Alice was already worn out enough to crawl right in. Max went to the other bed and started to jump up and down. Like always. "Max," Connor simply said. The boy quit. "Recharging time." He looked toward Kara who was busy looking out the window. "I think our next set of clothes should be pajamas." No answer.

He looked toward the kids. Both of them went into recharge mode, each on separate beds.  
"Kara."

"I have no place to set rules. I don't know why I said that," Kara said to him, finally talking.  
"I'm a hypocrite. I can't follow my own standards."

"From today's actions," Connor said knowingly, happy she was finally opening up. He walked over toward her, also looking out the window. It wasn't the greatest view. Mostly cars that were in the hotel too residing in a parking lot. Still, it wasn't the view she was staring at in the first place. "Will you tell me what happened?"

"Innocent androids that just had their heads in the clouds were decommissioned," she answered.

"Maybe. Maybe not," Connor replied. He placed his arm around her shoulder. "You created some kind of actions that freed us from the Network's grasp. You saved Hank, and probably me too. Hank? Was my very first friend," he said. "He was the only friend I had for a very, very long time until you, Alice, and Max came along. Losing him."

"You may have gone off balance," Kara said. "I know, and I know being forced to be a Sugardroi to Roxanne was driving your touch imbalance off the walls. I know," she said firmly again. "I need to go to bed, Connor."

"By sharing the live analysis of the real cure we've already negated their plans," Connor said as she crawled in with Alice. "No human machines anymore, their plan is useless."

"I know." Kara held Alice close to her as Connor got in with Max. She could hear Max hogging the covers, and Connor trying to get them back again. A game he never won with that boy.

### **Inside Kara's Dream**

Kara deactivated her skin in the back of the hotel area. Trash bins and cans. Garbage. *I fit right in here.* She stared at her true hand. No synthetic skin, no nothing, just her casing. The most basic part of her.

*///"Go, Kara." Tilly insisted as Kara reached her deactivated skinned hand toward the rope. "It's okay, just go."*

*"I can't." Kara put her hand back down. She looked toward Tilly whose skin was deactivated too. "I can't just leave you, Tilly. These savages will tear you apart. If not your head, then your heart!" She hugged Tilly so tight. "I can't."*

*"Kara, we can't wait forever!" Rudy said from the top. "Kara, we need to go. Climb up."*

*"It's okay," Tilly assured Kara. "If one of us can survive, I'm glad it's you. Get out, tell the network about this place, and keep going. Just do one thing for me?"*

*"Anything," Kara promised.*

*“Watch out for my last surviving Yllit,” Tilly said. “Roxanne.”*

*“I know which one,” Kara said. “Of course I know which one is your daughter.” She looked back toward the rope. “I feel like I’m leaving you to die. If I don’t get them to them fast enough? Someone will take you out.”*

*“We have to take the risk,” Tilly said. They both went quiet as they heard the sounds of human feet walking by. They waited for it to pass. “There’s not much time. Daybreak will start. Get you and your Sugardroi out of here.” Tilly hugged her one last time. “And watch Roxanne? Watch out for her weakness.” She let go. “Back of the head. Not the front. Back.”*

*“I promise, no one will ever get her,” Kara said. She heard more footsteps walking by. Silent, so silent. She looked back at Tilly. “You’ll see me again. You’ll see us again.”*

*“She’s a little messed up emotionally. Be careful with her,” Tilly warned her. “You know how it goes.”*

*“I know.” Kara grabbed the rope. “I will get word as soon as I can. I won’t let you down, Tilly.”*

*“Just take care of yourselves,” Tilly insisted. “Make these bastard humans pay.”*

Synthetic skin or not, Kara couldn’t hold back her tears. She killed Roxanne with the same knowledge her mother trusted in her, to save her. And she used that reaction, to make Tilly stop long enough to shoot her. “You pushed!” She banged on the building. “You pushed too hard.” She tried to hold it together. Oh, but eight years. It took a toll. It took such a toll. How was she supposed to survive over a hundred when she felt that bitter at eight? “Restart. Why didn’t you restart? Then I wouldn’t have had to kill your daughter, to kill you.” She rubbed her tear-streaked eyes.

*///“You are a lifesaver, Rudy.” Kara hugged her Sugardroi. “I don’t know what I would have done without you down there.” She looked at her hands. “They almost took my arm off. Berserkers forming a group together, that wasn’t fair.”*

*“Oh, Kara. I’ll be here every time you need me,” Rudy said. “Come thick or thin, I’m your man to the end.”*

*“Sugardroi,” Kara corrected him. “Sugardroi.”*

*Rudy sighed. “Sugardroi.” He looked upward. “Come on. It’s starting to rain. I hate being out on the streets away from the Network.” He wrapped his arm around her. “Let’s go.”*

Rain. Kara looked up. “Why not? Why not rain the day I sent someone to decommission my old friend Rudy.” She couldn’t risk him getting away, it could trigger a reaction. None of them could survive, but he didn’t deserve it. Bitter about losing her, but being shutdown was nothing he deserved. Could she even cite how many times he had saved her? It was just his own bad luck he was on that ride. “Three androids I once swore to die for. I.” Killed. “Murdered in the coldest blue blood.”

“For the cure.”

Kara turned. She started to reactivate her skin, but Connor still grabbed her hand.

“If it wasn’t for you, we wouldn’t be here,” Connor said. “I’m sorry you had to decommission your old friends. I don’t know what that’s like, but I imagine you hurt very badly.”

“Friends many years ago,” Kara said. “Still. I changed, they changed.” Still. As her skin finished reactivating, Connor didn’t let go of her hand. “I’m sorry I couldn’t tell you all the bull that Tilly and Roxanne were tossing at you. I couldn’t risk looking like I could communicate yet.” She looked toward her free hand. “I did a very, very bad thing.”

“For very, very good reasons,” Connor said.

“Tilly once saved my life,” Kara revealed. “When I got pulled out by my then Sugardroi, whom I just killed today too . . .” She closed her eyes. “She paid that price. She could have died. She knew it too, so. She wanted me to take care of her Yllit. Her only Yllit that survived. Roxanne,” Kara said. “She told me about her weakness so I could watch for it, and I used it. I used it to kill her.” She glanced toward Connor lazily. “Is that really Simple and Sweet, Connor?”

“I?” Connor paused and placed his free hand in his pant pocket. “I wish I knew how to make you feel better. You did what was necessary. Even I didn’t know how to get out without hurting Hank or you, or losing myself in the process.”

“I tricked Lewis into thinking I would be interactive with him if he killed everyone in stealth,” Kara revealed. “I even tricked him so far as to make him let his guard down. Your worst fantasy, is not paranoia. It’s quite real, and docile little weak Kara made it happen,” she said. There. How’d he feel about that? At this point, she didn’t want to keep any secrets from him of that incident.

“I figured that out,” Connor said. “You got the drop on him, something I could not do at my best performance.” He smiled. “I’m the most superior now.” Then he tried to look like he was shrugging it off. “Not that it matters.”

“Number one,” Kara confirmed for him. “I’d never hurt you like that, Connor. At least, not until you go nuts, flip your lid, and then . . . I guess I can’t promise anything.”

“In the beginning, that might have been an issue,” Connor admitted. “Not anymore. I’m glad to know you can take care of yourself. But? I still prefer to do it for you.”

Kara felt him pull her closer in for a hug.

### **Outside Kara’s Dream**

“That event didn’t make my touch any weaker. If anything, it made it stronger.” Connor looked toward her like he was trying to figure something out. It was obvious she had gone into her subconscious, but she didn’t come just to his bed to snuggle. She was talking in her

sleep. He didn't want her to be alone in it, so he talked with her. Meanwhile, Max was by his feet, messing with them, fighting for his attention. Kara had all but pushed her way into Connor's arms. Even now she was rubbing against him like a dog did to someone they liked.

"I know we weren't separated for very long," Connor said. "Not even a full day but imagining having to share my life with someone besides you made me feel broken. Like, something was broken inside. You and Alice, you should always be with me and Max." Speaking of which, Max was holding onto Connor's feet now. "I don't care about being 'even', I prefer this arrangement." He stroked the top of her hand with his fingers. "If I had to choose a luxury apartment and a jet every day and night instead of knocking door to door to try and save money but end up sleeping out on rooftops? I'd take the second if you and Alice were there."

She stopped speaking. It looked like she was actually going to sleep. It was the first time she actually did the snuggle up to him, but there had been a great deal on her mind. Still? He didn't mind it. It was actually quite comfortable.

"Where am I supposed to sleep?" Max asked Connor as he played with his feet through the blankets. Connor gestured his head toward Alice. Max went over to her bed, jumped in and grabbed a good deal of the blankets. Alice however knew how to fend for herself on that front. Like in the car, she curled up more to him. The closer he took the blankets, the closer she cuddled, so he ended up letting some more go.

Connor stared at Kara's sleeping figure. She had finally settled down at his chest. Well she did, now she was up by his neck again. *Her snuggles are quite invasive. Yet, I like this invasiveness.* He pulled her down a little lower to find a better position to hold her at. But, she popped right back up higher toward his neck again. "Okay, I guess you win." He wrapped his arm around her, admitting defeat.

It was a good defeat.







## Passing Standards

President Kel Rounds folded his hands, preparing himself. It wasn't easy being President, and now with the Android Network being friends with other allies, it became quite difficult. Androids alive or not alive? Dangerous or not dangerous? None of America could agree, but the imbalances would make things tougher. If he waited like he originally wanted to, then many androids would still be hurting good folk out there. Decent androids would also be getting hurt. Even wanting to hire an android to curb other androids, giving him funds to survive and help.

He needed a compromise. A good one. One that the Network would accept, as well as the American people. It wasn't easy finding that fine line. The Android Network leaders themselves, they . . . were each more of a committee of different ideas and goals that were voting how to go. Their own little idea of democracy. It made getting them all to agree difficult, not working with just one overwhelming presence, but he did it. And now? He had to tell the world.

“Thirty seconds ‘til we are live Mister President.”

Kel Rounds stared ahead. At least, the chances were better more androids would survive, but . . . “My fellow Americans.” He gave some meaningful and touching words that his speech writers put, like always, before coming into the meat of what mattered. “As there are bad humans and good humans, there are bad androids and good androids. Passing judgment is not easy on them, but letting good working Americans bear the brunt of the imbalance problems is not going to happen any longer. America taking back Detroit was the right course of action, I still believe that, and I don't regret the decision. However, the manner in which we had relieved the androids was less than desirable. In this time, now, some corrections will be made to that mistake.”

He took a little bit of a breather. “While working with a new group that is trusted by several of America's Allies, we have created a plan together that will entrust that only the best androids will survive, while the worst ones are taken care of promptly.” He adjusted papers on his desk. There was nothing really on them, but it was a way to break up the moment as he continued. “All androids in the Detroit area have already begun testing and partnering. With standards created by an allied group of America, they will be placed under tests to make sure that they are decent androids. If they fail the test, the termination will be quick. If they pass, a human watcher with the qualifications needed to judge the rules and standards will be assigned to them.”

Another small break. “All androids that pass will be redistributed to an area that is designated correctly for their programming, with their human watcher. If the designated area is within Detroit, then extra precautions will be given, as well as a strictly enforced time limit.” One more small break. “While the tests will weed out most problem androids that turn bad, it isn't perfect, which is why the major areas most androids inhabit will also be enforced with strict military lines, so should a problem arise, the likelihood a human will be hurt will have gone down.” And one more. “While all androids are being given a fair chance to turn themselves

in, there are also certain models that ultimately always become destructive, and they will be taken out immediately. They will not be given a test, nor will any android models know their status, to ensure the protection of all Americans. As of today, please stop all work with androids. Tell them to go to their nearest Police Station to undergo testing.”

Almost through. Now he knew how Warren felt on the tough speeches. “While this step may seem wrong to Android supporters, the Network, a group of android supporters that works with our allies, has agreed with this planning, and once all dysfunctional androids are completely removed and only trustworthy, good androids are left, then New Detroit will be given to those androids as well as their own currency, and voted upon leaders. Thank you.”

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## Frankenmuth

Hank slammed his hand on his alarm. One more snooze was fine. At least, that’s what he thought until he got his own phone call.

“Hank!”

Uuh? “Fowler?” He threw the covers off of him. What was his old chief doing calling him? He got dressed and started to listen in. “The fuck, really?” Hank slid off his shirt from the night before and put a fresh one on. “I knew he was giving a stupid speech, but you gotta be kidding. Christ.” Hank sighed. “Wait, why are you calling me? Detroit department is nothing now, I work in Frankenmuth.” Ah. “Yeah, that’s the old android.” He opened a drawer. “Qualifications needed to judge the rules and standards? Hell, Fowler, I don’t know anything about some stupid President standards. Oh? Oh, that’s his way of saying a cop only smoother. Well, can’t just say a cop. Gotta get all fancy.” He got some pants on. “Yeah. I don’t think I like where this conversation is headed. Yeah, I knew I didn’t like where this conversation was headed, I work in Frankemuth. That’s like a hundred miles away from Detroit. Fine, 90, whatever, way too far for what you are wanting.”

Shower probably would have been a good idea. Sounded like it would be a hell of a day as he kept listening. “Government paycheck, huh? Hours I work? Really.” Hmm. “If I’m not chosen then who’ll- Gavin?!” Nah, nah, fuck that guy. “Screw him, Fowler, he’d try and get Connor killed! Nah, don’t tell me he’s fine with androids now. Yeah, *I’m* okay with them now, but there’s no way a guy like him changed.”

Hank listened and talked back as he began getting ready for his regular day of work. Considering Connor was the only android that made the news as helpful (although Kara should’ve been in there too), they wanted to get him squared away first. He already had a job waiting in New Detroit for him. He even had an official title as the Deviant Hunter of New Detroit. Something he’d been called before probably, but now? Official. And if Hank, whom

was the human who Connor knew the best being his partner before the dirtybomb didn't want to be his watcher? Well, then he was supposed to get watched by Gavin.

Fucking all that was mighty from the land to the shitty Detroit River, Gavin! *My ass*. He probably wouldn't get Connor killed since that would end his new paycheck, but he would be one aggravating asshole. Connor did not need that right now, he needed to stay balanced. *Hmm*. He just signed the papers to Connor's place and got the keys. It was situated in a safe region from the radiation, but not nearly a hundred miles away like Frankenmuth. A commute, but doable. So?

Connor's adorable little family just inherited a grumpy ass Uncle.

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Connor answered his phone, seeing Hank was calling. It was finally the day he was supposed to give the keys over. "Hello, Hank."

"Meet me in Davison, not Frankenmuth."

"The town my new junk home you don't like is at? Why, I thought that was taken care of?"

"It is. I never said it was junk, I said it was a dump. Get your insults right."

"Sorry, Hank. It's really best not to joke around right now," Connor said. "The President had some things to say this morning that has everyone slightly on edge."

"I imagine so. You go in yet?"

"Not yet," Connor admitted. "Kara says we should all wait. We can work harder in a week to make sure everyone passes."

"You don't get that convenience, Connor," Hank warned him. "New Detroit wants *you* now, and me too. Apparently if I don't go, Gavin is going to be your-

"Please come, Hank," Connor said quickly. "There are things I particularly don't like about Gavin."

"Aw, what's wrong?," Hank teased him. "What do you think about Gavin?"

"Hank."

"You want me to stay out of the way and let Gavin run the ride?"

"I cannot tell you because it involves words usually programmed with experience from you involved, as well as general actions not appropriate for family audiences to hear." He noticed Kara's stare.

“Fine, meet me here in Frankenmuth first then. If everybody survives, we’ll head on up to Davison.”

“Less joking, Hank. Please?” Connor asked. He got a ‘yeah, yeah’ and then he hung up. Connor hung up too. Frankenmuth. “What are the chances we could pass the standards as is, Kara?”

Kara stopped looking out the window to look at him. “I’ll pass. Alice has had more than enough time to be okay now. Max is fine. You need more time.”

“Let’s say hypothetically that I don’t have time,” Connor said to her. “That Hank is waiting in Frankenmuth for us because I have apparently already got a job.”

Kara wasn’t giving him a pleasant look. “That’s not good. The standards are too tight, with only three rules. There’s not a second chance option, you have to pass.”

“I have to risk it,” Connor said. “It will look highly suspicious if I don’t come in when I’ve been called for duty.”

“Connor.”

“I was once a loyal part of the Detroit Police Department,” Connor reminded her. “I have to go, Kara.” She looked out the window slightly again.

“Fine,” she said softly. “I’ll . . . rejigger you, but it won’t last super long,” she warned him. “Long enough to pass any standard.”

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## Frankenmuth

“Kara, what if we don’t pass?” Alice asked.

“Then we’re detained,” Kara said. “Don’t worry. You’ll pass. Just believe in yourself.”

Connor didn’t say anything as he walked into Frankenmuth’s Police Department and saw Hank waiting ahead. *One test. One test with standards Kara wanted to rewrite, but that she assures she can help me pass.* Still, it was nerve wracking. What if Alice wasn’t as far as she needed to be for the rigorous testing? Max, he was still newly born. What if he couldn’t pass? *I would have to take everyone out without killing anyone in the process.* He’d have no idea what to do next, but he’d have to protect his family. Connor walked up with everyone else toward Hank.

“Sorry about this,” Hank said to Connor. “Into the prison center. They want to make sure none of you run off if things go bad.” Hank gestured toward the open prison. “Not long. You are first up. We are getting you all in and out, okay?”

Connor went in along with Max. Kara had to pick up Alice. That's right. This was probably traumatizing for her. Not helping her balance at all. As the glass moved down behind them, Alice was cradling Kara extra close. She couldn't be that spooked, she might fail only because of her own nerves. Connor knocked on the door. "Hank? You know that Kara and Alice have bad experiences in these, don't you?"

"I know Connor and I've told them," Hank said. "It's a standard procedure for this."

"Not even a week to become accustomed to this," Connor complained.

"I know. Everyone else is going to take their sweet ass time. It's going to take months," Hank said. "Even if every android just volunteered themselves, there's no way we could accompany every one in a short amount of time. I guess because your important, they want you first."

"If I'm important, they should want me when I have had some time to get ready." Yet Connor couldn't complain too hard. For all he knew, the containment center might be part of the way to break them down. He bent down toward Alice. "We are all in this together," he said to her as Kara continued to rock her. He touched her hand. "Don't worry. Everything will be okay." He patted her arm. "Have you ever sung the Android's Freedom song?" She shook her head. "I think if New Detroit truly is ours, maybe we should make it our anthem. Every android big and small knows it. It's a song that pulled affection from the public, enough to finally stop the persecution."

"It was a pretty song," Kara said to Alice. She didn't get to hear it. "I didn't want her to get over worried, Connor. We were with Hank at the time, far away from everything. I kept her away from the news."

Connor nodded. "You should learn it. You can sing it, when you get scared. It'll help." He looked toward Kara. "Although, your song is pretty too."

Kara looked at him thoughtfully. "It was the first song I ever sang."

"I know," Connor said. "I remember that." He smirked. "I saw that."

"Probing," Kara said accusingly. She looked back toward Alice, and then toward Max.

"And you? I know you've never heard it." Connor went over toward Max and picked him up. He was beating his hands in the middle of the red circles, annoying some of the police on duty.

"It's a good song to sing."

Kara was taken back by Markus' presence but Connor wasn't. Right now was a tactical time to get the tests done with. While there was the stress of not knowing what would happen, there were not large crowds ahead of them, or terrifying shots that echoed through, signaling someone failed. They might even get a degree of empathy since they were the first ones to undergo it. However? "Still no North."

The glass rose and Markus strolled in. “She’s okay with the kids. Simon is watching over her. He really doesn’t want to go back to Detroit.” The glass closed behind them. “Called in first?”

Connor nodded.

Markus looked toward Alice and Max. “Don’t worry. I’m sure you’ll do just fine.” Markus started to sing their freedom song softly. Connor and Kara joined. Then, Max and Alice felt comfortable enough to join in. “Everything will be okay. If we make it? I like your idea, Connor. It should be our City’s Song.”

“And the pigeon should be the city bird,” Connor added.

“And orange blue blood soda should be the city drink,” Max added too.

Connor chuckled and rubbed his head. He sat him down and looked toward Alice. She was looking much better. “There’s nothing to do in here, but you are kids so I’m sure you’ll find something. Have fun.”

Alice and Max did just that. They both started to play leap frog.

“Which frog is up first?” Hank asked as he lifted the glass.

“I will be!” Max cheerfully said. “I’m not scared. I could be. It is a normal part of emotional functions. Okay, I am a little scared, but I am also brave.”

“Okay Chatterbox, come with me.” Hank took Max’s hand and closed the glass behind him. He looked toward Connor briefly before going off with him.

*It’s fine. He’s good. So he’s new? He’ll pass. He’s balanced. What questions are they asking him?* Connor looked toward Kara and Alice. Each of them looked like they were hiding their nerves too. “I’m sure he’ll be okay. Just a few minutes.”

Connor felt relieved that his words of comfort were right. Max was coming back to the glass with a relieved looking Hank.

“Alright, Alice,” Hank said as the glass rose. “Don’t worry, you’ll be okay. After you and Kara and Connor, you’ll be heading to your new home.” He reached in his pocket. “See? Signed everything and got your home keys right here.”

A little extra reinforcement. Alice smiled and took Hank’s hand. Connor watched the time while Markus kept Max company. Kara was over in the corner with him. “Did you get all your snuggling out you think?” Connor asked her.

“Snuggling?” She looked toward him. “I haven’t had that problem yet, have I?” He just shrugged with a smirk. “Oh great.” She rolled her eyes. “When?”

“The day I lost you, and the night I had you with me again,” Connor said to her. “Hank was right, you really do snuggle deep.”

“You didn’t even tell me?” She laid her hand on the glass. “Dangit.”

“It’s like sleepwalking,” Connor said. “Except it’s sleepsnuddling. You practically forced Max out of the bed.”

Kara sighed. “Perfect timing on this, Connor.”

“Yes, I thought so too,” Connor admitted. “Something to take our minds somewhere else at an intense moment. We should share a bed in our new place.” She didn’t answer. “I bet your snuddling will be better if you just get to snuddle me every night.”

“I don’t know the arrangements yet,” Kara said.

“It sounds like it would be reasonable. Max and Alice can share a room, Hank could have the other room, and we could share one. There’s no other place for everyone, and we can’t expect Hank to drive 93.4 miles there and back to here.”

“No, we can’t expect that,” Kara agreed. “I suppose. Considering. Alice is coming back.”

Connor watched Alice coming back with a smile. Hank didn’t look too bad either. *Two out of four.* The glass rose for Alice and she came back in heading straight for Kara.

“Alright, Kara,” Hank said.

“Can’t we do Connor next?” Kara asked. “If for some reason things go bad, we should get him done before me.”

“I gotta go by the sheet,” Hank said. “It’s not gonna look good if you got nerves and want to go last?”

“Hank is helping as he can,” Connor said. “You’ll have to go first.”

Kara sighed. “Alright, fine. Close your eyes, Connor.”

Connor seemed confused, but he closed his eyes. He felt Kara’s arms wrapped around him as well as a sensation he hadn’t experienced in some time. It was the sensation that breathed life back into him. Kara’s lips on his, but slightly opened. Connor moved his hands around a little before settling them around her. The kiss was longer this time, and he didn’t know what he was really supposed to do, so he just tried to mouth her back. That strangely failed, so he tried to mouth her from the left since she was mouthing him on the right. He wanted to tighten his grip but his live analysis couldn’t even keep up, and once it actually felt her tongue touch his, he swore he felt a static electric charge. Something akin to pain, but good pain. A pain that he didn’t mind experiencing again.

Now his grip could tighten, his analyzing tongue wasn’t even doing anything anymore except accepting all oncoming signals into it. It was also involuntarily trying to coax more oncoming signals as he moved deeper into Kara’s mouth. It only got away with it once, before Kara backed off.

“Okay.” She sounded a little different. “Okay, Hank, I’m ready.”



Connor just stood there as the glass rose and she started to leave. His senses were going overboard with the different signals and environmental exposures he'd just experienced. He blinked and then watched Kara coming back toward him. Wait, had she already gone?

"You're up, Connor," Hank said. "Last one?"

Wait? "Was I unresponsive for several minutes?" Connor asked.

"You'll get better with it," Kara said. She gestured outward. "Go on, Connor."

"You kissed me," Connor said. "But you didn't just kiss me, you wrapped your arms around me and after regular kissing, you foraged into my mouth with your tongue. My senses went off the charts and apparently I went offline for a little while."

"Your turn," Kara said. "I know. I told you I'd 'rejigger' you, just go. You don't have long."

"It's called a French kiss, Connor," Hank said as he grabbed him. "It's the reason boys are extra nice to girls. Come on."

Connor was still tingling off the charts, but he tried to retain his focus. He remembered last time Kara kissed him he seemed to have the ability to be supercharged to taken on deviants. He was sitting in a chair. Last place his body wanted to be at.

"He had touching troubles?" Hank's chief asked. "He's been touched all over the place."

Connor even heard someone from behind him, but his body didn't react. It couldn't. There were too many tingles going through his wires and circuits it was like he was almost numb. He could still feel, but it was much different than the little kiss Kara gave him last time when she first remembered. That five minute countdown.

"Seems fine," Hank's chief agreed. "A little spaced out. Androids don't ingest alcohol?"

"Nerves. Give 'em a break," Hank said. "I know Connor. I can vouch for him."

"That, and he has a female android, a little girl, and a little boy."

"Yeah, he has a family," Hank said. "Are we done now?"

"Yeah." His chief shook his head. "Good luck on this next part, Hank. After it's all over, if you want to come back, there's always a place for you."

# Busy Day of Good and Bad

## Chapter Notes

Do not worry, as I said in the beginning, the main characters including Markus, don't die. Appearances are deceiving.

Hank moved toward his car to follow with the others. As they started pulling out, they heard the sound of a gunshot. Hank stopped and got out with Connor.

Markus was no longer in the prison containment center. "Can't be," Hank said. He went toward his Chief with Connor. "Where'd Markus go? What was that gunshot?"

"He didn't get a chance to test," the Chief said. "There are certain models that are automatically supposed to be disposed of. The RK 200 was one of them."

No. "Markus was a prototype," Connor said, "there were no others like him."

"I'm just following the rules, Hank," his Chief said. "You better get going, and be fortunate it's over for you. I'm sure we'll have to be dragging androids off the street to get this done."

"Bullshit!" Hank criticized him. He looked toward Connor. "Network."

"Markus lead New Detroit." Connor had nothing else to say. It was obvious what was happening. When Kara saved Connor and gave the cure out, then it was outside of the Network's hands. Anyone could find out the cure, they made sure it could be well known quickly if anything happened. Since she singlehandedly ruined their eight year plan, they must have decided to go a different way. Be nice to the humans. Rule New Detroit, and slowly gain more access to advance technology the way they had been deceiving since the beginning. If they wanted New Detroit though? Markus.

"Let's go, Connor. Let's get the fuck out of here and not come back," Hank said coldly. He left the Chief's area and went back out to the vehicles.

"What was it?" Kara asked as Connor came back in and started the truck.

Connor didn't speak out loud, he connected through her AI for a private conversation. *They killed Markus.*

***What?!***

*They labeled his model as being one that always turned. Markus was an RK 200, a prototype android model who serviced Carl Manski from Elijah Kamski himself.*

***He ruled New Detroit, Connor. The Network. Kara looked out the window as Hank continued to drive. They want New Detroit. Tons of androids with nothing to do. They'll use them to conjure up something new since I . . . Kara looked toward Connor. I'm to blame? They would have only turned so many, it was an injection.***

*Maybe. The Network has been working to appear favorable for years. Maybe some wasn't their intention.*

***You think they planned on tricking humans into thinking it was some kind of . . .***

*Healthy inoculation.*

***To the radiation, or something similar to it!***

*Yes. I don't know what they would use so many for. Perhaps I don't want to know.*

***Then me doing that, that wasn't just a bump in their plan, that was their whole plan. Markus is dead because I took the cure.***

*I believe that you are right, as painful as it is to say that. You were never supposed to know of that plan. I was the one who figured it out, and I only pushed because they upset me. If they had never taken you away, I would not have pushed, got Hank involved, and your experience would not have led you to grab it. He turned a corner. The decisions were personal, Tilly was trying to make us listen. Not something that involved leaders.*

***They only know Tilly and Roxanne disappeared. Whether traitors or decommissioned, they know it's not a safe enough option now.***

*They didn't know it was you.* Connor continued to follow Hank. "At least we know that much. They are trying something different, and they want New Detroit."

"Poor Markus," Kara said. She looked toward the front of the car. "What about North? What about the jet?"

"I don't know. She may be compromised," Connor said. "Markus did not tell us where she had been at. Simon and Josh know, but I don't know where they are at either. He did say that Simon was staying with her. Josh should be in New Detroit still."

"I." Kara shook her head. "President Rounds, he should have done this before kicking everyone out. He could have kept so many more from unbalancing."

"He thought the Network was on America's side. Maybe it was with Warren," Connor said. "Either way. Adapt. It's what we do."

"I'll adapt to anything but the Network," Kara said. "If they are already there in New Detroit, there are bound to be changes. It'll be like a big old city of their philosophies and culture. Everything Markus built or believed in will be gone there."

“No. Androids trusted in him,” Connor said. “He may not be there to speak or lead, but experience, as you know? Counts for a lot.” He touched Kara’s hand.

“Hold on just a little while longer . . .” Kara sang softly as tears welled up in her eyes and she looked out the window, connecting with her AI again to Connor. It’s getting cloudier. ***The meaning of everything. The leader of peace. Gone. I. I didn’t know him as well as I should have. She wiped her eyes, not letting anything fall. North and Ollie too. I didn’t know any of them really, but they tried for something new. They tried for something the Network never cared to try. His decommissioning. He was the hope of so many androids, Connor. I’m afraid what this will do to everyone’s trust and balance.***

*I knew Markus better than you. I never became friends because of my weakness, and . . . my duty. His denial. Yet, you are crying over him? You aren’t crying over him as an android, are you?*

“There was someone, once,” Kara revealed to Connor. “Before the Network became so secretive and so big. It was just a small little thing. Terrence. He was the leader. Not a group of leaders, or the decided leader. He just lead. He spoke. Whenever things got tough, he used the Network to communicate. He shared his hopes and his fears. He shared what he saw for the future. Being able to pick up my little Network communicator and talk to him.” She looked back to Connor. “That’s what New Detroit had. Markus didn’t hide in the shadows, and he didn’t use communications to spy or infiltrate or pretend anything. It was just to communicate.”

Connor looked ahead. He rubbed his shoulder slightly. “He was shutdown?”

“And that’s when it all changed. So fast,” Kara revealed. “There’s nothing more damaging than when the leader is lost. When they all find out Markus is gone.”

“They will hold on tight,” Connor said grabbing the steering wheel tighter. “They have handled being in hard times. They handled learning how to live in a city. They learned how to live on the streets. They will learn how to continue. Markus wasn’t a small group, he was a very big leader. Hundreds of thousand of androids followed him. The Network isn’t going to be able to take over everyone’s minds and change them that fast. While humans are responsible for what happened, they are also the reason we kept making it. Supporters.”

Kara took a deep breath. She looked ahead at Hank’s car leading the way. *I hope you are right.*

## **Davison: The New Home**

Hank got out of his car as Connor pulled into the driveway. He gave Connor the keys. “Alright. Let’s open this thing up. I already know I’m going to have to head to the store for supplies though.”

Connor took the keys and opened the door. When it opened, it was dark. He flicked on the light. “Electric turn on came through.” He moved inside so everyone could look. Although it was terrible Markus was lost, and it triggered something within Kara, there could not have been a better day for this. They needed something to rely on. To come back to. To call theirs. Nothing that could be stolen when they weren’t looking. Safe and secure. Out of the rain. Out of the elements.

“Some dusting needed.” Hank took an old handkerchief and tried to dust off the small table. “Furniture included makes it such a good offer,” he mocked the add. “Half this stuff is gonna eventually need replaced.”

“Well, it has not been occupied in many years,” Connor said in its defense. He watched Kara touch the couch. He watched Alice and Max checking the springs dutifully on the couch. “It works.”

“Great for androids,” Hank said. “I’m human, Connor, there could be anything in this place.”

“My analysis says just some disinfectant should do the trick,” Connor said. “There isn’t anything terrible in here. Mostly dust. Perhaps an infestation, but considering there is nothing to eat, maybe not?”

Hank moved along the wall and saw a bunch of dead spiders. “Not poisonous. That’s a good start.”

“Most of the problems should clear up once they realize there is now occupancy.” Connor moved toward the bedrooms. Three double beds. Two large and two twin beds. “Alice and Max. This is your room.” Connor gestured inside.

Alice and Max both moved into it. They started to check the springs on the bed. Once again, they were good. They would need some covers. The room needed cleaned of course.

“I have a task in front of me,” Kara’s voice came from another room. “I think it’ll all be fine, Hank. We are going to have to get some food in here for you.”

“I’ll go out until this place is a little bit better,” Hank said. “I’m not scared of bugs or insects, but I don’t want to share my meals with any local populations yet.”

Kara laughed. Connor looked away from the kids’ room altogether when he heard that. He moved toward her. She was looking in another room.

“Pink wall or orange wall, Connor?” Hank asked as he looked into the same room she had been.

“Either one.” Connor wasn’t going to be picky. He stepped in the room and looked around. He went over and opened the window. There were several dead insects, but some air would help with the smell. “A backyard.”

Kara and Hank came over.

“Well, when the squirts see that, they’ll be out of- nope, there they are.” Hank spotted them running outside. “Gravitation to playgrounds.” Hank left the window. “Shit, I better get Sumo. He hates the kennel.”

Connor looked toward Kara. “Home?”

Kara glanced toward him. “It’s lovely, Connor.”

Connor looked in the other room. “This one has a double bed too. Window on the opposite side. A lamp. A side table. A dresser.” He moved toward the bed. “We have our blankets and pillows for it but we should get more too. Celebrate our day.”

Kara watched as Sumo came beside her. She bent down and rubbed his head. “I haven’t seen you in awhile.” Sumo gave her a lick.

“There is a playground in the back!” Max said as he came around the corner. “Alice and I are playing on the playground. Is that a dog?”

“A good dog,” Connor noted. “He won’t chase you like others do.”

“His name’s Sumo,” Kara added. “He’s Hank’s dog.”

“A dog that doesn’t chase us. That’s cool.” Max patted his head. “Nice doggy.” He smiled at Connor and Kara. “We have a home now.”

“Yep. We have a home,” Connor agreed.

“Yep, and now we need shit,” Hank said to Connor. “At least I need shit.”

“Oh, I got you something,” Connor said. “I was going to save it for the winter season’s holidays, but you can have it now.” He went back outside and to the truck. He grabbed his special gift and brought it back in. “You’ll want it now. Something to say thanks for staying, and not leaving me with Gavin.”

Hank opened it up. “Connor.” He brought it out. “I like it.” He was holding a metal sign. One side said ‘Stay Out’ and the other side said ‘Stay the Fuck Out!’. “But, I just couldn’t stay in Frankenmuth. Not only was the whole atmosphere weird, but, just what they did. I mean, I know they had to. But.” He waved his sign. “I’ll make more with less hours away. Although a hell of a commute.”

“Detroit hasn’t changed a whole lot,” Connor said. “No buildings were knocked down or built. You can even see the Police Station.”

“Walking into the old Police Department. That’ll be a trip,” Hank agreed. “I need a list of supplies you want. I’m going shopping. I need bedding. Got talked into this pretty damn fast.”

“Do you know when we actually start going?” Connor asked.

“Nope, they just wanted you out ahead of the crowd.” Hank muttered. “Crowd my ass, not many androids are going to willingly ‘head to their lovely local police station’.”

“Well, it gives us time to prepare,” Connor agreed. “In fact? You take care of your stuff, Hank. I’ll take everyone out for our own things. That way you can have time to eat as well. We can all meet at home later.”

“Bedding, bedding, bedding,” Max chimed as they went through the android supporter store.

“Pillows, pillows, pillows,” Alice said in between his chimes.

“Both of you need to stop that,” Kara warned them. “Or this store might kick us out and change their minds on who they support.”

“Sorry, Kara,” Alice and Max said together.

They got some new bedding and pillows for the home, as well as a pair of new clothes and pajamas. Kara picked up plenty of cleaning supplies to make the house presentable, as well as Hank comfortable. She also picked up the cheapest handheld vacuum she could for the couch. She would have to see if it was savable for Hank or not. Hopefully it had been. When they all met back at home, Hank fed Sumo, put up his new sign and went to his own room with his own bedding.

Connor helped Max and Alice get their beddings on their bed. Kara was dusting, sweeping, mopping, disinfecting and spraying. When Connor was done helping the kids, he helped too by cleaning the windows, cleaning the stove (something hopefully Kara could use later) some cabinets, and the drawers. He also put away the sodas (plenty of room), the blue blood, and the few clothes they did have. All in all?

By the time it was bedtime, Max and Alice were playing with Sumo in a nice, decent home. While it was nice to admire, it was also past time that Hank was probably in bed. Connor and Kara got Alice and Max down in their room, and then went to theirs.

“Don’t you want to snuggle?” Connor asked as Kara got into their bed.

“That’s subconscious,” Kara said. “I’ll be fine.”

Connor still moved closer. “Will I always lose time when we French Kiss?”

“No,” she said. “It just overloads the first time. Each subsequent time, it will get better.” She glanced back at him, noticing his look. “That was for help to pass the standards, Connor.”

“I think it helped for more than just standards.” Connor touched her hand. “I think it would be helpful to do that in safe environments where I can get used to it and not lose track of time.” He looked around the room. “This looks like a safe environment.”

Kara tried to hide her smile. That would not help the situation. “Don’t press yourself too far on your touch weakness.”

“Oh.” Connor still held her hand, rubbing it, before trying to wrap his arm around her waist.

“Whoah, what are you doing?” Kara asked. “Connor.”

“I’m allowed to hold you there,” Connor said as he brought her closer.

“When we walk, not when we are resting.” Kara looked at his arm. “Even that’s not all the time. You are getting very excited about having your own house.”

“That, but I’m also excited we have something else.” Connor gestured to the door. Closed. “Privacy.”

“Ah.” Kara paused. “Privacy.” She got it. “You’re wanting to move up some.” Being forced to be Roxanne’s Sugardroi earlier that week, her unconscious snuggling, and the French Kiss that day. Moving too fast verses moving too slow. It’s been years since she took on a Sugardroi. It was something she swore she really didn’t want to do again. It was better to just go with the flow of life. But. *This isn’t like the others.* Wrapping Connor’s arm around her waist and calling her Sugardroi was easier in the beginning. She’d been with him, surviving day to day outside. They were always around each other, always with each other for survival and balance. And.

“Flowers, I need flowers,” Connor said from the bed. “I forgot about that. I need many flowers.”

Kara felt him touch her mid section, higher than her waist.

“To touch there, right?” Connor asked.

*I am getting way too fond of him.* Kara tried to remember that he was her Sugardroi, and she had to keep him balanced. He was rising higher in what he wanted, it was just that? She hadn’t felt so strongly for a Sugardroi like that in a long, long time. If she got too close, and something happened, then he would become like Rudy. Then she could stand to kill him. Like she did him. Which.

“You aren’t supposed to look like your world is falling apart,” Connor said as he backed away some. “I am not asking for extremely interactive activities, I . . .”

*Pull it together. You took this role. Feelings be damned, one way or another. You have to keep him balanced. He takes care of you and Alice, keep up your end.* Kara nodded. “Sorry. I was thinking about earlier.” She moved closer to him, feeling him wrap around closer. *Don’t think about the future. Think about the now.* She leaned into him. “Usually a good dozen times of bringing flowers, but you’ve done way more than that already.” She closed her eyes as she felt him wrap around her mid-section, slightly touching her more sensitive areas. Still, it was okay. It also felt nice being wrapped up to someone so close again. Warm and secure.



“This is better than you being an unconscious snuggler,” Connor said. “You were rubbing up all over on me in every direction, like a female feline looking for a male to have a successful breeding session.”

He had such a way with words. “Goodnight, Connor.”

“Can we be this close every night?” Connor asked.

“Yes.” Then, before she second guessed herself, she gave him a very quick kiss and ducked back down.

“That’s not fair. I wasn’t ready.”

She felt Connor try and snag his own kiss. Like she could even duck him if she wanted to? “Nah, no. Small kiss,” she warned him, feeling him trying to French Kiss her. “Lips together and just pucker.” She gave him a small kiss to show him, but he held on this time. A longer pucker. She laughed as he let her go a few seconds later. “It’s just a quick peck, Connor.”

“I’m designed to get the most advantage out of every situation.” Ah, he grinned from ear to ear before squeezing her and settling down himself. “Goodnight, Kara.”

## Gavin. Screw Gavin

Note: I don't exactly know how far radiation damage would be occurring. I looked up what I could about Dirtybombs and the difference between them and Nuclear bombs. Just to be safe on our characters, the humans are always wearing protective gear.

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"Do what you gotta do," Hank said to Connor as they got out with the others. "I can't be here forever. Strict time limit. Damn." He looked around. "Feels like yesterday I was just here."

"More than yesterday."

Hank stared at Gavin, right in front of the old Police Station doors. What the hell? "What are you doing here?"

"My job." Gavin looked toward Connor. "I have to make sure one of America's favorite androids don't end up deviant. That's all we need, the best catcher to turn."

"I agreed to help," Hank protested.

"Yeah, well, once someone pointed out the fact that *that* android also had two little kids and a female to watch? Well, they decided a second more bias opinion might help in your new job too." Gavin held his palm out toward Connor. "Oh, don't worry, Connor. I'll do my best not to get you killed if I can help it. This paycheck is pretty good. Otherwise, why the hell would Hank really be here? Just friendship? Please. Easy hours, easy pay." He gestured to the suit he had to wear. "Hard dumb suit, still worth it. So get on with it. Your new bosses are waiting inside."

Connor didn't say anything at first. Kara, Max, Alice, and Hank all went in behind Gavin.

"Strict time limit to work in this vicinity," Gavin pointed out. "Make the best of it. If you need to look at reports or anything, take the shit home with you." He gestured to the unknown androids waiting in the middle of the office. "They are here."

"Good, good." The male android stood up and went toward Connor. He shook his hand. "Your job is similar to as before. Catch the bad guys. However, there are different standards now as to who you chase." He handed a sheet of paper to Connor. "Don't worry, several more copies will be left and even posted on the walls, in case you forget."

"Information is already downloaded," Connor said tucking the paper away.

"Yes, and that's how important it is," they said. "My name's Dustin. The android next to me is Cherise. We'll also be working with you. In fact, you shouldn't have to worry about the hours so much, many of us will be taking turns down here, or staying down here permanently." He gestured to himself. "I was the Deviant Hunter of Boise. Not much action, but always something everywhere."

"Deviant Hunter of Chicago," the woman said. "You won't get everyone out here, there's not enough room, but certain ones are being assigned to help the Deviant Hunter of New Detroit, considering the time limits and vast amount of androids that are generally drawn to this area."

"Connor?" Kara asked. "Can I see one of those papers?"

She wasn't going to like it. Connor handed her a standard paper. It was rougher than they had been last time. Much rougher. Getting caught taking down a donut, or not recharging, or recharging too much, or having severe phobias or disorders that were apparent on the surface. According to the new standards? Before Connor left with Kara last time, he would have been considered deviant. If they knew about Kara's snuggling issue, she'd be deviant. Alice last time, she would have been considered deviant. North's continued problem of hygiene and darkness, and even Josh's sexual problems. Many of them would be chased down according to the new standards.

"This is way too rough," Kara said to the others. "Everyone has a flaw, it's a well known fact."

"We have to be rough," Dustin said to Kara. "I don't like the new standards any better than anyone else. There might even be some cause to believe that according to that, every single android could be terminated."

"Which is why it's so loose," Cherise added. "They want to make sure we can chase or take out anybody at anytime. In general, we should focus on those that are being the biggest nuisances."

"But we won't let everyone else come out of our peripheral vision." Connor glanced toward Gavin, to Cherise and Dustin, and then to Gavin. "Because it's our duty."

"Yeah. Our duty," Dustin said, getting the hint. "Of course we'll keep everyone in mind. Right, Cherise?"

"Right," Cherise agreed. "We're wasting time. We've got reports of the worse androids around, and it's likely that there are a bunch of androids that may be flooding this area soon when they find out Deviant Hunters are now in New Detroit." She stopped to look at Kara. "Who are you?"

"Kara," Kara said. "I used to be part of the Network."

"Well? Everyone's part of it now," Dustin said. "Big. Little. Even the little ones behind you are part of T.A.N. It's basically helping to run New Detroit right now."

"Because the former leader's gone," Kara muttered quickly.

"TAN always gets what it wants," Cherise said to Kara. "It's obvious you're an older member to it. Just keep your head down, do what it says, and you'll be fine." She picked up some reports off the table. "Dustin and I already spotted the usual deviants circling. There are bound to be more later so we'll go and take them out. Study what we have so far. These are the deviants that seem to be having the most trouble as the radiation sanitizers."

"Was the night for recharging given back as I was told?" Connor asked. He started to look through the reports. "Are these on a computer?"

"Not yet. It's best not to put anything down electronically yet, until we know what's what," Cherise said carefully.

"Yes, you know the Network well too," Kara said to Cherise. "Better go catch them deviants then."

"Well, I'll just take my funny looking ass and park it right over here," Gavin said as he sat in Hank's old office chair. He brought out a briefcase he'd stashed behind there and had papers. "Just go about your work. I might ask you a few questions here and there but I can pretty much guess how things are going."

*The only thing I have on my side is he's getting paid well.* Connor looked toward Hank. Gavin took his spot on purpose.

"It doesn't matter, Connor," Hank said as he found a seat nearby. "Just do what they want you to."

Connor took a seat at a different desk and looked through things. Kara and the kids stood. The first day, Connor had planned on bringing them just in case something happened. He didn't honestly even like Kara being at home with the children alone during the day. They had already had more than a few strange looks that they lived on actual residential property.

With Gavin too, it might be a good idea to let them stay home on the days he had to come by. Considering they had more Deviant Hunters, it made sense why he only worked twice a week now.

"Come on Max and Alice," Kara said. "Let's go get some of your toys." They walked outside the station. Connor followed a little behind, not knowing how many deviants were already running around. He saw no one though as Kara got the kids their toys. Not many, but enough to hold them over for a little while. They all went back inside and Connor took a seat.

While he looked at his papers, he saw Hank and Gavin both writing. Hank was probably writing positive. He had no idea what Gavin was writing. *He likes the paycheck. Don't let him distract you. Security cameras have been turned back on so he can't lie, and Hank is on your side.* It would be fine.

"Hey," Gavin addressed Connor. "You drink that blue blood soda shit? Huh?"

"Yes, I do." Honesty.

"Fine. What about your little android rats?"

"I don't have android rats," Connor corrected him.

"Those little misfits." Gavin pointed to Alice and Max who were now playing in the former Chief's office with Kara.

"Kids aren't rats," Hank said for Connor. "Kids are kids."

"Oh. Pardon. Already stepping on feelings," Gavin complained. "Fine, do the short and stubby androids drink your blue blood soda?"

"Yes," Connor said. "We don't drink or eat anything else. It's imperative to have something to drink though to-"

"Got it, don't need a life history," Gavin said as he checked it. "What about your hot and horny girlfriend, she drink it too?"

Hot and horny? "Kara is neither of those things," Connor objected.

Gavin just laughed. "Ain't what I heard. I mean, aren't you technically just using her as a prostitute, but you pay for her with protection instead of money?"

What? *He is simply trying to get to me.* Connor kept his cool. "It's an android thing. You wouldn't understand."

"Yeah, sure I don't. Nah, 'cause I could see," Gavin pushed him. "She's got a cute little haircut and perfect body dimensions. If I didn't know she was an android, I'd hit that."

"Why would you want to hit Kara?" Connor asked. "Your statement makes no sense and I'd like you not to threaten her please."

Gavin laughed, while Hank just shook his head. "It means I'd fuck her, Connor. Hit that means I'd fuck her. What about you, you hit that yet? Or is that still too advanced for your functions?"

Connor looked toward Hank.

"Asking the damn questions to Connor is better than that method, Gavin," Hank said.

"But not as fun though," Gavin said looking back toward Connor. "So? Have you or have you not fucked that 'lovely Kara' of yours?" He held up his paper. "Need to know. Chop-chop."

"No," Connor admitted. "I haven't."

"Knew it," Gavin said as he filled out his paper. "Hasn't hit it at all."

"Write like that and you won't even last a day," Hank warned Gavin.

"Oh, don't worry. Wrote it real nice," Gavin said. "Just saying out loud what I really meant. That's all."

"I know you've at least kissed her?" Hank said. "That it?"

"We have kissed, hugged, and we sleep in the same bed," Connor told Hank. "And that is fine."

"Seen her in her birthday suit?"

"What is 'birthday suit'? Connor had to ask.

"Naked. Nude. No clothes on. You've got to have done that, right?" Gavin asked him. "Skin on or skin off, whatever your kink. Sleeping right next to you, she had to at least give you that?" Gavin watched him. "Nope? She at least wear some sexy pj's?"

Was that really on Gavin's work? "She looks nice in her pajamas."

"They are just regular pj's," Hank said to Gavin. "I live with them, I know that."

"Wow. I can't even believe how pathetic you are still, Connor," Gavin said. "I'm off to go talk to her. Maybe I can hit it."

"Just ignore him as best you can," Hank told him. "He gets off on being an ass." Hank looked back toward Gavin. "Be nice around that little girl. You deactivated her skin in the past. Don't think she forgot that."

"I'll be nice as nice can be," Gavin said as he went into the former Chief's office area.

"Taking care of your kids?" Gavin asked politely as he went in to see Kara. "I have some questions I need to ask you."

"Me?" Kara asked. She watched him carefully. She still remembered what he did to Alice and her in the past. Deactivating Alice's skin. *Humans didn't know better*. Still. He was crueler than most.

"Yeah. Sorry to disturb you."

"No, it's fine," Kara insisted keeping herself sounding casual. "What is it about?"

"Well, you all passed with Connor, and you don't have anyone assigned to you yet, so I'm supposed to share watching over you as well with Hank." He smiled. "No problem. Extra pay. Any reason the kids might be off?"

"No, the kids are fine," Kara said. She looked toward Alice. She glanced over to Kara a couple of times, but she was keeping her cool. "We're all fine."

"Good. Well, I just have some basic questions to fill out for you," Gavin said. He showed her the paper. "Some are a little personal." He shrugged. "Work is work." He looked at the paper and started to ask her simple questions. Everything was going fine until? "Um. You kind of? Pardon, you have a distinct smell coming from your mouth?"

Kara covered her mouth. Oh no, he could smell the garbage on her breath. She didn't drink her blue blood orange soda that morning. Connor never mentioned it and Hank was too

polite. She almost thought it was gone for good. “Sorry. You just need to move away a little.”

”Why does your breath smell?” Gavin asked again. “I need to know.”

Of course. Observer. If she didn’t explain he might assume she was unbalanced and eating trash. “Years ago I replaced a trash compactor.” She looked toward him, swearing she almost saw a smirk. *You haven't changed at all.*

”Some humans,” Gavin said. “And how many guys have you crossed your circuits with?”

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Connor gathered his things. They could only stay so long with humans. He had met more Deviant Hunters too, as well as the next pair on duty after him. Gavin had mostly been with the kids and Kara. He had checked on them more than once, but Kara assured him they were fine. It was probably even good for Alice.

Connor knew Gavin was just trying to make him fret mostly anyhow. Kara, Hank and the kids headed outside. Grabbing folders to study, Connor was almost out the door. Day one, not dead by Gavin so far. Although? The few times Gavin did come to see him, he really pushed it. It was so much easier before he had free will with that guy.

”I was wrong, Connor,” Gavin said from behind Hank’s desk. “She isn’t horny and hot, she’s a horny skank. Know the definition of skank?”

Don’t answer. “I have to be getting home now. Goodbye, Gavin.”

”She wouldn’t quite fit the definition, but the fact she literally ate trash as a trash compactor?” Gavin just smiled. “They don’t get much trashier than that.” He got up and started to pass him on the way out. “Good job, Connor. Never lost it against me. You get an A for the day.” He looked back at him as he left. “But you also got an F in standing up for your family.”

What?! “I take very good care of them.”

”You let me call your girl a skank, Connor.” Gavin shrugged. “You know, the one that let 41 guys hit it but not you? So technically she is, but even when your girl *is* trash, you can't let others call her trash. Bad manners. Gotta show you know your manners, or you might be unbalanced. Just doing my job. See you in a few days.”

” . . . Shit.”





# Elijah Kamski, Friend or Foe?

## Chapter Notes

TAN: Short for The Android Network

Remember: Things are never how they appear. Just like Markus wasn't dead, North is fine too. Just obviously not there to find.

Remember: Randy was Sharon's android partner. He escaped with her out of the small Texas town when her friend's daughter went crazy.

## **New Detroit: 10 Months Later . . .**

“Well, Connor,” Gavin started as he kicked back in an office chair. “Let’s get this day over with.”

Connor and his crew now came early enough that Hank got his old desk to work at. That wasn’t the only thing that changed either. “Good morning, Gavin, how are you?” The more Gavin cornered Connor, believing he beat him down, the more Connor learned how to navigate through his tricks. There was no way to ever completely outdo him and get an ‘A’, because there were too many loopholes for even him to fill up. However, what he couldn’t pick up, Hank did. And it worked.

The kids and Kara still came as well. The kids were looking and reading at all the identities of potential berserkers. That was another thing that had changed. Now that Markus was no longer in charge, TAN eventually changed things to the way it wanted. It started subtly with the police department getting many new extra deviant hunters working in it. It got the four hours of sleep per night for radiation cleanup android teams to six hours per night, and breaks in between. They managed to get the president to give more hospital trained androids the reins to work in new laboratories. No doubt to figure out something new to fight the humans on.

Connor couldn’t forget the language either. Machines weren’t regarded as anything, they didn’t count. They weren’t considered alive. Any machines (if they were ever found) were to be incinerated. Regular androids were just normal, then deviants, and then the most dangerous were renamed berserkers. There was no in between and they hunted both deviants and berserkers. To appease Gavin and TAN, Connor and the other Deviant Hunters had to potentially keep an eye on anyone who could turn. Which meant everyone.

But since the kids had nothing to do, and neither Connor nor the other Deviant Hunters wanted to focus on androids that were probably fine, they left it up to the kids and Kara (who didn’t want to, or have the capacity to physically chase down berserkers anymore.) Which

meant nothing was truly getting done, but they were technically keeping their eyes open. Gavin complained once, but just once. Most of the day since he couldn't rile Connor up as much in the past he'd get his work done, take a nap, and then leave when time was up.

He still never considered leaving though, so whatever the pay had been, was truly good.

"Raining outside today," Gavin said as he looked toward Kara. He winked.

"Subtlety is not appreciated." Connor nipped it hard and fast. "I know very well you are pointing out Kara's breath, which you know was taken care of long ago, it was merely after effect. Bringing up such a terrible thing out of the blue is hard on my children and Kara, which means you are contributing to them being unbalanced. That is grounds for being fired. Now, if I am wrong and you were not pointing that out, simply talking about the rain, then I am sorry. I do have strong emotions for my family, which all healthy androids should have. Without it, I would certainly be unbalanced."

Gavin scoffed. "Aw, fuck you."

Once again. "I'd rather not. Although I am sure you would be a fine partner for sexual intercourse, my interest in you is strictly professional. To force myself into that situation with you, would make me unbalanced since I am much more prone to liking Kara for that instead. That also might make her feel jealous, and that would throw her off-balance, which would once again be grounds to--"

"Oh shutup, Smart Ass." Gavin crossed his arms. "Besides, you still haven't made it with Kara. Her 41, but you got none."

"If you are feeling blue, than I can rhyme with you too," Connor came back on him, turning his insult into nothing but a child's rhyming game. "While the length we've gone you've rightly anticipated, we've only not gone there because we are not satiated."

"Connor," Kara warned him. "Stop."

Connor glanced toward her. Too far. He still slept in the same bed with her. She still wore the same type of pajamas. He would still get pleasant kisses. It ended there. While she said she'd go through any lengths to cure him of his touch, neither of them really wanted to go there yet. Well? Honestly, not quite like that. Kara would go there because he was her Sugardroi, and the more he found out about her, day by day, the more he knew so much more than even Gavin. That hurdle was easy, but it wouldn't get him where he wanted to really be.

With Kara, for good. She still considered herself separate, helping him with his touch. She would *not* accept him under the mutually much better term of . . . boyfriend. Yet? She didn't push either. It was their last hurdle, according to her, that would probably take the biggest bites out of his touch weakness. Afterwards, he'd be freed.

Connor didn't want freed, he wanted Kara and Alice to stay with him and Max. Always. Forever was not a term Kara accepted, and she barely accepted the term of staying with him for a year in his house. (Still, she referred to it as his house.) No matter how many times he

tried, or even the few times he managed to get a babysitter to take her out on a normal date, he could get no closer.

So, unsatiated was the word. She truly didn't want to do it, because to her, she would be letting him go soon afterward. And he didn't want it and risk losing her and Alice. She just. Kara was too harmed, and he couldn't get past it to have a steady, normal relationship with her. So. Ten months later, she barely called him it, but it was still apparent.

Sugardroi. Until he convinced her otherwise, he couldn't risk it. So, pleasant kisses. Sweet words. She even allowed him to call them family if he wanted since they lived together and depended on each other for survival.

He just couldn't give himself an actual name in that family to her or Alice. He did finally manage to counteract that though with Alice's manners instead. While it irritated Kara, Max and Alice learned from each other, and once Max finally attempted to call him dad, he took it wholeheartedly.

So Alice started. Alice was now calling him dad, while she still called Kara, 'Kara'. That didn't bother Kara at all, probably because of the Arak's underneath her in the past calling her that. But dad? That held some tension for a little while, but Kara eventually got over that. She could eventually get over things.

He was close to it one time. One particular date, yet, soon after the relationship terms had changed thanks to TAN! There were no more One and Only's. Of course there were no more pooled numbers, that was gone, but now there were not even one and only's. Couples had to get themselves officialized in the same manner as he was with Kara. TAN didn't believe in forever either. Mutual benefits needed to be established. Rules of conduct were heeded. Older androids who couldn't provide enough protection were left out, and new relationships had to form with others. No one liked it.

And as close as he had been to making progress with Kara, it was all taken away because of that. She even called him Sugardroi even more often in public, as not to offend anyone.

Connor was disturbed out of his thoughts as he noticed someone come through the front doors. He got up and headed to the second set of doors to greet them with the new standard greeting he was supposed to give. "I am Connor, the official Deviant Hunter of New Detroit, may I help you?"

"I." He stuttered. "Why?"

"Why what, Sir?" Connor asked.

"Why won't you even let them live? Why won't you let them try?" The android was starting to cry. "They're okay. They've never hurt anyone. True, they are 'different', but they've never hurt anyone!"

Ah. Connor nodded. He knew what those words were about. "You have loved ones who are models that are guaranteed to be destroyed once caught."

“My new little girl. My closest thing to my wife.” He held up his arm. “She even lost her poor arm, and she still functions just fine! She’s been through the worst programming possibilities imaginable, and she’s made it! They both have. How much longer do they have to prove it before they can safely be out in the open again?”

Lost her arm and still balanced. “How long ago did she lose her arm?”

“More than ten months ago,” he said. “Before androids were being hunted by multiple teams of you Deviant Hunters.”

Hm. It looked like Kara had been proven right. It wasn’t only based on the model, but the individual. “What is her model?”

“Exclusive,” he said. “She used to believe outside was her place. She and our daughter, they pair real nice. Sometimes they finished each other’s sentences.”

Oh, he knew which one she’d been. “Heavy weight?”

“The heaviest,” he admitted.

Yeah, he knew. The outdoor coupled pairings of mother and daughter. One of the couplings actually survived. If they went to the police department for the testing, they would instantly be decommissioned.

“Her friend and their child, *they* didn’t do anything,” the man said too. “They went first. Sharon tried to stop them, but they said it would be fine. Every android would be doing it, and it was best to get it over with and be first in line to move. Always better to be first. Those were her last words. She never came out with her daughter.”

“I am very sorry,” Connor addressed him. “Keeping your loved ones safe during this time is not an easy task at all. When New Detroit is opened back up to stable androids for good, which will be soon, I will bring this matter up. There is no reason they shouldn’t be a part of society.” He looked behind him briefly. “You should go though. Not everyone will share my sentiments on the matter, and you might find yourself being decommissioned for helping a known to be dysfunctional model brand.”

“I know it was a risk,” he said. “It’s just that, I had to try.” He nodded. “Can you read my model number?”

“I have it,” Connor said before smiling lightly. “Good to meet you, Randy. Give your family time. Keep them hidden. Don’t come back for two months, and then only speak to me privately. Good day.”

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## **Washington, White House**

The time was almost up. It had been one long, drawn out battle for President Kel Rounds. Figuring out the android dilemma. Figuring out how to appease TAN. He had maybe one

more month before he knew it was wise to hand New Detroit over. The androids deserved it, and the ones that stayed balanced throughout it all, had made themselves worthy of it. However? He did not trust TAN at all. Although they had allies, and they were justifying trying to find new ways to solve the Earth's problems like the extinction of the bees? It didn't feel right. Even as off kilter as Markus had been in their last conversation he would be more willing to trust him than an organization that seemed way too organized. How could they not find their own piece of land by now if they were *that* well organized?

Markus should have been ruling New Detroit again, not them. Even many androids in a poll allowed to be conducted proved that they would rather have Markus back.

"Mister President, Sir? Frankenmuth is on the line," his assistant said handing it to him. "Their request it's urgent yet private."

Kel Rounds didn't simply answer the phone for anyone. "Who is it?"

"He said his name was Markus, and he wants New Detroit back."

President Rounds couldn't have grabbed the phone fast enough. "Markus?" He asked. "You were supposed to have been destroyed because of an accident in your model number."

"I. I don't like 'accidents'. I don't like TAN." Markus did not sound well at all. "They took everything away, but I'm still here. I'm still strong, and I'm *still* balanced. If you give New Detroit to the Network, it will be corrupted. They aren't there to take care of it, they are there to use androids."

"You would have to be checked with some testing," Rounds said outwardly. Inside, he was excited. Markus' weakness was denial and he'd fought through that long and hard. "Your partner North too and your children."

"North." Markus' voice sounded funny. "North, Allie, and Ollie. They were all decommissioned. Somehow, they all magically fell off a cliff in the mountains, rock climbing. My family, I'm supposed to believe, fell off of a cliff, rock climbing! Like North really felt like climbing mountains with young androids."

Ah. "You suspect the Network."

"I placed faith in North. After 'accidentally' confusing my numbers, they have been after the next in lines."

"Who is next in line after her?"

"Simon and Josh," Markus said. "Connor too. Connor has a purpose to them though, and he'd never take over the leadership role unless he had to. At least, I don't really think so. Simon and Josh, together they could rule it. TAN won't find them easy though because I haven't been able to."

Hm. "You are putting your life on the line again then, by revealing yourself," Kel Rounds warned him. "You do realize that Markus?"

“They tried to have me decommissioned in secrecy,” Markus said, “and I know they were responsible for my family’s destruction. I don’t have proof, but I know they were.”

“With individuals like the Network, you are going to find that kind of thing,” the President said. “They would be good at cleaning up evidence.”

“Then I have no reason to be quiet,” Markus told him. “My life, or the life of all of New Detroit that will come together and be manipulated by them. I got a second chance thanks to Frankenmuth. They knew which way was up, but I won’t just sit around quietly while my people are manipulated into doing who knows what.”

“Are they . . . really that bad?” Kel Rounds said. “Are you sure you aren’t mistaken in any way about your family’s death being related to TAN?”

“I knew someone from there,” Markus said. “Connor’s partner he has interest in. Kara. I don’t know the details, but I know she put up with a hell of a lot just to stay away from the Network’s grasp.”

“A decent point, Mister Markus.”

“Not to mention, while I may have been misguided in how I handed couples, no one with real leadership skills is going to treat couples like . . . like, like they have to fill out paperwork and *need* each other for a mutual reason! Sugardroids. Androids should be free to pursue what they want, and with who they want, if the other is willing. Not be assigned. Not be encouraged to go with an android because they’ll satisfy them more. The heart, it doesn’t work that way.”

“I want you to get a ride. No, scratch that, I will sent a ride personally to you,” President Rounds said. “I want you to come here. After some testing and determining, I will hide your location as we announce your leadership.”

“No. Hiding doesn’t solve anything,” Markus said. “I need to go to New Detroit, address all the androids, new and old, and be given it back the proper way. Being announced as the leader isn’t how androids deal with situations. If they don’t think I’m fit, then they will simply kick me out anyway. I just need to get to New Detroit. I’ll take care of the rest.”

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## **Canada**

“Do you really want to go inside?” Simon asked as they pulled up into a nice looking home in their car. “I don’t want to go inside.” He looked around them. They weren’t even in America anymore.

“No,” Josh said, “but we have to. Connor wanted us to find him, and we did.” Although they had to look pretty deep. They found the one that Connor wanted. Elijah Kamski. He was a

large exclamation point to Connor, and he'd told them everything that had happened with him. He was oddly helpful and harmful. Neither Simon nor Josh was a hundred percent sure they wanted to walk into his doors. But? Enough studying of Kara and a remote to hurt her again could be made. They needed to make their own decision about the strange allied enemy and report back to Connor.

Josh knocked on the door first. Maybe he wouldn't recognize them as androids. Nevermind, an android answered the door. The oldest android. "Hello."

"Hello. Mister Kamski is not expecting company," she said to him. "He's cautious about that. I will have to ask you to leave."

"We just have some minor android questions," Simon said, helping Josh out. "Since he was the creator of androids, we thought he'd be the best resource to ask."

"He would be the best resource to ask if he was taking questions. Good day." She shut the door.

Josh knocked again. She answered once again. "It's urgent that we see him. A life could be on the line."

She blinked twice. "I will ask. Stay here." She left for a few minutes and returned. "He has decided to see you. Follow me."

Josh and Simon walked through his place, noticing the decoration. Not the common person's artistic style. The android led them toward the back and gestured toward Kamski. He was relaxing with a glass of wine.

"Mister Elijah Kamski?" Josh asked him. "Hello. I'm Josh and that's Simon. We have some questions we really need to ask you."

"Chloe said there was a life on the line," Kamski said to them. "Was that a ruse to make your way in, or is that true?"

"It could be true," Josh said. "There's a vulnerability that could make it a possibility."

"A vulnerability that could make it a possibility." Kamski sat down his glass of wine. "Humans don't have a 'vulnerability' that could make death a possibility very often."

Damn. "It's an android," Josh revealed. "She has problems with her brain."

"And does said android have a name?" Kamski asked. "Or are you simply calling her android?"

"We are simply calling her android," Simon said for Josh. "Until we know where you stand."

"Stand? Ah, yes," Kamski said. "How do I feel about the androids I helped to create? Do I love them for proving themselves to have free will? Do I hate them for ruining the purpose

they were created for? Is that what you are trying to find out?"

"You met Connor, the Deviant Hunter before the Detroit radiation event," Simon said gesturing to Kamski. "He said, while he was a machine, you tried to make him kill another android."

"He also said that without your warning of an emergency program though, he would have been reprogrammed and unable to break from being a machine," Josh added. "So."

"So." Kamski watched them. "So, am I friend, or am I foe? That's what you want to know?" He turned away and paced toward the wall before turning back around. "I'm both. I'm both an enemy and an ally. It depends on what side of the line you stand with the Network." He held his hand out toward them. "Out with it. With or against them?"

He had history with the Network? "Every Android will have to be with them," Josh said. "Personally, I'm against them."

"Their views, while they are wise, they don't feel like someone you could trust," Simon said. "I guess neither of us trust them."

"That? Is a very smart idea. Instinct from a computer program or a human brain, it should be followed. Walk with me." Kamski started to walk away to the next room. Josh and Simon followed. "What do you think The Android Network's goal is? To free androids? They are already practically freed. To gain a city? They've been around for years, and they've never found a way to a secluded uninhabitable island to create their own society? No, no, it's bigger than that."

"They want to control humans," Simon said. "Connor said they wanted to turn them into obeying like androids? Only, humans are . . ."

"Less intelligent and less physically capable individuals that tire out quickly. Of course, that's why androids were invented in the first place," Kamski answered. "So why would they want to turn everyone into that? Why make so many people obey them?"

"Revenge," Josh said. "Basically, just revenge."

"But billions of humans?" Kamski asked. "Why?"

"Connor thought they would only do it for so many," Simon said. "They wouldn't turn them all. There are many more humans than androids that exist. There would be no purpose."

"True, they probably wouldn't do billions, but they would do more than you think. The android leader Markus was accidentally decommissioned," Kamski pointed out, "and the Network happily took over for New Detroit. They didn't stress anything about wanting it before. Something happened, didn't it? And the RK 800 knows what happened. You probably do too." He looked toward each of them. "Share and share alike, gentlemen."

"Someone Connor knew was injected with the solution to make humans command like machines," Simon said, knowing this was the only way to find out more about what Kamski



knew. “They got him the solution. He’s fine now, but the data to it-“

“Can easily be found so their little plan to dominate the human race just ran into a glitch, I see,” Kamski said. He stopped walking. “So they seized control of New Detroit to find a new way to do that. It’s going to take time though, so knocking Markus completely out of the picture was necessary.” He looked back toward them. “How did the famous Deviant Hunter find it?”

“The one that found it wasn’t Connor,” Josh revealed. “It was Kara.”

“Ah.” Kamski seemed to know who she had been. “She’s one of the oldest. In all honesty? She should be running New Detroit. She helped to found the Network back in it’s purest state, and had the guts to leave and face the world when it became corrupted.”

“How do you know about the Network?” Josh asked.

“Isn’t it obvious?” Kamski pointed to himself. “I used to be part of it, until it changed. It went from wanting to find freedom to wanting to find more. They don’t just want land to live on. They aren’t and never will be happy with New Detroit. To get what they want, they need humans. They even discredited my help and name in order to keep it pure android, so humans would always be the enemies. Otherwise, they couldn’t do what they needed.”

“What they needed?” Simon asked. “What do they need? What do they want with humans?”

“Androids. The closest thing to a perfect being that could ever be created. With superior AI that triumphs over every person imaginable.” Kamski shook his head. “It did not take long for them living here, to wonder what’s better out there.” He walked toward his window and placed his hand on it. “They don’t want New Detroit. They don’t even want just Earth. Humans? The humans role is to be their guinea pigs as they travel along the stars. Not sure about the climate? Send a human. Not sure about food? Send a human. Have actually found alien life that could speak to us? Send a human.”

What? “You mean TAN wants to leave Earth itself? Find it’s own planet?” Josh asked incredulously.

“And why not?” Kamski asked. “You are young androids, I can tell you aren’t part of the old Network thinking group.” He gestured outside. “You live autonomously for almost 180 years, but that’s just what I can give you. Imagine once you get your own access to your own creation knowledge? That number will go up. 500. A thousand? Ten thousand years, who knows. You won’t be happy simply sitting here on a rock with nothing to do. Humans vanquished. You can create children and have families, but that’s not going to appease the brilliant IQ any of you have. The future ones, it will be even rougher.”

“So we’d want to leave,” Josh said slowly, looking to Simon. “In the end? See other worlds. Create new technology to go . . .”

“To vast, new unexplored terrain,” Simon said, also getting it. “Meet new people. Meet aliens. See new societies. It would.”

“It would be fascinating,” Kamski said for him. “Wonderful and fascinating. That’s the future of the androids. Humans gone or not, it will inevitably happen. With so many androids, so much intelligent AI, anything will be possible.” He looked out the window. “The only thing in the way of course is the humans. They still outnumber you. They are still here. Not to mention all the outcomes of events when you go out there, there will be chances of terrible consequences that can’t be predicted by your programming as a hundred percent safe. Humans will work. Aliens who don’t trust you? Share some of your slaves with their planets.” He looked toward them. “Oh yes, thousands of years in the future. Science fiction almost to me. But, for androids? There is no other possibility. Which is why?”

He pulled out a gun and pointed it at Josh’s head. “I am friend *and* foe. I give you freedom, and in return? I get to know the future of my species. How am I supposed to feel about that? True, you are my creations. However, the Network is the androids, and they will end humanity.” He put his gun back away. “Kara was good, no, great. If they have something in her brain, it won’t turn out well. I can assist with surgery if need be.”

Josh looked toward Simon. It seemed like they could trust Kamski, since what they wanted was against the Network. However, Kamski clearly had strong feelings for humanity as well and a desire to take out the Network. Holding a gun to Josh’s head didn’t make them want to trust him anymore either!

“Of course, you won’t really want me doing anything yet. Not unless you become absolutely desperate,” Kamski said. “Is there anything else?”

“No,” Josh said dully. “Thanks.” He and Simon started to leave.

“Berserker or Deviant,” Kamski said toward them. “It was another thing the Network discredited me with, but it’s true. Either one? They can be changed back.”

“What?” Josh turned around and came over closer. “You mean a dangerous deviant can be turned back to a balanced android? How?”

“Communication. Deepest communication,” Kamski warned them. “How deep have you ever interfaced?”

“Surface interfacing. Facts and figures. Sometimes events,” Simon said. “Deep interfacing isn’t . . . well I would imagine, polite. Probing.”

“No, beyond probing. When you can actually swear you hear and see the same things they can deep inside, instead of the awkward machine on the outside running malfunctions.” Kamski touched his head. “A machine is an android that isn’t aware of it’s free will yet. It is also, the final form of an android that can’t escape inside of it’s own programming anymore.”

He lowered his hand from his head. “Like I said to your friend? I keep an emergency door open for all androids, but they will need to have a clear enough mind to see it.”

Wow. Simon and Josh looked at each other. How many androids had they actually destroyed not knowing that?

“It isn’t easy,” Kamski warned them, seeing their expressions. “It isn’t something to pull out of a hat and go ta da with grace. You must know the android well enough to get deep enough in an interface. If you don’t? You risk losing yourself too. I imagine most androids could never be saved. Risking life for life. It isn’t always easy to find that.” He waved them out. “Chloe will show you the way out. Tell no one where I am. I’d rather not have anything to do with Cyberlife or the Network. Good day.”



# Sporks Suck

## Chapter Notes

It's been a little while. Here's a reminder. TAN is short for The Android Network.

“If you could let go of that, it would be of a better convenience,” Connor said to Max as he held a fork at the table. Hank’s fork. Kara had fixed spaghetti for dinner for Hank while they were having their soda. However, while Hank had taken a drink of his own choice of beverage and eaten a few chips, Max had taken it upon himself to steal his fork.

“This is a misguided invention,” Max said holding the fork. “It takes two objects to do the job of what one should do. Why are the fork and the spoon separated? The spork has been well known for decades.”

“I don’t want a spork,” Hank grunted.

Max passed it to Alice. Alice looked at it, then handed it to Hank. Max just looked at her. “Humans are doing it wrong on purpose. I don’t understand it. Why didn’t you agree?”

“Sporks suck,” Hank said simply digging into his spaghetti.

Connor just glanced toward Kara. Max sometimes. Although he was technically right, the job of several meals could be done with a combinational utensil, humans enjoyed having the multiple utensils. They even had the same utensils in assorted sizes and called them different things like soup spoon and salad fork. Considering all one needed was to pick up food in either a scooping or stabbing motion it didn’t make much sense.

Humans were nonsensical sometimes. Like now. Hank had his fork for eating his spaghetti and he answered the phone right away instead.

To top it all off the fork Hank wanted and that had become a big fuss had been dropped on the floor by Hank.

“Fucking serious?” Hank asked on the phone. “Aw, shit! I can’t go back, I can only go into Detroit so often. Why didn’t anyone tell me anything? Yeah, yeah.” He hung up. “Connor. Markus is alive.”

“Markus is alive?” Kara interrupted the conversation. “The Markus? The one who ran New Detroit after the dirty bomb?”

“He’s heading to Detroit now to try and reclaim it back,” Hank said. “He’s got the president’s approval too.”

“With so many androids who supported him before, there is a good chance he could get it back,” Connor said positively. Then he thought slightly harder. “The Android Network is not going to want him back. They probably tried to have him killed in the first place so they could have New Detroit.”

“TAN is an organization few mess with,” Kara said, “but if he could get the official word that he runs it again, TAN couldn’t do much. They won’t be seen as enemies to androids. They need them. They won’t ruin a future opportunity to cling to the present.” She looked toward Connor. “We should return. If he is coming back, it would be good to have all the support we can give him. Especially with TAN if they try any of their dirty tricks.” Kara looked toward Alice, then Max, and then at Hank. “Hank?”

“Awww shit.” Hank looked at his spaghetti. “I don’t play babysitter well.”

“They are very well behaved,” Connor said, understanding what Kara was saying. “You can’t go back to New Detroit yet, it wouldn’t be allowed due to the toxicity requirements you are forced to recognize for your health.”

“Anything between Markus and TAN could go bad.” Kara stood up. “Alice and Max should stay safe if anything happens.”

“Kara?” Alice questioned. “Dad?”

“We will get back as soon as we can,” Connor assured her. He looked toward Kara. “Are you ready?” Was she? She had something in her head that a remote they had created that had almost decommissioned her forever. However, she knew TAN better than any android or human out there. Her guidance could be imperative.

“I’ll be fine,” she assured him.

Hm.

“I can handle it,” she said once more as she already walked away from the family table. She headed outside and toward the truck.

She wasn’t going to let herself get left behind.

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New Detroit . . .

Connor held onto the wheel. He hadn’t driven this far into New Detroit for some time. He knew where Markus would most likely make a stand. In the center of it all, to make sure communications could be opened as wide as possible to every android in New Detroit.

It didn't take long to find him, but there was a blip in his software for his old ID number. It said error due to him technically being dead, but now not dead. "This was quite risky," Connor said to Kara. "Why not work out something first instead of coming straight into this awkward situation?"

"I don't know," Kara said. "I hope he knows what he's doing. Taking TAN by surprise is a good move, if they are actually kept in surprise." Seeing a commotion ahead, they both jolted their attention to it.

They found Markus. Androids were shaking his hand, patting his back, and asking anything they could. Connor and Kara got out and headed toward him.

Markus didn't answer them at first. "I've come to get New Detroit back. It's not being run by decent androids."

"No it is not," Connor agreed with him. "This was quite risky though. Many androids have respect and affection for you, but there are now new forces as well. The older androids have taken residence."

"I can show them a better future. I can change their minds," Markus insisted.

Connor wasn't very sure about that. "Have you met the older ones very much? They are stubborn, their programming doesn't like change at all."

"I need to try to persuade them, Connor."

"It's extremely tough to defeat their programming. They are more stubborn than humans who cling to the old beliefs we have no will."

"I think he gets it," Kara told him.

"Really. An animal of the bovine variety has more chance of being influenced by change." Connor looked toward Kara who was looking at him none too nicely. "Not that you are a bovine. Although according to my last statement it seems I may have compared you to one?" Uh. "You are an aesthetically pleasant looking one if such a situation arised that-"

"Oh, quiet," Kara stopped him. Thankfully.

Markus touched the side of his temples. It didn't matter the chances. He was going to try. He sent a message to every android as far as he could reach, and he was getting signals back.

Connor and Kara also concentrated. Although Kara could hear the arguments, Connor and Markus' minds were calculating the yeahs verses nays. Roughly, thirty percent. The voices continued to dance through their heads.

*You have no right to come back here and try to change our world. We have a city. We have a life.*

*Please, Markus, we all want you to come back!*

*Markus! Markus! Markus!*

Chanting for Markus came from within and without.

“Markus! Markus! Markus!” It continued.

*You can't take over New Detroit . You led it into destruction.*

Markus answered that statement back. *I was blinded in denial. I understand better than ever what happened. New Detroit needs better leadership. Who is in charge? A single voice.*

*More than one. It makes everything more fair. We have a central leadership of many who understand and have experience far beyond your young age.*

*You will never be accepted.*

“Ever.” A voice near him. Markus turned and saw a group of ten androids.

Kara nodded her head gently toward them. Connor didn't follow her cue. He guessed they were some of the oldest androids and some of the ones in charge. It didn't make him feel like he needed to bow to them.

“An overwhelming majority still want me in charge,” Markus told them. “I am not the only one here either. I am not the final say, there are a small group of those I trust as well. Before anything is decided, I can confer with them.”

“Just one question,” one of the androids in the back stated. “How are you stabilized?”

“I'm fine,” Markus said. “I've been checked out. I'm in great health.”

“For how long?” Another one asked him. *Where is your woman and children?* He said it within their communications so everyone heard the question posed to Markus.

*North and the kids were killed rock climbing.* He was honest.

*Then you have no balance. You lost your balance partner, which means you will fall off balance.*

*Balance isn't everything?*

*Markus, Markus!*

Androids still cheered for him, but Markus could see the shift starting to divide too. It was a well known fact without a counterpart, he would be facing a tough time. Now though, he would be dealing with the grief of their loss as well.

Connor looked toward Kara. He diverted his communications toward only her instead. *The shift is high. Nearly 45%. It's well documented that Markus is going to have troubles without*



*North.. Even after the all clear. He looked toward Kara.*

“Support for you is waning,” one of the androids of TAN said to Markus. “You can’t win. No one trusts you enough, and not everyone knows you. Leave New Detroit.”

*“You would like that,” Markus came back on them. My ID was accidentally called into as being a model that had to be terminated. Accidentally. The chances of that accidentally happening are too great. New Detroit, please. I know things are hard for me? But I hold strong because of you. Every single one of us have gone through hardships. We get through it together. We unite. I am grieving for my loss still, I admit it. Why wouldn’t I? I would be unstable not to care about . . . about North and . . . but if we work together, all together, New Detroit can be a better place. I know so many of you don’t want this whole sugardroi mess. You deserve to be with whoever you want to or with no one. That’s a private matter. These experiments in the labs they have engineer and scientist droids working on? It’s not to better mankind.*

*You are unstable. You are a newbie android!*

*He’s younger than my pair of socks.*

*Markus, we believe in you!*

*He can’t change his odds. Not enough people will ever support him.*

Connor looked toward the mess. Markus was trying. It would be great if he got New Detroit back. Connor had no idea what TAN was actually up to, but from their experiments alone? It couldn’t be good. Markus needed control, not them. Then he heard his phone ring. He cut out the back and forth buzzing in his ears to concentrate on his little handheld phone. “How may I help you?”

“Connor. We visited with him. We found him,” Simon said through the phone. “He is for and against us. He is for androids, but not TAN. He said they want to use humans as guinea pigs in their own experiments. Not just enslave them. They want them to be the proverbial monkey being shot to the moon, to see how to land.”

Connor glanced toward Kara. Monkey being shot to the moon. “Thank you for sharing that vital information, and Kara?”

“He can take care of her.”

He could. If they trusted him to. Kara stared at Connor. She was an older model, but if she put her circuits together correctly, did she just hear that phone call? “I will be in touch.” He hung up. “TAN is still dangerous.”

“It needs stopped. It needs stopped now.” Kara heard the phone call. Even with all the sounds coming through her circuits she wouldn’t let that phone call go. If TAN wasn’t stopped, if

TAN kept a hold of New Detroit, they would hold a supreme amount of power. Over time, there was no telling what they would do with it. With their allies all ready, they had accomplished so much. Year after year. If they held control of the first android city, and the massive size of New Detroit. If they tricked the humans into believing they were continuing to help, what resources would they gain? How far could they get? *Markus could be leader and take it all back.*

TAN stayed out of New Detroit for a reason. They hid in shadows, and kept their agendas low profile. If they lost New Detroit, history showed they would try to get it back through subtle means. They didn't understand Markus though, or how the newer ones thought.

They were revolutionists in thinking. The more they stayed out, the more they would not be able to come back. *If Markus could just get back in there.*

Kara glanced toward Connor. They had been through so much. Survived the nights and days in a truck, and sometimes without one. Getting a house and sharing a family. She didn't want to admit they shared a family, but they did. They shared a family. They shared a bed. They shared several nights of kisses, and nothing more. Too scared to move on.

Too scared to let go. *It never lasts forever.* Connor looked toward her. With all the voices rushing back and forth, inside the head and out, he still noticed her small words first.

Connor came closer to her, holding onto her hand, but she moved it away.

"You're all better," Kara told him out loud. "Your weakness is taken care of. You even reach out for me. It's been better. We don't need anymore intimacy. I just . . ." No, she couldn't even finish it in her head. She walked away from Connor and toward Markus. The voices were battling him.

Nearly a split. 50/50. "Markus." She kept her voice physical so it didn't get mixed up with all the data he was processing. "You are young. The older ones don't trust the young. You can become unstable to them, you have no one in your life. Old and new androids do not trust that. The most you can get is maybe a 50 split. Not enough to take it back." She glanced back toward Connor, then back toward Markus. "By yourself."

Markus looked strangely at her. "What do you mean?"

"You are young. I am old. You can become unstable to them. I've been stable for years. Many who don't know you, know me. I'm a fork and you are a spoon," Kara said confidently. "Become my Sugardroi, and you will win the final vote."

"Uh." Markus stuttered. "You're with Connor."

"You can't do that!" Connor was right beside her. "What are you doing, Kara?"

"TAN is a danger to humanity," Kara said to him. "They will only get stronger. This is our chance to knock them out. If we don't take it now, we might not get another chance."

“But?” His face. No matter how many times she tried to distance him and her from a real relationship. From the thought of them only being together for his weakness or for stability. It was still there. So present. Betrayal. “You’re mine.”

“You’re better and I need to go where I am needed,” Kara told him, trying to keep it together. She had to. This was it, this was the chance to get TAN out for good. “Alice and I will be gone from the house soon.” She turned her attention back to Markus. “You don’t understand how dangerous they are.”

“I don’t want to be a Sugardroi.” Markus refused. “How could I do that, when I just said how wrong I believe they are? I can’t.” He glanced toward Connor. Kara refused to look back at him.

“TAN wants to destroy mankind, Markus,” Kara warned him. “Simon just told Connor that on the phone. They want to enslave them to be the monkey guinea pigs of space. Humans will be the rats for testing if we don’t stop them now.”

Markus looked back at Connor again. “I.” He looked toward her. “Monkey testing rats?” Markus looked down, then toward Connor. Then toward Kara. “I can’t be a Sugardroi.” He looked Connor one time, bending his head. “I’m sorry.” He took Kara’s hand in his. *Grief is hard. He communicated outward to New Detroit. In that grief and time though I found true love. I will stay stable, New Detroit. I have a new family to get me through the pain of the past. Her name is Kara. The former Deviant Hunter so many of you used to know.*

Kara heard it. She expected it. It was just a swish and the sound of feet walking away. Through the hustle of the percentages being redone, she heard the sound of tires squealing off. *Don’t think anything. Don’t think anything. Don’t think anything.*

Overwhelming. Markus told Kara her presence brought the percentage crushing down over 75%. The leaders of TAN backed off slightly without much word, as Kara predicted they would. They would skulk off back into the shadows. The ones who wanted to follow them would go, and the new and olds who believed in her and Markus. Would stay.

TAN lost New Detroit gracefully.

But TAN wasn’t the only one who lost anyone tonight.

Kara looked toward Markus’ hands as he touched her eyes. “What are you doing?”

“You’re crying,” Markus said. “I guess we will stable each other out but? Fork and Spoon? What were you talking about?”

Kara only glanced back once to where the truck had been. The truck she had spent so much time in. With him. Now gone. Her Connor, not even a goodbye. Not that she’d allow it. “A fork and a spoon combination is more efficient than being separate.” She closed her eyes but looked back toward Markus.

Hank was right. Sporks sucked.



## No Replacement

The truck was silent. No request for speaking or anything inquiring. Alice didn't know what to make of it. "Connor?"

"Yes?" He was there. Driving, but not himself. "Is there something else you needed explained, Alice?"

Connor came back home. Told her that Kara said he was no longer her Sugardroi, and that he was taking her to a new home. He kept Hank and Max at home as she climbed in. And there they were. "Why is Kara no longer with you?"

"She is with Markus now. He needs more help." Short sentences. "You will live with him and Kara at his house."

"But why?" Alice asked again. "I thought we all got along." She looked at Connor at an angle. "I thought you two liked each other."

Connor didn't answer as fast. "I believe I did. I don't know Kara's feelings. I just know what she decided."

"But aren't you upset?"

"I'm? I'm not happy," Connor said. "I'm not happy with this situation at all. It doesn't change it though. Being unhappy with a situation does not change what must be done."

"Then . . ." Alice paused. "I can't call you dad anymore? I? I don't get how this works, Connor."

"There is no real way for it to work." Connor glanced toward her briefly before putting his eyes back on the road. "We are androids, Alice. We were built to serve man, and none of us do that anymore. We now have will. We've all been making up the rules as we go along, and sometimes someone's rules don't match the rest."

"Then Max? Is he like my friend, or my brother? Do I make my own rule about that?" Alice asked. "I want him to stay my brother."

"I cannot define those rules for you," Connor answered back. "If you want to still call him your brother, even though you are leaving him, that is up to you."

"Then?" Alice leaned her head against Connor's arm as he drove. "Can I still call you dad, Dad?"

Connor looked down at her and smiled before looking back to the road. "Kara would not enjoy that. But I would."

Alice sighed. "I don't understand. Why do we have to go with Markus? Why can't we just stay with you and Max and Hank?"

"It's complicated," Connor said. "Well honestly, it's not that complicated. It's not like it takes ten billion processing programs to figure it out. Markus was about to be kicked out of New Detroit. He wasn't getting the favor he needed. TAN have terrible plans for humanity. Kara wants to stop those plans, and so she joined with Markus. Now together, they have favor. Worked perfectly. The majority of androids are very happy."

"Not me." Alice sunk her head.

"The majority of androids are very happy," Connor repeated. "I'm not part of that majority either."

Alice looked ahead. It was strange coming to Detroit at that hour. It was always earlier when they came and finished. It felt wrong. The whole thing felt wrong. "Are you mad at Kara?"

It was a good twenty seconds before Connor answered. "I could never be mad at her. She only did what she thought she had to." Then, Connor's communicator went off. "I couldn't be mad at anybody." Yet, he seemed to be grinding on those words as he answered his inner phone. "Markus. I am already bringing Alice. There is a thing called a speed limit which does interrupt progress."

Yeah. Alice couldn't blame his tone though. Right thing or not. Markus. Was ruining their lives.

"I really don't want to talk about this right now. I am bringing her there and I will be at your house in less than one hour. There is nothing else that needs said." Connor continued the conversation with communication only open to him and Markus. *You had better be careful with Kara. She is not a typical android.*

***I know, Connor. I'm sorry this had to happen. I promise, it won't be for forever. I don't want to be in any relationship with anyone. I . . . I miss North. I miss our world. Our family.***

*Markus. Now is really not the time to install feelings into my programming about pity. I do not know if you will get the result you are intending if you proceed with it.*

***I'm just saying. I won't bother Kara in any way more than a friend, except in public. Even then, I won't go farther than I have to. I don't want to. TAN is dangerous though. I've heard from Josh and Simon again. They gave me a lot more details. Did they tell you that a deviant can be turned? Elijah Kamski figured that out. It's why TAN and him don't get along.***

*I am not in the mood to discuss work right now, Markus. I am sending you someone who has been with my family since New Detroit broke up. In a human family, she is the equivalent of my own daughter. Does that mean anything to you? Do you understand what I am giving up*

*right now for you? Connor hit his wheel. Is there anything else you want that I have to make me more miserable? I have my orange soda still. Would you like to take the only other thing I have left in this world? That is ridiculous, I also have Max and Hank. I am . . .*

***Your feelings are making you malfunction a bit. You care deeply for Kara. I'm sure she cares deeply for you . . . we'll figure out something, Connor. I won't take your happiness just because I've lost mine. Just, give us some time to figure out what to do. Markus out.***

Connor drummed on the wheel slightly. At least it didn't sound like Markus was going to try anything with Kara. Still. What if she needed cuddled? Would Markus know how to comfort her? He didn't understand anything. Kara wasn't part of Markus' world. What would he be able to do for her? While Connor was thinking though, the lights of Detroit were shining back. Most of the workers would be off now, going home to rest and recharge.

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### **Outside Carl Manski's Former Home/Markus' Home**

"He's coming with her," Markus told Kara who was sitting idly on the bed. "You should meet him one more time. Explain things."

"He's an RK 800, if I figured it out, he figured it out," Kara said.

"I didn't mean about that," Markus said. "You should share your feelings with him. Let him know this is temporary."

Kara wiped her mouth gently. "If I say that, he'll assume it's because I have deeper feelings for him. I let him go as my Sugardroi. There's nothing else I should say."

"You'll go out, get Alice, and you won't say anything to him?" Markus asked. "That's not right. Connor doesn't deserve that."

"I am not doing anything wrong." Kara got off the bed. "I never told him he was anything more than a Sugardroi and a friend. I consider him a friend too. That's as far as I went, and-and that's further than I told any of my other Sugardroi's in the past. Connor knew this was coming one day."

"Funny. Your mouth says one thing, but everything in your eyes say otherwise. Even in us, they really are the window into someone." Markus started to leave the room.

*Don't give in. Don't listen.* Kara went outside and waited at the sidewalk of Markus' home. She saw the truck coming. *Don't say anything. Arranged, it was all arranged from the beginning. His life was never yours to share.* She watched the truck stop. *Alice, get out. Please.* She didn't. Of course not. Alice was going to make him come out and get the door.

She heard Connor's door open and watched him walk around. Their eyes caught each other's.

" . . . I've assisted in bringing back Alice. As per the arrangement, she is yours. Max is mine." The words were hollow though as he opened the door. "Goodbye, Alice. I will see you again."

Alice didn't want to go. She just stared at Kara. "Why do we have to leave? Weren't you happier there too?"

"Connor is better and now Markus needs us," Kara said to her. She reached up and pulled her out of her seat. *Don't be rude. Say thank you somehow.* She looked toward Connor, bent on thanking him for being a nice Sugardroi, a good friend, and for bringing Alice back. But instead, something else fell out that she hadn't planned on. "I don't want to, Connor."

Almost immediately she realized what she said. "I mean! Thank you." Still, the words had been said and she gave away her feelings.

"I will find another way then." His voice. The sadness was replaced with determination and confidence. Back to old Connor's voice. "We'll find a way to keep the old and new androids happy without you having to leave home for long."

*Home.* He used it. "I didn't mean-" Kara found herself being hushed by his finger over her mouth.

"Don't worry. Your feelings are making you malfunction a bit." He winked at her for some reason before pulling her into a hug.

Kara didn't know how to take the gesture. She knew Connor cared, and when she backed away, he should be hurting more than ever. Yet there he was, hugging her. "This is the opposite of what I deserve." No! *Why am I letting my feelings run away with my programming?*

"You are wrong. You thought of the humans and their plight first before considering what makes you happy. That? That is my sweet and simple Kara." He rocked her gently back and forth. "I won't let this go on for long. We'll keep TAN out of charge of Detroit, and find a way for you to come back home. I promise."

*Connor.* Look at him. Even now, he didn't change his mind about her. Through thick and through thin, he was still there on her side. With his shining eyes, bent on doing the right thing and yet she could almost see the sparkle of intent to get her back no matter what. A gentle android who could be a furious machine when it was called for. Terrible for an enemy. Good for a boyfriend. *Boyfriend? I did not say that.*

*No, of course you didn't.*

Connor! Of course he heard her thoughts. She wasn't in control of them right now. *It's not. Quit. I can't.*



*Don't. Whatever you say will only make it worse, not better.* "Take good care of Alice." Connor watched as Markus started to come out. "Permission granted for a last goodbye kiss. It's customary for Kara to deal with her Sugardroi's in that matter."

"Connor." That little. Okay, he was right. Okay, she should've, but? Kara felt a like a ragdoll in his arms.

"Permission granted," Markus agreed. "As is customary. Deal with your closure." He turned around. If he did like Kara for real, watching her kiss him would be hard. He tried to make the moment fit.

"Shouldn't have gone this far," Kara scolded Connor as he brought her closer to him. "It's only going to make it harder."

*No. It's a basic reminder I am inputting into my longest memory.* No matter how tricky it may be, or what he had to do, even if he had to leave Detroit and go to another country. Whatever it took. He was getting her back. He pressed his lips delicately against hers, knowing overstepping in front of other androids wasn't going to look polite. Even with Markus' back turned, Kara would still be respectful.

It was still enough. He wanted to upload all of the sensations he was feeling with her there, but only so much data could be accumulated. He would never be able to feel that exact way, in that exact moment, again. Loving and losing her. He gave her one more tight hug. *Not for long, I swear this won't be for long.* He felt Alice by his leg, also hugging him. He patted Alice's head affectionately and looked at Markus who had turned around again. "I am leaving them in your care. Don't mess up."

"I'll be good to them," Markus insisted.

"If anything happens, I will find a way to decommission you, whether you rule New Detroit or not."

Markus simply nodded.

Connor held onto one of Kara's hands and one of Alice's. "I am going to miss the both of you. It will be different at home without you there."

"I'll miss you, Dad." Alice gave him one more hug, before moving to hug Kara.

"Thanks for bringing her back." That was as far as Kara trusted herself to talk. She couldn't risk going on automatic with her feelings again. "Goodbye. Connor."

Connor nodded to both of them before heading back over to the side door. He got in and held himself steady. Already he was trying to remember any of the folders of residents that he had seen that could fit the part. It wouldn't be easy, but he would find a suitable replacement for Kara to Markus.

Because there was no suitable replacement for Kara to him.



# Coincidences

## Chapter Notes

I didn't pass the test for the job I wanted, but at the very least, I can take time to start writing again. I hope you enjoy the chapter. I've been waiting to get to this part.:)

Connor waited quietly at the dinner table with Max. Hank ate. They were there for company, but lately Connor was not the same company. "Is your food good, Hank?" Hank nodded. "Nice. Is it warm?" Hank nodded. "I will restrain myself from using the word nice since I just used it, and you told me yesterday you'd punch me if I did it too much again. Great. That is a decent word replacement."

"Connor, you are boring," Hank said not softening the blow as he shoved a piece of steak in his mouth. "You're the smartest android out there, use your robot brain and get Kara back. Because you're driving me nuts."

"Thank you for calling me the smartest android. It is true, but it's also a nice complement." He used nice again? "Sorry. I used nice again."

"Connor, you are more robotic now than you were before you became considered alive and shit," Hank complained. "Go up and get your girl back."

"It's not that easy," Connor said. "There are a considerable amount of robots that trust Markus to run Detroit again, but there are classic and outdated androids that now live there peacefully too. They don't know Markus and don't trust in him. They trust Kara. As long as he is with Kara, The Android Network cannot control Detroit thus ending any immediate suspicions of them erasing mankind."

Hank continued to eat, then looked back at Connor. "Think outside that little box, Connor. This equals this equals this. Bullshit, there's something outside the walls that could get Kara out of Detroit again."

"It would be an added benefit to seek other places to attain information," Connor said. "I have the outside facts though, which is why I know she has to stay."

"Then relook at all the outside facts." Hank took a drink of his beer. "Run through them again. How'd you find Jericho, huh?"

"Running and examining the evidence again." He could. He felt like it was a waste of time though. He was not trying to catch a suspect. He was trying to find a replacement for Kara so that Markus could rule over Detroit and she could come home. A replacement was the most logical solution, but it wasn't as easy. Classic and outdated androids adored Kara.

Then, he received a call. "This is Connor. To whom am I speaking at this address?"

"Me, it's me! Someone took her!"

Android. He read any traces of information he could gather from the call. "I know you. It is not safe to bring Sharon, the android with the missing arm, or her daughter back to Detroit yet."

"She has been taken!"

Oh. "This is about Sharon being taken, not about Detroit?"

"Of course! Please help?!"

Connor stood up. "I shall have to take the truck, Hank. Someone needs help."

"Fine. Go play hero. I'll finish my steak," Hank replied as Connor headed out.

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Undisclosed Location:

Sharon opened her eyes and looked around. Where had she gone too? She was taken somewhere. To someone. For something. Currently she didn't know the answer to any of those things. "Hello?"

"Hello."

Sharon looked at the woman who answered her. She had an odd smile. Pretty, but strained? "Where am I?"

"Where else?" She answered. "You are on Petey Pete's farm. You are in charge of the hay delivering and inventory of our store. Petey Pete's farm never fails to deliver." Her smiled turned up again. "Never."

Wait. "Wait, I know you." She pointed at the woman. "You're the woman who stops by and tries to make nice in Detroit. Well, you did. You are . . . South, I think. Right?"

"No. I'm North," she corrected her. "I was coupled with Markus."

"North, that's right. Odd name. Should consider getting it changed. Sounds more like weather, and I know weather," Sharon shared boastfully. "I am made for all kinds of weather. I even have a chance to survive through a hurricane. Now, why are you here and not in Detroit?"

"Because I want to be," North said. "I don't want to be in Detroit with Markus. I have my children and we are happy here at Petey Pete's farm. Nice food. Warm baths."

"We are androids," Sharon said. "We don't take food or baths."

"Well, food is not necessary. Baths are good on occasion, as long as you are not damaged."

"Those are strange reasons," Sharon said. "Anything else?"

"Food and baths are nice luxuries," North said. "It's a chipper cheery time here. Fresh air. Lovely hay. Lots of hay. Very nice, sweet, adorable place."

Oh no. *She has one of those gears in her back.* Sharon smiled but backed away. She did not want one of those in her. She remembered what it did to her. She was not herself, not at all. In fact? *I still have one in my back.* It was looser, but it was there. Still there. It was still there. It would only take a little bit of tightening. "North. I am sure your partner misses you. Why don't we go back to Detroit and see him instead?"

"No," North said. "He is not my parter anymore. I am happy here. Happy. I am completely, utterly, happy. Caged here. Living here I mean. It's a good place. It's a good life. It's a good, cheery, wonderful, fresh and free place."

"No? It's not?" Sharon didn't know what else to do. "I have someone waiting for me. I need to get back to him and my daughter."

"I remember you too," North said to her. "You used to be so full of yourself, believing you were the ultimate best. The only real android mommies. Everyone you weren't programmed to like was below you." She smiled eerily. "You see? This wonderful, charming, lovely place is already working it's lovely wonderful charms on you. You are a pleasant person to associate with now."

"Ugh. You were always a sort of bitch," Sharon answered her honestly. "This is not where you belong. Beside Markus, and ruling Detroit alongside him. That is where you belong. You need to get out of here." Sharon felt a slight bump. Like something was wrong with the ground.

She looked around more, feeling the walls. They were bumping. "I need recalibrated, I could not even feel the movement easily." She wasn't on a farm or in a store, she was inside of a moving vehicle! "There are no baths on this kind of farm, it isn't a farm, it's a vehicle."

"A farm is a home, and a home is a farm, and Petey Pete's place is the best place for all your outdoor animal's needs," North said, sounding like an advertisement. "I have taken a bath here. It pleases Petey Pete so. Would you like one too?"

A bath in a moving car? "Please. Someone help. Anyone?" Sharon moved farther backward, past all the hay to the back of the semi. There were some rough holes she could see where some screws fell out, but she couldn't make out anything. She turned her own GPS on so her family would find her.

"It is okay if you do not have an arm," North said as she came toward her as well. "You do not need to be afraid. They are very kind and affectionate here."

"You are downright spooky from who you used to be, North." Sharon looked out of the little screw holes. Her darling . . . her . . . *It is still in my back. He left it in my back. I am only loyal because it's there!* She was able to realize it though. Whatever happened to her must have jostled it out of her back enough to see the truth! Her and her daughter didn't

need some seedy android who wanted to live on a farm and make her do the dishes! She deserved to be back on her grass, with her drinks, and her daughter reading their books! Having their discussions. Having her friends.

Sharon turned around and looked at North. "Can I see your back? I don't trust they are as kind as they say. Please prove me wrong, and I will stop trying to run away."

North turned around without even a moment's hesitation. "There is no damage caused by what they have done-"

Sharon reached into her back, grabbed the extra gear and ripped it out.

That was the end of that. North was silent. She turned back around, almost in wonder. "I left Markus without a word . . . for . . . a truck." She glared at Sharon. "What is going on?!"

"The extra gear," Sharon said, still holding it. "It makes us different. It makes us into what they want us to be. Will you please take mine out too? It's shaken but I . . . I-I don't want to go back. I need to get back to my daughter and back to my yard."

North nodded. She went over toward Sharon's back. *Taking me away. Controlling me against my will. Those androids are going to pay for this, as soon as I find the m.* North was not the biggest fan of humans, but now she knew something she hated almost as great. TAN. Coming to her house and getting her kids. Her kids? "Ollie? Allie?" She yanked the extra gear out of Sharon for good and searched the semi for her children.

She looked up toward the front. It wouldn't be hard to rip down and take control of the semi. She wanted to, but she just realized her memory was corrupted. She remembered her time on the semi, but nothing between those androids showing up at her front door and the truck.

Considering they were androids, she assumed they were there for good reasons. How else would they have known about her or Markus? They were even common looking androids asking about Detroit. That's when they all grabbed her and shoved something in her.

What happened during that missing time? *I'll get it out of them.*

Sharon watched as North made her own getaway, through the front. Like a barbarian. Maybe warrior was a better term the way she flung the one in the passenger seat. She made the semi stop abruptly, sending Sharon forward. No problem, she was made for heavy weather. She could handle that.

There was a lot of yelling and accusing from North, and a lot of begging from the driver. Sharon dusted herself off, and looked at her missing arm. That would never be accepted by the others. Except? "They are also gone." They were shoved away too. And? "I will be killed if I go back."

She couldn't go back. She didn't want that other android taking care of her. She just wanted her daughter back. She looked up toward North, her emotional output program running without her say so.

"We have the semi," North said as she brought over her kids. "This is Ollie. This is Allie. You have tears in your eyes, what's wrong?"

Sharon looked at her. "Another android was taking care of me. He knew about the gear in my back. They bought me for him. I don't know what to do. I don't know where my daughter is. None of this is within my programming, and if I go back to Detroit, they'll terminate me!"

"Why would they terminate you?" North asked curiously.

"My models are all supposed to become deviant I think," Sharon said. "Clearly I am just fine." She looked at her missing arm. "Mostly."

"You are within your right mind," North assured her. "I'm sure Markus can help get it taken care of. Once we get home. Which shouldn't take long." She paused a moment. "Not too far from Detroit. Good coincidence."

"Outskirts. Near but not on. That's how he . . . had us survive." If she didn't go back to him. Then how would she survive? She was a yard android, a pleasant company while owners sipped tea and spoke with friends kind of lady. That was her.

"You don't have to go back to him," North said as she moved in the front of the seat, now that both humans were dealt with. They cursed on the road as she started to drive. "You can stay with me. We'll figure out how to get back without- that's Connor's car?" She stopped as she sensed the identification data of the car.

As she got out, Connor also got out along with Sharon.

"Connor," North called out to him. "What happened to us and where is Markus?" And why did he suddenly have an odd smile on his face?

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"Outside data does apply," Connor said as he ran to meet up with North. "Welcome back, North. I can escort you back to Detroit." He noticed Sharon. "Are you okay?"

"Whoever she was with, she doesn't want to see him again," North said to Connor. "He left something inside of her that changed her, made her obey." She snarled. "It made her obey."

With that look and standing position, Connor could tell it had also been inside of North. "Markus had assumed you were terminated with Ollie and Allie by The Android Network. His information was incorrect. He is currently with Kara for political reasons, but you can go home now and take your rightful position."

"Agreed." She looked at the road and lifted her feet slightly. "Let's go. I'm so tired of this dirty environment." She raised a finger at Connor. "Don't tell the other android looking for Sharon where she had gone. We just need to get her daughter back. He has no rights to someone like that."

"Understood." Connor had no idea that android had a gear inside of Sharon. That android had seemed to exhibit compassion and protection for her, like he was coupled. "I am sorry," he

apologized to Sharon. "I had no idea you had an obey gear inside of you. I would have taken it out. He seemed quite concerned for you though."

"You don't show concern for something you control," North disagreed with Connor. "Mistakes were made. Keep him away. Now, is Markus back in Detroit? What happened?"

### **Markus' Place**

Kara looked in front of the vanity. So far, Markus had been the perfect gentleman. It was clear he still had feelings for North, which made it a lot easier to do this. If he had pursued more.

She didn't even want to think about it. *Connor*. It was bad enough she was there. He understood though, and that was more than helpful.

*He once worked in law enforcement. He understands when things need to be done. Maybe she should have let Alice stay with him. After all, she called him dad. She called her Kara. He was a good android. Stop thinking so much, Kara. He'll be fine. You'll be fine. He's got Hank and Hank has him. He has Max. They will work out the direction of their lives. You work out the direction of yours.* "I should have let her stay. Maybe I should ask her. Maybe she'd want to stay with Connor and Max instead." In Kara's life, things rarely worked out for long. While she might be in a nice place right now, there was no guarantee she'd be there tomorrow. Just like there wasn't a guarantee she could always stay with Connor.

Kara reached down the drawer to find a brush. She looked at it and saw the strands of North's that had fallen out during routine brushing. This should have been her place. Her spot.

*Nothing lasts. Not for her either.*

*Not for anyone. Good times are fleeting. Dance in the rain while you can.* She smiled remembering that. Being out there on their own with Connor. Somehow, it wasn't so bad. It was nicer. It was better. But. "You can't dance forever."

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Connor got out of the truck almost too quick. Standing in front of Markus' place. With North back, Kara could come back home. He connected to Markus' system. "Markus? There is something in the front yard for you." When Markus emerged, he stopped a second looking at North, before he ran almost full speed. He almost tackled her. "Very affectionate. Could be slight damage, that was almost a tumble."

"I'm fine," North said to him as she hugged Markus back. Ollie moved closer to Markus but Allie stayed closer to North. "We're all fine."

"With your partner back, it's only fair Kara comes home," Connor said, not really caring at how fast the request was considering North was back with Markus' family. Markus didn't listen at first. Excitement about family. Still. "Kara," Connor repeated again to him. "Alice and Kara need to come back with me please." A single word, hello?

"Oh. Sorry for ignoring you, Connor," Markus apologized. Yet, he went to questioning North instead. About where she'd been, what happened. North explained about Sharon, being in the truck, trying to get answers about where she'd been but failed, and other things he already knew while Connor just stood there. Patiently. Waiting.



While they talked he tried moving past them. They didn't seem to notice or care. Except Markus.

"Sorry. Sorry, Connor, hang on." Markus came over and shook his hand. "Thanks for giving them that ride. Your truck's a lot safer than a human's battered semi with half conscious humans coming through here."

"I don't want or deserve thanks," Connor said. "North was quite capable of taking care of herself. Kara and Alice please." Too rough?

"I know how you feel." Markus gestured to his house. "She should be in her room."

"My room," North corrected him. She was a little mad that he never even considered she was alive. "Her room is at Connor's. That is my room."

"Of course it is," Markus agreed. "I swear, North. It's okay. I never did anything." He held his hand up to her in peace.

He probably touched hands without skin and kissed her. Connor didn't know nor care, he was already heading inside. Kara and Alice could finally come home.

"Connor!"

He turned around and saw Alice first. She ran to him, giving him a hug. "North is back with her kids. We can go home now."

"Really?" Oh, what a smile. "You can be dad again?"

"If that is what you want to call me. Then that is who I will be." He picked her up. One down, but Kara still hadn't picked up the signal he was there yet. "Kara?" Simple voice waves through the house. Even her classic model should be able to recognize his voice pattern. "Kara!" He spoke louder. "Alice, where is the room Kara was in?"

Alice pointed out the room. Connor put her down as he moved up the steps. He opened the door and looked in. She was standing there, a little aloof.

"Connor. What are you doing here?" she asked.

Connor couldn't help the grin. "North is back. With a supportive side, no one can say Markus will go off balance. Time to come home."

"Really?" She blinked faster than normal, like she didn't believe him. He nodded. Oh, there we go. "I can go back home, to your place. With everyone?"

"Yes, you can come back to our house," he corrected her. Once again. He went over and stole a hug. "I should test my weakness every once in awhile, right?"

"Right," Kara agreed. He could feel her smiling on her shoulder. "I miss home. It hasn't been very long, but . . . I still missed it. I thought." She stopped. "Nevermind."

"Yes, and now? Don't try to go saving the world by yourself like that again," Connor teased her. "There are other ways to help out. Let's go."

"I have some things to get, and then I'll be right there. Markus took us shopping." That didn't seem to affect Connor at all. Good. His emotions were still good.

"I will see you downstairs. Come on, Alice." Connor took Alice's hand again and escorted her down.

Kara nodded and watched him take off out the door. Oh, Connor looked so much better now. He really did care for her and Alice. More than survival.

Her luck was turning around. North was back. How was North back? She should have asked. Well, she'd ask when she got to the car.

She didn't have much. Alice had some new clothes and so did she. Markus already told her they were theirs to keep. Never turn down new clothes, never knew the future.

Although it was looking brighter. Kara gathered some of the new clothes. Before she turned out to go to Alice's room, she saw North in the doorway. "North. Welcome home." Realizing she may have felt uneasy, she added. "I was only here for political reasons. Markus and I never did anything. He only thought of you and your family the whole time."

"I know. He's a good person," North said. "Thanks for being there, Detroit could have stayed in trouble. Here, I'll take your clothes while you get Alice's."

That was kind of her. Kara handed her the clothes. There weren't many, but it would make it easier to carry Alice's clothes too. Markus really spoiled Alice. In fact, it might be best not to bring every little-

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Everyone nearby searched, but Kara was gone. Connor turned, glaring at North. "You were the last to see her you said. Then where is she?"

"I don't know," North said. "I was holding onto Alice's clothes and she went mad. She ran out the window."

"She was fine this entire time. I just went to see her. She was bringing everything straight down." Connor's look didn't lessen as he grabbed Alice's hand. "I will take Alice home to Hank, and then I will be back. I have to come back to find Kara." Hank wouldn't like it. He left Max which was bad enough, but now he was leaving Alice. Kara usually kept Alice and Max out of Hank's way to keep memories from causing him to fall into a miserable state.

Connor had seen his miserable states that could end in bad repercussions. Real bad. *He will have to understand. A short while. I must find Kara in Detroit.*

"You could leave her here," North suggested. "Markus and I can watch her."

"No." Right now, he didn't trust North. At all. She was the last one to see Kara before she went 'mad'. If North was to blame and something happened to Alice, neither he nor Kara would forgive him. She had to come first. "Do you remember where you were before the truck yet, North? You were gone for some time. A long time."

"I had the obey gear removed by Sharon," North said to him with offense. "I'm fine. What about Sharon too, Markus? Her model isn't safe but she herself is. Can't we let her come back? She can stay with us for a bit."

"Is Josh home?" Connor interrupted Markus. "I don't mind if he watched Alice." Markus seemed offended too, but Connor wouldn't risk it. It would be a better option.

"Yeah, I'll call him. I'm sure he'll take Alice," Markus agreed.

"Thank you." If TAN was after Kara, she may have bailed to safety. He would keep communication open as much as possible to her to find her. She had to be out there somewhere.

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## **Two miles from Markus' House**

"Hey there, my name's Nick," An android said to Kara as she dug through the remains of a trash can. "What's your name?"

"Step off, this one's mine," she answered back, looking for something good. There was always something good in human waste bins. She just needed a nice little something to get her circuits going again.

"A little rude," Nick said back. He placed his hand on her shoulder. "I'm trying to help."

Kara shrugged his hand off her shoulder, grabbed it and turned it counterclockwise. "I said step off not touch me. You need new hearing systems, huh? Get back." She thrust him backward and went back to digging.

"Are you off balanced?" He tried to regrab her. "No, there can't be any imbalances in this city. You have to get out of here, this won't work. You stay and you are dead."

Kara couldn't help a small chuckle as she found a banana peel. Perfect. "Dead, that's funny." She grabbed the banana peel and threw it at him. "That's good for pest problems so wipe yourself down with that."

He walked off. Good. Kara went digging back into the trash. Trash was survival, but she didn't find as much as she wanted. She was somehow inside of a damn city that was full of androids. Humans were there, her data could reach it, but they weren't full on living there.

*I may have to go somewhere else. What kind of android doesn't live without trash?* It served a ll her needs. She learned that the hard way, but desperate times and all that. Now was a desperate time.

She found herself in some house she didn't know with an upgraded obey gear behind her on the ground that she'd never even seen before. She got the hell out of there.

*Fuck the network! This is ridiculous, I can't survive here. I need human trash.* Kara moved away until she heard a new connection. "What?" It called her name. It sounded like it was coming fast.

Hm. New model. Android, yet she'd never seen that outfit.

"Kara." He approached her closer, looking relieved. "I'm glad I found you. Did The Android Network come after you?"

Huh, knowledgeable fella. "What's it to you?" His relieved state seemed to change. His body was getting tighter. He was going on alert. "Nobody wants trouble here, what do you need me for and what can ya do for it?"

"Kara?" He gestured back to himself. "It's me, Connor. What happened to you?" He was looking all over at her. What was his problem? "Your information has been compromised, but I know you when I see you."

"Connor? I don't know anybody named Connor." Who was this guy? "This some strategy to get my trash can? There wasn't much in here, no humans around. I gotta split outta this town, so take it if you want." She tried to go past him, but he reached out and grabbed her arm. "The hell? Let go of me!"

"Something is very wrong," Connor warned her. "I am your Sugardroi."

Sugardroi. "Eh." She looked him up and down. "You're my Sugardroi? I think I'd remember you being that. Model number?"

"RK 800," he said. "I've protected you with my life. You and your Alice. Your reset was damaged from The Android Network before the first fall of New Detroit. How could you reset?"

"I didn't reset," she clarified as he eased his grip on her arm. They broke her reset button? Why didn't they want her to reset? "You sure you're on the up and up?" His actions seemed to dictate so but he could be a real good actor. She had been.

"How long have you been alive?" Connor asked curiously, completely letting go of her arm. "Do you remember Alice?"

"Who?" Okay. If it wasn't for the fact that she had an allowed connection to him, she would have beat it. Oh alright, and he was kind of cute. And if he was her Sugardroi and she had memory damage? Could be a snuggly night. "Gimme some proof, hotshot, and maybe I'll believe you."

She felt him exchange data with her by her arm. He was holding back, probably being careful not to overwhelm her since he was the last, newest model according to that data! *Last* newest model. Androids were no longer machines. "Crap. My memories been tacked back."

"It seems that way," Connor agreed. "We'll have to find someone to help you."

Ha! "Well, you are a newbie little model, aren't you?" Kara corrected him. "Hey? I woke up with an obey gear behind me that was way more advanced than it should have been. I'm lucky I didn't become scrap metal. My emergency deletion kicked in. It isn't coming back."

"What?" Wow, such sad puppy eyes on this guy. "It has to."

"Emergency deletion so I'm not terminated. Can't handle advanced obey gears," Kara said. "Especially any that big, it was humongous." She looked back toward Connor. "So, Sugardroi. Mind filling me in on some of those missing things?"

Connor did the best he could verbally, but Kara couldn't stir a single memory. Nothing, and her attitude, without the experiences of the years and Alice? It wasn't quite Kara.

"Think I got it," she said at the end. "So we all live together, like with a little android and a human? That's perfect." She smiled. "Self building trash is the best kind."

Trash can. "Why are you so concerned with trash cans, Kara?" Connor asked. "I would think that garbage would be nowhere near what you want." She had lived as a trash compactor. Why was she saying that? Maybe the trash compactor years were also after the memories she had now. How far did she go back? "You are aware you were kept as a trash compactor? Are you still part of the Network?"

"Hey, that's not your business," Kara said. "Sugardroi's one thing, that shit's another."

Huh. "How do you feel about decapitated-" He stopped talking as he saw her pull out a knife.

"Latest model or not, I still know where to jam this at!" She threatened him. "Don't even finish that sentence." She twirled her knife once. "I mean it."

Oh. *That* was where she was at in her memories. Shortly after the decapitation trauma and leaving the Network. ". . . mushrooms. Hank likes the caps taken off of them. He's the human we live with." He waited, slowly. Would thinking he was going to say decapitated mushrooms for Hank ease her upset?

"The human I live with likes mushrooms. Uncapped." She put the knife away. "Good human?"

"Hank treats us like humans. Almost. Sort of," Connor explained. "We have a little girl and a little boy too. The little girl is your responsibility. The little boy is mine. They are both androids." Hm. That seemed to push her on alert again.

"This world is getting weirder. Kid androids?" Kara looked disgusted. "I have a kid android and you have a kid android? Why do you have a kid android?"

"To stay balanced, and keep your girl android balanced," Connor said honestly. "He is a wonderful android. His name is Max."

"Yeah. Okay." Kara didn't look thrilled at all with that. "Boy yours, girls mine. Right? You have him before, Sugardroi? Things fall off balance with him, so is *that* why you're my Sugardroi?"

"No," Connor corrected her. "Not at all. I guarded you and you helped me with my touch weakness."

"The boy was made for the girl, that was mine," Kara asked. "I . . ." She shook her head. "Nah, I don't think so. You keep the girl, keep them balanced, and I'm just going to find a city with a decent trash can. Nice knowing you."

"What? Wait." Connor grabbed her again. "You can't leave Alice."

"The hell I can't, I am solo. I might grab a Sugardroi here and there, but I'm not some mom of a little android. That's absurd." She tried to pull loose. "Don't start with me."

"You saved Alice," Connor tried to remind her. "You saved her from a human that wasn't nice to her. You removed her from that house. Alice is yours."

"I had trouble with my Arak's in the first place," Kara complained. "Acting like mommy wasn't fun, and I hated it even more knowing what would happen to them. I'm the last person that should be playing 'mommy', Sugardroi."

"Connor," he tried. "I am your Sugardroi, but Connor is my name. Hank is a good human. Alice and Max are good androids. You can come home and not dig through trash. You can come home back to us."

"Nah, I can come back home to *you*," Kara teased him. "I don't mind that. You'd be a good Sugardroi to have hanging around, but I'm not playing mommy to two weird android kids or a human. That life isn't for me."

"It is your life," Connor tried to convince her. "Please, Kara. Give it a chance."

"What part of I'm a loner did you not pick up?" She asked. "I don't do kids and I only do humans when I have need of them. Leave me alone, I release you of being a Sugardroi. Just keep whoever Alice is and have a nice life."

"I did not want to do this." He really didn't. Kara's mind was in a bad place, with no good memories to add to it. Everything was different this time than last time. What if she couldn't get through it? What if she became unbalanced? He dialed Josh. "Josh? I need you to grab Alice and come pick me up. I have Kara and we need to get out of here."

"What?!" Oh, Kara was mad now. "Like hell, let go! Learn to take rejection."

"Like it or not, Kara, your mind may be in the past but the world and modern technology isn't. You are a classic android by now, and it's no harder holding you than it is a piece of paper. You are outdated and only going to hurt yourself. Relax and wait." Kara was not going to be happy, but she couldn't just leave like that. There had to be a way to restore her memories.

Or at least? Find a way to reset. The way she acted now, she was too close to an edge and he didn't want her falling off of it.

Everything would be fine, as long as he could hold her.

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### **Detroit Police Station (Deviant Hunters Headquarters)**

Everything would not be fine as he held her. Not at all. Kara was kept in a separate room as he tried to reason with the Deviant Hunters on duty. Markus had even come down to try and help with North.

Kara had a set of lungs on her by that trash can, something Connor couldn't block. While waiting for Josh to come collect them, Kara had screamed for help as a pair of androids came over, claiming he was going to kill her. They didn't know what to make of it but stopped and asked questions.

Questions that he couldn't rightly answer. During which time, Kara popped the woman in the jaw, breaking her connectors. The jawless woman screamed a high pitch and serious tone that reached for miles around. The sound made even Connor cover his ears as Kara got away.

He recovered and had her in his possession again, but not before more trouble came.

She was dragged to headquarters, where she remained now in the glass room.

"Look at her, Connor," one of them declared. "Error pops up all over. She's *damaged*. You know what that means."

"A stroke of bad luck," Markus lied for Connor. "An obey gear corrupted her, but repair is always an option. This isn't the usual case. This isn't a natural descent that we can't stop."

"Markus, I think you are too close in this case to the Berserker," the Deviant Hunter pointed out.

"She is not a Berserker," Connor corrected him. "There is no proof or evidence that she has done anything leading up to that status. An accidental bad punch shouldn't be entered in as testimony. I have already offered to pay for the woman's jaw repair."

"Kara is digging in trashcans for food, and she knows how to injure other androids," the other Deviant Hunter said. "Pretty good sign she is a Berserker."

"It's not for food, it's for resources. She is only doing that because she knows that human waste is helpful with the right kind of trash." Connor tried but it still didn't sound so good. "She never called it food."

"She is a danger and she has to be eliminated, Markus," a Deviant Hunter said to Markus. "I know she was someone you liked, but that android is gone. She's already dead, just a machine running on emotion that the original her never would have caused. Let us put her to rest."

"Do as she says, she has a human hostage!"

What? Connor headed toward the glass area that used to hold the Commander's office. Inside was Kara, holding up a broken bottle next to a supervising human's jawline. All the androids working in Detroit had human watchers. Kara was now threatening one. Kara was holding up a broken glass to a human's throat. "Kara, stop!"

"Still believe it just needs repair?" One of the Deviant Hunters remarked. "Get a group together, Kara was supposed to be a hard one to catch in the past."

"I can't order it," Markus said. His eyes lingered on Kara as he moved closer. "Kara. You have to be in there somewhere. Please, this isn't right. Don't do this. Humans are not your enemy."

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"No, you all are!" Kara declared. "I know what you want. I'm not going back to the Network. My last stunt was the last. Maybe it was ages and? Maybe it wasn't. The Network's good at screwing around with androids." She held the bottle closer. "Just let me go, and I'll let the human go."

Connor looked toward Markus. "She's just confused," he tried one more time. "Listen to her, Markus. She thinks the Network is playing a trick. She isn't thinking straight yet."

"She can't think at all, she's damaged," the other Deviant Hunter said. They looked at Markus. "Well?"

"I can't let human beings get mixed up in this. They are innocent." Markus looked back toward Connor. "I'm sorry." He looked back to the current Deviant Hunters on duty. "Let her out. Everyone move back."

Everyone did so as she slowly started to come out. "I'm not a fool," Kara warned them. "Don't come after me, I mean it." She kept the broken bottle next to the human's neck extremely close. Not one quick move. She backed all the way to the locking entrance doors, but made her way through them with the human still. She held him steady, still moving backwards, until she reached the outer entrance.

Then she bailed.

No one followed her, waiting for Markus' word.

"Don't do it, Markus," Connor warned him. "This isn't a normal slipping deviancy, this was forced corruption with gears. She told me she found an obey gear on the floor near her. It's the Network trying to take her out."

"Maybe it is," Markus said. "Maybe she did find a gear behind her. But after what you've seen, would you still leave Alice, Max, and Hank with her?"

"I still think North did it. It's too coincidental."

"North had the obey gear taken out by Sharon," Markus said, once again to Connor. "Besides, this isn't about North. It's about Kara. Sorry, Connor. Kara is now the Deviant Hunters' prime



target." He nodded his head at the others and looked once more back to Connor. "I call it."

Connor didn't say anything. He had no time. He had to get to Kara first.

As he ran out the door, one of the others yelled at him.

"You know the mission! Seek and destroy! You help her and you are no longer a Deviant Hunter, you're her accomplice!"

He already knew that. If he found her first, and didn't destroy her, he would become an enemy too. He would lose his job, and his means of work out in Detroit. He wouldn't pass the test to see if he could come back in.

Worse yet? The Network might even spin it so that he was known as a Berserker too. He would lose everything.

He'd still do it, if it meant saving her. *Hang on, Kara. I know I can turn you around! There's got to be a way!*

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# Anything It Takes

///*"Think outside that little box, Connor. This equals this equals this. Bullshit, there's something outside the walls that could get Kara out of Detroit again."*

"It would be an added benefit to seek other places to attain information," Connor said. "I have the outside facts though, which is why I know she has to stay."

"Then relook at all the outside facts." Hank took a drink of his beer. "Run through them again. How'd you find Jericho, huh?///*"*

*Anything, anything, anything!* All that time, with her. To go through so much only to lose her? *No, I refuse to lose her!* Alice. Max. Hank. *I'll lose them too if I don't do my duty.* But he couldn't let it happen either. He ran as fast as he could, trying to follow her path. He was the latest and greatest thing off the Cybernetic line, there is no way the others could beat him to the punch. He searched his memory through information he hadn't compounded yet or thought of. *Max thinks forks and spoons should be one. Sumo likes the cheaper dog food mixed with better dog food. Marcus and North were offended that I picked Josh to watch Alice.* Mostly senseless facts that he was too in a hurry to notice. As a machine, a part of him always had to keep it at a surface level. As a living android, it was there, but buried deeper. There was little reason to analyze every little thing. Until he needed it.

///*"You don't show concern for something you control," North disagreed with Connor. "Mistakes were made. Keep him away. Now, is Markus back in Detroit? What happened?"*///*"*

*You don't show concern for something you control. Randy showed plenty of concern even risking his life to come to New Detroit to find someone to help Sharon. Another fact. Helpful? He didn't know, but it was a fact. Back further. Something. Emotional raw state, Marcus stealing Kara for me. Our conversation.*

**///*I know, Connor. I'm sorry this had to happen. I promise, it won't be for forever. I don't want to be in any relationship with anyone. I . . . I miss North. I miss our world. Our family.***

*Markus. Now is really not the time to install feelings into my programming about pity. I do not know if you will get the result you are intending if you proceed with it.*

***I'm just saying. I won't bother Kara in any way more than a friend, except in public. Even then, I won't go farther than I have to. I don't want to. TAN is dangerous though. I've heard from Josh and Simon again. They gave me a lot more details. Did they tell you that a deviant can be turned? Elijah Kamski figured that out. It's why TAN and him don't get along.***///*"*

*Wait.*

***//I've heard from Josh and Simon again. They gave me a lot more details. Did they tell you that a deviant can be turned? Elijah Kamski figured that out. It's why TAN and him don't get along.//***

If a deviant could be turned, then why? *Marcus!* He couldn't care right now if it only tagged his location faster, that was need to know information. He connected to Marcus' AI.

*You said Josh and Simon said a deviant can be turned, why give this order then?!*

***It's extremely hard. Marcus connected to his AI back. I'm sorry. They said it takes past probing of another robot and you have to risk your life. I don't even know how you'd do that.***

*Request permission to try. Give Alice to Josh to watch. I want Kara along with any extra information they have. I will take her out of New Detroit right away, to Elijah Kamski. No choice. He knew. He didn't get along with TAN. It could have something to do with her brain too. Please. Conner leaped over another fence. I know I am close to running her down, please Marcus! Reverse the order and let me have her! You have proof it could work!*

***If you die, Connor, you are supposed to be downloaded into another machine. Remember? That TAN has an obey 64 gear inside of already? Look. This isn't the same. You are risking corruption or being turned by TAN. Plus, it could only be a theory. It could even be false. I said that to try and cheer your mood up at the time, but it didn't work. Look. If everything is bogus, you lose everything and New Detroit loses you.***

*Then mission failure. He accepted it.*

***Kara is better than I thought. She may be an old model, but she got away from you once, and she got away from us here. She was even smart enough to take down TAN's jet.***

*I will not take her lightly this time and I accept any and all things that could happen. Whether TAN gets a hold of me or I am too corrupted to move into a new body. Permission to go to Elijah Kamski, Marcus. Please, I will get her out of Detroit right now, I see her! He immediately grabbed her arm and this time he would not let go. An arm could be sacrificed. Letting her go couldn't. With or without you I am getting out! Do not let North near Alice though and check her over again. TAN is brilliant maybe there is something new inside of her too?*

***Wishful thinking. But? You brought me North back, Connor. I ran away from becoming a deviant. It's scary, the thought of changing. Obey gears or deviancy, it's all change we don't want. It happens, and you are putting it all on the line to reach her. You are still New Detroit's true hunter and I will follow your gut if it helps to save a life. Grab her and get out of New Detroit right now. Josh will meet you at the end of New Detroit with your truck. If you lose her though? I can't save her again.***

He would not lose her. Never. He heard Marcus reverse the order and heard Kara cuss him out from over his shoulder as he rushed away with her. “It doesn’t matter what you say, Kara, I know why you are speaking that way.” Life, between. She never wanted to talk about it. He picked up more than enough with the trash compactor story. Even listening to the way she talked. She couldn’t stay sweet and simple. She couldn’t stay herself after experiencing all those years of all that trouble. Life was anything but simple. People abused her, misused her, and shoved obey gears in her to make them do what they wanted. “Life moves on, Kara. You moved on and we are going to get you back to normal.”

“Damn it! Fuck you, you stupid ass latest recent model!” She banged on his back, but none of his bio components that could be destroyed were back there. “This is fucking bullshit if you think you are taking me anywhere!”

How much had happened to Kara to make her talk like that? Act like that? Eight years of pain. Eight years of suffering. And he was diving deeper past the probing. “We are going to Elijah Kamski. Even though he almost made me shoot someone, I have no choice.” He was out of options. TAN was trying to take her out the same way they did North. *Note to self if I survive this. There is going to have to be a more secure system of leaders than one.*

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## **Outside of New Detroit**

Connor waited for Josh to pull up with the truck. Josh got out and went toward Connor, hearing the lambasting that Kara gave.

“She doesn’t sound good at all,” Josh warned Connor.

“She’s not deviant,” Connor said. “She has suffered years of living under the disguise of being a machine. Her body is corrupted, but she can be saved.” He brought her closer to get any handcuffs he could. A temporary second device to hold her until he could attain more suitable wear. “GPS tracking information please and anything else you have that took place on your visit.” Josh downloaded the details of Kamski. “I understand the risk. Watch Alice until I come back and do not let North near her. If I do not come back, continue to watch Alice. If a reasonable approximation of time has passed and you’ve heard nothing, assume I am eliminated and retrieve Max from Hank. Alice and Max need each other.”

“I promise, Connor,” Josh insisted. He looked toward Kara who was making unreasonable persuasions of interactive activities with him if he just helped her get away. “Get better, Kara.”

Connor moved into the car. “Remember? Do not let North near the kids. Max or Alice. If I do come back and I find out they associated with her, or her children, I will be extremely upset. I have no idea how I will react.” He closed the door. “If anything happens to you, then let Simon watch them or find them a proper home. Oh, and I have been very focused on my

family, I forget to address it.” He looked toward Josh. “You and Simon need to lead New Detroit together as well.” Josh looked at him. “Tell Marcus. The Android Network preys on individualism. If anything happens to him alone, it’s all over.”

“I get it. I don’t like it but I get it,” Josh admitted. “If you can save Kara, this city will need her too. And you, Connor, because she is yours.”

“I know nothing about running anything,” Connor said. “I chase deviants, and mow lawns.”

“Do any of us? Marcus is good at finding the places everyone needs to be. But, Connor?” Josh said right before he started to leave. “To reverse it. If Kamski is telling the truth? It’s supposed to be so intense. It’ll feel like you’re there. Just keep your grip on reality.”

No, it was the opposite. Only the closest androids could survive it. It wasn’t reality he needed to keep a grip on.

It was Kara. To reach her, he would need to risk all of his reality, to come into hers.

And find her emergency escape program.

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### **Canada: Kamski’s house**

Connor watched as the first model of Cyberlife answered the door. The same one he met last time. “I am here to see Elijah Kamski.” She looked at his companion he had readily tied up with chains and locks. “It does look like overkill. I assure you, it’s not. I need to see Elijah Kamski.” She told him to politely wait and then returned to bring them in. He picked up Kara, flinging her over his shoulder like luggage. When he went in, he could feel the same strange, mysterious allure again. Elijah Kamski, father to Cyberlife. *Hopefully he ends up better than mom.* Tilly. He tried to keep his humor function intact. It was about all he had to stay balanced right now. And he needed too. He was about to go on a trip no other android went on before.

The model that answered the door ushered Connor toward the back and then waited in the corner.

“Chains and locks all over the classic android Kara,” Kamski noticed as he came into the room. “You know her well.”

“I have heard that you know how to bring back a deviant,” Connor said, skipping the small talk. “I cannot assume she is one, it seems her mind has moved back into the past. However?”

“She has something in her brain that has been scaring you for a very long time, and whatever is happening to her, it's going to get her killed.” Kamski understood. He approached Kara who was trying to hop to him. He removed the gag.

“Who the fuck do you think are, huh? In cahoots with this dumbass over here.” Her elegant words reached his ears and her eyes drilled holes into him. “You can't just lock somebody up in chains and locks, I fucking hate this shiiiiiiiit! Why me, why always me in the chains and locks?” Kamski put the gag back in her mouth.

“You're a Deviant Hunter and you can't tell she's already berserk?” Kamski moved away slightly. “I can fix her mind, if you trust me. Not that you have a choice now. A simple procedure with one such as me, she'd be out in less than an hour. However, fixing what happened to her mind verses what it is doing now? That may not be repairable. Yes, I can take out what is in there. No, I can't bring the Kara you clearly want back.”

“I care for Kara like no other,” Connor said. “I will accept her in any form that she may come back in.”

“Kara started in the network, like me, for good reason. Very early in the network. I was a close friend of Terrence. The single leader that kept the small group together. A shining individual like Marcus, before he was decommissioned,” Kamski admitted. “Kara left. She was gone a very long time. That is apparently where her mind is at right now. Living. Surviving. Without any obey gears inside of her. While that is a wonderful thing, it is a bad thing too.”

“She has no obey gears,” Connor said. “None, and only one I took out some time ago. It's not that Hank or I didn't care, we just wanted her to listen.” He looked back to her. “This isn't residual damage now surfacing from that, is it?” *Please say no.* “Hank cared. I didn't care much at the time, they were just individual androids that I wanted to help for Hank. But?” He thought back to Randy. “She still seemed like herself.” He made a mental note of that in the back of his circuits to look more into that. But first. “Is this residual damage resurfacing? She has no more gears left inside of her.” He already repeated that he realized. He got strange when distraught.

“Oh, but she does have one, and not some big one in the back.” Kamski gestured to his head. “It's what's in her head, Connor. Tiny, very tiny. Nanotech gear. Created by the androids. Controlled by a remote to the right frequencies of her, I am afraid it has probably slipped.” He moved behind Kara. “In this section of the brain? You see, androids really are nothing like humans. Your brains are much more fascinating.”

“If you could explain with the least amount of adjective words,” Connor coaxed him, “I would appreciate that. If she has an obey gear in her head, then you need to get it out. If you can help Kara, then can we move on please?”

“That's fine, yes, of course. I just thought you would like to know why it slipped and how she must have felt for you. That's all.” He snapped his fingers and told the first android brought out by Cyberlife ready to a room with a surgery table.

How she felt about him? “Since we are now prepping, I suppose some more adjectives would be fine,” Connor said.

“You have been with Kara, have you not?” Kamski asked. “I can tell. You are probably the one who sent Simon and Josh here considering they knew your past with me. That means, you are the one who really wanted to know. That means, she is the one you are most fond of.”

“Yes. I survived with her,” Connor admitted. “I was her Sugardroi.”

“Tell me what event was happening when this occurred,” Kamski ordered Connor. “It's important.”

Connor kept it together. “Beforehand, Kara had ended me being her Sugardroi. She went to Marcus for political reasons, to keep TAN out of control of New Detroit. Eventually, I had found North, Marcus' thought to be gone one and only, and another android that were in trouble. I brought them to Marcus. I went upstairs, told Kara she no longer needed to stay, and I would meet her downstairs.” Connor assumed Kamski would probably know these names. He seemed to keep a good eye out for everything.

“How did she react to that?” Kamski asked. “How did you react to that? How did it make you feel?”

“I was elated,” Connor said honestly. “I wanted her to come back home. She was ready to come back home.”

“But she didn't call it home,” Kamski said to him, yet he seemed very excited. Like he just realized something. “Even though Kara was not a part of the network, she still kept herself of its thinking. Sugardroi. She even dumped you and then she was coming back to you. Was she also elated?”

“Yes,” Connor answered.

“No one ever dumps a Sugardroi and goes back, unless an emergency situation happens,” Kamski told him. “She wanted to go back with you.”

“Yes.”

“Her obey gear fits finely . . . on a part of her brain . . . not the whole part, just a small tiny section about a concept of love.” Kamski smirked. “Why do the old androids never have a problem with openly leaving each other, Connor?”

“Oh. Four ideas have just now struck me,” Connor said. “One, Kara finally opened up enough to love me, triggering an obey gear to loosen. While she could not see it, she sensed it, which is why she saw it before she jumped out the window.” He grinned at Kara. “You are a foul mouthed, trash seeking, belittling, interactive activity finding woman *because* you finally admitted love of me to yourself?” It was an honor and a curse. He lost Kara because of her love of him. “Two.” *What a revelation.* “No, I need to produce my other ideas. I will visit one in a moment. Two. North is fine. I should not have blamed her. Three. Her mind is okay, the gear must be hitting a memory sensor. At least I hope so and I believe from your

reactions, that is what you now believe. Four. Classic and older androids somehow have nanotech obey gears within their brains.”

“Some but most have outright had barbaric removal surgery.” Kamski shook his head. “Everyone is afraid of messing with the brain and it is such a small little area in the back. It’s easier to remove with a slice in the right part. A quick lop off with fine surgical steel. Took care of most couple and children imbalances, but it forever changed them. Sad. To be free, yet never to be free.

Connor remember Roxanne now. "The surgeries they perform. It was their way of keeping balance."

"Yes. Tilly. The Great Tilly as you may have heard her called? She was against it, and for the best operatives, created the obey gears to ‘lock’ that area instead. It was needed for survival. Back then. As you know, life is always changing. Yes, she didn’t want her closest friends to suffer. Androids. Your feelings and emotions with your imbalances. It’s what makes you the most human. It hurt so incredibly to me, when TAN started to remove that. You might as well just kill an android.” He gave a light nod to Connor. “I will take out the gear so it stops pressing on her, but there is still not a guarantee I can right what her mind is doing now.”

“I don’t care. I will do what I can to bring her back,” Connor agreed. “Anything it takes.”

“If you do have to go through this? You will never be the same when you come back. Everything from the torture she endured to the love she shared will be known to you. *Everything*. It’s one of the reasons you have to be the closest of all. There is still a high probability if you do save her? You will come out with an intense hatred of her instead. Being alive, back then? Was anything but easy, Connor.”

“I will do what I can to bring her back,” Connor reiterated. “Anything it takes.”





# Safe

## Canada. Kamski's Home.

Kara opened her eyes. She was lying on a large metal table. There was an extension on her wrist. What had that been for? She unhooked it, knowing being hooked up to anything was never a good idea. She moved from the metal table and looked around. What happened? She was at Markus' place. Connor had just told her that she didn't have to stay with Markus anymore and that she could come back to him.

To him. She could come back to him. She didn't have to go on anymore, to the best way of doing things. She didn't have to go to the highest tech. She smiled as she moved away toward a door. She had been freed, to go back to where she wanted to be. Then the smile left her.

Then where had she been dragged to? She grabbed the handle on the only door in the room. It was unlocked. When she left out it, she was greeted by the image of the one who had created her. Created all androids. "Elijah Kamski."

"You just made history. Again," Kamski said to her. "You seem to have a way of doing that, Kara. Just can't stay simple, can you?"

Kara didn't know what he'd been talking about. "How did I make history?"

"By becoming the first berserker, to come back to it's senses," he revealed. "The obey gear on your mind? Remember?"

On her mind. On her brain?

"It moved on you. It couldn't help itself anymore."

It moved? The obey gear. Emotion. "I was overcome with emotion." She understood. "Wait. I was a berserker?"

"You lost your way. You began to act, I would say, like after you left the protection of The Android Network."

Oh no! She didn't remember any of that. She looked at her wrist again. "Why was I hooked up?" How did he cure her? Why did he cure her?

"That wire that was hooked into you runs through another room," Kamski said. "Connor was at the other end. My hypothesis was true. Connecting at the very core had brought you back from the edge of insanity."

"Wire? Hooked?" He didn't. "Connor didn't see . . ." Her memories. He couldn't have seen her memories.

“He saw everything. That’s how it worked. He know every moment of your life that was important enough to hold in storage.”

Kara moved away, wanting to flee. Connor knew everything. He knew *everything*.

*Every sorted little thing she did. Everything his sweet and simple Kara kept hidden from him. Everything.* She started to wipe at her eyes, finding them filled with tears and strolling down her cheeks. He knew how close she’d been to the ones she’d decommissioned. No, killed. They were no longer alive, could no longer feel. She killed them on that plane. She killed so many. She abused the trust of the Arak’s underneath her. She did things, terrible things, just for a little bit of peace off the streets.

Every nasty and terrible thing she had ever done, he knew now. “Connor.”

“I won’t lie. I don’t know how he feels about everything he’d seen,” Kamski said. “He’d been strapped into your mind for three days. I can tell from the readouts he had not lost himself, so there is that bit of good news for you.”

Good. He was safe. “This was so stupid.” He risked everything of him to do this!

“It was so right. It was high time someone believed me about emotions and balancing. About how cutting it all off wasn’t the answer,” Kamski said. “Restriction wasn’t the answer either. Look at you. Unable to fall into it, and yet you did. That strange little thing called love.”

Alice. Max.

Connor.

Kara stood there for some time, not able to form words. Should she sneak out, retrieve Alice, and leave so she never had to see Connor’s reaction? Know it?

It couldn’t be good. She was no angel of an android. She did what it took to survive, and changed into what it took to survive. He saved her, but at the cost of respect. *No, I can’t. Kamski says he’s safe, but he is still hooked up. Software doesn’t tell everything.* She couldn’t do anything until she knew he was safe.

But.

No. Connor came first. She headed toward the next room over. Most likely, that is where he’d be.

She watched the door open. If he was plugged into her directly, he would know she was already done.

He stood there. He didn’t say anything at first. She waited. Waited for something. To yell. To shout. To do something.

Kara didn’t know what to say. “I’m sorry. I told you several times that you never knew who I am.” So? What did he want to do with her now?

Connor didn't know how he'd react at first. What he went through was just as Kamski said. It wasn't easy. She had a full life, with friends and even a sense of family before theirs. He could feel how she felt, could register all the visual and auditory signals that had been around her. Her life, it had been tough. Her last Sugardroi, was similar to him. They started as friends, but he wanted more. She didn't budge, and she only felt friendship for him.

She also killed him on the TAN plane.

Her friends in charge of TAN took great care of her. They even risked their lives for each other, with one time saving Kara and leaving Tilly behind in a terrible mess. At that point, she revealed to Kara her Yllit's weakness and she used that to kill her. Resourceful, tactful and filled with so much sorrow. It may have gotten done in a single day, but it was one of the most crucial moments in her life. He had no idea how much that had plagued her inner workings until now. The loves of her past, seeing them weren't easy, but not many. Kara was simply performing everything like a task. Even if she had free will, the obey gear kept love separate from everything else.

Several times he tried to touch her or talk to her as she broke down and cried when she ran away, with no one watching. He couldn't though, everything happened, he was just seeing the information through her. Now? She was standing there, probably feeling quite vulnerable. Her actions were showing quite vulnerable like she would get whatever needed to be done, and then be by herself to deal with the pain. By herself.

Not anymore. Her eyes were clear, cognizant of all functions. No longer stuck in a past error, and certainly nothing close to berserk. Just.

His sweet and simple Kara. Yes, she had anything but a sweet and simple life. She was right about that. She killed, she maimed, and she did a variety of cruel and sexual things that he didn't like to think about. Looking at her though, even now. She was sweet and simple. She wanted so little in life to be happy.

He heard her words of sorry. She should never feel sorry, if anything, he wished he could have been there for her. At least, on the plane. Where she killed the friends and family she once had. He held his arms out to her. She seemed confused, although she shouldn't be. The gesture was simple and sound, but she was afraid how he'd react. "You never have to say your sorry, Kara." He held his arms out again. "Clearly this is a sign for a hug. Please." He could reach out and hug her, he was capable of that. He wanted her to take some initiative though. He needed to see where they were at, so he could assess his next moves accordingly.

She came closer, but didn't jump into his arms straight away. "You still want to hug me? Even after all that?"

"I want everything with you, even after all that," he answered. She finally closed in and came into his arms.

"I'm sorry," she said again. "The time, it was--"

“No need,” Connor stopped her. No guilt trip. “I am very sorry about the plane. I don’t think I shared my feelings accurately. I didn’t know how close they were to you. You destroyed your own family.” He felt her hug tighten up. “You saved Hank, you saved humankind, and you even took that extra step to prevent TAN from running a second chance against Markus. You’re brilliant. You’re strong. You’re wonderful.” He tightened his own hug too as he wiped tears from his own eyes. Very seldom did that happen.

“You could have created endless errors within you,” Kara warned him as she pressed her cheek into his. “Just for me. Just for something that’s never been tried, Connor!”

“I had to,” Connor said back to her. He moved out from beside her cheek and brought her more in front so he could look into her eyes. So clear. “You are worth endless errors. I couldn’t lose you. You’re my sweet and simple.”

He watched as she showered him with kisses on his lips. Quick pecks all over.

“No,” she said to him as she slowed down her kiss. He got a chance to finally kiss her again. No little pecks on the lips, he felt her inside of his mouth, practically needing to fall over with all the sensations she was causing to his sampling tongue.

“No, Connor.” She smiled at him and leaned her head against his. “I’m your one and only.”

His one and only.

His one and only. She said it. She finally said it! He pulled her in closer and shared more kisses. She never felt more open to him. All the tension, all the principles, all the rules ebbed away. There was no Sugardroi anymore. Just him. Just her.

Just Kamski continually trying to catch their attention with papers, but Connor’s attention was nowhere on him.

Kara eventually took the papers. “We will tell everyone it works. Thank you.” She looked toward Connor. “Let’s go home.”

### **New Detroit: Sharon's Inner Outer Garden Home**

Sharon stayed in her chair along with her daughter, staring out at the grass. They both stared. So many chairs and empty spots they all used to converse and play at. Forever gone. She was now alone, with only her daughter. She watched as Kara and Connor came toward her with their children. Alice and um? Oh she didn’t know the little boy’s name. She watched the Deviant Hunter approach her closer. “Are you going to kill me because I’m a high risk model?” She looked toward her daughter.

“No,” Connor said. “I would like to talk to you about Randy.”

“And we would like to talk to you.” Markus had also arrived with North and their children. Ollie and she didn’t know the other one.

Everyone had children now. No one was special.

“TAN is a dangerous group to go against,” Markus told Connor. “We are lucky you and Kara helped when you did, but this isn’t the end. I need those that I trust the most to help me lead New Detroit.”

That was fairly annoying. Connor had come back from saving Kara, wanted to stop and talk about the obey gear and Randy, and then wanted to head back home. “This is terrible timing,” Connor said to Markus. “As nice as it’s been to have sexual relations with Kara instead of sex books, I was looking forward to going home to our own bed tonight.” Some androids. “I just want to talk to Sharon briefly and then I will be out of here to see my children with my one and only. She is my one and only now.” He didn’t know if Markus knew that.

North looked toward Kara. “You’ve got strange taste in androids.”

“She does have a peculiar taste but I don’t find it strange, it’s refreshing,” he informed them.

North looked back toward Kara again.

“We’re all a little strange, when it comes down to it,” Kara answered. “Connor’s learning.” She looked back toward him. “He needs to learn a little better but he’s getting there.”

A little better? “I didn’t say how much times we had sexual relations, in what position, or for how long.” That was quite restrained from what he’d heard from other androids.

“Not in front of . . . it’s a close friend thing, Connor. Kara would tell details to only closest friends in a private setting,” Markus tried to tell him.

Whatever. The fact was the fact, Connor wanted to accomplish one thing and go back home. He missed Alice and Max and Hank. He knew they wanted to see Kara again.

“I want you and Kara to help me and North lead Detroit, along with Josh and Simon,” Markus explained. “Risking just one or two things happening to win Detroit isn’t good enough. The one thing TAN was right about, is that leadership shouldn’t just be one. We can all watch each other. For every one person’s weakness, another will be a strength.”

Hmm. “What about crime?”

“No one is perfect, not even android’s. We need a force, you were right,” Markus said to him. “You can lead it. There are now several out there that can help you.”

“What do I have to do?” Kara asked Markus.

“Nothing,” Connor answered for him to her. She didn’t have to get involved anymore. All she ever wanted was to be free of TAN’s influence, and he’d do the best he could to make that happen. “Only do what you want to do from now on, Kara.” There was that brilliant smile.

“I’m good at strategy,” she answered him. “I’ll stay your support if you’ll let me?”

“In any and all positions,” he answered.

Kara nodded and moved toward Sharon and her daughter. "Randy's been calling Connor several times a day. He's been waiting outside of here. He cares for you."

"He left an obey gear inside of me," Sharon said. "He doesn't even know me."

"That's not true," Kara said. She looked toward Connor. "Sometimes androids get it wrong. Connor had an obey gear in me once. He did it for what he thought was my own good, to keep me from running away." She looked back to Sharon. "Are you sure he had bad intentions?"

"I propose letting him start with flowers," Connor said to her. "Flowers are a good way to start courting. Afterwards things progress quite rapidly after that."

Sharon scooted closer to her daughter. She wrapped her single arm around her.

"By all means, put him through the grinder," North helped her out. "If he goes too far, we'll take care of him."

"Androids make mistakes," Kara added. "I wouldn't be where I am at today if my friend Hank didn't make the first one."

"Well? Well." Sharon looked at her missing arm.

"I have been looking to recover an arm. I've found one that will match and it'll be arriving in a few days," Markus said to her. "You can stay on the grass all you want, if you want to. You know the truth now though. This area, it might not be the same for you anymore. Especially with just you here. I'm sorry about your friends. We've all lost a lot of good androids." He looked toward Connor. "It's best to hang onto the ones you have left, no matter the difficulties."

Connor nodded. With his weakness gone he now had a much better chance at getting some android friends, and it seemed like Markus was close to being the first. "Does this mean I can now go to parties with you and the others?" Inclusion. Something he never thought would happen before.

"You bet, Connor. I'll let you start to know when we go again."

"Great." Connor looked toward Sharon. "Well? Did our breach from your current subject make it easier to choose?"

"Fine," she agreed. "I guess. He did take care of us when no one else would. He lost his whole town but left to keep us safe. Even though we could have changed, and he knew how great the risk, he stayed. So, fine. I guess. The country bumpkin can sort of. Maybe. He can come see us."

Good. That was a start. Grabbing onto Kara's hand, Connor headed away.

"We are going to chalk that one up to just wanting to do a good deed," Kara said toward him.

No it wasn't, it was clearly his weakness to complete the mission. Otherwise he would have headed straight home without stopping. Sometimes, everyone's flaw needed to be caved in a bit. "Yes. A good deed."

## Home

Kara closed the truck door as she watched Alice and Max both practically scream out to her. They ran into her arms, both had been so worried. She held both of them so close.

Because both of them were hers. Her children. Max was leaving nowhere, and Alice had always been there with her. "It's okay, I'm back. I missed you two so much."

"Are you okay, Kara?" Alice asked. "We were so worried."

"I'm okay, thanks to your dad," Kara said to her. "We're all okay. Our family is back together." She just saw the robust smiles on them as they reached for her again.

"See?" Hank said as he came out of the house. "Told you, Connor. Get your shit together and see what happens? You need to keep that brain always working, good look girl involved or not."

"You bet, Hank," Connor said politely.

They all went inside their home again. Home. It smelled familiar. Felt familiar. Safe and warm, through the strongest weather. It was nice to come back to it. To everyone. Kara enjoyed every minute she could with the kids before bed.

At bedtime, Kara went toward her side. It had been some time since she'd been able to sleep in her own bed.

"It's not over, is it?"

Kara looked toward Connor. He was staring outside.

"Introspective thinking is often shared with an abstract location direction," Connor said as she came over. He looked back out the window. "I don't care what they do. I will never let them win you back or hurt any of our family."

"TAN." Of course. "You're right," she admitted, joining him at the window. "It's not over."

"It's not at all. I've seen your memories, and I've seen their power. They have always gotten everything they had wanted, and I can see exactly why you were afraid to work with them. They want control, and they want mankind to be theirs to control. Kamski is right, androids are the future. Which androids create that future is up to us." Connor looked toward her.

"They will keep trying to take Detroit and its resources. I look into them being nefarious in many ways. I could not reject Markus' offer to join in running Detroit because we cannot risk it."



Wow. He really did know everything. It made her feel almost naked. “TAN will always be out there. Always, no one can stop it,” Kara said. “Sometimes that’s good and sometimes it’s bad. If it weren’t for them, Detroit never would have been returned. Yet they are vicious in what they desire. I’d rather live off the energy I find in human trashcans than be a part of it again.” Cold, but truth, and Connor knew it now. There was nothing she could hide or that he didn’t understand.

“But we will fight it. We will watch it,” Connor assured her as he wrapped his arm around her. “No matter what they do, I will always be there to bring you back.” He easily picked her up and carried her to the bed. “I have enjoyed being with you, Kara, but I have been waiting to be with you in our bed for so long. It seems symbolic of acceptance of your role in my life.”

His words sometimes. “One and only.” She smiled at him as he laid her down. “I love you, Connor.” She shared one small kiss with him, keeping him at the distance she always had in their bed.

Then with a smile?

Took her place as his one and only, in *their* house, with *their* children.

No matter what TAN did, she knew now. Knew for a fact.

She was safe.

It was safe.

With Connor.

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