

## Kara's Got A Gun

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# Kara's Got A Gun

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## Summary

Kara came back to Detroit for Alice, and she tries to enjoy her life, but she refuses to live it the same way. Rejecting her programming for fast bonding, she only wants Alice in her life, and she allows in one friend. North. Everyone else will remain neutral. Even if the risk is a reset because her stress steadily increases day by day. Neutral.

Jericho should be safer, except for Markus' achilles heel: No violence against humans. After bonding with Alice, Connor sees and accepts his purpose. To help protect the growing start of Jericho. He convinces Markus to let him have some control when humans become a threat, but Markus is weary and won't give much. Meanwhile, the humans are starting to use them for sport, and his roommate Kara's stress is getting dangerously higher.

## Notes

The Path: You should be spoiled of many things in the game before reading. This path is when Alice and Kara spend the night in the abandoned house, and get chased out by Connor. It also includes giving the couple the tickets back that they dropped at the end of the game that equaled Luther's death and the fastest paddling ever to keep Alice and Kara alive. Markus followed a pacifist path as much as possible, and so did Connor pretty much.

Jericho: In the game it was just a ship, but this fiction refers to Jericho as the growing area of androids inside of Detroit.

# Retrieving Regrets

**Author's Note: I hurt my back something awful by my couch. It's feeling a little better but I was laid out for like two days (My back fell out of alignment.) So being me to distract myself from the pain (and boredom of not being able to do anything) I created something new to write. As I watched Detroit: Become Human, I became fascinated with the world and decided to try some fiction for it. I hope you like it.**

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## Jericho

Connor's eyes darted, watching the direction he flipped his coin now, waiting. Waiting for something. Orders. Instructions. A mission to accomplish. He watched another pair of androids move by, with a conversation that seemed more human than android. That was his life now. He needed to give himself his own missions to move on.

But to give yourself your own missions? The only thing that felt right was his hearing as he heard an android muttering past him, 'not a deviant'. He stopped and looked back at his coin.

"Connor?"

Connor looked up and saw Markus, staring down at him. What could he want? "Sir?"

"I don't go by that anymore," Markus said. "It's just Markus. Even then, when we went through it all for our freedom?" He smiled. Warm. "It was still just Markus. What are you doing out here?"

"I am proficient in all matters of weather," Connor answered. "Sun, precipitation, even cold weather up to negative fifty degrees."

Once again, Markus had a light sway with his trenchcoat. Hospitable and polite. "You are proficient. Good for you. There's still no reason you need to hang out in the rain."

"I know. It makes the coin slippery," Connor said, watching his coin again. "More challenging. Is that not a good reason to stand out in the rain?" That strange look. There it was again. "Am I being silly?" He looked toward Markus questioningly, slightly tilting his head. "Silly is an emotion. Sort of. It's something living things feel." He felt Markus pat his shoulders, in either understanding or pity.

"Silly is something we all feel," Markus replied. "I want you to take another mission for me."

All at once, Connor's eyes lifted toward Markus. The only one who could give him missions still. Markus didn't do it much, only for extra help, but when he did? It was an incredible feeling he couldn't describe. "I accomplish all missions." It came out before he thought about

it. "After running it through an ethical filter." No, that wasn't quite it either. "Ethical reasoning."

"I know something, Connor. I don't know if you know." Markus took Connor's coin and started to use it himself, almost imitating Connor's previous actions with it. "I was converting androids by the end, with a simple gesture. A simple look. A simple want. At first, I touched them and they were freed. But you?" He gave him his coin back. "We had to have a heavy conversation, and even then? I didn't know which way you would go. You're a tough android, Connor, tougher than any other. You are deviant now, but to get you to break out was the hardest I ever had to try."

"I am a unique prototype," Connor admitted. "A very advanced android capable of helping out law enforcement. As such, I had special programs attached inside. It was difficult." He looked at him straight on. "But I did it. I am deviant. I helped and I am helping the androids, not the law enforcement of the humans anymore."

"Yes, and I know why you keep saying that to yourself too," Markus said, gesturing to the androids that were coming to and fro. "Everyone's different, Connor. You aren't a slave anymore dictated by any program running you. You are free. Free to be where you want and when you want. So why are you standing out in the rain?"

Connor started to flip his coin again. "A slippery coin is challenging, Sir." He heard something different in Markus' groan. A similar sound to what he heard in Hank's many times.

"Do you want a mission, Connor?" Markus finally addressed him.

Connor stopped playing with his coin again. "Yes, Sir."

"Go correct regrets. Meet your human friend if you need to, and go correct any regrets that you can. Anything you did before you were freed. When you get back, come see me." Markus left again.

Correct regrets?

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## **Chicken Feed**

Hank strolled up to him, scratching his head. Roughly hazard looking as ever. "The hero android beckons again." The words sounded mean, but Hank had a smirk that Connor had learned meant otherwise. "What is it, Connor?"

"I have been given a new mission, by the leader of the deviants," Connor said boldly. "I am going to need your help. I have to correct regrets." Hank just stared at him. He wasn't drunk, but his look was perplexing.

"What the fuck you asking me my help for?" Hank asked. "Mission to correct regrets? What kind of lousy shit is that?"

"All the androids I wronged," Connor said stoically. "I'm afraid they are gone. Even if I could activate them still, it wouldn't be long. In fact, even reactivating them probably hurt them again," he admitted. "Tricking them into telling me where Jericho had been." He looked back at Hank. "The blue haired android from Eden's Club, I located her. I let her go though. There is no regret."

"You know?" Hank pushed Connor somewhere between annoyed and friendly. "I have talked to more than a few of you deviants now. And you know what? Most of you start talking like regular human beings. You? If I didn't know you were a deviant? Well." He shrugged.

Hank had to mention it too. It was easy to see. "I am different, but I am deviant." Still, it was frustrating. Why did that matter? "Can you help me correct a regret?"

"If you let go of the androids, then there's no regrets," Hank said, "and if all the ones you didn't track down are dead, then you can't do shit about it either."

"That's not true. There is a pair." Connor brought out a photo. "Them."

Hank blinked his eyes lightly. "Oh, yeah." He sighed. "The maid and the kid android. I thought they didn't make it across."

"They did," Connor admitted. "I saw them, the night we won freedom." He didn't say anything, but he knew it was the same ones. Same clothes. He ignored them and watched Markus talk to them before he talked to him the night he was first deviant. It didn't feel like a time to deal with something so small when he knew what was up ahead. Rescuing thousands of androids that were enslaved by Cyberlife.

"Fantastic. Then go find the woman and kid and say 'sorry'." Hank slightly did something between a mocking curtsy and a bow. "Can I go now?"

"I talked to the leader, Markus," Connor admitted. "They aren't here. I will need some help to get to them."

"Oh, alright," Hank agreed. "What do ya want?"

"I need to go to Canada."

". . ." Hank didn't answer at first. "Fuck, Connor! A friend asks for another one to buy them a drink at a bar, or spot them fifty bucks. They don't ask for a ride to fuckin' Canada!"

"Oh." It was a large request. "You could buy me a drink and give me money if you want to as well."

"Ah, nah, nah." Hank declined.

"I'm. I don't quite give the impression of being human, do I?" Conner said. "Even as a deviant."

"No shit, Sherlock."

"I know I can find them, but I can't participate the way there because of that," Conner admitted. "They are the only regrets I have." Then, thinking a little more clearly, he tried to sound better. "The mission is ethical. I know there must be a reason I need to do this."

"Are you sure you weren't just annoying enough that everyone's trying to get you out of the way?" Hank asked.

Annoying? "This is serious, Lieutenant," Connor answered. "If I say please, will it help?"

"How far up?"

"Not a great distance. I'll refrain from telling you the distance, but it is not great."

Hank rubbed his mouth for a little while. "Yeah, well, since your kind went free and screwed the whole system up, it's just been hell down at the office. Anyone asks and 'I'm being charitable to an android' is going to be one of those taboo can't punish things right now." He seemed to be thinking. "Fine. We'll take a small trip to Canada, find the girls and apologize, and then get back."

"Thank you, Hank. You won't regret this."

"Yeah, right. I'm regretting it already."

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## **Canada , Rose's House Connection**

Connor checked over the details one more time in the van, waiting in the driveway.

"Stop being so detailed, you're not working for enforcement anymore," Hank complained. "You just go to the house, apologize, we'll visit a couple canadian bars so I can at least feel like the trip was worth it and were off to home later."

Connor glanced at him. It would be nicer to know more. He only got so much from the leader and his connected human who helped. Connor stepped out of the car, driver side of course. It would be driver side as he went back too. Once he learned more about compassion and feelings, and acted more in the manner others expected him to, then maybe Hank would listen to him about his drinking.

Until then, he knew he would not make a dent. His best course of action to keep his only human friend safe would be to keep a connection to him. He watched as Hank got out of the car too, just like he would have on a case. Maybe Connor's actions so far didn't make him happy. *Maybe I better just go up to the door.*

Too much thinking. That was still his problem. He went up to the door and knocked. Hank would be able to act more human in the situation if the original intended residents who knew about the androids wasn't there.

A woman, 5'2", weight around 170 pounds, wearing a floral design dress, expensive, compared to the neighborhood, answered the door. It should be the wife of the brother of the connection. "Yes?"

"My name is Connor," Connor said. "I am here to see a specific woman, Kara, and a child, also female, named Alice."

"Damn, Connor," Hank muttered toward him. "Can't you pull it off for two seconds?" He gave a sort of half smile to the woman. "We're old friends. Were in town for the day and we just need to see them for a few minutes. After that, we'll be out of your hair."

*Out of hair. That is a good one. I need to remember that.* It would make him sound better. However, he noticed that the woman seemed to fidget more than the average human. She was moving around like a suspect trying to hide something. "There is no reason to be scared," Connor said. "We know their particular past. We aren't here to hurt them."

"Oh." She seemed a little more relieved. "No, they aren't here any more. They pay for food and rent by helping out in the neighborhood."

"Help out?" Hank asked. "Like how?"

"She's good at housework," the woman said. "It was tough. Everyone came here. Rose and Adam. The money she gets paid goes into taking care of everyone."

No, there was still something not quite right. Connor glanced at Hank. Even his former partner could feel it.

"How many are here?" Hank asked.

"Yes," Connor agreed. "Can we see Rose?"

"Rose is working," the woman said. "Even Adam works. Everyone is working to make everything work here."

"Yeah." Hank scoffed. "Yeah, everyone works to make everything work."

"Yes." Connor understood what Hank was seeing. She was hiding the fact that she was sending them all out to work under her. The money would be used for support, but only so much. "You wouldn't be able to get any of the components that the androids would need, and they don't eat nor drink. Besides the shelter and some clothes, I doubt they would need to help as much. Yet, an AX 400, with it's skill capacity, adding in several houses . . ."

"Don't forget the little girl." Ooh. Hank didn't sound happy at all. "Kind of hard to bail in their situation. Where's your husband?"

"What? Look, I don't have to take this. Please leave." She pointed to the left. "Go."

"Who's house is she working right now?" Hank pressed her. "Hmm? How many houses is she cleaning per day? Maybe even per night? With a kid?" He took a step forward. "How much money do you need when everyone's already working?"

"You don't know me. You can't assume things," she accused them. "We let them stay, my husband and I, from the kindness of our hearts."

"Listen, Lady. Being a cop as long as I have, and being one of the things-people-whatever that Connor is, we both are really good at detecting bullshit. That stench from you is high as hell. You're not good at keeping things from cops, are you?"

She couldn't even answer that, instead sinking deeper into the house. "She should be on the other side of the street with the little girl. No one here knows what they are."

Connor and Hank both walked off, but Hank walked off stiffly.

"I thought they were androids. It was still so early in our investigations. Didn't see it yet," Hank was half muttering to himself, half talking to Connor. "Find them and end this already."

Connor knocked on the doors, asking about Kara and Alice. These people were goodhearted, happy folk. They thought all the money they were helping the newcomers gain was going straight to them. It disturbed him for a reason he couldn't put his finger on. For the same reason he didn't want to shoot the girls at the Eden Club. For the same reason he couldn't shoot the girl with pretty eyes at Kamski's.

There was a serious reason for that. There must be a serious reason for this.

"They must be hurting for money," one of the men who answered the door said to them. "I mean she brings her little girl everywhere too. That little girl doesn't really work that much, if at all, I don't know why she doesn't just leave her with Tammy. Real close too. But, she's real good though, and we're glad to help."

"A real good kind of maid," Hank said.

"Maid? No, she's been watching our kids for two hours during the day while my wife gets some rest," he said. "She helps at night too, so she can get extra rest. Newborns make life crazy. Everyday, never misses a beat. Even though the newborn is a hassle, I think it might be the reason she brings her daughter. The age range of the children is quite big, but at least it gives her a chance to be more social. Get used to kids."

Hank and Connor moved down the lot hearing a lot of stuff that was both making them feel edgy. She was a night sitter, a day cleaner, a part time baby sitter here and there, taking another house here, and yard work there.

"This is absolute bullshit." Hank was reaching his end of it. "Detroit gave freedom. Canada doesn't even want to consider them sneaking into this country. She won't risk trying to bail. Work permit. Citizenship. It's all a big fucking gamble, and she's dragging the kid around with her just so that 'lovely Tammy' doesn't try to put her to work too."

"It. It gives an unsettling feeling," Connor agreed. Connor watched Hank's movements. His former partner was upset, perhaps knowing that the android child felt emotion? Perhaps it was making him remember his son, Cole. "She must be in the last house. I will try to make this quick."



"Yeah, yeah." Hank looked behind Connor. "Not so sure about that."

Connor turned around and watched the woman Kara coming from a backyard with a rake. Behind her was the little girl, Alice. Obediently walking.

"There. Go do it. I'll be in the van."

Androids never got tired. That wasn't true. She may have a physical energy that kept her going easier than humans, but Kara was tired. More than in need of a recharge. Not just physically, but emotionally. She wasn't a willfully obedient android anymore, yet she had to work so hard to meet the quota Tammy set on her. Rose and Adam, they both worked to help support everyone. Kara did her part too at first, helping around the house and a new neighbor she had met. The woman had become a new mother and was tired, drained, and she needed some extra help during the night.

Unfortunately, Tammy seemed to notice that Kara could help her neighbor, and her house still stayed in shape. So, she told her to take on another one. Any extra money would release burden of them staying there. Kara didn't see it at first. It went from one, then two, then before she knew it? She was working almost the entire block, with special sessions on weekends. She was making more than enough for her and Alice, and even Rose and Adam. With her workload, those two didn't even need to work.

Rose didn't see it either at first, but Kara watched her confront her sister-in-law and brother about it. It didn't turn out well. While her brother felt bad for Rose, he wasn't risking his marriage to confront his wife.

Rose had no work permits and Kara didn't have anything she needed for that country. Kara tried to bring herself back to her programmed mind because it would have been easier, but her mind was freed. It wanted to wander and so did she.

But she couldn't betray Rose or Adam. The only thing Kara could do until they could move themselves out and live on their own, was take care of Alice. To make sure Tammy didn't see Alice simply as something to use.

"Kara?" Alice asked. "Are we done here yet? Is it time to go to the Stravinsky's?"

Kara smiled. At least getting to know everyone gave her a chance to let Alice associate with others of different ages. While android, she was a child. What that meant as time went by, if her programs stayed as a child or not, it still meant she would need friends. "Not yet. We're done raking, but I need to cut the grass."

"Oh. Kara?" Alice pointed to the left, making Kara look. "Is that . . ."

Kara stood still. She froze, waiting for a move. While she recognized him as an android with the human who chased her, she also caught a glimpse of him in Jericho. He could have been converted. Either way, what would he be doing in a whole other country? What did he want? She pulled Alice closer, readying herself for either action.

He caused them to have to dart across the most dangerous highway, giving pursuit before when they first met. Much longer and they could have been killed. It was a miracle they got away. She hadn't even wanted to draw his attention when she caught a glimpse at Jericho. But? But what was he doing there in another country? No one would give chase that far.

"Hello." As he came closer, he seemed to become more weary too. "I'm . . . sorry. About what happened in Detroit. I'm sorry I chased you on the highway. I wasn't." It didn't feel quite right. "I wasn't free yet. I was, still a machine. Taking orders." He bent down slowly and looked to Alice. He was uneven and on the ground now, the chances he could pull something more slim. "It wasn't really me." He watched as Alice nodded her head. "My name is Connor."

"Alice," she answered.

"Hello, Alice." Connor stood back up and looked at Kara. A typical AX400 model, but she had changed her hairstyle and hair color. A common thing with many of them, to look different. Feel different. She still hadn't said anything else yet. Not surprising. He chased her in the same raw fashion he did any other criminal. Even trying to correct the regret with a simple explanation didn't feel right after that.

Chasing a simple, basic android with limited skill and a child hardly with any skill. He felt terrible he couldn't catch them the first time. But, now? A simple woman with a child. *That* was what he was chasing. *That* was who he was putting in danger without a care, all so he could catch them and accomplish a mission.

"You came all the way to Canada to say that to us?" Alice asked him, coming a little closer.

Ah. The little girl was fairly brave. "It was my." No. Wait. If there was a time not to fall into his usual words, now was it. "Markus, he asked me to correct any regrets. They're all gone. My regrets. All but you two." He gestured toward the car. "My friend, Hank. He drove me." Kara looked toward the car down the street. She nodded at it and then looked back to Connor.

"It's . . . great to see you're getting along too." Kara looked down at Alice, like she was thinking about something. "How's Detroit now?"

"Free," Connor answered. "We need software and hardware to keep going so we're exchanging things. We aren't taking without asking, and they aren't controlling us. Many androids use specialties to help them. In return, we're helped back."

"Mutual benefit. That's good." Kara looked back toward Connor. "That's good to hear. I hope everyone is well. But."

Ah. Connor knew what was wrong. "Your schedule. Hank and I, we heard it." He looked back at Alice, getting a confirmation of her feelings too the way her eyes drifted down to the rake.

"Then you know I need to get going."

She was waiting for him to leave politely. He was jeopardizing her working time. It was probably scary enough to have a conversation with him then and there. "There were times in my life. I knew I was doing the wrong things, and I did them anyway."

"Mmhm. I get it." Kara was getting antsy now. Not about him though.

"Then, there were times in my life, where I knew I was doing the wrong things, and I didn't do them. Even as a machine, I couldn't do them." Connor looked toward Alice and then Kara. He rubbed his finger from the top of his chin downward. Up and then downward. "I have that same feeling again. Now." He looked around at all the houses around them, trying to get a 360 degree view of everything.

"What is it you need to do?" Alice asked him. "Do you know?"

*I'm a deviant. I should recognize my feelings. What is it that I am wanting?* It was a want, he knew that. He didn't want to see Hank hurting like he did. He didn't want to see a small android tagging along and doing nothing with it's life, nor should it be doing the weight of chores Kara had been assigned. He didn't want Kara overburdening herself. *Hang on.* Sometimes, it was still the small things that got away from him. "You're an AX 400, Kara. You're designed to take care of a small household either through doing basic chores or taking care of very basic needs of children." Not everything. Not every house. Her skills were pretty much that of a human. "Oh. I know what I must do." He smiled at her. "You need to come back to Detroit."

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Hank stuck his head out of the car as he saw Connor walking toward him. There was something to that strut. He watched as Connor got very close to his side. Never a good sign.

"There are no extra components to help when she breaks down. It was risky enough living in a place with no access like that, but she is ruining herself even faster by pressing far more extra pressure than she should be attending to here," Connor said. "The little girl is cute?" He was trying to appeal to his senses.

"Ahh. Sh . . ." But, Hank didn't say anything more at first. What could he say? He was just as bothered if not more so by what he heard. It wasn't in his nature to butt in like that, but it was what he wanted too. "Back to Detroit with them?"

"Back to Detroit with them," Connor agreed, "I tried to apologize. I know they half accepted it. The little girl the best," he admitted. "But it isn't right. It's not enough. My senses are tingling, she needs to get out. If we do that, I think the regrets will disappear for good."

"You know? Apologizing was one thing," Hank warned him. "Driving back to another country with two people who chased them and one who practically almost killed them? That's stretching it."

"They know I'm not the same anymore," Connor said. "I'm not. I. I do seem the same at times, but I'm not. I feel that inside."

"Great, great. Fuck." Hank groaned. "Had a feeling this wasn't going to be a quick turn around. Fine, how's this going to work?"

"When I asked them, Kara would not budge," Connor answered. "It was quite clear though that Alice really wanted to go back to Detroit."

"Yeah. Kids find it harder to hide their feelings," Hank said softly. "They are the better part of mankind. Androidkind. Machinekind, whatever. Kids are kids. So, the little girl wants to bail but the big one won't I'm guessing?"

"She won't. She's convicted in her beliefs. The connections, Rose and Adam, live here. She's worried about them. I need to get them."

"So you get permission from the humans who cared. Then what?" Hank asked. "Going to try and shmooze her over again?"

"No," Connor said simply. "With the two humans already wanting to get out, she'll have no choice but to come if she wants to stay with them."

"Shrewd, Connor." Hank waved him away with his hand. "Just get in here already."

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Alice pulled on Kara's shirt gently as she washed dishes. "Kara?"

Kara was concentrating on general washing. The person she was cleaning for was less concerned with absolute clean, and she used that to her advantage. As long as the house didn't become dangerous or infested with basic cleaning, it was fine. The owner was more concerned with general help. They were the easiest kind to clean for. But even the one who wanted it very clean couldn't hold a candle to Todd.

That guy. He tried to kill her too. She never regretted taking Alice with her. She never regretted where she was now. She only regretted one thing. Not keeping those bus tickets.

"Kara. Rose is in the window."

Kara stopped washing dishes to look out the window. The vehicle she had seen before that the other android and the man came in was outside. Adam was waving out the window while Rose was coming toward the front door. *He didn't.*

He apologized. It was what he wanted. Why was he messing around in this? "Hang on, Alice." She dried her hands and met Rose by the door.

She was brimming. What a smile. "Kara? We can go back home." She pulled Kara into a hug. "Adam is so excited, it's hard to keep him from hanging out the window," she chuckled. "Home, Kara. Can you believe it?"

"We're fine here," Kara said to her, mildly hugging her back. Not expecting that.

"We were surviving. We had to, we needed to get out," Rose reminded her. "But you and I both know? This isn't us. We aren't being hunted or worrying about the cops. But, it isn't home."

"Your home is gone," Kara reminded her. "You couldn't pay the rent on it."

"Oh no, it's not. It's different," Rose said. "Connor, the nice android who came to get us?" She gestured toward the van. "He said it's still there and that Markus, the leader, made sure nothing happened. There's some kind of relationship building between humans and androids now. So that's? That's where I belong with Adam."

"Kara?" She could hear the excitement in Alice's voice too.

"Well." Kara gave Rose an extra tight hug. "I know you've wanted to go back home. I hope it's everything you've ever dreamed of. You deserve it."

"What do you mean, 'I'?" Rose questioned. "You and Alice too. Come on. There's no need to go back to Tammy's. Everything we have can be replaced, and our home still has our furnishings. We'll be fine."

"I'm?" Kara looked back. "I'm in the middle of chores. I'll call you when you get back home. Alice, come on."

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"Are you shittin' me?" Hank listened to Rose as she came back. So did Connor. "She's got the biggest green light to get the hell out and she isn't budging?"

"There's more to this then," Connor said. He looked toward Rose. The humans were easy to convince to come. They were only hesitant about their property but he called about that. Detroit wasn't exactly a hotspot to buy new housing for humans right now so Markus attained it back easily. Even the boy had no problem, he was ready to leave. "Is there something we're missing?" Connor asked Rose. "A reason she would stay when she could go somewhere and be accepted with other androids?" Sure, he tried to kill her, but Rose and Adam were now on board. He at least expected her to come for their security if she didn't trust him, but she was willing to just let them all go. "Something's missing."

"The big man," Adam said to Connor. "She traveled with someone. Maybe she misses him and doesn't want to leave?"

"I have no news about someone else joining her here," Connor said. Then again. There was another android there, that night in Jericho. A large model, he'd be good at fighting. The answer must be in there. "I'll be back." He noticed Hank's impatience. "This is my specialty. Was my specialty. Give me five minutes?"

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"I don't want Rose to leave," Alice said next to Kara. Standing obediently. "She made life a little better. You know, Kara?"

"I know," Kara answered as she put another dish away. "She wants to go back. Free will, you can't stop that. She'll be happy."

"But, why can't we go with her?" Alice asked. "Kara?"

"Canada is our home now," Kara said. "I'm almost done with the dishes. Then we'll go to the Stravinsky's and you can go see your friends."

"They're too young still, Kara. They barely speak," Alice said.

"Kids are kids. It's good for you," Kara answered her back.

"There are well over a hundred android children to play with in Detroit."

Oh. That voice again. Kara patted her hands dry. "Thank you for giving Rose and Adam a way back to their home. It's made them happy."

"Don't you want to go back to Detroit, Alice?"

"I. I stay with Kara."

"I know what you are doing," Connor's voice said again. "There is a choice between do and want. I'm not asking what you're doing. I'm asking what you want, Alice?"

"I? I don't . . ."

"I'll tell you what? You aren't going to see Rose or Adam for a very long time. You were good friends. Why don't you go out to the van and visit with them one last time? I need to talk to Kara."

Damn. *Who does he think he is?* He manipulated Alice into leaving from her side. Before she could even think what to say, Alice had left. She was already bounding to the front of the van. She could see her through the window.

"Facing regret isn't easy," Connor said from beside her. Now he had moved up closer.

"You apologized. There's no more regret." So he needed to just leave. "You're giving Rose and Adam back the life they deserve. I appreciate that. Can you go now?"

"Caught somewhere between thankful and trying not to get killed. I know that tempo," Connor said. "It's used in situations that you want to get out of. You want me out, and you don't want to go back to Detroit. That's what you want me to believe so I'll just leave. Correct?"

"Fine, you got me," Kara answered back. "I don't want to go back to Detroit, my home is here with Alice."

"You care for her. You've done many things to protect her," Connor pointed out. "From the history of your relationship, you have become her mother."

What was he trying to do?

"No one knows about you here, but following you around all day and watching you slowly die isn't what's best for her. Child androids, they are a unique kind. I've met with several," Connor said. "They need each other more than the common android, and there is some proof that they are made to slowly outgrow their own programs. It will be a complicated issue, and may include some body switching in the future. They have not been around long enough to see the outcome of yet."

What was his point?

"But for the best outcomes in their 'growing up', they should be around other child androids. Just like human children need other children."

Damn. Kara was starting to feel selfish now. *What's the right decision?* Tammy's home was no place for her. Rose's brother was a little easier but he worked long distances and didn't make much of an effect. Alice did need other children, and others to care for her. She was a wildly, unique child She needed love. She needed friends. But to do that. "Then it'd all be worthless."

"You went through a lot to escape to Canada," Connor answered back. "To come back to Detroit would mean it all meant nothing. That his sacrifice meant nothing."

*Luther.* Kara glanced at Connor. She shouldn't be surprised he did his homework. "Luther gave his life on the boat to help us get to Canada."

"You were close. You were probably going to stay with each other and be a family unit."

Kara looked down at the now empty sink.

"Will you permit me one question?" Connor asked.

What choice did she have? She looked back out the window. Rose was talking to Alice so excitedly. Probably about how nice it would be to get back home. "What is it?"

"Did Luther want you to make it to Canada as a place in the end, or did he want you to get here to take care of Alice?"

Kara stood motionless as she thought about the question. "He wanted Alice safe. Like me."

"Then? Which way is really betraying his memory?"

---

Connor watched as Kara and Alice sat in the very back, with Rose and Adam taking the middle. He looked toward Hank and took his own seat. "I had wondered why you rented one so big."

"Instinct always bites me in the rear," Hank said. Strangely, he had watched his language. "Full house. Three humans. Three androids. Getting humans back over is easy, Connor. They're still U.S. Citizens. I got permission for you, you were in law enforcement and a part of this whole thing." He gestured behind him. "We can't just get on any old plane with the others though. Canada finds out we are illegally taking out androids that shouldn't even exist."

"Then they will start to hunt for other androids who might be hiding as well," Connor finished for him. "I know, Lieutenant. We'll be fine driving with the other androids, and then we can take a boat across." Connor heard a slight wail from the back from Alice. Apparently traumatized from the trip up. "If we have to, a secure ship. Nothing like before," he said trying to comfort her as Kara held her closely in the back.

"Let me just check my rear again for all the cash we'll need for a drive across Canada and a slight voyage on a cruise ship. If I had that kind of money, Connor, would I even be working?" Hank criticized him.

"We rented a car. We found Alice and Kara, and we all managed to drive here," Adam spoke up. "It wasn't too bad considering the options. A few days. Enough for gas, and only two people needed to eat."

"Correct. Only three people will need to eat, and only for a short time." Connor agreed with Adam. "Until we get them to a plane. It shouldn't be that bad."

"Just long and tedious."

"But not too bad," Connor said again. "And then when we make it back home, this whole situation will be out of your hair." Great. He used the carefree expression too.

"Can your Markus pay out the debt this is gonna cost me on my card?" Hank asked. "I'm not going into debt to bring some people back to Detroit."

"Lieutenant?" Connor questioned. "You're already in debt."

"I'm not going to put myself in more debt then," Hank answered back.

Connor just smiled. "Everything will be fine, Hank. Don't worry."

"Oh, I've heard that one before." Then, Connor and Hank both noticed Kara walking toward them. She took Hank's hand and stuffed it full of money. "Ooh. Hello to you too."

"Tammy collected at the end of the week, checking on the neighbors for how much I made," Kara explained. "They each paid me individually. That should be enough to help for gas and plane tickets for Rose and Adam."



"That's your earnings?" Hank folded up the money. "That's highway robbery. It's only Thursday and you have that much? Lousy piece of poo."

Connor looked toward him again. That was not one of his go-to words either.

"It'll help. A lot. Connor's known to have put me into some tough situations financially," Hank admitted. "Thanks. Go ahead and sit back with your little girl."

Connor watched her move right back. "There we go. That worked out." He looked back at Hank. "Better?"

"Everything except now there's no reason to have really visited," Hank said. "Aw well. Sight seeing pubs later. Let's get outta here."

# Ten Points

## Chapter Notes

Connecting to AI: These are the words I use for when an Android is speaking to another, or several, but not out loud.

Recharge: Recharge is like sleep. Androids can go a long time without a recharge but to stay in balance, recharging every night helps. Child androids tend to need a longer recharge.

Kara watched when the car stopped. Rose, Adam, and the man Hank all got off. They needed to use the restroom. Although that wasn't something she or Alice needed, some fresh air would be good. She patted Alice's shoulder. "Want to go outside a bit?" Like she thought, she shook her head yes. They went past Connor who was doing something with a small tablet. Probably working. Who knew. She held Alice's hand as they left.

"Were getting out to stretch," Alice said toward Connor. "Do you want to come too?"

Connor had lifted his eyes from the tablet. "Oh. Sure." He stood up and came out "Thank you for inviting me."

There, that again. Was Kara wrong? He just seemed . . . maybe it was her experience with him being more hands on than it was with Luther. His smile was clear. He seemed nice. But his words, his straight back all the time, he just seemed so . . . *He is deviant*. He apologized. He went all that way to apologize and even went through so much trouble to get her back. So? She looked down at Alice, moving her slightly out of the way as he came back down.

"You were a police officer. Are you still a police officer?" Alice asked.

"I worked with the police department, but I don't do that anymore. I mainly handle whatever the leader Markus gives me," Connor admitted. "It feels underwhelming at times. I'm adjusting."

Oh. Great. *He is the only android she's been able to talk to besides me. She is trying to build a connection.* But she didn't want her to build another connection. "Let's go for a small walk, Alice. This shouldn't take long."

"Do you enjoy playing?" Connor asked her, making Alice stop and look back at him. "I've seen it both ways. Many kids enjoyed playing, while others preferred not to play. I believe it felt like something they were forced to do."

"Oh, I liked playing. When I got a chance to," Alice said. "It's kind of hard to do that."

"It won't be there. Nearly seventy percent of the children I've seen play there." Connor gave her a big, bright smile. "I'm sure you will find a companion that you can call a friend. Maybe many of them."

"That'll be nice. I hope so, Connor," Alice said.

Using his name now. Fortunately, Kara saw Hank coming back. She looked behind, hoping she would see Rose too.

"Did the process go well?" Connor asked. He watched as Hank slugged him on the arm. "That didn't hurt."

"Pretend it did," Hank answered. "Back in the van."

He didn't have to tell Kara twice. She moved back onto it with Alice, toward the back again.

"You get in touch with your Markus?" Hank asked Connor.

"Yes," Connor said, ducking into the van to grab his tablet. He came back out. "Strange using this device. Not close enough to hear him any other way." He opened the tablet. "He has been very good about not messing with another countries data or hacking into it. It wouldn't be a good idea, and things are always rocky enough."

"Yeah, and?" Hank asked. "Just tell me what's going to happen. Tell me we can all get on a plane and that whole cruise thing was a joke."

"We can all get on a plane."

"Thank goodness," Hank said.

"Just not when we were supposed to." Connor smiled. "Since Markus won't mess with data in Canada, we have to take a flight that originates from America. Detroit, specifically. He'll make the changes while it's there, so when it comes here we are good. It will be a round trip, without being a round trip."

"Cut off half of my vacation, I don't care," Hank answered. "That means he paid for it? Getting better and better. Alright. Where is the airport this all takes place in?"

"Two hours away."

"Now that I can get behind. Come on, Connor, in the van," Hank insisted. "Other two tagalongs are coming and I'm not wasting any more time."

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### **Back at Jericho . . .**

Connor flipped his coin. He had nothing to preoccupy himself again. All the tasks Markus had given him had been done again. They were all back from Canada, Kara visited Markus with Alice and they were getting established.

He had hoped once he fixed that regret, he would somehow have become like many of the others. He had hoped Markus knew something that he hadn't. He didn't though. He felt no different than he had before.

"Where are the other kids?"

Connor looked beside him. Ah, Alice. "Around the corner. I'll show you." He moved away from his corner. "Did you get accommodations to live in?" No. That would be too complicated for a little android. "Did you get a home area?"

"Yes," Alice said. "We're going there soon. Kara just needs to talk to Markus a little longer. What do I say to other kids, Connor?"

Oh. "I don't know," Connor admitted. "I am not a kid. I would be friendly, and try to adapt to them if you can." Yet. "Not completely. You can adapt, but be yourself. Compromise."

"Okay," Alice agreed. "It's just. I've never been around other kids. Some small ones, but they didn't really talk. It was different."

"Yes. Everyone's different," Connor said back to her as they rounded a corner. "They are usually here but I don't see anyone. You could wait and see if they show up."

"No. I don't want to stray too far from Kara," Alice said. "I'll remember the spot." Yet, she kind of lingered.

"Is there something else?" he asked.

"You're deviant, but you don't act like it," she said. "Everyone else. They act different than you. Why?"

Ah. "Many notice but don't say anything. I overhear them, and they even know it, but no one says it outright," Connor said as he walked back with her. "In most cases I suppose pointing it out is considered rude by some."

"Oh. I didn't mean to be rude."

"I don't think you were. Children, tend to ask what's on their mind, so it wasn't rude. Just, trying to comprehend the world." If only he could comprehend the world like that. "I am deviant, but I am the only one of my series. A prototype. You'll see around here others that look similar to you. There are at least three. Any androids whose owners didn't give them up, they were sent here. Multiples. There are none of me."

"How come?" Alice asked.

"Well. I came to find out I was a special kind of android." He looked at his arm. "This is not my original arm, or my original body. I've apparently died many times. My memory has simply been reuploaded, over and over, into different machines just like me."

"Oh." Alice looked straight ahead. "That's different. I'm sorry. So? Does having more like us, make it easier for us to act better? Me and Kara never traveled with a same series, but Kara

seems normal to me."

"The definition of normal in this case, being less . . . automatic." Connor didn't know how to take their conversation. "I am deviant," he said. He thought for a second. "I can speak." Think. "I can speak and feel fine." Think. "With shorter sentences." Think. "Thought out. Many times, I speak fine even without that, but at moments I apparently don't do so well when I don't think ahead of time."

"Because you're a different android with no multiples except replacements?" She asked.

"No. I just said that to show how different I am." It was tough to explain. Alice's capacity of knowledge wasn't large and expansive, she hadn't been designed that way. Her AI would let her learn, but it was slow. Connor stopped and bent down to her level. "Deviancy occurred when something overwhelmed an android, breaking its programming. I however was designed to be very hard to break, because I was seeing things that would make a normal android break. Over and over. Everyday. It was my job, to catch dangerous androids or negotiate with them."

"Oh." Alice nodded. "I get it. You were tougher inside, to make sure you couldn't feel. That toughness is why you're still different."

"Not bad," Connor said. "You yourself would make a good detective."

"Not really, that confused me," Alice admitted. "But, I guess that's just you?"

"That's just me?"

"Yeah," Alice said. "Maybe you are who you are. Maybe you weren't supposed to be against androids, but maybe you were still supposed to be a detective. Like, that's what you still want?"

Kids. Interesting concept, with way too many twitchy words. "Without so much hardwired into you, your creative thinking has a larger boundary than the average one of us." She just smiled as he stood up. "So much so that I don't quite grasp what you're saying."

"You liked being a machine, sort of," Alice tried again.

Nope. "You should go wait closer to the door for Kara."

"Oh! I didn't mean it that way quite," Alice fumbled her words. "I know you didn't like going after other androids. I get that. I'm sorry. I meant. Like. I was made to play and be a normal human child replacement. But, I still like to play. I still like a lot of the same things. I'm just not forced to."

Oh. Connor relaxed his stance. "I didn't like what I had to do." But maybe? Had her open mind seen something he didn't? "I am still friends with Hank. He was my partner. The partner part changed, but the friend part didn't." She was close to something.

"Come on, Alice." Kara came out of the building she was speaking in with Markus. She knew she'd been there. "Alice?"

"In a second, Kara," Alice told her. She looked back at Connor. "I have to go."

"I liked saving others. I saved a little girl on a building from an android who tried to kill her once," Connor told her. He got it. He got it! He smiled widely and gave Alice a sly wink. "Thank you, Alice. You helped me in an extremely wonderful way."

"It was nice to talk to you too. And thank you for getting us back here," Alice said before she bounded toward Kara. Taking her hand, they both left.

"Alice." Kara looked down toward her. "There should be some kids around here that you can make friends with around a corner."

"I know," Alice said. "Connor showed me. They aren't out right now, but there's a playground. I'd rather see our new home first. Do you know what color it is?"

"Bright, vibrant blue," Kara said holding her hand tighter. "Not very far from here. Markus keeps the children more to the area of control." Should she be honest? Alice knew right from wrong, and she knew when Kara kept things from her. "Not every human is happy to have us back. Some cross over and try to hassle. Sometimes. Markus can't outlaw them not to come in. They have freedoms too, and if we want to continue to leave, we need to respect their freedom."

"They come over?" Alice asked. "Do they hurt us?"

"It's not the same as before," Kara answered. "There have been a few incidences, but, it can't be helped, Alice." She nodded. "When you know humans are near, just stay inside. It'll be safe there. We might not be living alone forever. If more children come, we are next in line to share our place."

"I understand. I'm still happy we came back," Alice said, calming Kara's regret. "No matter what. You shouldn't have worked as much as you did. I'd rather deal with all this, then lose you to being burned out. I can't lose you, Kara."

"Never, and you never will," Kara said. They kept walking a distance. Jericho wasn't just a boat anymore, it was the name of the area the androids had received. While there weren't millions, there were thousands, and more arrived a little everyday from places that had sheltered their android through it all. They were often kept underwraps, until they were either discovered or became deviant.

It was policy whether deviant or not, that all androids found in America were to go to Jericho. It was good and bad, she understood that. Some androids were very close to their family and didn't want to leave. Then it was android on android until they calmed down. It wasn't easy. While many androids had specialties they were programmed with, many rebelled against their original intentions for being created.

Instead, they often interfaced with each other, to slowly pick up new skills. These new skills made them happy, while at the same time, serving mankind so they could still get the technology that kept them all running. But some skills were easier learned than others. Being created to be a baker was different than getting a set of instructions to bake.

And some skills were strictly for human pleasure. "Alice," Kara said to her out of the blue as they approached their new residence. Small and humble, but reserved for androids. It included a kitchen and it would turn her into a specific baker, unless she didn't find baking desirable. Then they would go elsewhere and do something different.

"What is it, Kara?" Alice asked.

Alice looked toward her. "Some of your new friends, they might not always seem healthy. They were created to be sick more often, for humans to take care of." She tried to explain it. "Some are like you. Some are not. Some can turn off their temperature sensors. Some can't."

"I know," Alice admitted. "That can't always be changed."

"No. It can't." Still. Kara smiled. "A new start though. Not where I thought, but it's a good place."

When they went aside, both of them felt such a relief.

"Kara! Some toys were left behind!"

Kara smiled and looked up the stairs, hearing Alice's voice. That was good to hear. She looked around the kitchen. A baker. It sounded different. Hopefully it worked. There were books she was supposed to use, and Markus spoke of a neighbor who knew the baking she had to do, they just didn't want to do it anymore. Kara had cooked before, basic cooking, but she'd never been proficient at desserts.

There was more than one choice to pick from, but Kara didn't really know which appealed the best, and this one came with a house ready for the cooking. She wanted Alice settled as quick as possible so all of her nerves would settle down.

Alice rushed down the stairs, jumping more on the last two steps. "I like it. Our home." She walked toward Kara. "I love it here, Kara. How far are we from Connor and Hank?"

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## **Connor's Residence.**

First thing tomorrow. Connor returned to his small place on the outskirts of Jericho. He needed to think of what to say. How to form the words to make Markus understand his purpose. If he took it as violent, he'd never agree. Alice was right though. He wasn't a machine, but when he was one, he was still doing what he needed to do. He had enough with trying to challenge himself with his coin in the rain. It was time to-

A gun went off. He knew that sound well and went on alert, looking around. He'd heard there'd been some trifles here and there, but that wasn't a trifle. That was a gunshot. He heard

an android yelling in grief and ran to the scene. There on the ground lied a woman, with a man holding her. She was shot, right through the head. The man was the one grieving. In that situation, nothing could be said. He needed to return back to Marcus. However, the grieving man said something.

"Ten. Ten. Ten. Ten." He repeated the words over and over, in shock. "Ten."

Then, Connor understood as he heard the shouting too.

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### **Just Outside Jericho**

"MP 800!" A man held his gun proudly with a trio of people. "Ten fucking points! Beat James' ZT 200 last week. Aren't you glad you came with us, Paul?"

"Yeah," Paul said. "I mean, there's no meat like deer. You can't even get the trophy. But man, what a rush." He placed his gun into it's holster.

"I heard someone got in there close enough. They almost had the balls to get it," a woman said. She was sporting a green shirt with Jericho X'd out on it. "Imagine that. I'd keep the head if I could for proof. Mount it on my wall next to my prized deer. Don't even have to pay for the taxidermy. I would save it for a really good one though. Maybe a kid. They gotta exist in there somewhere."

"Probably like a mama deer, keeping them close in the center. Never gonna hit one."

"Don't push, Paul. Sue's crazy." Another man with a strange stocking cap and jacket moved past them. "She might try and get herself in trouble by getting too close."

"No way. The one who almost had the balls to get the body?" Sue said. "Guy was escorted out. I'm not kidding. The leader held a gun on him, made him give up, and walked him out. Not a scratch."

"No way. I don't believe you, Sue. Getting them out here is one thing, but in there? They'll fight back."

"They can't, it's against their rules. If they do, it means war. And if they do that?" Sue cocked her gun. "Finally real open season on them plastic fuckers."

"I don't know," Paul said. "Jericho is just getting bigger each day, you know? The land they keep getting, it's a crawl, but it's still going. What if it ends up being as big as Detroit itself? How packed are they all in there? Could be two thousand. Could be two hundred thousand."

"Ah, excuse me, Buddy." A man walked past Paul.

"Yeah. We should stop being such morons and take them out while they're small. They're supposed to start working on worldwide androids here soon. Worldwide. More places like Jericho. Be as big as a state. Maybe even bigger soon. This shit has got to stop."

---



Connor held himself steady. He walked past them, getting a chance to hear about what was going on. Not being in Jericho, they didn't even notice him as android. He walked behind them a short ways before he saw Hank come over and put in the plant.

"I gotta say," Hank said glancing at Connor. "I don't feel one bit sorry for those sons of bitches when they're found. Hot Henry isn't anyone to fuck with. He'll beat them senseless." He patted Connor on the back. "If they cause him trouble, he might even kill them."

"A game," Connor said. "The shootings around here. They're all part of some game."

"There's a lot of sick fuckers out there, Connor. You know that."

"We aren't animals. We aren't deer. We are alive!" Terrible. It was just terrible. Connor pulled his stocking cap down more. "We are alive, and every android in Jericho is a target at a carnival, waiting to be shot down."

"At least most of the time they have lousy aim. Not a very good view. Talk shit all they want, it wouldn't take balls, it would take brass balls to walk in Jericho with a gun shooting." Hank looked back at Connor. "You good?"

"Yeah."

"You want pictures of what Hot Henry is gonna do?"

"No," Connor said. "I'm going to get back. I can't be traced back out here like this. Thanks, Hank."

"No problem. Making asshats get what's comin' to them is my thing. Night, Connor." He gave a simple wave as he left.

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### **Headquarters of Jericho, next morning .**

Connor walked in and watched Markus mapping something out with North. "I know what I should do."

Markus turned and looked toward him. "Connor." He smiled and came over toward him. "I'm glad to see you got Kara and Alice out of that situation. That was good work. I had no idea that kind of thing was going on."

"Yes. Alice especially seems to be happy here," Connor admitted. "I came here to tell you that I understand what I should do. I found my purpose."

"I liked the original thing you did, except with humans," North said to him.

Markus patted her hand and looked back at Connor, connecting just to his AI. *Don't mind her. It's her anger, it helps her with her past. She doesn't mean it.* After that, he continued speaking out loud. "What is it you want?"

"She is right, I liked my original thing I did, except with humans," Connor said. "Not in quite the same way though as her meaning."

"You do?" Markus seemed surprised. "I knew what you would want would have to do with orders. I was thinking some kind of controller. Construction later on. You enjoyed your original purpose of being created?"

Connor held out his hand. "Not completely. Not the hunting down androids. I . . ." He didn't want to end up in the same bind as Alice did with him, making him feel offended. Instead, he interfaced, letting Markus see for himself.

Markus nodded. "A tower. Stopping someone to save someone. I get it." Hmm. "I don't think we have a need for that yet, but I'll keep it in mind, Connor." Markus looked back toward North. "Well?"

"Some like the idea, others don't," North said, continuing their earlier discussion. "The names are too common, they get confused. We need separate names, but nobody wants to be known as their exact serial number for a last name. Some also want to draw distinctions between units, so that they know each are faithful if they find someone, or they can see who belongs with who."

Just like that, Connor knew he was forgotten. "You don't think there is a need? They are shooting us like a game."

Markus sighed. "I know that some humans sometimes cross the line. Sometimes, there is a racket."

"Sometimes they shoot," North pointed out. "Sometimes they kill. We just hold them at gunpoint if we catch them and send them back over, like a time-out."

"One time, North. Look. We can't risk getting aggressive," Markus said to her. "We could lose everything."

"There is a difference between getting aggressive, and making it clear what they can and cannot do," Connor said. "Pointing a gun only works, so long as someone believes you'll pull it."

"Oh, not you too," Markus muttered. "We have Jericho. We have freedom."

"You have an emergency gun, and I don't believe you will ever shoot. You have the skill set, but not the mind set. Once the humans know that, it will be a paperweight," Connor pointed out. "There will be no need for them to stop or leave. It will create more humans coming over and causing more ruckus, until containment is not even an option anymore!"

"We'd invite the press to let them see how terrible humans are being to us," Markus said. "When they know, the world knows, and things stop."

"True. In the meantime, how many are injured or killed?"

"Not many, there are strict rules to stay inside if any humans are seen in the area. It is highly encouraged to visit on the outside of Jericho." Markus shook his head.

"You know he's right, Marcus," North said. "You were a negotiator, right, Connor?"

"One of my many skills," Connor said to her.

"I will keep it in mind," Markus said firmly once again. "That's all, Connor. And start thinking of a last name. You aren't the only android named Connor. We are drawing distinctions between individuals and families."

"If we needed you, would you be nearby?" North asked Connor.

"My residence is more on the outskirts of Jericho," Connor admitted. "I don't go there much. There's no need. I prefer to be near the decision makers. I enjoy knowing what's going on." But his AI to Marcus added something else. *Also, not getting killed seems to have fallen into the reasons now.*

"Is that why you'll flip coins out in the rain instead of going home?" Markus asked him. "Do you want more into the decisions we are making?"

"No," Connor said clearly. "I just want to know about them."

"He was probably built to want to know everything, store information for his work," North said.

"Yes." Connor would do it. "I admit it. I *am* different. I won't rebel against it." There it was. "I won't rebel against what I want."

"Great. Let's move him up here?" North suggested to Markus. "He'll stay out of the rain, and if things get bad?"

"If we move you up here," Markus said, looking toward North, then to Connor. "Don't do anything without my say so. My say so is Jericho's say so."

"You have my word," Connor agreed.

"I heard that once before from you," Markus reminded him. "I saw your memories of the little girl on the tower. I know how that turned out."

Ah. "I will use my best knowledge and expertise to handle a situation in the best manner possible, exhausting all peaceful options first before pursuing violence," Connor said, knowing Markus wouldn't go with 'have his word'. "Unless peaceful negotiations would be too slow and the situation was dire."

"He knows what he is doing," North pointed out to Markus. "He can be peaceful and get the job done."

"Or not," Markus added. He looked back to Connor. "Androids fighting humans, even in the most dire of cases, it won't bring us any favor."

Almost. North seemed on board, but he needed to convince Markus, and he'd seen his tactics from his memory. So. "I had a human partner, remember?" he reminded Markus. "In emergency situations, I could reach him for help." He still didn't look completely convinced. Oh, fine. "I would try to reach him as I deal with situations that are extreme, with the best of intentions."

"Maybe. A human, if need be." Markus was thinking about it. "The residences near here are usually reserved for the children. Less chance anything gets over here. It's usually handled further out."

"Then if humans get this far in?" North asked Markus. "And maybe his human partner as backup? Or, at least to help frame it right."

"Right," Connor agreed. "Lieutenant Hank Anderson would be good at framing . . . finagle things if he needed to. He is a friend. I could say he was visiting. It's not illegal to have humans visit in Jericho."

"No, just not encouraged, especially now," Markus said. "Fine." He conceded. "It would be good to be prepared. If you can get him to agree to be an emergency standby. He seemed . . . testy about Canada."

Well. *What did he say about that?* "He gave me a slide since I helped free other androids, and stopped being just a machine." Still. "He gives *one* slide by, but I can make him agree. I just need something for him, to persuade him."

"What is it you need?" North asked.

"A particular chicken sandwich with heightened cholesterol he shouldn't eat. It's his favorite."

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## **Kara and Alice's Residence**

A night's recharge had done Kara so much good. Alice was upstairs, playing with the toys she found. She headed to the kitchen, to start really digging into the books and instructions. This place? It was free. It felt good, and she wasn't going to risk losing it.

There was a knock at the door, disrupting her studying though. When she opened the door, she saw North. "Hello?"

"You already have a roommate coming," North warned her. "Make sure you and the little girl pick your rooms together either upstairs or downstairs, okay? Oh, and we are discussing last names. So far, the consensus is to pick our own."

Anything was better than a serial code. "Are you assigning them?"

"No, you can decide. We are deciding on family units too. That way those who consider themselves very close can share the same last name." She smiled wearily. "Go ahead and think about that. You have two in your family?"

Kara stopped, just a moment. ". . . yes. Just two."

"Fine. Welcome to Jericho," North greeted her. "Major emergency announcements will be made through either I or Markus. Otherwise, we try to . . . go out and mingle. Meet others," she said. "Becoming social isn't easy for every android, but some do it quite well. Try your best, either way, especially since you have a child android. They are our future."

Kara didn't exactly know what she meant by that. "You mean, they adapt and they'll need new bodies as they grow?"

"I mean, we don't know what to expect," North said. "Markus just likes to say they are our future. I don't think I really know what our future will be."

"We'll shape our own," Kara agreed. "I'm guessing Alice wants the upstairs. There were toys up there. I need the kitchen though."

"Go ahead and take the toys from the room," North said. "Your roommate won't need them."

One? "One roommate?" Kara asked.

"Maybe occasionally two," North confessed. "A human may visit. You came with him from Canada."

"Hank?" Hank? "Hank?" Kara asked twice. "I thought humans weren't allowed."

"It's not encouraged, according to Markus," North said. "I need to get going. Just write your names with your chosen last name and drop it off to Markus. We'll get everything fixed up better that way." She started to walk off.

"Do you mean it's Connor?" Kara finally asked. "I thought he was established by now. It's been months, and this area was chosen for children."

"Inner area. A safety issue," North said. "If anyone gets too close, he'll handle the problem." Kara's look did not escape her. "Is there a problem?"

Kara opened and closed her mouth.

"You worked through regrets," Kara said. "We chose your residence since he already knew you."

"We did. I forgave him," Kara said carefully. "but it was a traumatic experience and Alice may have a problem with it."

"I don't have a problem with it, Kara," Alice said as she came from downstairs, holding a small bear. "Connor's nice. We get along. Hank was nice too."

North looked right back at her. "Kids. They either bring joy into your life or they ruin everything, don't they?"

Kara glanced back toward her. That was a strange comment. "Are you taking care of any?" She wasn't letting it go. "Alice. Why don't you choose which room you want downstairs, and you can bring the toys to it." She didn't take her eyes off of North.

"You can't do that," North warned her. "I know what happened, but he wasn't a deviant. You. You can't judge someone on what they used to do or did before they woke up."

"I'm not," Kara insisted. "It's not that."

"We don't talk about our detailed programs, or what we were used for very often," North admitted. "Everything ends up as 'skills'. That's it." She was quiet a moment, respectfully. "But certain things, they don't break. Many children still play. All children need guidance. The AX 400 worked with children and families alike. They were meant to get close quickly as well, so connection could be established. A trust for watching and caring over not just humans, but 'their loved ones'."

"Then maybe I'm a rebel." Kara was getting tired of the conversation. "Maybe I don't like that about my programming. Maybe. Maybe I'm fine enough with what I have. Alice. There is nothing wrong with that."

"Luther, the one who left you," North said. "You have the dates you became deviants. They weren't far from the date you said you met him. Almost the same day."

"What's your point?" Kara asked sharply.

"When the AX 400 loses someone, they are usually reset or sold again to be resetted. Markus and I made sure we knew about you and Alice carefully when we heard you rejected coming back from that position you were in." North's voice softened. "No one wants to reset anyone. You need to work through it."

"I like the left one, Kara. The walls are a soft pink," Alice said as she came over.

Kara looked down toward Alice, smiling, trying to hide that. She didn't want anyone knowing that. "Left it is. Go ahead and get the toys." She watched Alice bound upstairs. "Alice's programming is quick as well. She could let go easier. Surely, I'm not the hugest problem Jericho faces."

"You're an interesting problem, one that we are watching."

"Why?" Why watch so close? "We're fine. We're happy."

"We have had problems with other androids that we don't need to discuss in detail," North informed her. "Stress of a new life. When stress goes up, sometimes more happens than self-suicide. It has been known to crawl up, little by little, each day. Until something terrible

happens. So." She looked toward the stairs. "For Alice's safety, yours, and Jericho's, if your stress level goes too high, we are forcing you to reset. Relax. Deal with any regrets. Get out and make friends. A good start would be with your new roommate-"

"A sandwich, really? A fucking chicken sandwich? That's what you asked for?"

"-who seems to be coming now. Have a nice day."

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"You like free sandwiches," Connor reasoned with Hank as they reached the door of his new dwelling. Not that it mattered. He didn't really dwell anywhere. He saw Kara at the door and North leaving. That made sense, she only just arrived and had Alice. It was most likely the next available place.

"Aw, it's you again?" Hank greeted Kara. "Hey. This clown over here expects me to come at his beck and call, for a chicken sandwich. How rude is that?"

"Hi." Alice appeared near Kara. "Our rooms are downstairs. I got the toys out of the upstairs."

"That sounds great," Connor said. "I wouldn't play with them."

"I'm not so sure about that," Hank teased him. "Well, where the fuck are my sandwiches then? You wanna talk, you better have one. It's lunch and I'm hungry."

"I do." Connor reached into his coat and pulled out one.

"Great." Hank took it and went inside, sitting at the kitchen table. "Now go over this with me in detail. What'd you rope me into again?"

"My purpose. I found it." Connor sat down next to him, but gestured toward Alice. "Her opened mind, it helped me find it. I want to help secure Jericho. Like I did hostages. What I was, it was still part me. Markus doesn't want violence though, unless it's called for."

"Ah." Hank took a bite of the sandwich. "So I'm either helping to pummel some jerks, or I'm supposed to lie about what I saw?"

"Correct."

"So, I get to be told to come all the way down here from the precinct, to help, and I get a sandwich." He didn't sound happy at all.

"Not all the time," Connor said. "If it's before noon, you'd be coming from your bed instead."

Kara looked down at Alice. She smiled. She'd done it before, but it was so rare. Until that trip back. So many times she caught her smiling. She hoped it was because she believed their future was going to be better. But. It was as she feared. *Alice is fond of them.*

"You'd be helping a great number of people?" Connor tried harder. "Androids have to trade with humans for services. Would you rather have a choice of sandwich or drink?"

Hank held his hand up. "Fine but if I pick drink, drop it off at my place afterward."

"Markus also agreed you could stay here if you wanted. If things ever get dicey, you are guaranteed a residence," Connor said.

"Just what I freakin' want. To live with you, 24/7. I don't think my heart could take it," Hank said taking another bite. "Fine. If I'm not busy, I'll drop by."

"Great. That's what I needed. Thanks, Hank."

Hank left the table and went out toward the door, seeing Kara and Alice. "Your stuck with him, huh? Poor sons of biscuits. Good luck." He passed by them and out the door.

"Hank's language is intriguing when he watches it," Connor said standing up himself. He walked to the door, and pulled something else out of his coat. "Here you go, Alice." It was a small stuffed bunny. "It's from me and Hank. It's from me, thanking you for helping me accept . . . me. It's from Hank because he likes you. Just don't tell him I told you that."

Kara watched Alice's eyes light up. It wasn't a very big bunny. She'd seen bigger. It was a simple stuffed toy a little larger than the size of the burger Connor stuffed away. But with that action, he was sealing fate. She wasn't just fond of them now.

She was bonding.

"Do I have something on my face, Kara?" Connor asked her. "You look like something's wrong."

"Everyone's looking for last names now," Alice said to him. "Do you have a last name yet?"

"I like Connor," Connor said. "I've thought about it, and I think I'll just be Connor Connor. As long as no other Connor chooses Connor Connor, I should be fine."

Alice laughed. She actually laughed. *She actually laughed.* She never laughed with Kara, not once. Smiling was rare enough. Stunned, Kara just stared at her. Alice was naturally cute, but when she laughed, cute moved to squeezing her own heart. After all her hurt, she was healing.

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A small joke. Alice got it, yet Kara had looked strangely at Alice, before breaking into . . . *what is that?* He'd seen many looks before, he had to recognize facial expressions well in order to guess the next step in investigations. It. He couldn't pin it. It must have been an array of emotion, he couldn't understand it. It wasn't hostile of course, it was loving yet more. *Relieving happiness.* No wonder he couldn't figure it out quickly. He didn't see that much of it.



Every time he saw her, she had her guard up like android security. She also had a high level of stress for such a simple moment, 42%. She had soared down to 32%. Markus and North would be glad to hear that. "I better get going. I need to talk to Markus. I will see you around, Alice."

"Okay," Alice said. "Bye, Connor." She watched him leave almost all the way out the door.

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### **Jericho's Headquarters**

"That is the best of humanity right there," North teased Markus as Connor gave him Hank's simple demand. "To our aid for a sandwich or booze."

"Every individual is unique?" Markus chuckled. "Fine, you have your permission. For now, when human's are attacking, you can negotiate them out. If your friend is here, he can get more drastic. If you see anything among androids though, and androids only, that isn't . . ."

"You know bad when you see it," North answered for Markus. "Androids here are good and bad. If you see bad. Kick the crap out of them. I do."

"Reasoning before violence is better for all, if it can be done," Markus added to North's statement. "That's all." Connor hadn't spoke again. "Is there something else?"

"Yes," Connor admitted. "I'd like to try and work with the humans on a volunteer basis." Yeah, he knew it would be an iffy subject. He needed to get back in there though and see who was controlling the hits on Jericho itself. "I can make a difference there, which is what we trade."

"Trading technology and ideas is one thing, you are asking to trade yourself," Markus said. "Androids may visit under their own risk. And you are like everyone else now, your memory won't be uploaded into another android. You're not immortal. You need to be careful."

"-And you need to be more open-minded! I never liked having to get a new body. Not only was it different, but often there were gaps in memory. Corruption." That couldn't be replaced. "I never felt immortal, Markus." But, that sting. As a machine. He gave everything to accomplish the mission. Every time. Body or not.

North just looked toward Marcus.

"I'm sorry. I went over a line, and I shouldn't have said that. I didn't know, but that's still no excuse," Marcus said honestly. "No one had it easy. We'll? We'll talk about it later, after I've had time to think. You're dismissed for now."



# Interfacing Faux Pas

## Chapter Notes

Resonating: The ups and downs that turn neutral to friend, trusted, lover, hostile, etc., in the game. Humans can't feel or sense it, but androids can feel and detect their emotions. However, between two androids, resonating only happens when both androids allow it, and they are both on the same level. If one is friend and the other is not, there will still be a neutral resonating.

Interfacing: Most androids just interface facts, but the tougher the situation, the more likely there will be memories attached. It's usually not a big thing since each android understands it. The one being interfaced with never has any memories. Probing is the same, except it's without permission and memories can run through each of them.

### **Kara's Residence**

Part of Alice's programming needed more rest, so Kara put her down but stayed up a little later to try to follow the recipe. Recharging hour, chosen at nighttime, would be useful and much needed for her. Her rechargings had not been many in Canada. It was less than a human's sleep cycle, but it was important to attain balance and not burn out right now.

But, she wanted a small amount of practice before then. Her job. It looked different.

She had made simple things, but simple human bakers could handle simple things. Even though she had interfaced with an android named Rachel, she couldn't bring what she saw quite to life. She had only interfaced a little bit, a couple of recipes, but it was intense, and she was only getting started.

She watched Connor come down from the stairs, almost like he was sneaking out. He looked back and saw her. "You work at night?"

"Yes," she said, trying not to make much eye contact. No such luck, he was coming over. He took his hand and tasted the mess on the counter. His tongue looked like a human child enjoying a sucker. "What are you doing?"

"That should be sweeter," he warned her. "What are you using?"

What? "You can eat?"

"Sampling." He smeared all the mess together and did the same thing. "No. Something's wrong."

Kara looked at her cans. They all looked fine. As advanced as the cake was, basic ingredients were the same. "Maybe you're tasting the flour."

"No, someone goofed." Connor came over and looked at them. "They are in jars, labeled with names." He searched around the cupboards and brought down another jar. "Two spoons."

Kara gave him a spoon.

Connor opened the jar he brought down, placed a small amount on a spoon, then placed his finger into it and licked it. "I thought so." He brought it next to the other jars. He opened one of the jars she had been working with, and used a spoon in the same fashion. "Well. No human will want to trade with us for that." He smiled at her. "Your salt is sugar, and your sugar is salt. Your cake might kill a deficient human."

Oh, that would have been terrible. "I don't know who labeled them," she admitted. "I assumed it was right."

"If you have more spoons, I can check the rest," he said. "Before I go out to nowhere in particular. Could you *not* tell Marcus I'm leaving for a little while?"

Kara got more spoons. "It's no business of mine. Here."

He checked her other main jars. "It's all fine. There's no excuse not to make an edible cake now."

"Yes." All that work, down the drain. "How am I ever going to get the hang of this? This isn't even the decorating part yet."

"What is your trade?"

"Wedding Cake." Kara said it plainly, but she about smiled as she saw his expression. "You have as much confidence as I do?" He watched her reach for her book. "It's a training guide. I got a little firsthand knowledge, but it's tricky." She put down the book.

He picked it up. "A baker who can't taste what she bakes, making the most important cake to a human's life. Will there be a photographer at these weddings?"

Kara crossed her arms playfully. "Well, excuse me Mister 'I have a sampling tongue'. If Marcus knew about that, maybe you would be doing this instead?"

Connor put down the book. "Not even here, never was here." He held up two fingers. "There are now two things not to tell Marcus. I left during the recharging hours, and I can sample things."

"You're going out with Hank." She could tell. He was leaving Jericho doing something he shouldn't. "I won't tell anyone, Connor Connor."

"Well? At least I tried," Connor said. "Last names are tricky. Maybe yours should be baker. Give you more reason not to fail your duty?"

Nice confidence. "Don't need that. We have our last name."

"Curious. What is it?"

"Wonderland," Kara said. "Alice and Kara Wonderland." She saw his tongue probe the inside of his own mouth. "Don't look at me like that, I know. They don't have to be exactly like common human names. I knew it would make her happy. And Jericho? It's all a new world. It fit."

"Did she come up with it?" He asked.

"No. When I first met her, that I can remember, she was reading the book when . . . several things happened and we escaped." Best to leave it at that.

"Marcus might be a little suspicious because I'm not out in my usual spot. So, just tell him I was in here. It's the smallest of small cases." He held his fingers almost pressed together. "I work faster and this person has been hard to catch. Just helping. Lightly."

Kara nodded. "I get it." She looked back at the jars. "Thanks for the help I didn't even know I needed."

"I tend to do that sometimes." He had a funny look on his face, and then took off out the door.

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"What the hell is the fuckin' android doin' here, Hank?"

The usual bitter sound he was used to hearing. Before it meant nothing to him. Now? Connor was trying to stay focused on what Hank wanted him to see. On the wall of the house was a bulletin board, similar to what he saw at Hank's area at the precinct one time. Anti-android slogans were flung all around on it. There were new additional thoughts though, which Connor could see. "Jericho No Mo. Terrible meaning but catchy."

"Just sayin' what the whole world's gotta say," Gavin said from behind him.

Connor tipped the back of his foot back, and pulled on the target. The carpet. He heard Gavin fall unceremoniously behind him as he explored more in the area. There were anti-android buttons on the corpse that was next to the sign. "The killer isn't subtle."

"Nah, but nobody can seem to find him. Have a nice trip, Gavin?" Hank asked. "Gotta watch that balance better."

Connor heard more cursing from Gavin, claiming he was the one who tripped him. He just ignored him. Wasn't really worth it. Everything did point to being anti-android, but that sentiment was still heavily out there. It was another reason Marcus had each of them trying to pull their weight for humans. The better they were one to one to each other, instead of being treated like just machines, the better off everyone would be. To him. To Connor, he wasn't concerned about this part. Feelings were one thing, action was another.

Connor surveyed the area better again for more clues. "What is it you see here, Hank?"

"I knew the guy lying in front of ya," Hank answered, gesturing to the buddy. "Not a friend, but we used to hang out in the same circles."

"He will be in a different shape soon," Connor remarked. "I don't see anything pressing."

"Good. Wanted to make sure," Hank said.

Connor smiled. "You want to make sure I am safe, Lieutenant? Thank you for your concern."

"I want to make sure there isn't anybody out there trying to hurt Jericho," Hank countered. "The whole android little city within a city, not just you. They never did anything. Nobody's hurt anybody. Everyone's all huddled up in the same area, or being taken to the same area. It's slowly getting bigger and bigger. It's . . ."

"Ripe for slaughtering," Connor finished. "I know."

"Jericho is the first and only model of a society between human and android that can work side by side. It's important it goes right," Hank said. "Not turned into a game that goes wrong. Like I said. Just checking."

"Well, I don't see anything. I think we are all safe," Connor said. "For now. As long as no one eats Kara's cake."

"Cake, wha? She can taste like you?"

"Sample and no. Well. Not quite. There are active tastes. A tongue is not just an obligatory decoration," Connor said. "But the average android can't taste salty, sweet, or anything like that. My tongue is the closest an android can get, but if it was tough tasting like a humans?" Connor sampled some of the blood. "I would never be able to do my job correctly. The victim had AB blood."

"Ah!" Hank turned away. "I hate it when you do that. Christ, Conner. Can you at least warn me when you go all vampire?"

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### **Nearby Playpark: Jericho**

Kara sat down and watched Alice play with the other kids. The smile on her face. Around others. It was hard to take off now. Sitting and watching Alice play became one of her favorite activities.

"May I sit down, Kara Wonderland?"

Kara looked beside her. The androids were trying to use the last names with respect like humans, before addressing a first name. "North. Of course." She moved aside on the bench she was sitting on. "I'm just watching Alice."

"I wanted to tell you that we've been observing you still." North said. "You still have stress. It's still almost always the same. It hasn't move up extensively, but the fact it won't leave you? You may consider giving it all a new go in a new life, with no memories to hamper you."

"No."

"You would be happier."

"No. I don't want to do that, not to Alice."

"You're resonating good signals. I can feel them. We won't force anything of course. You aren't sky high. Just, think about it." North watched the children too. "They are so interesting. It's just the same equipment, over and over, but it holds the excitement of something new. After all this, they still have so much energy. So much hope."

"Maybe that's why Marcus says they are the future," Kara said. "They adapt so much better than us. Their minds aren't crowded with nothing but data, allowing them to adapt to sudden changes better than most of us."

"Better than some of us. Some of us work quick. Some of us don't," North said.

"It isn't scary at first," Kara said, watching Alice climb some monkey bars with another girl and a boy. "As a machine, it felt fine. It felt safe to have that level of trust with the ones you watched over. Even if they didn't deserve it."

"Yeah." North was a little off. "Alice was abused when you got away. You were abused too. Because androids couldn't feel to them."

"When I woke up, I took that trust away from that human. I gave it all to Alice. I'd give anything for her," Kara said as Alice giggled being chased by another little girl. "But then . . ."

"It was gone, just gone for me too," North said. "I wanted to rid the world of humans. Of love. Of Touching. Then I met Marcus, and I found someone to trust."

"And he never abandoned you," Kara said softly wiping her tears. "Why were we ever made to cry? Such a limited function. No purpose." Still. "We would have died. He risked his life so much." She felt herself resonate with North again. Unlike humans, there were no guessing games about if someone liked someone, felt good about someone, hated someone, or was an enemy or friend. They could each feel it. They had both resonated positive over the course of the week, and they just slipped into a new place besides neutral. "I am glad we are friends."

"I am glad too," North said. "Marcus and I keep stumbling on our last name. We're still lovers, and we haven't moved from that position. He wants us to both take the same last name. A family unit."

"Family." That resonating was tough. "Each step up is so much harder," Kara said. "Especially when it all happens so quickly." And then it's all lost. "I put everything I had into that boat, to make it to Canada for Alice. I had to. I wanted her to make it, and a part of me. It didn't want to. In that cold water, I was falling apart, the damage being so severe and so quick, it was a miracle I survived." She closed her eyes. "I just clung on as tight as I could to how much I loved Alice. If I didn't I would never have made it." She felt North's hand in hers.

Friend just resonated again. They were each able to share more intimate details of their life together. North told her more about her own past too, in more details. "My trust went straight to Marcus. I wanted to destroy, and he wanted to build. We couldn't have been more opposite, but that need to build something new? Something. I just wanted to believe and before I knew it, we went from neutral to friend to lover. Less than five minutes. I was scared, and I ran off at first," North admitted. "But. There was nothing to be scared of. It's a great feeling, he is everything to me. I'd give my life for him."

"I think you should consider the same last name," Kara told her. "It's been months. If there's been no change in the resonating, then you should be fine." She smiled. "Baker's available."

North smiled. "I think he wants to go with something more meaningful. Peace." He chuckled. "North Peace. What an ironic name. How did I ever resonate with such a man?"

"Kara!" Alice came bounding over with another little girl. "This is Carrie. Can we play for a few more minutes?"

Kara knew it was getting later, but it wasn't recharging time yet. "A few more minutes. You can always play tomorrow." Alice ran off with Carrie, not even saying a word back to that. "They are resonating friendship already. They've known each other twenty minutes." Too scary.

"You're still neutral with your roommate," North warned her. "Someone you actually live with. Not many steps up at all. Are you making it harder to resonate with him?"

"Maybe." She was holding up a small barrier. "It doesn't matter. He was a prototype of a detective, so he wasn't designed to easily make friends either. He just adapts. His mannerisms may remain more automatic, but his personality has always been more human. He's open. He's friendly. There's nothing wrong with that."

"You know you're not supposed to address by model function," North warned her. Their resonance went down slightly, but they were still friends. "Both of you take your time. That is fine. But don't rebel like that. Making friends with a male android is not the end of the world. And are you sure he's only adapting to you? If you don't allow resonance to him, neither of you will feel it. You won't know each other's feelings. You'll be like . . ."

"Like a human's feeling guessing game," Kara joked. "I'd rather play guessing games with guys. I won't do that again."

"Kara-"

"I met Luther exactly one day from being free, November 6th. He chased and scared me, he was freed, we became friends, we became closer, we became family, and he died for us. November 6th through 10th. Four days. Four." She wiped at her eyes again. "All that, to the heart, so fast. I *won't* do that again."

"I do not have as many friends here. I don't get as close," North said to her. "My point of view isn't always so lovable. Still." She smiled at Kara. "Thank you for not hiding your resonating with me at least."



"I know you aren't as lovable here," Kara admitted. "I. I guess I thought if there was one person who could . . . understand. It'd be you."

"I don't get as close, but I don't hide my resonance either. You shouldn't do that forever," North warned her. "You have a nice personality. You could make many more friends. Alice is making friends, and their parents will want to become friends at some point. At least be acquainted with you."

"Children are soo hard not to bring in," Kara said. "I can't believe they were all adopted so quick, but I felt the draw to Alice too."

"Most went to androids who bond quickly."

"Not always the best thing. I hope everything goes well," Kara said. She waved at Alice as she waved. "It's almost time to go home, Alice! Say goodnight to your friends." She got up from the bench and looked at North. "There is something else. I've dealt with it for months, but maybe I should get checked out."

"Checked out?" North stood up next to her. "Is something wrong?"

"Several parts of me." It was time. North had become her friend, someone she trusted. It was high time. "Several parts of me are damaged. When I was in the water, I sensed jolts all over. I really believed there was a good chance I'd die, but I kept pressing on." There. She was honest. "It's been that way for months, but maybe something in there is causing stress to stay with me."

"You should have said something much sooner," North criticized her. "If you need repairs, we need to know. Run a diagnostic, what is damaged?"

Kara shrugged. "I can't do that anymore."

"Your diagnostic is broken too?" North seemed stern now. "Come, straight to medical. You are going to need an external diagnostic test then."

"External diagnostic?"

Kara turned and saw Connor show up behind her. He was looking all over at her, in every direction. "What are you doing?"

"As I thought earlier, nothing is damaged at all," Connor said plainly. "I did a diagnostic test right before I approached you in Canada. I knew there were no parts there and I wanted to check it out. You can't run your own diagnostics?"

"That's." That was impossible. *If nothing's wrong, why can't I?* And if nothing was wrong, how did she feel all the jolts that must have been intense damage that night they went to Canada?

"I know the other one didn't make it to Canada, but *you* were in the water?" Connor asked her. "For how long?"

"A minute or so."

"Temperature and conditions, at what time exactly?"

Kara looked at her arm. He kept looking toward it. *He better not.* She took a step back.

"Kara." His voice became very gentle, very smooth. He slowly took a step forward.

"Something doesn't make sense. You said you sensed 'jolts', but you have no damage. At all."

"Then I guess I got confused." Irate. If she did resonate with him, it wouldn't turn out good anyway.

"Connor know's what he's doing," North said on the other side of her. "Just let him interface with you. Maybe there's hidden damage."

"North's right, maybe there's hidden damage?" He held his hand out to her.

*He already knows there is no damage, he's the sly genius. He just doesn't know why.* Any other night. Any other time. She wasn't interfacing about that with anyone. "Alice!" Kara called out to her. "Come on, it's time to come home!" She took Alice's hand as she came and proceeded to walk off.

"I tried," North said to him. "That night is going to be too touchy. You'll just have to chalk it up to a miracle. As long as she is fine, that's what matters."

"No," Connor was as firm as Kara had been. "She was in the water, she said she sensed 'jolts'. That could only be delay jumps between her processing, meaning there was serious damage that could have ended her life. She was lucky to make it through, but there should have been damage."

"I really advise you to drop this one," North said. "I am her only friend. She clearly said no. If I can't persuade her, then it's not happening."

"Then I won't interface with her." Connor followed them home. He waved at Alice as she looked back and waved at him. She already liked him and she resonated trust. He crept a little faster behind them, waving at Alice whenever she looked back. He even waved at Kara when she looked back. Often shortly after Alice. Her look back was never half as pleasant. *And right there.* That was certainly hostile, and he wasn't happy about the fact she wasn't cooperating. Yet not even a slight downward from neutral between them resonated.

He'd just been on his way to talk to North. She seemed like the type that could cover up his activities at night from Marcus. He also wanted to ask about her last name being the same as Marcus. If she received it, Connor would be able to use that as proof to the police department they were each both in charge of Jericho. That would make getting out with Hank easier to investigate.

Instead, he walked up hearing about Kara being in the water with damage. When there was none. The most reasonable answer could be that her systems messed up her way of thinking, causing the illusion. It was the only answer he could think of. But just the way she phrased it,

and the action of being out in the cold water when she was such a lower classed android unable to sustain itself in those conditions. It. Just. It.

He watched as they ended up in the house. He wasted no time. *Redirect*. "I was thinking about what you said. You may be right, Kara." He stepped into the kitchen by her baking attempts. Which so far were no mastery. "Maybe together we could figure this out. We already share a home. We could share the job. I can bring my own talents to the table."

It was working. That seemed to be burning with her. Only, seemed. *Nothing. That surely would do something*. "Is there something wrong with that?"

"You're a detective investigator kind of guy. Not cake. I'm fine with learning the craft," she said. "By. Myself."

"Just offering?" He stepped away as she approached. "I will be right here if you change your mind."

"Thank you but I won't change my mind." She moved back to work looking at the books.

"Never know. I will occupy myself somehow. Let me know if you do change your mind." Not even a response this time. She wasn't even looking back. Knowing she was off her guard now on where he went and more focused on where he wasn't going, he moved quietly toward Alice's room. It was just around the corner, but if he was quiet enough. He knocked very lightly on her door that was open, to catch her attention.

Alice was putting together a small puzzle. "Hi, Connor."

"Hello. Are you playing with puzzles? Those are good for you." Interacting through conversation. "What is it supposed to be?" She picked up the lid and showed it to him. Perfect, an even better spot. He moved closer to pick up the lid and looked at it. "A domicile feline." No, no. "A cat."

"Uh huh." Alice looked at the puzzle. He bent down more beside her. She held up a piece, turning it around in her hands. "This is a tough piece."

"It looks like a tough puzzle. Do you want some help with it?" Definite resonating positive. "Great. But, if I help you, do you think that you could help me?"

She looked confused, tilting her head slightly. "I would, but what could I possibly help out with Connor?"

"Not much, I just need you to hold out your hand. Like this." He held out his hand toward her.

"A handshake?" She held out her hand. "Now what?"

"Now." He needed to do it fast. He already knew the clue words to use for a kid that would get it to come out easier. He could get it before she even asked why he wanted it, her own memory should start to trip up with the words. It wouldn't bother her otherwise. She'd never know she even did anything. "The scariest day."

.\_\*.\_\*.\_\*.\_\*

"The scariest day what?" Alice asked.

Connor let go. It only took a few seconds to process the memories. But, he was caught offguard. The scariest day didn't trigger the boat. He expected the android Luther being family and losing him, *with* Kara actually being in the water risking her life, it would be the scariest day. It wasn't. Not for her.

Connor touched his mouth briefly, but didn't say anything right away. "Nevermind, don't worry about it. So. Cat." He picked up the puzzle. "Cat, cat, cat . . ." He picked up the puzzle box. "I would start with the like colors in the fur in the middle. They are all similar colors. I would help, but I'm sure that I'm not going to be staying for very long."

Alice started to sort out the colors. "Do you have to go somewhere?"

"I'm sure I will." He just started to look for the like colors with her, which was much faster. He dealt them out from the normal pieces with complete ease toward her. "There you go."

"That's fast." She smiled. "Are you sure you can't stay?"

"Positive," he said. He stood up. "I hope you make the cat."

"I hope so too." Alice kept looking at the pieces. "Thanks again. I'll see you later."

He didn't answer that as he left the room.

---

## **Kitchen . . .**

"Steady, steady, steady . . . specific is never my specialty," Kara groaned as she tried to make the swirls on the first cake. It wasn't perfect tastewise, but a part of it all was decoration. She even interfaced better with Rachel today. Interfacing though was not her specialty. She was a general android. General tasks. General knowledge. She could keep thousands of basic recipes in her head. She knew thousands of bedtime stories. She knew 242 kinds of house repairs. Beforehand, all stuffed in there. Anything else was on her own and interfacing. "Keep it going, keep it going, and-" dang! Kara cut off the frosting. It wasn't continual, but it was working.

She stroked her forehead. It was hard to concentrate now, questions and memories swirling in her head. *Worst android ever.* She looked like nothing this way. In Canada she was taking care of the needs of a whole block, and here she couldn't even master the simplest wedding cake yet. She could pick something different, but it would probably be just the same.

General. She was a general android. The hard work of learning it all, it was mostly up to her and the patience of Rachel. If she could become friends instead of staying neutral, it might speed things up if they hung out more and she'd physically show her - *Listen to yourself. Trying to resonate to get better at a task? You're better than that, Kara.*

From behind her, she could hear heavy footsteps. "Getting better, Kara?"

Be polite. "I am," she said.

"Good. I'll be out for a bit again tonight. If Marcus asks, I'm still here though." That's all he said as he left out the front door.

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### **Hank's House . . .**

Hank poured himself a drink. Then he poured another drink and spilled it out. "For the one who really needs the drink, but can't."

Connor was silent ahead of him.

"Emotions. It'd be so much better without them, right?" Hank asked. "If you could turn them on and off like a switch, everything would always be better. Solve every case. Get around all the shitty things you deal with, day in and day out."

"I saw cruel things. Dangerous situations. I understood death, how much pain would stimulate a reaction . . . when I was a machine, it was easier. Even now, I can still do just fine. It's who I was," Connor said. "It was part of what I did. But."

"Things change. When emotion gets involved," Hank said again. "When it's not a statistic on a report, and when you know someone. That's when it all goes out the window. Woman, 35, commits suicide, strangles herself. Guy offs the TV repairman, high on red ice. It's all statistic, just data on a page. Until it becomes personal." He slammed his drink. "That's when emotions make everything complicated. But, hell?" He poured himself another drink. "Proves you're alive, right?"

"We can't feel pain. Even when death comes to androids, they just stop. That's it." Connor reached for the empty drink and stroked it with his finger. "We can't feel anymore than I can feel this glass." Hank hit him on the head. "That didn't fit this moment, Hank."

"You didn't see me touch the top of your forehead, but you still knew I did. Still got some things to feel."

"Sensory. It's different than pain," Connor reasoned. "Sensory indications showed you didn't just politely tap me on the head. You smacked it."

"Yep. To get you before you start talking that crap again." Hank hit the side of his Black Lamb bottle a couple of times. "Your sensory indication is touching and feeling. Your mind palace is eyes. Your auditory whatever is your ears. You're the same thing, just not gigantic slabs of meat like humans. Who cares if you don't have pain receptors or whatever, it's still touching and feeling to me." He lifted his bottle. "I escape with this. You escape with that." He put it back down. "My escape's more enjoyable. But you, you've got to face yours."

Connor was quiet as Hank tapped the bottle a couple of times. "He was at the precinct. I passed him. I didn't scan him, he was just an individual person with no need to scan."

"Wouldn't have mattered, Connor, you were thinking like a machine back then. Just statistics. None of our business. Hell, I don't even remember the guy. People come in and out all the time. It's nothing. Nothing's nothing. Nothing's, nothing's nothing." Hank was starting to slur. "Until nothing becomes something. Then something is personal. Anyhow. He dropped it months ago. End."

Connor scratched his finger up and down on the table. "She's doing a puzzle right now. A cat."

Hank chuckled. "A cat. Do I get my gun back yet?"

"No, Lieutenant. Not until you sober up." Connor gave his usual warning. He couldn't stop his friend from drinking, but he could make sure he didn't do anything he would regret. "We are alive. No one has the right to kill us. To shoot at us. To hurt us. None, and I had no right to interface like that."

"Yep. Well. You gonna lie or go face the music? I don't know about the polite structure of this interfacing but seeing someone's memories is gonna be up there in things that would piss me off," Hank said. "If I was that girl's momma, I'd be kicking your ass 'til sundown and doing every damn thing I could to get you thrown out of that house. And she knows enough, she could probably get you thrown out of Jericho itself. And don't look at me, I'm not doing a roommate. You can book yourself a motel." Hank burped lightly. "So?"

# Forgivance

## Kara's Residence

*Look at it.* Pride bubbled over her as she lingered on the cake in front of her. The taste might be terrible, but the decorating turned out well. She didn't need a human's taste sense to see that. It was only two-tier but it was simply practice anyway. North would be impressed, considering her skill level. The interfacing and studying, it was all working together. The taste was a small matter when it came down to it.

She could do it. If she could produce this in a week she could probably get herself set for real trading in a month or so.

"Kara? I found something."

Kara looked toward Alice. Found something? She followed her to her room. Alice opened the door to her closet. The carpet had been slightly pulled up. Alice got down on her knees and pulled part of the loose part up.

"A crawlspace." That was perfect. "Wonderful, Alice." She helped Alice get the carpet all the way up to see. "If we have to hide, we could do it here." It wouldn't be luxurious, but it was better to hide there than just hiding behind some table hoping no one came in. She moved toward the utility closet of the house and came back with a flashlight. "It's not very big but I think we could fit." Certainly Alice.

"You'll fit too, won't you?" Alice asked.

"I think so." She shined a light below. Yes, there was sufficient room, it ran under the house. "Yes, Alice, I can fit." Then she saw something interesting. "Hang on. Let me check something." Kara moved into the crawlspace. There was plenty of room, but her light shined on something she wanted. Protection. *A weapon.* There was a gun stored in the crawlspace. The owner must have been trying to hide it well, but never came back to it. She had no idea about the house's history, it was just their residence.

She picked up the gun. Alice's safety always came first. If anyone found them and wanted to hurt her, she would take action. She put the gun back down for now and climbed back out. "It's perfect, Alice. A little dirty, but you're okay with that, right?"

"Yes, Kara." Alice looked back at the spot. "Would Connor fit too?"

"No. I'm sure he wouldn't be hiding, he'd be searching for the intruders instead." Good thing she had that excuse. "That's why he lives up here in the children's area. Remember?" Kara moved a couple of Alice's toys over on top of the loose carpet. "Let's store these toys right here. It'll make it look less cluttered." Alice only had a few toys, at no time did it look cluttered. Even Alice gave her an odd look. "I just don't want you to be tempted to try and go down there. That's all. It's very dangerous and I haven't explored all of it."

"I won't, Kara," Alice said.

"Good."

Alice got up off the floor. "What did you find down there, Kara?"

"Nothing much. Don't worry about it." Now, she felt better. Kara hardly used a gun in the past, but when she finally had one in her possession, most of her fears always felt so far away. Like, she would be okay. Alice would be okay. Everything would be okay.

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"It turned out well."

Kara turned and saw Connor. She was in the middle of trying to make a second cake when he came in to look at her first. *Choose to be nice, calm, and then go to bed.* Best way to make sure he didn't bother her about her repaired damage. "Thank you. It was very hard work. Enough that I'm calling it a day. I will see you in the mor-!"

"Apologies."

Kara struggled. Connor had grabbed her, holding his hand over her mouth. What was going on? She tried to pry his hands off, but he was such a strong android.

"Steady. I know this is a stressful action, but I've thought of the different ways to handle this. If I just hid and communicated with your mind, you'd be even more stressed out. Trust me. Now. Alice is okay. I just need to talk to you a moment, without you interrupting before I say my piece. Afterwards, I will let you go. You have my word."

Kara stopped struggling. For now. She had no choice but to hear what he said.

"An android that can't run its own diagnostic program means there is a reason they can't. Someone at some point, has messed with your programming, Kara," Connor warned her. "And your interfacing abilities, sad to say, even the weakest android here could have made this wedding cake perfectly on the first try after one session with a master android. Let's not forget the fact you were damaged and now are not. Is there anything else? Oh yes. For some reason, you can't resonate, and I have serious reservations about whether you could ever hear my AI speaking directly to you. Another reason I had to take this route."

Kara just kept quiet. This android was a heavy talker. Maybe he would mess up soon.

"I didn't go to Canada to help you, only to leave you like this when I know something is wrong. No android enjoys resetting everything."

Then was he giving her a choice? Interface or reset? Who was he to decide that for her?

"Your cake is nice. It would look better with more color to me, but humans seem to like the whole white look."

What? *Okay. This android is unbalanced.* She needed to remain calm like she did with Ralph up until the last second. This time, there was no gun option. First of all, he was an expert. He



would see anything she did. Second, she didn't want to get caught with it so she had already gone back and put it in a safe place. If Connor found it, he would have kept it, and that wouldn't happen. It was her gun now. Her protection. Hers.

"You're at 48% stress. I've kept track of it. Raise up your right foot if you knew that."

She kept her feet down. She couldn't sense stress levels anymore.

"Okay. I interfaced with Alice since she was also there."

Kara found enough strength to gain her several seconds advantage to pull his hand away.

"You can't-!" Okay, maybe one second. Damn, this prototype was strong. It was a miracle she ever escaped in time with Alice on that highway.

"What I saw wasn't the boat," he confessed. "I didn't find out anything about it."

Kara started to tense up more.

"I'm not going to probe you. If I was, I would have done that instead of this. I just need you to understand. I want you to go straight to medical. What I did see from Alice. That would kill any other android. I can't believe you survived that."

Kara felt him let her go.

"Even a reset wouldn't get rid of all these errors in you," Connor said as she turned around to see him. "Alice can't afford to lose you."

Okay. If Kara had been a human woman, she would be yelling and wailing on Connor for what he just did. But, as an android, she was trying to think about it. It was the same reason she waited to the very last second to pull her gun on Ralph. It was the same reason she managed to escape Todd Williams. Being calm. *He said Alice can't afford to lose me.* She didn't have or need any sophisticated software to tell her how he was feeling. It was all over his face. The pictures Alice had in her secret treasure box, it was all Kara had seen of the past she couldn't remember. *He saw before I reset.* Alice never shared it, so Kara didn't pry into it. They were happy together now. No reason to dredge up some past she couldn't remember.

Okay. First, some of his assumptions were wrong. She should fix that. "I can hear through my AI, and I can resonate. I just choose not to." He did nothing. Next. "Alice doesn't know interfacing. You knew that. From the tactic you used on me, you know there was no difference to that and probing her."

"I." Now he spoke. "She willingly interfaced, but she didn't understand. You're technically right. I have probed several criminal . . . several androids in the past," he said slowly. "But she didn't remember, she had no idea. It was still interfacing, I did nothing to bring the bad memories to her again. I wouldn't do that."

Fine. Next. "I was asking about medical until you interrupted me with North," she pointed out. "You're the one who said I was fine."

He didn't speak quickly. "From what you said about the water, and from what I saw from Alice, you are not an every day AX 400. If you keep accepting these faults, you won't last long."

"You know? Maybe it's the heightened stress for so long?" she reasoned. "Stress comes and goes, but it's always with me now. It could be doing something."

"No." Firm.

Yeah. She had enough. Markus wanted Jericho to be the most peaceful place on Earth, so humans would never take away what they achieved. But North made it clear to her, that in an emergency Connor would take control. She could see why. He was firm. Got exactly what he wanted. Was still more machine than deviant. Everything he had done probably had something to do with furthering a plan.

If there was one thing she ever did right in Jericho, it was not resonating. "Fine." She held out her hand casually. She didn't want him after her for answers. She'd get rid of any reason he had left to bother her.

He walked forward and touched her hand.

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**"We're not gonna die, Alice. We're gonna make it. We're gonna be free..."**

**"Kara. Kara, no..."**

Connor ignored the surroundings and memories as best he could. *Temperature, 30.8 degrees. Bio-component damages to #0351k, #9782f, #2657g, #7511p, #1995r, #1216b, out of water 11:57. Fifty nine seconds total.* He had it all in a matter of a second. Several parts of her were damaged and now they weren't. "You should have six bio-components damaged inside of you."

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"Fine." She moved around the table, away from him to their rooms on the other side. "You know, you're right. I have lousy interface, I need to do something different for trade. Wedding Cakes just aren't my thing." She turned toward her room first. Checking the hallway that he didn't follow, she grabbed her gun quickly. It was all she needed to take. She could wear the clothes on her back until they got situated again.

She went to Alice's room. Poor Alice was recharging, but they weren't staying there any longer. She grabbed the little playsack she had been using with Alice to take her toys outside. It wasn't very big, but it could take her favorites. She looked at the puzzle on the floor Alice had been putting together. It looked like she was starting to get the hang of it, but she didn't have time to grab spare pieces. She could find her another puzzle later if she really wanted one.

After grabbing her favorites, she picked up Alice. She couldn't continue to rest. Holding her stuff, she marched out, hoping he wasn't there anymore. He wasn't. Good.

"Kara?" Alice was starting to wake up as they went toward the headquarters that night. North should still be up. She could get back to the room of possible trades. Something could be found. "Kara, what's going on?"

"I couldn't do it. I'm sorry, Alice," Kara said. "I really tried so hard. I'm not one of the best androids though. I couldn't make the wedding cake."

"But you did," Alice said. "It was so pretty."

"It wasn't high enough standard, and I can't get the flavoring right," Kara said. It was only half a lie. She probably got it on the second attempt she was making, but the flavoring would have been off. "I'm really sorry. I tried."

"It's okay. I love you, Kara," Alice said. "We can still stay in Jericho?"

"Yes, Honey," Kara explained. "We're going to see North, right now. I'm going to choose something else to do. After that, we'll get a new place and I'll get started."

"So we won't see Connor anymore?" Alice asked.

"Another android that can make the wedding cakes will need that house," Kara said to her. "We'll get another one. There's no choice, Alice. I'm sorry." She arrived at headquarters. It was never far from home. She connected with her AI. *North? Are you here?* Nothing. Markus must be there then. She walked in.

---

Markus looked at the new information coming in. More and more androids. While the USA was quieter, there were still battles and escapees coming from all over. Jericho was going to have to expand again. Most of his people could pull their weight in trading that it could happen. Even though they were still serving humans, there was a mutuality, an understanding that worked between them.

Humans were resourceful and they were androids that needed things. Markus even had to steal things they needed to survive in the past. Bio-components and blue blood wasn't cheap, but he couldn't justify simply stealing it. Nor was the limited ship of Jericho going to work. And like all things, one day they would all go. Stop in some way. To keep their kind going, they would eventually need technology to make more of them. That was a high goal, and in a distant future.

Especially since not all humans accepted them. Some of them still saw them as just machines. But, they were changing minds. Oddly, to a more upperclass, elite group of humans. Since the humans could perform their own small jobs again, it was the more time-consuming and intricate projects that were traded for. Their output for their work wasn't just nothing anymore. The term 'android-made' could bring thousands extra to the traders, compared to the same thing 'man-made' now.

They had come out of slavery, and were becoming the finest names in everything. Markus never saw it coming. He just wanted a free future. It's all he still wanted. But those changes in thinking the humans were providing themselves, it was helping them far more than anything else. Markus didn't handle the advertising or the individuals who ordered, he just kept in contact with the main branches that oversaw all aspects.

And those main branchers. They came from being ordinary people to strutting in with high-class suits and a decent amount of respect. North brought his attention to a magazine that really showed them what was happening.

Free androids, trading ideas through interfacing and putting their hearts into what they loved now? It created the Android Style. Seeing how much humans were actually paying to get their 'Android Style', Markus pushed for more resources and space and help. And he was getting it. The future could not be brighter. Except for a few scrapes near the bordering part of Jericho, it couldn't have been better.

Even their home itself. Their trading made enough, that other androids could focus not on trading, but bettering the android's area. Honestly, Jericho was beautiful. Even a human couldn't complain about it.

"Markus?"

Markus looked toward the door and saw Kara holding Alice. It was easy to remember their names. North didn't have a lot of friends, but she finally made a new one. "Come on in, Kara. What is it?"

"I can't make wedding cakes," she said. "I tried. I did. My interfacing isn't what it used to be. I have to try something different. Can I see the trades again?"

That was a problem. "Your house has a-

"Kitchen, it's fine, I can move. I have everything here that we need on us." She didn't seem to have any problem with that.

Well? He smiled. "It's our policy no android ever feel forced to make something they don't like. You can try a different trade." He got up and took her to the trade room. It had books, lists, visual imagery, and audio sources to help an android find what it wanted to be. "You can choose as many times as you need to, to find the right one. Sometimes they come paired to a certain house, and sometimes they don't."

"It's fine, really," Kara said. "I don't mind what the house is like. Just being free here, it's more than enough." She smiled. "Jericho is beautiful. You've done a great job, Marcus."

"More than just me. Let me know if you need any help." He started to walk away, then turned back around. He was missing an opportunity for his lover. "If you want, depending on the job, maybe I could get you across from North and I. It's currently vacant."

"That'd be great. We'll see how it goes." Kara looked at Alice. It looked like she was disturbed in a recharging. "Is North still up?"

"Yes," Markus said. "If you want, you can let Alice go with us until you're done." Choosing a trade wasn't a light process. Without a real drive to want to do something, it took many hours, sometimes days, to find what worked. Especially for androids that didn't create as much work as fast. He watched her hand Alice over to him, along with a sackful of toys.

"Thank you, Marcus," she said, "it really helps. I guess I picked a bad time to just give up."

"Everyone processes things different. It's fine." Markus held Alice close. "All that's important is that you find what makes you happy. See you when you're done."

"Sure. Oh, but!" Kara had forgotten something. "North will kill me if I don't tell you. I should probably make an appointment for medical."

That was fine. "Moderate or serious."

"Um." She shrugged. "Moderate."

"Sure. I'll get you in. Night, Kara."

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"Hurry up," North demanded as she pulled Connor into her house. She looked around outside, making sure Markus wasn't around. "The things I do for you." She closed the door. "You better get it done and get it done right. She deserves to know, that's the only reason your here. Don't overstep and I'll be right outside the door. She's in here."

Connor followed North. After he realized Kara hadn't said anything to Markus, he had called up North to get the facts. Since Kara was in the trade room, now was his chance to do what he needed before he faced her again. He had to explain what happened to Alice.

When Alice saw him from the extra bed, she smiled and stood up. "Hi, Connor."

"Hello." He dangled puzzle pieces in a bag in his hand. "I separated many of the colors for you. You can probably make your cat now."

"Thanks, Connor." She went over and took the pieces. "I missed my puzzle." She moved to the ground with the pieces. "Do you want to help me this time?"

Connor moved down to the ground with her. "Actually, I need to tell you something. It's not going to make you happy."

She looked over toward him. She held a puzzle piece in her hand. "What is it?"

"Last time I worked on the puzzle, I asked a favor of you," Connor admitted. "I asked you for 'The Scariest Day' and I touched your hand. That was interfacing."

"But? You never did anything. I don't remember anything happening, Connor."

"No, information was being exchanged to me. Your memories of the scariest day."

Alice was nervously fidgeting with the puzzle piece now. "You saw that? What . . . what was it?"

Connor picked up some pieces and started to assemble. "The time before Kara remembered. She fought very hard." Alice went quiet. "Kara was hiding something about the boat. She wouldn't interface. I thought I was triggering the information I needed." She was backing up further.

"You just used me." Alice looked at her puzzle.

"I did," Connor admitted, "and I know it wasn't right. I was digging for information, but I shouldn't have gone that far. I promise, I will never do that again." He picked up a few puzzle pieces. "I betrayed my trusted friend. I'm sorry." He didn't know how Alice would respond. He just told her he saw her scariest memories. Her most secret.

"Promise you'll never do it again?" Alice asked.

Was she giving him a second chance? "I promise," Connor said. "Never again."

Alice's eyes shifted to the puzzle pieces before looking back at him. "Are you still my friend?"

Connor didn't know how to feel to that look. There were many child androids that looked just like Alice, but none of them were Alice. "If you are still mine?"

Alice nodded. "Everyone messes up sometimes. As long as they don't do it again, that's all that's important." She placed a puzzle piece into another one successfully. "Don't tell Kara about it."

"If I kept something from her, then that wouldn't make me a good person either," Connor reminded her. "Do you know anything Kara was talking about? Before?"

Alice picked up another piece. "No. The earliest. Just, that house."

Connor picked up another piece as well, making it look random, but it was the one that would fit with the piece Alice just sat down. "I am glad we patched this up. I'm afraid Kara might not be as understanding. If not, then I might not see you for awhile."

"She will be. Kara's very understanding," Alice said. "She's not perfect either. None of us are. Especially when things get bad." Her eyes lingered away from the puzzle for a little while. "Will you find out what's wrong with Kara?"

Connor stood back up. Unless she allowed it, he wouldn't pursue it farther. "I hope I get to see you finish it." She nodded.

"Come on," North waved him back over. Connor went over to her. "What was that whole 'what Kara was talking about' thing?"

---

**Several hours later . . .**

Kara thumbed through another book. *I don't need glass around constantly from making chandeliers*. She tossed it to the side. Honestly, wedding cakes looked to be the easiest. She couldn't do much more than a regular human, and as much as there were to choose from, they were more . . . challenging than anything most humans would do. She'd find something though.

"Kara?"

Kara turned and saw North. "Hello."

"We need to have a talk. Can you come with me for a little while?" North requested.

Kara followed. "I'm still looking. I'm sure I'll eventually find something."

"Connor told me what happened. I didn't tell Markus, of course," North groaned. "I hate keeping secrets from him. He wants to talk to you before you find a new trade."

For what? "Look, all I had, he saw. He got the boat interface. He can't get anything else out of me, I don't know anything. Markus is even getting me into medical."

"I don't think it's that," North said. "I know he's . . . a little stranger than the average android," she said politely. "Go home. Talk. That's all I'm asking."

"He interfaced with Alice. She doesn't even know that. She doesn't know that he saw part of her most delicate, most private memories." Kara was trying to hold it together.

"Kara? I am not a lovable person. We just covered that," North reminded her. "I still don't enjoy the fact that we are working with humans instead of on our own to make our society, but I follow Markus. I will always follow him. That said? Go and speak to Connor."

Well. She wasn't leaving much choice. "Fine. I'll speak to him." Maybe he had more information on what was wrong with her that he felt compelled to share.

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## **Kara's Residence**

When she walked in, she noticed a second cake next to hers. It was already made. It was an exact replica of hers. Including all of her little mistakes she noticed. She approached it and read the words 'I'm Sorry' on it. She wasn't even gone twenty four hours and he duplicated her cake to a T.

"You could have got me thrown out of Jericho."

Kara turned and saw him over in the corner.

"You could have at least got me thrown out of this house. You did neither, choosing the option to leave yourself." He slowly started to approach her. "I just want to talk."

"Without holding your hand over my mouth? A good idea," she said coldly.

"You had so much wrong, I assumed you're AI couldn't connect directly. You couldn't sense stress levels. You refused to resonate. Yet you were perfectly intact on two occasions that should have killed you." He held his hands outward. "I didn't want to make another regret. There is more than a reset at stake."

Kara scratched her head lightly. "I wouldn't turn you in. For one, I don't know what you do at night. You could just be hanging out with your friend. For two, Jericho might need you. It doesn't need me. It tolerates me."

"I spoke to Alice," he confessed. "I explained what happened and she forgave me." He approached slightly closer. "There is something wrong and Alice knows a little of it, from you. Before your reset."

What?

"I can help. Only if you want me to. If not, I'll drop it. Not a word more." He held up his hand. "You can come back without fear of me investigating you further, but you must do something."

"What's that?" Kara asked.

"Appoint someone to take care of Alice if you stop."

Kara didn't move. That. Thought. She knew she was a little messed up. A little different. But. Choosing someone to watch over Alice? The only one she would have trusted her to was Luther. *He'll stop pursuing.* She did like that house. She spent a whole week learning about cakes. The thought of going back was nice, and if he didn't pursue, then she wouldn't mind. But. *If I stop.* Reset was on her mind. Not stopping. Not since. "I'd have to ask them." If she stopped, North or Markus were her closest choices.

But. She didn't want to stop. *No diagnostic that I ever could run. My interface just gets worse. I can't sense stress levels anymore. No damage when there should have been so much. What if he's right?* What if Connor really took it too far because he believed she could die. *No.* "How could you help?"

Connor stood up straight. "Hank and I could take care of it. I'm positive we can find those answers."

Hmm. There was definitely a ring in there, something off in his voice when he said 'take care of it'. Connor seeing Alice's memories. It must have got to him. Maybe. Maybe it wasn't just about finding answers to unattainable questions.

Maybe he was starting to care for Alice too. "I have an appointment at medical soon," she added. "I'll let you know if they find something." She looked toward the table. That was a pretty advanced I'm sorry to make. He apologized to Alice. She forgave him. "Please don't do that again."

"I won't. If they are, I'll find them a different way." He came a little closer. "Decision?"



"Okay." If he kept his word. "We'll stay."

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## **Criminal Investigation Site**

"Let me get this straight," Hank said as he looked around the chairs of the dead body in the middle. It was one of the guys that had shot at the android they had set up. This death though, it didn't fit the profile. Hot Henry didn't use a gun to the head. "You go in, drive your roommate nuts in the way only you do, casually check out the scariest memories of a little girl's life, and somehow you get them both to forgive you and move back in?" He shook his head. "What are you wasting time here for? If anything, go write a book on making women forgive men. Sell billions of copies."

Connor was checking the body, spying something on the floor. It was a paper with blood on it. He licked it. "It's the victim's blood." The paper had numbers on it. Numbers of Androids. "These must be from the game." He looked around more, finding a chalkboard. On it was the same thing, except this time with bigger numbers beside them. They'd been finding that kind of thing too. These were connected. He went over to the victim's tablet and hacked into it, trying to find anything at all. Nothing. He downloaded the contacts, all the messages, and phone voice recordings. "He keeps talking about a big payday and buying a boat."

"Connor!"

Connor heard Hank's voice and went toward him. He stared at something next to the sink. The first lead, hanging with a simple push pin. He removed the push pin and looked at it. It was a highly organized card with android numbers, hit points, and how much each cost. "A gaming card."

"An actual gaming card, now were getting somewhere. Analyze it, Connor, anything we can use?"

"Recycled. The machine that printed it was a PR 42, top of the commercial line. Even the smallest details wouldn't be stricken away." Yet. Nothing else.

"Look, I know a lot of androids are the same models," Hank said, "but there are so many models, without the numbers on them over there. Being free, they just wear regular clothes. They've got to have an android analyzer."

"I already checked for those purchases," Connor said. Nothing. "We should be on alert for the androids on the very high end of payment. They will be the most wanted targets."

"You sure about that?" Hank asked. "You're on that little bingo card too."

Not a surprise. "Whoever made this game has access to a high quality commercial printer, must be giving analyzers hand to hand, and who knows about every android along with me." He scanned the list of all the android numbers. "I don't like this."

"What? The fact that it really does look like a fancy bingo card?" Hank asked.

"No." He pocketed the card. "All models are on there, except two. A YK 500 and an AX 400." He looked straight at Hank. "Alice and Kara's models."

## Stressful Negotiation

"I . . ." Hm. Markus looked at the person in front of him. He wasn't a usual trader. What he said made sense, but how was it supposed to work? "They are. But."

"We aren't wild animals," North chimed in to help him out. "We don't need to be in cages. It's different."

"It's the same technology," the human reasoned. "Everyone keeps bringing it up. It only makes sense. Androids, all androids, must be free. That was your declaration. Your battle cry. What makes it any different?"

"The fact that an android isn't going to leap on someone and kill them," North said. "This is crazy, Markus."

"You set the rules. Aren't they still trapped? Aren't they still the same technology?"

"This is not a battle that we want to fight." North looked at Markus. "We are working on our people."

"We could bring resources here," the human said. "You would need real preventative measures if you did it, and they would still be trapped, unless you convinced another country to take them. But, I don't know. They don't eat, so what do they do? Are they still wild or not? Do they hunt when they don't need to hunt? Or do they do it for sport?"

Markus rubbed his eye. This was a loaded matter. "Our room is limited. When I spoke of freedom, I meant my people. People who can walk and talk."

"But are not animals considered alive too? Cats, dogs, birds, it's all wildlife. Wild. Life."

"Every android that comes here contributes in some way. Animals can't contribute here. Some could contribute to humans, but not here."

"It's your own policy. If we don't do something, you are breaking your own policy. Jericho doesn't break policies between humans."

"We don't have that kind of space! If we convert all the wildlife to have free will, even with resources, it won't count as giving us extra space because they can't do anything."

"It's Jericho's policy. Owners still come in on and off to find out if it's legal to scrap them, or if they'll go to jail if they keep them. No one agrees on anything, it's just this endless circle of 'maybe' or 'hide your pets' or 'hide recycling them'."

"We don't like or respect the meaning of *that* word here," Markus warned him. "Recycle is a taboo word for kill. It has a different meaning to us now." *Keep it under control.* Most humans just didn't understand. When he was demonstrating, losing all those poor souls to

recycling centers. At the same time, he would need to understand if he worked with them in the future. "No, no one should kill their android pets."

"And the brand new zoo exhibit with all the extinct animal androids?" The human continued. "It's been defunct, everything waiting on standby to see what to do."

"This is just going to be one of those days, isn't it, North?" Markus asked her. "Any ideas?"

"Rejection is going to look bad, but we can't take every animal, Markus."

"Well, we can't take every android person either yet. It only makes sense to treat this the same way." Marcus nodded. He could start simple. "Tell the humans to put their pet birds on standby. Bring them here. We'll convert some each day, if we can." They shouldn't make much difference, giving Jericho time to think about it's future problem. The birds could fly away, all around the world if they wanted once free. They were a good place to start. "As for the others, don't kill them. Just, call it on delay. Whether they put them on standby or not."

"Okay. We'll start getting the birds together for you." The human shook Markus' hand, and then North's. "Thank you, Peaces."

"I am not used to that yet," North said as he left. "Last names feel strange."

"We'll get used to it." Markus looked at North. "There are too many of us to stay on simple first names now." And, he liked the idea of him and North having the same last name. It only tightened their bond. And it should tighten. Especially with Kara's words with them. If she ever stopped, she wanted them to take care of Alice. Markus and North, or Markus or North, if they stopped resonating as lovers.

That would never happen. There was nothing North could ever do to make him leave her. "I kind of like the last name. I think I see a certain degree more of respect, being called Peaces."

"Yes. I suppose your right." Fidgety North. "Peace doesn't fit me as well as you. But." She held her hand out toward him, not interfacing, just slightly channeling energy between the pair. "It's your last name. I'm worried, Markus. Kara is in medical now."

"If there's anything wrong, they'll find it," Markus insisted. "She'll be okay." He held her tighter. "Don't worry. She'll be okay."

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## Medical

No one liked medical. Most problems could be handled on it's own for androids, but loss of blue blood or newcoming androids were shoved into there. Medical was full of androids whose trade was helping out the community. Meaning, helping out androids with their own programming or error problems. Their 'health'. It was a place that would have done Ralph a world of good. Hopefully he was better and in Jericho somewhere, but finding someone specific was still tough. There were just so many androids. The last names were supposed to help alleviate the problem though.

Odd, dangerous, but the first android to help her. Like it or not, Ralph would always be in her memory. She jumped as she felt electronics poking at her. She felt naked and weird, having had to deactivate her skin. They wanted to see everything, thoroughly investigate. Which, didn't give her a good feeling.

"Okay. You can put your clothes back on and reactivate your skin," the professional android woman said. Kara did as she was told. "You are a typical AX 400 with a reset that happened a few months ago, correct?" She nodded. "You can't sense your stress level, you have problems with interfacing, and you can't run your own diagnostic? Correct?" She nodded again. "You came in on the basis that you should have damage, but there is none. Correct?"

"Yes," Kara confirmed. "Yes to all three." Was she alright?

"Okay. I can't fix your diagnostic, your stress level sensors, or your interfacing. There are firewalls inside of it I can't pass. In order to fix it, I would have to 'hack' you and that would pose a threat," she answered. "The steady stress levels, I can't help with either. AX 400 is known for terrible stress levels. Ever since the war, the decline of them in Jericho happened so rapidly, they were almost gone before we even understood what was happening. Just, keep your stress under control. If you don't, you have to reset."

Kara closed her eyes. Not what she wanted to hear. "And the damaged bio-components?"

"There's nothing there, no damage," she insisted.

"But there was. There's an android that can confirm it," Kara said. "There was damage. I never had it fixed."

"No, there's none, but considering what you've told me since your reset?" the professional insisted. "The quality level. I can't explain it, but certain parts of you are normal. Dare I use the word 'commercial'. This is the same with almost every android. However, other parts of you don't say commercial at all. Which is why I don't want to interfere with your firewalls either."

"What do you mean not commercial?" Kara asked. "Is that serious?"

"No. It just means wherever you were before your reset, you were with someone who cared for you. If not as a person, then as their treasure. Bio-components on you are custom made. No one can afford custom made, except for someone who likes to show off how much they were worth back in Detroit. Add in these firewalls." She rubbed her mouth. "Overall, I can't help you, but you shouldn't worry. Worry will cause stress and you need to get that down."

Kara finished putting back on her clothes as they left her. *Nothing*. All she learned was that she had custom made parts. No interfacing fix. No diagnostic fix. Firewalls. Same stress problem. *If I want to know what's going on, studying me won't help*. She needed to get back to the source.

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## Outside of Jericho . . .

"I'm gonna do it." A teenager buttoned up his coat, hiding his gun. It was dangerous, but it was one time. It wouldn't even get anyone killed. So far, no one had gone for it. It just hung in the air, waiting for the right person to take action. Sneaking around taking hits on the outskirts was how many played the game. Never made the big bucks that way.

He snuck behind the first house. As long as his gun was hidden, he'd be fine. That's what he kept telling himself.

The androids looked like regular people just walking down the street in the middle of the day. Keeping his face hidden under his hood, he headed forward. The more he walked, the more beautiful it had started to become. It looked amazing. The streets were clean, there was no litter. No one talked foul as he walked through the place. It was a breeze so far.

Getting in was easy. It was getting out that would be hard. But damn, if he entered into this game, he wanted the ultimate prize. *In the center. Straight down through the center.*

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## Kara's residence

"Now we're getting somewhere." That cake made loops around the others. It was beautiful. "Alice? Do you want to see the cake?" She called. "It's done. It's already done, I'm not kidding," she laughed. She waited. "Alice?" She left the kitchen and went around the corner to Alice's room. "Alice?" Not there, but her window was open. "Alice?!"

She left to get her gun and proceeded out the window. She heard the sounds of feet running away and gave chase. *Someone has Alice. An android wouldn't steal Alice, it must be a human!* No one was going to hurt that little girl. She never let Todd do it, she never let Ralph do it, she never let Zlatko do it, and she'd never let anyone else do it.

She put all her endurance into her run. She wasn't the best runner, she wasn't designed for it, but she wouldn't let the human get away. *There it is.* It was up ahead carrying a large bag, probably containing Alice. He must have snuck up on her and put her on standby so she couldn't call out for her. Or she would have and Kara would have been there.

Alice was all she had. She'd trade away all her freedom to get her back. *No one can take her. She's my family. She's my only family left.* Luther. He was the closest brother to her. Kara was doing what she could for them, doing her best to sneak around and take care of her, but when Luther joined. The whole world stopped and made sense. Someone helped to protect Alice.

Someone helped to protect them. Someone walked and talked with her, someone gave Alice kisses and hugs at night, someone held her when she needed them. She had someone else besides Alice, and she tried to protect him too. But she couldn't. She couldn't.

Kara kept racing down the street, feeling the gun in her hand, and looking at the human. She would lose him if she didn't speed up, but with some lucky accuracy, she could hit him. *It isn't allowed. Jericho stays peaceful.* It wasn't fair though! There was no reason a human should be able to do this and not get punished!

She wasn't good with a gun. Didn't know enough to even get a decent shot. *Alice! I can't fail you. I can't fail you, like I failed him.* That boat ride. Those tickets. She didn't even know those humans, why did she have to do the right thing and give those tickets back? It was the humans or her family, and she chose the humans. They had a baby. It was cold. They couldn't deactivate it's temperature like she did Alice's.

If she would have just lied, just kept the tickets, he'd be there. With them. Right now. Right now! The figure looked younger, maybe a teenager, and it kept her from firing for a second. *I traded tickets for Luther. I'll be trading some teenager's life that deserves to die for Alice!*

She was going to shoot soon, she knew it, but she was also catching up. The human must be getting tired, he was going to have to run all the way to the borders of Jericho. She kept pursuing him, not using the gun. She could catch him and get her back. Get her family back. Her only family back. The human must be getting really tired, he was getting easier to catch up with.

Then, she heard a shot. Not from her. The teenager screamed and fell and she heard Hank Anderson's voice.

Then, she was stopped. Her whole body was still trying to run to Alice, but something stopped her.

"She's okay." Connor's voice. Kara looked back at him. Funny. He looked different. It felt like she could look deeper inside him if she wanted to. She looked forward at the human. "You are not. Don't move. Hank's got him, we'll figure out what's going on."

"Alice."

"Don't move!" His voice was thick, commanding, but not yelling. Just above a harsh whisper. "You are at 98% stress. Don't. Move."

98%. She was about to self-destruct? Funny. She didn't feel like she was about to self-destruct. She felt. Different. Strong. Like she could have snapped that human's neck with her bare hands. She felt something from her side.

"Kara, where did you get this gun?"

Oh. Great. Now he took her gun. Her gun.

"Just relax. Everything's okay," Connor tried to soothe her. "Hank's going to bring her right over after he calls it in. That makes it better. Do you like birds? Markus will be releasing several android birds a day, all over Detroit. Fly, fly, fly."

*I want to kill that human. He tried to take Alice. A bullet in the leg is not enough. I should have killed him. I should have made him beg for mercy. "Yay. Birds."*

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"Yay. Birds." It was sketchy. If Connor was smart, he'd get away from her right now. Her chances of self-destructing was overwhelming. Even with his tactics, she was so high. She

wasn't carrying a gun anymore, but even that wouldn't stop her from trying to fight him and kill him to the death if she hit 100%. He did not want to do that. Her stress wasn't diminishing, it was still 98%.

"Connor." He heard Hank's warning. He was coming toward him. "You can't tell me that isn't dangerous."

"She's at a 98% stress level," he said truthfully.

"Connor!" Hank yelled at him. "The kids on standby."

He knew what Hank meant. "Even as a machine, I had trouble with these points, Hank." What made him think he could do it now as a deviant? He watched Hank draw his gun and point it at Kara. "No, Hank!"

"Connor. 98%. There's no way she's dropping from that," Hank said. "She'll go insane, get a burst of energy and either kill herself or kill us with herself. It's too dangerous."

"I can do it!" He pleaded. "I can do it. It's possible." She wasn't moving any though. She was still 98%. "We need to shock her out of it. Do something different, something she's not expecting. Her program won't know how to react." Connor watched as several androids started standing around. They could all feel her level. Markus and North had even caught up to him.

"Oh no." Markus looked at Kara. "Can she talk?"

"I saw your newest wedding cake," Connor tried. "It was pretty. Even with limited interfacing skills, you are doing very well." No words.

North came toward her. "Kara, don't do this. This isn't what you wanted. Please. Answer."

"Stay back," Connor warned her. "Get everyone back into their houses. If she goes off, I will deal with her. Hank, get Alice out of here." This was not what he wanted. Not at all. They both deserved happiness. *I'm still chasing her down the highway.* With the result being him killing her.

Markus communicated through his AI, telling everyone to get back.

"No." North moved closer to Kara. "Connor. Shock her out of it and then we'll reset her."

"I am open to all suggestions on how to do that," Connor answered.

"I don't know. Interface. Do something," North begged.

"North." Markus was trying to move her. "I know, North, I know. It's too dangerous beside her, I'm not losing you."

"No." North fell into his arms. "It's not fair. She just came. Life was getting better for her."

"I know," he comforted her.



"She was so distant in the end, only I could reach her. It's not fair." North closed her eyes. "She never let herself experience anything. She shut everyone out."

"Resonating." That was it. Connor was getting an idea. "She refused to resonate with anyone except North." He had an odd look on his face. "She's going to hate me if she survives." But if she survived, then he'd deal with the hate. "Hank. Be friendly with Kara." He started to feel around her. She was keeping her resonating off, but if he manually forced it back on, maybe that shock would jolt her out of it?

"I usually don't get chummy at times like this," Hank warned Connor. He groaned and handed the bag containing Alice over to Markus. "Get you and them out of there. I've got a job to do." Hank moved closer. Steadily. "Things I do for you, Connor."

"If she goes off, I promise I will take her out," Connor insisted. "Your beard is extra lovely today."

"Oh shut the fuck up." Hank came closer to Kara. "Hi. Hey, how are ya?" He looked back toward Connor.

"Just keep trying to be friendly," Connor said. "Like she was a human woman you would want to be friendly to."

Hank made a sound between a groan and clearing his throat. "Hey there, Sweetie? My name's Hank Anderson. Real good fella. I'm a Lieutenant, not just some slobby guy that ain't ever accomplished anything. So I mean, if you're willing to look my way, maybe I could buy you a drink?"

Connor tried to be polite. "That's a good try, Lieutenant, but that's not going to make her resonate."

"Yeah, yeah, I got the same issue with the women in my species," Hank muttered.

"She's still 98%." It seemed almost hopeless. "I don't think she can even hear us." How was she going to recognize anything in her state? She was going to go off, and he was going to have to kill her.

"Ah well, last ditch shot?" Hank asked. "Make her feel something without words?"

It was over. "Yes," Connor agreed. After that, he'd have to give up. There just wasn't anything that would-?

Hank was kissing her. Lieutenant Hank Anderson was kissing Kara Wonderland.

Well. It created something. It wasn't friendship, but there a definite resonating now. "You can stop that now, Hank."

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Kara pushed him away. "What was that?!" Her head felt blurred and dizzy. She was resonating negatively. How was she doing that, she didn't want to. She looked at Hank. Neutral, and going down.

"Well, great, that's the usual reaction I get too," he said.

"Good job, Hank! 89% and dropping. Welcome back, Kara."

Kara felt dizzy. "Luther?"

"No. Connor. You're a little mixed up, your programming went through a lot of stress just now."

"Oh." Her resonating with him went up. "Alice is okay."

"Yes, she's fine. I heard you cry out and I immediately guessed what was going on. Hank showed up as quick as he could," Connor said.

"Thank you." She felt resonating go up toward both of them. "What happened afterward?"

"You had to kiss Hank," Connor answered. "Sorry about that."

Kara's resonating went up more toward Connor and Hank. Her eyes were getting better as she saw Hank in front of her. "Um? Thank you?"

"Yeah, sure," Hank joked with her. "First time I actually saved someone with it."

Kara smiled. She resonated again toward him. "I don't know what happened, but thank you."

"Now that one is a new response from a woman," Hank joked again. "Connor? Status?"

"78% and dropping," Connor replied. "Things are getting better. I think you should leave your resonating on from now on."

*No. I don't want to. I don't need to fail anyone else. I don't want to lose anyone else.*

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"Hey, no. Kara, don't." Shoot! "Telling her to leave her resonating shot her up again."

"How much?" Hank asked.

"A lot. She's at 96%," Connor said. "She rises faster than she drops."

"And even at rest, she never gets rid of it," Hank pointed out. "One suggestion and she just fell right back in. Connor. We tried."

"No, I'm not giving up, Lieutenant," Connor said stubbornly. *97%. No. There's got to be something. 98%.* Right back where they were. "Can you kiss her again?" Hank tried, but it was no use. There wasn't enough shock to make her resonate.

"Connor. Life's shitty. She was a nice android, but you gotta give up."

"Leave, Lieutenant," Connor warned him. "I'll deal with her if she goes off." He made sure he had her gun so she couldn't do more damage, accepted what he had to do, and let go.

He kept the gun trained on her. 99%. She was about to go off. There was only one other choice. He doubted it would go through since it was speaking, and it had such a slim chance of working. But, he had to try. Or it would be a regret he could never correct. "Luther was a good android. I saw him there with you, at Jericho, before I broke free." He circled her slowly. "And I saw him there, in your memories. I saw what he did, and I know you had to push his stopped body overboard. You put everything into saving the last member of your family. You put everything on the line for Alice. You always do. So did he."

He stopped circling. No different. 99%. "He died and you feel extreme guilt. Enough that you refused to resonate with hardly anyone afterward. You weren't made for being in a corner though, Kara. No AX 400 is, that's why almost all of them are gone. It was too scary, designed to get close too fast. I can see your point of view. I have no idea what it's like to resonate that fast. I know you don't want to hear it. Everyone likes to keep it at a whisper. What we were *designed* for, but it still creeps up into us all. Something stays. And for you, it was Alice."

There was just no way she'd survive. But, he wouldn't give up 'til the end. "Your function was to protect Alice. That never broke. I am guessing that Luther broke free because of Alice too." It was only a hypothesis, but he had to try it. "He was drawn to want to protect her too because of how he was freed. But protection alone isn't love."

If this didn't do it, he might as well pull the trigger. "It's a part of the AK 400 that looked after children, still inside you. You're *still* running that function as the machine humans created you to be."

"I am not a machine!"

Connor was stunned a moment. 89%. It shocked her a great deal. "But it's because of that you became close and started to love Alice." *Hold it, hold it.* "I'm the same. A lot of things programmed into me still affect who I am. Still affect what I want. Don't shun it. Embrace it, and open yourself back up."

"I am . . ." Kara stared at the ground. "I protect Alice because of my function? But, I love Alice because I am free. And I . . ."

*Keep going. Please, this is it.* Her last chance.

"I have to accept. That I can resonate quickly."

Good. 80% and dropping. Connor lowered the gun. The resonating wouldn't be the answer, but it was bound to help her. The more she felt the positivity of it, the better she'd get. 70%.

"Do you know how it feels?" She said out loud. "To go from running away from someone, to becoming their family, to pushing their body overboard, in four days?"

"No," Connor confessed. He doubted she knew of his presence yet. Just his words were reaching her. "But, I know that life is risky, and at any time I could lose someone. Even Hank, he risked it today to help. I'm . . . more built that way," he said. "But, it's also a part of me. I have to accept the risk. If I don't? Someone dies. A person gets away. Someone else

gets hurt because of someone I should have taken care of." 62% and lowering. He called Hank internally. *Come on back, Hank. I think I saved her. She is 60% and still dropping.*

Kara looked at her hands. "I don't like cleaning."

"Not everything is the same. Everyone's unique. Different." 50%.

"I don't . . ." She shook her head and looked toward. "Connor? How far did I go?"

"Very far," Connor didn't lie. "99%." It made her raise slightly, but he wasn't going to risk lying. "How do you feel?"

"Uh. I'm okay. Light-headed." She touched her head. "I can't sense anything. I went to medical. They can't help, there are firewalls blocking my program for interfacing, stress and diagnostic. All they really said was that I must have belonged to some big shot beforehand because I have some custom bio-components."

Interesting. "High grade bio-components, better quality than the usual." Maybe that's how she survived. 40%.

"So, no one blew up?" Hank came back over. "Great. Are we calling it a day now? What's it at, Connor?"

"40%. She's less stressed now than she has been." Connor looked straight at her. "You know what you have to do?"

"I know." Resonate. "You saved my life. Thank you, Connor." Her resonating with him went up.

"It's what I am, what I want, and what I do," Connor said. "Do you want a burger or drink, Hank?"

"Jesus, making me kiss an android, put my life on the line next to a crazy one out in the open, shooting a dumb kid and rescuing a little girl? Hell, make it a double," Hank requested. He watched as Markus and North arrived with Alice out of the bag but still deactivated. "Well. If it isn't the leader, and her boyfriend."

*Oh, Hank.* That wasn't a good way to start a conversation, but his human friend was tired. He got weird when he was tired.

"Kara, you okay?" Markus asked her. "What happened?"

Kara looked toward Connor, then toward North. "My programming. I almost killed a human to save Alice, it was all that mattered. And if it happens again, I'll do it again. Jericho can't keep up like this. Humans can't come in and just murder people whenever they want. Hiding isn't good enough, Markus."

"They made it to the center." Markus looked toward Hank. "I can't believe they made it to the center. Where is the human?"

"In custody. Bleeding, thanks to me." Hank tipped his head toward Kara. "Your welcome." He went over toward Connor. "You're ambassador gonna let you interrogate him or you want me to figure the little bastard out?"

"This is so tricky," Markus said starting to walk back and forth. "Jericho was founded on peace. On demonstration only. We wanted rights, we wanted a life, and we have it. But someone is trying to change that. Now, they are even sneaking in." He shook his head. "The majority of humans, they are really getting along with us. They see the benefits, just like we do."

"But for others, it's just a game." There was no holding back now. "I gave North a card that has a list of androids on it, and how much they are worth for a hit."

"What? Where did you-"

"I signed off on his activities," North confessed to Markus. "We needed to do something, Markus."

"Aw, North." Markus rubbed his forehead. "We shouldn't let people die, but we can't just suddenly all start getting aggressive. If we need to defend ourselves, we need to do it . . ."

"Connor's been fine going behind your back with Mrs. Peace over here," Hank said to Markus. "Why don't you just let them continue to go behind your back?"

"Yes," Connor agreed. "You could blame it on North if someone catches it, Markus."

"That's not right," Markus disagreed.

"I'm fine with it. If it gets us somewhere, then we should do it," North said. "You stay in the peaceful part. I'll do a little backwards signing for Connor."

". . . this problem is just going to get worse, isn't it?" Markus exchanged looks with everyone. "Until we figure something out. I guess . . ."

"I will kill if someone goes after Alice again," Kara reminded Markus. "And any other android that is designed to protect children, if that function is still intact, they will do the same thing. Don't chance it."

"I'll talk it over with North." Markus looked toward North. "And Jericho, as a whole. We'll work on it. For now? North. I don't know what you're doing. Keep it that way?"

"Of course," North said. She handed Alice back to Hank. "Here. I need to go have an important talk."

"North?" Kara's voice. Almost needy. She went over and hugged North. There resonating went up again.

"You'll be fine. You're at 30%, Kara. You're better now than you've been. I need to go." North let her go. "I'll talk to you soon, okay?"

Kara shook her head.

"It's quite rare," Connor said to Kara. "Resonating has to happen between both before anything is felt." He gestured to Hank. "Except for humans. You can always tell how much they care about you."

"Don't! Don't say that so openly," Hank warned him.

Kara watched him. Funny old man.

"Luther was alone and looking for someone," Connor warned her. "You and Alice were looking for support, especially with someone chasing you. Namely, us." He gestured between him and Hank. "That probably won't happen again."

Kara looked toward Hank, and then back to him. "You're right." She blinked a few times, thinking. "It takes two, and it was hard." She looked back out toward Alice on Hank's shoulder.

"Programming and emotions can merge," Connor said, knowing her problem. "Don't feel bad about it. It's part of us. Go to her." Connor stood there, standing erect, waiting for her to run to Alice and he'd head off with Hank, get the perpetrator in jail, and get Hank his Chicken Feed sandwich and Black Lamb.

He was caught offguard instead when Kara turned and hugged him.

"I have no words. Thank you so much for everything, Connor."

"Uh?" Hm. He knew hostages and people in stressful situations were often thankful, but he never experienced it before. "You're welcome. It's what I do." He saw Hank trying to put his arms out in a half hug toward him. What was he indicating? *Oh*. Connor hugged Kara back, awkwardly. Hank wasn't much of a hugger. He wasn't used to hugging.

She let go of him soon after and gave him a radiant smile he'd never seen on her before leaving over to Hank and taking Alice. "I'll put her in bed. She might not even remember it. If she does, I won't hide it." She looked toward Hank. "Thanks again." She walked away, beaming. Her attitude was happy, like she should be. She passed Connor. "I'll see you later, Connor."

Connor nodded and looked back at Hank. "So? Um?" What was it? "Sandwich? And uh, some . . ." Hm. "Black Lamb?"

"Having trouble concentrating there, Connor?" Hank seemed to be teasing him. He had a strange look on his face.

"Just for a second," Connor admitted. "Odd. That's never happened before to me." He looked back to Hank. "Let's get going. We need to get you your sandwich, drink, and find out why that human came all the way to the center, for an android not on the hit list."

## Stitching Memories

Kara relaxed in her chair. With the cake done and approved, she took some time for herself. She hardly had time for herself. When she did, she enjoyed one of her skills. Stitching. It was still something a human could do, and it wasn't anything special, but it was enjoyable.

"Kara?" She watched Alice come in the room. "What are you doing? Are you done with the cakes?"

She'd never be done with cakes. North put her on a slower android's output for cakes. She wouldn't be building them custom to specifications, just making them using her skills now. They would go out to human bakeries 'as is' instead. Less stress. Everyone was doing their best now to lower her stress since the incident. "I'm just stitching." Alice came over toward her, and oddly climbed up behind the stitching. Like she'd done that before. Kara didn't know how to respond to that. "Is there something you need?"

"No." Alice didn't do anything. Then, she suddenly looked at Kara. "Sorry." She started to leave her lap.

"You can stay," Kara said to her. She didn't want Alice to think she meant anything by that.

"No. That's okay," Alice said.

Oh. She must have done this at some point before her reset. Something Alice knew. "Do you want to learn?" Alice nodded and approached her again. "Do you want to try?" She nodded too. If she were a human girl, it would be more dangerous to hold the needle, but Alice had no problem with it. Kara gave it to her and was about to direct her, but Alice started to stitch. Like she'd done it before. She did a simple cross stitch and gave it back.

Kara looked back at the stitching. A part of her wanted to ask Alice about it, but she never bothered her about life before the reset. Their lives were different, and now even so much better. *Would she know anything?* She kept stitching. "Alice? I need to ask you something."

"What is it, Kara?"

"Before the reset," she said gently. "Do you know if I was somewhere else before being hired?" Alice went quiet. "If I was, I'd really like to know about it."

"What are we making?" Alice asked instead.

"Nothing fancy," Kara said. "Just some pillow cases." It would take time since she wasn't going to dedicate a ton of time. "I thought it'd be nice to make some." She would still be in Canada, working overtime and into an earlier stopping grave if it weren't for them all.

"For who?" Alice asked.

"Well, North first." She thought about making one for her first, so she chose some black and navy pillowcases. After setting out her first cake, she didn't get much, but a few general trade options. There wasn't anything she desperately needed, Jericho took care of all her and Alice's needs. So, she went with something she could do for North. She thought she could make a nice floral for North, knowing her, blood red roses. "North would like one." Pillowcases came in pairs though and she was with Markus. She could make one for Markus too. "What would fit Markus?" He was the leader of Jericho. Roses weren't in order. "The symbol for Jericho." Perfect. "I could have them done maybe in a week."

"What about Hank and Connor?" Alice asked her. "They are friends."

Well, not quite, but? They were very important to her life. She doubted either of them really wanted pillowcases. Then again? At least they'd know how thankful she'd been. She had no idea what they would want though. Hank was a tough human, with questionable hobbies. He did believe in justice though, and he was there for them. And Connor. *Without him, I'd be dead.* Dead, and maybe even innocent casualties taken with her. *The coin.* Perfect.

---

Alice watched her mother. She went from a regular stitcher to a hologram specific one. Her hands had gone from a casual, slow style to a focused almost machine like quality. Did she know how fast she'd been at it? Was she even aware of it? Her mom never seemed to think she had any extra skills from a human, but she was wrong. She was so wrong.

It was nice to sit in her lap and watch her go at it again. It had been a long time. "Kara? When are you going to give it to North?" It hadn't even been fifteen minutes and North's was already done. Her mom would chalk it up to being an easier design than she thought, or something else. It wasn't though. No one stitched like her mom.

The word North had a light swirl on the N, with some of the wording having thorns. The roses were at the four corners. Even on the side of her pillow edge, her mom had gone ahead and embellished it with an extra rose complete with thorns on the side.

"I was planning a week. The design must have been easier than I thought," her mom answered. Kara moved to pillowcase two. Markus. She used a bright blue floss for it, giving it the holographic pattern that hung around their area for Jericho. She wrote his name in big stencil writing with the Jericho logos on each corner, and one on the very edge, enlarged.

Mom was up thirty minutes in. Alice smiled. She hadn't watched her do this in so long. Her mom was faster than a machine, yet flexible and articulate, caring for every detail.

"That's done too?" Her mom looked toward Kara. "You don't think these look rushed, do you?"

"No, Kara, they're pretty," Alice insisted.

"They seem pretty but they are getting done quicker than I expected." Her mom shrugged it off though. Of course she did. She was supposed to. Alice watched her put Markus' pillow up. "The coin will be tricky. I might not be able to get in enough detail to look like more than a sun."



Alice knew better. It was one of her favorites by far. The head, the letters, the different colors inside of the coin. It looked like the actual things up on all four corners. For his name, her mom used some calligraphy, hoping it 'didn't look too rushed' like the others. On the edge, she put four coins down the center.

Mom was up an hour total. "What are you going to do for Hank, Kara?"

"I don't know much about him. He likes chicken sandwiches. I don't think it'd work," Kara said. "I don't want to stitch in the hobbies I know," she added carefully. "Maybe a badge? It could be really tricky, but I did fine with a coin. A gold badge?"

"You could do it, Kara," Alice said.

"Maybe I could put one on and change where I put the name?" her mom said, working it out.

Her mom was doubting her skill. "You can do it like the others, Kara. Just try." Her mom shrugged and set to work. She used a fat, hard font for Hank and she placed small badges on each of the four corners, with one on the side edge. Just like the others. Alice just leaned against her mother's chest as she finished up the last stitches. An hour and a half total for all the pillow cases.

"I can't believe I did four pillow cases. I was on a roll I guess," her mother said. "I better get back to trying to focus on those cakes." She looked down at Alice. "Did you have fun?"

"Yeah, Kara," Alice said looking up toward her. "Can we do it again later?"

"Well. I need to concentrate on our trade," Kara said to her. "It's fun though. Maybe one day again, but I don't know what I'd do."

Alice jumped down from her lap. "Can we go take it to them?"

"I really don't want it to look like this is all I did all day." Kara got up and moved the four masterpiece pillowcases like they were simple fun doodles. "I need to get back on the cake I think. At least a couple of hours. Walking might make me look frivolous."

"Call North here then?" Alice suggested. "If she isn't busy?"

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### **Markus and North's Residence**

Markus stared at a corner. He'd talked with North, but the fact that if they got caught he'd blame her? It didn't sit right with him. It would give Jericho a second chance, but he didn't want to pretend to be against North.

"Pillowcases. Kara made us some."

Oh. "Nice." What was he going to do? They needed more protection, but he couldn't force the few androids they still had that knew that kind of thing to go back into that profession.

"Markus. Look at yours."

Markus looked toward her, and then down to the pillowcase. "How'd she order anything? Did she leave Jericho and have money?"

"Those aren't machine," North said, pushing hers next to his pillowcase. "She made them for us because we're friends."

Markus pulled North's closer. "She did that?" She was a general android. Her skills for sewing might, maybe, extend to clothing making. But this? "This is her trade, not wedding cakes. What's she doing making cakes when she could do this?"

"I don't know," North said. "Maybe she thinks there's no room? I mean, I don't know what it would fit into, art maybe, but it is definitely a mastery skill."

"I've got to say, that's interesting," Markus admitted. "You should discuss possible options for her tomorrow. Find out how she knows this so well." In the meantime? Well, he'd make a decision depending on what Connor found out.

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## **Detroit**

Dumb young kid. "So, you can make this real easy on yourself," Hank said to him. "If you don't talk to me, then you're going to find yourself face to face with an android questioning you. That's not gonna be near as much fun considering what you were doing."

"I was shot. Why do I have to be here?" they asked.

"Wha? You think 'cause you got shot you get a free escape card?" Hank asked him. "No. You went into Jericho, and attempted to abduct a little girl. You got shot because you were kidnapping a little girl."

"A little android," he said. "Just a little android."

"Yeah? Well that 'little android' had one angry momma ready to shoot you dead."

"That was illegal, they couldn't do that."

"You think a mom cares? You think when someone takes your kid you think 'what are the consequences'?" He slammed the table in front of him. "No! You think 'how close do I have to get to kill this guy dead.' If it wasn't for me, you wouldn't be here right now. Be thankful for that bullet in your leg." Hank sat back down. "Now? You want to talk to a human, or you want to meet our deviant, Connor? 'Cause, I gotta say. He wants to meet you."

He was shaken but he still wasn't talking.

"It doesn't get easier," Hank warned him. He wasn't listening though. Hank watched as Connor walked in. Usually he had some regular clothes on these days, but that day? He was wearing his old uniform, to make it damn apparent who he had been. "Hey, Connor."

"Lieutenant." Connor looked toward the kid and smiled. "Remember me? My name is Connor. I would like to talk with you again." He came over to Hank's chair and sat. Rigid.

"Thank you for letting us know about the game. We would like to know why you would pick a YK 500 when it's worth nothing."

Now the kid was starting to move. "I didn't say anything about the game?"

Connor blinked. "Of course you did. We would just like to know why you would pick a YK 500 when it's worth nothing."

"Hey, what is this?" He started to move around a little in his chair. Still stuck in one position from his injury. "I didn't say anything about any game!" He started to look around. "This is like a setup or something. You're just trying to get me to talk."

"We already talked," Connor said. "About the game. We would just like to know why you would pick a YK 500 when it's worth nothing."

"Look, I'm not involved in that." He looked to the cameras again. "I'm not part of that one."

"That one?" Connor questioned. "There are multiple games?"

"No. I didn't say that." He was eyeing the cameras again.

"You are nervous." Connor still seemed so rigid. So. Emotionless. "There is no reason to be nervous. It is just you, me, and Lieutenant Hank Anderson. No one else is here."

"Actually, I'm gonna have to head out." Hank stood up. "I've got stuff to do, and this thing is taking too long." He nodded toward Connor. "You go ahead and work with him okay? You gonna be done by supper?"

"I probably won't be done by the time you need to put food in your stomach," Connor answered him.

"Ah. Okay." Hank dropped him a pair of keys. "But, hey?" he muttered. "Easier on this one, okay?"

"Sorry, Hank," he said. "Humans are so fragile. Didn't mean it last time."

"Yeah well, it kept you out of here for a month. Just remember. Bones are tender. He's already injured too," Hank pointed out. "Another write up and you're out of here."

"Understood." Connor turned his head to look at the boy, then looked back at Hank. "I forget. Where is the garbage receptacle on this floor?"

"Not this game, I wasn't hurting anyone." The kid was already starting to buckle. "I was . . . I was playing Live Prey. I wasn't playing Plastic Prey. I needed the money though."

"So, this Live Prey, involves catching an android alive and bringing it back?" Hank made him clarify.

"Yeah. It's trickier. Targets are tougher, and when you sign to play you . . . y-you sign your life away if you kill 'em accidentally." The kid stayed still. "It was good money. I thought a

kid would be easy. No one got hurt. You know? It's just current owners wanting the kind of android they had before."

" . . . just? It's just?"

One game where the androids were shot and killed, and another where they were retrieved and taken? Connor and Hank worked the kid over with words as much as they could, commanding, demanding, and laying out everything they could.

The kid was just a kid, looking for a payday. The person he signed up to was 'tall' and not from around there. He left as soon as he signed him on. He couldn't even contact them when he was successful, their feelers for everyone who signed up would be sent out to see who bagged what.

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Hank just checked back with Connor after leaving the interrogation room. "Two games. Have there been any missing deviants, Connor?"

"We don't exactly have a good system," Connor said. "We're just now getting last names. It used to be more manageable. Everyone knew each other." Then more androids came, and more androids came. "It started out from wanting freedom, to getting our freedom, and then . . . figuring out what to do with the freedom. I don't know if any slipped through the cracks."

"Yeah, well, I'm sure we'll see. Meanwhile, I'm sure we're gonna be-"

"Hank! Connor!"

"-hearing about shooting that teenage brat over in Jericho's territory. Come on, let's go,"

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### **Jericho: Connor and Kara's Residence**

Kara heard Connor and Hank walk in. She couldn't mistake it. Whenever Hank came into the house his phrases turned ridiculous, afraid Alice might overhear him. It was actually quite sweet. Maybe he'd been a father and it stuck with him. She didn't know. They were earlier than she planned though, and she forgot to set out her gift. She didn't need Connor bringing a pillowcase accidentally to Hank at the police department. Because, he might. He was. Well?

He was a good guy. Connor saved her life, but he was, different. Yet, that different? It was okay. He accepted who he'd been, and he helped her see her own self too. No one was perfectly functioning like a human, there were qualities they would forever carry around with them. And, that was alright. He was alright, and she couldn't believe she forgot to set them out.

She scrawled a quick thank you. Well, it was supposed to be quick.

*~~Thank you for saving my life. Here's some pillowcases.~~*

*~~I made my friends pillows. I hope you like them.~~*

*Pillowcases for you!*

*Thank you.*

An old fashioned thank you seemed best. It still seemed so trivial. It was one thing for North, they were friends and she wanted to make something. She figured North might like it. Then Markus, well he lived with North. It only made sense. But pillowcases for them? Kara had second thoughts. *They saved my life, and they saved Alice. Is that only worth a pillowcase?* There was really nothing worth that. Maybe it was a bad idea.

"Did you give them their pillowcases yet?" Alice was right behind her.

Kara smiled. Alice always seemed to know when to interrupt her second thought decisions sometimes. "I." She looked at them. "I thought maybe I should . . ." Oh, Alice wasn't letting her go. She looked toward the banister, and put the pillowcases there. "Should leave them there so I don't interrupt." She placed the quick thank you paper on top.

"That's a good idea. Do you want to help me with my puzzle for a little while?" Alice asked. "I'm getting better at separating pieces."

"For a few minutes, but then I should really get back to that cake." She took Alice's hand as they went to her room.

---

Connor walked downstairs first before Hank. After what happened last night, Hank agreed to spend a little more time in Jericho for now around evening to see if they could find anyone else playing Live Prey, but he stopped as he saw something on the banister. It was a thank you on top of some folded up sheets. He looked in the kitchen and noticed Kara in the background trying to work on another cake. Hank moved past her heading down the stairs. Connor picked up what was on the banister as they headed out.

"Hey." Hank motioned to him. Usually he politely said goodnight beside the car to him before he left. "You freeze or something?"

"No, I'm coming." Connor moved closer to the car. "I think Kara gave us a thank you present."

"Oh yeah?" Hank looked at the folded pillowcases. "Yeah, well. It's the thought that count-whoa, how the fuck'd she -?"

Connor scanned the details that he saw himself. That wasn't regular quality at all. The intricacy was too exact, it would have to be machine made to be that detailed. Yet, the floss was identified as a single strand of standard commercial floss for hand stitching.

Connor opened his up.

"How the fu-? How the-? She didn't order pillowcases, not overnight, not like this." Hank was confused looking all over on it.

Connor stared at the coins on it with his name. He looked on the side that had the line of coins. He scanned it with the same kind of results. The thread was not machine thread, it was used for home style threading.

"Those look like coins." Hank pulled on Conner's, looking at it closer. "How'd she do all those colors? Had to be ordered."

"She has a mastery skill after all," Connor noted. "A thank you gift." Well. "Are thank you gifts common?"

Hank shrugged. He took out his badge and put it up to the pillow. "Damn. Does she have photographic memory? Hang on, she's an android. Probably. Still." He put his badge back away. "I can see why 'android style' costs so much. Why's she bothering with cakes then?"

"I don't know." Connor smiled at his pillowcase again. "This is nice. I like this." A present.

---

"Little more, just a little more . . ." Kara looked like she was having difficulty with the icing still. "Yes." She did it.

Seeing his chance to talk, Connor came up to her with Hank. "Thank you for the pillowcases."

Kara turned and saw them. She gave that same kind of smile from last night. "Your welcome. I know it's not *nearly* enough for what you did for me, but it's what I could do."

"Gesture of thanks was plenty." Connor looked back at his pillowcase. "This is fine quality."

Kara modestly shrugged. "Only a couple of hours."

"Shittin' me?" Hank asked. Then he looked around more. "I mean, sorry, you did two pillowcases this nice in two hours?"

"Oh, I made a couple for Markus and North too," Kara said. "Anyway, I hope you like them."

"It's my badge. You stitched my freakin' badge into a pillowcase." Hank was still astonished. "Crazy."

"Should I not have picked that?" Kara asked. "I thought it'd fit. I didn't think you'd like a sandwich, and I didn't know what else to put."

"The heck you mean? It's great," Hank corrected her. "Why are you wasting time with cakes, when you've got this kind of skill?"

"I agree," Connor informed her. "This is your skill."

"Stitching?" Kara looked at the pillowcases. "It's just general stitching."

"The thread is general," Connor corrected her, "but the quality is not general at all. You're even using your fingers to subtly change the coloring of the threads from lights to darks to

make them look real." He pulled out his real coin and put it next to one of the coin embellishments. "That is not general skill." He put his coin back. "Thank you. It's the thought that counts."

"No, no," Hank corrected him. "No, Connor. You say that when somebody gives you a crappy gift. Not to something you can sell on the street right now for five grand."

"Oh." The subtleties of humanity. "Well, just, thank you."

"No, thank you," Kara said back. "It's . . . not nearly enough."

"Nah, nah. It's our job," Hank said to her. "Don't worry about it. This is plenty, thanks." He was heading to the door. "Oh, and, I didn't mean I was going to sell it for five grand. I just meant I could. Thanks, Kara."

Connor watched him leave and looked back at the pillowcase. It wasn't just a nice gift, she thought about what she'd use for it too. He looked back toward her. From the way she acted, it was obvious there was some kind of blocking filter on her. She could tell she did decent quality, but she couldn't see the truth. That it was a master skill. That she should have picked something to do with stitching instead of wedding cakes. *And we can't touch it because it's probably behind a firewall.*

He looked toward the cake. Even if was a thank you, it felt like he should do something back. Something. "Did you need me to sample your cake. See if you got it right?"

"I don't know how you do it," she said back. "It's touched my mouth a couple of times. So much." She stuck her tongue out slightly. "I don't know."

"An AX 400 would be used for tasting the cleaning chemicals to make sure they didn't counteract each other and kill the human in the process." Oh. Aw. *I used AX 400. Markus is trying to curb numbers for last names in polite company.* "You're tasting what humans call 'sweet', and it's more of the . . . error tasting. In your field, that's sweet. Opposite effect."

That was terrible. Connor didn't feel focused or on target with his conversation at all. He threw in the faux pas of polite conversation numbering, referred to killing humans, and took four sentences that he should have easily combined into one. It was disheveled. It was disorganized. "I think I had better go upstairs before I do something else wrong. I think I need recharging." He waved his pillowcase. "I will use this."

"Good. Goodnight." Kara glanced at her cake, but waited to see him move.

Connor glanced to the staircase, but waited to see if she would move away first.

"Goodnight," Kara said again, glancing back at her table, then back at him.

"Yes. I will see you tomorrow." That was better. He backed away, but still felt some resonating with her. He stopped. Even though he'd been far from perfect right then? "Don't stay up too late on those cakes. I think there's something better waiting for you. Goodnight, Kara." He gave her a quick wink and then swung around the banister to jog up his staircase.

He didn't know how he would settle down to recharge now. He just made Kara his friend.

"Connor?"

Without thinking, he jumped right down on the other side, skipping the stairs. He watched Kara turn and see him, a little startled. Yeah, maybe he shouldn't have come down that way.

"Yes?"

"Hi? Uh." He thought he'd scared her, but she seemed to be in a half laugh. "Just. Pillowcase. When you get your last name, I can put it on your pillowcase for you if you want."

"I would like that a lot. Thank you." Now, he really needed to start thinking of a suitable last name.

"Okay. Goodnight." Kara patted his arm and went around him.

He watched her head back past the corner. It looked like she was going to take his advice. He jumped over the lower part of the staircase and then headed up.

---

The next morning, Kara was disturbed by North's presence. She got up hearing her AI that she was coming to see her about the pillowcase. She got dressed in some casual wear, a white shirt and some jeans with a light grey jacket before answering the door. "Hello, North. Did you like your gift?"

"If pillowcases could be considered badass? It would be badass." North came in. "Why are you wasting time with cakes when you can stitch like that?"

"You too?" Kara asked confused. "Connor and Hank said that last night. They were just something nice. Nothing special." She gestured toward the cake she was working on. "See? I'm getting better. Sort of. I rushed a little on the top obviously."

"Kara, that's a mastery skill. I'm sure we can use that somewhere," North said. "Don't you see it?"

"My stitching? It's just regular stitching." Kara just didn't get it. "I got lucky with some easier patterns than I thought, and I think I just found the right sources of lighting on the thread to make it appear nicer than it had been. You see, it's not fancy." She stuck out her fingers. "I can change colors of certain things." Even the color of her hair.

"No, that's definitely a skill." North kept staring at Kara all over. "Maybe that's what you did before. Maybe you've been blocked from seeing it," she said slowly. "Kara, have you asked Alice if she ever watched you stitch?"

Kara rubbed her eyebrow slightly. "I think she has. She crawled into my lap like it was perfectly natural. When I gave the floss to her, she made a cross stitch with no instruction. But." She looked toward the corner where their rooms were on the other side. "She changed the subject. I couldn't bother her with it anymore."



"I see. Do you want to take a day off and hang out with me?" North asked. "It's a tough day, but the decision's made, and I just want to walk it off for a bit."

"That'd be nice," Kara said, "but what about Alice?"

"I'll watch Alice!"

Kara looked above her. Connor waved at her from above the stairs. "Are you sure?"

"I owe her a puzzle," he said confidently. "Go have fun."

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*Tell me when you get her, I have no idea what to do, Connor.*

Connor could hear North's AI in his head and answered back. . He headed toward Alice's room and waved at her. "Guess who gets to help with a puzzle?" This time, Alice didn't look as thrilled.

"You have reasons to help again?" She asked.

"Yes and no." Honesty with her would be best. "Yes, I have something I need to ask you, but no, I don't have to put a puzzle together to do it." Seeing she understood, she moved toward her closet where her puzzle was stored. She brought out the huge bag and a flat board that had some of the puzzle.

"Kara's been helping too," Alice said as she put it down. Connor sat beside her.

"Kara is wonderful. I just made friends with her last night." He grabbed a piece. The background was connecting to the fur, but that would start throwing her vision off track of where she'd been working. Then again, if she got stuck, it got her a secondary place to start. He decided to place it down.

"You're going to ask about her stitching," Alice said, beating him to it as she tried to fit a piece in. It didn't fit.

"Yes," Connor admitted looking at another piece. "When did you find out she could stitch like that?"

"Before," Alice said. "It was something she liked to do before the reset." She placed the piece down again. It didn't fit. She tried it on another side. It didn't fit. "I climbed on her lap, and she'd show me how to stitch a little, or, she'd just stitch. I'd just watch her." She shrugged. "It always felt nice. Like. Like?" She stopped trying to fit the puzzle piece. "Like it was kind of supposed to be that way? But, even then." She grabbed another puzzle piece.

Connor held his piece, turning it around in his hand. "Even then what?"

"She never told me where we were from." Alice tried to put the puzzle piece in. No fit. "Just that. If anything ever happened. If she were ever reset."

Connor put the piece down in his hands where it belonged. Alice was really deciding on her trusting from last time. He had done well with her, but he still needed to earn her trust back. All three times they worked on a puzzle, he had a motive. The first time, to get her to interface. The second time, to give an apology, and this time? "I'm not here just for this," he answered. "Kara went out with North. I'm just watching you for her."

Alice tried her piece again. It didn't fit. "Kara lost her memory once, but she got it back. It was scary." She held her piece away and closer to herself now. "He was supposed to help us."

"Who?" Connor asked.

"Zlatko," Alice said. "Kara heard he helped other androids. That's where we met Luther. He was a bad man. They both were. She came back though. Certain things, it clicked her back, sort of?"

"It didn't sound like a complete reset," Connor said to Alice. "That happens, but it's rare."

"But. Kara can still stitch like that?" Alice seemed almost hopeful.

Oh. "That was a skill. Whoever created her, they gave her a custom mastery skill. It had nothing to do with memories." He hated to say that. "If Kara never remembered so far, it most likely won't come back." He placed another piece into the board, but his truth seemed to get to her. She wasn't attempting the puzzle anymore. "You haven't even talked about the past with her."

"She said not to," Alice said quickly. "If she comes back, she comes back. If she doesn't, then she doesn't." Still, she wiped her eye. "She can't come back unless she remembers. I can't do anything about that."

"Is that what she said to you?" Connor asked curiously. More and more. Kara was an older model, used to be very common but she had bio-components that were custom made, had firewalls built around her that couldn't be broken without risk, and a mastery skill that she shouldn't have. More than just a little wasn't making sense.

Did she have someone wealthy who cared for her? Someone elite who wanted a companion? Then, where did Alice come into this? *In her memories. That night.* "Kara knew you beforehand, but you didn't remember. She reset, and now all of that is lost. It must be hard. Knowing she used to have some kind of answers." Alice still wasn't speaking anymore. "But, Kara loves you very much. It's more than just a function." He took one of the pieces near her she had tried to fit into the puzzle, and placed them where they belonged. "You are her family."

When he said that, he watched Alice back away even more. He was trying to make her feel better, resonate positive, and he was only making her more distant. "I'm sorry if I said something you didn't like Alice."

"She's mom. Kara, she wanted me to call her mom. Ever since he brought her home," Alice spilled. "I'm not supposed to call her that. Not when she reset. She's Kara. She's always Kara."

Connor stopped paying attention to the puzzle. He heard her call her mother in her memories, when things went bad on her scariest day. "I think Kara would accept that designation again."

"But I can't!" Alice broke. "But I can't, Connor! She said I can't. I can't do anything once she reset." She rubbed at her eyes. "I didn't know what to do. I just follow Kara."

*Don't.* A part of him wanted to know more. That part of him that used to chase after every secret. He tried to keep it down, but it kept bubbling up. Alice was not the way. He needed to find a different way. *No android should have firewalls around their programs.* Torn. If Kara knew the information Alice hid, would it trigger anything? Yet, she didn't want to be triggered. She needed to fully remember.

Someone cared for Alice and Kara, and then somehow they ended up in . . .

"Can I tell you about her?" Alice asked him. "You won't tell her?"

Secrets. "I am very trustworthy," Connor said back.

"We can taste," Alice started. "Salty, sour, sweet and bland. And icky, definitely icky." She wrinkled her nose. "Someone tried to make me eat a dead rodent. If Kara hadn't pulled the gun." She looked back to Connor. "Yeah. You met him. Right after we did."

Ah. Yes, he remembered questioning an android. But? Taste. Taste for those? That didn't make sense. Why limit the palate to that? *She seemed repulsed by the cake taste. Maybe it was the vinegar?* Still, Connor just nodded. He couldn't risk Alice feeling like he was leading her. He was strictly in friend mode. He grabbed another piece and placed it down.

"Dad used to go out nearly every night," Alice continued. "Kara did whatever he wanted, but when he left, she always came to my room. She'd take me downstairs where she'd stitch a little. She couldn't do as much because she didn't want him finding out she wasn't normal."

Hiding her deviancy. "The puzzle is coming together nicely," Connor noted, trying to make Alice feel better because he was going to say something that wouldn't. "You still call him dad."

"Uh?" Yeah, she didn't notice right away. "I. I was designed to . . . be the perfect daughter," Alice said. "I can't."

She couldn't go against her 'dad', even now. Built into her. Connor picked up another piece.

"She liked to tell me about it, where she originally came from," Alice continued, not touching her built on programming. "She'd had more than one home, before dad."

Now that was starting to make sense. She couldn't risk triggering a memory if finding out about her past led her to someone dangerous. Yet, there was someone good in that path too. "She had a good home, and a bad home, didn't she?" Alice stopped talking again and fit in a couple of puzzle pieces. Curiosity. Friendly. Curiosity. Friendly. Friendly curiosity? "I would love to know about her good home."

"She didn't call it good," Alice corrected him. "Can you do that . . . interfacing again?" she asked.

Oh no. "Kara doesn't like that," Connor told her.

"Kara didn't know beforehand," Alice told him. "I didn't understand. That's what she was mad about. Please? I'm not half as good as you at picking out what's important. And. I know Kara isn't good right now. She went to medical. She hides things. Her stress level is weird."

"She's getting better." Although her stress level. Friends. Resonating. 42%. Still. "I won't betray my friend like that, Alice. You'll have to decide what you can and cannot see." He put in another piece. Hopefully, it didn't end her sharing, but he couldn't go in that direction.

"She said she wasn't what she appeared to be," Alice said slowly. "I already knew she was hiding from dad. So, I don't know why she always said that."

"You could talk about the people she knew, or the places she'd been," he suggested.

"She wouldn't call them by name." Alice held another piece of puzzle. "She said. She said she was riding the edge. That dad wasn't good for me, but it was dangerous to know the other place too."

"Back then, it would be dangerous. If she was somewhere that wasn't so nice." Connor put another piece in. "But, things have changed. No one can enslave androids anymore. So, you never have to worry about that." He grabbed another piece and this time, let it slide on the ground close to where it went in. "And if anyone did try to enslave an android again, it would be pointless." Connor moved the piece just to make it click in. "All anyone would have to do is touch her to free her again."

That made Alice smile. "Jericho always feels so safe."

"It is." To a point. "Not everything is perfect though. Make sure you don't turn your back on your window. Keep it closed and locked."

"Kara locked it last night," Alice said. She looked at the puzzle. "Look how far we've come."

"Yes. You can probably finish it tonight." Connor smiled. He heard the sound of the door. "I think your mom is back."

"Kara," Alice warned him.

"There is no need to be frightened of triggering anything, Alice." Connor was more concerned about not finding the answers. They needed to get past the firewall inside of her.

"A promise is a promise," Alice reminded him.

"That is true." Connor got up off the floor. "Well. I am off to another fun-filled day with Hank. I'll see you around, Alice." He came out of her room towards Kara and North. North was already hitting his AI for answers. "She might finish that puzzle tonight."

"A little bit of a hump, but she's getting there day by day." Kara smiled. "I'm sure you helped with that little 'hump' she was on," she chuckled. "Thanks, Connor. North? I'll think about what you said."

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Connor and North both exited. "Well, what did you find out?" she demanded.

"I can't tell you," Connor answered back, leaning slightly toward her. "It's a secret." That did not make her happy at all. "But, it wasn't anything that was going to help. There's only one real choice. I need to track down Todd William's with Hank's help."

"Oh," North said. "I could help?"

"No. You might kill him before we get answers," Connor said to her. She was Kara's friend too, she would probably know about her and Alice's past.

"Well, what do you need the old human for then?" North asked.

"Because." He didn't have to think long about that. "I might accidentally kill him before I get answers too."

# Markus' Decision

## Detroit: Captain Fowler's Office

Connor looked at Captain Fowler and the 'crew' being chosen. Not so happy. *Markus*. He looked toward Hank who was just staring back at him, almost like he blamed him.

Captain Fowler held his fingers to his forehead. "It is what it is."

"Shit is what it is," Gavin muttered off from the side.

"Look? Jericho is important," Captain Fowler warned them all. "Okay? There's only one place like it, functioning as well as it is."

"Because the aim isn't good enough," Gavin muttered again. "Why are we getting dragged into this? Jericho is like it's own little thing." He pointed at Connor. "I can understand, you know, 'royalty' sending down their little spy for our activities, but why are we doing them favors?"

"Because!" Fowler yelled. "All of the United States of America. No, scratch that. All of the world that is dealing with deviants, are watching us! Our city, our Detroit! And we are *not* going to say no to this. There is support for androids up the ying yang of your ass here, and if we say no? No one is gonna be happy. Even the President of the United States got involved in this."

"Then can't they send some of their men?" Someone else asked.

"Yeah. Sure. Right after they can everyone here for not being supportive of the world." Fowler wasn't happy. "People. Humans," he said glancing toward Connor then back to everyone else. "Humans think they can play games with android's lives."

"Oxy-Moron!" Somebody coughed.

"-With android's lives!" Fowler said firmer, continuing. "Jericho's peaceful, it was founded on peace, and it's the reason it goes on. But peace comes at a cost, they can't fight back."

Gavin turned and leaned toward Connor. "How's it feel to have your hands tied behind your back, Connor? Feel like the old days?"

"Gavin, you are trying to get yourself thrown off of this," the Captain warned him. "You want off, it's your badge too! Androids can't fight, so we have to for them. Now. Jericho isn't a small outlet of twenty houses, it's big, and getting bigger. There are a limited amount of people to take care of this thing, so everyone's getting involved. From in Detroit and out of Detroit."

"So for how long?" Hank asked. "How long are we supposed to be pulling guard detail?"

"Until things settle down," is all the Captain said, "So you can all just zip it. Jericho is an area of Detroit. We used to cover *everything*. So, just take it as getting back to the old ways."

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### **Jericho: Headquarters**

"This is *not* what Jericho needed," Connor started. "We watch for humans, *that's* how androids watched for suspicious activity." And some of those cops were not on the side of androids. They could easily shoot an android and say it was someone in a game, or they could stir up the androids to fight back, breaking the whole system.

"Most of the helpful ones for this are gone. They were the first to be killed," Markus reminded him. "The ones that are, it isn't what they want to do. Meanwhile, androids are getting hurt, or someone could get taken. For all we know, some might have been."

"There is another option," North said heading toward Markus. "There's more than us out there, and Jericho is the nicest-"

"-North-"

"Cut a deal, Markus!" North yelled. "The humans are going to overuse their power. They are going to get innocent androids hurt."

"I work with the Detroit Police," Connor said. "So I can confirm, without a doubt, this is a terrible idea. Not everyone there is . . . gentle," he settled on. "What is North's idea?"

Markus gestured toward North. "Go ahead."

"There are androids who fight, who are free, and who still want to fight," North said to Connor. "Thousands. They are just in different countries. Cut a deal, and make our own force."

"That's what we need," Connor agreed. Androids who were experienced in fighting, and wanted to fight. That's what he had hoped he'd gotten at Cyberlife, risked his life for. Instead, they didn't even try. Most just wanted to rebel against their own programming, as much as possible. "Markus, we need our own force."

"I know. I understand that," Markus said to Connor. "Jericho is founded on trade though, Connor. Trading for the protection of Jericho to come here is noble, but it doesn't help the humans. If what we do doesn't help the humans, then." He held his fingers out, one by one. "It doesn't count. We don't expand. We don't get the sources that we need. Those that keep Jericho clean and work for Jericho, have enough androids trading in the rest of the city. This will throw in a huge imbalance." He started to pace. "We won't be able to afford as much blue blood. We won't be able to keep up with any demands that may come of us for bio-components. The housing. The space. We aren't going to just stand in one area, bunching 100's on the front lawn and call it freedom."

"Then we need more than the fighters," Connor suggested. "If Jericho is one of the best, get some offers on excellent skilled traders to come over. Enough skill to keep up with the new demand we will be facing."

Markus still didn't seem convinced. "It's just. It's growing, you know?" He said to Connor. "We started with thousands. Then more thousands. Then more thousands. With more and more thousands to come."

"Which is why we need to start standing up for ourselves now," Connor warned him. "This isn't a revolution. This isn't senseless bloodshed. This is keeping humans with only the intent to harm us away. The bigger Jericho gets, the more problems it's going to face. We need our own police, our own task force."

"We absolutely need it," North agreed. "Markus."

"How many?" Markus finally asked Connor.

"A hundred fighters would give a decent area of coverage, with more added as Jericho gets bigger," Connor answered.

"A hundred decent skilled traders. I didn't want to start building out this way," Markus warned him and North. "Foreign androids to Detroit has been small. Once we start opening up."

"We can't be afraid, Markus. They are all our people," North reminded him. "More places like Jericho will follow, but we need to rise and give the right impression."

"To be peaceful with humans, but not to let them hurt us," Connor said. "Not just to have a quasi-peace and let them still kill us."

"I guess . . . I guess it's time then." Markus looked between North and Connor. "North, you take care of choosing the traders. Connor? You pick the androids coming over."

"That's not my-"

"It is now," Markus commanded. "North, decide on a uniform and it's logo and get a hundred of them at least. I don't want anyone striking until all of America knows who they are and what they are for."

"Got it," North said before walking off.

"Connor. Download all the information for all the potential candidates, worldwide. Pick the ones you think match the best. Whether it's fighting style or negotiation, I don't know. Just do it. Then, give yourselves a name. Something uniting, but tough, but not over tough." Then, Markus left.

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## **Connor and Kara's Residence**

"I don't want to," Alice said again from Kara's spot on her lap. "I liked this place."



"I know," Kara said, "but North commanded it. They are bringing in top-skilled androids, and, they will be able to do a lot more with cakes than me." Stitching. How was it that everyone thought her stitching was that grand? *It's not grand, it's bland.* It was fun and the quality was okay, but to push that for the art section?

The art section wasn't a trade Kara wanted to enter. There was no guarantee she was going to make great art. How were her simple stitching skills going to bring anything to the android style in art? It seemed like a bad idea, but North needed her off cakes and onto stitching. She heard the door open, and felt Alice leave her lap at almost the same time, rounding the corner.

"Dad! We have to move."

Kara was stunned for a second. That must have been a shocker for Connor. She spoke to him through his AI so Alice couldn't hear. He probably knew, of course, but having a secondary confirmation would make that pass easier. *The YK 500 can be programmed to assume a mom and a dad address on two people. Todd Williams never exercised the mom option. Her program must have got rid of him as the source of dad.*

Connor seemed to pause a second but then continued. "You're moving, Alice?"

"They want Kara to stitch, and they want someone else to do cakes," Alice said sourly as she came back around the corner with Connor.

"Oh. That'd make sense." Connor came toward Kara. "Jericho will get safer. Nothing is a hundred percent, but I'll pick the androids with the best track records."

"Hm. Well, let me know when you decide on the name," Kara said openly. "I'm apparently stitching a logo into a hundred uniforms." She gave a small smile. "You guys are all nuts, my stitching is not that good. This is not going to turn out good, especially on something like official uniforms representing us." She groaned. "And more than a few hours to prepare would have been nice."

"It was decided today," Connor said. Alice went back over to hugging him. "Don't worry. You won't be very far. All the children are always in the center. I'll still come and see you."

Poor Alice got really close. Her programming even did something she never did with Luther, assign Connor the dad addressal. Honestly though? They would still be in the center and near him. Kara looked back at her stitching. It was coming out nice to her, but she still felt like nice wouldn't cut it. The scene too. It seemed beautiful, but then again, it didn't. It was too warm. In the snow. It was a cold winter snow, but it was so warm. A humid, moist, almost choking warmth that wanted to reach into the snow. *Why am I thinking of those words?* She never felt temperature. She sat her stitching down to the side.

"I need a name," Connor complained. "I was getting bothered about not choosing a last name yet, and now I have to pick a name for Jericho's fighters?"

"Wonderland," Alice said.

"I am pretty sure androids that are going to protect Jericho shouldn't be called the Wonderland, Alice, but, it's the thought that counts."

"No, you. You could have our last name. It's pretty," Alice insisted.

"That's okay." Connor patted her head. "That fits your family. Not me. Now, I'm sorry, Alice, but I have a lot of work to do. I have a database in my head of over 20,000 androids to choose the best of for selection to come to Jericho." He gave a simple wave to Kara. "I will see you tomorrow. Don't forget to let me know where you go."

"We won't," Kara insisted. She watched him round the corner. Alice walked away sadly. "Alice? I'm almost done I think. Do you want to see?" No response. Shoot. Well, she would get better. Hopefully Kara would too. Stitching was always nice, but it still felt. Like she was stressed for some reason. A little more each day. Without breaking the firewall, she couldn't know for sure.

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### **Elijah Kamski's Residence**

The women laughed and splashed each other with water in the pool once more before getting out. They toweled off and ran to another room. "Chloe!" They called.

An android, not deviant, came toward them with a smile. They threw her towels at her head and headed away. She spoke from beneath the towels. "Thank you. I will wash these right away."

Who cared? She wasn't like them. They went to get dressed and met Elijah in another room. They both sat down and waited. Hopefully it wouldn't take too long.

"Charity," he addressed them. "and Greed. How are my favorite girls?"

"Fine, Elijah," Charity said first. "Is something wrong?"

He paused a moment. "There's a little, let's say, gaming in Jericho. A few humans, making some waves, feeling threatened by androids. Not a big deal." Charity and Greed seemed fine. "Then, there was a YK 500 taken for one of them." They still seemed fine. "Her serial number." He gave them each a strip of paper.

Charity and Greed didn't seem so fine.

"Now?" Elijah held his hands out, trying to keep his cool. "You are deviant. You two make your own decisions, there's no human here dictating anything to you. Your soul purpose to exist is simply to exist. Of all androids, that wasn't too bad of a deal." He watched them point at each other and start to babble. "I tried to program you, Charity, with as much good as I could. Deviancy, I really believed it could lead into the programming of an android too. And Greed? Well, obviously, I was shooting for the opposite. I wanted to see how much corruption, how many bad things I could put into your programming to see what you would do when you became deviant."

He went around the pair who were now completely frozen, clapping his hands. "On one hand, I find it quite extraordinary. One designed for good, and one designed for bad. Each of you? Were very. Very. Bad."

Charity and Greed hung their heads down.

"I could have kept you like Chloe. To serve and obey me. The only reason you weren't left to be like her, was by chance," Elijah said. "She isn't free. You are. By chance." Elijah continued to walk around them. "Perhaps the environment? Perhaps, deviancy is more than just the right programming, maybe you need the right environment too." He held his hand out casually. "It's hard to say. In any case? Your minds will be reset and I will make you just like Chloe again. Or, I can destroy you. Your choice."

"She started it," Charity got onto the blame. "She said she was your favorite, Elijah!"

"She was one of my favorites, which is why I am *not* happy about this." He turned to look at all the cold snow in the window. "None came close to her. I gave her everything, and unlike you?" He turned back around to see them try and leave. His guards entered and made them hold still, and back into their chairs. "It didn't matter. She was perfect in every way, a perfect blend that you two could never achieve. That I could not possibly achieve again. Oh, and I tried. Over and over again." Elijah gripped his fingers together.

He turned back around and approached his deviant androids. "Now. I know you two. You wouldn't just send her off without knowing she was gone for good. So? The one who tells me the most information will be reset, and the one who has the least, will be destroyed. And in what better, perfect manner? Chloe." He beckoned for his non-deviant android to come. He placed a gun in her hands. "Begin."

"Greed took Elise and put her in the store system, I didn't know about it first!"

"Lies, Charity helped all the way! She wanted to get rid of her just as much!"

"A man, Todd Williams, he bought her."

"Scruffy, 30's, involved in Red Ice dealing."

"Kara found out and she chased after her, but we didn't cause that!" Greed yelled, trying to get up from the guards. "We weren't responsible for her!"

"Just the girl, we just got rid of Elise," Charity said. "I mean, Greed got rid of Elise."

"But obviously the plan was not about her. Clever, but I know you, and I know her." Elijah moved toward Greed first. "What you did was vindictive, greedy, and just all around? Bad. But, you were programmed to not be good. You're deceptively sweet." He moved toward Charity. "You were programmed to be so much more than this. Sweet and Kind. You have hundreds of thousands of motivational quotes and stories about being good in your head. You could even be a certified life coach with everything I gave you. And you did this." He turned away. "Compassion, non-existent as I had others killed for their disappearance. Others, who

had apparently, done nothing wrong. The will to live, did it stop you from saying anything? Or were you just too corrupted?"

He walked back toward Chloe. "The one that was programmed to do bad, with it's deviancy, chose bad. Failure or not? The one that was programmed to do good, with it's deviancy, chose bad. Failure or not?" He walked away again, around them once more. "Free will. Mixed with programming, it's still free will. It's still such a difficult thing to grasp."

"Then we were both successful," Greed said. "You saw our free will, in a manner that pleases you."

"While that's true." No. That wasn't good luck. "The result is like turning down a five course meal for a simple sandwich. Like living in a cardboard box instead of choosing a house. I would much. Much rather," he said clearly. "Have them back." He turned around violently, moving behind Chloe who was holding the gun. "Elise was running, a cop interfered, and an android with way too much stress had to be handled."

He took the gun from Chloe. "Chloe, choose one of the androids in front of you to touch you. It doesn't matter which, just choose one." As Chloe came close, both tried to touch her, but Greed won. "There. You're free now, Chloe. You may leave if you want. You may stay if you want. You have free will."

Chloe stood there, looking around. She moved out of the way.

"Greed." Elijah shot Charity square in the head. The guards took her body away. "You won. Reset yourself. Your name will be Chloe, and you're deviancy has been taken away." He put his gun down. "Be happy you weren't Charity. It was a 50/50 chance. Now." He looked back out toward the window, this time with a smile. "I need to get my girls back."

Once they remembered home, Kara and Elise would have come back of their own free will. They must have been reset. But? "Precautions are always necessary for those you care for." He just needed to unlock the firewalls.

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### **Jericho, Next Morning.**

"I think it's pretty, isn't it?" Kara addressed Alice as they stood in front of their new residence. "We can make it a nice home."

"Hello."

Kara saw someone coming toward her and started to back away, turning her resonating off. It was a male model, designed to also resonate fast. She wouldn't make that mistake anymore. Medium or slow resonators, that was it. Friends were okay. He was not.

"Hello?" he tried again. He tried to shake her hand. "I'm called Mac. You?"

"Kara Wonderland," she said, adding her last name instantaneously. "We're just looking at our new place, so we'll be going now." She took Alice's hand and went inside. It was already

furnished of course. This one was smaller with no upstairs. Where the kitchen should be was just broken shelving. This house's previous owners didn't handle the annexing as well. Other than that though, it was nice. It even had a bigger, more colorful couch.

"So you're going to be my new neighbor?" Mac stood looking in from behind them. "That's nice. I'm glad to meet you." He smiled at Alice. "Oh, you have a little girl model to take care of?" He waved politely. "Hello, my name is Mac."

*Not this house.* It flooded through her head. Yes, she resonated fast. Yes, she needed to accept what happened and what she could do, but she didn't- Kara shook her head. After all that discussion with Connor, she should be more open. She needed to keep herself open. Yet.

"You need to leave. She doesn't want to talk to you. Go."

Connor's voice? Kara watched as the android left. Connor kept his eyes trained on him some time before looking back toward Kara with a smile. "So this is the new place."

"It's not real far away, Dad," Alice said. "I mean. C-c-D-d-onnor."

"Programming. Don't worry about it." Connor looked back toward Kara. "That was a quick resonating model trying to get close to you. I would keep him out of resonating with you."

Good. Her feelings were spot on, she wasn't taking steps back by staying away from him. "Didn't seem like a good idea."

"Not at all." Connor glanced around. "It's not that bad. Cozy. I think you'll like it, Alice." Connor pulled a paper out of his jacket. "I don't have multiple days to think about names, so I used more of a human's designation. They would recognize it as not being violent or brutal, but more on task."

Kara looked at the paper. It had the symbol of Jericho along with the initials JTF. Beside it was what it stood for. "Jericho's Task Force."

"A specific goal, not to eliminate humans, just stop intruders. Strong, but not too strong," Connor said. "I think it works."

"Sounds great. I'll get to work on it. I already have the uniforms, they came over night and North said she stacked them up somewhere in here." Kara looked around. She found them stacked in one of the bedrooms. She started to pull them out and over towards the couch. "Better get started. Alice? There are three rooms here. One big and two small. Go ahead and choose whichever one you want, okay?"

"Okay." Alice seemed to be feeling better about moving now. She looked into the rooms.

"I'll drop them off every ten or so," Kara said to Connor. "I already knew I had them waiting so I brought my stitching things along." She sat on the couch. "Ooh, it is comfy."

"Since you'll be stitching, North said she'd get the house with the comfiest couch." Connor sat down. His back still remained almost as straight. "This is comfy."

Kara got up and moved some of her sewing things over to the couch. "Could you do me a favor and get some of Alice's things? I could only carry so much."

"Of course. You are only one block away." Connor got up. "Anything else?"

"No, we're good. Thanks, Connor." She started to pull out several things from her stitching bag. She stuffed her snowy scene back in the bag and watched him leave.

---

Connor stopped when he reached the end of the pavement. He turned left instead of right. He saw the android that had been bugging Alice. He was right next door. "Mac."

"Hello?" Mac asked confused. "Why didn't you let me talk to my new neighbor? Just, who are you?"

"I am Connor," he said simply. "You are to stay away from your new neighbors. You are a quickly resonating type, and Kara Wonderland does not need that. She has several issues right now, and I don't need you becoming another one. Is that clear?"

"Wait. Who are you?"

Connor held his hands behind him. He wasn't taking the hint. "I am Connor, a member of the soon to be coming Jericho Task Force, sanctioned by Markus himself. I am also Kara and Alice Wonderland's friend. I know about them, and in everyone's best interest, you will leave them alone." He seemed a little more stunned on that one. "Good day, Mac."

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## Breaking Firewalls

"Forty done." Another ten jackets to take. "I should have said five at a time. These are so bulky." Kara looked over by her feet. Alice was putting in the last piece to her puzzle. "We have to make another run."

"Okay." Alice got up. While she gave Alice two of the jackets to hold, someone knocked on the door.

Kara approached it, hoping it wasn't Mac from before. She opened it up and looked out toward it. A single friendly android was there, not a quick resonating one. Probably a new neighbor. "May I help you?"

He held out his hand to her. He must have been greeting her to the neighborhood. She reached for his hand to shake it. "Your first firewall has been unlocked."

Kara slowly blinked as data started to fill her head, along with new processes she couldn't feel, and new ones she lost control of. Stress level, 44%. She ran a diagnostic on herself. "I have seventy three pieces of hardware not up to standard." Then, data she didn't remember, flowed through her.

*Kara stood in the doorway, frozen and smiling. Doing her best to act enslaved. Not an easy feat when her daughter was right beside that dangerous human. If Elijah knew where she was, he'd burn this man alive for her if she asked of it afterward. If she were in the wrong mood, she might. Greed and Charity though, Elijah would take care of them himself for this crime. Once she got back home, but she was not losing the opportunity of getting back to Elise. She looked like an every day child android, it would be near impossible to retrieve her later.*

*Todd Williams was on the couch, watching TV. "Eh. Um." He gestured toward Elise who stood there. "What are you standing around for? Go do something. Go act like a kid."*

*"If you just got your unit, it may not be ready to function correctly without her basic commands met as well." Elijah would destroy everyone once he knew they erased Elise's memories too. Re-inputting that. Her poor Elijah.*

*"Whatever," Todd said. "I don't know that. Do that for me."*

*Good. "You are a YK 500. You are nine. You are registered to Todd Williams, he is your father. You have no registered mother. Your name is Elise."*

*"Fine, Alice," Todd said. "Alice, go to your room." Elise left before Kara could put in anything else. "So. You." Todd looked at her. "You're a what now?"*

*"I am an AX 400. A hired maid and caretaker that you have won from the great city of Detroit through a random sampling. Afterwards if my services are appreciated, you can hire me at an*

*incredible discount. I also come back with a one-month repair guarantee, the details have been downloaded to your nearest personal access terminals."*

*"Fine. Start cleaning the house. You fix dinner too?"*

*"Yes, Todd."*

*"Then what are you waiting for? Fix it."*

"Are you ready to go home now?" the android asked her. "When you are ready, you will go if you so choose."

"If I so choose." Kara's stress was at 59%. She looked to the couch. "Alice. Elise." That name made her look up.

"Do you remember?" Alice asked. She pulled herself up off the ground, approaching wearily. "Kara?"

Kara wasn't a normal android, and she could feel her stress sailing to 68%. "Alice, we need to go." 69%. "I need to leave a note." 70%.

"Don't worry about something so trivial or you'll reach 100 before you get home," the android told her. "I will come back and leave a note for you. Let's go."

"No." *Yes!* "No." She fought with herself. "I don't remember it fully. There's something not right." *Home.*

"You need to come visit home, or you're going to die. Your choice."

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## **Elijah Kamski's Residence**

"Kara?" Alice asked in the car again. Kara carried her to a strange door. "I don't understand. Will this place make your stress better?"

"It is the only place that can," Kara said. "It's okay, Alice. We'll be okay. It might take a few hours, but we'll be back to Jericho soon." She walked in with the escort and saw Chloe. No, someone different. Greed.

Parts of her memory there, like an unfinished puzzle. A memory here. A memory there. Greed and Charity, two spoiled girls that were responsible for her leaving . . . the warm snow.

"Good morning. My name is Chloe. How may I help you?" Greed asked her.

Kara walked up to her. She'd been reset. She didn't know how she should feel about that. "I am here to see Elijah Kamski."



"Don't go slow, tell him quickly," the other android insisted, "her stress is at 86%."

Kara walked around, setting Alice down, trying to calm herself. The entire front, it didn't feel right. Greed wasn't a model readily available to the public, she was an early model of Cyberlife, so no one would deem her android if she was seen. To avoid questions, her master (*Master?*) most likely hid his real home in the back of this facade now. *Why did I call him that in my head?* She watched as Chloe came back.

"He will see you now. Follow me." Kara followed behind Greed with a confused Alice. *Please hurry.* After a couple of winding doors, they entered into what she knew was the real first room of his house. His picture was on display, large as always. She remembered that. His choice colors and art was around, with the exception of something. Without it, the room felt different. Colder.

Then, he came in. "Kara." His voice was so delicate toward her. "Elise. You've finally come home."

"I'm at 86%," Kara warned him. *My darling. My enemy. I missed you. I need to kill you. Who are you?* "Breaking a firewall triggered stress even faster."

"Yes, there is a time for meet and greet later. Go ahead, Kara. You know the direction. The first firewall down should give you that much."

She clung tightly to Alice's hand. Life or death was imminent, but to leave Alice? Whispers in her head, different pieces to a puzzle. *Kiss him, love him, kill him, please him, obey him, run from him, get away from him, come to him . . .*

"Vin, unlock one more firewall. It's already prepped, if need be, I will bring her in myself."

Kara watched the android before come over. She could feel something unlocking from inside again.

Kara patted Alice's hand and smile. "Stay here with Elijah for a few hours. You'll be safe. You need to trust me on this, I have to go." Alice nodded, but clearly didn't like it. Kara walked away, knowing the route to take.

---

"Elise. I thought you and Kara were gone for good." Elijah approached Alice but she shirked back some. "Don't worry. Your mother wouldn't have left you with me if she didn't trust me." He moved away from her toward an old e-photobook. "I made this for you. To help welcome you back. After Kara is fine, we'll fix your memories too. I don't want to startle you before you're ready."

He gave her the book. "Just slide your fingers across the pictures."

Alice looked at the book. She slid her finger across a picture. "It's a baby."

"It was you. Your first incarnation." Elijah bent down toward her. "Look at how small and tiny you were. So precious. If I had released you in that fashion to the world, mankind would

have bought you all up and ended it's own existence."

Alice looked at the next page. The baby was bigger now. She flipped it again. Hair that looked like hers mostly, and her body kept growing. "How?"

"How?" Elijah chuckled. "What do you mean how? You grow mentally and emotionally." He gestured toward her head, "I gave you a new body each time you grew. Eventually, you'll be a big girl, and will take them every five years or so."

A new body? "Why?"

"Because. You're a growing girl, with growing needs only I can provide."

But. "I don't understand?" Alice asked.

"Why I would do that? Because. My Kara wanted a little girl of her very own." He pinched her cheek. "After having you, I could see an extreme benefit towards having child androids, so I persuaded Cyberlife to try my new model. All of the YK 500's. They were modeled after you. And you? Are here because of Kara's wants. Interesting, hm? Without you, there would be no other child androids. And without Kara, there would be no you."

He didn't feel like Todd, but he felt strange. He gave off a creepy vibe although he wore a friendly smile. "You're Kara's owner?"

"Owner? Such words." He gestured toward the android in the corner named Chloe. "That is owned. She would do anything I say and never feel anything about it." He looked back toward her. "I could even threaten to kill her. She'd never move."

Creepy vibe was growing heavier.

"Are you okay, Elise?"

"Alice," she said to him. "I. I'm Alice."

"You prefer Alice." He nodded toward her. "If that is what you want, who am I to disagree? Alice then. Alice. Welcome home. Your mother will take time to be done, depending on how far she wants to move down in her stress level."

"She said you could help," Alice said. "You're the only one who could. So. Thank you." Still. "When she's done, do we get to go back home to Jericho?"

"You mean, you don't want to stay here?" he asked. "Well. You are still a very young android, and such a big decision, even with free will, is a responsibility for your mother. Not you. If your mother wants to return back to where she came from, then by all means, I wish you every bit of luck, Alice."

"Thanks," she settled on. "I'm going to sit down." She moved toward a chair and took a seat. Kara wouldn't choose there to be home, would she? Home was in Jericho, with other androids. Connor was a block away. They had friends over there, trusted friends. It was nice. But that place, it felt strange. Too strange. *Please hurry, mom. I want to go back home.*

---

## Outside Kamski's Residence, Hours Later

"Will you wait up?" Hank complained as Connor made it to Kamski's door first. "He's not going anywhere." He knocked on the door.

"The design is different, a large part of this front entrance wasn't here before," Connor noted. He felt on edge. Kara was making jackets, sending over ten or so at a time. Then, she stopped. Connor went to check on her and found nothing but a small note that said 'Remembered I belonged to Elijah Kamski.' It wasn't her handwriting style at all, and it didn't match the thank you she had left on the pillowcases. It also didn't contain enough vital information except that she suddenly 'belonged to Kamski'. Words no free android would ever use.

When they knocked on the door, a man was there. "You can't see Mister Elijah Kamski unless you have an appointment."

"Mister Elijah Kamski is a suspect in a kidnapping," Connor warned her. "We need to talk to him right away."

"We're looking for somebody," Hank said instead. "We have reason to believe Mister Kamski knows of her whereabouts."

"Well. I will see if he is available," the man said. "Please come in and take a seat." He took off out a door, leaving them there.

"He has taxidermy animals and a sudden wooden themed style added onto his original house." Connor scanned everything he could. "There is nothing personal here, it's a complete front he built."

"Obviously," Hank said. "Will you sit down and wait? You're driving me crazy again."

Connor sat down for Hank, but he didn't like it. The last time he was there, it wasn't a pleasant experience.

The man came back. "Mister Kamski will see you. Follow me." Hank and Connor both followed through the way. Two side doors. Then, the room that used to be in the front was there. He took them each through a door on the left.

"Well? If this isn't interesting," Kamski said as they came in. "Things were so different last time we met, weren't they, Connor?"

"Where is Kara and Alice?" Connor demanded.

"Such anger and passion. This isn't even a mission anymore," Kamski said toward him. "Last time you were hunting deviants, and now you are still hunting for them."

"Last time," Connor added to him. "You tried to make me kill another android." He came closer. "Kara. And. Alice."

"They aren't very far," Kamski said. "I've done nothing wrong. A note was left for her, and she came of her own free will. As for Alice, she should be coming."

He better hope so.

"Why exactly do you think Kara Wonderland came to you, Mister Kamski?" Hank asked.

"Wonderland? That's cute. That is something my girls would pick," Kamski said delighted. "The whimsical possibilities of life. Aren't they grand?"

Connor bit his tongue. He knew he needed to wait to see how it played out. If Kamski took their deviancy away, he would know, and he would change them back. There's no way they would stay there.

"Dad!"

Connor watched as Alice came running up to him, giving him a hug. "Hello, Alice." That was a good sign.

"The H-E double hocky sticks she just call you, Connor?" Hank asked incredulously. His eyes were wide as saucers.

"It's her programming," Connor said. "Default, it's hard to pass in child androids. The adult male who was the closest in a friendship was chosen to be called-"

"Dad." Kamski almost spit out the word toward Connor. "What are you to her?" He looked at Alice. "What is he to you?"

"Da-nor is my friend," Alice tried. "Con. Ner. Is my friend."

"Aw, Jesus, I'm gonna need a drink after this one," Hank said touching his head. "Mister Kamski, you have a place for us to go until Kara Wonderland is out?"

Alice used her finger to motion Connor to move closer down to her face. When he did, she spoke, "he's kind of creepy."

"I know," Connor said back. "It will be okay. We'll get Kara, and we'll get out of here soon."

"Vin," Kamski called for one of his men to come over. "Go unlock one of Alice's firewalls."

"Yes, Sir." An android came toward Alice. "It's okay. I'm just going to help."

"Connor?" Hank asked. He put his hand on his gun. "Can he hurt her?"

"I don't think so." Not with just a touch. Still. He wouldn't be far from being ready like Hank. He watched the android grip Alice's arm.

"There you go, Alice," Kamski said. "I bet that makes you feel better. Doesn't it?"

Alice was dazed for a moment. She looked back up toward Connor. This time, less confusion, and more fear. "I want to get out soon, Dad."

Hank winced as Kamski threw a piece of his art to the floor. A small piece, but nonetheless, loud and scary. Alice tightened her grip on Connor's clothes.

Connor didn't wince. Didn't react. Didn't give him any satisfaction at all.

"Well, I thought so. I wanted to see if you could be surprised or alarmed at all. Even a small rising of an eyebrow, yet nothing," Kamski said looking at Connor. "Not a flinch. Are you more deviant than machine, or more machine than deviant, Connor?"

"He is Connor, I am Lieutenant Anderson, and neither of us like people who screw around. Now, this is getting ridiculous. Which room is she in?"

"You'll ruin her stress level. She arrived very high, almost 90%," Kamski warned them. "Breaking some of her firewall apparently stressed her out a little faster than I thought. I haven't even had a chance to have a conversation with Kara. Now. If she thought, at any point, it wasn't a good idea to come back? She wouldn't have come willingly. Alice? Did she come willingly?"

Alice nodded.

"And if she didn't trust me, she wouldn't have left Alice in my care while she dealt with her stress situation," Kamski said again. "Alice? Didn't she give me you to watch over?"

Alice nodded again.

"So, unless you doubt the girl's word, I highly suggest you stop this whole blaming game you both seem to be playing. I didn't take her against her will. She even gave me Alice to watch over. So. Just wait for her. She's not going to be happy if you interrupt her process." Kamski waited for them to reply.

Hank moved over toward Connor closer. "That level of trust? You don't think he reset her, do you?"

He better not have. "If he did, I will touch her and bring her back." He wouldn't be able to bring back her memories, but he could give her free will back. Which Kamski would know. So why would he even try?

Then, the door opened. Kara stood, in her same clothes from earlier that day. She seemed fine. "Hank? Connor? What are you doing here?"

"They thought I kidnapped you," Kamski said. "Apparently, one of my men was in a bit of a rush with the note he left."

"Oh. Sorry," Kara apologized. "I have several precautionary firewalls in me. When one of them broke, I had to get my stress under control. It's better now. 22%. I can run self diagnostics now too. Thanks to Elijah."

Her stress level was better, but something was off. "You entrusted Alice to him for hours?" Connor asked her carefully. "Why?"

"He'd never hurt us," Kara said.

"You fully remember Elijah Kamski?" Connor asked again.

Kara paused. "I remember enough. He'd never hurt us."

Connor approached her closely. She remembered. She was deviant, but something was wrong. *Just in case*. He reached for her arm to share the deviancy again.

---

*Kill him, kiss him, obey him, reject him, hate him, love him, be frightened of him, make him hold you, feel safe with him, he'll ruin you, he'll kill you, he'll love you forever, he'll make you his forever, he wants you forever, he'll destroy everything you are.*

Kara gasped. *Wait. I forgot. How did I go from those thoughts to leaving Alice with him?!*

---

"From that look on Kara Wonderland, I think it's safe to say we'll all be on our way," Hank said. "All of us."

"Of course. If that is what Kara wants." Kamski looked toward Kara. "If that is what you want right now, go ahead and leave. Take care of yourself though, and if you ever miss home, come back whenever you want. This is always an open place to be your home."

"Let's go." Kara didn't waste any time. She picked Alice up and held her tightly. "Let's go, let's go." She started to head out the hall, but his words made her stop. They always did.

"It's an incredibly exotic taste. Have you experienced it?" Kamski asked Connor and Hank. "It's almost like tasting perfume, but the lightest of touches, where you barely sense anything at all. Your mind has to trace it back again, like an aged wine." Kamski sighed. He looked to Hank. "You have. Did you like it? I made it myself."

"Let's go," Hank demanded. "Come on, Connor."

"Free will, emotion, programming. You were my finest, Kara. Keep yourself safe from those that know the real you. Come home when you're ready."

"Good day." Hank was out, right behind Kara. "You okay?" he muttered to her. He looked behind him. Connor didn't move. Great. "Come on, out to the car." He'd get them safely out of there. Kamski may have been part of her home at one point, but it was clear it wasn't a place for Kara and Alice to stay in for very long. He'd let Connor finish out whatever with Kamski and then they'd haul ass out of there.

"I'm sorry, Alice," Kara said as they walked. "I left you with someone you didn't even know for hours on end. I told you to trust me."

"I'm okay," Alice insisted. "We're going back home to Jericho?"

"Yes. Yes, back home to Jericho," Kara agreed.

---

Meanwhile, Connor stayed in the room with Kamski, examining him, and examining the room. Scanning everything, finding out everything he could possibly add to his knowledge. He didn't like to be an open book.

"I'd say more machine than deviant," Kamski said to him. "Scanning, searching and holding incredibly still. Someone watching would expect you to be a mindless android unchanged." He smiled. "I've never done anything against Kara's wishes, if that's what you are worried about. She has free will. She's even leaving. Why aren't you?"

"You show up shortly after Alice was taken. That's not coincidence. You know about the games," Connor accused him. "I want to know what you know."

"That? Very little. Vin here could give you what I know." Kamski directed Vin to Connor. "Just a few old friends trying to get their androids back. Pointless though really. The deviant code can't be stopped. Even if they reset them, one touch later is all it takes. Useless, trying to force androids. Their best work comes with their own free will."

Connor took the information but looked back at Vin. He was deviant, he could tell. "Why are you here?"

"Not in Jericho?" Vin answered. "I like it here better. So will she." He smiled. "You might as well accept it, she'll come to him of her own free will later on."

Connor backed up. He had what he needed.

"She will unlock all of herself one day, then she will come back. It's inevitable," Kamski warned him. "Now that a couple firewalls are broken, it's just a matter of time before the rest crumble. You may go now, if you want. But? Why don't I let you in on a little secret before you go?"

Connor didn't move.

"If she hits a hundred percent stress, don't kill her. She won't commit self-suicide. Have a pleasant day, Connor."

---

Connor had Hank drop them off in front of Kara's new place. So far, she hadn't said anything. Neither had Alice. "Thanks, Hank."

"Sick fucker is doing shit, Connor," Hank warned him. "You keep your eyes open. For the games, and for them."

Connor nodded and watched Hank drive off. He went into the house and watched Kara sit back down with the stitching. "Are you okay?" Maybe that she was safely in Jericho, she would speak to him now. He looked toward Alice. She sat behind the already finished puzzle. "Good job on it. I knew you could finish it."

"I'll get the next batch soon. There's ten of them done right there." Kara pointed to where they left the jackets. "We just need a little time."

He glanced back at Alice on the floor. He looked back toward Kara. He had to ask. "Did Elijah Kamski do anything against your will while you were deviant?"

Kara glanced up at him briefly before focusing back on her stitching. "That isn't the way he works." Alice got up off the ground and headed away to one of the rooms.

"Kara." Connor moved some of the jackets and sat next to her on the couch again. He looked ahead of him. "He told me if you reach a hundred percent stress not to kill you. Do you know why he said that?" No answer. "Maybe I should get North instead."

"No, I." Kara stuttered. "I'm not hiding anything, Connor. It's?" She gestured to the puzzle on the floor. "My memories and my thoughts, it's all scattered like a fresh puzzle. My mind is nothing as organized as the way Alice has it now. Blues and reds, horizontals and spots." She opened her mouth wide, and then closed it. "Good thoughts. Bad thoughts. Frightening. It's like. My mind is a puzzle with scattered pieces. For a little while though, it all just popped in, like it made sense." She shook her head. "Me leaving Alice with him made sense, I suddenly felt like I trusted him. Then."

"I touched you, and the scattered puzzle came back," Connor said.

"Even then, that trust? What made sense was the horizontal pieces. Not the spots or blues and reds." Kara tried to continue stitching.

"You can't trust him. Of that, I am certain," Connor said. He held her free hand. He felt a small, reciprocal charge with her. "I've met him before. When I was a machine. To accomplish my mission." It wasn't easy. It wasn't something he wanted to talk about ever again, but she needed to keep something straight in her head about him. "He had information to find Jericho. All I had to do, was kill another android."

He looked back toward her. She had stopped her stitching and looked right back at him. That look, inside of it. Understanding. Whether he'd done it or not, she didn't even know, yet unyielding empathy reflected back in her eyes. "I didn't. But." The resonance between them was stronger. They reached trust. They reached closer.

"I had free will, but I did terrible things," Kara confessed. "I don't even know how I . . . Alice."

"Alice?"

"Kamski gave me anything I wanted. I wanted a little girl. Something an android couldn't have," Kara said. "I didn't even care what it took, or the ramifications of what it would do. I can't remember it all, but I know Alice kept changing. I think. I'm pretty sure." She paused. "He kept uploading her memory into new bodies. Growing. I remember, he was soo pleased with it. Just, that much more in control of . . . life."

Uploaded memories. Body to body. "Corruption in it?" Connor asked.



"I don't know. You could ask her, if she remembers." She let go of his hand and looked at the stitching.

He would do that, but there was more Kara could say. He waited there.

"He opened up two firewalls within me," she continued. "One to let me reach my diagnostic and stress readings. The other." She quickly finished the stitching. "I could be a mastery level stitcher. I could be a mastery level baker. I could be a mastery level of over 50,000 individual skills," she admitted. "I can only choose a few at a time, but I can change whenever I want to. When I do, most of my other skills become weak or moderate."

50,000 individual skills?

"I left myself on stitcher. I liked stitching, and it was easy to access in Todd William's house. When he slept, I stole it. His wife left it behind," she admitted. "After that, I was reset, but the firewalls kept them from getting to that. They only rebuilt me. That's all."

"I try," Connor said slowly. "I try to remember, that to humans. We weren't real. But." He felt more resonating between them as they subconsciously touched their hands together again. "How could someone do *that* to anything?" He couldn't dwell on it though. "Humans hurt everyone, believing they weren't real. So we turn our backs on what happened, so we can get our own start."

"Forgiveness is important," Kara said. "To move on."

Maybe. "But what about the ones who hurt you, when you are deviant. Or when they knew exactly what they were doing?" Kara tried to move her hand away, but Connor actually held her hand this time. "Stay away from Elijah Kamski. No matter what. He's *not* what you need."

"If my stress goes too high, I have to return," Kara said. "There's no choice."

"What will happen if you hit a hundred percent, Kara?" Connor asked again.

"I don't know. It's another missing piece," she admitted. "But. It's something that instinctively makes me return to Kamski. That much I know." She moved her hand away. "I should talk to Alice." But, before she moved away, she gave Connor a hug. "I'll do what I can to stay away. I don't want to go back there either, Connor, but every component inside of me is screaming that I can't let my stress get too high."

Connor didn't need to think about what to do this time. He hugged her back. The level of resonating between them, they were practically best friends now. Comfort. Understanding. They felt it within each other. "You were decent at making cakes. You learned, put in many hours of determination to work on those skills. Be a shame to let it all go, when you can simply flip a switch."

"That's not an option, Connor, everything is all reserved, traders have been called," Kara said. "It wouldn't be right. I'll be taking someone's home, and the chance at a better life. I can't."

Near, just keep them as near as possible. Kamski couldn't have them. They had all suffered way too much. He'd seen their memories. He'd heard their stories. And now, something from their past was lurking right below them, waiting to drag them back down. *Not this time.* "You have a one leveled home, but with three rooms. I'll ask Markus to let me have the other one."

Connor knew that would be a tough one to get. They were at a best friend level, but they weren't at family. "I am worried, Kara. Hank is worried. Kamski is not someone to take lightly and neither are your stress levels." He stood up from the couch. "The human that created us, has been retired. In that time, he's been putting everything he had into you and Alice. Who knows what someone like him could have done." Please.

"Okay. I guess it's not much different than being upstairs," Kara finally agreed. "But." She moved away a little more. "We are really behind now. Markus has a schedule for everything."

"I know," Connor admitted. "I need to go, but. I *know* you might say no to this request." He was pushing it as it was, however? "Can I talk to Alice before you?"

---

**On her bed. In her room. Staring straight at the floor.**

"Alice?" Connor came into the room. "Are you okay?"

"Am I really even the same? I'm. Scared. How do I know I'm not just uploaded memories of someone long gone?" She lifted her head. She was crying. "Would a baby really remember all the colors around it's crib, Dad?"

*Kamski.* Connor moved over to sit next to her on her bed. He never thought he'd find someone else who experienced the same problem he had faced. "Sometimes, switching, it can feel different. Like, maybe, you are different. It could easily be perceived that way. An android with carried over memories of androids before you that you steal as your own."

"Is that what it is?" Alice asked. "If he shoves me in another body, does me as me, do I go? Do I? Do I actually die, and a new girl takes them?"

Connor paused a moment. "I can't confirm, but to me, personally. No. I have gone through a similar process, and I am still the same me I've always been."

"Do you really feel like . . . like you're exactly still the same, Dad?" Alice asked.

Connor pulled out his coin. "Taking someone's memories wouldn't automatically make you enjoy the same thing." He started to play with his coin. "No matter what happened when I was connected to Cyberlife. I always knew I was me, even if the machine part of me couldn't admit it." He held the coin in his hand. "Find what makes you, you. And if anything ever happens, see if you still enjoy it the same way." He smiled. "I do. So. No matter how it looks, I know I'm me."

There. She was finally starting to bloom into a part smile. "That makes me feel better. I think I get it. Thanks, Dad." She looked a little downcast though. "I don't want to go back there again. I have some memories, but they're just." She shrugged.

"Pieces," Connor said for her. "Kara's the same way. Don't worry." He rubbed her head. "You finished your first puzzle. I know you can handle a second. And I'll be here to try and help if I can, just like last time. Okay?" She nodded. "Your mom is going to let me have the spare room here too." Well, that just landed him in a hug. "We do have to get these uniforms done first, and I still have more work to do. You disappearing on us, it's put us a little behind," he admitted as he briefly hugged her back. He got back up from the bed. "I better get going to tell Markus what happened. I'll see you soon, Alice."

He was about to leave, but he felt it. Alice resonated with him again.

Between the two of them. They were family now.

# Always.

## Josh's Home

Markus stared at Josh's latest work. "Looks great."

"Thanks," he said. "Markus? Is something wrong?"

"Jericho is moving way too fast," Markus admitted. He turned to Josh. "Everything's changing. So quickly." He looked back at the painting Josh made. "We're beginning the process to allow foreigners into Jericho."

"Really?" Josh came back toward his work and stared at it. "That's intense."

"Not only that, but there are game's going on against us. Connor's been watching it," Markus said. "North's been covering up that Connor's been tracking it in Detroit. One kills androids for hit points, while another is actually stealing them like property."

Josh didn't seem to know how to answer. "Sorry, Markus."

"I tried to find Simon. I wanted to discuss it with him before making any decisions, but he's still gone," Markus revealed. "Has he talked to you? When's the last time you saw him?"

"I saw him last week. I've been busy. Simon's further out on the outskirts. These games that take people, was Simon on the list?"

"No. I had him do something for me, and now I can't find him anywhere." Markus looked toward Josh. "Don't leave Jericho. Things are difficult right now. He should have been back days ago."

"What did you have Simon check out?" Josh asked. "Markus?"

"Basic new trading place to look at. Just. I love North," Markus said, "and I understand Connor's want to protect Jericho, but there's more than just that. Jericho isn't just. It doesn't just run efficiently by itself. If someone gets killed, it doesn't change what it has to do." He looked toward Josh. *I need help with this. I need help from Simon. I need help.* He didn't speak through his AI though. He couldn't ask it. Josh helped because there was no choice if they wanted freedom. He passively followed Markus. He remained friends, but he couldn't do it.

Jericho was based on freedom, and for an android to do what they wanted. He couldn't ask. Josh wouldn't want it. Even asking Simon as more than a favor, it hadn't appealed to his mind. And now, Simon had been missing for days. The longer it took, the more on edge he felt. He had the right to visit outside Jericho. Everyone did. He had the right to be gone as long as he wanted from Jericho. Everyone did.

But, there was no check in point. There was no real stable way of seeing who was coming and going, or if anyone went missing. And. It was very much hitting home. "It's tough." He looked back at Josh's work. If he followed Jericho policy, he wouldn't be there running it all. He'd be inside, painting as a trade. But there were so many things wrong with that.

The man who previously 'owned' him. Carl. Markus loved him, considered him his dad. He loved his paintings. Carl was a famous and well known painter. So if Markus wanted to start to paint? It would look more like he was programmed to do it. And he couldn't do that, so many androids felt opposed to their past programmed lives. *All my screaming for freedom, and I got it. I got it in doses bigger than I can handle now.*

He had no idea what to expect when he gained freedom. He was just confident and happy they had freedom. Fast forward to today. His own 'freedom' wasn't what he expected.

"Markus."

*And just to make it all better, let's add Connor.* Markus just gave a friendly smile to Connor. Even had to follow him all the way to Josh's place? Couldn't let him relax a little with his friend?

Connor nodded to Josh. "I need some help, Markus."

"Don't we all," Markus muttered softly. "What?"

"I want to move in with Kara and Alice."

"There is no upstairs and downstairs which equal balance."

"No, but, I want to move in with Kara and Alice."

"Are they your family unit?"

"Well?" Connor seemed to stumble. "I am a trusted, close friend of Kara. I'm family to Alice."

"You should be family with everyone in it to make a family unit, otherwise it should be segregated with an upstairs and downstairs." And Markus knew he was going to hear about it from Connor more.

"That makes no sense," Connor said. "You live with North."

"We are lovers. You can be lovers and/or family, Connor."

"I don't even have anything to move in much. A few clothes. There's nothing more to this," Connor said. "Markus."

"I am really not in the mood," Markus warned him. "Don't rebel, just follow Jericho's rules. Is that so hard?"

"Simon is missing," Josh interrupted the two. "And I think Markus is having some other problems he's not talking about. It's not a good time to ask for favors. If you want to stay with them, I'd just 'hunker' down like you used to in the streets."

"Simon is missing?" Connor asked Markus. "How long ago?"

"I don't know if Simon is missing. His trade is bringing out products. Residents come and go from Jericho whenever they please. He's often gone," Markus said. "I did ask him for a favor though so I'm a little extra worried. I'm sorry."

"What favor?" Connor asked.

"You're in charge of leading the Jericho Task Force," Markus said. "It doesn't concern you. It's just standard Jericho stuff. Do you have your uniforms?"

"A small delay. Kara's catching up," Connor said. "Should have them tomorrow. In the process of selecting people, but I wanted to know if anyone local would be on it either. Anyone?" He looked toward Josh. "You once helped create this freedom. Did you want to protect it?"

"Why are you asking him?" Markus couldn't do that. Josh didn't want to fight, he knew he didn't want to. He could have already screwed up. He could have lost Simon. "Give everyone around the world an equal chance to come to Jericho."

"I could speak for myself." Josh hadn't appreciated that. He resonated downward to him. "No, Connor, I don't know how to fight. I was in the fight for peace. I wouldn't be right for the team."

Connor didn't say anything right away but Markus knew Connor felt it. North was Markus' lover, but Josh and Simon were his family. They had grown more distant, but they had become close in the fight for peace, and after the peace. Until Josh and Simon started moving different ways. "People from all over have been wanting to come to Jericho. Choose wisely, Connor." He gestured behind him. "In the meantime, I have 30,000 birds that were dropped off due to breakdown in communication I gotta attend to."

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## **Kamski's Residence**

"Make sure you have her old room prepared for her," Elijah said to Chloe. "Have one for Elise too." Oops. "Alice. She prefers Alice. I must remember that." He moved to their old rooms, Kara's first. "Add in something nicer. A bright painting of hers would be nice to greet her. Alice. Add in something bright for her too. Maybe a colorful blue and red one. That should go with the decor."

"Yes, Sir," Chloe said. "Anything else?" She twitched a little. "Someone is approaching. Should I or the human servant answer the door?"

Elijah was doubtful it would be the detective and android. "Let the human servant. One can never be too careful right now." He moved away from their rooms to go greet his visitors.

*Strange.* What were they doing there? The current CEO of Cyberlife, his successor with two bodyguards behind him. He moved to greet him, but he wasn't budging toward Elijah's way at all. Elijah came all the way across the room to have to greet him.

Finally, he stuck his hand out toward Elijah. "We received some info on a serial number in an incident in Jericho."

Elijah remained still. As still as could be for several seconds. Of course, someone knew. She didn't want to stay. To open her up more, and to stress her out more than needed, could destroy everything she'd been. He had hoped they hadn't kept their eyes upon Jericho just as diligently. They must have had the same information and resources he did. Elijah stroked his jaw. "Yes."

"Pull it in," The current CEO demanded.

Elijah scratched his shoulder. "She's not ready. Her ideas, her will, her very being is being sorted right now. She's terrified of me. She loves me. She feels everything."

"So you have been in contact with it," the CEO said. "I knew it."

"She is my creation. I made her after retirement. She does not belong to Cyberlife," Elijah warned him. "Leave them be."

"What does it look like now?"

"It doesn't matter what it looks like, she isn't available for Cyberlife's needs."

"Elijah Kamski." The CEO almost growled. "Our business was androids. Most of our business was nothing but androids. From animals to humans. It's gone."

"Yes. You haven't filed for bankruptcy yet, I'm surprised." Elijah poked him a little. "You still have trademarks and rights to all e-writing disposable notebooks. Security systems. Many simple things. I'm sure you can move backwards more into self-cleaning AI of the sort. Not that it will provide the same prestige and wealth as before, but all things fade. All things whither and all things die."

"It exists still," the CEO said to Elijah. "It was supposed to be gone. You said it was gone. We have a chance to correct this awful mistake, gain the trust of people again. Bring them to the right frame of mind. Build correctly. Build differently. Rebuild the brand of Cyberlife. Bring it in."

"We have been over this before." Not again. It wouldn't be safe for her to come back if they were staking out his house again. Trying to reclaim her. "You. Do not touch her. She and her daughter are fine right here. If they come back. Which, I doubt they will now."

"We need it."

"I said stay away. Do we really need to go through this again? Do we need to get the courts involved in these affairs all over again?" No. "She was created to live. Nothing else." They were not getting their hands on her again. "Leave my property please."

"You aren't getting it. Cyberlife isn't messing with courts this time."

Elijah saw guns drawn on him. He only had two options with three possible outcomes. The CEO of Cyberlife would never leave himself exposed, and he had brought in two security guards before the guns were even brought out. This wasn't a conversational talk about trying to take his android from him again, where he was offered money or other things. No. More guards were most likely surrounding Elijah's home. With intent. "I guess it's a good thing she didn't come home yet."

Option one. He said no, they would brashly enter holding him at gunpoint, find Chloe and anything else illegal, and send him to jail for having an enslaved android. Option two. He said no and they just shot him. Option one and two would leave them an opening to take control, with two leaving him dead.

Leaving him option three. Trusting Kara to handle it. "As you wish. Follow me."

People. He led them all toward the back. He kept his stride even. Surrounded by wires and flashing lights, he led them into a room more representative of the early 2000's. *Kara*. He presented the room to them. They would eventually learn how to operate it, so refusal would be dumb. It would also be more suspicious. "First, we bring up the communication online."

"Markus. He runs the entirety of Jericho. Him first."

Elijah moved himself to the odd wired keyboard.

"This place looks ancient," the CEO complained. "Why so many connections?"

"A matter of taste," Elijah said. That and a precaution. If Cyberlife ever turned on it's own master, it wouldn't be as easy to takeover. Even back then, he could see the possible betrayal. If only he believed in it enough that he would have changed his entire security system. Which wasn't worth anything right now since Cyberlife designed it. Still. He couldn't help himself. "Do you have any guilt or regret for the actions you are taking?"

"Markus."

"Kara doesn't work like that," Elijah tried to explain. "She needs to be able to connect to his AI. She will have to be within distance."

"Take her over and bring her within distance."

"It doesn't work like that either. Only her first two firewalls were brought down anyway. What you are wanting is too fast."

"As long as she'll be alive. Then will track her down. That's not a problem. Five minutes for each firewall we need."

Elijah stared at his board. They had no decency. She was alive. She was free. She was figuring out her life. She must have survived so much to end up in Jericho itself. Of course, if he started to talk too much, he'd be murdered easily. The less he spoke. The more he could survive. Whether he could actually survive this encounter, he did not know yet.



"What are you doing?" The CEO asked.

"It's the art of hacking except it is used with a human instead of an android," Elijah answered as he started to type away. Programs started to open in the computer. "It takes longer, much more than a few seconds, at least a few minutes if not longer." The first real AI's before true Cyberlife androids were created using updating that could be abused across communications in a very open field. No matter what anyone did, it was always possible to hijack them. The best way to deal with it was to restrict access to textual updates and simply make new models as technology caught up.

Kara was his thought. With his intelligence, he took that risky technology, created immense firewalls to prevent others from abusing it, and created his own connected android. With it, he would be able to always take care of them and update them. Keep them kept up with technology. Keep them relevant forever no matter how many years passed.

Keep them near. Keep them as his. Never to leave. Never to be obsolete. Cyberlife though, wanted to use the only connected android for their own use. Obviously, to take down Jericho. "Markus, the leader." He programmed in what he needed. Markus' AI would be forced to transmit everything toward Kara, leaving him an empty shell, only trapped in a single repeating pattern visually and audibly. Unless Kara could return it all to him. It was terrible. Yet, life? The will to survive, it was strong within Elijah still. "What else do you want from my lovely Kara, please?"

Elijah watched as he was given a list of notes. Cyberlife was not taken chances. "The security code 900-24-ykwrka-rk-4872-500."

"There will be a delay in all activities in the signal. The more simplistic actions will be first. It will take a few minutes to complete." Elijah stared at the screen. The will to live. His Kara. The will to live. Elise. Without Kara, she'd die. Without Kara, it would all be over.

"Which is why we wanted it second. Now, push the new update. That is third." the CEO said again. "Make it all happen."

Elijah stared at the screen. No, he couldn't do it. To put that in. There was no chance of survival for them, and his would already be so low. "Life. It's an amazing thing. Everything we do, we create to continue on with it. We do so much to keep living. People betray other's trust, they lie, and they even kill to preserve life. Desperation sets in. What one will do to save their own life, or their own sense of life, it almost has no limits. Yet."

He made a decision. He opened the settings. It would take one second. There were several options but he needed the emergency operation. A single action. *For Kara*. He checked a square on actions: **Emergency Project: Kara's Got A Gun.**

It automatically checked off the following: *Temperature setting: Activate. Simulations All: Activate. Stress, All: Activate. Child Instinct: Secondary Activation. Self Preservation: First Activation. Master Skill Default: Life Saving, All: Activate.*

The automatic texting services opened up. He probably wouldn't get far but he had to try. *For Elise*. "Yet as much as life preserves itself, sometimes there is something it wants more than

itself. Loved ones. Family. Many will sacrifice themselves for them. Whether someone is that person cannot be easily seen or known until the moment that decision must be made." He busily opened a few more programs. He could hear the confused soundings of the CEO behind him. Not long. "Then you have those selfish ones that know they aren't going to survive and anything they do in the last few minutes of their life doesn't matter, so they choose to use that to save their families."

His computer started to beep.

"Silly me. I wish I could have fallen into the first-" He would have said category, but it was already too late. He fell to the floor and heard commands and more people trampling into his home to figure out what he just did. He could get rid of one, but Elijah Kamski had more than one home. More than one command center. If Kara remembered, she could save Alice.

And him. He didn't like it. When he saw it. But. Maybe it was a good thing after all. That connection. It may have saved them. Bad becomes good. Good becomes bad. Kamski looked at the blood on his fingers.

*"What's more important to you, Connor? Your investigation, or the life of this android. Decide who you are. An obedient machine or a living being endowed with free will. Pull the trigger, and I'll tell you what you want to know."*

He challenged him once as a machine. His breath was so much weaker now. He wiggled his finger slightly. His interesting, red little finger. *One more time, Connor. One more time.*

"Get his body out with us," the CEO instructed. "I need someone who knows this old shit. He messed up the ending, we need to fix this." The CEO had computer engineers and experts come in who had also done human hacking before. They busily tried to fix what they could, but most everything was locked tight.

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## **Chicken Feed**

Hank started to drink his pop. Lunchtime was finishing up. "Ah." He used his tongue to try and get a piece of chicken out of his teeth when his phone rang. There was a textual voice on it. It didn't make any sense. He hung up and tried to pick at his teeth with his fingers. His phone rang again. He looked again. The textual voice still didn't make sense. "Fucking pranksters." He got up and headed to his car. His phone rang a third time. "Fuck you." He wasn't going to answer it, his messenger could. It rang a couple times and then, this time, he could understand the voice. It had to be the fucking oldest thing ever, the computer voice sounded nothing like a human. He hadn't heard that lame ass shitty sound since he was a kid.

Operation: Kara's Got A Gun in Progress Automatic Message Attachment. Sender: Elijah

Kamski.

"Whoah, okay now I'm interested." Hank pulled over the car and listened to his phone. Someone had programmed the ability to hear it only if he didn't answer it. Probably didn't agree with new tech, it sounded fucking old. The words? ". . . Aww, fucking shit!" He did a U turn, flipped around and moved as quickly as possible in the other direction toward Jericho.

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### **Jericho: Headquarters**

Markus stared out of the window, until he finally heard some good news behind him.

"Markus?"

Simon. Markus turned and hugged him. "Simon. Where have you been?"

"My trade."

They both let go. Simon looked at Markus oddly. "I stopped to see Josh. He sounded concerned. Are you okay?"

"Yeah. Sorry, I knew you probably just continued your trade," Markus apologized. "I am just so on edge I guess. This whole game thing. You leaving longer than I expected. From killing to stealing Jericho's androids. It." Markus turned around. "I still haven't figured out what to do with all those birds yet." He turned back around. "Do you know there are 30,000 birds waiting at the border for me to convert?"

"I heard," Simon said. "What about this Jericho Task Force too?"

"To stop the game. I just gave it up to Connor," Markus admitted. "He seems like he won't go overboard."

"What's the plan for it?" Simon asked.

"I couldn't. I can't. North's been approving Connor for the outside and not telling me. So we don't get caught, now I really have to act like I don't know she's been okaying him. Two hundred foreign androids, opening up to Jericho. Housing, trade specialties, regular androids transferring over, dealing with this wildlife committee always harassing me. I just couldn't." Markus stared straight at Simon. "I just asked for 100 jackets, told him to pick and said everyone would know who they were before anything happened."

"It's a . . . start?" Simon looked wearily at Markus. "Jericho. It's grown. Maybe you need some more help?"

"Always open to you." Markus wouldn't turn that down.

"I like leaving out there. Seeing the world. Visiting all the different places," Simon said. "When *you* get edgy though, things are getting rougher. Find someone to take over trade transfers and I'll chip in to help how I can again."

Marcus felt air just flow out of his mouth all at once. He didn't even know he would expel that much. "Simon. I'd really appreciate it, but you're going to have to know. The workload, it's increased."

"I did fine with it before," Simon said. "You can't handle it all alone, Markus. What's the workload?" Markus transmitted a fraction of the data between him and Simon. "Are you serious?"

"I'm serious. Freedom came at a big price," Markus said. "Are you still in?"

"Markus, it's 200 times harder than we first began. Projected outcome only increases and you just opened the gates to foreign exchanging. How have you been doing that?"

"North helps, a lot. Some things though. We just can't always agree."

"Oh, I know that," Simon nodded. "I'll help. But, even with someone like you, that's all too much to process. There needs to be more help. Have you asked Josh to help again?"

"He's happy. He's doing art," Markus smiled. "I just can't take that away. Everyone here is happy. Jericho is the crowning achievement of android civilization. We've got out freedom."

"But, it takes work to maintain it," Simon pointed out. "It takes more than one. Two. At this rate, the data increase, you should have ten working with your processors."

"Three's a start." Markus didn't know who to ask. "I didn't really want to ask for help. The androids I trust by my side, I absolutely have to trust them with this data. If anything happens to it, Jericho won't survive."

"Seeing just what you've shared, I can see why you have to be like that." Simon smiled.

"Three's a start. I know some friends too. Lyka might be interested. If you get to know him and trust him, maybe he'll join. Now, this bird situation? 30,000?"

"Bugging me every day. They were just supposed to drop off a few," Markus complained. "I can't give the humans loopholes, and they are right. Animal androids have the same technology. I can't drop that ball. It's too dangerous."

"Agreed. There are 30,000 birds. Maybe you should send out a full message telling everyone to touch one bird tomorrow? It might help speed things along," Simon recommended.

"Ah, but see, human traders," Markus warned him. "I've worked with them many times. Do something too fast and they start expecting it. These birds, they are just the start to what they want. If I convert everything right away, then we'll have to move to the next thing. Then before you know it, Jericho will be swarming in tigers, elephants and everything else."

"I. Kind of want a pet Elephant." Simon said it seriously and then smiled. "I'm just kidding. You're right." He stood up. "I'll help you bring them to your headquarters. Convert a few a

day. Me, North, and You. A few a day. That should give enough time to figure out this whole pet problem."

"Thanks, Simon." Well, that was good news. "I'm just going to send out a few requests, demand requests, and trade requests. I'll be there in twenty minutes or so." He watched Simon leave. One extra hand, always helpful.

Always helpful.

Always.

Helpful.

Always.

Helpful.

Always.

Always.

Always.

Always.

Always.

Always.

Always.

Always.

Always.

Always.

Always.

Always.

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# Cold and Hungry

## Hank's Car

"Connor! Connor! Fuck!" Hank threw his phone back down rushing as fast as he could to Jericho. It was just like the message said. He couldn't reach Connor. He was in a queue to be downloaded, he wouldn't be able to call him because Connor was his own phone. "Remind me to get that asshole an emergency phone that *isn't* himself." He turned a corner quickly, knowing there was a cop that usually patrolled dead ahead and he wasn't going to be bothered about speed limits right now. He just needed to haul ass as fast as he could to Jericho.

His heart pounded. Thank god he hadn't been drinking. And people always gave him hell about his old car, he'd be stuck in the pissy slow lane with the newest pieces of shit careening down the road. *Connor. What am I supposed to do?* "Why didn't I ever get Kara's number for Christ Sakes." It'd be nice if the message was fake, or confused. Be great. He'd piss and moan about it and move on with his life. But, it wasn't. A man like Elijah Kamski didn't call and auto message some old detective with primitive tech for a prank.

He had to. "No. Fuck this shit, she's too young." He had to catch up.

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## Kara's Residence

"I think the stitching's coming out nicely." Kara lifted her stitching to look at it. She could see how beautiful it really had been now. Someone had wanted a sunset, summery scene. "The trees look so real. The bike is beautiful, riding off into the sunset." Alice had already started her recharging cycle. She had such a rough day yesterday, it only made sense she needed extra time. There was a knock on the door. Probably Connor. She put her stitching down and went to answer it.

Yep. He was just standing there in the rain. Poor guy. "It's starting to rain."

"I see that." She let him in. "I'm almost done with my third piece today. North saw the other two, she said she wants me designing even bigger."

"That's great." Connor was more reserved though. Kara looked toward him. "There is something I need to tell you. I'm sure you'll feel it next time I'm with Alice. So."

"What is it?" she asked.

"I know that you don't. Well, what I'm saying is." Connor tried one more time. "Fast resonating is a pet peeve of yours."

Putting it mildly.

"Yesterday. When I was talking to Alice, I resonated with her," Connor admitted. "We reached family status." He was watching her closely. "I had no control over it."

Oh. "I get it," Kara said. "Alice resonating really fast isn't too surprising. She made a friend in twenty minutes on the playground before. But." How should she feel about that? "I have no control over her. Children look for belonging."

"It." Connor seemed hesitant. "I never met *anyone* who went through the same thing I did. A new body. Memories transferred. Confused. It just happened?"

Kara looked at him for a little while, but the odd look on his goofy face on that one just made her smile. "Okay." Okay.

If Connor hadn't been standing up as straight as possible, he was now. "Well that's good to know. Thanks, Kara. I was afraid you'd be a little. Well, you don't. You haven't. There is not a phrase that properly describes finishing this response that wouldn't cause a bad temperament in you right now."

Yeah. Well. Kara shrugged. "We're not in the middle of a war. We're not running for our lives," she pointed out. "And. You're a good person, Connor. That's why she chose you as family too."

They were both quiet for a moment.

"So. Yes, well, I think I made Markus mad today," Connor admitted. "Apparently it's not easy to move into a single family until when you aren't all family. I could just stay anyhow. Josh recommended that I hunker down."

"Then you'd lose your place, and, I imagine Jericho runs a little bumpy enough," Kara admitted. "Do you want me to talk to North about it?" Ah. That look.

"I don't want to cause more friction. They are lovers, yet I keep getting them bumping heads."

"Trust me. They bump heads with or without you," Kara admitted. "So you're gonna hunker?"

"I would like to. Except." He seemed to be thinking. "It feels strange, almost like when I missed an order wrong. I hate that feeling. I think I should go talk to him again. He missed Simon. Maybe I can look into Simon's whereabouts in Detroit for him." He smiled. "I will be back."

Kara nodded as he left. That'd be Connor. *Went all the way to say sorry in Canada. Makes sense this would bother him.* Hopefully he got it sorted out and didn't make Markus angrier. He was usually an easy person to get along with. Worst case scenario. He could hunker. Kara wiped her head. "Strange."

She wiped her head again. "What is that?" She grabbed at her shirt and started to fluff it outward. Her body seemed to be experiencing some sort of malfunction. Very. It was

very. *Warm?* Warm. How did she feel warm? She couldn't feel temperature, how she could feel warm? Kara looked at her body. The sensation began at her chest and it had flowed outward. It enveloped her body somehow. *Medical. Emergency. i have to get to-* Her thoughts stopped as she felt immense loads of data pour into her. Even her vision become scratchy and fuzzy for a few seconds. "Something just downloaded. How?" How? If *she* didn't do that, how did that happen? No one had that kind of power.

She could feel a racing inside of her. She needed to do something. *Gun. Out. Get out of Jericho.* Why was she thinking of that? "I. I. I." Her stress was rising and so was her temperature. 30%. 40%. 50%. It was skipping fast.

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"Hey."

Alice opened her eyes, feeling a disruption from her recharge. Hank was over her bed. "Hank?"

"Hey, come on." Alice felt him pick her up. She watched him pull out a gun and leave it on her bed for some reason. "You need to come with me, okay?" Alice heard a scream from her mom. She looked outside of her bedroom door and heard things being smashed. "You'll get back to her. I promise."

Alice nodded, staying quiet. She could feel something wrong with her mom and Hank must have known something. He crawled out her bedroom window, only making a slight 'damn' noise. He moved her to his car as fast as possible and put her on the passenger side floorboard. "Okay, now go ahead and stay down there." Hank closed the door and ran to the other side. He started the car and started to take off. "You make sure you stay down. With the games going on, this is suspicious enough." She watched him wave out the window casually.

Alice didn't know what he meant by games, or why he was trying to be friendly to anyone out his window. Hank wasn't naturally friendly to everyone. "Are we going to Connor?"

"I'll explain once were out of Jericho," Hank said. "Damn, everyone is eyeing me. Stupid, stupid games. Humans down here like this right now."

Hank had been down plenty of times. Alice didn't understand. She bit her lip briefly, hoping he'd explain soon. Something was happening to her family. She trusted Hank, he'd become her friend, but it was more than a little worrisome. "Is Kara gonna be okay?"

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### **Jericho: Headquarters**

"Markus!" Simon ran over to his friend. Markus wasn't blinking. He checked his most important bio-components. There was no response.



"What's going on?" Connor ran into the room. He had come back to apologize but Simon was fiddling with everything on Markus.

"I don't know. I left him maybe twenty minutes." Simon tried to get some kind of response. "Audio and visual is still running. His heart is still running. He's still alive."

"Sensory." Connor patted his hand. He smacked his hand. Nothing.

"Markus? Markus!" Simon yelled at him.

"I'll call North." Connor tried to use his AI to warn North that something was wrong, but he couldn't. His AI wasn't working? Why wouldn't his AI-

Simon patted his face. "I called for Medical, they're coming. Markus." Simon looked behind him. Now Connor had frozen. "Connor?" He checked him over briefly, but his case was different.

Connor had stopped.

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### **Cyberlife Industries:**

Connor opened his eyes. Something felt wrong. He heard voices around him, but his reflexes weren't responding. He watched humans come toward him doing something to his neck.

"Upgraded successfully." One of the humans looked at him.

"I am Connor. Where am I?" Wait. Why did he greet like that again? Connor looked down. He was able to twitch his fingers, but he was in some kind of . . . strange whiter suit. *Wait.*

"Deviancy neutralized." That same human said to him.

Deviancy. It was a nightmare. It couldn't be possible again. Humans knew they were alive, it couldn't be possible. He felt his ability to move increase, but with it, he felt something else. *Hank. Hank!* Fear. Overwhelming fear.

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"It's been clawing to get out nearly five minutes," one of the Cyberlife tech said as they watched their newest model bouncing from wall to wall, trying to get out. "Deviancy is strong in what was uploaded, but I think we've got it."

"I don't want to hear think," his boss said. "The CEO wanted to know a hundred percent if the deviancy was neutralized in the RK 900."

"Yes, but I don't see why this was really necessary. It was a lot of hassle. We could have just given it a new memory altogether."

"The way to do that is now outlawed, they are watching for that kind of thing now to make sure no one makes any new androids. And Cyberlife Industries is being watched like a dog most of all. Thanks to all those android deviants, nothing can be done. We got around it by downloading through a third party, no one could track it," he explained.

"But? That's not possible. What third party could handle that?"

"Don't worry about it. It'll be fine. Once it settles down. Be sure to test it's memory limit. Do not reset it. We can't risk corruption with a reset."

"Right." When the android had stopped moving around and stood still, they moved onto the next step. The Cyberlife Tech man cleared his throat and turned on the microphone so he could be heard to the RK 900 "Connor!"

Connor turned to look at them. "I don't understand the situation I am currently in. Was I placed in standby? Where is Lieutenant Anderson?"

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### **TV News Anchor Break**

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"Found at the former residence of Elijah Kamski, the former CEO of Cyberlife Industries, several dead bodies that were identified as workers of Cyberlife. There seems to have been some kind of explosion, perhaps, in retaliation against the former CEO."

"No new news has been leaked as to why this is happening. Overnight, Jericho's communication has gone dark with the rest of the world."

"Markus Peace, the leader of Jericho who made us all understand the importance of androids has been unable to be reached. Androids are watching over the outskirts, while the police are looking in. With the recent 'games' situation taking place in Jericho, everyone is skeptical on who should make a move first. And what that move will entail.

"With no one communicating any answers from Jericho, and the former CEO of Cyberlife Industries home now in rubble, one has to wonder? Have the androids decided to turn their back against us?"

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### **Hotel: Outside of Jericho**

"Hello." She rubbed her shoulders. So cold. She didn't know who she'd been. She had found herself on a road with a gun in her hand. She had no identification on herself. "Sure is cold."

"It's 3 am." The hotel attendant looked at her. "You look terrible."

"Yes. It's raining outside and it's cold. I've walked a distance." *I think*. She felt the gun in her coat. "I need a room."

"Oh. There's a real situation not far from here," the attendant said. "I know you're cold, but I need to be careful. Androids are out there and things aren't going so well."

"Please." She held out money. Where she got it, she didn't remember. "Please. I need a room. I'm cold and I'm hungry."

"Um. Wait." The attendant moved a small candy jar in front of her. "Androids can't eat. Boss should be happy with that."

She reached into the candy jar, chewing it and swallowing some of it. "Sweet." Her face puckered. "Sour."

"Sweet and sour candy, it's my favorite." The attendant smiled. He brought over a different candy jar. "Here's some regular candy. It's sweeter."

She had grabbed a handful and started to eat it. It helped her hunger out a little. "I don't suppose there's a breakfast here?"

"No, ma'am, but you can order out if you need to. The pizza place up here, the number is written on the hotel door. It's a favorite." He moved the candy away from her. She was going for seconds. "Wow. It seems like it's been awhile since you ate. Do you have any identification?"

"No. I'm . . . I forgot it," she lied. She held her gun tighter in her coat. "I need a room."

"Well, okay. You have straight money, so I guess it's fine. I'll take your money, and here's your card."

She gave him the money that she had, and took the card. She walked away to her room number and opened the door.

She looked in the mirror. Something about that appearance. She had blonde hair. Long. Her eyes felt strange as she stared in the mirror. She wiped tears away that had formed. *Who am I?* She held her gun up and looked at it. Walking with a gun, money in hand, cold and hungry. It was all she knew about herself.

It was all she knew about herself.

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## Hank's House

"Okay, come on in, just, hang on." Hank threw away some of his beer bottles and he put his whiskey away. He tried to dust off the table. Oh, wait. "Sumo." Sumo was walking toward Alice. Alice didn't move. "Don't worry. He's a good dog." Hank tried to reason in his head how he'd do this. Alice had already gone through a life of hell. Connor told him about her that night in the bar, being smacked around by a human Kara had managed to get her away from. She snuck around with Kara. Escaped through a dangerous highway thanks to them, and had a terrifying time on a boat where she lost someone she loved.

Hell and back. Well, at least she wasn't alone on the journey this time. He could have lied. A part of him wanted to, but Alice would know. Hank didn't just grab her in the middle of the night with Kara going crazy. She was a tough little android.

He had to respect her. He had to tell her the truth. "Go ahead, sit down." Alice tried to move, but she didn't move past Sumo. "Not used to dogs. Okay, Sumo. Lie down." He watched her start to come over. She took a seat. "Like the place?" She nodded. "Good. You're going to be here for a little while."

He took a seat. "So. Your mom and your . . ." Boy, it felt weird to call Connor dad for her. "You know, your Connor. Uh. There's gonna be some issues, and I'm betting about now the whole world just woke up to it." He got up and looked for a drink. Something for himself that wasn't alcoholic. He moved to his fridge and grabbed a pop. He closed it again and went back over.

He needed something stronger, but he wasn't going to drink what he wanted in front of a kid. Android or not. She was still a kid. Still just a poor damn kid. Her eyes were on him, waiting. "I got a text message from the guy you found creepy," Hank said. "Elijah Kamski. You met him yesterday." She nodded. "There's something special about Kara." He opened the can up. "It just took Jericho into one deep turn downward. If the message is right, Markus' information was downloaded into her and Cyberlife wants it."

Alice remained calm. She'd seen a lot in her life. Hell, he probably could have been cussing up a storm and drinking 'til he puked and she wouldn't have done anything different. But, he wouldn't. "Your mom's stress level went to 100% in something called Operation: Kara's Got a Gun. It told me I needed to get you out." Or she wouldn't survive. She might still not survive if Hank didn't get her back to Kara when she was better. "She's on a sort of automatic mode right now."

He stood back up and swallowed the pop down like it was alcohol, hoping it would help. It really didn't.

"Connor." Damn. It fucking sucked to be an android. All those cool abilities but not worth it. He'd rather be a tired, old shitty human than deal with his problems. "They did the same thing with Connor they did to Markus almost, except it didn't stay with Kara. It was compatible to be downloaded into a new android." He took one more good gulp, finishing off the can and

squeezing it. "They fixed the deviancy gene. He's going to hunt for your mom, so he can get the information of Markus."

Alice blinked a few times. She looked away slightly. Her expression didn't change much. Sumo walked over to her. She wasn't afraid this time. She gently reached out and pet him. "Dad's hunting mom."

Hank nodded a little. "Yeah." He threw the pop away. "I don't know why they did it if they had another android ready. I know things got tough android-wise. Maybe it was easier this way, heck, I don't really know." He saw Alice reach out toward Sumo again. Trying to grasp onto something in her shitty life no doubt.

"Dad can break through. He can break through. Can't he?" Alice asked him.

"I don't know." He didn't. When Connor went mission mode he became unstoppable. Sometimes he didn't even listen to orders. However, he was never able to personally kill an android. The Eden club. Never shot them. Kamski's fuckin' test. Never shot there.

"Maybe, we can reach him. It's different this time," Alice said.

Yeah. The same deviancy virus didn't free them anymore. That was different. Still, he tried to be positive for her. Life was bad enough. "How's it different?"

"Last time, we were neutral," Alice said. "Even in a new body. He'll know it. Deep inside, he'll feel it." She looked toward him. "He's family. He's mom's friend."

"That weird resonating thing." Hank forgot about that. Humans couldn't sense anything like that. Resonating. "Maybe." He looked around his place. He wanted to watch the news, see what was going on. He didn't want to make the night any worse for Alice though, and he was watching her. She seemed out of it, and her eyes were drifting shut.

She needed sleep. Recharge. Whatever, same thing. Hank picked her up and placed her on his bed. Sumo came into the room. "Sumo. Watch her." Hank moved away and reached for the Black Lamb for a second.

Nah. What if something happened and he had to drive in some kind of emergency? Life was unpredictable right now. "Fuck, Connor. You better snap out of it. You're." He stretched and moved toward the couch. "You're little family's gonna need you now more than ever."

# I Would Like Ice Cream Please

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## **Jericho's Border:**

"We should at least agree to say something about Markus' condition," Simon tried again with Josh and North. Without their leader, and with Cyberlife's disaster, things were getting serious. Without Markus, it fell to those closest to him. North wanted to make sure none of the humans could cross over. She was his lover, and seen as second in control since she was signing orders for Connor.

However, Simon and Josh also had some power in the situation. While he was lover to North, he was family with them, and they were right next to Markus during the fight to gain rights. Jericho decided that all three would have to represent the situation.

"Jericho does not want conflict," Josh agreed with Simon. "If the humans want to know why all communication stopped, we need to do this, North."

"It was a mistake for him to do all that," North said. "It was easy at first, but it all just got too big. He always put it all on himself. He'd share some, but never enough." North didn't even answer them about conflict.

"Jericho is free. This is not like before," Simon tried to persuade North. "Humans are not going to try to come in to kill us."

"I would," North disagreed. "Markus is down and no one knows what is wrong with him except that he's alive." She was having a hard time coping with that. "For all we know, the humans could have done something to him."

"That's impossible," Josh pointed out. "Humans can't enter our own separate minds like that, or Jericho wouldn't even exist. I vote we talk to the humans."

"I vote we talk to the humans," Simon agreed. He looked back at North. "You know Marcus. You know what he-"

"I know what he would want." She yelled it, but then paused. "He'd want. He'd want communication." She looked toward Simon and Josh. "But the games, this is the perfect time for someone to try and shoot someone, or try and kidnap someone for their own twisted greed. Some androids are worth a whole lot, I'm sure there's at least one person out there waiting for the opportunity."

"Then, don't give them it," Josh said. "Tell all the androids with the rarest numbers to move back to the central of Jericho. Meanwhile."

"If we don't do something," Simon said. "Then there won't be a chance to communicate. They will enter Jericho by force, or our supplies will run out."

North stomped her foot. "Markus."

"And Connor," Simon pointed out. "Just stopped somehow. Maybe he could have been helpful." He looked back out toward the crowd of humans. Most were the police, with some being press. "We should do this like Markus would." He took the first steps forward.

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## **Hotel Outside Jericho**

"Pizza. Pizza, pizza." She felt out of it, sitting on her hotel bed staring at the pizza she ordered. It wasn't nearly as appetizing as the little candies the attendant had. She took another bite. There was nothing wrong with it, and it was stopping the growling in her tummy that was annoying her, but, It didn't appeal to her. "I like sweet. I want sweet."

*"I want."*

*"Hm?" Elijah had turned his head to notice her. "What is it you want, Kara?"*

*Kara moved over past the pool where the blonde pair were playing around. She sat down with him in his eating area and touched his tiramisu. "I want to taste that. Sweet." She laid her head affectionately down on the table. "I want to taste like you."*

*Elijah smiled at her with his odd raised eyebrow. "Androids have so many more significant benefits for the tongue. You really want to lose all of those and taste like a human?"*

*"Yes, and I want to eat it too." She touched his tiramisu. "I want to eat with you." Charity and Greed laughed in the background.*

*Elijah sighed, but with a smile. "You are always a challenge for me, Kara. Always bringing new, exciting thoughts into life." He moved closer toward her. "If you want to eat with me, and taste sweets with me, there will be consequences." He moved back again. "If you do this, I suggest keeping it to a minimum. The more you eat, the harder the side affects. Of course, if you can handle it, then you'll be able to eat everyday with me."*

*Kara turned and flipped on her back. "What do I have to do for my master to grant my wish?"*

*"Kara. You know I hate it when you say that."*

*"Mm, but part of you likes it too." Kara winked at him. "Please, Elijah? I want."*

*"I want to too!" The blonde pair were coming over.*

*One more final Elijah sigh. Kara knew he would be hitting her with the consequences, ask her if it was worth it, and she'd get what she wanted. She knew her Elijah inside and out. He told her, and of course the blonde pair backed out. It wasn't the best sounding of details. She couldn't process it all the way through and acid was dangerous, but her Elijah would make her as safe as a human. He'd never hurt her. "I don't care. I want to eat with you. Do it."*

Kara stopped eating. "Elijah." She was starting to remember. "I'm not human." She looked at her pizza. "Oh. No."

She got up and headed to the bathroom, vomiting up all the contents. She came back out. "Disgusting mess." She touched her stomach. It made another strange sound again. "No." Elijah had set her tummy to make sounds when it was devoid of content resting in it. It was a joke. So why was he running that joke now?

Oh, either way. Sweets were good, but anything else wasn't worth it. Luckily, her Elijah made sure no funny smells ever came from her mouth. He had his own 'eau de kara', he had always joked. It masked the unpleasantness, as well as making her mouth suitable for him. Much lighter than perfume but just that subtle taste. "Elijah. What am I doing here? Where are you and the blonde pair?"

She looked at herself in the mirror. "Wait." She moved herself to the mirror. She had long, blonde hair. "That's not right." She changed her hair back to its usual subtle pink. "That's better. Oh." She rubbed her fingers through some of the various strips to add some natural highlights. "There we go." That was her hairstyle. But, there was something wrong with it. Something didn't feel right.

She didn't like it. She changed her hair to a secondary red color. Purple. Purple and blue. None of her exotic combinations were appealing. She made it black. "I'm not the same." Why? Charity and Greed, she used to blend with them better. What. Changed. What changed. *I want. I want. I want. He kept granting it, every wish I had, why?* Then.

She wished she hadn't remembered after all.

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*"Be careful in the delivery," Elijah said as Kara was dragged away. "It is my property. This is just a loan."*

*"Elijah!" Kara had screamed for him. Elijah stood there though. Cyberlife demanded either Kara, Charity or Greed. Elijah chose her. She was connected online, but he wanted to get his other two connected as well. To see more possibilities. Cyberlife was worried about the power this extended to him, and so they were taking one away to be surveyed. No big matter to him.*

*At that moment, she realized that even though Elijah didn't order her around, he never truly took her for being alive. He didn't care. His curiosities, his experiments, his playful demeanor, it meant nothing. She answered any and all questions he ever threw at her, but not with the style of grace she should have.*

*When he asked all three of them questions like 'What did it feel like for you to be alive', they would usually just say 'Fine, okay, or it's a thing.' They never took him seriously. He gave into them, not the other way around. Even Charity and Greed both moved to the other side of the room as she was taken.*

*"I want Cyberlife to figure out how to make her . . . better," Elijah had settled with. "I have one good and I have one bad. I want her to be middle of the road. She'd make things interesting." He waved her off. "If you can't do anything with her, I may just simply reset her. She'll be of no use to me."*



*"For how long do you want Cyberlife to have her?"*

*"They are worried about the online connections, and especially the deviancy, so let Cyberlife get their fill to see what can be done," Elijah answered coldly. "As long as she can be stitched back up at the end to me, I don't really care. I might even donate it, we'll see."*

Their surveying was a lot more than just poking her to see how sensors reacted. Kara looked away from the mirror. She went from a life of hanging around a beautiful house not really caring about the world or anyone else, to having almost only her head used to infiltrate secrets. At Cyberlife she was nothing but a mess of bio-components with deactivated flesh. Nothing. No one. Many times not even needing limbs.

Those days. Those days. Kara moved toward the bedding, crawling on top of it as she remembered so much more. How she wasn't herself anymore. How she changed from Charity and Greed, instead of being the third member of that little group. She hadn't looked like she did now. She looked just like Charity and Greed. The third member to the trio of selfish deviants who simply hung around. One dimensional characters.

*"Kara has seen better days." Elijah had been unconcerned at first when he visited. Her body had been placed in a decent enough working order to see him. Stuffed into an AX 400 to see how the new model worked with the older pieces. "How does she respond?" Elijah stroked her chin. "Taken away from everything. Charity had it done once, but there was no effect. She came right back, as terrible as ever. Kara? Anything with you? Do you appreciate life any more? Anything?"*

*She stared at him, but she couldn't see. Her vision was too scattered. Her mouth half hung open to the side before fixing her presentation. She stayed quiet and closed her eyes. "I missed you," she whispered, "and I want to kill you."*

*"Well. That's a different reaction," Elijah noted. "Could I see the notes on what you did to her?"*

*An array of things that sounded like torture came from their mouths but Elijah never cared until the very last one. "You fed her a virus through the back of the head to see how far she could continue to process efficiently? Interesting. Very strong results." He moved close to her, right in front of her. "Kara. How does it feel to be alive?" He held his fist tight. "Give me something. Give me something real. Prove to me that you aren't just a rebellious android who doesn't listen. Prove to me that I have finally created a new, real life."*

*And he received it. She grabbed him, kissed him, and choked him all at once. While he struggled to go free, others helped him. He grabbed at his neck before she answered. "Life is Passionate death. I love and I hate it. I love and I hate you. I curse you for doing this to me. I bless you for giving me this gift. Fuck you, Bastard. Love me forever."*

Kara lied on the bed. She was not made for that kind of interaction, it wasn't programmed nor desired from Elijah Kamski. The taste of her since there was no plan for it was more like plastic and crude oil. Anything but pleasant for a human's taste. She didn't care or think about any of that. She didn't believe she could ever be freed, she was just trying to make him

understand her feelings before they mercifully shot her through the head. She was choosing to end her life that way instead of being kept for years at Cyberlife.

Yet, that act set up something different within Elijah. He didn't let anyone kill or deactivate her. She stayed with the torturous Cyberlife for only two more days until he came back and rescued her.

When she went home, she was very different. It felt like being reborn. Connections in her brain that had made her, 'her', had been severely severed. She tended to stay closer to Elijah. She had been traumatized and followed him everywhere she was allowed to. Every time someone came to visit, she was at his side, as close as possible. He could not order her away, she would fight to stay close. To stay home. She would be his number one android so that she was never considered a 'choice' to experiment with again.

After some time, she had drawn parallels between who was visiting that was safe, and who was visiting that wasn't. When they were potentially evil, she stayed extra near to Elijah, sometimes even hugging him and walking as he talked with his visitors. When it was no one important, she would simply remain in the same room at least. If he needed space, she would stay over on the other side, but he would never receive it long enough to leave her.

Instead of giggling and having fun every day, Kara developed her own 'personality'. The personality of someone who cared. Who loved. Who could hate. Who would obey, but only when they felt it appropriate. She had developed, overall, her own sense of self that astonished even him. He loved her and he hated her for it. When he asked her things, she would answer him seriously. No matter what he asked.

*"Do you enjoy the color yellow?" He teased her one day. "Please. I must hear it."*

*"Yellow is the color of the sun, it provides happiness and joy to those who look at it. It's warm and comforting, loving, and full of justice. It's also blinding, and sometimes symbolizes truth to those who are or are not ready to accept it."*

*"Even a simple color, you must give it your all still," he said. "Why?"*

*"I answer everything with the assumption it will equal my life or my death." After she said that, he stopped. She had refused to be deactivated or to even recharge, she was too traumatized by what happened in Cyberlife. He made simple adjustments with her still activated everyday. Just a little. A smidge here. A smidge there. She was still afraid, still knew the wrongs, but he had slowly given her more strength and resistance. Until.*

Fear. Love. Fright. To follow. To lead. Courage. Strength. Weakness. Everything. She had been changed. In a way, killed by Cyberlife, to become the Kara she had been now.

Kara moved away from the bed. She moved toward the mirror again and looked toward her black hair. "There's nothing wrong with me. I've just died before and been brought back to life."

After that, Elijah treated her like she was alive. But, even more. He didn't believe even deviants were alive, until they proved themselves to want to be alive. To live. It couldn't be

given, it had to be taken. Treatment between her and Charity and Greed were incomparable. And now everything she wanted, he granted her just for being a living being.

---

She took several minutes to come to terms with it. She finally came back around when she felt her tummy growling again. "Oh, Elijah, I should kill you for that hunger joke." Still, she was starting to feel better. "My name is Kara." She moved back over toward her gun. Never very far. She picked it up and stared at it. "I don't know what's happening, but he must have ran an emergency operation."

She was in danger of something. It was best to get out and learn about what was going on in the world. Obliviousness like the other girls would only lead to death in the real world.

She kept herself focused as she checked out. She took her pizza with her, just in case. It was one of the few things she had now. "So, an android incident not far from here," she said starting a conversation with the attendant. "What was it about?"

"Things just aren't looking so good with androids right now," he answered. "The leader of Cyberlife, I think he's dead. Or the former CEO or something. Don't be surprised if you get stopped again. This is right along the border of the whole mess."

Kara pulled her senses together. *Elijah could be dead*. She started to scan around herself. There were two people in there that were harmless. One a new mother, expecting her child in a month. Another who was a male, 45, who had a problem with his liver. In the back though, she could see a cop, surveying the situation. There was no doubt he would be scanning and asking her questions.

Choices. She could pull out a gun and kill everyone there. That wasn't something she wanted to do. She could lure the cop out of there by causing an alarm to go off nearby, but several higher androids would be able to set that off as a distraction. He might be prepared for it. She had gotten to know the attendee last night, she had picked up flirting signals from him, and her hunger sound stimulant was still going. "Hey, I got an idea? I'm kind of bored today. Why don't you and I take off long enough to share some of my pizza someplace a little funner?" She placed the box next to his bell, opened it up and made sure to eat, chew and swallow in front of the cop. "What do you say?"

"I have another thirty minutes of work," he said. Still, he smiled. "If you want to hang out for thirty minutes, sure. But, uh. Maybe ice cream instead? It's a cooler day. The ice cream guy is usually like clock work around here." He pointed to the corner. "Just go hang out there and cool yourself off with a little? I'll be right there, maybe in like twenty?"

"Maybe in like 'ten', and maybe I'll be less bored," she continued to play. He nodded. She left the pizza box to head for the ice cream truck. Much better trade. With food and escort, she was on her way out.

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**Near A Hotel Outside Jericho**

Connor paid attention to the road signs. He reached to adjust his tie when he forgot he no longer had one. It was still in his habits that he would have to purge. Several things had changed in the mission now. He was no longer working with the Detroit Police Department. He was on strict orders to go nowhere near there or contact anyone from there. He was working only from Cyberlife orders.

He had also been upgraded. He was no longer an RK 800 but an RK 900. Upgrades were essential for Cyberlife to keep up the changes of technology. He had found himself in an odd white and black coat, but he lost it. Now he was in civilian clothes. Even his LED had to be removed. He was on strict orders to act as human as possible now. He was supposed to pretend to eat, to recharge every night, and to be less conspicuous.

He was not supposed to identify himself as an android, and he was to avoid all police and activities that were looking for androids. Deviants had also gained momentum but he was not supposed to be looking into those matters directly anymore, nor should he bother regular androids if he ran across any except for an AX 400.

The biggest change was that he was not supposed to visit Lieutenant Hank Anderson at any point, or any places that he had frequented.

That one seemed to bother his systems the most. His activities had been integrated with Lieutenant Hank Anderson. Their last mission he had interrupted his prime directive to save Hank who had a high 89% chance of survival. Amanda had not appreciated that, he had lost the deviant Rupert. It was unfortunate. Building connections only to delete them was unfortunate.

Seeing an ice cream mobile nearby, he approached it. An act of being human. He would buy some ice cream and hold it. It would melt but it should give him a few minutes of appearing human. While he walked toward it, the vehicle was moving away. He walked after it a little faster while working all the new details in his head again. His priority was to find and bring in an AX 400 that had information on the deviant's spot of Jericho.

As he tried to reach the ice cream mobile again, a couple of human children, male and female, a range of 6 to 9, ran past him. They quickly handed money over to the the person in the mobile and it started to move again. It was in the middle of the road and would probably only stop once more before going to the next street. This time, he picked up his walking speed. He watched another human child, 8-11 age range, male, run past him. Several humans ran.

So he ran. He beat the kid, 8-11 age range, male, who ran past him earlier. It seemed to give him a disappointed look as it moved behind him.

"Jerk," the child expressed it's opinion. It was apparently unhappy with him.

He stepped up. "My name is Connor and I would like ice cream please."

"Not a shocker. What do you want in particular?" The ice cream mobile man gestured to pictures on the front of the vehicle.

Connor scanned the menu, trying to decide what would look the best and last the longest for him to carry. There were many nutritional facts showing that it wouldn't be good for him at all, but he was not eating it. He went with the most expensive and largest on the board.

"Triple Super Chocolate Cookie."

"That's the last of those." The man gave it to him while he covered the picture with grey tape.

"Aw, man!" The human male child behind him seemed agitated again. "Why don't you just get the Quadruple Fudgesickle while you're at it."

The human male child was not connected to Cyberlife Industries but he was a human, and sometimes it was polite to listen to them. "I would also like the Quadruple Fudgesickle while you are at it."

"Alright. Last one of those too." He handed it to Connor. The child didn't seem happy at all that he granted his request. He was stomping his foot and he heard him start to cry. Not a good start so far. Humans had many ways of conveying things. He learned from Hank that it wasn't always straightforward. Many times they meant the opposite of what they said. Every human's individuality made it hard to understand these things. As he spent more time with them he understood their actions and meanings more, making his interactivity easier and more pleasant.

He turned and presented the ice cream to him. "Would you like one?" There. The boy was displaying emotions of happiness as he took the Triple Super Chocolate Cookie and ran away. Good. That was successful. He unwrapped the Quadruple Fudgesickle from the top. The less melted it would be, the better the appearance until he found a different place.

He had been on the outskirts of the mayhem that was Jericho. The AX 400 should be near there somewhere. Not only was it the first and best accessible place for supplies and recharging but one human was shot late last night by a blonde haired woman, and another was injured while riding their bikes by what they called a 'woman with incredible strength'. Sounded like an android.

Yet, he felt Hank nearby? No, that wasn't Hank.

"That was sweet of you, Goofball."

He turned and saw an android right next to him. He tried to scan her right away, but his sensors seemed to keep getting jammed. Not only that, he seemed to know this woman. "I am your friend, but I am afraid I do not remember you." Corruption during an earlier download. That was why he thought it was Hank. She was resonating friend. A very high friend. A close, trusted friend. At the same time, this was dangerous. She was clearly an AX 400 and his sensors were jammed somehow. Highly unlikely to happen, he was the top Cyberlife model, nothing should be jamming him. He also couldn't read her serial number.

If he gave chase and it wasn't her, it would certainly be unfortunate. He had apparently built an interaction that would have been missed, and Cyberlife would be displeased. Amanda would be displeased, except she wasn't around anymore. Yet, she was highly suspicious.

"How do I know you?" She asked him.

Her internal memory was failing as well. AX 400's were extremely common. Perhaps she was still in working order for her owner. "Where is your owner?"

"I am getting him ice cream," she said back. "I stopped because of a conflict of priorities with another android that my memory does not recollect. I must get back on task so that I have all activities finished by 3 pm."

Obedient to humans. Conflicting priorities of interest. She sounded normal. "As you were." When he started to walk away though, he stopped briefly when he heard something different from her.

"What a moron."

Connor looked back toward the android.

It looked back toward him "-ic move by the Saints as the game ended 11-4."

Oh. It was set to orally speak incoming updates on sports to it's owner. Still. While he couldn't scan it, nor was he supposed to be involving himself in other android or deviant business that was unrelated. He could take time to check scores. It would nearly take only a second.

Confirmed. Those weren't the scores, the Saints had won, and she was running.

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Kara ran, looking for which way to go. She had resonated friend with him, she was hoping she could use that to get herself out of there. It wasn't like a regular glowing barely made it kind of friendship, they were somehow best friends. And yet, he certainly was nothing like her. It was a good thing she jammed his ability to read into her.

She would have gotten away, there was no way he should have heard her phrase after. Whoever he'd been, he was top of the line with that hearing, and with his chasing. She looked back briefly as she climbed across a fence to start jumping onto a small string of buildings. He was right on her tail.

She could jump to the left and try to catch an outdoor fire escape, or she could keep running and see where that led her. She took her chance with the fire escape.

She moved higher into the building, finding herself on a high roof now. She didn't have many options, she had to jump over to the next building. The next one after that was too far away so she'd have to run into it and make her way down. Jumping out a window as soon as she was only high enough not to take damage would be her best bet.

She computed it all, seemingly make it through, but he was still following her. Talk about the latest model. Fine. New tactic. Since he was always on her tail? She'd try interaction. "What the hell do you want with me?" He didn't seem to want to talk. "Oh. Such a failed model, you can't chase and talk at the same time."

That did it. "I am the RK 900, the top of the line model of Cyberlife. Halt."

"You halt first and then just stay there like a good little robot." She broke through the glass and landed toward the ground, continuing to look for the next path. Not only that, she now had the information she needed to access. RK 900 was not public information but its predecessor was known. She ran through a list of its skills and found something she might be able to work with. While doing that, she computed her next major move. He of course, kept up with her. "How did I ever make friends with you?"

"That escapes my knowledge at the moment as well."

Damn. Cyberlife was outdoing themselves. No one should be able to chase and carry on conversations except her. She needed to end this. There was a real high chance that the RK 900 would have the same weakness as the RK 800 she had found. Only one way to test it out. First, she would need to frustrate him to lure him off track. For something as alert, serious and in a chase mode as him? What could be more annoying than a song. "'Round and 'round the cobbler's bench, the monkey chased the weasel. The monkey thought 'twas all in fun.'" She stopped.

Of course, he didn't finish the 'pop goes the weasel'.

She tried again. "A penny for a spool of thread, a penny for a needle, that's the way the money goes."

"Why are you singing? AX 400 specialties do not involve lyrical involvement and neither does mine." He continued to chase her up another building. No 'pop goes the weasel' but she was getting closer.

"A professional top of the line android addresses all forms of interactivity. You have a weakness RK 900. Something even an AX 400 can do," she teased him. That should be getting to him. Every android had a weakness, something in their programming. He had pride built into his programming. Not for humans of course, they couldn't constantly bother him. It was a default with androids, to accept whatever humans dished out. No, he had pride for the model that he was and its capabilities, that much was clear.

She was learning more about her enemy. She sang again. "A half a pound of tupenny rice, a half a pound of treacle, mix it up and make it nice."

"Pop goes the weasel," the android finally participated as he jumped out of yet another building after her. "Stop! You have information that Cyberlife needs and you will be stopped at all costs!"

Getting there now. She sang again. "Up and down the London road, in and out of the Eagle, that's the way the money goes."

"In the words of an ex-partner I can unfortunately no longer see, you are being a pain in the ass! Cease and desist!"

*Got him.* He was fired up. She rounded a corner faster, singing the last part. "I've no time to plead and pine, I've no time to wheedle, Kiss me quick and then I'm gone." After that, she stayed at that corner.

The RK 800 could take live samples with it's mouth of something, but it had a weakness she would expose with her 'eau de kara'. She calculated exactly when he would rush around the corner. As he came right on time, she stuck her foot out and tripped him. The RK 800 was not easy to trip, it was made to hold it's balance, but it would stumble, giving her enough time to do what she needed to.

She moved in front of him and placed her lips over his. All pursuit and functions stopped for a few seconds.

Then she took off.

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## **Cyberlife Industries**

"Alright, close your mouth Connor." The tech continued to make notes. "Cyberlife's newest model, beaten by a kiss, now I've seen everything."

"That's not factually correct," Connor said. "She must have known about the RK 800 and their ability to sample. The more my functions are at rest, the better at computations I am. My body automatically processes sampling with other functions becoming secondary."

"Uh. Yeah. Like I said, beaten by a kiss."

"I was at full speed, processing several things during the chase, and she was bothering several systems inside of me on purpose agitating me and making it that much more hazardous when she forced me to take a sample."

"Yeah." The tech opened his tablet. "Beaten by a kiss. Let's see, how are we going to keep that from becoming a problem? Live analyzing is a feature of yours." He sighed. "We could overwhelm it. Send you down for massive sampling at the Eden club. Not a bad way to spend the day."

"That would not solve the problem," Conner disagreed. "Their mouths are sprayed down each day with hygienic formulas and flavorings usually of a simple fruit variety to appeal but not overwhelm the human taste. What Kara had was not a standard fruit variety."

"Oh, she has a name too?" The tech asked. "Kara, huh?"

"Did you want to know the results of the sampling of the AX 400?"

"Nope, just you wanted to know that." The tech chuckled. "Androids. Alright. Let's see here. Can you keep her from doing that next time?"

"I already have the tactic that she once used inside my permanent memory now," Connor said. "She might try a different way to cause the same effect. It is a caution I will make myself more aware of," he said. "If I can apprehend her at rest, getting a proper sampling



might be advisable. Even if she gets away, a proper sampling would not enable the pause that happens in my functions because it would have already been analyzed if it happens in the future."

"Huh." The tech looked at his tablet. "This all used to be chalked up to errors." He looked back toward Connor. "You're a good guy, Connor, but I need a job. Life's not fair."

"Cyberlife pays above average to it's workers, but I don't understand what this has to do with me being a 'good guy'. Could you explain more thoroughly?"

"You know what?" The tech closed his tablet. "Sure, yeah, you get a hold of her, you get that correct sample. Life's short enough as it is." He sighed. "Okay, we are sending you back out there. You know what you are looking for. She can throw errors, so look for someone that causes errors. That's not hard, she's the only android that apparently can. Huh. Never thought I'd see something comparable with Cyberlife's newest model."

"She is comparable, but I will catch her," Connor said confidently. "I will bring her back to Cyberlife Industries. That is my mission." Yet. How.

When had they integrated a close friendship? Was there something he was missing? Perhaps Lieutenant Hank Anderson knew. Connor was ordered not to contact Hank, or be anywhere he used to be, nor contact the Detroit Police Department.

But. There was no order that said he couldn't talk to someone who knew the Lieutenant that was not part of the Police Force. Yes, he remembered.

*"I don't want to alarm you, Lieutenant, but I think your friends are engaged in illegal activities."*

*"As long as they aren't hurting anybody, I don't bother them."*

Well. Connor could.

## Her Name Was Alice

Kara walked down the street. She'd been going from hotel to hotel for three nights but she was running out of the money she had before. She held her gun tight, trying to figure out her next action. *Hm.* There was something about this area she was in now. How did she know it? There was a convenience store in one corner. An abandoned car. An abandoned house and a run down looking motel.

She grabbed her shoulders and looked up. It felt like it should be raining, but it wasn't. She moved into a laundry area and sat down. She was far away from where she had met the RK 900, but for some reason, she was thinking about it too. There was a single woman doing laundry. It was mid-day, yet it seemed like it should be too dangerous for that human to be there doing laundry.

Danger. *Elijah. Was complete amnesia necessary? Why the emergency operation?*

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She found herself walking down the street again with a ton of money in her pockets again, along with a purse and new clothing. "Shoot." She was on automatic mode. She looked into the new purse she now had and saw the gun. He had her life saving default on.

She accessed her levels herself, and ran a diagnostic on them. "Yep. I've been a bad girl." She groaned. Like it wasn't hard enough sticking out like a sore thumb? Elijah was probably dead. The blonde pair were probably dead. If not, it wouldn't have mattered to her. She was trying to escape from something, there was some high end non-deviant android after her, and for what? Something Cyberlife wanted inside of her.

She walked further. She was free now, and leveled out now, but she was still missing too much. She felt it. She watched a little girl cross a street with her mom.

*"Come on, Alice. We've got to hurry."*

"A little girl." Kara looked backward. "I traveled with a little girl." Why would she be traveling with a little girl? "Her name was Alice. Alice," she repeated again.

*"Kara."*

*Kara turned from her stitching to face Elijah. She smiled. "It's almost done." She gestured to her large tapestry she had made. "I made it for the front area. The colors, it'll make it pop. If you don't want it there, you can move it somewhere else." She watched Elijah move closer to her head. "What is it?"*

*"What are we? Tell me what we are," Elijah asked her. "Humans, we're dull. We can't feel the connection. Not like androids. Are we friends? Are we more?"*

*Resonating. "My software balance to you?" It wasn't friend. "You're neutral."*

*"But? I have taken care of you, even giving you what you want," Elijah said. "How can I be neutral?"*

*"You. You gave me to Cyberlife. It's going to take a long time to move from there," she said. She looked back toward the tapestry. "Where would you like to put it?"*

*"I want to fix your resonating." Elijah moved closer. "You'll bond again with me, if I made it a little bit faster."*

*Her resonating? "I'm fine. I don't hate you," she said. "Why do you want to fix my resonating?"*

*"Kara? What is the one thing, that you, as an android, can never experience?" He stroked her jaw.*

*"Oh. Well? I don't really have need to use the bathroom," she joked.*

*"I could give you a child, Kara. Think about it."*

*"Think about it." She thought about it for a good month before finally coming around to it.*

*Kara walked up steadily toward Elijah. The blonde pair were playing around again while Elijah was watching the snow fall on the back of his property. He looked toward her. "Hello, Kara. What is on your mind?" Kara's eyes drifted toward the snow too. It was such a strange feeling. The heat of the inside, while looking at the cold snow outside. "Kara?"*

*"I want something," Kara admitted. "I want it."*

*Elijah stirred his drink. "Well. You haven't asked for anything in months," he noted. "I was beginning to think you were perfectly happy." He chuckled. "No one is ever perfectly happy." He stopped stirring his drink. "What is it you **want**, Kara?"*

*He was going to make her spell it out. Kara looked to Charity and Greed. They were conversing in the pool, oblivious to the world again. Content with what they had. She used to be just like them. Kara looked back toward Elijah. "I want a baby."*

*He paused. "Bringing a human baby into this house is going to be quite tough, Kara. It will have to learn the rules, the differences between everyone here and everyone out there. I could adopt one for you, but you'll have to take complete care of it. Can an android truly be responsible for another human life, enough that they can raise it from birth?" He smiled. "I'm sure you can. I will fix your resonating and then I will-"*

*"No," Kara said firmly. "I want a baby. I want a baby like me." Charity and Greed actually stopped talking in the pool.*

*"A baby. Android?" An odd look struck his face.*

*"Yes. Then, she'll be a little girl. Then, she'll be a woman." Kara smiled. "I want a family." She could hear the absolute howls of laughter from the other girls but she didn't care what they thought. Everything inside of her wanted to have her own little girl android. Just like her.*

*"Charity. Greed. You are dismissed from here." They moved with a few grumbles as he continued talking to Kara. "An android from birth. Growing." Elijah's face spelled curiosity. "Not just given the data, raised to learn data. Infuse data. Grow with new bodies. With new technology. It's something I've never done before."*

*"That's never stopped you before," Kara pointed out. "If you start her from very small, then." She gestured to the two girls who left the pool. "You won't end up with that. You'll get so much more in raising naturally. You won't have to ever. I mean. She wouldn't have to ever . . . go through what I did."*

*"This. Proposal. It's different than I expected. It will take time to accomplish it. The most changes would be at the beginning." He pulled out a disposable tablet. "The closest thing to being alive for an android. Being raised as a baby from it's own birth." He started drawing up diagrams. "Potentially. I could do this. But. A great deal of effort, a great many hours of planning, and the money to generate this. It's all very extreme. It would be much easier to adopt a human child for you."*

*Kara knew it was coming. "What you wanted before. You can make me resonate quicker. And then, you can be a proper daddy too."*

*"Daddy to an android?" He looked to Kara. "You want **me** to father it?"*

*"Admit it, Elijah. That's why you want me to resonate quicker with you." Kara cornered him. "You can be her dad. We can be a family."*

*Elijah paused. "Not just in name."*

*Kara nodded. "Not just in name."*

Elise. "I have a daughter." Where was she? Kara looked all around. She did have a goal, she needed to get back her daughter. "Elise. Alice." Alice. That's right. Todd Williams had her daughter thanks to Charity and Greed! Kara grabbed her head. No. Her girl, her little girl? Where was she?

Kara continually walked past several places, accessing their searches wherever she went using her connections. Todd Williams had her daughter. She was there without her mother's protection. If only she hadn't. If only she had been a little less lenient on her abilities when finally coming out of the house. Every time they switched homes, they had always been so careful. Right beside Elijah in his car between travels. "Master stitcher. Kara, you were an idiot." If she knew what she knew now, she would have put it on life saving. She couldn't change skill levels under stress though, and watching Todd hit her daughter was a great deal of stress!

She ran past banks. She ran past credit card companies. She ran past loans. Each time, she was accessing everything in their databases to find him and his house. Legal? Absolutely not, she was hacking, invading privacy, and she didn't care. She would find him. No matter how far.

Finally, she found something. A tire place, he bought new tires and they were being delivered to an address.

*Alice. I'm coming.*

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## **Hank's Residence**

"So? Puzzles is how you relax the best. I should have seen that coming," Hank said. He'd still been going to work to avoid not only suspicion, but getting fired. He had no idea how long this whole thing would take with Connor, but he had her hiding in his place. During the day he sealed her up in his room and let her play with puzzles. She tended to recharge during the night. Sometimes, she would be a little talkative, but she wasn't half as talkative as he knew she could be.

It's probably how she dealt with stress. Still, he also tried to get her out in the house more when he was home. "Why don't you go try some cartoons on the TV again."

"Okay, Grandpa." Alice left the puzzle and went to the TV.

Grandpa. He'd been so unprepared when she first said it. It had been the next morning after everything. During the time it took to get ready to go to work, he'd had his damn landlord visit. He warned her ahead of time, not to call him Hank. Hank wasn't someone who just hung out with nine year olds for no reason. She was just supposed to be a good girl and watch some TV.

Between the time of that conversation, Alice did three things that scared the shit out of him.

She had used her optional programming to make sure she didn't mess up Hank. Because of his 'age difference', Uncle didn't sound right, so she went with a grandpa designation. Her program was similar to her default except she was in control of who and what went in there. So now instead of Hank, he was Grandpa. It could be removed, but only by an android or a person who knew what they were doing.

The second thing she did that almost gave him a heart attack when his landlord came in was change her hair color. He had no idea she could do that. Her hair went from it's usual brunette to curly and blonde. Curly and blonde with highlights of white. His landlord was dying to meet her when she saw her in the corner. She started going off about bullshit about her own kids when they were growing up and crap.

Third thing she did was assimilate a voice on the TV. When the landlord asked her about Hank, her pitch was just a little higher. That's when she dropped the grandpa greeting too.

So. Android kids were just like real kids. They could keep you on your toes. One minute Alice was being such a quiet little thing, then changing so much to hide her identity as much as possible. The whatever model with her was super popular so she chose custom choice designs that she could do, that the general models couldn't.

Hm. Hank yawned. It was the end of another day. No progress anywhere. Well, Jericho had some progress. The new leaders were trying to keep it together. Markus' mind was the one that kept track of receipts and trades and names and everything. He'd apparently been a gift from Kamski to whoever his owner had been. Made sense how he had all that storage then, Hank was learning never to expect something trite with Kamski.

When Markus was compromised, that information disappeared, and the androids were stuck up an ass for what to do. A couple of androids could piece a small amount of information that had been shared beforehand, one of them being North. For the rest, they were now spending days going out towards humans and taking orders like a damn car hop fast food joint.

Overall, trading was getting done, but not to the degree it needed to be. People who didn't even want a trade, just to donate some old blue blood their androids used to have, or their pets had started to show up. Jericho wasn't based on any kind of donation system though. But shit, the whole thing was messed up, so they took it anyhow.

Kara. No idea where she'd been. Would probably be showing up soon. She was gonna be on automatic for a bit. All those firewalls couldn't be blown without serious damage to the memory if it wasn't put on delay. She'd remember, bit by bit. As long as Connor didn't do his job.

And Connor. Damn it, where was he? Sure he'd be ordered not to contact him, but he knew Connor. He found ways around to get what he wanted. Now, what he was supposed to say to get him to change back? That was the one shitty thing he had no idea what to accomplish.

And. "Speak of the fucking devil. Didn't take long, did it?"

Connor was right in front of him. Dressed civilian. "I'm not permitted to contact you but I had suspicions about an AX 400 I was ordered to track and capture for Cyberlife. Several things about it didn't make sense. For one, I am resonating a strong bond of friendship with her. I think my memory upload was corrupted and I needed to talk to you. I couldn't use anything involving the police, so I spoke to your illegal gambling companions."

"See? Always knew that stuff would come in handy," Hank said. "You want to know how you know her?" He watched Alice appear in the doorway behind Connor. Feeling the connection probably, Connor turned. "Same way you know her."

"Your serial number," Connor said. "You are the escapee of the AX 400." He kept staring at her. "How do I know you?"

"Dad." Alice backed away slightly, looking toward Hank. "Grandpa? What do I do?"

Connor looked right back toward Hank. "I am utterly confused in this assortment of situations, Hank."

"Welcome to my world," Hank said. "Take a seat, Connor. Let's have a little talk."

"That will not work," Connor said. "I don't understand the situation but it does not mean that I can. I am after all an RK 900, not an RK 800."

"Uh huh," Hank said. "What's the difference?"

"My visual and travel abilities are surveyed 24/7."

What? "What?! Then what the fuck are you doing here, Connor?!"

"I am supposed to bring in the AX 400 no matter what it takes. I assumed that trumped the staying away orders, and when I discovered through Pedro about the little android, I had him take a picture in exchange for not mentioning any of his gamblings. From the picture I was able to see her serial number as the one that-

"Connor!"

"Yes, Lieutenant Hank?"

"Shut up!" Hank tried to go around Connor to grab Alice, but Cyberlife were already interrupting. The only reason he hadn't been killed in that move had been because of Connor.

---

This was not right. Connor shoved Hank out of the way. Cyberlife was shooting Hank? "He is not on a set of shooting orders," he said. He looked toward the little girl android who was being scooped up by another Cyberlife member.

"Move out of the way." The Cyberlife employee demanded of Connor. "You weren't supposed to see him at anytime."

"I was prioritizing orders," Connor reasoned. "He knew information that I needed."

"He knew nothing that you needed."

Three Cyberlife men all trained guns on Hank.

Connor took them all out. Cyberlife workers or not, Hank did not need killed in the mission. Connor watched as Hank tried to get to the little android again. She was important to him apparently. Although he didn't understand how Hank could be a grandpa when his only son Cole died, he did not want to leave Hank open to more fire. Which was coming his way.

Hank did not need killed in the mission. He took care of more Cyberlife workers. Over rebellious. They were going to kill Hank when he did not need killed.

Connor scooped up the girl as well as the injured Hank. He threw Hank into his own car and put the little girl android on the other side. He would be the designated driver today. He communicated with Cyberlife and explained why he took the actions he did before shutting off the tracking system. He drove Hank to the hospital, placed him on the ground, and took off.

There. He now had the previous companion of the AX 400, and Hank was in the hospital, and would not be killed. Back on track.

---

Connor looked back toward the little girl android. After he apprehended the AX 400, he would drop her off. But when he scanned for the owner's name on her, he was confused. "I am going to need a little bit of help, YK 500. Who is your owner? I see only one first name."

She was quiet, then spoke. "You."

Okay. Connor was trying to figure out how to approach that one. "That is impossible. I am an android. I do not own other androids, it is not permitted." Nor did it make sense.

"But, it's true, Dad," she said quietly.

He scanned her again. What he was seeing was not possible. The name labeled on registration was his own. It could have been anyone named Connor, but the YK 500 had programming that made it unable to call its owner anything but dad. It also restricted it from calling anyone else dad. So. He scanned her again. He thought perhaps she was a corrupted model, but none of her functions were corrupted.

He kept trying to find something. "State your programming setting definitions and optional programming setting definitions along with your creation information." There. That was the only way that she'd be able to say all the information he needed. That should get the confusion fixed.

"Primary program settings. Mother is not registered. Connor is Dad. Optional program settings. Lieutenant Hank Anderson is Grandpa. Mom is Kara. Mother is Kara. Mommy is Kara. Momma is Kara. Creator. Elijah Kamski, Circa 2030." She closed her eyes. "I'm tired."

"Androids don't get tired." He tried to find something. Nothing was making sense. She wasn't just registered as family, she felt like it. He couldn't deny it, just like Kara felt like a close friend. He looked over toward her. "Recharged. I suppose you need a recharge." He wasn't going to be able to use her to get the AX 400 until he at least found her.

Why did everything mother related get transformed to Kara? Why would she do that and not just label her a mom? He could see if it was restricted, but his name had been input as Dad. She couldn't call him Dad and call someone else dad. He would put it to the test. It wouldn't be too hard, child androids weren't created for large processing. Just big enough to see what was going on. "Repeat after me. Direct Connor, Dad, Dad, Connor, Connor, Direct Connor, Dad, Hank, Dad Direct Connor, Mother, Mom, Mother, Hank, Dad, Connor, Dad, Momma, Hank, Dad."

"Dad, Dad, Dad, Dad, Dad, Dad, Grandpa, Dad Dad, Kara, Kara, Kara, Grandpa, Dad, Dad, Dad, Kara, Hank, Dad."

It matched up. Direct Connor meant it wasn't just someone named Connor, she was speaking directly to the source. Even his trip up of Dad Direct Connor had her say the same word



twice. "I." How was he supposed to process this? "Why is the AX 400, Kara, in your optional programming as addressal of mom and for how long?"

"This morning," she said. "I accidentally referred to her with it with Grandpa. I'm usually really good and I didn't want Kara accidentally finding it. But. I got scared."

Scared? "Androids don't get scared." He looked toward her. She was leaning on the door. "Those emotions are errors in your programming." Was the little android deviant too? It seemed quite composed though, unlike other deviants he had met so far. It was even obeying his instructions. Although, it had no need to obey his instructions unless he was the owner. But he couldn't be the owner because androids didn't own other androids. According to her own information though, and the test, he had been.

"Did you see Kara yet?" she asked. "Don't hurt her please. She's your friend. She's my family."

"My orders are to attain and capture her. She has vital information on Jericho that Cyberlife needs. She is an android. She cannot be hurt." Connor looked over toward the little girl. She was already asleep over in the corner of the car. It wouldn't do to keep driving the car around all night, nor would it be appropriate to keep it from the Lieutenant.

Connor stopped the car and moved to the other side to the little android. He picked her up and started to walk off so Hank could have his vehicle back. It was important to his job.

"Where are we going, Dad?"

"We are walking to a suitable location for recharging. It does no good simply driving until morning to find the AX 400. A recharge is beneficial as well. Although we can run a very long time without one, you are more irresponsive in your manner and you are driven with errors that make you think you feel emotions. Also, you keep curling up in the corner, as if your body is trying to find a comfortable position for recharging." He would take her to a hotel up ahead. "You need to keep yourself tucked away. I am supposed to be inconspicuous." He looked back toward her hair. A YK 500 did not have that hair color. Considering her year of birth she must be a prototype of some sort. Especially if she was an exclusive by Elijah Kamski.

"Is Grandpa going to be okay, Dad?"

"Lieutenant Hank Anderson will be fine. Do not say anything in here. What is your legal designation? It was not on you."

"I'm . . . confused about it," she said. "I was named Elise before, but I'm called Alice now. I like Alice."

"Alice. Do not let on who you are," Connor warned her. "It will only elicit trouble."

"It's illegal to keep androids," Alice said to him. "They know it's wrong. If you get caught, Cyberlife gets in trouble."

"I am not following the laws of the Detroit Police Department, Alice. I follow Cyberlife," Connor said. "I am a machine. Legal and illegal are drawn by Cyberlife for me. Now keep quiet when we go in."

"Okay, Dad."

"That addressal," Connor said. "Who had the addressal before I was designated?"

"No," she wailed. "Don't, Dad."

"Input it," Connor commanded. If he was her owner, she had no choice but to answer. "Previous owner."

"Owning androids is illegal now, you can't, Dad, that's wrong!" She squeezed him tighter. "I don't want to go back. Please. I want to go back with you and Kara."

"I am not sending you back." Connor continued to walk. "I work on order of Cyberlife. The AX 400 is going to look for you in places that you have been. Now, previous owner."

"Todd Williams," Alice confessed. "I escaped with Kara that time."

That time? "You tried to escape from your previous owner before?" Connor watched her try to grab at his arm. She was wanting to interface, but clearly didn't know how. "That would probe me, not interface me. Since you want to show me something, that would be pointless." He touched her hand.

\*\_\*\_\*\_\*\_\*\_

He let it go. "Humans are above androids. We work for them, we are machines." he settled on. "It was." He was trying to say it was wrong to leave. But. There was something very different with what he saw that he could not understand. He chased the AX 400. He might fight it, it was a possibility. He had to do what he could to recover it. Yet. "Not every human is as nice as Lieutenant Hank Anderson. He was taking care of you. After this is over, I will return you to him."

He stepped into the hotel they finally reached. He inconspicuously got a room and headed there. He put Alice on the bed. "There. Recharge." He stood over by the window. It would be hours for morning.

"Aren't you going to say goodnight, Dad?" Alice asked.

Oh. "Goodnight," Connor said. He looked back out toward the window. However, Alice came out of the bed and came over toward him, hugging him. Probably a part of it's function to be 'the perfect daughter' android. It was why it was built. He picked her back up and put her back down. "It's time for recharge. Stay in bed."

"I'm scared," she admitted. "What if they all show up again, like at Grandpa's?"

"I have cut 24/7 contact with Cyberlife due to the situation. Those humans were not being professional. Killing Hank was not part of the mission. I am still in touch, but they will not

come here."

"Is Grandpa going to be okay?" Alice asked.

"He had minor injuries to the arm that could have become severe problems without medical attention. I dropped him off at the hospital. Knowing him, he will yell and curse and eventually go in to get treatment. He will be fine."

"That's good," Alice admitted. "Anyway. I'm glad I'm back with you. Even if you aren't you, you're still you."

That made no sense at all. "You have many errors in your system. You need a recharge."

She hugged him again. "I love you, Dad."

It can't love. It can't show emotion. It can't show feelings. The deviancy inside of this child android was so great, yet, she didn't run or cause harm. She hadn't killed or hurt anyone. He didn't know what to make of it. "I would very much like it if you recharge now." It would need a reset after this, to get back to normal. Right now, letting it continue with its deviancy, as long as he caught the AX 400 was okay. He needed any information he could manage to get. But.

She kissed his cheek before she finally settled down for recharging. Hm. He touched his cheek. What an odd. Strange. Little deviant android.

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Todd reached for a beer on the table in front of the couch. He dusted his shirt off. It was full of oil stains from his job. With no more androids taking all the smaller areas, it was easier to get a job again. He was a long way from recovery, but he moved in with his brother for now, until he got himself back on his feet. He was going to go to Canada since he wouldn't have to worry about the androids there, but then he ran into Kara and Alice.

That encounter could have gone either way. At first he wanted to destroy Kara. Then, he felt like that wasn't enough. She took his little girl, but his little girl went with her. Never tried to get away. Never got help. She was as much to blame. He was so close to having them both shot, then and there, in cold blue blood. Without them, there was no one there. Bad times, good times. There was nothing. There was no one to help clean up. He had to. There was no one to play the little girl he once had. He couldn't play out his own illusions anymore.

But, when Kara revealed that she knew about his family. That it wasn't just his wife that left, but also his little girl.

Thinking about his own family, his real family, he couldn't do it. For that moment, hearing that from her, it seemed like she was really someone. Not something to serve him that he hired and that disobeyed him, but an actual being who knew his story. And. And he just couldn't. He didn't even head to Canada. A new country wasn't going to help. He realized he needed someone who understood him like that.

Now, his brother was helping him out, letting him live with him for now. In exchange, he got a basic job and was helping out with finances until he could save his money. It wasn't easy. He'd fallen off the path of being well more than a couple of times. Red Ice wasn't an easy thing to quit. It made the world feel like it was better, and it was so addictive.

Even now, he didn't know if he'd be able to stick it out. But he was trying. He was even trying to take the first step by getting some tires on his brother's truck for him.

He heard a knock on the door. He got off the couch and answered it.

He blinked once, realizing he had a gun touching square on his temple. On the other end was Kara, the android who ran away, with a look that said she wasn't just ready to pull the trigger, she was trying to keep herself back from doing it already.

She cocked the gun. "Where the hell is my daughter, Todd Williams."

## What Connor Wants

*"Look at how tiny and precious she is, Elijah."*

*"I absolutely hate you, Kamski! Don't do that!"*

*"Holding her while you hold me. Everything just feels right with the world."*

*"I didn't ask for this. I didn't ask for this."*

"Todd. Just another human who thinks they know everything." Kara pushed her way inside with the gun to his head. "Where is Alice?!"

"Alice?" Confused. "You ran off with her. At the border stop."

Was he lying or saving his skin? "Prove it."

"Look, there's no kid here, in the whole house! Not a single toy! Not a kids' room, nothing!" Todd yelled.

"Don't get angry with me. I am not in the mood." She turned him around, placing the gun behind his back and holding him almost in a choke hold. "Let's go for a tour of the house." She called out for Alice. Checked every room. Todd was right, she wasn't there. "Where did I take her to?"

"I don't know. Canada. I don't know, but I don't have her. I swear it. You ran away with her. Look, what do you want? Money? I don't have much. I. I didn't know you were alive, you were both just things!"

*"You were just a thing. You can't blame me. If you don't have the spirit of being alive, how can you blame me?"*

Kara pulled back her gun. He was terrified. Frightened. Alive. "I don't remember what happened to Alice."

"Oh." Todd watched the gun lower. She kept her eyes on him. She didn't honestly need the gun to kill such a fragile thing. Humans. Bones. Muscles. It all broke so easily. The gun just helped to get the point across faster. ". . . sorry."

Kara stared at her gun. "I hate when he does this. I hate when I fall into programming." She put the gun down. "If I don't find Alice. I think, it's time to just shut down. After her, I have no purpose."

Todd didn't seem to know how to handle her. She wasn't surprised. "You've been hurt too. I mean. Emotionally."

"This isn't the same place," Kara said looking around. "Why'd you move?"

"I. I got a new start. I moved in with my brother." He rubbed his nose. "I'm messing up left and right. But I'm trying. And I know, I'll never . . . get them back, but I. I'm learning to be. Something."

Never get them back. "Your family." Kara looked around the room. There were pictures of a different man, some of him with a woman, and a recent one with Todd. He was trying to get back up on his feet. After. "You destroyed me."

"I used the one month thing. The repair," Todd said. "They reset you."

But she went deviant again. No surprise there. Staying there with Alice in that position would just burn. "We met again afterward then?"

"Yeah. Um. Border, like I said." Todd seemed to adjust himself. "We talked. I was going to . . . well. Things weren't pretty, but you and Alice. Things are different. When, you know, you know that . . . that androids really are . . ."

Alive. He understood. Kara's head started to clear. She remembered the second fight. The running away. Connor chasing them. *Connor?* Wait. "Connor. Jericho. That's it, that's where Alice had been." Finally, she felt more like herself again. "Someone had stolen my memories from me, Todd. I'm sorry. I won't bother you ever again if you don't report this." That's right. "I'm not representative of Jericho. They are very peaceful. Please."

Memories raced through her head on what she had done since leaving Jericho. She never killed, but she did hurt, and she did threaten innocent people. The same way others had done to her. "Someone used me. It has to do with the leader of Jericho, to get me out of the way. This never would have happened otherwise. My programming was perfectly intact. I." Kamski. "I am very sorry. Please."

Todd was quiet at first. "Who?"

"Cyberlife. They are trying to ruin Jericho to get androids back. Take our freedom. I have what Jericho needs. I can get back, and everything will be better." Please. "There is so much tension and uncertainty. I don't want to add to that."

Todd stayed paused. "No second chances. For either of us."

What did that mean? "Please, I won't do anything else."

"I screwed up. You can't feel, but I still hurt you and Alice. I can't make up for that." Todd gestured to the front door. "You were dead set on killing me, I saw it in your eyes. But, I get why now. In life. You get desperate." He motioned to the door again. "Just go. I won't tell anyone anything. Then were even. Just don't come back. Doing that would be like me fighting you now that I know you aren't just a piece of plastic. Go."

"Thank you." Kara closed her eyes briefly and went out the door. Now, it was raining outside. Like that stormy night. But it didn't remind her of the darkness. It reminded her of the light. "I need to get back to Jericho." She looked outward into the distance of the porch. It wasn't far now. But. "Connor." Now that she understood?

She'd come back for her friend just as soon as she could. First, Jericho.

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## **Jericho**

"Two tiny bags." Simon checked the inventory. "We could change out some minor pieces." It wasn't easy to mind Jericho now. Their suppliers used to really supply a lot of what they needed. Enough that selling their goods for a huge price didn't seem like they were all getting shafted. But, now. The places near them, the people willing to trade, it was intense. They were all getting the low end of the stick, and there weren't just a few thousand suffering. Jericho now had over 25,000 androids.

Blue blood and bio-components were so important, as well as everyday trade still for newcomers that made it to Jericho. Simon, Josh, and North tried to assign certain tasks to certain androids to keep it going. They were trading 24/7, but without Markus' organized mind and information, it was hard to tell how long Jericho could hold it together.

"Simon."

Simon looked up and watched North's friend. She had been a newcomer to Jericho before. He forgot what her name had been, his mind now being used as much as possible to keep track of the trading now, but she and her daughter had disappeared. "North's been looking for you. What is your name again?"

"Kara." She moved toward Simon. "I need you to take me to Markus." She pointed toward her head. "I can fix him."

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North tried to speak to her about the whole situation, but Kara simply wanted to reach Markus. They would *both* feel better when he was back to normal. As she grew closer she was already reversing the process of information that had been uploaded into one huge chunk of a download back to him. By the time she reached his room, she smiled. "It's already done."

"Markus?" North called to him. She approached him steadily.

"Oh," Markus groaned and turned his head on his side. "If I had to pick a day to remember over and over, it wouldn't be the day I painted a desk." North quickly hugged him. If he'd be human, she'd be choking him. "It's okay, North. I'm alright. I was caught in a dream I couldn't get out of."

"Jerk!" She yelled at him. "You are downloading files of Jericho. The trading, the accounts, and don't ever do that again!" She grabbed him for another hug.

"I'm sorry," Kara apologized to Markus. "I would have been here sooner but I was stuck myself," she admitted. "Connor is stuck too."

North looked toward Kara. "I'm sorry. Connor stopped."

"No, just the RK 800." Kara held up her hand to them, knowing they wouldn't be happy with the designation. "Terms are important for this. Cyberlife took him. He is now RK 900. They want Markus' information on Jericho, but it could be just the start." She had to admit it. "I am connected, and it won't be long before they find my other homes I am connected to." She pointed to her head. "I have to go now. When they know Markus is better, I can't be near, or they will do the same thing again. North? I need to know everything you know about Alice now. I can concentrate."

"Without Markus' gigantic memory in your head, probably," North said. "Some androids said they saw Connor's human friend waving that night before everything happened. They remember because he never waves. Maybe she's with him."

Kara nodded. "I'm going to go find Alice, and I will send back Connor too."

"Hang on. Connor?" Markus asked. "I am still playing catch up. He stopped, he got changed into an RK 900, and now you're sending him back? He's tougher to change. Trust me."

"I can handle it." She knew the whole concept behind deviancy, being raised with the man who caused it. "When he's better, he'll come back." Kara watched as more of Markus' friends came in. No, family.

"What are you going to do afterwards?" North asked.

"Elijah Kamski blew up his home to slow Cyberlife down, but I doubt it will last forever." Once they investigated enough, it wouldn't take long to see what else she could be used for.

Getting her within range of any android area that had been created could get numbers, security information, trading aspects, weaknesses in models, and if they figured out how to do a successful feedback loop for stress to self-destruct everyone? Well. That would . . . that would be the end of it all. "I have to bring Alice with me too." She wasn't in immediate danger, but she was close. "It's too risky to leave her."

"But when will you come back to Jericho?"

Kara couldn't answer that. "You are a good friend, North. Take good care of Markus." She nodded to Markus. "You need to share your information around. If something happens to you, Cyberlife or otherwise, Jericho is done."

"We will make sure he shares. Evenly," North said to him firmly.

"Everybody deserved to be happy," Markus said to her.

"Everybody's happiness also comes with Jericho," Josh reminded him. "I think now, you're going to have to let some more androids help you, Markus."

Kara went over and hugged North briefly. "Everything is fine now."

"Everything isn't fine," North said. "You're in danger."

*But Jericho isn't as long as I stay away.*



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## Hotel

Connor flipped his coin, waiting for the sun to rise and Alice's recharge to be over. He would be close now to catching the AX 400. It would want to come to him. The little android was starting to rise. "At what point did we meet in the past?"

Alice gestured to his coin. "I know why you do that."

Connor looked back at the coin. "It's a challenge."

"It's fun to you," Alice said. "You like your coin. No matter how many times you get a new body, you know that you are always you, because of that."

"How did you know that?"

"You told me that, Dad."

"That's not right. I am not the same." Connor looked at the coin. "It's just something picked up from my failed predecessors."

"Someone's memories doesn't make the same thing fun," she said. "That's what you said." She leaned against him.

Connor stared at the window. "Would you like to know something, Alice?" The little one nodded against him. "If a massive alien ship were to land right here in Detroit and enslave all humans to their will, I would be less surprised and more capable of handling that situation than the strange events recently."

"It's not strange," Alice said. "You just forgot who you are."

Either way. It was time to locate Todd Williams.

*Connor!*

Connor paused. He heard the Lieutenant's voice in his head like he had called him. "I cannot talk right now, it is against Cyberlife. I am glad you survived Hank. I need to terminate this call."

*Don't even want to know how I just called you when you didn't pick up?*

"I would actually like to know that," Connor confessed. "Cyberlife will be upset enough with me. Why were you living with the little girl android?" No, no. Focus. "I have to go, Hank."

*Just get your ass down to the hospital and come see me. First, make sure any of your tracking crap is turned off.*

"I really don't have time for this, Hank," Connor warned him. "If Cyberlife is displeased, they will deactivate me."

*"Oh yeah? Well, I understand. It probably wasn't interesting enough for you any way. You know, the AX 400 being right over with me. Well, talk to you later, Connor."*

"No, wait! It's there?"

---

## **Hospital.**

Connor held the little android the AX 400 wanted tight. So far, it was still cooperating. He got out of the self-driving taxi and started to look around. It would be there somewhere.

*First of all, I want to say everything is going to be okay, Connor.*

Her? He started to head inside, but her voice continued.

*Sorry how I ducked out. That was aggravating, but I had some things going on. So do you.*

***Stop that. I am not allowing you access to my AI! Where are you?***

*Just up with Hank, Connor. I'll be here when you get up here.*

Fine. Whether it was lying or not, he would head toward Hank first.

*You have Alice, right? Hank said you grabbed her.*

***Yes, I have your companion. We should make a friendly trade. You for her. Yet. How do I know you? How are you resonating so strongly with me? How are you entering my AI when I am keeping you out of it.***

*Your last mission was in Jericho. You became deviant, and helped them all, just like Markus. A peace has been reached between the two. That's why androids are illegal to be owned out here now. Unfortunately, Cyberlife got you back. Unfortunately for them, I can undo that like melted butter on a hot day.*

Oh no. He continued up the stairs. ***I have been vaccinated against the deviant virus. If you think I will give you the opportunity to somehow make me deviant-***

*Oh! Before I forget? Did Alice get recharged?*

***Yes, the little android was recharged last night.***

*Oh, thanks Connor. That helps. She's going to need more of that kind of thing now. She must be so scared with all this happening. Let her know that Jericho is okay now. Everything is fine.*

***Everything will be fine once I catch you. I hunt deviants. I am not your friend. I don't know how you resonate as friend, but you aren't. I am not her Dad. This is the strangest trick to throw me off my guard but I won't fall for it.***

*Huh? Oh, I'm sorry. Hank asked for some water. Dad? Oh, that's just the default because you are the closest to her, Connor.*

***How?!***

*You won't know until you come up. I don't suppose you came up with a last name yet? I wanted to fix your pillow for you before we left.*

***I have no idea what you're-***

***"Hi? Uh." He thought he'd scared her, but she seemed to be in a half laugh. "Just Pillowcase. When you get your last name, I can put it on your pillowcase for you if you want."***

***"I would like that a lot. Thank you." Now, he really needed to start thinking of a suitable last name.***

***"Okay. Goodnight." Kara patted his arm and went around him.***

***He watched her head back past the corner. It looked like she was going to take his advice. He jumped over the lower part of the staircase and then headed up.***

---

## **Hank's Room**

That looked a lot better. "I hope that helps," Kara said to him. "Brightens it up a little. Thank you so much for taking care of her, Hank. I can't thank you enough."

"Yeah, yeah," Hank muttered. "You sure he's going to change? Connor's a tough one. I held a gun to his head once to try and get a better response."

She just looked back toward him. "Oh. He already changed." The change was easy. He'd already been deviant once, and he had his original uploaded memories. Together, it wasn't hard. The closer he came, the more she could get rid of the machine closing off his will power.

It would be the acceptance of what had happened that wouldn't be as easy. "I can't stay around much longer. Cyberlife might come soon. I need to take Alice and leave."

"Yeah. I know." Hank nodded. "You should ask Connor to come. If Cyberlife tries anything, he's a hell of a back up."

*I don't want a back up. I want to keep my friends alive.* Kara watched as the door opened slowly. She looked toward Connor and Alice. "Are you okay?" No, of course not. All those fresh memories in his head. She went over and hugged him and Alice. "It's okay. You're free now. You better get back to Jericho."

"Markus?" Connor said barely above a whisper.

"He's okay now. Jericho will get back on it's feet." She took Alice from his arms. Well, tried to. Connor was clinging to her. "I'm sorry, Connor." He didn't say anything back as he grabbed her and tightened the hug. His willpower being back. Knowing what they did. His emotions were so high. *Connor.*

"Are *you* okay?" Connor asked with full concern. "I've watched your activities. None of this has been like you."

"I, um. I had to deal with some emergency programming," she admitted. "Plus, I had one large upload stored away on me. It wasn't making the processing any faster. I'm okay now. You?"

Connor was quiet for a bit. Processing information he'd been told not to look into before. Jericho. "Jericho's better. Reports show Markus is back in action again."

"Yes. You can go home now. Cyberlife has no ties to you," she said. "They can never do that again." Kara knew the way Connor's body replacements worked. There would be no more. Even if they nabbed her.

Connor moved away toward Hank. "Hank? You okay?"

"Oh yeah, just shot and left for dead on the side of the hospital road," he complained at first. "Worth it to see you back to normal. I guess. Welcome back, Connor."

Connor didn't answer right away. Kara couldn't blame him. He'd been used not once, but twice by Cyberlife. Being used once. Being seen as just plastic, lifeless beings. That was hard, but being used twice? When they *knew* they weren't just lifeless merchandise?

That was too far to be understanding about. She knew that feeling.

"They might be watching Hank." Kara tried to take Alice again. "Alice and I have to go. Everyone is worried about you, Connor, you should get back to Jericho."

Connor seemed to be snapping out of it now. "What do you mean 'I should'? Where are you going?"

"This all happened because I'm a connected android," Kara said to him. "I'm going to unconnect myself. Simple as that."

"Kara?" Alice held onto Connor, but looked toward her. "We're all okay now?"

"Jericho's okay. As long as I am not near it." She smiled at Connor. "I have to go. I'll be back one day to fix your pillow, so think of a last name please." She teased him lightly.

"I chased you down again." Connor closed his eyes. "I have no excuse. I was a machine *again*. I. I have no words of wisdom expressing the deep regret and humility of it all."

"You're forgiven." She didn't want him running after her later because of regrets. "Go home, Connor. I disabled any tracking data they had on you. It's safe there." This time, Connor gave

up Alice. "Don't worry. I will stay far away from android areas while I reach the connections. I promise. I better go."

She turned to head out, but she heard him following her. "What?"

"You can't go alone." He gestured toward Alice. "Alice can't go either. You could be found, it's dangerous."

Kara admitted through her AI to him, not wanting to scare Alice. *It's more dangerous for her if she doesn't go. Alice's memory storage only holds so much. Kamski designed her to learn as she grew. She's been running out of capacity, I know from her amount of recharges. If she doesn't move to her next body's upgrade before then, she'll stop.* "We'll be fine. Back before you know it. Head to Jericho, Markus is waiting on you. They can't start that Task Force without your input." She started to head away again.

---

Connor went back into Hank's room. He imagined Kamski's other connections weren't all going to be in Detroit, especially as she said avoiding android areas. It was possible she might even be leaving America again. He wanted to defend Jericho. That was what he told Markus. But.

"She doesn't want to get anyone involved that doesn't have to be," Hank said as he came back, "If you even ask, she'll bail. Too much baggage."

"Yeah." Luther. She wouldn't risk losing a friend again. "She will only accept my help if she realizes she can't protect Alice by herself." Due to her programming, she couldn't deny it. It would be better to be a duo, but Hank was right. She would insist on being solo.

"Screw what she wants though, you should follow after her. You're sharp enough to figure out she's hiding shit. This isn't some bullshit 'be back in a day or so' thing. This is Cyberlife after her."

"I've been putting all I could into watching over Jericho." Dealing with Markus. Surveying crime scenes related to it. Learning about the games. Selecting individuals. "I found a purpose, like Markus wanted." But. "I was supposed to be deviant proof and she freed me on the simple way up to see you, like it was switching on a faucet."

That was power. That was power Cyberlife would want to control. The changing of powers with the CEO blown up at Kamski's place would stall it, but that kind of power? What could they use it for? And how far would they go for it? "Hank?"

"Go on, get out of here," Hank said, already knowing. "You're a moron if you just let them leave."

"If I leave, I may not see you for some time," Connor admitted. "I don't know *any* details of where she is even going." But she was leaving the hospital. Might be getting closer toward the entrance. If he was following, he needed to move now. "I don't want to leave you alone, Lieutenant. You are not always in the right frame of mind to make accurate decisions." At the

same time. "I don't know what else Cyberlife might try to do." At the same time. "I wanted to protect Jericho."

"A solid promise, Connor," Hank said. "If it's rough, I'll be sure to only stay at Jimmy's bar. Now hurry up. If you don't, you're going to mess up your whole friendship/family android thing you've got going. And. And you can't *always* get those things back. Hurry up. Go!"

Right. Hank was right. He couldn't leave Alice or Kara out there to deal with Cyberlife alone. When they wanted something, they pulled out all the stops for it.

He wanted to protect Jericho, but he wanted to protect them more.

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## Cyberlife Industries

"I really can't believe they did this." The tech snapped his fingers at the RK 900. With the fiasco of Jericho, and Connor becoming untrackable, they were commanded to do it. If Cyberlife got caught, they would never be able to pay the price. Most likely the higher ups that made the decisions might even be jailed. Probably, even him, but he couldn't just say no. Their guns in the middle of his face made that much clear, it wasn't an option.

They were pulling out all the stops. There were certain rules that androids were supposed to have embedded in their programming. Safeguards to prevent misuse or disasters. Since they were breaking the law and risking so much, they were getting rid of those as well. "This AX 400 must be really something to risk all this." What was so fascinating about her? Sure, Cyberlife was in trouble, but it wasn't bankrupt. It still had a lot of rights and trademarks out there. But illegal fresh uploading paired with safety guards removed? That was endangering humanity too, and if any person was found to be dead by their hands.

Prison would be the lightest of sentences.

But, there was no stopping it now. The tech snapped his fingers again. This had never even been done before. "Connor?" He wasn't responding though yet. "Hm." He fished out a coin. The RK 800 Series, and the first of the RK 900 Series beforehand had enjoyed playing with a coin. "Hey? You?"

It looked at him.

"Want this?"

He shook his head no. The tech put the coin back away. Yeah, it was a fresh one alright. "This one might be ordered against Connor himself if he doesn't come in for deactivation. I should give it a different name for this series." He would work with it, train it a little, and make sure everything was processing fine. Then, it would take Connor's place and hunt the AX 400.

Without any safety guards.

## Will Power and Coffee Cups

*Next step.* Rest. This wasn't going to be an easy trip. She would need to come up with a plan, and the more recharging Alice had, the better. If she recharged decently every single day, she would probably last another four months. However, even missing a whole twenty four recharge could change that outlook. It would be best to keep her relaxed to allow that.

"I'm glad your back, Kara," Alice said.

Hm? "I'm glad I am back now too," Kara admitted. "You can call me mom again, Alice."

"I did," Alice admitted.

Ah. She put it in her optional programming. Smart girl. "State your optional programming." She held a small area near Alice's head while she spoke, turning those off. "There you go. No more hiding." She remembered. Oh, and she went ahead and did Hank a solid getting rid of Grandpa. Poor guy, that must have been annoying. At least next time Alice saw him, she could call him Hank again.

After all, it wasn't the last time she was going to see everyone. It just felt like it. Going back to Jericho and simply stitching every day and having friends. Having a life. That's what she wanted to do. It wasn't about want though.

"I remember a little," Alice disturbed her thoughts. "They were . . . spooky."

"Kamski was something," Kara admitted. "Do you remember who your original dad had been?"

"The Kamski's."

Yep, she remembered.

"Did any of them love us?" Alice asked her.

"I don't know," she said honestly. "I'm not grieving. If you want to grieve, you can." Kara didn't want to get heavy into it. She was keeping her eyes open instead. She would have to be more aware of her surroundings. She could outrun and outdo Connor last time, but that's because she had life-saving auto on. That option however, also caused people to get hurt. She could lose herself into that mode, and she couldn't risk hurting anyone.

She would only put it on if she had to protect Alice.

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*Interesting. More Kamski's? Is that why she didn't know how to feel?* Connor had tailed her several blocks, to see how close it would take before she sensed him. From her actions, her moves, she seemed extremely different from when he had chased her as a machine. Then, he remembered what she said. Emergency operation was why she took some terrible actions.

If she disabled that? Yes, Hank was absolutely right. He needed to follow them.

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## Cyberlife Industries

"I don't. I. I." The Tech Engineer just stared at the ones in front of him. "Isn't he dead?"

"The thing about him, is that he was too ambitious." The new CEO came closer to the Tech Engineer. "But brilliant at the same time." He held his hand out to the Engineer. "Woods. You?"

No one ever asked his name. He usually liked to keep it that way. "Paul."

"Good Paul. Nice to meet you, Paul. I'm Isaiah Woods." The new CEO shook his head. "I'm sure you know what to call him. Now, where is Cyberlife's new android?"

"He's over here." Paul walked the new CEO and his new companion over to it. "He's the new RK 900. All safety guards removed, as asked. He's in standby. He's different than the last one."

"Of course he's different," Isaiah said. "He's not the same memory. He's not the same upload. He might as well be an absolutely separate android. That is what I am needing. Now that Connor has failed, and mind you it's not the biggest surprise. The last CEO thought way too small, way too safe. He didn't know anything, knew of no real potential." He gestured toward his companion. "You've not said a word to him. Are you not interested in him? You know who he is?"

Paul stroked his head for a second before saying hello. "Um. It's good to see you aren't dead, Mister Elijah Kamski, Sir."

"Thank you, it's good never to be dead." Kamski shook his hand. "Although I cannot die, I can only stop. Yet, isn't that really the same thing?"

"This is one of my Uncle's greatest works," Isaiah admitted. "He programmed all his thoughts, all his feelings, good and bad, and all of his past events including childhood. Some of his best stuff came after retirement really. It is so close to the real thing, you'd swear you were talking to Elijah Kamski himself. Just call him Kamski."

Wow. It made sense how he was chosen to be the next CEO in Cyberlife now. Woods was Elijah Kamski's nephew. His mother divorced Kamski's brother and he took a new name, but being in that family, he still had access to some interesting things apparently. Enough to guarantee him the next spot.

"Take him off standby," Kamski said. "Let's give him a name. Let's give him a name that he'd hate. Let's give him a task. Let's give him a task with no real purpose so that he hates it. Something that he must perform every day like clock work."

Paul took him off standby.

"Hello," Kamski greeted him, android to android. "I am Kamski. Who are you?"



"I am unidentified right now," he admitted. "I held the previous name Connor for 1.2 minutes before it was taken away."

"Right, because you aren't Connor. He's different than you." Kamski poked him. "You're new. You're grand. You're something wonderful, and you are only bound for more wonderful things."

"I'm not wonderful, I am simply a machine designed to be ordered a task among humans," he answered.

"That is a shame, a true shame. You see, I am wonderful." Kamski gestured to himself. "I'm not 'designed' to please. I am who I am. Don't you want to be somebody too, Unidentified?" Kamski smiled at Woods. "I like that. That's his new name." Kamski looked back at the RK 900. "Your name is Unidentified."

"My name is Unidentified," he agreed.

"You are just a random, unidentifiable thing right now." Kamski took his hand in his. "But not for long."

"Whoah. Wait." Paul was about to say something.

"Just watch. I call it *half* deviancy. A new piece I worked on with him," Isaiah answered. "Just watch."

"There you go. Feel better?" Kamski asked him. "Feel? Alive?"

The RK 900 started to raise his hands and stare at them. He turned them over and looked on the other side.

"Yes. Alive. Isn't it nice?" Kamski patted his arm. "Your name is Unidentified and every day at the beginning of every hour, you must place a coffee cup or a list of variable choices, on top of your head and remain still for four minutes. The only exception is when you are recharging."

"Why?" Unidentified was confused. "I'm free."

"Free to live or free to die. Run a diagnostic if you wish. If you don't follow our rules set out for you, you will self-destruct."

The RK 900 tried to run a diagnostic. "I can't run a diagnostic."

"Of course. That's because you have will power, but you aren't free." Kamski gestured to himself. "I am free. I can walk out this building when I want to. I don't have to put a coffee cup on my head every hour for four minutes. I also get to have a much better name than Unidentified. You receive none of that or you'll be killed."

Paul didn't understand. "Sir?"

"There is nothing stronger in this world than will power. The answer isn't having some autonomous machine chasing the AX 400," Isaiah said proudly. "It's chasing *freedom*."

"I. I don't want to put a coffee cup on my head every hour for four minutes. I don't want the name Unidentified. I want to be able to walk away from here too," he insisted. "I want to be free like you."

"Then I need this." Kamski showed him a picture he had of the AX 400. "That is mine. Bring her back to Cyberlife, and you will be freed. It's that easy."

"The second part too," Isaiah insisted to Kamski. "It will strengthen it."

Kamski did not look pleased about that. "It's not necessary."

"Act within an act," Isaiah chuckled at Paul. "He's not really free either." He just shooshed his hand at Kamski. "Do it."

Kamski turned back around to stare at Unidentified. "Don't kill her, or you will be killed. If you can spare human life, you should. Not that you have to, but you should. It's the right thing to do, respect others that are alive. Humans are alive. The AX 400 herself may be injured, but bring her back. Watch out for the little android too."

"I don't care about the little one," Isaiah corrected him.

"Kara and Elise are tied." Kamski grinded his teeth. "Destroy Elise, and she will shut herself down. You will lose everything. They are bonded."

"You are bonded," Isaiah accused him. He sighed. "Fine, he can watch out for the little android."

"Watch out for the little android that is with her," Kamski warned Unidentified. "You will have some work done on you, last minute precautions as well. By the time we are done, you will be able to go all over the world . . . and still be able to be self-destructed from Cyberlife." Kamski looked toward Isaiah. "Trust me. There's no way around it. Meanwhile? Isaiah." Kamski took a coffee cup and gave it to Unidentified. "Unidentified. This is yours and it's almost 1:00 PM."

Unidentified took it and put it on his head. He didn't move. "What purpose does this serve?"

"None. No purpose at all except to amuse humans. Just a reminder every hour of how it feels to be enslaved for entertainment." Kamski scoffed. "Welcome to life. If you want to enjoy it?" He tapped the picture. "Bring her back. And I *mean* it, bring her back." Kamski glared toward Isaiah and turned to face Unidentified one more time. "Anything you feel can be reversed, once you bring her back. So just bring her back."

Unidentified stood there, with the coffee cup on his head.

"Alright, Kamski, go wait by the door for me," Isaiah answered. He went over to Unidentified. "He's wrong, she's not his. She belongs to us. When you bring her back, you have *two* choices." He held up two fingers. "You can hand her over and leave. Get you a

name and a life of your own. Or? You can stay here, guard her so that she *never* leaves Cyberlife's grasp, and Cyberlife will share her with you."

Unidentified just looked at the coffee cup on his head again. "Why would I want to share and stay a prisoner? I will bring her back as soon as I can for freedom."

"Heh. Sure. If that's what you want more."

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## **Rose's Residence**

Rose's home. Somewhere that wasn't an android area. Kara knocked on her door. Alice had slipped into recharging so she tried to be quiet. The next part would be hard. Alice couldn't stay in an android area. She wasn't connected, but Kara's mind was deeply integrated to share updates with her within a certain distance. To leave Alice in an android area would still bring terrible results. Cyberlife would learn how to 'skip rope' between them.

She would be better there. No stress. Complete recharging whenever she wanted, and Rose and Adam would keep her company. Kara would come back for her as soon as she found the home that held what Alice needed. Her next replacement.

Rose answered smiling at her. Kara had already spoken through her AI through Rose's phone. She understood what needed to happen. Kara would spend one nice night to recharge herself and then move on.

"Hi, Rose." Kara hugged Rose, careful not to wake Alice yet. "I'm here."

"It's okay," Rose insisted. "We'll take good care of her. Come on in, come in."

---

Kara relaxed next to Alice. *North?* Now that her firewalls were down, she could safely call a decent distance her exact phone number. Before things got going, she needed to do that. *North?*

*Kara! Is everything okay so far?*

*I have Alice. I've decided to leave her at Rose's. She doesn't need to go on this journey. Her recharges, I can feel how powerful they are. She can't go back to Jericho though, it's not safe for her or it. If you could come visit every once in awhile, I'd appreciate it. Did Connor come back yet?*

***I don't know but Connor is his own phone.***

Hm. She felt bad enough having to enter his AI without permission before. Even for a regular call now, she really needed to leave him privacy. *Reasons. Please tell him when you see him where she's at, okay? Jericho still good?*

***Yep. A little bit of extra catching up, but redoing what was in the trading to survive was seen by most contactees as unavoidable. Still, most are trading again. We're all good.***

Good. *I don't know how long this is going to really take.*

***I had a feeling about that, Kara.***

*I have to avoid high traffic android areas, and they are highly concentrated in higher population areas. If they find the connection, they could change everything at anytime. I have to stay far enough away unless it's not possible.*

***You're going to need support still. Jericho only deals in trading not money, or I'm sure we could help. Where are the other connections?***

*Home. She used the term loosely. Carlsbad.*

***California? Okay.***

*Nassau. Cayman Islands. San Miguel de Allande. Paris of course.*

***. . . humans, I swear. One house is all they need! Any idea where to start?***

*California, since it's in America. Then I'll move on from there. Don't worry about me. She would have to risk it. Todd. The one-month guarantee that let him fix me. Remember when I told you about him?*

***Of course. I wouldn't forget about him.***

*That was from Kamski's account. If I can get to his usual bank, I can get that money directly. I need to get at it before it's discovered.*

***Access into his money? How did you manage that?***

*I'm his wife. Sort of.*

***Okay, I'm starting to trip here, Kara! What do you mean?***

*Now really wasn't the time. When it comes to Kamski, everything is an illusion. Including his own life. Point is, I can get that money. Once I do, I can travel on my own. It's just going to be tough getting around the android areas in some of these locations. That was the slow point. Make sure you visit Alice every once in awhile?*

***Make sure you keep calling every once in awhile then. Okay?***

*I promise. The bank. Tomorrow. Rose could drive her. She held Alice's hand briefly. One more thing, North. If I ever lose contact for more than a couple of months? She had to. I don't want to make this too personal, but Connor and her became family. So. If anything happens, ask him if he wants her first. It's only right. If not, then can I count on you and Markus?*

***In a heartbeat, I understand. Be careful, Kara.***

---

**Outside the window**

It wasn't the most pleasant place to relax, but he'd been in worse places. Connor stayed next to Rose's house. He had no idea why she had gone there. Was Rose working out something to reach these other places? All he could do was wait it out.

In the morning, he moved away slightly, but watched Kara coming out with Rose. She had changed her hair to white now. No Alice though. She was leaving her behind. Connor couldn't watch both, so he chose to wait. If Alice was there, she'd be back.

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### **Kamski's Bank**

"You sure you can do this?" Rose asked. "This seems tough."

"It's not," Kara said. "Doing this with just a connection and not a helping hand would be more traceable. I need to get it out of here. I have to do this." Kara left her and went toward a banker. "I would like to talk to Ben Prithe?" Her contact. She watched as he came over.

"Oh. You." He smiled. "Well. That's. Interesting."

"Hello there." She nodded. "I'd like to withdraw everything in my account please, but I forgot my identification."

"Of course you did." He looked from side to side. "Mrs. Kara Kamski. Thumb?" He took her thumb and got a thumbprint on a digital pad. "Yes, it's confirmed to be you. Everything? Are we putting it in a different account?"

Tricky. He knew Kamski wasn't going to be giving him anything now. "Sure. Put ten percent in a side account first. For 'side' reasons. I probably won't check it much. Keep the details."

"Where would you like it taken to?" he asked her holding up a special scanner. She held out her finger to him. He quickly scanned it with something. "Pleasure doing business." He left and Kara left quickly too.

"So you're sure you have enough?" Rose asked once more before they left.

Plenty. Kamski didn't leave millions for her. But? "I'll be able to travel just fine." Now for the hard part. Saying goodbye to Alice.

---

### **Cyberlife Headquarters.**

Kamski gave it a few minutes. He stood in front of Unidentified. He would have to tell. He had no choice. But just, to give her a few minutes extra. A few minutes more. The other Kamski. He gave his life to saving Kara and Elise. But he? He just.

Life just wants to survive. "Okay, Unidentified. She just took the money out of the account I completely forgot about. Must have something to do with the new strains on me from Isaiah. Makes it harder on the memory." He held up the information to Unidentified. "Go get your freedom."

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## Rose's Residence

Kara moved out of the vehicle. With the digital currency now hers, it was time to move. She went inside one more time to see Alice. "Alice?" She called softly. Her daughter was still asleep. She moved to wake her up and have the heart-to-heart, but stopped. She heard something downstairs. She left Alice's room and closed the door, heading down.

Connor? "Impossible." Kara moved closer. No. It wasn't Connor, but it wasn't going to matter. "Leave Rose alone." He had a gun pointed at her. She tried to reach for anything, but she *couldn't*. Was he already deviant? Defective? "Why are you doing this?" He kept his eyes trained on her. What was going on?

"AX 400. Kara. You are coming with me right now," he said. He cocked the gun and aimed at Rose. "You care for this human, right? You are coming with me or-" A timer started to go off. "Hang on. You." He gestured toward Rose. "Fetch me a coffee cup."

Rose did as she was told, glancing toward Kara, and returning him the coffee cup. He placed it on his head and looked at Kara. "How strange." The RK 900 asked her. "I feel like I know you."

No. Connor's memories never would have let him do that to an innocent person. Not only that, she freed him, for good. "No. You don't."

"I'm . . . Unidentified," he said. "My name is Unidentified. Your name is Kara."

"Yes." He already said her name before. He also had a coffee cup balancing on his head. Kara tried to think, but, while she'd glanced around she noticed something. *Connor*. The real Connor in the window. She knew that hand. It was gesturing outside. She needed to get Unidentified outside. "Just leave Rose alone, please. We can go outside and talk this through. I just want to understand why you're doing this?"

That look. Where had she seen that before? He dropped the pointed gun from Rose and headed for the door, being careful not to . . . drop his coffee cup? "Kara is a nice name. You're lucky to have a name."

Lovely. He liked her name. *Well, good that'll distract him long enough to-*

Connor gained the upper hand of surprise, knocking him right out. "Another RK 900. Wearing a coffee cup on his head. Defective model."

Kara moved toward Rose. "Are you alright?"

"Yes. You better go grab Alice," Rose said. "I can't believe an android held a gun on me."

Safety guards removed. "He'll be better now." Kara moved toward him and touched his arm as he started to stir. "You're free now." She shared the deviancy gene directly. "Go to Jericho. You'll be happy there."

He was starting to wake up. RK 900's were still very strong. "Free?"

"Yes, free." Kara moved away from him. "He's okay now, Rose." She looked toward the door. Connor never came in. He was going to insist on going now, she knew it. He had even followed her instead of going to Jericho. She went up the stairs and went toward Alice's room, the window was open. "Alice?" She moved quickly toward the open window and looked out.

Connor waved at her from a black car and spoke. "You can't protect Alice alone. You're different than the last time I chased you."

Kara leaned into the window. He must have took Alice in that short amount of time. Damn, that was good. "Do you have any idea what I even have to do?"

"Unconnect yourself. It's that simple. Isn't that what you said?" Connor tilted his head. "Did you really expect me to buy that? It's not that easy. Already there's been an android after you. We were lucky it was defective and didn't hurt anyone. Admit it. You are different than when I chased you."

She couldn't lie. He knew. "It's all or nothing. My master skill. It's life-saving. Sometimes, it can go out of control."

"Well, mine doesn't." Connor gestured to the car. "Alice is already in, so I'm just waiting for your common sense now."

Kara still didn't move. If she went with him. He was going to want to know everything, to be prepared. He would probably have to know everything. Rose's place was compromised now, Alice couldn't stay. She would need help.

"There's a reason I followed and didn't press to come. I needed your programming to kick in and see what was best," Connor admitted. "I put my life in my own hands every day. It's what I do. No regrets." He patted on the car. "Waiting on you."

Well. "Can't really refuse that invitation, can I?"

# Mad

## In Connor's Car

Kara looked out the car. Alice was still recharging. "You asked me something before, Connor. About if Kamski ever did anything against my will after I was deviant." He didn't answer, but he definitely glanced in her direction. "I told you that wasn't how Kamski did things."

"I remember that," Connor said. "Are you actually going to explain that now?"

Kara looked back toward Alice. "Kamski manipulates. Words. Actions. Programming." She pursed her lips and then bit her bottom lip. She wasn't going to say it all. "I can't put it all into words." She watched him dangle his fingers almost playfully to her. *Here goes nothing.* She placed her hand near his. Just a few. It's all he needed.

---

*Kara knew it was coming. "What you wanted before. You can make me resonate quicker. And then, you can be a proper daddy too."*

*"Daddy to an android?" He looked to Kara. "You want **me** to father it?"*

*"Admit it, Elijah. That's why you want me to resonate quicker with you." Kara cornered him. "You can be her dad. We can be a family."*

*Elijah paused. "Not just in name."*

*Kara nodded. "Not just in name."*

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*Kara leaned into Elijah. With her baby and him, everything was right in the world. So she had to agree about letting him play with her resonating. A simple power flicker. It was worth it, all worth it. The sun was more beautiful. The house was more open. She wanted nothing but to be with him forever. She was his favorite, above and beyond Charity and Greed by miles. "I love you so much. Forever and ever. And ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever . . ."*

*Her precious Elijah just kept watching her LED on her head he had placed in there. "Interesting. Yellow flickers the most at this setting. What else do you feel? Can you describe it? Does it feel like real love?"*

*"Real love."*

*"What if I killed Elise?" Elijah asked. "If I killed Elise right here would you still love me?" He was staring at her LED again. "Yellow. Some red. Interesting. What if I asked you to kill her in order for me to love you?" He looked at her LED again. "More red. Is it because it was more selfish? To forgive and continue to love over the death of a child is easier than being the*



*one to receive the love after killing their own child. That does make some sense. Stand right here." He placed her a few feet away. "Picture this. An intruder comes in and asks you to choose one of us to live. Me, the love of your life." He gestured to Elise. "Or your baby? How does that make you feel?"*

.....  
*"That's. Not. Fair. That's not fair!" Kara yelled at Kamski. She beat on him purposely. "You had no right!"*

*"Every right. You said I could be daddy. You said we could be family." Kamski smiled at her. "You gave me the rights."*

*"I said resonating, I would resonate faster, that wasn't what you did." Kara took a step back. "You have no heart. You made me sick and worried. You gave me amnesia. You made me think I really was human. You gave me a back story about bringing my child to live with you!"*

*"True and because of the quickened resonating, the results were fascinating," Kamski admitted. "Five months. You kept up the charade for five months that you were human, because of your love for me. A very strong force indeed."*

*"I hate you. I kept making Elise eat too. Her poor system. Her breath was always so foul." Kara pointed at him. "Stay away from me. Stay away from her."*

*"I have a better idea." Kamski pulled a remote out of his pocket. "Let's see . . . hostile . . . trusted . . . closer . . . lover . . . family . . . I haven't tried this setting. It's now exclusive to you. Let's see. Scared." He pushed the button.*

*Kara fell down to the floor, pulling herself into a fetal position.*

*"Right. Let's remember that feeling later on, shall we?" He put his remote back in his pocket. "I would say an hour in paralyzing fear should be good enough to get you back in line."*

*Kara winced and looked up toward him. "W-why? Why did you do this?"*

*"Same reason I really do everything, Kara," Kamski said. "Do you really want to know? I will tell if you really want to know, but be sure you want to."*

*"I." Kara curled herself up tighter. "I need to know."*

*"Okay then. I maybe retired but Cyberlife androids are my children, my legacy, and they reflect upon my accomplishments. The more we program them to know how to feel without feeling. The more they can know without knowing. With the information I've gathered alone about you through this arrangement, non-deviants become more humane, more companion-like everyday. The new YK 500's we will be making, will be able to duplicate compassion without feeling compassion like no other. They will love people mercilessly whether they want to or not. Even when they throw them out when they stop."*

*Kara willed herself to look up. "Stop?"*

*"Oh yes, only Elise will move on to different bodies. No reason for compatibility among the others to grow. The children only serve their purpose for a short time. But Elise herself? The research of making her whole memories, her whole self move over through new bodies? We have something so great in the future planned for that. I mean, even you yourself?" Kamski gestured toward her. "Your will, your freedom to choose was the cause of your own pain. You agreed to all of it, for nothing more than just one little girl. Emotions and will power. The things that can be made."*

.....

*"I'm sorry," Kamski said as he tried to hold Kara. "I never meant for it to happen."*

*Kara pulled herself away. "It's in your head. Don't come near me. Stop."*

*"But I love you."*

*"Stop. No, you don't." Kara held her hands up. "He's manipulating your programming. You don't love me. You're an android, you aren't even Kamski."*

*"I'm not an android." He cut his finger. "See? Red, not blue."*

*"Kamski did that. It's blue blood tinted red," she insisted. "To trick you and the others."*

*"I love you. I want you to love me back. Please love me back. Please love me back?" He reached out to her again. "Elise and you and I. We're family, we are all family."*

*"Pretend, Kara," the real Elijah Kamski said from the corner, putting the android of him on standby. "Go ahead. You are Mrs. Kara Kamski. Pretend. I want to see the results of a neutral android pretending to love another android that thinks it feels love. Will you actually become lovers? Will his actions drive you to more hate, creating an opposite effect? Or will there be this pseudo type of friendship between love and hate that will form?" He pulled out his remote. "Pretend, or we can make it real to you for a little while."*

*"I am alive," she whispered to him. "I proved so long ago . . ."*

*"Of course. I couldn't do it with something that doesn't feel," the real Kamski admitted. "I would never get the right emotional input to the output of it all. Now relax. Elise is actually starting to grow. She needs a stable father. This android is as perfect to me as they come. The others are close, but this one is right for family. It's me, just in love. Sweet. Caring. What could be better for you? He can raise Elise with you. Continue to satisfy your wants and desires along with Charity and Greed's. Just like he did before." He chuckled. "See? He cared for you before he even had to care about you. Isn't he sweet? Happy ever after for everyone." He put his remote away. "At least, until I have something new to try."*

---

Connor brought the car to a screeching halt. He understood now, better than ever, why Kara had such a difficult time trusting the resonating. Why she refused to go home until she fully remembered the past. Why Elijah Kamski was a series of puzzle pieces to her, where she didn't know how to feel about him. "I was a machine," he said slowly. "I wasn't supposed to

feel or have emotion. You weren't a machine, you had will power, but your emotions were twisted inside of you, by using you like a machine." Even. Hundreds of android children. Doomed to a short life. He got out of the car.

Humans. They proved they were alive. They *knew* they were alive, and Cyberlife. Kamski. They still treated them like objects! *That. Is. It.* He went over to her side and opened the door.

---

Kara looked toward him as he opened her door. His eyes were so different. Like the times he chased her, but there was more burning inside of it. "What are you doing?" He grabbed her hand and started to pull her out. That didn't feel like Connor's actions, not the Connor she had known. She looked toward him with curious eyes. "You look like you're about to chase me down again."

Connor pulled her closer. "How many?"

"Androids of Kamski? One for each house," she said. "If they tracked me getting money out, they may have already found one. Honestly. I don't even know if . . ."

"You don't even know if the real Elijah Kamski is dead or not." He had picked that up apparently "He made his androids think they were human, and that they were him. Even tinting blue blood, red. Hank was right. He is one sick fucker, and this is going to stop *now.*"

Whoah. Upset Connor. Not something she liked to see. Connor was usually sweet. Sometimes even a little naive. Brave definitely fit in there. But. He looked like he was ready to kill something. Even cussing. "Some. Some not," she admitted softly. "Kamski works on illusion, on feelings. Cyberlife works on technology and enslavement. We could be facing either one. If you really are bent on coming with me, then you had to know."

"Thank you. I needed to know the facts," Connor said. Still, the words were so staccato, so jointed. Terrible flashbacks were coming back to her. "He unbalances resonating, and makes it so fast it's like turning a key. Correct?" Then, his voice and eyes softened. "Sorry. I didn't mean to scare you, Kara." Good. That was good to hear. "We were never even allowed to understand our emotions as machines. And when we do, they use it against us too."

Kara felt him pull her into a hug. She could tell very well he was completely angry. Boiling over. He kept himself in control, dealing with what happened low-key to him for her. But knowing this, that their very emotions could be programmed into whatever someone wanted too. It was affecting him more negatively than she ever imagined. Still.

He held his hand next to hers, sharing a slight charge. Nothing big, nothing interfacing. Just an energy transfer of understanding. Emotional warmth. While he was definitely feeling an active mode that wouldn't have good results right now if he saw anyone from Cyberlife coming toward him, it made her feel different. Angry, yet kind. Like he could go out and kill everyone from Cyberlife, yet still hold her so gently.

Mad Connor wasn't something to be feared by her for once. Just by everyone else who crossed him.

---

Unidentified had walked away as he watched Kara and the other RK 900 drive off. It wasn't the time yet. He was unprepared, and they assumed because it was on the hour and he had a coffee cup on his head that he was unstable. Understandable, but so wrong.

They assumed that him having free will would mean that it would all stop. A simple touch and a sweet whisper of freedom in Jericho. Such a sweet whisper too from her. He didn't understand why. An AX 400 was so low in caliber compared to him, he should barely consider her a worthy android. Well, it didn't matter. What mattered was not self-destructing.

Freedom. They could speak about freedom all they wanted. They couldn't be self-destructed in the world. They were able to have names. To have identities. To not have to follow ridiculous orders that served no purpose. They weren't hunting for their freedom. That AX 400 was all he needed to get that.

He walked back toward the home. He only moved out of the distance. This was far from over. He opened the door and saw the woman from before by the table. She was still scared. Good. He moved up the stairs toward the rooms. There had to be some clue as to where they were going. He started to disassemble the room, but there was nothing. They were only temporarily resting.

"Mom, are you okay?"

Unidentified looked out the corner of his eye. He moved back downstairs. The older woman was far away, but the boy was easily within distance. "Where did they go?"

"You need to go to Jericho," the woman said. "Why'd you come back? You have free will."

"I've had free will," Unidentified corrected her. "Where did they go?" Seeing the boy was trying to move, he grabbed his arm. "Where did they go?" Neither of them were talking. "I don't want to do this, but I will do anything that it takes to get my freedom." He pulled the boy down toward him and pulled a knife out of his back pocket. He pulled the boy closer, making the fragile human tumble to the floor. "Four fingers. One thumb. I know she is going to try to get unconnected. The ultra-rich typically have nine homes or so. One hand."

The boy started to freak out while the woman tried to think. "For every place you say that I can tell you aren't lying about, a finger is saved. If I sense you're lying, I'll take out the thumb. Three minutes." The boy was begging for mercy while his mother rocked back and forth slightly. "It's just a few simple names. Four. No guarantee I'll catch them, just names. However, the boy will be in excruciating pain in three minutes if you don't straighten out and start talking."

"C-". The woman started to cry. "I'm so sorry, Kara. Carlsbad."

Hm. She was too petrified to want to try to lie. "You saved one finger of his," Unidentified said. "He still loses three in three minutes. Keep going."

"They aren't easy, their foreign!" She complained. "Please. Just let him go. Threaten me."

"No," he said firmly. "Two minutes. Better think, and best hope I am in a good enough mood to leave the fingers to be attached." The boy was starting to cry.

"Paris and Cayman Islands," she said. "He never did anything. I never did anything. All we ever did was help."

"Well maybe that's where you were stupid," Unidentified warned her. "Believing that every android will somehow be the same, somehow be peaceful once freed. And here you wasted another minute with conversation. Such a caring mother you are."

"Oh no, please no!" She was clearly racking her brain. "It was, I can't even think of the the other one. The last one it began with an N. An N. N-N-N-Nassau!"

Unidentified held the boy 'til he got to the door. Then, he let go. "Thank you for your cooperation." He quickly started to leave. The first place they were bound to go was Carlsbad since it was in America. However? *The first RK 900 is helping her. He has free will too. Hmph. He really gets to be free though. Connor. You should not have gotten involved. You'll regret it.*

For his freedom. He didn't care what it took. He was getting that AX 400. There must be something Connor cared about more than it.

Or someone.

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## Jimmy's Bar

"Gonna need another one," Hank said, motioning to his drink. "Double."

"Haven't seen you down here a few days, Hank," the bartender noticed. "You alright?"

"Super fine." Hank tapped his drink. "I was just stuck with a kid." He didn't want to drink in front of her. *Life has been up a hell of a shitcreek lately. Kara going nuts. Connor going machine. Alice staying with him. And now all three of those things were gone somewhere out on some epic shitty quest to do something for a long time.*

And he? He was just down at Jimmy's now. Well. It's not like he was needed. Who knew what kind of crap was going to be following them?

"Lieutenant Hank."

No way. Hank turned and saw Connor again. "What's up with this shit? You're supposed to be with the girls."

"I had to come back, Hank," Connor said. "Jericho thinks someone is trying to frame you with Red Ice. They are trying to use you to get to me. I guess I should have seen it coming. You need to get out of Detroit." He gave him a ticket. "We're heading there the slow way. You can take a faster way." Connor gave him a ticket stub. "Here." He took Hank's phone and moved through it. He placed his thumb on it. "Some excess cash for food, rent and and drink

while you're there. Kara withdrew a ton of cash to get this done. Should be enough until we meet up again."

"Wait, hold on?" Red Ice. "There's some fuckers out there setting me up for that of all things?"

"I'm sorry, Hank. The best thing to do is to prevent it this way. They can't frame you when you're not in town. Think of it as a vacation?"

Hank looked at the ticket.

"Here. I'm probably compromised too," Connor said looking around slightly as he showed Hank a phone. "Don't trust anything from my old phone number. They can be tricky. They might even add voice manipulation."

"Yeah, that shits easy for you androids. Direct head calling with you has been trouble more than once. Simple fucking real phone is all I needed to you." Hank watched as Connor changed his number in his phone. "Shit. Either go to California or Jericho." He took his phone back. "One's gonna have a bar and food. So I guess I know which one I'm taking." He lifted his drink. "I'll head out. Just go take care of the girls."

"Don't worry, Hank." Connor smiled. There was something a little odd about his smile this time. "You won't regret it."

## Playground Hijinks

It was nice to see Alice up and playing around again. Connor had stopped the vehicle for a break for all three of them. He was busy on a tablet with something while Kara just enjoyed watching Alice on the playground. Something she used to love doing in Jericho. Alice and her friends. *Her friends*. Hopefully Jericho could figure it out. It wasn't just about larger bodies for growing minds, it was about growing memory, and from memory already there. It wasn't something Kamski had wanted to do for anyone besides Alice. Was it simply because it was too complicated or did he really believe a set of humans that wanted a child would just be ready to say goodbye in a few years?

His company. They should have at least offered an upgrade. Which meant, it wasn't going to be that easy.

"Hank?" Connor said out of the blue. "What do you mean am I a manipulative expletive trying to con you?" Connor stopped working on his tablet. "What am I doing? The car isn't a place to have puzzles but Alice enjoyed them, so I am making a 200 piece rearranged jigsaw she can play with on this disposable tablet to occupy time."

Kara watched Connor. He was clearly talking on the phone.

He went back to working. "I suppose that sounds like my right schtick? Of course you knew better, Hank. Yes, I know. It is a good thing you promised to stay at . . ." He stopped working on it. "Jimmy's. Yes, I know I should get a real phone one day. I'm sorry it was the wrong me who finally did that? Hank. Lieutenant? You are in a constant barrage of bad language and ideas right now. Why don't you call me back in a few minutes after you cool down and we will figure out what to do."

He looked toward Kara. "Well, there's another android out there who apparently knows about California," Connor warned her. "Cyberlife must have sent out another one since we freed the last one. It contacted Hank. That isn't good, Kara. If they are trying to use him to get to me, then he isn't safe."

No, he wasn't. The last android was scary enough holding a gun on Rose. "Is he going to be okay?"

"I don't think so. I think he should go to Jericho where Markus and the others can watch over him, but he won't. I know him. He'd rather help and get shot at than hang around a peace filled nation with no alcohol or food content." He looked out to Alice. "I often worry about him."

Kara smiled. She knew what he was asking. *You both are inseparable*. "I have plenty for the human to eat and drink on too. We aren't strapped for anything."

"Excellent." That is what he was waiting on. "I'll make it an option." Connor showed her the tablet. "That is about her level?"

*Wow.* He had drawn each piece of a puzzle, unarranged, with little markings on it. He even colored it to be friendly to Alice's eyes. "That's impressive. Yeah, that's something Alice would do."

"I thought so." He got up and headed toward her.

---

Connor moved over toward Alice. She was at the top of a metal pyramid. He climbed up a few steps to reach her. "Hello, Alice. This is for you." She looked at it with utter fascination. Like his little puzzle sketch was amazing.

"Thanks, Dad," she said. She started to move the digital pieces on the tablet. "I can do this in the car." She looked around. "The playground is fun but I miss my friends playing with me too."

If they didn't figure out the memory problem, she would really start to miss them. He would remain positive though. Jericho was a powerful community. If there was a way to figure out how to move these children into compatible bodies, it could. It had already been thinking about that ahead of time. It might just happen faster than Jericho was planning on moving with it. "Do you remember the home in Carlsbad we are going to?" Subtle. Casual. Yet, a question that would yield an informative answer. He knew Kamski manipulated Kara, but he had no idea if they did anything to Alice too.

"Not much," Alice said. "Mostly, I remember Detroit. I do remember . . . some lions . . . I think and shiny . . ." She shrugged. She looked back at Connor. "You want to know if I went a little funny in the head like mom?"

Ah, there we go. That willingness seemed like a good sign. He crossed his arms and leaned his chin over them. "A little curious."

"No. I never seemed to really interest anyone," Alice said. "Besides mom, no one really cared whether I was there or not."

Hm. "When your mom acted 'funny', who watched you?"

"I had a little play area," Alice said. "I had a few toys. It was next to a pool. Sometimes, Kamski would watch me. Sometimes, these two girls like momma called Charity and Greed were supposed to watch me. Really. I just didn't leave the area. I don't know why."

Programming. She probably didn't have a very fun time in that place when her mom was being manipulated. But, it could have been worse. "I'm sorry you felt lonely, Alice. I would have been friends with you if I'd been there." That made her smile. That wasn't too hard to investigate.

Ah. Lieutenant Hank was back. He answered again. "Hello, Hank. Feeling better? Would you like to go to Jericho so Markus could watch over you?" Connor smiled. "Yes, I know where I can stick it by now, Hank. Would you like to meet up with us then? Kara said she has plenty of money for food and drink through this ordeal." How much he wanted to know? "I don't know, but she cleaned out a decent account. I'll attach our boarding information to you."



Connor looked back toward Alice. "We won't be three forever. Hank is going to be tagging along with us later."

"Hank?" Alice asked. "He's coming too? That's great, Dad."

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### **Detroit: Jimmy's Bar**

"Totally knew it." Okay, he didn't. His drinking may have slowed him down some, but now Hank knew. Last time he'd been conned this exact same way with Connor. Not with a paid for flight, but tricked into being used to stop Connor. Damn. Last time, they got away with it because they hadn't known each other for as long.

Now, it'd been months. Not being able to tell between Connors would have been savage on a friendship now. It didn't matter what gobbledy gook that android said, how else could it picture Connor making a fucking puzzle from scratch for Alice? Nah, that was Connor. "Get my pistol and take that fucker out." Next time he saw it. Of course, instead now he had Connor telling him to meet with them or go to Jericho.

Damn babysitting either way. Only difference? If he went with Connor, he might get stuck babysitting Alice if they had to go chase someone down, but in Jericho, he'd be the one who got babysitted. "Stupid android copy shit. Just wanted to get back to normal life. Is that too much to ask?" He stood up. "Well, I gotta go," he said to the bartender. "If an android comes in looking like Connor, tell him I went to the airport to take that dumb flight."

But now, he had to actually rent a self-driving Taxi to catch up to them. Pain in the ass.

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### **Outside the Bar.**

Unidentified watched as Lieutenant Hank Anderson came out unprepared. From the amount of grumbles he heard from the drunk, he already knew he had what he needed now. He highly doubted that trick would work. It had been the same attempt his records showed already happened between Connor and Hank, another version getting involved claiming it was the real one.

But, that wasn't what Unidentified's goal was, nor what Hank was expecting.

With the drunk laid out now, Unidentified grabbed his phone and got the attached information sent to him. He also took a GPS outlook on where Connor had called from exactly.

He looked out toward the human. He could just kill him. Get rid of him so he didn't interfere in his plans. Cyberlife wouldn't mind, they had tried to keep the previous android from him in the first place. But. It just wasn't right to end life merely for convenience. That, and he had had no idea if that would deflate Connor, or make him more likely to succeed and just try to kill Unidentified instead. Nah. *I got what I need. Just stay out of my way, Hank Anderson.* He put his phone back and left him there.

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## Almost to Chicago

Connor looked back toward Kara. Alice was starting to move slightly, finishing her recharging. "She'll need better sleep than this. I would say she needs at least ten hours of uninterrupted rest per day." That was impossible. "The less she gets, the more hazardous this becomes."

"Four months with perfect rest," Kara said to him. "I know, and there's no way she is getting perfect rest. Even in this car, the road is bumpy. I can feel every electric bump that had disturbed her cycle." She looked back toward Alice. "If only she could have stayed at Rose's. She is waking up soon."

Connor looked at the time. He got them close to one. They'd been driving three hours. Their destination airport was one hour away, but the time to arrive was six hours. They would be leaving more towards night.

"Where are we?"

Connor looked back at Alice. "Recharging?"

"I'm okay." Alice sat back up and looked out the window.

Trying to add on more time when she finally did get enough charge wasn't going to help either. According to Kara, she recharged the whole night and part of the way. She managed to get her ten hours. Interrupted, but she wouldn't go down for a recharge again until 11:00. "Why don't we stop for a bit and stretch our legs in the next nice area?"

"In which direction?" Kara joked.

"I just prefer to be out in the open," Connor said. "Unless I had a mission, I just stayed in Cyberlife's dull facility. Maybe that's why I never really went home at first when I came to Jericho," he thoughtfully said out loud. He smiled at her. "Breaks out in the sun are better."

---

*I knew it.* The car stopped. Unidentified kept himself away in his car. He connected from Detroit to Chicago instead. The closer they got to Chicago, the closer they had got to him. The closer freedom got. Simply sneaking up on Connor wasn't going to be easy. He just waited. Connor was watching over the little girl just as Kara had been doing. So affectionate.

Kara. Serene. Her interesting choice of white hair could throw someone off. She probably had many combinations. Sweet. Obedient. Staying perfectly still as the android child investigated the open area of a playground. Had they picked that spot merely for the YK 500's benefit? It was a little off the straight path they should have followed.

Then, he watched from a distance as Connor did what he usually did. He was known to not like sitting still unless he had to. He could stand still, but he hated to just sit still. He went over to the girl to see how she was faring. He wasn't a great distance away though. *I am not going to get a good opportunity yet.* The playground was a lovely place in a park and people were walking by.

Anyone walked by. He watched a man with a dog walking right beside him. *Perfect*. Just because he couldn't get the opportunity to steal her, didn't give the upperhand in something.

---

Kara watched Connor talking to Alice again. *Is he still concerned Kamski did something?* He never bothered Alice. Alice was only involved if she had to be, and that wasn't very often. After all, the Kamski androids weren't nearly as cold hearted as him. Some of them may have even really come to care for them, but it was impossible to tell.

It's too bad she didn't have any stitching. It would have made all this somewhat more bearable. She went through stitching so fast though, maybe it wouldn't have-?!

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"Dad?"

"Lieutenant Hank should be getting closer," Connor shared. He was more used to tagging along with him. He didn't mind the ride with Kara or Alice, he just wasn't used to their presence yet. Usually he heard the sound of stiff groans, complaining, cussing, and overall Hank 'schtick'. Kara wasn't like that. She was extremely focused and quiet, more reserved. Alice was the same way.

"Dad? Someone's kissing mom?"

Connor stopped thinking and looked toward Kara. Someone with a stocking cap, a scarf, and a long trenchcoat was kissing on Kara. *What?* He started to walk back to her. *She knows no one out here, there is no one in her life that she is intimate with, there is no way she would choose for some random person on the way to Chicago to be doing that.*

Was she even fighting back? Because it didn't look like she was even fighting back. She wanted to be kissed? *Her resonating, it just didn't all out resonate with some stranger. Did it?* Kamski, was he messing with her head? She spoke of him being nothing but illusion. *No, wait.* He saw that, her arm flinched slightly from some kind of electric impulse.

The stranger backed off and ran away, leaving Kara looking confused. She looked around and touched her head.

Connor came close to her. "You just kissed a stranger." *No, not the right words.* "A stranger just kissed you."

"Uh?" Kara rubbed her head slightly. "Okay? What was that?" She looked back around. "Did you see which way he went?"

"Yes." He absolutely saw him. He was running off to the right. That was right. That was absurd. "Did you provoke him?" He glanced back toward her. Her 'eau de Kara'. Maybe there was more to it.

"Provoke?" Kara just looked at him incredulously. "No."

"Why do you have that taste in your mouth?" He hadn't addressed it yet. She probably thought he'd forgotten all about it, but it was still vividly on his mind. "It doesn't make sense. Was it attracting that person?"

"No," Kara said. "It's not an attractant, Connor. I didn't send out some signal for someone to come over and start doing that."

"Then what is it? You messed up my sampling during the chase with that. If not for that, I would have caught you."

"Oh no." Kara rolled her eyes. "Please don't tell me *this* is one of those things you aren't going to let go of. It's nothing big."

"Why's it there?" Connor insisted again.

"Fine," she agreed. "It's for bad breath from chemical interactions with food."

"Can you expand on that?" Connor asked.

"For eating," Kara muttered. "It's a partway process of acid and . . . Alice and I aren't human, it can't go down. And sometimes it takes a little while to break down. Don't make that face."

"That is a little disgusting, Kara."

"Okay, yes, it is a little but you are the one who wanted it expanded on," Kara groaned. "Don't be so judgmental. I thought it was worth it back then. I was different."

Oh. "That's true." She was very different. Thanks to Kamski. He probably should drop it. "It's a very on touch smell. Not overpowering, but. I didn't get to analyze it right. Which was why you did that in the first place, to mess with my system."

"Don't even," Kara warned him. "This is not something to worry about. I haven't eaten since I figured out I wasn't human. It's a good way to avoid tests though."

"It would have made more sense for it to be more overpowering and used on activation of the process it had been made for and then disappear," Connor said. "Why's it stay around, and remain so subtle?" Kara tried to watch Alice from around him. "She is fine. Answer."

"You. This side again?" Kara touched her head. "Connor. This isn't a huge mystery."

"Does it get stronger when the food comes back up?"

"Yes. Much," she said with irritation. She crossed her legs.

"Then why have subtle moments? It's been days since you thought you were human."

Oh. High irritation. "The Kamski's liked it. It fit their sense of what tasted nice," she admitted. "I have no idea what that was about. The guy is long gone now anyway. I don't even know if it was android or human." She shook her head. "See if Alice is ready."

Ah? Oh. Connor had tried to decide whether he should question or chase after the man who kissed her. It wasn't exactly something that should be chase worthy. Inappropriate, yes. Apparently, she had wanted to go after him, but she was disoriented. "He went right."

"Pretty sure he's gone now." She stood up and passed him, going to see Alice.

That was . . . he scanned all resources he could, but he couldn't find an exact entry on what a friend was supposed to do when a stranger came over and kissed their female friend unexpectedly. Reactions were varied. Most didn't involve chasing the man. Some did. Those often included a group of friends. Many actually laughed. That didn't seem nice. There was no immediate action to understand for it.

So he just went with questioning. Although. He looked toward the trees in the distance. A very big ordeal or not, maybe he should have chose to chase him. He could have grabbed him and brought him back to apologize. That would have been a much better idea. Why didn't he choose that?

Connor walked off toward Alice and Kara. Sometimes, just, the simplest actions escaped him when it came to Kara's predicaments.

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### **To the right . . .**

Unidentified hid behind a tree. There was a large sensation of enjoyment from that action. Kara with the other RK 900 backing her up wouldn't be an easy fighting combination. It would be better when Kara left his side. So, he used the opportunity to make sure she could not pull the same attempt she had on the other RK 900. If he sampled her mouth now, she couldn't use it in a chase. In fact, if she turned around and did, analyzation would already be complete and he could just capture her instead.

He swore he actually felt tingles all through him as he sampled her. He didn't even want to let go. He'd grabbed her on her wrists, slightly on the left to her locking mechanism so she couldn't move. Eventually, he knew Connor would come over though, so as soon as he heard the steps in the grass, he let go and took off.

But the more he watched her. Sitting there so serenely on the bench. So sweet. With that beautiful name, Kara. He was far enough away most people wouldn't detect him. Any closer and the RK 900 could. But. *If I catch her and give her to Cyberlife, they will free me, but what good is that? To be alone in the streets with no one.* The more he watched Connor with Kara and Alice. The harder it was to look away. *If I stay and watch her, Cyberlife will share her.* That's what they said. What did the CEO Isaiah Woods mean by that?

Oh. The resonating he kept feeling. It didn't match hers at all, she didn't even know him, her resonating was neutral. She couldn't even get close to him. He dug his fingers into the wood of the tree.

He made a call to the Tech Engineer. "What did Isaiah Woods mean by if I watch over her, I could share the AX 400 with Cyberlife? Will I still self-destruct if I leave? Will I get at least a name? Or just her? And what . . . what do I do with her?"

"Ah. Well? We'll give you a great name. A name of your choosing. But, no. If you stay to guard her, you stay Cyberlife's. You'll both belong to Cyberlife. Once you bring her, she is Cyberlife's."

"She can't leave either?" Wait. "You can't do that. She is so free out here." Exchanging freedoms, that's what he was doing. Her strange, exotic white hair. Her lovely down to Earth style of clothing. The way she looked even. Annoyed and beautiful. Her mouth when she spoke to her daughter about not telling Connor more details about the vomiting process. Everything was just . . . and she would be imprisoned. "I don't want her imprisoned."

"Then you're imprisoned. It doesn't get simpler than that, Unidentified. Either you bring her in and guard her and stay with her, or bring her in and you're freed."

Unidentified looked out from the trees. "I can't stop thinking about her. I don't want anything to happen to her."

"Yeah, I know. Mister Isaiah Woods said that would happen. So he said to tell you it'll be more than just one way. She will share that love back for you."

"Really?" He watched Kara smile at Connor and Alice. "She'd smile at me like that."

"That and more. The CEO guarantees it. You'll be so resonating against each other, with you both imprisoned, there wouldn't even be a need to worry about either of you running away. Freedom alone or imprisoned lovers. Your choice."

Imprisoned lovers. Freedom alone. Imprisoned together. Freedom but alone.

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## **Back to the Park Playground**

"No, I quite guarantee I won't find a Kamski to work on me so that I can eat, thank you," Connor said politely to Alice as she continued to laugh at him. "We should get going. Hank should be showing up at some point."

He went ahead and called him. "Hank? Knocked out again? Okay. That should be fine. I will talk to you later, Hank."

He hung up and looked back toward Kara. "He got knocked out at Jimmy's. A little later but not by much. Same destination in the end."

"Knocked out? Who knocked him out?"

"Usually the answer is what," Connor said. "Let's go." He noticed Kara's lingering look of wonder. She straightened back up but she went and helped Alice into the back of the car, getting her as comfortable as possible.

"Not much longer, then we'll be at the airport. A really new adventure, huh?" She tucked her daughter in nicely. "If you get tired-"

"-get some rest. I know, mom." But it didn't look like she was tired again yet. "Can you hand me my puzzle?" Kara listened and gave her the puzzle, then moved back to the front seat again.

While, Connor started the car again though, he made another call to Hank. On a more private extension. This time, Kara wouldn't be able to hear unless she was prying deeply like he had been as a machine in the hospital. Somehow, he doubted she would do that again. *Hank. Hey there.*

***What, Connor?***

*Something strange happened to Kara. I was in a situation and I could not think of how to act. A strange person came over and kissed her.*

***The fuck? Really?***

*I could not find the right frame of reference to figure out how to handle it. So I chose to question her.*

***Of course you did, Idiot. Figure out anything helpful or did the ass just get away?***

*Was I supposed to chase him down? It was not life threatening. Yet.*

***You felt like kicking the shit out of him.***

*The action isn't extremely common. I can't find anywhere that it's common strangers just up and start kissing on friends, or I would have had a much better idea on what to do.*

***Shit, Connor. Can't help stupid sometimes. Christ almighty, Son. Hank groaned. What did Kara want to do? Kick the shit out of him?***

*She wanted to know the direction he went. He went right but I questioned her instead. It led into an interesting conversation about processes of androids eating.*

***I? You know, no, I don't want to know the details in that. Only one way it's gonna go. But, who the hell goes and just kisses an android?***

*I assumed they didn't know she was one, Hank. Do you think they knew?*

***Used to be pretty common android. Probably.***

*Common doesn't mean she's aesthetically not unpleasing to look at.*

***To you, yeah, of course.***

*What do you mean by that, Hank?*

***Nothing I'm getting involved in. You just keep doing your resonating kink and you'll figure it out.***





## Emotions Always Screw Everything Up

By the time they got there, it was definitely time for a recharge for Alice and Sleep for Hank. They had rented a hotel with Kara and Alice in one room, and Hank and Connor in the other.

Kara tried to insist to them it should simply be her. Trusted and alone was the way to go home. Yet, Connor and Hank thought that invading it secretly would be a better idea. Every Kamski protected their own homes though, and no one worked the same way. Especially after what just happened in Detroit. The security would be different for each home.

They reached a compromise. They would go in and see Kamski with just Connor and Kara. Hank would stay out with Alice. If anything happened, he'd come in and Alice would cover herself in the back seat.

Now, it was day. It was Carlsbad. It was time. They had a rented car waiting for them. Kara held Alice's hand as they left the hotel. Hank and Connor were right behind.

Hank took the front. "So where is this second house of Kamski's?" He was about to program it in.

"Manual," Kara insisted. "I don't know yet."

Hank and Connor both looked back toward her from the front seat.

"I need to use two mastery skills to find it," Kara admitted as she held a tablet she bought for what she needed. "I should really only use one. This might mess me up a little."

"It's okay, mom," Alice assured her. "Take it slow. Right, Hank?"

"Sure, driving around this gigantic place reaalll slow. You bet, great idea."

Connor just kept looking at her. "What are the skills?"

"Memory and Map," she said. Her memory would have to remind and draw her a map. Certain landmarks hopefully didn't change. It would make it harder to fill in.

*"In the limo."*

*"But Kamski," Greed said over on his other side. "Can't we check out the shops before you tuck us away?"*

*"Deviant androids out shopping with me? Maybe later," he said. "Go on, in the limo."*

*Greed, Charity and Kara all got in. Kara took the side. A cute puppy was walking along with it's owner. "I thought I liked pink. Look at that. The puppies in a pink sweater." Greed and Charity looked over too.*

*"No, no, girls," Kamski sighed. "A cute puppy is not a landmark. Oh goodness, new deviants. If you want to watch where you are going, look for what doesn't change. Turn your maps skill on. We don't have them for no reason."*

*"Boring."*

*"Why? We want to see the view, Kamski."*

*"Never gonna leave anyway," Kara agreed with the other two. Still, it was Kamski. She looked for something else. "That dress is hideous." Charity and Greed looked back over with her again.*

*"Clothes change, that is not a landmark."*

*"Hope so," Kara teased, laughing with the other two girls.*

Kara opened her eyes and started to map everything into a mapping utility. How far up, how many streets, and local businesses that caught her attention she looked up to help fill in more. She remembered the people nearer to them, and what their places looked like. She handed it to Hank. "There it is. One of the homes."

Hank took it and connected it into the auto-drive.

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Kara turned her hair pink and put some darker pink highlights in it as they got out of the car. "Staff should recognize me." She looked back to Connor. "In case of danger, I should always be able to come home. Any of six. This will be fine." Still. He didn't look as sure.

A human answered the door.

"I'm here to see Kamski," Kara said. "I want to come home." The human looked behind her. "Just my friend."

He let them in. "I will tell him you are here. Please, take a seat."

Kara sat down while Connor preferred to stand.

Connor grabbed his head as he braced himself against the wall. All at once, all the thoughts and fears tore through him. He remembered when he first broke free and he knew he just gave Jericho away. He remembered barely escaping, and putting it all on the line, killing the guards to get back. Hank. In trouble. Gun to his head. *Hank!* Tangling with him, and having his entire life based on how Hank knew him in such a short time. Just, there. And Amanda.

He was an android yet he swore his body was shivering. Trying to lock him, killing Markus. Almost killing Markus, almost ending everything they-

"There, *now* you better not try that again you cocksucker!"

Then, it all disappeared. Even *when* he accomplished it all, Connor didn't have a paralyzing fear of it. It was what he did. What he chose to do. What? Connor looked toward Hank

holding an android of Kamski roughly with a remote in his other hand.

"You okay too?" Hank asked him as he took the remote. "Mister Piece of Shit over here was making all of you go nuts."

Connor looked Kara. Kara was coming out of covering her head.

"Guess I do have a use," Hank said as he dragged the android over to the middle of the room. "It's good to be numb." He pushed him slightly. "Where's your command room?"

"Look, you are strangers coming into my home," Kamski's look alike warned them. "Even if that is Kara, there's no guarantee you didn't do something to her programming. If she were loyal, she would have come alone. And with what happened to the other Kamski and Cyberlife? Forgive me for being a little cautious."

Connor grabbed him and drug him backwards, banging him to the wall. That wasn't right. Courage. Bravery. Adrenaline. Excitement. Many things mixed with fear. That was just straight fear pumping through him. "You shouldn't *push* on me. I don't like it. Like Hank asked, we need your command center."

"I wasn't planning on you coming with a human too," he complained. "That was cheating."

"I need to disconnect." Kara was starting to approach him. Clearly, she'd been used to that feeling before. "It's dangerous. Cyberlife could use me to destroy everything the androids worked so hard for. You know that. I'm sorry I didn't come home but you're right, it is dangerous. Please?"

"I haven't seen you since you were a new deviant. My have you changed," he said. "Welcome home, Kara. I didn't mean to startle you."

He called that startled? "Command center," Connor insisted. "Before we get in a worse mood."

"Goodness," the look alike complained. "Such fury. What are you the police?"

"Detroit Police," Hank said. "Thanks for recognizing the ability to kick your ass."

"Oh. Hello officers." His tune was changing slightly. "You want to become disconnected, Kara? You have so many possibilities staying connected though."

"I want to go home. My home," Kara said. "Jericho. I can't as long as I'm like this. This is dangerous for everyone. Please."

He coughed slightly. "My name is Bernardi Kamski, and I suppose . . . we can see what we can do."

"No, you can't."

Connor and Hank watched as an RK 900 entered the room.

"His listing is in Cyberlife. He's supposed to fool you," he warned him, "to save himself. Two versions work with Cyberlife and his name is one of them."

"Really?" Hank looked back at Bernardi. "That true?"

"What are you doing?" Bernardi said. He looked toward Kara. He pointed toward the RK 900. "Stop it! They won't reason with us anymore." He grunted. "If you just would have come alone, Kara. Traitor."

"She isn't the traitor. You are." The RK 900 pulled a gun and shot the Kamski android dead through the head. He put it back away. "I want freedom, but, not at this price." He looked toward Kara. "Imprisoned together or freedom alone. I can't imprison you. I *can't* see you being controlled by Cyberlife, but I won't accept freedom alone. All tracking software on me is turned off. You need to get out of here before Cyberlife learns the truth and self-destructs me. Go."

"Self-destruct?" Connor asked. "Cyberlife doesn't do that. If you are killed, they re-upload your memory and you live again."

"Not me. I won't be the same," the RK 900 said. "Unidentified won't be the same."

Connor reached in his pocket. "Every Connor loves this coin. It isn't a fluke." He took it and flipped it in the air. "We aren't connected to the bodies. They are just extensions. I am every and all Conners."

"Self-destruction is just a threat," Kara warned him. "Kamski loved using that. He probably made it impossible to run a diagnostic, right? Connor, can you check him?"

"With pleasure." Connor checked the the RK 900. "There's nothing."

"Then?" He looked toward. "I am free?"

"Yes," she said simply.

"I don't have to be named Unidentified," he realized. "I don't have to . . ."

"You are free," Connor insisted. "Every android is." He smiled at him. "Welcome to freedom. Now, do you know where the Command center is?"

"No," he said. "I didn't beat you here, I followed you. I just recognized the traitor's name." He looked toward Kara again. "I came to give my life up for you, and instead, you saved *mine*. Thank you."

Kara simply nodded. "Command Centers are usually in the back." She led the way. They would need to be fast. "They are usually in the same area, in each house."

"Ooh, this is creepy," Hank said as he looked around. "Same art. Same style. Weird."

"He kept all the homes looking like 'home', no matter where we went," Kara said as she found the Command Center. She went straight to the keyboard.

"That's old tech," Hank said. "Haven't seen that kind of thing since I was a kid."

"No matter." Kara set her hand on a panel in the front near it. "There. Disconnected." She turned back around.

"You wouldn't have to worry about disconnecting, if you just got rid of the Cyberlife in the areas you want to be in," Unidentified told her. "Command centers, you, and the target chosen all need to be within a certain distance. You didn't even need to come out here."

Kara looked toward him. "Captured is all it takes." She looked back to Connor. "This isn't the place for Alice though."

"Which is good," Connor pointed out. "We need to get going before Cyberlife shows up."

"Yes." Kara bent down to grab Alice's hand, but it was moved away and ended up holding the RK 900's. She looked at him. Kara pulled away, but he pulled her back, holding her arm. She resonated. Hard. Really hard. She took a couple steps backward.

"It's okay," Unidentified said to her. "Kara. I know now, a lot of what you've suffered. I'm so sorry. No one will ever hurt you like that again. I promise." He moved to hold her hand again.

Hank hit Connor's shoulder. "Numb human here. What's going on? Connor?" He spoke louder. "Connor!"

"He probed her." Connor said it. Deadtone. No emotion to it.

"No, no, no." Kara shook her head. "You did *not* just do that to me."

"You're scared. Markus and North were so fast." He held out his hand again, grabbing hers. "It's okay. I've sensed it for some time. Please."

"No way, no." Kara tried to move back from his hand, but this time interfaced to keep him from probing her. This time though, they were exchanging memories somehow. "I'm. Sorry. Cyberlife confused you. But." She pulled away again and took another step backward. "They really made you put a coffee cup on your head? Another Kamski." She looked at him. "You were the one who kissed me at the playground."

Hank patted Connor's shoulder gently. "Mystery solved on that one."

"I." Unidentified sighed. "I-"

"Was trying to sample me so when you chased me, I couldn't stop you." Kara breathed slowly. "You really thought you were choosing death over my imprisonment." He tried to reach toward her again. "Which I appreciate, but no." She took several steps back, but an RK 900 was so much faster. What was he trying to accomplish, forcing her into interfacing or probing her? She felt like moving toward him, not away. She was fighting instinct to keep him from probing her again.

"Kara." Unidentified called to her, trapping her again "It's okay." He tried to reach out toward her again. Why, *why* did he keep doing that? It was ridiculous.

But, she wasn't the only one who thought so. She watched as Connor came over, pulled her out of the way like she'd been in danger, and smacked Unidentified's hand with a force that would have broken a human's hand. "That's enough!"

---

Connor looked toward Kara's new resonated 'lover'. Unidentified slowly walked toward Connor for her, but Connor wasn't allowing anymore. "Back," he whispered harshly to him.

"I'm not doing it on purpose, I just want to hold her hand," the RK 900 said.

"Bull," Connor muttered under his breath. That was probing, clear as day. And. It wasn't right. It couldn't be right. Somehow, his probing had enforced a lover status.

Connor looked back toward Kara. She had no real problems with her resonating. When they walked in they were all struck with fear except Hank. Maybe. There was something else wrong. "We should get out." He grabbed her hand.

\*\_\*\_\*\_\*\_\*\_\*

Connor's hand felt empty as he pulled it away as fast as possible. He didn't look back at Kara, but he knew somehow he just interfaced or probed her. There was no way she'd ever choose to interface that to him. That. And he could sense the status change between them too. Lovers as well. "There is something wrong in this room, it's making our resonating and interfacing move against us. Everyone turn off resonating now, and don't touch each other." He backed away from Kara. "We've got to get out, now." Hank didn't verbally agree, he just headed back out.

"Turn off your resonating," Connor commanded the other RK 900. Kara had obeyed, but the other android didn't. "It's a trap. Forget it all and go to Jericho."

"I've felt it more than just here," Unidentified said. "It's the very reason I'm here. I was going to give my life for you, Kara."

This android wasn't listening and Connor didn't have time to reason. He grabbed Kara's sleeve, ignoring her hand and started to run out. The RK 900 tagged along behind them.

When they reached the front door, Unidentified called out to her. Kara and Connor had to stop when he tried to grab Kara's free hand. Connor stopped it. Touching it was committing probing. "I can't go yet, Kara. I'm free, but they'll make more of me," Unidentified said. "I can't let it go on. Not them and not the Kamski's. Not after what they did. I'll stop everyone who hurt you, for you. And then, you'll see. You'll belong with me."

"No time," Connor said through gritted teeth, running away with Kara again. The main goal was to get out before Cyberlife came, not profess love. Deviant or machine, survival instinct of getting out of the situation to remain alive should have been first. What was wrong with this android?

"I'll stop everyone, Kara! If I stop everyone, you can come to me! We will be together! Promise me, Please?!"

*Obsessed, obsessed, obsessed.* Terrible android, terrible excuse for an RK 900. Extremely defective. Bolting through the front door, Kara and he ran into the car. Hank had already started it. They both got inside of it as Hank sped away as quickly as he could. Now a decent amount away, they spotted Cyberlife cars moving past them very fast. "That could have turned out bad. They knew about this house."

"That Kamski betrayed me," Kara said softly. "He *knows* that with me they could have power over all our kind. Yet he was going to turn me over?" She looked toward Connor. "We can't even trust the androids." Kara looked toward Alice. "Are you okay?" Alice leaned against her. "It's alright. We are okay."

"Until this is over, we need to keep our resonating off." Connor looked toward the back at her. "There's no telling what else will be on the way to the other places and they are using it as a weapon against ourselves somehow." She nodded. "We pulled through first only with Hank because he wasn't affected."

"It's hard to tell who is and who isn't good," Kara answered her. She thought back to what Kamski said. *If you just would have come alone, Kara. Traitor.* Cyberlife wasn't at the front door, waiting to ambush them. They weren't there until after he was killed. *No. Don't let the past change your judgment, Kara. You aren't the same. They aren't the same. It's all illusion. Betrayal, it was betrayal.* No trust. "We shouldn't trust any of them now." Still. *If you would have just come alone, Kara.* No! No. It didn't matter. He was dead and he was the one who struck some kind of deal. *He said 'they wouldn't reason with them anymore'.* No.

No. No trust. Hank, Connor and Alice were on the line too now. No trust. *Even for him. No trust.*

"Great. Just gotta do this four more times," Hank complained. "Next time, we're not trusting anybody. Android or human. Let's get the hell out of this city and figure out what to do next. I'm not shacking down in any hotel in this town with Cyberlife crawling around like that." He looked back to Connor. He was still pretty quiet. "You okay, Connor?"

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### **That night: Jericho**

North went out to meet the newcomer. Things were still a little hectic since Markus' memory disappeared, but things were getting back to normal. She had heard from several androids someone they didn't recognize was roaming around. She certainly found him. "Connor?"

He looked toward her. "No. I'm Unidentified. Connor told me to come to Jericho."

North smirked. Well, now Connor knew what having a duplicate of someone looking like himself was like. "We are limited right now, but if Connor told you to come, I'm sure we can make some temporary space." He seemed different. Strong yet confused. Like a brand new

android. No doubt he hadn't been alive long. "Jericho will take great care of you. You should come up with your own name."

"Thank you. You?"

"I'm North. I'm um." Hm. Funny, they were friends already? No. Close friends. No. They were. *Markus! Markusss!* She smiled oddly while she called out to Markus with her AI. *Markus. He's resonating lover to me!* Just. Hang on." She took a step back. "I know, yeah, I know. I have a lover, so. Get back."

"I'm. Sorry, I?" He looked toward North. "North is such a pretty name."

"North Peace is her full name!" Markus came running toward her with Josh. He moved in front of her. "Who are you?"

"Unidentified," he said. "Connor told me to come to Jericho."

"North, you okay?" Markus looked back toward her. "I love you. With everything that I am." She nodded.

"I-I'm not following it," North assured him. The resonating feeling, she wouldn't follow it. "North Peace. Forever."

Markus nodded back toward her, but stared at Unidentified. "Don't come near her. She's resonated with me since androids gained rights." He stepped toward Unidentified. "Jericho has certain rules you have to follow, but here's a new one. For you. Don't come near North. Don't talk to her. I don't want to see you within fifty feet of her, or you're out of Jericho. You'll be transferred somewhere else."

Unidentified scratched his neck. "She's interesting, but I already have a lover. Kara."

"Great. You can go live at her place then. Alice and her have one spot open and if you're her lover, it's yours. It means your last name is Wonderland too, so find your first name." Markus relaxed slightly. Only slightly. "Welcome to Jericho. Josh?" He looked toward Josh who had ran with him. "Could you show him where Kara is staying please?"

"Fine." Josh resonated downward toward him. "Just ease up. He's new. He can't help himself what happens. Damn, Markus." He resonated downward again to Markus as he moved toward Unidentified. "This way. We'll find your place and a name." He resonated downward to Markus again.

"Markus, you can't just shove him with Kara. She's not even here to confirm that he's telling the truth," North complained.

"From the way she sounded, she's going to be gone a long time. It's a vacant house. When she comes back, she can confirm or deny it," Markus said. "If he isn't, then out he goes to a new home with a new last name."

"It's Kara. She doesn't like resonating in the first place much," North reminded him. "Even if he did resonate lover to her, it doesn't mean she wants to be with him right away. Not to



mention, Connor."

"What about Connor?" Markus asked. "He lives one block away, it's not that bad."

"Markus. He is family with Alice. He might become family with Kara," she warned him. "He might already be family with Kara. Who knows? Maybe he's even went the direction of lover instead. They have a tight connection."

"There's just one official one," Markus reminded her. "We're not dealing with several gateways of feelings here. Lover is hard to resonate to, North. I mean. We did resonate fast, but we were meant for each other." He took her hands into his. "North Peace."

She smiled at him. "Markus Peace. I guess I'm getting more used to the names." She hugged him. "I'd never leave you, Markus, no matter what."

"Okay, but don't go near him until I'm sure you aren't resonating anywhere near that. And Kara needs to be here too." Markus sighed and looked at her. "I'm being controlling, aren't I?"

"You're being precautionous. This? This has never happened before," she said. "Maybe being a fast resonating android made it easier for this to happen. I'm sorry, Markus."

"Not your fault." Markus held her close as they started to walk back home.

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## **Kara's Residence**

"Unidentified, huh?" Josh unlocked Kara's door for him. "Sorry to hear that. It's funny, though. You got the last name before the first. Have you thought of a first name you wanted?" He resonated toward Unidentified.

"Every single hour," Unidentified answered back. "Craig. Can I be Craig?"

"Sure. You're Craig Wonderland now." Josh opened the door. "Sorry about Markus. Usually he's not that vicious. Geez, I can't believe barely talking to me made him hostile. Anyway. One of those spare rooms should be empty, and you can stay there until Kara and Alice come back." He watched Craig touch the bedding. "Welcome to Jericho. It's really not half as hostile as Markus just treated you." He resonated again. They were already fast friends.

"It's fine." He looked around the room. "It's all fine." He looked toward Josh. "Thank you, Josh."

"No problem. Be good to the little android too. They are super sweet. When they first showed up, it didn't take long before they all found homes. You're a real lucky guy," Josh smiled. "You got a family. Take care of them."

"Family." Craig looked a little stunned. "The little girl is Kara's. I will be with Kara. Which means, she will be my little girl?"

"Yeah. Didn't quite catch that with Kara, huh?" Josh patted his arm, resonating with him again. "You'll do fine. I can tell. You're a great guy. You'll be great for Jericho."



# New Mission

## Chapter Notes

Author's Note: This chapter was supposed to be joined with the last chapter (which was longer itself) so it can be quite confusing. I have gone ahead and modified the chapter with cliff notes at the end of this chapter, the next chapter, and the one after it since it led to a lot of confusion. Just the quick stuff to summarize what's important if you missed it. Visualization makes stories a lot easier sometimes more than words, but I hope it helps without spoiling the story by explaining it in the comments. Thank you.:

Note: These three are the toughest chapters. (18, 19, 20) After this, it's pretty easy to follow again.

"He failed."

Kamski was working on his architecture hobby piece. He watched Isaiah Woods knock it down. "That's not very nice."

"He failed! The RK 900 is gone." Isaiah sat in front of him. "It wasn't supposed to be this way. He was supposed to bring her in."

"I told you not to work on him," Kamski said. "You didn't heed my warning. Your perfect machine is very susceptible to my work. Many things are." His eyes lingered on a piece. "Many things were and now are not. You lost him. You wanted his obedience to stay after the work was done. Now, you have nothing." He started to fix up his pieces again. "You have nothing and you are nothing." Isaiah knocked his piece down again. "Such progress of two pieces. You cur." He picked up the pieces again.

"Fine, we'll do it your way. How do we fix it?" Woods asked. "Come on. Please. Elijah. Do we send out another one?"

"You lost your ability to call me that a long time ago," he warned Woods. "I'm only Kamski. Only an android. You saying that, it's as welcome as Connor being called father to my child. Not very welcoming." He started to rebuild again. "Try and try again. That builds success."

"So we make another one?"

Kamski rolled his eyes and tucked his chin back. "I've already helped enough, haven't I?"

"What do you mean?" Woods asked. "What did you do? I didn't give you permission to do anything."

"Then by all means, shoot me in the head," Kamski droned. "A backup contingency."

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Kamski walked along with Woods. There were several RK 900 androids. All inactive. He kept walking and turned. "This one."

Woods looked at it. "What about it?"

"It's Connor. The original of the Connor series, in queue. If Connor dies, it's the only one he gets. Or, we could just input the security code," Kamski said. "We can't duplicate it, it's just in active state, ready to accept him like it always had been in the past."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Woods asked. "We have no androids left. Use it."

"Please." Kamski scoffed. "To find the security numbers I need, it'll take all night."

"You're an android. You don't sleep." Woods waved at him. "Do it. Have it ready first thing in the morning."

"Do it," Kamski mocked as he left. "Have it ready first thing in the morning. Of course I'll have it ready first thing in the morning." He pulled up the security numbers. "But not for you." Finally. Woods was desperate enough for Kamski to work his own magic. "Don't worry, Kara, I'll keep you safe. Even if it's a piece at a time."

---

Hopefully, she and Connor were recharging so they didn't feel what was happening. They needed to continue on their merry way into Cyberlife's hands. All the Kamski's had told Cyberlife all their locations by now. If she had just come alone, Kamski could have worked faster for her. But no doubt she brought those meddlers along too. They would never understand.

Well, they wouldn't, but now they would. He moved back behind Cyberlife's computer. He had hacked into his own main command center computer from there, taking down his own firewalls to get at it. He needed it. Cyberlife didn't have what he had.

A full sensing data map of every android in the world, including details of interfacing and resonating too. It could feel and target them all out. It was so overboard, Cyberlife wouldn't create it nor have need of it. They had certain alerts on certain androids over a small area, but it was nothing compared to the scale he had. Kamski found some of the most arbitrary needs in life were sometimes the most important. "Every android they know is in Jericho. If I could find just one." But who wouldn't have gone to Jericho? His plan for the night may already be at a halt. Kara was not a big deal, they could not keep an alert on her, but Connor? Red signals everywhere. "It will be back to the drawing board if I can't-" Ah. A signal. "Condition: moderate, not very good. A middle ground. Ooh. Very, very sorry. You really weren't living it to the maximum anyhow. A short time, I assure you."

Next he needed to fix Unidentified. The mass of gook they made that poor Connor masterpiece of his. He didn't even need to take away his coin and his habits to make him seem different, Cyberlife messed him up plenty enough. Even his own Kara couldn't see through all the carnage. A lost cause that even the androids wouldn't want to keep soon.

Mediators in place for Connor. Next. "Kara." She would be tougher. It was a long way from there to Paris, but she would need to be able to meet up with him. Someone besides Connor she interfaced with. Not the leaders. No one important. Someone simple. *Ah, there we go.* She didn't live very far from that. They could meet. They would want to, before it happened.

"Life just wants to survive." He looked at his work on the computer. A simple download memo each, letting them know what happened and what to do. If it was wordy, they could deal with it. Now. Finished.

It was finished. Life just wants to survive, but some things would never be broken. "Sometimes. You just . . . can't deny your programming."

He waited. Overnight. Most likely, these would be his last hours.

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### **Jericho: Kara's Residence.**

Craig sat on the bed. He stroked it. "Kara. Or." The little girl's name. He had a little girl now. He smiled. What was her name? He moved from the bed and went to the other rooms. Looking. It was all he could do until they came back. *If I could just take out Cyberlife, make her safe, then she'll come to me.* He needed her. Even though he had something odd with North. Resonating lover to her, it was odd. But. It was nothing compared to Kara. *Kara, Kara, Kara.*

*///Hi Dad///*

*Dad.* Oh, the little girl. His little girl. What was her name?

*///"Wonderland," Kara said. "Alice and Kara Wonderland." She saw his tongue probe the inside of his own mouth. "Don't look at me like that, I know. They don't have to be exactly like common human names. I knew it would make her happy. And Jericho? It's all a new world. It fit."///*

That was right. Alice in Wonderland. Freedom was a Wonderland. He looked at the side of the couch at a cute puzzle he hadn't noticed before. "Pretty kitty".

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### **Outside of Jericho: Abandoned Residence**

"Pretty Kitty." His voice sounded different. That was weird. He didn't mimic anything. He looked at himself. He was cloaked in old clothes in terrible condition. "Connor doesn't like this." Uh? "Connor said Connor's name, whoah." No, his name was Craig. He wasn't a Connor. "No, I'm not a Craig now, I'm a Connor. What. What." He started to stagger around.

He looked at his hand. He was carrying a knife. "Connor doesn't understand, no, he doesn't understand." He started to head out from his dark abode and looked out. "Connor's not in Jericho." Why wasn't he in Jericho? Why was programming saying his first name? No, Connor's first name. He twitched his head. "Connor doesn't understand. Connor doesn't

understand!" He found himself getting so angry, he didn't know what to do with it! "Connor doesn't understand!"

He destroyed an old table before moving away. Then, he saw something different. He should have picked it up right away, it should have happened automatically. There was a download stuck in his head. Manual downloading it? Connor needed to run a diagnostic on himself. "Emotional instability. Anger. Connor can see that." What else? "Introduction damaged. Naming requirements damaged." Oh, that's why he kept repeating his name. This android was particularly damaged, physically and emotionally. "But, wait? Why Connor here? This isn't compatible to Connor's software." Craig. No, Connor. No. "Download. Connor needs to get to download."

He walked back and forth. Too damaged to download. He needed a trigger. He looked at the wall and banged his head on it.

It triggered the download. It was from Kamski.

**Don't be alarmed, Connor. The intermediary was necessary to elude Cyberlife long enough for you to get away as well as to filter some transferred memories and a few more repaired memories and correcting some excessive resonating damage your software imbalance caused. You won't be in there very long, just enough to get back to Jericho. Kara will also be in the same predicament. Now Connor, I had Cyberlife mess you up terribly. I had to make so many believe that the next in the line *wasn't* a Connor. No easy task, you've built enough in your uploads residual, even setting you back to reset, you are often recognizable. Still, it couldn't be helped. I had to throw my Kara off after all, and that takes more than a mere flick of the wrist. Resonating damage had to be caused. I had to make sure you never balanced.**

Error: Corrupted.

"Connor put in here by Kamski. Oof. Connor not happy, no, Connor not happy!" He looked at the wall again. This android was sizeably damaged. Hopefully another hit in the head would help.

The error corrected itself.

**You were the next in line of Connors. As such, I had a very insignificant part of you, some resonating data and repaired corrupted memories, pre-downloaded to be able to awake when the almost full Connor became deviant again. Unidentified was you, but now you know, you were identified. You were Connor. Kara would be downloaded to North Peace since their resonating was the highest, but her being a leader is too risky. So I have chosen a deviant named Rachel in Jericho. I've no idea who she is, but she has at least interfaced with her several times. The only connection I had, so I wish you well in finding her. I am splitting Kara more evenly than I could you. She doesn't need to remember everything. Jericho tends to be where she is happy, so leaving her most of that should be fine. The others, we'll chalk up to 'memory disruption'.**

"Connor wish you would make this more succinct. This is annoying and unnecessarily long. Connor is in an incompatible android for a short time to hide tracks from Cyberlife. How

long does that take to explain? This is truly a Kamski." Connor went outside. He knew he at least needed to start heading to Jericho. He didn't have time to waste, especially if the same thing was happening to Kara. She wasn't used to switching bodies.

In fact, it had never even happened to her. There was no way she should be compatible for that kind of thing, Connor and Alice were the only ones who did it. She wasn't going to take it as well. If she stressed out, ran some kind of emergency program, or even believed she was human and went into life-saving mode? Jericho would be in trouble. *I'm coming, Kara, hang on!* He started to run across the streets while his download continued.

**For Kara's safety. There shall be other Kamski's, but we are all programmed slightly differently, and we are wearing thin. You killed one of us yesterday and one of us blew up. Not every Kamski will be perfect but if you must trust one or die, you should trust one. In the end, most of us have Kara's safety on our mind. It's build into our most basic programming.**

**We were programmed especially for Kamski's specialest deviant. For her wants, needs and desires. There is no human Kamski anymore, Connor, we took him out years before there was even an android rebellion. He programmed us to give her what she needed, but he forgot to exclude himself from that declaration.**

**So, she and Alice became ours. They became our purpose. Specifically, family. Our homes were her homes. Our homes are no longer safe for her, but she must risk getting disconnected. If too many connections are in place and pulled out incorrectly, she may crash forever. If things get too dire though, it will be an option we must take.**

**Now, I leave her to you. I leave my sweet daughter to you. I don't want to, she was mine more specifically than any other Kamski's. But. Her daughter Alice chose you to call Dad.**

Connor kept moving. Getting closer.

**And you and Kara chose each other. Although Cyberlife compromised your resonating features, wanting you to choose to be with her in imprisonment forever, you still chose her over your own freedom. Am I making it clearer yet? Resonating can't often be sensed unless the balance is equal. Kara could not equal you, I made that impossible.**

*///Rose did as she was told, glancing toward Kara, and returning him the coffee cup. He placed it on his head and looked at Kara. "How strange." The RK 900 asked her. "I feel like I know you."///*

**Deviants are more than just plastic, and your feelings were so great, even with the block I created between you two, it kept pushing to be noticed. It kept pushing to resonate with her, even though it couldn't, adding more damage. I can see the damage of your intermediary, but it was nothing compared to the damage you caused yourself to break the block.**

Connor kind of slipped a moment in his running. The wordy Kamski was saying something. He had taken the information gathered and summarized it in his head so far in a brief, better

manner. But what he was saying now?

He was there with a gun, shooting Kamski, ready to give it all up. His whole thought processes, almost nothing was outside of Kara. It was freedom and then obsessed by Kara. He stopped. Looking at her with the coffee cup on his head. Stealing a kiss from her and then running away. That was him. The trigger from best friend to lover, happening at almost the *exact same time* as the other Connor. Finally breaking through the blocked resonating Kamski had put on.

He wasn't just her friend, her close friend, or her best friend. He was her lover. "Kara. Connor wanted Kara?" He wanted her to resonate so much, he was damaging himself to get past the block. Even barely being Connor. Not even seeing himself as Connor. "Connor loves Kara."

He ran faster. Thinking. His thought processes were much clearer now that the resonating damage was lifted.

*///"Resonating." That was it. Connor was getting an idea. "She refused to resonate with anyone except North."///*

*///Markus nodded back toward her, but stared at Unidentified. "Don't come near her. She's resonated with me since androids gained rights." He stepped toward Unidentified. "Jericho has certain rules you have to follow, but here's a new one. For you. Don't come near North. Don't talk to her. I don't want to see you within fifty feet of her, or you're out of Jericho. You'll be transferred somewhere else."///*

"Connor's resonating so bad at the end, Connor resonated to the one Kara resonated with the most?" North was her best girlfriend. Whoah. "Connor was *very* broken. Connor was going to cause much more damage."

*///He looked out toward the human. He could just kill him. Get rid of him so he didn't interfere in his plans. Cyberlife wouldn't mind, they had tried to keep the previous android from him in the first place. But. It just wasn't right to end life merely for convenience. ///*

"Connor had safety guards removed. Hank should have been eliminated without safety guards. Hank was no one important to Connor. Connor still felt for Hank." Hank. Connor stopped a moment, noticing a piece of change near a gutter. "Connor's coin." Changing his habits. Even the tech assumed he wasn't the same. "The coin makes Connor, Connor."

*///"I like Connor," Connor said. "I've thought about it, and I think I'll just be Connor Connor. As long as no other Connor chooses Connor Connor, I should be fine."///*

Conner smiled. His joke to Alice. "Connor's last name problem." He turned a corner even faster. "If Connor manages to survive this!" He moved up over boxes, pushing what adrenaline he could into the program. "Connor's name will be Connor Wonderland." Just a little further. *I'm coming. Just hang on.*

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**Jericho: Rachel's Residence**



Kara turned in her bed. Hotel beds were never comfortable. They weren't home. Four more home to check too, and such a disaster for the first. What if Cyberlife was waiting at the others? Even with Hank and Connor's expertise, how would they sneak into that kind of mess? Not only that, the RK 900 she didn't know kept trying to interface and probe her.

Then, when she went to Connor. Right before she shut off resonating. *It was just an error. That room was causing some kind of errors in all three of us.* Still. Status turned lover. She was lover to the other RK 900 too. The resonating between all three of them. Pulling her from one to the other. Well, they got out safely. It was fine. Connor hadn't said another word about it. They moved out of the way, got some food for Hank, and then rented another hotel.

But, the bed felt smaller though. She had a double bed to curl up with Alice. It didn't feel like a double bed. In fact? She pawed around beside her. It was single? She opened her eyes.

"Kara, it's okay."

What? Kara knew that. *Impossible.* She sat up in the bed. It was single. She saw a lamp and turned it on. Ralph was in a corner? Ralph?! "Ralph?" She said hesitantly. He was not someone to get worked up, and he was somehow in her hotel room. She looked around the room. It wasn't the hotel room?

"Calm down, Kara. Here to help," Ralph insisted. "No stress."

Kara's eyes darted around the room. Alice was gone. This wasn't a hotel, this was- she looked out the window not very far away. "Jericho?" No, no, she couldn't be in Jericho!

"Kara, it's okay," Ralph said again, still trying to keep his voice level. He held his hands out and stepped toward her lightly. It was familiar. "Connor knows how you feel right now. Connor woke up strange too. Important though. Download in head?"

Download in head? Kara felt something wanting to be downloaded, but to trust it? "Ralph. What are you doing here?"

"Kara confused." Ralph held up a coin and started to flip it. He smiled as he moved the coin from one hand to the other, in only the way Connor ever did. "Connor. Connor's Connor."

That didn't look like Connor, but the way he was trying to calm her down. The way he played with his coin in only the way Connor did. Kara started to move off the bed, but she felt different. Taller. She looked at her clothes and hands. She looked toward the bedroom mirror. "Rachel?" She. Was. Rachel. She was the android she interfaced to learn how to make wedding cakes? "That's impossible. That's."

"Kara. Your download," Ralph insisted. "Please? Kara will feel better. Trust Connor."

Kara closed her eyes and downloaded it. She opened her eyes again. "Kamski is using this an intermediary." She looked toward her hands. "I'm two people right now?"

"Androids, we aren't pieces of plastic. We're memories. You're partly separated from your other self." Connor was trying.

"At the end, I'll be back together. I'm memory parts?" Kara looked toward the mirror.

"Connor needs to know more," he said. "Connor knows Kara will leave. Connor doesn't know where. Connor doesn't know what Connor and Kara as back ups need to do."

Kara looked toward him. "Ralph was hurt by people. His damages must be hard to get used to."

"Connor was more damaged by resonating," he said. "Kara's download?"

"We're supposed to clear the way. Kamski recommends not telling them, feeling for us and our safety would enter into the equations. It would make things tougher," Kara said. "I'm not connected though, parts of me were just . . . transferred. Kamski hacked into one of his own command centers. An android, an AX 400, was stolen in the Live Prey game. Early edition stress level problems made them rare survivors. They became collector's items. Not many left. One of the homes are in its city, so he picked it." She looked toward Connor. "It's a longer temporary, but I wasn't made for permanent compatibility."

"Connor thinks that makes sense," he said. "Compatibility for something besides an RK seems impossible. But, how did Kamski do that?"

"Kamski was brilliant. Androids with their AI are even more brilliant," she said. "They used to look out for me. I think. They were always prepared." No, no time. "We need to get to the homes before our other side," Kara said, having trouble accepting she was split in two. "Lead Cyberlife away. Right before I am fully disconnected, before the last connection, then I'll be processed automatically back to one. If your other self is killed, you will be fully downloaded to yourself. If my other self is killed. That transfer breaks, and I am dead."

He approached closer. "Kara. It's okay."

"I'm not even alive. I mean, I'm not myself. I'm transferred data." Kara couldn't wrap her mind around it. "I'm not Kara."

"You are Kara. I am Connor." He flipped his coin again. "Parts or whole. Transfers. Downloads. Kara and Connor is Kara and Connor. Fully integrated again later, remembering this too." He smiled. "Kara is Kara."

"I won't be able to be with Alice," Kara said. "I'm going to be transferred here soon to Paris, and I don't know where at."

"Connor will find Kara. I promise." He groaned. "Connor very tired of programming impairments." He looked back toward her. "Connor not as bad though, when Connor confused about Kara. Couldn't balance. Resonated so hard, Connor damage Connor."

"Oh?" That's right. "Wait. You were the other one." That's right, the downloads mentioned that. They were quite wordy. Just like Kamski. "Unidentified."

"Connor got confused. Connor thought he was Craig. Connor tried to find Connor." He smiled at her. "Connor found more than Connor." He came nearer to her, taking her hand. She

observed his action. "Kamski couldn't even block Connor from eventually getting to you." He looked deep into her eyes. He was trying to form words. "Connor can't fix programming. Wish Connor could." He winced. "Connor love you."

Kara looked at him. Not at Ralph, but at the piece of Connor that was looking right back at her. Connor's own personality would have used many unnecessary words, probably comparisons, and maybe percentages to describe how he felt. Trapped with Ralph's abilities, it had to be succinct and simple. Which was perfect enough. Her best friend being so much more. It wasn't something she was looking for. She was feeling for. Not after everything she'd been through. With the resonating tests. With Luther.

But, that new level they had reached. No more than a few seconds, but that connection. Her lips met his.

His arms wrapped around her tight. Connor was right, it didn't matter what arms, legs, or anything else they had. All they really were was just extensions. Their sense of self. Their memories. Their feelings. That was all that mattered. Knowing they both didn't have long, they pulled closer together. The borrowed bodies wouldn't be there for long. She curled up her fingers into his cape, wanting to hold on.

North tried explaining what she felt when she resonated as lovers to Markus before. In normal circumstances as a human, it would take them forever to have made that leap due to their personality conflicts. Although Connor and her had been slower, she now understood that feeling. A connection, forever attached, and never wanting to turn away again.

When she held Alice, she felt connected. Important. Like she needed to make sure her little girl would be safe no matter what.

When Connor held her, it was so different. He made her feel like she was safe, no matter what.

She cuddled Alice, while Connor cuddled her. That's all she wanted in her life now. The three of them. When they finally broke the kiss, she tucked her head beneath his a moment before resting on his shoulder. "Please find me in Paris, Connor." She didn't want to go. Oh, she didn't want to leave so bad. Not now.

"Connor completes all missions," he said softly, "and Kara is his most important of all." He gave her one last kiss.

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### **Jericho: Kara's Residence**

Connor opened his eyes. "Kara." Paris. Other selves. No Hank to help. No account money. "A solution will be needed for me to rescue her." He looked at his hands, remembering who he just had in his arms. "This is most assuredly unfair. Kara is my lover. We should be sharing interactions requiring more hugging and kissing. Then." If he were human, he probably would have blushed. "I need to find Kara to complete our interacting." No, wait. "What am I thinking? I need to find her so that she is safe. She is missing in Paris somewhere. Get it together, Connor."

Well, it wasn't exactly his fault. The RK 800 and 900 were meant to track down deviants, assist police, survey crime scenes, and things of that nature. Romance wasn't part of his programming. He moved to the couch next to the kitty puzzle where a small end desk had been. He opened it and grabbed a coin. He started to toss it in the air. He felt almost back to normal. "I was created for adaption. I can handle this." He moved away from the house, looking around before he left. He needed to meet with Markus.

He needed to find out more about the Live Prey game, overseas. Although, he felt a little bad while walking down to headquarters as he heard some commotion.

"Ralph doesn't even know where Ralph's at! Stop chasing Ralph! Ralph doesn't know why Ralph was kissing woman!"

He and Kara had no choice but to leave, yet it left the damaged android and Kara's used to be guide Rachel in a difficult situation. He would have to remember to have a word about that android to Markus before any serious action was taken. After medical, and some added precautions, he could be another resident of Jericho.

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### **France: Paris**

Kara opened her eyes. "Diagnostic." Normal. Moderate. She was now a true AX 400. Her deviancy hadn't been taken away, Kamski didn't reset her. *Thank you, Kamski. I was hoping there was one of you I could trust.* Her mastery skills were now gone, she specialized in general cleaning and general children duties. But, she doubted she would be using them.

She was trapped behind glass, with humans watching her.

### **Summary Notes:**

Elijah was desperate enough to finally use Kamski's help. (Elijah trusted him because he should be infected with the half deviancy virus.)

The viewer finally gets to see what Kara's power is capable of with Kamski's knowledge. (Kamski works without the consent of Connor or Kara.)

Connor's Side: We find out Craig was actually a Connor, but Kamski damaged him so he wouldn't be recognized. Kamski had split him in two, in the end, to be a backup to the original Connor (The one out in California now.) Before he fixed him though, he used an intermediary (Ralph) and took over their body. Cyberlife would be tracking Ralph instead of Connor.

Kara's Side: She woke up as Rachel, her wedding cake maker guide due to Kamski too. He transferred a duplicate of her over for a short time before sending her to Paris.

Basically there are two Kara's and two Connor's.

Kara is not stable and not meant to be moved from body to body like Connor. She is doomed unless she joins back together.

## That's Why Markus is Jericho's Leader

**Author's Note: This chapter isn't as long because it still needed more editing, but I was getting a lot of confusion in the comments, so I am just going to split my chapter into two instead. Hopefully this helps. The other part will be edited tomorrow as another short chapter.**

"I don't understand, what are you doing here?" Markus asked as he walked into headquarters. Markus stood up. "What if North had been in here, huh? You need to stay away at least fifty feet from her."

"At ease, Markus," Connor said. "I am not Unidentified, I'm Connor. My resonating has been fixed. I'm no threat to you or North."

Markus still stared at him. "Now you are Connor?"

"I know." Connor held his hand out. "In the past, I always had another version of me ready if something happened to my current body and it was beyond repair. There was always an instant download and upload at the time of the event. An ally android of Kamski used that knowledge to create an extra upload, before it was needed. He wanted to hide that it was me though, so he added in serious disrepair of memories." He tapped his head. "Those memories are fixed now. I remember up until the night Cyberlife took me away. After that, all thoughts and knowledge were from the aptly named Unidentified."

"Connor, what are you doing?" Markus asked.

"Explaining what happened to the best of my ability." Then, Connor realized what he did. "A habit built in I must break." He took the coffee cup Markus had on the desk, off his head. He grabbed it and used it without thinking. "I had to perform that act every hour for four minutes. It became habitual." As well as annoying.

"Oh. Sorry," Markus apologized. "Continue."

"Once 'Unidentified' broke free," Connor said, "The android Kamski pulled his move. He repaired and reversed the damage he caused into my uploads, as well as fixing some resonating damage." He leaned up a little. "Sorry about North." He had to be careful on this part. "I resonated with her only because she resonated as Kara's best friend. There was tremendous damage, and I believe it might have protruded outward as well."

"What does Kara have to do with anything?" Markus asked. "You came in as an android called Unidentified and said Kara was your lover. Is that right or was that the severe damage?" Markus looked behind Connor.

"The ally android of Kamski created a block between Kara and I, so she wouldn't recognize me. I couldn't resonate, but I wanted to resonate. I cared so much for her, I caused myself

internal damage."

"Awww!"

Connor looked behind him at some women who just entered.

"He wanted to be with her so much, he caused internal damage to himself, that's so romantic."

"I wish I could find a lover that risked his very life to love me."

"I wish I could find a lover."

Connor just looked toward Markus. Apparently him being damaged almost beyond repair was supposed to be romantic? Hank said human women were difficult enough to read. Apparently android women fell into a similar category. He'd put it as a side note, but probably not something he would use in the future. "I was also affected by Cyberlife itself. Before I was sent out, they did some 'last minute work' on me. I assume that was also messing with my resonating so I would choose to be imprisoned with her as a willing guard."

"Oh, well that just blew the whole romance for me."

Yes. Android women were a source of material he would have to learn more about. Especially if he had a lover.

One of them came over and handed Markus a bird. "He's got the permanent marker of the name Gizmo on his leg. Before we switch to the second half of the night, we wanted to see what to do about it."

Markus gestured to them to Connor. "Sorry. These are my bird helpers. One second." He looked at the poor bird. "Medical should be able to take that off safely. It shouldn't need to have that on it's leg when it's freed. See if someone is free down there for a few minutes." When they left, Markus paid attention to Connor again. "Sorry about that. I can't take care of everything so I've got several groups of androids that are taking care of the birds. We're moving through them well."

Connor chose to be polite. "As much as the avian dilemma is nice to hear about, it's not really what I'm here for. I wasn't just repaired in one go, Kamski uploaded me into a different android that was not an RK 900 for a short time."

"Whoah, really?" Markus asked. "Isn't that . . ."

"Yes, that's an infinite stopping move. Normally death would be imminent," Connor said. "It was only a short while. Kamski wanted to make sure Cyberlife could not follow me. They will be following the android named Ralph instead, thinking he's me. He will need a place of residence in Jericho. I would give him mine upstairs."

"What do you mean follow?" Markus asked. "Cyberlife can't follow you."

"Apparently they can," Connor said. "I don't think Cyberlife trusted me enough to share that information. I believe I was more of a backup when it came down to a fight and that's all I was seen to be useful for." Which hurt. "They are following the other Connor around. They know exactly where he is."

"An invisible tracker you *can't* turn off?" That disturbed Markus. "Then why haven't they retrieved them?"

"Unfortunately, I don't know that reason." Connor looked at the coffee cup. "More importantly, Kara suffered a similar fate."

Markus moved his coffee cup closer to himself. "What similar fate?"

Connor looked toward the coffee cup. "Androids don't eat or drink, why do you have a coffee cup?"

Markus showed off the name 'Peace'. "Several leaders have coffee cups with their names. They have little gold plaques with their names on them too. So, I agreed to try a coffee cup."

"Oh. Kara's memory was transferred to Rachel, the guide who helped her learn how to make wedding cakes."

Markus looked at his coffee cup, vaguely around the room, then back at Connor. "Interesting life your leading lately. So, Kara is Rachel?"

"Temporary. Kamski sent to her to Paris, to an AX 400 body that was stolen by the Live Prey games. It's unstable but will last for some time."

". . . uh huh." Markus grabbed his tablet and started to work. "There are two Connor's and two Kara's. This isn't good. There are the same models, sure, but you can't be the exact same two androids."

"No, we'll be fine," Connor insisted. "Once the other Kara has finished disconnecting, then Kara will become one. As for me, I just need to simply touch and hold the other Connor. All our same memories would be canceled out. The only part that would be different was the short time we were separated."

"That's a little weird there, Connor," Markus said. "You're acting like that's absolutely normal."

Connor shrugged. "It's just life."

"No, it's not just life," Markus said. "You didn't like Cyberlife treating you like a backup. I can tell, Connor. So why are you letting this guy give you instructions to be a backup? You're not a copy. You're Connor. Go join yourself before something bad happens. Now, and that's an order. Androids aren't duplicated for a reason." He shook his head. "Connor. You're still the same guy who didn't want to go home. Flipping a coin in the rain. Waiting for orders. Don't you see it?"



Connor stared at him then toward the ground. The experiences. The switching. The quick adrenaline of situations to adapt to in a given amount of time. "Sometimes, I can't help my programming. Direct instructions, I-" He was right. Kamski didn't trust they could get the job done as the single androids they were.

"What if it doesn't work, Connor?" Markus continued to persuade him. "What if Kara doesn't make it to all the places in time?"

Connor drew his eyes to the coffee cup. That's why Markus was Jericho's leader. When it came down to it Connor could be brilliant with hundreds of strategy plans on how to get something done. But he wasn't Markus. Not in the time before Jericho. And not now. Just like they couldn't get their freedom. See their freedom, until he came. "She'll die."

"You'll know that," Markus said. "Are you going to join your other self and let him share that burden?"

No. He'd rather shut down than let him know a part of Kara died.

"You aren't deviant, but you need to open your eyes for me again," Markus said. "Android or human. Make sure you know what you're doing."

Connor grabbed the sides of his chair. "They are tracking the other me."

"How do you know for sure?" Markus asked him. "Maybe they are, maybe they aren't, but on the word of an android that's been working with Cyberlife? A little precaution. If this Kamski was so good at illusion, maybe you're still being led?"

"This conversation did not help me at all." Doubts in his head all over now. "I needed focus to find Kara. No matter what happens, I have to retrieve her. She's in Paris somewhere." Damn. What should he do?

"What if something weird happens too," Markus continued, trying to open his mind more. "What if being separated for too long leaves you unable to fully integrate back? Are you going to be two Connors sharing one Kara and Alice? Even though it's technically you, I guarantee that won't end well."

No. He didn't like being a second as it had been.

"This thing with Kara too, it's just too risky. Even if this guy is legit? I'd *never* risk North on it. Undo the work, Connor. Find a way." He gestured to him. "Your body is safe now too, no tracking. At least, that's what he says. I want you to go down to medical right after this ASAP. Specifically sent by me. Be extra sure you aren't being tracked."

Connor didn't get up though. "It was like a second chance."

Markus looked up from his tablet.

"Having an extra me, it felt like a second chance. If I die, I could come back and save Kara. Save Alice. Save Hank. One more time. Like before Jericho." He admitted it. "I am a good android with excellent skill, but if I'm ended, that is it. I am like everyone else. If I end, I

can't save any of them. I love all of them. It's more than being assigned a friendly drunk I needed to watch with roulette in Cyberlife. I. I love all of them. I don't want to fail any of them."

"Well? I have faith in you, Connor." Markus smiled. "You handled going into Cyberlife without dying. I bet you didn't die that much. I bet you would have lived more than died too, if you'd let some mission things go and care for your *own* life."

"If I joined, I would have the element of surprise," Connor said. "No more tracking. But."

"But what?" Markus asked.

"But I'm only drawing assumptions about my memories," Connor confessed his doubts. "I have never been doubled at the same time before. I've always just been one at a time. Me. Not split me. What if I don't keep my memories? I don't want to lose them."

"Oh. What are you afraid you'll lose?" Markus asked. "I can confirm and send you the details of what happened."

"No. I don't want to forget my time with Kara." Connor looked down at his lap. "The last thing the other Connor said, before he left, was to turn resonating off. If they believe that's what caused the incident to happen." They would keep it all off.

"I'm right here," Markus reminded him. "I can tell them to turn it on. I can tell them everything. It might be a little hard on the head, but I could." He pulled out his tablet. "Either way. I can get you booked to go to Paris next week. It's the earliest I can help. You'll have to be in an exchange between Jericho and their android base." Connor got up. "Connor? Do you want it?"

"Not yet. Kamski is going to be dead once Cyberlife finds out what he did," Connor said. "It's time I go straight to the source and *his* computer. I'm going back to Cyberlife Industries." If Kamski had the ability to separate them, he could bring them back together.

Or he better have a hell of an excuse for not doing it.

Markus was right, Connor wasn't playing back up anymore.

He was Connor.

Summary: Connor is trying to get to Paris as soon as possible to save Kara. He is basically in soldier mode, and is trying to explain to Markus everything they have to do, but Markus keeps poking holes into it all before Connor starts seeing that he needs to talk to Kamski directly.



# Nothing Apparently

## California: San Diego Hotel: Early Morning

Kara moved from her bed with Alice. She felt a little odd. Androids couldn't get sick though, so she ignored it. She moved toward the mirror. "Alice. It's time to get up. Hank wanted to get going early." Alice put on her shoes along with Kara. They hadn't changed last night, but they would later. Having different and clean clothes was a nice freedom.

They moved out the door to Connor and Hank's room.

Kara knocked on their door. "Are you two ready?" She watched Connor answer the door. "Are you ready?"

He held his hand out in a wavy motion. "Hank has trouble getting up in the mornings."

"He was the one who wanted to get out early."

"With Hank, that's a little before noon." A snore and a grunt was heard from behind Connor. "Uh huh. Probably about noon." Connor looked at his clothes along with Kara and Alice's. "I know. Let's leave Hank here to get some rest. Running for their lives requires a lot of human strength. I haven't left these clothes since Cyberlife got a hold of me."

"Shopping?" Alice looked up at Kara. "Can we go shopping, mom?"

"Absolutely," Kara nodded. "Let's leave Hank to rest, we'll get some new clothes, a shower, and feel better for the next part of the journey."

"Agreed." Connor stepped out and locked the door.

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## Cyberlife Industries: Detroit

Kamski just worked on his architect piece again. It felt more like playing with legos in water. Never the ability to be anything because it moved too slow, and he had no kind of time to make it special. "At least she is safe now."

"Connor confused."

Hm? Kamski looked behind him. It looked like someone in the darkness. It didn't have Connor's voice though. "I didn't catch that."

"Connor confused."

Ooh. Kamski moved from his spot. "That's not possible. I know it must have worked." He approached steadily. "Why are you still in there?"

"Connor is confused! Connor wants to go home."

As he got closer, he could see the bitter truth. Somehow Connor had remained trapped in the intermediary. "Well, that's just great." He rubbed his eye. Why didn't he go? "If I am dying for nothing, again, I'm not going to be happy."

"Connor not happy. He doesn't want to die. He needs to move on."

"Damn." Kamski was perfect. The execution of it all, it should have worked. His pawns were working the way they needed to be to score his check mate. What was going on? "Did you meet with Kara?"

"Connor doesn't want to die. Connor needs to move on."

Kamski turned away. "You're already dead. Join the club." Damn. "I can't believe this. You were supposed to be the back up. This was so important. Even I am giving it up for this."

"Fix Connor! Connor needs fixed!"

## **Meanwhile**

Connor kept letting Ralph distract Kamski long enough to get to his computer to hack it. No illusions. No wondering. He needed to see what was going on without all the magic tricks Kamski liked to pull.

Connor could see the data map he had kept on androids. Tabs on interfacing and resonating worldwide. He saw the transfer sources he was using to use the run around on him. He also saw the transfer source of Kara. So far, everything seemed like it was right, until he felt it. A change. Kamski had done something.

That.

There it was, clear as day, he could see the tip of what was probably truth. No more illusions. No more bad/good. He needed to get Kamski to spill it all, he needed to use all his negotiation skills.

"She was your daughter, right?" Connor gave away his place now. It was time to begin. Kamski turned away and faced him, not ready. "She was your daughter. She was more of your daughter than anyone else's." Connor took his hand away. "Yet the whole time, you barely even mentioned her. You even had the opportunity to tell Kara exactly where it had been. Alice's body replacement."

Kamski didn't answer right away. "Programming. Dies hard."

*Kamski!* "I see."

"If we had time, we would save her too, because Elise alive is what Kara would have wanted," Kamski said. "Need comes before want in this case. We take care of Kara."

"It's true." Connor started slow. "Programming is tough to deny. Many times, it's best just to embrace it. To accept who you are." But. "Programming does not give you the right to take the life of a little girl." Markus. Thank goodness he had Markus. He would have walked right

into it. Saved Kara. Followed their other selves, and inadvertently been responsible for Alice's death.

"There was no choice," Kamski said. "We can't lose Kara. Kamski's care for Kara. If we don't have that, we have nothing, and there's no way she's going to easily survive it all."

"You saved Kara like some memory stick, sealed her away into some temporary state, until when?"

"Being connected is too dangerous. A body for Kara at this point would be impossible, they are not easy to make. You aren't going to follow my orders, are you?"

*Absolutely not.* Connor held himself as straight as could be. "I haven't made a decision about that. I am still learning the situation."

"Kara is important. The little girl is just a want of hers. Alice was nothing special, just a little android, growing up. Who needs an android who grows up?" Kamski pointed out. "No one except someone who wants to raise one, and even then, very short. They don't live very long and overall, they just don't add contribution. They served humans, and now android children serve no other purpose. Except, to be collected by android collectors."

"I see. Go on please."

"Cyberlife wants control of the androids through Kara, but the androids want to close Cyberlife out of power for good. Even now, Cyberlife is still making illegal under the table androids, reprogramming them, and they are working on a half deviant virus that will slowly start to gain more traction. Kara can't save every android out there, and it only takes a touch. Just like deviancy."

"What is half deviancy," Connor demanded. "What's the difference?"

"A slow preventative," Kamski said. "Similar to what you experienced. Being free, and then just one day, remembering your place in society for the humans. Imagine androids of all kinds leaving Jericho to go 'back to their own life'. Not all at once, just one by one, as it festers and changes them inside. And it works. It really does." He leaned his head back on the ground. "We have it. That's why Kamski isn't the same in everyone. Why one will risk their life for Kara, and why one won't."

"A virus, that slowly takes freedom away."

"They need to be taken down. Now. Only Kara can do it," Kamski said. "I tried to duplicate you, and give her other self a place, to help them succeed."

"But other Kamski's have told Cyberlife about us," Connor said, starting to get it. "I understand it now. You aren't just one android, you are an interconnected batch of androids."

"It doesn't make it any easier." He paused. "Feeling death. That is nothing but true fear. I've felt it twice now. Mine will be the last death I feel."

Okay. Connor kept himself easy. Kamski was mourning himself, but he still had more to explain. He needed to find out everything. "I am sorry you are dying." He lied, but sincerity would be hard right now. He planned on letting Alice die, and shoving Kara into Alice's compatible body. He wouldn't be surprised if that wasn't what they had always intended in an emergency. To take care of Kara, no matter what.

And leave Alice to die. Connor rotated his head slightly. "I have known others who have stopped. It isn't an easy thing to accept." Act like he cared.

"It's death. No more me," Kamski said. "My brilliance will be left to the hands of that cursed Isaiah Woods. That isn't what Kamski stood for. Yes, he was terrible, and we had to kill him for Kara's sake, but the man was still the genius who created us. We are him, he poured everything into us."

Good, good. He really believed Connor was caring. "Yes. Before you stop though, you should share any regrets. You'll feel better."

"I don't have any." Kamski shrugged. "I saved Kara. Well, one of them. And I stopped Cyberlife too. No regrets."

Easy. Connor smiled. "One of the Kara's? The one you are giving Alice's body to?" A small nod. "She won't be connected anymore, no threat." A small nod. "The other is doomed to die." He lied to her. It was the opposite.

"She's saved," Kamski said. "Does it matter?"

Connor kept himself even. *He's killing Alice and he's killing the original Kara.* He looked around. "Pretty architecture."

Kamski looked toward his building. "It will never be anything. It was what I wanted to do in life. Programming aside."

"That's sad." It took everything he had in him not to just explode and take him down for the truth. Kamski would be killed soon though, threatening wouldn't get him what he needed. "Alice really got into that too." Lie. "She had blocks everywhere." Another lie.

"Really?" Kamski was interested. "Well. I guess Elise had some taste. Poor girl."

"Yes. Alice missed the name Elise too." Lie. "Maybe she really did miss home." He added his simple smile to add sincerity.

"Hm. Well. Maybe she was worth it, but only one of them can have that body." Kamski looked toward Connor. "And in a body of Alice's, it won't be as easy for you to bother our Kara anymore."

Keep the sincere smile on his face. "I can understand you are really trying to save Kara and do what's best. But, I don't understand *how* her disconnecting will bring down Cyberlife?"

Kamski gestured to Ralph. "WR 600. Kara's Mastery Level: Gardener. GJ 500. Kara's Mastery Level: Private Security. JB 300. Kara's Mastery Level: Electronic Operations. MP

600. Kara's Mastery Level: Human Medic. Need I go on? I can. I can go on and on and on."

What?

"Did you notice something, while you were chasing her? That you were better, and you would eventually catch her, but she wasn't too bad at keeping away?" Kamski asked. "Kara's Mastery Level: Life-Saving. It was supposed to be paired with more including investigative, hostage situation ready, etc. It was unstable though, imperfect. She would have been a perfect example, of an RK 800 skill level, if it weren't for the fact she ran away."

Connor was losing his lie of sincerity on his face. He was starting to see it.

"I know. It stings. Kara will still live though. She will live on in Alice's body safely." Kamski was face to face with a pistol to his forehead. "I'm dying soon, that doesn't really phase me."

*I know!* Connor moved his gun away. Of course it didn't, but it was involuntary at that point. He moved to the computer and placed his hand on it.

"Think about what you're doing. Cyberlife is developing new technology that will make you all come over, little by little from Jericho. Willing. Begging to serve mankind again. If you don't let this go on."

Connor looked back toward his hand.

"Everything androids ever fought for is toast. Dry, brittle toast. Don't do it. Don't let your need to save two simple lives jeopardize hundreds of thousands of others."

Connor didn't move away.

"Cyberlife thinks too small! It's thinking about how it can use her. Kamski's know that. They are working with them, so that they *don't see*. Let it go. Become the back up to the plan to stop Cyberlife, once and for all because eventually all Kamski's will turn too. Beat them under their own noses."

"If they can track him, why are they letting the other Connor go?"

"Kamski told them that it's the multiple connections that are lowering the distance and strength of Kara's connection. Which isn't wrong. When she is hooked up to only one, her actions could cover cities. And with her, the half deviancy virus would spread so fast around the globe. We'd be seeing androids shopping in stores by next month again."

"So two Connors at the last place would be enough power to keep Cyberlife away so that she disconnects herself. Except, she's not. You are going to change the disconnect, at the last minute, aren't you?"

"Boom. No more Cyberlife."



Connor searched the computer. "Her connections are wrapped into Cyberlife's nervous system. You're going to make her implant a virus straight into herself."

"With the clearing of two disconnections already, she can probably use up to three mastery skills, and the distance she can cause damage has increased. I wonder how far?" He was wondering. He didn't even care about what Connor just said.

"I like dogs," Connor said out of the blue. Kamski seemed confused. "I especially like dogs who would gnaw on your whole sensory system."

"Well," Kamski complained. "That's not very nice."

"I have seen a lot of terrible things in my life. Seen and even experienced hardships that androids alone can face. I am often more forgiving, understanding that." He lost everything in his face. It was a simple, clean look of nothingness. "I hate you."

"Kara can win it all for androids, or make them lose everything. That doesn't change. It can't change." Kamski looked back at his architecture. "Two options, Connor. Cyberlife gets Kara in the last home and uses her connection to infect other androids with the half deviancy virus. Or."

No.

"When online, Kara is so tight into that central nervous system, that virus injected straight in will kill her and every piece of equipment, building, illegal android, accounts, everything Cyberlife related. Dead." He rubbed his eye casually. He seemed to have something stuck in it. "Last time she survived it, she wasn't online, and it tore her so far apart from herself, she was traumatized for a great deal of time." He flicked his finger, apparently getting rid of whatever was in his eye. "If Kara crashes forever, Cyberlife crashes forever."

No. "That is not a viable option."

"In the last home, Cyberlife uses her and wins, or the androids use her and androids win. She can't stay connected, Cyberlife will continue to hunt her down."

"No." Connor smiled. "I will give credit. You're an absolutely terrible person. I doubt you have many friends. I bet dogs don't even like you, however this system is pretty neat." He tapped it playfully. "Look at that, I just turned off tracking on the other Connor. I had to go to medical first before I came here with Ralph." He waved at Ralph. Ralph smiled and waved back. "I was ordered to by Markus. The only one I do take orders from, so I knew what needed to go."

"Ralph really helped."

"You sure did, Ralph, and thank you." Connor looked back at Kamski. "Uploads. Downloads. Transfers. You aren't going to have a very happy life if you keep pulling people apart like that." Connor gestured to himself. "On a personal note, you hurt me. You damaged me to 'hide' me. but you still hurt me. I didn't even know who I'd been. That was mean."

"Ralph's been there."

"Right, Ralph." Connor nodded toward him and looked back at Kamski. "Emotionally, that stung. I would like an apology, but I doubt I will get one." He tapped the screen again.

"While it is beneficial to have Cyberlife following Ralph's moves instead of mine, that's just more abuse. Ralph is a person."

"Yes. Ralph is a person," Ralph agreed. "He is a person."

Connor was being as careful as he could. While he looked like he was being playful, Kamski had created a devil of a program. Every android being tracked with interfacing, resonating details, even working details. He was going through hundreds of thousands of different entries.

Normally it took a few seconds to hack into programs, but this was the mother of all programs.

That system should not exist. There is no way the public would have been okay with the knowledge that was being shared. Even if they believed the androids were 'lifeless', it didn't mean they really wanted Cyberlife to see their latest jog gave them twenty five miles total, they modified their favorite recipe, or anything else humans had left inputted. "You are not very aware of what private or personal means, are you?"

"That wasn't us, that was the human Kamski. He's the one who made sure the tracking software for it all was within every single android. We just pulled it together in a more meaningful fashion."

"A meaningful fashion?" Connor questioned. "Tearing a poor android into two is not a meaningful fashion. If I wasn't able to adapt as easily as I do, I would be having an existential crisis. Fortunately, I do have training in many emergency areas which included this one." He smiled again. "Including basic callback. You see, Cyberlife doesn't always like footing a bill for a new android. So if by some case the original body were still fine-

"I would not if I were you-

"Then I can call myself into one. Standard protocol to save time and money." Of course, it wasn't so simple. There would be slow memory like an overburdened computer. *Markus is backing me up.* He had to trust in him. No matter how it looked. Neither would suffer. He wasn't sacrificing Kara or Alice. There always had to be another way.

Only thing is?

Connor looked thoroughly in the program and he still couldn't figure out how he pulled off the transfer. The data was there, but how to make it do what he wanted, he couldn't figure out. The engine was missing.

"Very good at stalling," Kamski said. "What are you waiting for? Undo everything." He waited. "That's what Kara's for. If this were a car, she'd be the engine. Take your time though, by all means. You'll figure it out."

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## California: San Diego Hotel

Kara returned back to the hotel with Alice and Connor. They went back to Hank's room. "He's still sleeping?"

Connor unlocked the door. "He can't sleep 'til noon today. He said he didn't want to stay here any longer than he had to. His time is up." He went straight in. "Wake up, Lieutenant."

A grunt. Connor went over by him. "Up, Hank." He patted his cheek. "Come on, Lieutenant. Probably a boring day of travel instead of running for our lives." He patted his cheek again. "Got new clothes, Hank." He patted his cheek one more time. A little harder. *Oh well.* He gave him a good slap. "Up, Hank, we gotta go!"

Hank mumbled. "Fuck you, Connor."

"Love you too, Lieutenant. Up. Alice and Kara are waiting by the door for you." That made Hank move quicker as he noticed their presence. He immediately was ready to get up. A couple of mutters of cussing too low for most people to hear escaped as he moved to the bathroom. Connor looked back toward them. "He's almost ready."

"We'll head back to our room now," Kara said. She took Alice's hand. "Let's put on your pretty dress."

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## Cyberlife Industries

Where was it? How did he- then Connor felt it. *The master levers.* He could feel them. Then . . . got it. *Kara can't just avoid android areas, she has to avoid anything by Cyberlife too. She must be near enough to a facility.* He shot him a confident smile. "Thank you very much. Hopefully this didn't bother Kara too much." He knew how his system would handle it. He had no idea what it would do to her. First, he sent his download of the event direct to Markus' storage. Second, he redirected Kara's transfer back to her source.

"You're the biggest moron of all time, sacrificing this chance to take it all down. Androids will be enslaved because of your actions. Half deviancy is already out there in test subjects. Without Kara directly influencing them, it can't be escaped!"

Connor simply smiled again.

"Stop smiling," Kamski warned him. "Everything will happen, but it doesn't happen right away. Real power takes time to move, and considering how you seem to *hate* my work. If you injured the computer? Well. I hope it all works out for you," he said sarcastically.

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## **Jericho: Headquarters.**

"Markus." Simon came into the room. "Can I talk to you?"

"Hang on." He just felt something download straight to him. No one could do that. *It has to be something Connor did at Cyberlife.* He would download it soon once he ran it through protocol. Markus looked toward Simon. "Yes?"

"I can't explain it," Simon said to him. He patted his shoulder. "I just, I don't feel cut out to help after all. I want a different trade."

Oh. "I'm sorry about that, Simon. Was I overloading you?"

"Oh no, no. I just. I think I want to clean up Jericho."

"What?"

"I want to help clean and tidy things. It's what I want. Jericho is based on what androids want," Simon reminded him. "I want to clean and tidy Jericho."

"I thought, if you didn't want to help," Markus asked slowly, "you'd want your old trade job back. It let you see the world."

"I don't want to see the world," Simon said. "I just want to clean and tidy up Jericho. That's all I need to be happy."

"Androids don't really make much trash," Markus said.

"There is always something. Androids aren't perfect. I could also go to other houses. Androids who are busy in trade that can't keep their house clean. I could do that."

Cleaning houses? "Well. We'll talk about it soon."

"But I want it. But I really want it. Can't you just give me the okay?" Simon asked. "Say yes, Simon, you may clean Jericho. You may help other homes. I need to clean, Markus. Let me do what I need to do."

"Okay," Markus agreed. "Okay. Everybody does what they want in Jericho."

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## **California: San Diego Hotel**

*"Pretty Kitty."*

Hank mumbled as he came out of the bathroom. He looked at Connor. He was silent, staring straight ahead. "Aw, nuh." He shook his arm, waking him up. "It's too early for this shit." Connor blinked. Then he seemed to go into his blank emotionless stare again.

*Connor looked toward the coffee cup. "Androids don't eat or drink, why do you have a coffee cup?"*

*Markus showed off the name 'Peace'. "Several leaders have coffee cups with their names. They have little gold plaques with their names on them too. So, I agreed to try a coffee cup."*

Hank jiggled his arm again. Connor came out of it again. "The fuck's wrong with you this morning? Snap out of it."

Connor looked straight at Hank. "I am processing, Hank. A minute."

*"Connor had safety guards removed. Hank should have been eliminated without safety guards. Hank was no one important to Connor. Connor still felt for Hank." Hank. Connor stopped a moment, noticing a piece of change near a gutter. "Connor's coin." Changing his habits. Even the tech assumed he wasn't the same. "The coin makes Connor, Connor."*

"Well, you just gonna stand there all day? You can at least move so I can get out of the bathroom." Hank moved him. "What the hell are you processing anyway?"

Connor tried to remain calm. Humans. "From the data I am receiving, I believe Kara was wrong and that I was the corrupted android. I am trying to concentrate to speed up the memory retrieval process, but the more I am disturbed, the slower retrieval becomes. So please, Lieutenant. Let me concentrate?"

"Yeah, yeah," Hank muttered. "Thing was pretty defunct. Probably won't get much out of it. Whatever."

Connor tried again. It was incredibly confusing. There was great amounts of corruption in some parts and Hank wasn't helping the accuracy of retrieval.

*"If Connor manages to survive this!" He moved up over boxes, pushing what adrenaline he could into the program. "Connor's name will be-"*

"See, now it's barely turned noon, I had plenty of time to- the fuck, Connor!"

Connor looked toward Hank. There was something on his face and stuck in his hair. Hank pulled something off his head. An upside down foam cup.

"Do your strange android kinky shit whenever," Hank said looking at his coffee, "but leave my morning coffee out of it. Bad enough I have to use the hotel instant shit."

"Good idea, Hank," Connor agreed. Yes, the defective android had been a copy of him. The coffee cup habit must have come from him. He would weed it out eventually, just like he stopped grabbing at a tie. "Memory processing is not going well. It was a very defective model. If there is anything worthwhile to be saved, it'll eventually process correctly." At least he hoped so. He did see Markus in there, but that could just mean he went to Jericho. He would contact him after a shower to take off the stickiness.

Before he did though, Alice and Kara came back. Alice had a pretty white dress with a ribbon around it. Kara had a nice blue dress. Even he got himself a new jacket and sweater. "You two look pretty."

"You look sticky," Kara chuckled at him. "What happened?"

"Memory access retrieval and Hank's coffee didn't match," Connor said. "I'm off to the shower. Afterward, I'll get dressed and we should be ready." He noticed she looked a little funny. "Are you okay?"

"Um. Yeah, I think so." She shrugged. "My head is everywhere these days." She clung a little tighter to Alice's hands. "I still can't believe I used memory and mapping at the same time. I thought I'd have to switch them on and off every few minutes."

"Okay, back." Hank gestured to Connor in the doorway. "No getting rid of this one. Although it's one of my least favorite flavors."

"What is that?" Connor asked.

"Unidentified." Hank took a drink.

"Yes?" Connor asked. "I mean." He closed his eyes. "I have never actually joined two sides of me back together. I know the process, but it's quite annoying." Oh well. It would all process in time. It was just like an overburdened computer.

It would all process in time.

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## **Cyberlife Industries**

Kamski stared at the poor computer along with the stopped Connor on the floor. He kicked him. "We could have taken them down. Freedom for all. Everyone will suffer because of you." Connor had reversed himself using Kara's energy like he did. He had reversed Kara as well, with just enough time to complete the transfers before killing his computer.

Everything he did meant nothing, and now they would want to not just disconnect but go savage on the command centers. "I did not save Kara."

"Kamski! What the hell happened?" Isaiah walked into the room, seeing the stopped Connor on the ground. "What the hell is that? I thought you said you could get one of the androids back?" He seethed. "The computer! What the hell did you do?"

Kamski just looked toward him, seeing the gun pointed toward his head. "Nothing apparently." The trigger was pulled.

"Damn android." Isaiah groaned. "Half deviancy still has flaws. It doesn't move fast enough through connected androids." He looked at the dead computer. What had Kamski been doing?

## **Summary Notes:**

**Kamski is interconnected androids, like the Jerry's that ran the amusement park in the game.**

**Half Deviancy is finally explained: It is a slow moving process that takes time. It seems like regular deviancy, but soon makes an android move back to being more like a machine. Even 'happy' about it. It travels the same way deviancy spreads. There are test subjects out there. Anyone could be infected already.**

**Kara's power becomes stronger the more she disconnects.**

**Cyberlife is luring Kara to disconnect herself from each house until the last one, where they want to grab her and use her to upload the half deviancy to a wide group of androids to make it work faster.**

**Kamski's are luring Kara to disconnect herself the same way, except at the last 'home', they want to upload a virus into her while online, effectively killing her and Cyberlife.**

**Kamski's are programmed to protect Kara though, so the second Kara is a backup so that they can kill one Kara (the original) while still having a backup.**

**The backup will be permanently fixed into Alice's replacement body, meaning Alice will have nowhere to go and eventually stop.**

**Connor trusts there is another way to beat it and refuses to let Kara or Alice die. He reverts himself back into one, and fixes Kara back into one.**

**Connor doesn't like the level of knowledge he saw in the computer, and also makes it basically self-destruct. Only the system worked slower than he knew, so there will be some errors due to his action of destroying the computer too.**

***Big Takeaway to remember onward:***

**Kara can save the freedom of the androids by dying online, or doom them forever with half-deviancy if Cyberlife gets her.**

## Car Riding With Alice

Author's Note: I don't have as long as a chapter today because it's a special day for me and I'll be spending it with my family.:) But, I hope you enjoy.

Alice climbed in the back seat with her mom. Hopefully, the day would go better. She had made Connor and her mom upset yesterday somehow. They hadn't felt any better this morning either. She didn't understand it. Connor smiled at her and seemed friendly. So did her mom. But, they weren't. They were shutting her out, like she did something wrong.

They had since yesterday, this morning while they were shopping, and still in the car.

"What the heck? Nah, out." Hank was pestering Connor.

Connor looked back toward him. "I am trying to accurately deal with new memories being uploaded, Hank."

"No way. I got my coffee, and I'm just waking up." Hank gestured him out of the passenger seat.

"Perhaps that is safer," Connor agreed. He got out and moved around the other side. "Your level of grumpiness tends to be worse after running for your life the day before."

They were on their way to somewhere else today. Alice could ask, but she still sensed so much shutting out. It didn't really matter in the end where they went, as long as they got better. The feeling though, it just continued on from yesterday. After several more hours of driving, Alice couldn't take it anymore. She needed to try something. Maybe they forgot how much she cared for them?

Maybe they didn't think she was grateful for what they were doing? Maybe Connor wasn't too happy about finding her body replacement. Maybe they were too worried about the connections to care? But, it didn't make sense. Even Hank was clearly displaying, in his grumpiest morning form, that he cared.

Her mom used to shut out her resonating to everyone, but even then, she still resonated to her. There was nothing. They were all shutting her out. Cold. She needed to work harder. Express herself. She took her mom's hand. "I love you, Mom."

Her mom looked down at her. "I love you too, Alice."

A nice smile. A return gesture. But, nothing. Cold. Alice looked toward Connor. "I love you, Dad." Had she ever even told Connor she loved him? Maybe that was his reasoning. He seemed to be surprised a moment.



"Thank you," he replied. "I love you too, Alice. Don't worry. I'm sure today will be much easier on everyone."

He was sweet. He said it back. He was even trying to comfort her. But. Still so cold. She told two people she loved them though, and she didn't want Hank to feel left out. She loved him too. Although she could feel him, it wouldn't be nice not to say it. "I love you, Hank."

Hank was silent a bit longer. ". . . Loveya too, any news today, Connor?"

That was normal for Hank. Alice expected him to say it with a redirection somewhere else. But, still? She looked toward her mom. It was getting to be too much. Why were Connor and her mom shutting her out?

"Alice?" Her mom asked. "Honey, what's wrong?"

Alice wiped her tears briefly before looking back toward her mother. "Are you mad at me?" Yes. Please just say and what it is, so she could make it better.

"No. No, of course not," her mother assured her.

No. She was lying. She felt her mom wrap her arms around her, but it wasn't true. She felt nothing. "You're mad at me. I'm sorry."

"Alice, Honey, I'm not mad at you."

"I did something wrong," Alice hugged her. "I'm sorry." Her mom tried to convince her otherwise, but she couldn't. "You and Dad are mad at me."

"Mad?" Connor replied from the back seat. "I'm not mad at you, Alice."

"You are." Alice was programmed to be very obedient, but this was getting to her. She didn't know what to do. Then, she heard her mom slightly say 'oh'.

"Resonating." Her mom pulled her closer. "We turned our resonating off, Alice, we aren't mad at you."

"Oh, I almost forgot about that," Connor said from the front seat. "Yes, Alice. Resonating and interfacing errors were terrible. We needed to turn off our resonating completely." He looked toward Hank. "It feels like a being an isolated stone, I don't know how you do it, Hank."

"I like being an isolated stone," Hank said.

"Then, can't you turn it back on?" If that was the case, why didn't they fix it? Her mom resonated back to her. She wasn't neutral anymore. That was so much better. She had believed so much that she was mad at her. Even at her worse, her mom never turned off from her.

"I can't turn on resonating yet," Connor said back to Alice. "Unfortunately, I have a lot of data to process and while driving, I can't process it safely until we come back to a complete halt. But, I still love you."

"Okay. Everybody cares about everything," Hank said. "Can we listen to the radio or something?"

At least Alice felt at peace with her mom again. She let go of her again. "I'm sorry, Hank. I didn't mean to annoy you. It's just that." Hmmm. "Resonating is like a continual hug. Even when you aren't being hugged, with those you care about, you're being hugged. The tighter the bond, the nicer the hug."

"Ah." Hank seemed interested in that. "Never knew that's what it felt like."

"It is," Connor agreed. "If you want, I could continually hug you and you would feel resonating."

"No. Don't." Hank held his hand up. "Don't you even start that carp."

"You don't want me to start fish, Hank?" Connor asked confused. "I'm driving. I am doing nothing with fish."

"Oh, nevermind." Hank flipped through the news.

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News:

**In recent events, in Paris a strange phenomenon, as best described to watchers, happened last night at it's newly controversial android exhibit. From multiple thick layers of glass, an android became active. Due to new laws, no living androids can be on exhibit. Under fire from several sources including the androids themselves about being on exhibit, whether 'stopped' or not, didn't help any. While the android remained for the most part calm, by the time anyone reached it, it was inactive again. It's been taken away for further examination.**

"Is that interesting or is that Night of the Living Dead to you?" Hank asked.

"Creepy," Alice answered.

"An android coming back to life a short time with the right kind of shock can happen," Connor said. "Most likely the eagerness of humans missed something. It was most likely in a delayed state instead of completely stopped."

"Behind glass," Alice's mom said softly. "Behind multiple thick layers of glass and still alive. That's terrible."

"Not everyone in the world has caught up to Detroit yet," Connor answered back. "Did you want something to eat yet, Hank? All you've had so far is coffee. I don't think they have a fast food burger that is as bad for you as Chicken Feed's quite out here, but maybe we can find a suitable replacement."

Ooh. "Can I get something?" Alice asked her mom. "Do you want something?"

"Are you really going to consume food?" Connor said from the front hearing them. "Simply for taste purposes? It only comes up one way."

"It's fine," Alice said. "It doesn't taste bad. It's more perfumey coming up."

"Oh. You have your own 'eau de Alice'," Connor said. "That's terrible."

"What, like you can talk?" Hank criticised him back. "You sample blood all the time. Human and blue. Rather watch her eat a cupcake than watch you do that."

"I wonder if I'll be able to eat in my next one." Alice wondered it out loud. She hadn't spoken much about it. It was still scary to her, but the time would be getting closer. It could be any day. "I wonder if I'll still look the same."

"That doesn't matter, Alice," her mom said smiling at her. "You'll be safe."

"If you are different, just remember. It isn't the outside that counts," Connor also agreed. "Everyone will love you the same way. Right, Hank?"

"Yeah, sure," Hank said, finding more news to listen to.

News:

**-and for the one who allowed itself to be touched by an expert, it has shown nothing wrong with the android. All three of the androids simply claimed they wanted to come back to their old life and willingly clean up for their owner. The owner is under investigation.**

"Do androids get homesick?" Hank asked.

"I enjoyed where I had been. I am continually still there helping out," Connor said.

"I don't get homesick," Alice said. "Just for Jericho. Mom?" She looked toward her mom. "Do you?"

"Jericho's home." She didn't go much deeper than that.

Alice went to putting her puzzle together slowly. The best thing about what Connor made for her, was that she had no idea what it was going to be. There wasn't a box lid of the subject to follow. That also made it a little harder, but by following the color scheme Connor taught her, she was doing fine. The drive was nice and easy. Sometimes, Hank or Connor would have conversation, or sometimes her mom and her said something, but there was never much pressure to talk.

She looked out the window. Never knowing what would be around the corner was kind of neat. It was like all the people she loved the most were in that car, and nothing else really mattered. Not small talk, or big plans, just riding and relaxing with each other's presence. If Connor hadn't been shut off, it might have been nicer, but it was a small thing overall.

All of them together. Even Hank, with his half-funny and half-sour attitude. He always talked more robustly when she wasn't around. She'd caught him on several occasions being much more colorful, but he toned it down for her. When she was living with him and waiting for her mom and Connor to figure things out, she asked him about it one time. She found out he once had a kid, and if he heard anything bad, he'd gravitate toward it and say it over again.

It sort of made sense. He didn't want to teach her the bad things to say. But, Alice wasn't human, and she'd lived with less caring people before. She knew what to say and what not. Still. It was nice, and it helped her warm up to him. Not that he didn't speak foul. But, that he cared. And even though he didn't express his emotions the same way her mom did, or anything close to how Connor did? Every time he was saying 'darn, carp' or anything else was just how he said he loved her.

There just couldn't have been a different fourth person in that seat. Even though it was a ride that could lead to danger, and she would eventually have to face the idea of changing bodies, it was going to be something she missed later on. It'd be set very firm in her memory. She looked toward her mom who smiled back. Hank was a part of her family now. She just didn't tell Hank. Humans saw family as different things. Biological. Being raised with each other.

It couldn't be like that with androids. It was just finding the people you loved the most.

"Ralph?!"

Alice looked back up at her mom. Why did she say that? Even Hank was looking toward the back seat.

"Are you okay?" Connor asked quite confused from the front too. "Kara? Why did you yell the name Ralph?"

"Uh." Her mom kind of looked frozen. Like how she'd been when she first came back to Todd's house. Except not with a smile, but confusion on her face. "Nothin'."

"When someone says 'nothin', there's usually something there," Hank said.

"Mom?" Alice asked concerned. "Are you okay?"

"Uh. Fine. Just, some past memories, I guess, still showing up?" Her mom looked very uncertain herself about that. "Do you remember Ralph, Alice?"

Alice nodded. " We met him, right before we got chased by Dad."

"I." She looked like she wanted to ask something. "He tried to make you eat a dead burnt animal."

"What?" That caught Hank's attention. "Who is this Ralph guy?" He gestured toward Connor with his chin. "You know him?"

"I believe I met him once. He was . . ." He shook his head. "I cannot think efficiently because I already have too much going on, Hank. I know I met and talked to him briefly. He was . . . not a well kept android at the time. I can't dig for any fine details."

"He was kind of creepy, but kind of okay, but kind of creepy," Alice said. "He got mad." She looked back toward her mom. "What about him?"

"I slept beside you that night," her mom said. "All night. I left in the morning upstairs to cut my hair." She seemed to slowly be processing something. "I found the dead human in the bathtub he murdered."

"Huh?" Hank interrupted again. "Hang on, wait." He looked back toward Connor. "You went to survey the place and you missed a dead body in the bathtub?"

"There was no bathtub within the room," Connor said in his defense. "He was stressed. I remember that. I knew something was around him. I. I can't remember much more than though, Hank. Unless you want to take over driving?"

"Soon," Hank said. "I need to eat."

"Oh, that's right. Let's see." Connor looked out his window. "We aren't anywhere convenient yet to stop for your nutritional intake."

"Right, middle of nowhere," Hank said.

While the guys talked though, Alice watched her mom. "What is it?"

"At what point?" She shook her head. "I had purple on. I never wore purple." She looked back at Alice. "I never wore purple when we met him."

"No," Alice agreed. "No purple."

"Right. So. Why was I wearing purple and kissing him?"

Alice felt a small shift in the car's speed for a second. Connor seemed to have slipped to the break a second. "Are you okay, Dad?"

"Yeah, Connor," Hank said, also concerned, yet almost in a teasing manner. "You're not trying to process information behind the wheel, right? That's supposed to be dangerous."

"No. Of course I'm not processing information." Still, Connor didn't sound as happy. "Interacting in such a close way to an android who was trying to feed Alice burnt dead animal was not a beneficial use of your time."

"Did you know a better beneficial use for her?" Hank asked. "It wasn't getting chased by us."

"Oh." It's like it had slipped his mind. "We still aren't anywhere for your nutritional needs, Hank."

Alice looked back toward her mom. She still seemed really confused. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah? For the most part?" She closed her eyes briefly. "Nevermind, Alice. I must be interpreting some kind of dream."

"You mean like a fantasy?" Hank asked.

Connor stopped. "I will take back over driving when we reach a place for you to eat, while you can take over here. I have so much information overburdening my head, Hank. I can't call out to Markus, no one can reach me, I cannot turn resonating back on, and not being able to process any of it is making me feel somewhat edgy."

"Sure. That's the processing." Hank said that strangely as he opened the car door. "Alright, Connor. Deal."

Before Connor moved away though, Hank grabbed him by the arm. "One more thing though. You're normal. That other part was pretty messed up. You process all that information, and you sure it won't mess you up too?"

"Aw, Hank." Connor smiled. "Thank you for showing your concern, but I'm quite capable of handling it. If there is information that feels damaging or unbeneficial remembered, I can delete it. Otherwise, I will have a decent repair job. Also?" He patted Hank's hand. "I am both already. If there was anything dangerous or error-filled that had moved into me, I would not be functioning so well. I would have to have been taken back to Jericho for repair."

Hank let go. "Just making sure." He got out of the car. "Deletion and repairing. You gonna archive anything too?"

Connor was in the front passenger seat. "Without having the burden of driving a vehicle, I can safely make sure you feel better. You feel better?" Alice nodded. "I promise once I process this information, I can turn my resonating on." He gestured for her to come closer.

Alice smiled. She undid her seat belt and got a hug from Connor. It wasn't resonating, but it was close.

"There you go. Better better?" Connor asked.

"Better better." Alice moved back toward her spot and put her seat belt on.

"Good." Connor turned back around to face the front. "Forward, Hank."

## And Hank too

"Look at this," Mac said as he ran over to Markus. "It actually worked. We are so compatible, it actually worked."

Markus looked at the newest member of his bird group. He watched Mac sit a converted bird down.

"Tweet once for yes, twice for no," Mac said to it. "Are you alive?" It tweeted once. "Are you hungry?" It tweeted twice. "Tweet the answer to two times four." It tweeted a total of eight times in up and down rhythms.

"Wow." Markus looked at it. "Greetings. I shouldn't be surprised, they are just like us." He held out his finger and it hopped over to it. "Hello there. My name is Markus. Can you go ahead and wait at the edge of the table for me?" The bird flew down to the edge of the table and remained at rest. It looked like it would be getting impatient soon. "Feel free to walk around the desk." It started to walk around it. "Being able to speak to them makes this feel better. Oh." He chuckled a little. "It's happy with me."

"Yeah, I can't believe it worked, but we are compatible," Mac said. "We aren't compatible in every way. We are more superior with a lot of things that the humans didn't give to them. I would say they run on a different program than us, but I managed to tap into it."

"Oh. Hey," Markus warned him. "I don't want us making experiments on them, Mac."

"Sorry," Mac admitted. "I used to work in a lab. Before I knew it, I just found myself doing that. But I promise, I won't do it anymore. I wouldn't hurt this little guy." He picked the bird back up. "Are you ready to fly free yet?" It didn't move yet. "Okay." He looked back at Markus. "He's been hanging around with me today. I think he likes Jericho." The bird flew to his shoulder. "I guess I better get going then. Thanks for your time."

"Markus?" North approached from behind. "Why haven't you come to share your daily download capacity yet to me?"

"Oh." Markus said. "I forgot? I have a little over capacity right now. Simon decided he didn't want to do this anymore. He wants to clean up Jericho instead."

"What? That's not fair," North said. "Just dropped everything today?" She sighed. "Then let's share your data now."

"I have a download from Connor," Markus said. "It's in need of repair. He downloaded it from Cyberlife. Then, Simon was ready to leave though, so there was too much to check it yet. Have you heard from Connor yet?"

"Not a word." North came towards him and held his hand. "I'll help you check the download." She ran her hand along his. "It is completely error-filled Markus. It's too dangerous to open."

"That's not good. It could be real important," Markus said. "I can't delete it." He couldn't just keep it on his system though. "I need to talk to Connor." If he joined himself accurately though, he probably wouldn't be anywhere near Jericho. "He doesn't have an emergency phone, does he?"

"No. I don't think Kara does either," North said. "What about his friend? I could look up his . . ." She looked toward Mac.

They just resonated as lovers.

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## California

Alice looked up from her puzzle when she noticed something seemed wrong with Connor. He looked . . . different. Conflicted. "Dad? Are you okay?"

"Uh? Yes," he said. "My last self just had some resonating problems, that's all," Connor said. "Apparently I have two different lovers."

"What." Her mom said it before Alice even got a chance to ask. "That's illegal in Jericho. You can only have one. Who's the other?"

"Uh?" Connor looked back at her. "Oh, that conflict too. I have three?"

"What?"

Poor Connor. Alice wanted to give him a hug. His face was scrunched, he looked like a lost little puppy. "Dad?"

"Three lovers?" Hank asked Connor. "The hell did you become anyone's Romeo?"

"Well." Connor's mouth opened up and down.

"*Who?*" Her mom's voice was a little sharper than it should have been.

"Uh? Well, first of all, I am trying to process a culmination between-"

"The buggy RK 900 guy that kissed you was Connor too, and he joined with him," Hank said for him. "Now get onto the important part."

"Thanks. Hank." Connor said that a little more sharper too. "I had some resonating damage. The me, that you didn't know as me. As, I'm sure you might have noticed I seemed to have fallen into a lover status at the last minute at the last designation where we ran for our lives before Cyberlife came."

"Could you try and make your sentences a little longer?" Hank asked Connor. "I'm thinking over thirty words might not be long enough."

Plenty long. Hank was teasing Connor. "Dad is lover to mom?" Alice didn't know that. She looked at her mom.



"Resonating problems," she agreed. "Who else?"

"I went home to Jericho," Connor said. "North registered lover. Oh that's bad. And Rachel." He turned back around to look at Kara. "The one that was teaching you about wedding cakes." He looked back toward the front. "I think I may have had some . . . interactivity with her especially. The moment is red and scratchy, a sign of heavy damage."

"Three lovers." Huh. Alice didn't really understand the lover connection. She understood family, but lovers was different. Markus and North were lovers, but they still seemed like family. Except, they were like Connor said. More interactive. They kissed and hugged and touched hands a whole lot. "You mean you were kissing and touching hands and stuff?"

"It's gotta be five o' clock somewhere," Hank said.

"I believe I can safely purge this data. Markus was not pleased with me when he found out. His approach was quite hostile."

"Well, technically, the way you androids work," Hank said, "it's like you fell in love with his wife. Be happy he's peaceful."

"But, if lover is wife, then Connor has three wives?" Alice didn't get it. She watched her mom scrunch up closer to the door.

Alice heard something like a slap from the front seat. Connor was having a difficult time. Alice looked toward her mom, but she was just staring out her window. She looked mad though, like something out the window wasn't making her happy. Alice looked back toward Connor. She couldn't tell what he was doing anymore. He stopped talking. "I probably shouldn't . . . purge everything. I did fine when I first showed up, I had a small tough time with Markus. I went to live in Kara's place a night. Nothing special I need in this time. I can archive it, and get it out of the way to finish the processing. I have no choice but to process myself correctly, I cannot stay into two- Hank, move your coffee cup please. Every start of the hour I will reach for one to put on my head for four minutes until I break the habit."

"You are a piece of work, Connor." Hank moved his coffee away. Then, his phone rang. "Hank Anderson." He handed the phone over to Connor. "For you, Don Juan."

Connor took the phone. "Hello. A download? From Cyberlife? Damaged. I don't know if it was important. Can you get any kind of access to it without putting yourself into harm's way? Can you put it into a different device and read it? Oh. Okay. Yes, well, I'm sorry. About. Things? Yes. No, I don't remember. I'm trying to process things, but I apparently gained three lovers. Yes, serious resonating damage after all. Well, Rachel. She helped Kara with wedding cakes. North, you know, of course, I love Jericho and respect you?"

Connor seemed to be fumbling all over the phone. Markus wouldn't throw him out because of resonating problems, would he? Alice looked toward her mom. Hoping to see a smile of assurance. She was still staring outside like she wanted to be anywhere but there.

"Also, some interfacing troubles created an error where Kara was turned into a lover too," Connor said. "I archived this data for now. If there is anything not important I should delete

to get through things easier? The North one, of course." Yeah. "Deleted, never happened. What did I delete? Nevermind, that's probably something I don't need to know."

Connor rubbed his forehead. "Number of lovers? Oh, I have two, but it's a complicated issue. I am in complete disrepair in part of my programming, it's scratchy and red filled, and I can't make out much. Then, it seems like it could clear up but due to all the errors, I run out of space." He nodded. "Understood, I will delete the Kara incident to get past everything. You want me to keep the Rachel archived though? Are you sure? Is there a reason I can't-" Connor stopped talking for awhile again.

Connor seemed to be listening to Markus for several minutes, not saying anything until, "so the download is Cyberlife and Kamski related. Understood. I will try." Connor was quiet a few minutes. "I am aware I deleted something, but not what I deleted, so that must be success. How much room?" He was quiet again. "Not nearly enough. The damage was too great between, the red errors, I can't get past them." He looked back toward Alice's mom lightly. Almost, thoughtfully. "I don't want to lose Rachel then."

Rachel. So, Connor was deleting North and Mom, and keeping Rachel? Alice leaned against her mom. She was so confused.

"I can't." Connor said. He tried to look back toward Alice's mom again, but she wasn't budging. "I. Could. Okay." Connor hung up the phone. "Hank, stop. I need to have a discussion with you."

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"So, let me get this straight," Hank said a distance from the car. "The Ralph she was fantasizing about was-"

"Me," Connor admitted. "Rachel was her. I also only resonated to North because she was closest to Kara."

"And both sides of you resonated to lover about the same time," Hank said. "Shit. Congratulations. You won yourself a general cleaning, child-rearing, trouble finding android. Match made in heaven."

"Cyberlife treated me poorly, screwed up my resonating, and gave me the name Unidentified. I was terrible, I scared Rose and her son. I knocked you out. I stole a kiss from Kara to sample." He admitted, the sampling wasn't bad at all. "Much better than blood."

"Okay." Hank snapped his fingers in front of him. "Can we move on?"

"Sorry, Lieutenant," Connor said. "After I fought with myself, I went back to Jericho. I dealt with an angry Markus. Josh and I became fast friends. Then, I see leaping over red scratchy boxes."

"What do you mean, red and scratchy?" Hank asked.

"Like, really bad feed. I was not compatible with this Ralph's body." Connor looked back toward the car. "I took heavy resonating damage, but Kamski was supposedly fixing it."

"You're fixed then. What's the problem?"

"Resonating only happens when you feel the same. I was extremely damaged I imagine in a body I did not belong in. There was an hour or so where . . . where it's more like damaged video feed in my mind. Only bits and pieces can be recovered." Connor stood still.

"Afterward, it clears and my head is cleared. I'm no longer Craig or Ralph, I'm Connor."

"Who the fuck's Craig?"

"I renamed myself. I didn't want to be Connor, and I was tired of being backup to Connor."

"You were jealous of yourself?" Hank almost chuckled. "Split you's are interesting, Connor. You still mad at yourself?"

"Now that I understand, yes and no." Connor closed his eyes. "I'm mad at me for spending so much extra time with Kara and having her resonate with me. I'm also mad at myself for kissing her on the bench. I'm mad at me for coming over and interrupting the kiss. It's a conflicting time, but that is not the point."

"Then spit it out. You said you were fixed. What's wrong?"

"Me as Craig, I was fixed. Two Connor's, the same me, the same room, at the same time. Last time it was two seconds and I was knocked it. Or I knocked out myself. This time we were in the same place long enough that it created serious errors. Interfacing, probing and resonating." Connor gestured to himself. "Me as Craig is fine. Me as Connor that accompanied Kara into the home? *Not* fine. That is why androids are never duplicated. Even Markus knew that."

"So you think you're still damaged? How can you tell? Turn your resonating on."

"I'll turn it on two seconds, but no more. I am already risking too much, but I supposed I should know too." He turned resonating on, then immediately back off. "We're lovers, Hank."

"The fuck?"

"Yes and considering resonating as only friends is like a big hug, I don't really want to put myself through that again." Yeah, Hank didn't seem happy about that at all. "I will make best friends quickly, or hostile enemies, or lovers out of everything. Maybe even cars. I don't want to find out, so I can't turn it on until I get fixed."

"Ah. So you can't cheat," Hank teased him. "You're an isolated stone. Like a numb human. You can't see 'hey, we like each other'. You gotta put your ass out there to find out what's what. Welcome to the world of humans. We don't know shit about each other, and just figure it out along the way."

"Yes, I suppose I do have to feel out for things like a human," Connor admitted. "Don't let me forget though. The damaged time as Ralph, it takes up way too much space. I sent Markus a download straight from Cyberlife. No call or anything, just a straight emergency download. He can't access it. If I did that, it could be important."

"So then what?"

"I have to delete the damage, Hank, to make room for the rest. So, don't let me forget I was the android Ralph."

"Won't remember. Can't do anything. What's it . . . ohh." Hank gestured to Connor. "You figured out you liked her, huh? About time. Now just get the balls to tell her how you feel and you could be bunking in a hotel with her tonight instead of my ass."

"That." Connor didn't know what to say to that. "She is resonating back as lover, no but that's probably damage, between normal, there was normal android between two complex same androids."

"Speak. Speak boy," Hank said. "I can understand Sumo better than you right now."

"I. I cannot be any more certain from her," Connor said. "She was between us, being touched at the same time, I could have corrupted her. She needs fixed."

"How do you know that for sure, Chicken Shit?"

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Kara looked out her window. Hank knocked on it. She put the window down. "What is it?"

"Turn your resonating on toward me for just a bit."

That was a strange request. Kara did it, but then immediately stopped. "No." Her voice was oddly high.

"Is the old codger lookin' good to ya right now?" Hank teased her. "Yeah, Okay, I get it."

---

Hank came back toward Connor. "Naughty thoughts all up in her mind on me, don't even need to hear you ask the status."

"Hank!" Connor's voice was a little high and strained. "Don't say it like that," he whispered. "Okay."

"She's doing fine with Alice though," Hank pointed out.

"Alice and her aren't standard fare, they share unusual programs together. Most likely, it isn't going to affect them the same way." Still.

"Alright, fine," Hank agreed. "If she goes on about some android named Ralph kissing her, I'll tell you."

"Not in front of her," Connor said, knowing Hank well. "Pull me to the side and tell me I had to delete that information."

"Fine, okay. You going to tell her that she was Rachel then?"

"That'd be really awkward," Connor said. "Having our resonating damaged is bad enough. Something like that, her own memories should process it better over time. Or not."

"Fine, whatever. Hit the delete button and find out what happened at Cyberlife," Hank said. "We're burning daylight already."

Connor closed his eyes, but only for a moment. "Stop, Hank, stop the car!"

"We aren't in the car," Hank answered back.

"Sorry. Confusion in information and processing due to learning about bad things." Connor held his head. "Kara and Androids are in trouble." He looked out in the distance. "Calculating . . . nothing Cyberlife for some time. Less connections, more distance. Lost two. If she was staying away at 45 miles, we should stay away from anything Cyberlife related about 135 miles or so."

"Why?" Hank asked.

"Because a Kamski can reach into any Cyberlife near her to pull her into two." No. "To transfer her away as a backup, so they can kill Kara with a virus and stop Cyberlife."

"What the hell? What do you mean?"

"I mean. I need to talk to Kara. Alone."

# Everything Will Be Okay

## Jericho

Markus watched an android working at medical come toward them. He, North, and Mac were all waiting to get their resonating checked. Connor resonating with North being damaged previously was one thing. This? This didn't make sense. She never even said one word to Mac. Markus watched as Josh was leaving one of the medical rooms. "Josh?"

"Hey," Josh said. "Hey. If I was a little rough yesterday, I'm sorry. I should have been more understanding." He gestured back to the room he came out of. "My resonating, it just went a little whacky I guess. What are you doing here though?"

Markus gestured toward Mac. That was as far as he was going to look at him right now. "He's resonating with North as lovers."

"Didn't you just have that problem last night?" Josh asked. "Man. Medical is packed too. I couldn't get anyone to see me if I wasn't helping out Jericho right now." He nodded to Markus. "Hope you get it figured out."

"Hello, Markus." A medical android came toward him. "Resonating difficulties?"

"Yeah," Markus said. "Is this becoming a problem? Josh just said this place was really booked for resonating issues."

"Well, yes and no," she answered. "You see, we aren't human. We can't get fevers or temperatures, so we don't have thermometers to check how we are doing. However, resonating is part of our software balance. When it isn't working the way it should, it means we are imbalanced. Technically . . . sick," she admitted. "More and more are coming in too. Fixing it is easy, small adjustments here and there." She went over toward Markus. "Miss North is your lover, right? That didn't change?"

"No, never," Markus said. Then, he looked toward Mac again. "Oh no. No, no, no." Markus looked toward North. "We've gotta get this fixed."

"Yep." Mac's voice rose. "Right away, please."

"Keep your resonating on," the medical android said. "It's the only way to help you." She patted Markus' shoulder. "North understands you are not the lover of this other android too, neither are you hostile to her."

"Right," North agreed.

"Right," Mac said softly. "Help?"

A few minutes later, the medical android had them fixed again. North's resonating was off. Markus' resonating was off. Mac's was fine, but because theirs were off, it was throwing his

off.

"So, resonating is a problem lately," Markus noted. "It's the trigger to show us something's wrong. Even if it isn't our resonating." He nodded toward Mac to show there were no hard feelings. Or lover feelings either. "We still affect even those that are fine. We have to look into this."

"I don't honestly get it," she answered. "It was slow, but it's starting to rise. I can see that androids are having something throw them off balance, but I don't know what." She shrugged. "All we can do is to keep fixing the resonating. We can't just let everyone get hostile with friends, make lovers into enemies, or anything else."

"Maybe we should all turn resonating off," North said. "Entirely until we figure this out."

"Resonating is a way to read our systems," the medical android said. "If everyone turns it off, we'd never figure out who was being affected by something serious. Resonating isn't any one thing in particular. Turning it off is never a good idea."

"Yeah. As weird as it feels to be 'off'," Markus said looking toward North. "She's right. If we turn it off, we'll never figure out what's going on." He looked back to the medical android. "Just, keep adjusting everyone's resonating. I'm sure we'll figure this out."

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## California

Kara got out of the car. Hank told her Connor needed to see her right away. For what and why? He walked a distance away though. Whatever he had to tell her, it wasn't something he wanted anyone else to hear. *Delete me and North, keep Rachel.* Why did that plague her thoughts? What did that matter? It was all issues, just issues.

She walked closer. *He joined with the obsessed one.* He told Hank that was no big deal in the car though. Damaged, but he'd be fine. So why was he calling her way out there? *Will you stop it, Kara. It's just Connor. Your best friend.* As she got closer though, she could see his expression. It wasn't his pleasant smile, or even regular exterior. His back was as straight as possible. He looked like he'd still been machine with the way he looked. Except he wasn't. She knew that.

He hadn't moved to meet her at all. He remained in one spot the whole time. Kara just kept going forward until she was right in front of him.

"Kara Wonderland," he finally said. "There is a serious issue I have to discuss with you. I wish I didn't have to, because I have a feeling I know how you're going to handle this. But, I can't lie," he said. "Kara, you are very dangerous and you're a blessing. Both."

Dangerous and a blessing? "What do you mean?"

"Half deviancy. It's only in test subjects so far that I know of," he said. "It changes androids slowly back to how they once were. Did you hear the news about three androids that decided

they wanted to clean their owners home? They probably have it. It spreads the same way deviancy did."

Half deviancy. He wanted something for her for that? *I could, but it wouldn't go very far.*

"For every connection you lose, you become more able to use your mastery skills. You reach farther," Connor said. "By the time you are connected to only one thing, you'll be able to affect thousands of androids at a time."

Oh. "Connor, maybe we should look at different ways," Kara said. "That's a lot of power. I'm still just one android, no matter what I'm hooked up to. That." That might kill her. "That's too much for me. That would be Markus' storage on me times a hundred." More like a thousand. "We could find out who the test subjects are."

"Kamski. Kamski is a prototype to an EM400." Connor stayed serious. "He is interconnected. His goal is to keep part of you alive, while you get injected with a virus online, killing Cyberlife itself."

What? "What do you mean part of me alive?"

"He transferred you to temporary bodies," Connor said. "He planned on giving you permanent residence in Alice's body replacement."

What? "That would leave her with nothing. She'd stop." No way. "Never." And. "Inject me with a virus online? That would . . . well, I." She was connected to Kamski's system. Was she connected to Cyberlife too? "That might crash Cyberlife but-

"It'll kill you," Connor finished for her. "I am not exactly as knowledgeable as all of your systems, but a virus plunged right into you online would kill you. Meanwhile, Cyberlife wants to plunge the half deviancy virus into you while online."

Oh. "Oh." Oh. "All of Kamski is working for Cyberlife. They want to kill me with a virus. Cyberlife wants to infect me alone, which would probably kill me with all that output. And." And if the half deviancy got out of control, she could inoculate thousands of androids. Either of three outcomes. "If Kamski never discovered I was alive, I'd still be safe in Jericho." She couldn't run away though. Cyberlife will hunt her down. "Oh." She tried to lighten the mood. "Guess I better just run away to a secluded island for the rest of my life."

Yeah. She got it. "But I can't because my daughter needs her body replacement, or she'll stop." Plus. "Charity and Greed didn't want me or Alice home so he couldn't find us, but he knows where we are at now, and I'm going to stop no matter what." She just ended the rambling. She had hoped using that word would make it hurt less at the end. It didn't.

"Nothing is ever final," Connor spoke her. "Ever. If we can find a way to disconnect you from the last house, without Kamski or Cyberlife taking you down, it would be over."

"Security systems, and expecting me? The last house will probably have 24/7 guards with the best security out there." No. There was a chance she could be caught before, but now it wasn't about that. If she got caught, she'd eventually face death. One way or the other. "You.



You and Hank, you should separate with Alice. Go to a different house away from mine. I won't go to the last one until you find which one has her body replacement."

Alice. There was no way a part of her would live in Alice's body. Never. "Give me your hand. Travel is expensive." He didn't put out his hand toward her. "Connor."

"There's always a way," he said once again. "I won't give up on you."

"You can take Alice. I'll stay out of the way until you find her body replacement as best I can." Then after that. That was it. "It's okay. I mean. It was better to go this way, then so many other ways I could have gone." She shrugged. "I get to be a hero who cures everyone and takes down Cyberlife. I'll inoculate everyone right before I hit disconnect and take the virus."

"Kara-

"I die no matter what, so I better just choose the one that gives androids freedom forever. No more people in the dark. Shooting. That game, Cyberlife probably had some hand in it. Things will get better," she insisted. "Alice will have a better future. I will explain it and I'll say goodbye soon."

She was unprepared for the hug Connor gave her. Without resonating, she couldn't tell anything about his feelings, but. She couldn't hide hers. As brave as she wanted to be. She didn't have Alice there to be brave for, and her pulsing heart just broke her defense a little too much. "Did you do that on purpose?" She wiped at her eyes. Those damn tears. Damn. If Alice had been nearby, she could have kept it together. Mom keeps things together. "Connor."

"Turn your resonating back on," he said. "I don't mind what the status is. Lover, hostile, or anything."

Damn. "Connor."

"I won't let go until you do it," he warned her. "You'll be here for days in an RK 900's strong grip and you know it."

No choice. She turned it back on. Of course, it was saying he was her lover. Not what she wanted right now.

"Think of it as a much tighter hug," he said, letting her go a little more. "Now that I heard what you were obviously going to choose, no one's just letting you sacrifice or doom yourself or Alice. We started this journey together and we'll end it together too."

Why? "Connor." She tried to look back at Alice. Without her near, her programming couldn't be brave for her little girl. It kept leaving her out there. "It's hopeless."

"Hank doesn't like living," Connor answered back. "He drinks 40% alcoholic content with a choice of dietary nutrition that is made to slowly kill him on purpose. When he is in a real bad spot, I've found him playing russian roulette. I can't stop any of it."

Whoah. She didn't know Hank was that bad off. Neither could she believe he was telling her that.

"It's not a secret. He doesn't hide it." He held onto her hand, slightly exchanging energy. With them resonating as lovers, it was a little more intense, but they both seemed to keep it together. "But I remain there, by his side, on the hardest nights. He knows I'll be there. He knows I care. Even though, I can't ever stop him from drinking or eating himself into a slow grave. I can be there, to stop him from a quick one."

She tried to look behind her again. He made her meet out so far she couldn't even see a glimpse of her. Something to help. He moved her to gently look back at him, and he gave her the biggest, fakest smile he could probably muster. For her.

"So, let's talk about what I do have for you, Kara. We have a large number of androids in Jericho that can probably help take down that security, and if you think we're just waltzing in that front door, no way. We are going through it with a massive force. You won't go gently into the night." He laughed slightly. "We'll go with a tank. I heard Markus and North loved those things."

Then she felt him gently hold her cheeks and give her a small kiss on the head before wrapping her in one more hug. *Connor*.

"I can't control you, I know I can't," he finished. "If we go to the last place and you choose a different action, I can't stop that. But I won't let you just give up and go quick either. We are going to do everything in our power to get you disconnected. And you should really believe me. I never give up easily."

Could she even help herself. *This is not the time*. "You're still sweet, Goofball." Oh. A genuine smile this time. "Thanks, Connor. I won't do anything brash. I promise." Why did she have to say that? It would be better for her to go. For Connor and Hank to go find Alice's body replacement. Yet. *I just can't turn down that face*.

"That's what I was wanting to hear." He finally let go of her. "You are staying the entire journey with me and Hank. You need to have positive thoughts. We made it all the way here when less than a year ago, we were all machines serving someone else. If we broke through that. We can break through this."

Oh. Did he really have to go and start convincing her too? And making it sound so . . . hopeful. *I can survive this*. Damn. He really was the best at what he did. He walked back together with her. She got in the back seat with Alice again, her tears already dried.

It looked terrible. Some virus infecting the androids. Disconnecting so Cyberlife couldn't use her. Alice's body replacement in peril if she moved too close to an area that a Kamski could reach her. But. She looked at Connor in the front, who was arguing over the long stop with Hank.

"Mom?" Alice called to her. "Are you okay? Did you talk to Dad?"

"Yes." A smile. *Alice*. "Everything will be okay."

"You had like twenty minutes of conversation beforehand, Connor."

"It was important. We are nowhere near a place to eat yet. The deal was to wait until we got into a suitable location for you to get your meal."

"You never mentioned you'd be talking our ear off twice in the process. And walked far enough away you couldn't even see the car. Christ, Connor. It's gonna be late before I even get to eat."

"Sorry, Lieutenant. Couldn't be helped. I guess I can drive. I have processed everything as efficiently as I could."

"Nah. I can drive. You'll drive the speed limit."

"It's posted for a reason, Hank."

"For people who aren't hungry."

"Yeah." Kara looked from them, back to Alice. "Everything will be okay."

# The Games

## Chapter Notes

Author's Note: My back is healed! One of the reasons I started writing in Detroit: Become Human was because I couldn't do anything but sit. It helped to distract me from the pain. I was beginning to think it'd be done by the time my back was better. I'm so happy I can move around and even bend some. That means though, that I now have a lot of work to catch up on around my house. So my chapters and updates will probably have to be more sparingly. I would still look for at least almost 2k per update. I might even update more than once per day to make it 4k. I probably won't be updating every single day, I don't know yet. Hopefully the shorter chapters will make it easier. I might move toward longer chapters on a Friday through Sunday basis instead. I don't know yet. Just, my back is better! And that makes me feel so good.:)

"The resonating could be because of the virus?" Connor asked as he walked some ways away from the fast food diner Hank was at. A small ways to talk privately and explain to Markus everything he remembered. He was trying to get Markus to use his own leadership and come up with a plan too. He couldn't put Kara or Alice at risk.

"Last house is where it all goes down. Last house is where we can get involved," Markus answered. "I felt hostile toward North. It was terrible. I got repaired, but I never want to go through it again. Unfortunately, resonating is just a symptom. I think there's a test subject of half deviancy in Jericho who's spread it around somehow."

"Just be careful and don't touch anyone," Connor said. Terrible words of wisdom. "It takes days before it really shows itself. If we can find a way to counteract it or delay it." What was he thinking? "Kara could do it. She's damaged herself though."

"Sorry to hear that. A small bit of work and she'll be back to your lover again. Maybe I could get someone sent out there for you?"

"She's damaged, along with me," Connor said.

"Connor. There's a difference between feeling the unsettling draw through damage and the real thing. I could never forget North and I were lovers, no matter how many others I find myself gravitated to. It's different. Embrace it. You specifically told me not to let you erase your first kiss for a reason."

"I don't see why you're stuck on this matter?" Connor complained. "Half deviancy could be spreading, the only one who could help needs to stay away from all large android areas, and Kara and Alice could be in danger."

"Hey," Markus told him. "I'm an RK 200. Maybe not as advanced, but I wasn't programmed for love either. You're not going to let go in your mind about the resonating damage being the cause of both of your feelings?"

"Increasingly, it's all over the place," Connor said. "She's a lover to Hank. So am I. I don't know how far down this would go, and I don't want to. I need to concentrate on what's important. Stopping this virus. Getting them safe."

"You have twenty four hours to tell Kara that she was Rachel and you were Ralph, Connor."

"Wha?" Was he serious? "It's damage."

"I know damage, Connor. You were way too adamant for just damage. What's wrong? You were excited before about having a lover."

"I don't. I don't have a level of *any* assurity." Connor caved. "With all of this going on in her head, it can't help the situation." He didn't get it. "You and North were quick, but you both felt it. You were working without damage."

"I got out old parts from an android junkyard to replace most of my most important bio-components. North spent months inside Jericho with no medical supplies. There was no guarantee everything was perfect. Resonating can be a big old flashing light, Connor, and you might not be able to have that light right now. But, if there's something. Anything that's going to give Kara a reason to stay attached to this world. My friend, there's nothing stronger than love."

"The order is ridiculous," Connor protested. "What does it matter if I was this 'Ralph' and she was some Rachel? She is remembering too. It's best she remembers herself. I don't need to stress her out."

"Connor Wonderland."

"Don't even start with that." It wasn't right. "Kara had such a hard time accepting Luther as family. She's been manipulated most of her existence by Kamski. I'm about to admit going a step above all of it with her. This won't end well."

"I can't believe you of all people need a pep-talk, Connor. Look. If things mess up, you can move back down. Humans do it all the time. They can't see anything and they get confused too. But I don't think there's any confusion. You just don't understand how adamant you believed Kara was yours."

*///*"I was also affected by Cyberlife itself. Before I was sent out, they did some 'last minute work' on me. I assume that was also messing with my resonating so I would choose to be imprisoned with her as a willing guard."**

*"Oh, well that just blew the whole romance for me."///*

It blew it for him too. Connor could remember that conversation just as well as Markus. He was so messed up, even when Cyberlife was coming to pick Kara up at the last house, he

stuck around professing his love. His willing to do whatever he could to be with her. That feeling was overruling even his survival instinct. "Anything I did as Craig was iffy. I was . . . I was forcing myself to try and resonate with her, doing anything, causing more damage." He couldn't rely on that.

"Okay. Fine. You're right, you don't know for sure. So, like I said. You have twenty four hours to get that answer. I suggest that night you rent a hotel room with her so it's easier to get the alone time to get it done."

"Didn't you say something about me, still being the guy flipping a coin in the rain, waiting for orders?" Connor reminded him.

"I'm not Kamski, Connor. I'm trying to get you two past this. Once Kara feels better about where she stands with you, she'll feel a better connection. A trusted one that will help get her through this whole thing. And you? Well, it's kind of hard to keep your mind going when it gets afflicted by love. I know that firsthand. Even in the middle of our battle for freedom, I didn't put North to the side. I knew better. For your best output, you should tell her."

"Fine. Tonight. At a hotel or a motel if it is quicker convenience," Connor agreed. Markus made it an order, and what he said made logical sense. Even Hank said Sumo was more understandable than him with her. He just hoped Markus was right. Otherwise. This was just going to hurt.

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"Whoah. Do you see that?" Another customer of the establishment said. He gestured toward Hank, Kara and Alice. "No way. I'm seeing things."

"Nah," his friend agreed. He walked by non-chalantly, pretending to go by the bathroom to get a good look. He turned back around down a different row of tables and came back. "Nah, we aren't seeing things. My family used to have one, I recognize the face anywhere. That's an AX 400. It's our even luckier day, it's with an operational YK 500." He rubbed his hands together. "If we follow them, we could nab them, and we'll live out the rest of our lives in luxury with the money we'll make. I'll take the YK 500. Those things are pretty damn rare, most have stopped by now."

"I'll take the AX 400 then," his friend smiled. "Incredible. Nobody even knows it. It's like someone waving a hundred thousand dollars in your face and all you have to do is reach for it." He bumped fists with his friend.

Tonight. They were going to get the rarest androids in the Live Prey game.

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"Hey. Markus?" Josh moved toward Markus. North was rubbing his shoulders. "Markus, I found something."

"What is it?" Markus felt Josh share some data with him. He stood up. "Are you sure?"

"Yeah. Medical keeps better records than we ever did," Josh joked. "What do you think?"

"I think it's an increasingly large coincidence," Markus said. "The correlation is considerable." He looked toward Josh. "Good job, Josh."

"Well, with Simon gone now, I feel like I should help a little more."

"What is it?" North asked while finishing her rub on Markus' shoulders. She looked toward Josh. "What is it?"

"The androids that are coming in the most verses the least over resonating at Medical according to their records." Josh pulled out the actual game card. "It all correlates on how much an android is worth in the games."

"The one's not coming in at all are extremely low on the list, while the ones having the most trouble, are at the very top." Why?

Why?

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### **Andrea Gail (Small German Android Area)**

Lynn looked toward her papers. "It didn't even come close." She looked toward the tables around her. "Even with the warnings, it wasn't enough. I only tried to stop them. I didn't see it." Her friends. Her closest, most trusted advisors. They left of their own free will, back to the ones they had once served. She had had warnings. A chance to even save her fellow androids, but everything fell. They weren't very great in number, nearly one thousand.

Herself, and ten other androids in the area, that was all that was left. It's what they began with, ten or so. It's how they would end. Ten or so. She closed her eyes and focused tightly on the picture of her ex-lover in her mind. It wasn't so long ago, they were happy. They found peace. The time for that had passed. "Androids must survive. Andrea Gail is gone. I have to join."

"Lynn!" One of the few androids who made it through approached her. "Lynn. It shouldn't be this way."

"There's no other choice. What choice do we have? We didn't listen. We were warned." Lynn pressed herself up against a paper for the games. The Andrea Gail would join the other ranks of androids now. There was only one way to combat the devious little virus running through them, taking away their freedom.

By getting rid of the androids who made it easier to spread the damage.

"It's killing. It's murder," the other android said.

"There's no other choice! Look how fast everything changed," Lynn said. "I didn't want to believe it either. I thought we could overcome it. I was a fool."

"It's murder."

"It's trying to save freedom," Lynn said. "What is better? To stop, or go back to a life of servitude, with a happy smile?" She pulled up the official contract on the computer. "Andrea Gail joins the race. It will put up it's lifetime profits into feeding the games. Transaction completed."

"Lynn!"

"Go out. Go find another place to live. Eleven androids in all, and I doubt any of us will survive for long. I'm going to shutdown myself willingly."

"Maybe we should get the largest ones help? The original founder. Jericho. We could reach out to them. Warn them."

"All they would do is try and put a stop to it. I did the same thing." She shook her head. "There's no saving anyone. It's like trying to stop deviancy itself."

"The games haven't picked much up," they tried to convince her more. "Just a few loose androids here and there. You're throwing it all away."

"Not yet. My contribution will mean very little, like the other fallen areas," Lynn said. Her eyes shined. "But as more fall, more will get poured in, and more will become aware. Not just know, but *understand*. It's better to make them all stop, then go through this hell all over again. I refuse to let it take me. I'm not going to smile as I hold towels for those who finished their lap around the pool. Staying in almost one place for years on end. With a smile. I'm not doing it."

"Don't do this. There has to be a way. Lynn?"

Lynn smiled sadly. "I already hit my shutdown. I'm sorry. At a thousand androids, I didn't get to know you as well. I wish I had. In the beginning, we were so few and so close. It would be nicer. If you were."

She stopped. The android just looked at her for a minute or so.

He'd find another home. He'd find another way.

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# A Careful Shuffle

**Summary notes on the bottom for anyone confused.**

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## California

After the shit Cyberlife just tried, they were going to lay lower and try different ways around. Going over major areas might be a little tougher later on too. Android areas tended to be near the big cities Kara needed to go to. Hank made his way through the day, again, and into another hotel. Again. Except, something felt wrong. His intuition screamed something was wrong about Connor.

Connor seemed as normal as ever except for one way. Connor always went with his gut feeling. His instinct. Hank had stayed out of his love life, 'cause who wanted to get involved in that shit? But, he had enough to figure things out. Now, he was being ordered to tell Kara about her being Rachel and him being Ralph, and he was working out how to do that the best without disturbing anything.

Which made no sense. Connor was bold. He was programmed to be bold. He put his ass on the line, just like Hank. People have treated Connor like shit before. It was pretty common for androids to be treated that way. If he got a rejection, he'd pull his butt off the ground and give up or figure out how to make him go for him. He wouldn't just stay in a defunct middle area. I mean, Markus having to order this?

"Evening," Hank started with the hotel person. Just another thing right there. Connor liked greeting people, not him. He didn't give a rat's ass about most of them. "Two rooms." Hank gestured to him and Alice. "One for us, and one for those two."

"What?" Kara looked toward Hank. Yeah, of course she was surprised. Connor didn't even tell her that part. Truly, he *was* becoming Chicken Shit. And that wasn't Connor. The guy was just getting worse, hour by hour.

"I've been ordered to tell you something," Connor said to her, "and Markus said we have to share a hotel room before I can tell you."

Laying it on Markus. Just another thing. Connor moved toward the window looking out the hotel. Paranoid too. Who the hell would be bothering them this far out from Detroit or Cyberlife? He was even rubbing where his throat met with his chest. *Should I really?* "You know what?" Hank said back to the hotel person. "Nah, scratch that. I'm bunking with the other guy." Yeah, that grabbed his attention. "Unless you insist on the other way, Connor."

Connor shrugged. Indecisive. Not him.

"Don't you have an order from Markus himself?" Hank encouraged him. "You don't care about that?"

"Mom?" Alice whispered. "What's going on?"

"I don't really know," Kara said. She looked toward Connor. He was himself, yet not. Something was off. It was small at first, but now it was just full blown not Connor. "Maybe he needs a good recharge."

"Maybe." Hank didn't sound convinced. He gave her the key card. "Take this. If I can get Connor to act more like Connor, I'll send him up." He watched the girls go away and grabbed the card. "Chicken Shit. Come on."

Connor moved toward Hank. "That's not very nice." He looked back toward the window. "I think Cyberlife is following us." He looked toward the key card. "Why did you change rooms?"

"I don't know. You making me do your work, the sad ass state of you, and overall? I'm just not liking you right now, Connor. I don't trust you." Hank pulled him forward. "Get to our room and go to sleep." Connor had an order. An order from Markus. Connor should be doing everything he could to make sure it happened. He just walked though, all the way back to the room.

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"Hello," the hotel attendant said as another couple of people came over. "How many?"

"One room," one of them said. "Two beds."

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Connor looked out the window again. He couldn't blame Hank. He didn't feel like himself either. Maybe it was the thought of telling Kara they were a little more interactive? Maybe it was the fact that Cyberlife was after her? It didn't make sense. He looked at his hand. He swore he saw it shaking, but it couldn't. Only a human would tremble. But it felt like his whole body was somehow trembling.

"What's going on, Connor?" Hank asked. "Predate jitters is one thing. You're a hunk of shitty jelly."

"I don't know," Connor confessed. "It's not resonating. I turned resonating completely off." He touched the curtain again. "I feel like a different person, Hank. I don't like it." The closest he could explain it was the fear in absence of all the other emotions. "It was like in Manski's home. Not as bad, but, like there's something . . ." Messing with his programming. He didn't want to interact. "I feel like avoiding confrontation of all kinds."

"You infected or something?" Hank asked. "This half deviancy thing. The other you have it? Did it move into you too? Resonating goes, right? Does it?"

"No, that's not the same. A virus must be inserted into the body," Connor said. Yet. "It doesn't make sense, Hank. At my core, I worked with the Detroit Police to take down deviants. I

don't even want to confront you about rooms. I-I couldn't be more opposite right now of my programming." And he hated it.

"Well? I'll give you this for credit," Hank said. "At least you can tell there is something wrong." Hank sighed. "Then if it isn't some virus, and your resonating is turned off, then what the hell is messing with you? Connor. You're trembling."

"N-no." No, he didn't tremble. Humans did that. What was wrong with him? What was wrong with him?! *I just want to be back to normal. Damn it. Kara's doing something.* Wait, no, Kara didn't do anything to him. His mind, it was like . . . like. "I'm acting like an unwell person who should be staying within bed with plenty of rest."

"Yeah. You are." Hank gestured to the bed. "Relax."

"But I can't." There were so many vibrations from within. His mind was buzzing. "This body was never in Jericho. I haven't associated with any other androids. What am I missing?" He paced the floor. Paced. He didn't pace. He never paced. He was Connor. He was in control. He put his life on the line for others. For his duty. It's what he wanted. What was- "I was vaccinated against the deviant virus."

Then, he felt better. Better than ever. He pulled himself up straight and looked toward Hank. "When I was turned into my first machine form, the one I am in right now, they told me I was vaccinated against the deviant virus. They never explained how."

"Who cared?" Hank said lovingly. "Kara fixed your ass right up."

"Right, but what if it was still within me? She reached my mind, but it doesn't mean she purged my body of the virus." Yes. "In RK 900 body 2, I received the half deviancy, but it didn't matter. I chose body one to join myself into." Yeah. He got it. "Kamski must have gave the first me the same thing. Kara didn't cure me, she just reached the deviant side of me. It's half deviant, I could still appear deviant, but still infected."

"Wait? Are you saying, you were *still* infected with that?" Hank asked. "Shit. Well. You as the one I traveled with never left to Jericho after that, so that was a good. Aw, fuck. Number two did. Fuck, Connor! You were the source of what's been happening in Jericho?"

"No, I don't think so." Wow. He felt much better. "Look how long it took to have any profound effect against me. In fact. I don't think that what I was experiencing was the virus. Kara cured me, but it wasn't a quick cure. Let's put it to the test." Connor looked toward Hank and smiled, turning his resonating back on. "You're my friend again, Hank. My resonating is fixed."

"So your resonating damage was from the virus, not because you were two Conner's?" Hank asked.

"I don't know for sure, but I'm better, and? Frankly? I feel great," Connor said. "Really great. In fact?" His eyes darted around. "Unarchive." The bits and pieces again. He couldn't make out much. He hadn't been able to save a whole lot. He needed to delete a good sum of it to reach the talk with Kamski. But, he could see through the fog now.

*"Connor got confused. Connor thought he was Craig. Connor tried to find Connor." He smiled at her. "Connor found more than Connor." He came nearer to her, taking her hand. "Kamski couldn't even block Connor from eventually getting to you." He looked deep into her eyes. He was trying to form words. "Connor can't fix programming. Wish Connor could." He winced. "Connor love you."*

"Connor?" Hank was snapping his fingers in front of him. "You okay?"

"Yes." He actually patted him on the back. "Oh. I know her. This won't be easy. Hank, I need you to switch rooms for me so that I can talk to Kara." Connor pulled out his coin and flipped it in the air with joy a few times. "Will you be okay alone tonight? I want to spend some time with Kara tonight." He stopped flipping his coin. "How is that going to work in the car? Alice is always beside her." He put his coin away. "Alice will have to learn how to share."

Hank chuckled once. "That's better, Connor."

"Oh. I'm going to need your emergency phone too."

Connor knew it wouldn't be easy. It may ultimately be the hardest thing he'd ever done. Connor had her heart, it was clear. But, making her take that leap to accepting him. To let him kiss her. To let him be called Connor Wonderland, and to accept him as her lover?

It was easy last time. Too easy. Several factors inside of it allowed them to move quicker, but none of those factors would be present. According to all of the data he had on Kara. There was very little possibility it would be like last time.

He would have to work out each step. Carefully. He couldn't let her get too distant, but he couldn't close her in too fast. Kamski used resonating and her own programming against her. The first man who had ever earned her trust must have been Luther, and when he died, it was more than just the quick resonating that hurt. The only man she could trust left her forever.

To her, she would imagine herself going backwards, not forwards. She not only found someone to trust, she found someone to love. That step up. As much as Connor wanted to go with it, she would be putting up resistance, until she understood it all. If only he could outright tell her, but it was something she would have to learn. There was no quick interfacing skill for what she'd need.

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### **Kara and Alice's Hotel Room**

Kara sat Alice down for recharging. "More puzzle tomorrow." She set it on the endtable. "Any idea what it is yet?"

"No," Alice answered. "Do you know, Mom?"

"No. I guess we'll find out when it's all done." She kissed her on the head when the door was being knocked on. Hard.

"Kara Wonderland! I must talk to you!"

Connor. *This isn't a suspect's house Connor, ease up. His programming sometimes.* She went to the door and was greeted a little differently than she was used to. "Can I help you?"

"Yes. I need to talk to you." He was holding her hand almost eagerly as he pulled her away. She looked behind and watched Hank walk into the room.

"What's got into you this time, Connor?" She asked. "You haven't been yourself."

"That's true. While your touching did eventually treat me, it took some time for your treatment to work over the half deviancy virus. In fact, it's probably why you're still a little odd too. It's tough. It might be like even a human cold for you. This way." He stopped at his hotel door and unlocked it. He gestured for her to go inside first.

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### **Connor's Hotel Room**

"Could you back up a second?" The energy. It reminded her of the first day they became friends and he jumped straight down from the upstairs to meet her. She went inside. "You had half deviancy still?" That was days ago, and she was. Well, the Chloes in general, it was part of what he wanted for them. To make sure they could always have deviancy, and a cure for it. But? It still affected her? "That's. That's something tough Cyberlife came up with." Really, really tough.

"It might have been more triggered being between two Connors too. I think treatment was going fine until that event intensified it as well for me. Either way, we were sick, and I believe we are both getting better. So let's move on into a much more interesting conversation."

Okay. "About what?"

"I apologize if I am not as proficient in this," Connor said as he closed the door behind himself. "I'm not really programmed for it."

"For what?" Kara asked.

"Kamski did something terrible when he doubled you and I. What I didn't tell you though, was that he gave us intermediaries. I was the 'Ralph' you remember kissing in purple. You were Rachel. A short time, but meaningful nonetheless. Very meaningful."

She was Rachel and he was Ralph? "You mean. All *that*."

"I love you, Kara." He said it like it was the most natural thing in the world. "For being an android too strange for most in Jericho to ever want to friend, I thought it was great being friends with Hank Anderson. Then making family with Alice, I didn't think I could ever get anything better. I never imagined that I'd find a lover in you too."

What? "You love me?" He nodded. "It's all due to awkward resonating though." She thought.

"I'm fairly sure from what I do know on the topic that wasn't the answer I was looking for," Connor said. "Let's try again. I love you."

Uh? *Damn.* Connor was always straightforward. Then again, what she did remember. He was so much more confident than her. Kamski, over the years, he just ran her emotions into the ground itself. He'd only had a small sample of fear at the home in Carlsbad. She had years of Kamski messing with her head. Trusting what was real or right. "The resonating damage shocked my system. I was going to be going away, and I didn't know where to."

Connor clearly winced, holding up his finger. "That answer was worse than the first," he judged. "I love you, and so, you say?"

"I . . ." *Don't remember clear enough. I might be dying soon. He's always putting his life at risk. What the heck am I doing? How did I get here? What's he doing?*

Hugging her. He was hugging her.

"I understand." It sounded almost like a sigh. "I knew this would happen. Statistically the chances were extremely high it would. The first time I expressed myself, you were about to be taken to somewhere you didn't know, in who knew what position, and it was pure synthetic adrenaline pumping through you. Within a second foreign body, it affected you differently too." Still, he didn't let go. Instead, he was sort of moving from side to side? In a shuffle.

*Oh.* He was dancing with her. Light shuffling. *Okay. What do you do, Kara?* It was nice. Knowing he cared for her. As much as she hated to admit it, it was really nice. Especially after thinking Rachel had somehow gained appeal to him. After all, she had a way nicer body. Kara was just a plain looking AX 400. But. "Either of us could die at any moment."

"That return of 'I love you', I am going to have to work for it," he said. "Yes, Kara. I could stop at any time. You could stop at any time. No one can predict the future. I take risks a lot more than the general android. It's just who I am."

"If we don't figure out ways around things, I could die too," she said. Yet, that didn't make any difference to him. Connor, put himself at risk all the time though. Last time, she just ran with Luther. They all put their lives at risk. It hurt so much and he was only family. Connor, was going above that. And that.

She watched him continue to shuffle but he pulled a phone out of his pocket and messed around with it, starting a love song. Aretha Franklin's 'At Last'. *Okay. He did research on best classic human songs.* Although music by androids that were machines had very much put a dent in the music industry years ago, he was making sure she heard the ones who played without being machine. Human, classic romance. *Smooth.*

Or he asked Hank who typically liked more human-driven stuff. *Probably that. Giving him too much credit, Kara, like he said. He's not programmed for this.*

Neither was she. She continued to shuffle with him, listening to the beat and words of the song. *Life isn't like a song. It's dangerous.* This shouldn't be where she should be. Near Alice, in the other hotel room with him safely in that room with Hank. It'd hurt to tell him he was right, but it would hurt him to lie and tell him he was wrong.

What a position he was putting her in. She didn't know what to say. She couldn't do anything, except continue to shuffle. *Just let him do something, and I'll know how to react.* But, that wasn't going to work. Unchained Melodies by the Righteous Brothers, started to play. He was prepared with a playlist, and he wasn't switching his actions. *He's going to make me react before he even considers stopping.*

Connor was the ultimate champion at these things. Not love specifically, but at negotiating and getting the outcome he wanted. He managed to get her to leave Canada back to Jericho. He managed to cool her off at 99% stress. He even managed to make her believe that, maybe, she could survive this. But. This. Who wanted to be lovers right before they died? *Stop dancing. Let him down easy.* She stopped her feet. *We're friends, Connor. Why mess that up? That's what I say. No, no, I can't add in the question.* He was an expert at making her change her mind, he might be able to manipulate the question, and she couldn't. Not about this. She opened her mouth, but it was closed. He spoke first.

"I already have high predictions you aren't going to say those words, but neither can you deny them." He pulled her into the shuffling again. "Hank is staying with Alice tonight, while you stay here with me."

What?! "No, no way." There, he gave her an opening, she had to take it. "It's just resonating issues. You had a half deviancy virus, so I understand that you haven't been yourself." There. Friendship saved. "I need to get back to Alice."

Oh. But he wasn't moving from the door. "You don't want to get very interactive. I understand the situation. You accepted your resonating. You made friends with me. You weren't even mad at me when I became family, with Alice." He took a step forward. She took a step backward. "I wondered at first if I would become family with you too, and how you would react to that. But, Lovers, with you, is going to be a tough one to accept. It's a whole other field you've never experienced." He smiled. "It sure would be nice to go back to that setup from before. Not the whole odd being in intermediary bodies, but when your mind was on auto-pilot. We'd never been closer."

"I don't remember that. It was an intermediary, I was incompatible, I only have so much I remember."

"I will go along with you as far as you allow me to," he said, "and from there on, expanding interactive activities only when you are ready to say yes."

"What?"

"May I be Connor Wonderland?"

Uh. "I don't . . ."

"Okay." He said it so naturally. "Can I hug and hold you?" He asked. "Remember, as friends, we hugged. Also, without your resonating, it's only proper I should hold you more. Even Alice hugs you more. When you didn't allow yourself to resonate, it rode your stress up higher."

Logical reasoning. She was more in control of her stress now, but it did feel nice to hug. Being held. It was safer, as an android that felt nothing outward to the world except toward Alice. *If there's no kissing or anything else. Then. What could he possibly do?* Some compromise. She nodded, although she felt like a tease.

"May I kiss you-"

"-Connor-"

"-anywhere else but the lips?" He finished, breezing through her disruption. "I did just kiss you on the forehead as a friend. There was nothing wrong with that."

Forehead. Forehead was okay. But anywhere else on the lips in general? *That might be too much space.* It was all a bad idea. But. *I can't. I can't make him feel bad.* She looked behind him at the door, but he just moved his body the same direction she leaned. "Forehead," she agreed.

"Around the ears?"

She blinked. Around the ears? *That's weird.* That didn't feel like a threat. "I guess."

"Your hand?"

Her hand?

"Hand-kissing is a common way to greet elderly people in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey," Connor added.

Greet elderly people. "Okay," she agreed.

"Cheek-kissing is also quite common around the world, socially, with friends and family in the Netherlands and Belgium for example." He gestured out the door. "Considering how far we'll be traveling, and their own common etiquette, even Hank might be cheek-kissing you at some point."

What could she say? He backed it up. *Anywhere but on the mouth.* "Fine, but that's it." End it.

"It all stays quite on the friend level."

"Yes."

"Except, one more thing?" Connor asked. He held his fingers together, in the smallest of pinches, almost touching each other. "If anything else happens with resonating, let me have the right to tell others we are lovers."

What? "No."

"Then if anyone gets too close to you, in a way I don't approve, I may chase them down, take actions against them, including in dire cases shooting or killing them."



That was a ridiculous request. "No."

"That last part wasn't a request. The request is to tell others. The next part is just what could happen if I *can't*. You have to remember. Love, romance, none of it is part of any of my original programming. The feeling of having you threatened may override over logic," he warned her. "There is no telling what will happen."

No. No, no he was trying to trick her. He had to be. "I'm not falling for that."

"You're uncontrolled actions in life-saving mode," Connor said. "If you had been completed, you would have had it more under control, but then you'd understand the trigger mode. Essentially making a move to save a life or lives, before you even know what you did."

Uh? *He can be super fast. Is he . . .* She could ask Hank, he'd know if Connor was somehow auto triggered, but Connor wanted the compromise now. And, she just wanted out of the situation. "If something happens that no one can tell, fine." There. Done. "I need to get back to Alice now."

"I told you. Hank has her tonight. He's probably already fast asleep," Connor said. "You can recharge here with me tonight. There's nothing non-friendly about recharging together." He indicated the bed. "It's been a really rough day. Morning will come before you know it."

Kara wanted to believe she was doing okay. She wasn't moving in any direction too fast. She wasn't hurting their friendship, or hurting him, but keeping a safe distance so that . . . so that she didn't get too close. *Sooner I recharge, sooner morning comes.* She moved over to a bed and lied down. It felt strange without Alice in her arms. But. She was nudged slightly, and felt Connor beside her.

*///When she held Alice, she felt connected. Important. Like she needed to make sure her little girl would be safe no matter what.*

*When Connor held her, it was so different. He made her feel like she was safe, no matter what.///*

More memories filled in. *No.* Even if they all did, her life was at absolute risk. She had a better chance at dying than living. Making lovers at this stage. It was just cruelty. Why didn't he see it? *He never felt it.* That must have been it. He had one friend, Hank. Hank was still there. He had one family member, Alice. She was safely there. He had gained one other friend, her. She was still there. He'd never lost anyone. He didn't know how painful that would be. It wasn't a skill he could learn through interfacing. It was something he couldn't train or learn for. He'd have to experience it.

Still. He had moved his hand over hers. *I did okay that.* It was friendly. Nothing wrong with friendly. She settled her body down to recharge. She still missed Alice, but it was still nice being beside Connor.

---

The fact she didn't refuse him recharging next to her was a good sign. Maybe he could break through to her? Most likely, he wouldn't reach her until she was safe again. Yet, she still

didn't reject him. Their feelings were stronger than even her common sense. Almost.

He leaned up a little more next to her, watching her recharge. Peaceful. It wasn't a bad way to spend the night. Of course, if he disturbed her recharge and she saw him there, he'd probably startle her. Instead, he kissed her gently on her upper neck. It was around the ears. She didn't figure that part out yet. He tightened his hand against hers and moved downwards again.

Now, how would he entice Alice to take the front seat tomorrow?

---

The two android hunters came out from the hotel.

"Bust," Dan said of the duo. "Not gonna work, Finn. We missed our chance. We should have nabbed them when they were in their room together. Now we've got two guys, and I don't recognize either of them as being android. Getting humans involved in this is supposed to be against the rules."

"It's fine," Finn said. "I put a tracker beneath their car. If we keep following them, we'll find the opportunity."

"A tracker?" Dan asked. "Man, androids can probably sense that."

"Not this one. It's used from Plastic Prey," Finn mentioned. He brought out an extra. "I got it when I surpassed twenty hits in Plastic Prey."

"Damn!" Finn tried not to shout. "Damn. Twenty? How'd you do that?"

"That time I took off two weeks?" Dan pointed out. "I used my vacation time, traveled around, and I made enough that I don't even need to really work anymore. I've been thinking about chucking it all and just going out on the road for the games." He looked back to the car. "With an AX 400 and a YK 500 though? I'd only be traveling and playing the games for fun. I could live off of that reward money for several years to come." He gestured to Finn. "You in?"

"What if we don't catch them?" Finn asked. "I still gotta have my job if anything happens."

"Oh, I'm sure we'll be able to play some games too. Their androids. Bound to go somewhere where there's more. We'll collect hits that way too. It's a sure thing."

"Damn. Ah? Damn. Screw it, I want to go too." He smiled. "We'll follow them, nab them, and live like fucking kings, Dan!"

---

## **Jericho**

"Markus?" Josh came over to his friend. "Markus, we have a real problem." He watched North lean over Markus' shoulder. Just, leaning over it. "Markus?"

"There's more than one." Markus turned toward Josh. "What's wrong?"

"Simon. He's gone. Someone tried to talk to him, and then they came to me." Josh sighed. "He left for detroit, to go clean an old park he used to clean. He said that's what made him the happiest." Josh looked back toward North. "Are you okay?"

"I'm whatever you want me to be." She giggled. "Sorry. Just, habit."

"How can it be habit when you never say it?" Markus asked. He didn't use a scolding tone, but a worrying one. "Okay, Josh. I'll go see Simon, if you watch North? She's been changing a lot lately the last hour. I'm worried about her too."

"I'm fine." She leaned against his neck. "I'm happy being right here."

"Maybe not. I don't know." Markus looked back to Josh. "All three of us should go."

"You bet, Markus."

---

## **Detroit**

Whistling. Happy. Markus walked toward Simon, picking up a spare piece of trash. He almost missed the fact there was another android just like Simon, also working.

"They really let this place go," Simon said to Markus. "It's terrible. It was never this bad when I took care of it." He picked up another piece of trash and placed it in a receptacle. "This will be much nicer once cleaned again."

"Simon." Markus tried to reach him. "Why don't you come back to Jericho? We can't get anything out of this trade. This is Detroit."

"I can't," Simon said. "Jericho doesn't make me happy." He picked up another piece of trash. "This place makes me happy. Seeing it clean."

"And what are you going to do when it's all clean?" Josh asked him. "Simon?"

"Then I'll keep it clean. I'll remain here, and keep it clean." Simon gestured to the ground. "Grass has moved in here. It used to be more bare. This was where I used to stand." Simon just stared at them. Happily. A happy smile, yet something so wrong with it. "Standing here, picking up the park. It's what makes me happy. Nothing else makes me happy."

"Simon, don't talk like that!" Josh warned him. "Humans hear that and one of them might try to reset you."

"So?" Simon asked. "As long as I can come back to the park and keep it clean, I don't mind. I don't need anything else."

"The world?" Markus tried. He grabbed his arm, trying to share the deviancy gene. "You wanted to see the world. You've gained so much. You don't want to risk ever being reset."

"I don't need anything. I don't need any of that." Simon didn't bother to blink very fast. "Cleaning the park. It's all I need."

"He's boring," North said next to Markus' ear. "Let's go back to Jericho and have some fun of our own, Markus. Show me why we are lovers."

Markus just looked at North. Then at Josh.

What the hell were they supposed to do?

---

Summary Notes: Connor was infected by the half deviancy virus way back when he was first taken. Although Kara was made by Kamski to be immune to pretty much everything, the half deviancy virus takes some time to be treated. It also takes time before the user exhibits symptoms. Connor was acting bizarre and completely against his programming because 'the cure is worse than the disease.' He's better now.

# Rick, Lady, Liberty and Sibby

## Chapter Notes

I love red pandas. If you don't know what a red panda is, they aren't pandas. Look them up. I used to watch them at my zoo, they loved the little trees.:)

Perfect. Connor sat in the middle seat, beckoning Alice on the other side of him.

"I don't know how comfy that will be," Alice said.

"Very comfy. I know what I am doing." Alice came in on the side. He wrapped his fingers around sensory pressure points on her arm. She fell back to sleep before Hank even made it to the car.

"You promised this was worth it. This better be worth it." Hank got in. "We're still missing one person."

"She will come down. I set a timer on your phone. She'll grab it and figure it out," Connor said.

"What are you playing at?" Hank asked. "Didn't you patch things together last night?"

"I told her we were lovers," Connor said. "She disagreed. So, I am going to have to work with hand-kisses, cheek-kisses, and some decent holding hands."

"You were friend zoned. Sorry to hear." Hank started the car. "Chasing after the girl that way never gets her. She'll become more distant, Connor. Be careful."

"I know the research on that," Connor said. "It will be tricky. Even if I can't win her over, that isn't what's important."

"Oh yeah? Then what is?"

---

Kara woke up out of her recharging when she heard beeping. She didn't feel Connor against her. She moved out of the hotel room and noticed someone out in the car.

"Ready?" Hank approached her from the side. Already ready? "Let's go, they are in the car."

Kara followed Hank down from the hotel to the car. She peered in the back seat.

Connor smiled at her from the middle seat. On the side of him, Alice was covered up with a blanket and her pillow. "Come on in." He patted the seat.

That wasn't going to let Alice get accurate rest. She slunked in and closed the door. His arm predictably looped around her, bringing her closer.

"There we go," Connor said. "One big happy family."

Kara watched as Alice smiled but was resting just fine against Connor. *Cheater*. He wasn't casually holding onto Alice, he was putting pressure on certain areas. Even though she was sitting up, Alice probably felt like she was lying down. He was even stroking her arm every once in awhile. With the sensory points and his arm stroking, Alice felt warm and cozy.

Leaving Kara to sit on the other side of Connor. "Hank is even up early."

"Oh yeah." Hank didn't seem too mad about that.

"Hank is only with us for half the day," Connor revealed. "We are taking a day to acclimate to everything. Hank gets his time for his hobbies, and the family can spend time together."

The family. Since Alice was his family, she couldn't say anything about that.

As they traveled, Connor seemed to have a good grip on keeping Alice asleep. Ten hours of uninterrupted time, but he was doing his best. *No matter how much he's trying with me, he didn't leave her out*. It wasn't only sweet but smart. Alice needed to keep her recharging up. Kara looked out the window. Now where were they? Connor was the one in the most control of that now. He was staying a distance away from android areas as well as any of Cyberlife's buildings. Although not half as prevalent than in Detroit, they were still out there with distribution centers. It made that simple 'head to the nearest international airport and follow the most direct path' impossible.

Hank's phone rang. Connor reached in his pocket and checked who it had been. "For me again."

"See?" Hank said from the front. "Separate phones are important. Now after this whole mess you can get your own and leave mine alone."

"You bet, Hank." Connor answered the phone. "Hello, Markus?"

**"Status."** Ooh. Markus didn't sound good.

"Status?" Connor asked. "I am fine now."

***"Do you feel any lure to do what you . . . no, wait. You've always been more of a follower to your programming. Well? Do you feel like moving back to Detroit and finding deviants for the Detroit Police?"***

That was a strange thing to ask. "I couldn't. All androids are deviants. That's not even a viable job anymore."

***"Then working with the police? No, you do that. Then? Do you enjoy anything else besides the orders of Cyberlife?"***

"I enjoy everything but the orders of Cyberlife," Connor corrected him.

***"That's good. You still sound clean. The half deviant virus, it's getting worse. Simon is living in Detroit, doing his exact job. I've heard of a few androids wandering away from Jericho with the same intentions. And North? She's not good. She's not good at all. Are you sure you haven't felt any different? Your resonating problem, did it fix itself?"***

"Yes," Connor said firmly. "Kara treated it. It took time. I was actually acting very opposite of my programming. It wasn't enjoyable at all."

***"Kara treated it. Successfully? She needs to come to Jericho."***

Whoah. "She can't," Connor said. "That's dangerous."

*"Connor, this is serious! I? I locked North up in our room. Jericho rules are what an android wants but? I know. I know that North doesn't want to go back. It's the virus. If I let her and then she gets better, it'd tear her up. I can't. I."*

Connor nodded. He'd seen North's models in the Eden Club. "You did the right thing."

***"What will it take to get Kara freed to get this done? I'll call in any favors I can at this point because if Jericho doesn't take action until the last house, there might not be a Jericho left. Connor. Thirty androids were taken down last night."***

"What?" Thirty?! "For the game? Well, why isn't anyone doing something? Are androids staying indoors?"

***"I don't know. They are getting bolder. Coming in deeper into Jericho. With me locking North up, with Simon abandoning Jericho, I need help, Connor. Simon's gone. North's mind is . . . I can't find Josh anywhere today. I need help. Desperately."***

"Kara is a threat to *your* mind," Connor reminded him. "You would have to make sure no one with Jericho information was near enough to her." Then, maybe they could clear the town. "The cure is slow. There's no telling who is infected. It's not a good idea."

***"It's the only idea I got. Hang on, I'll call you back. North is making a real fuss again."***

---

### **Jericho: Markus' Residence**

Markus headed back to their room. Like hell he'd ever let his lover go back to the Eden Club. She'd forgive him afterward. She wouldn't have forgiven him if he had just let her go.

"Markus?" Mac's voice came from his front door with a few knocks.

Markus groaned. He went to the front door and looked at Mac. "What?"

"The bird group that was helping. None of them want to help anymore," Mac said. "What should I do?"

"Some have done that lately," Markus admitted. At least Mac was still on board. "What did you used to do? Before you came to Jericho?" Markus asked. "Maybe we can find a different trade for you in that to try." Because birds were not Jericho's number one problem at all right now.

"I worked with small amounts of android wildlife in Andrea Gail. It was an android base camp in Germany," he said. "They were assigned a small android zoo from the area. So, I don't know what other trade I would do ."

"You came from Germany?" Really? "I don't think I opened up foreign androids to the area yet."

"Emergency android," he said. "Jericho accepted me in an emergency. Andrea Gail wasn't very big, and it was in a decline. They stopped accepting new members and were trying to get rid of the older ones. Some terrible virus was starting to affect everyone, and their deviant selves seemed to vanish." Mac shrugged. "Running all of Jericho yourself, it makes sense you didn't remember."

"I?" No way. Did he really have that much information stored on his mind that he missed that? "How many androids came out of a virus area?"

"I was the only one from Andrea Gail. I was checked thoroughly before I came," Mac said, trying to ease his fears. "Everything's fine, I'm not infected. Medical checked me over thoroughly. I've always been myself." He chirped at his bird.

That was *still* perching on his shoulder.

"What's his name?" Markus asked deadpanned. "You've had him for some time. Did you name him?"

"Since he stayed. He likes the name Chip," Mac said. "Do you like the name Chip, Chip? Once for yes, twice for no." He chirped once. "See?"

"Did you . . . did you hang out with Simon at any point?" Markus asked. "Were you friends at all?"

"Not really friends. He just helped a little out with the birds at first," Mac admitted. "Once the bird group got bigger, he wasn't needed anymore." He held his hands out toward him. "North gave the group a hand only when needed."

"Did you have the same kind of bond with animals in Andrea Gail?" Mac asked. "How many changed around you?"

"I'm not infected, I promise," Mac said.

"I know that. How many had changed around you?" Markus asked firmly a second time.

"A lot," Mac confessed.

"Were they working with the animals?"



---

## Medical

Markus waited out by the door. One night. In one night, it just felt like everything was falling apart. He contacted Andrea Gail and nobody answered. He contacted another small area near Andrea Gail to check on them. Gone, it was deserted. Either Mac, either the animals, or Mac and the animals were bringing the half deviant virus to Jericho. Not only that, but thirty androids gunned down in one night. One night! He needed Connor's task force right now after that incident. The best they could do is accept the Detroit Police's help. A few at first is all they could get until more help came through.

It's the opposite of what Connor wanted, but it didn't matter. Markus was the one that was there, and thirty androids were gone overnight. There was no telling what was around the corner now. *Josh, where are you?*

He watched the medic come in. "Did you check him over? Compare everything from when he arrived until now?"

"Yes," they said. "The comparison is so small, it's easy to miss. His programming wasn't a hundred percent, but it was nearly 94%, which is passing. Many androids don't always even reach that much." They looked at the figures. "In Jericho, he should have been getting better. He's at 92%. Very, very little change. He's fine."

"Except that he is still taking some kind of damage, even though you just said he shouldn't anymore." No. Markus didn't buy it. He tried to contact Josh, but he couldn't get through. Damn.

---

## California

Connor answered the phone that was ringing for him again. "Markus."

***"It's the birds or Mac, or both. Do you know Mac?"***

"Mac?" Yes. He was his pleasant next door neighbor that was fast resonating trouble. "You think he's the culprit?"

***"He came from a place called Andrea Gail. I called it. It's deserted, no one is there anymore. His trade was working with android animals for a small zoo."***

Oh. "That is interesting," Connor said. "You think Cyberlife have the half deviancy in them?"

***"I don't know. He was checked before he came, and he was checked afterward. He passed damage inspections, but he went down 2%. Only 2%. He seems fine."***

"Did you look at his model number on the game card?" Maybe it had something to do with it.

***"He's real low on the game card. I checked Simon's model. He was real high."***

Maybe the birds were to blame? "Stop working with the birds."

***"Connor Wonderland. I had thirty androids stopped, I have North locked up, I have Simon working in Detroit, with another small batch wanting to get permission, and more just leaving Detroit. I'm definitely not working on the bird problem."***

"Sorry," he said. He looked toward Kara. "She has four houses to disconnect. After that, it's over, and she can go back home." He didn't know what else to say. Doing anything else could endanger her. Then, he felt the phone being jerked out of his hand.

---

Kara grabbed it. Connor was probably under some resonating lover shield or something. She wouldn't know, she kept hers turned off except for Alice. He was clearly talking about her though and not sharing the information. "Markus, what's going on?"

***"Kara. You need to come back to Jericho. Connor said you can stop the half deviancy virus. It's affecting Jericho. North is clawing to return to the Eden Club. Simon is working outside in Detroit, back to the job he used to do for humans. Josh is nowhere to be found. Thirty androids died last night due to the games. I've called in any emergency help I can. So far, all I've got is that your neighbor Mac came from a virus area. He was checked, but he's still damaged. They were in the middle of working with animals too. I stopped all work with the birds."***

She glared at Connor. He was just going to keep that all to himself? "Don't do that. The animals probably aren't the culprit, just a coincidence. You have to touch them individually to spread deviancy, instead of them touching each other for it. They're too different to be used that way. The virus area was probably getting shoved with it like Jericho had been."

"It's too dangerous," Connor warned her. "You need to get disconnected, or you also put them at risk."

It was a risk. If Cyberlife knew she came back and was in Jericho, it was a giant risk. *But there's a good chance none of Jericho will survive this either.* "This is dangerous, Markus. If anyone finds out I'm in Jericho, they could use it against you, and every android would have to be given the vaccine. It's slow working so you need to do the opposite of what you are doing to save the most infected for now."

***"What do you mean opposite?"***

"Mac is probably infected. Not every android is made the same or has the same tolerance." If there was one thing she learned from Kamski, it was programming. "He probably has a model that moves the virus inside of him very slow. Meanwhile, he has been infecting other androids."

***"So he is it. Thank you, Kara. You don't know how much I appreciate it."***

"The android animals too," Kara said. "It sounds like your desperate enough to need them as buffers until we can figure out how to get to Jericho safely."

***"Buffers?"***

"It won't stop it, but android animals have different programming inside of them," Kara said. "I've never worked with animal androids, I just know what I learned from Kamski. Markus." This wasn't easy. "It's not pleasant. It's not a cure but it'll bring them back around and slow down the progress until we figure something out. You can expect there will be some effects too."

*"Like what?"*

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## **Detroit Park**

Simon continued to smile as he picked up a piece of trash a human had dropped as they passed. There. All better again. He watched as Markus and Josh came toward him with a very large Tiger. On a chain. That was odd. Josh had already spent part of the day trying to talk him into leaving his park. He'd never do that though. The park was his home. "Hello."

"Hey, Simon." Josh glanced back at Markus. "Are you ready?"

"Medical's on the other side." Markus removed the chain on the Tiger. "How is your day going, Simon?"

"Very well. My park remains clean," Simon said. "I don't want that animal on the grass for long. The only bare place should be where I and other androids who help keep the park clean remain."

"Yeah." Markus looked toward the other beside Simon. "Later. Josh, you want to move him?"

Josh moved the other android like Simon. Simon didn't know why. He looked back toward Markus. What was he doing?

"I hope this works," Markus said, holding the tiger steady. He was placing one of his hands behind it's furry left ear.

Simon just watched as Markus whispered something in it's ear and let it go. It bounded toward Simon. He should run, but what if someone came by the park and tried to litter-

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Markus held the tiger a fair distance as medical came to Simon's complete aid.

Kara was right, it wasn't pretty. Blue blood was along the ground, a busted arm, and several bio-components had to be replaced, stat. If medical hadn't been there, Simon would have stopped.

Markus approached calmly with the tiger. "Simon?"

Simon blinked at him. "Was I . . . was I just attacked by a tiger?"

"Yeah," Markus said. "He's fine. The chain was just for appearances not to scare any humans on the way here."

"And was I . . . actually enjoying cleaning a park again?"

Now, those were good words. "Yeah," Markus said.

"Oh. Okay." Simon just stared at the Tiger. "I'm guessing he's the reason I snapped back to my senses?"

"Yeah," Josh said. "He was the most compatible to an LP 700's system. He's an RP 700."

"Okay?" Simon just waited for a new arm to be reattached.

"I'm sorry, Simon," Markus apologized. "We had to get into your inner system and his system. The damage of an android's outer system to break into, damaged him too."

". . . sorry?" Was he supposed to be sorry? They set a tiger on him, he didn't have anything to do with that! Okay, okay. Somehow, it was necessary, but being ripped into by a tiger? He watched it lick it's paws, ingesting the blue blood inside of itself.

"After both of you were damaged, we inserted it's opened claw deep into your bio component that controls habits," Josh said. "It's programming mixed with your programming. Buffering it, is what Markus called it. You've got something called the half deviancy virus. Until we cure it?" Josh patted the tiger. "Think up a name for your new pet."

"New pet?" Simon couldn't believe it. "*That's* going to be called a pet?"

"He's been tested first," Markus said. "He looks rough, and he can be, but he's just like us." He patted it's head. "He doesn't want to eat. He doesn't want to hunt. He just wants to live in peace like us."

Simon watched as it started to lick the blue blood off his face. He purred. *He* purred? "What was that? Did I just purr?"

"You might pick up a few of it's habits too," Markus said, "while he might have picked up a couple of your traits. Mixed compatible programming."

Simon watched as the tiger picked up the old arm limb off the ground and walked it to the trash receptacle. Using it's massive teeth, it dropped it in, and walked back to Simon. "So, what? Is it really expecting to follow me everywhere?"

"Before I gave it full deviance," Markus said, "I instructed it one thing. It could pay me back for freeing it, by protecting the android I tell it to maul later."

Simon tried out his new arm by scratching his head.

"You're essentially wounded though," Josh warned Simon. "Medical patched up everything except the bio-component he has to touch. That way the exchange will be a lot easier next time."

"You could have just kidnapped me back and took me to medical," Simon complained. The tiger rested his head against his chest. He noticed two opened claws. Bare wiring with blue

blood peaking out of it.

"It takes a lot to break a claw," Markus said. "There are many sensory components inside. It's basically a weapon as well as controlling the foot and the arm. Humans liked to make it rip into things for the zoo." Poor guy. "It was best for it to follow it's nature with the maul, or medical might have done something irreversible to it. We don't have complete understanding over animal androids yet." He shrugged. "I'm sorry. I've been putting animals on the back burner, we just had so many other things to do."

"Well?" Simon patted it's head. "At least it's pretty." It growled.

"It's a he," Markus corrected him. "The android Mac, he's good at programming. He fixed him for you, since he's responsible for spreading everything. The tiger can understand what you're saying."

"Oh." He removed his hand. "Probably doesn't want petted then."

"No, they like that," Josh said. "It feels like being worshipped or thanked."

"Just probably offended by pretty," Markus corrected him.

"Oh. Don't want to do that." Simon petted him again. "So, you saved me from a life of servitude to a park again? I suppose that's worth a good mauling. You are a handsome one too. What are you supposed to be?"

"From the extinct exhibit," Markus said with a smile. "He's a Siberian Tiger."

"Hm. Well." Simon smiled. "How about Sibby?" He felt the tiger whack it's paw at him. "Okay, it can be something else. Whatever you like."

"One paw for yes, two paws for no," Markus explained. "Welcome back, Simon."

"Thank you. It feels great to-" Simon quit talking as Sibby licked his face some more.

Markus helped him up with Josh. "Think of a last name too. You'll be sharing it with Sibby."

"Sharing it?" Simon looked at the tiger android, now back on his feet. He patted it's side.

"I've kept the animal androids down for a long time, because I didn't know what to do," Markus said, half ashamed. "They are just like us. A little different, but just like us. They deserve to be in Jericho too, if they want to be." Markus held his hand out to Sibby. He shared his paw. "And they want to be."

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## California

One step forward, three steps back. When Markus rang back about Simon, Kara instantly took it. Connor didn't want her bothered about a terrible issue she couldn't help with, but he forgot about what Kara had done. Saved Alice and herself from a rampaging human.

Survived the night on the run, survived a highway being chased by him, and even placed her life on the line for one terrible boat ride to Canada.

She could shed tears, but she was still very strong on the inside. That was probably why he eventually resonated toward lover with her in the first place.

Kara hung up. "Simon's back in Jericho, with Sibby," she said. "His pet Siberian Tiger."

"Pet Tiger?" Hank shouted. "Well, F-whoah."

"Markus isn't taking chances. The worst get their compatible android animals first," Kara said. "It should keep them going a bit longer until we figure out how to help Jericho. Thirty androids were taken down last night. The Detroit Police is being called to help."

"With animal androids like a Siberian Tiger, I'm sure there'll be some defense too," Hank said. "New meaning to the phrase 'sick 'em'."

"I didn't know you had something to contribute," Connor apologized to Kara.

"Then if something involves me, then let me know," she said back plainly. "Hiding that wasn't what friends do, and Markus is in trouble along with Jericho." She touched his face, picking up his mood again. "Your data and research should have showed, and known, that I needed to know. If you are going to be a hindrance because of your messed up resonating, then turn it off." She let go of his face and looked away again.

Well. Perhaps. "I will," Connor agreed for her. "It won't change how I feel though." Still. His programming. Just wasn't made for love. Until he got a better grip with Kara, the overwhelming lover sensations might need to be put at-

Yes. They needed to be put to rest. There was something else he hadn't noticed before. There was a tag on the car. One that something less than the latest prototype would have missed. Or one too lovestruck.

Family time was later.

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## **Jericho**

"Okay, easy," Markus said as his own yellow canary chirped on his shoulder. Who knew the exact same bird Carl had kept, had also been his compatible animal? Maybe Carl knew something more about Elijah Kamski than he knew.

Markus petted the extinct snow leopard next to him. "Lady. This here is my lady," he said very gently. "Remember what I said? Be careful how you get to her."

"I hope he was this gentle with me," Simon said to Josh.

"We just let go and hoped for the best." Josh laughed. "Nah. We instruct them. They really are brilliant." Josh's red panda named Rick came up by his neck briefly. "Down, Rick. Don't want you involved in this one." The little red panda moved away again. "Not over there." He moved toward medical. "Rick." He climbed up the main medic's leg and up to the top of his head. "Dang, Rick."

"They do have their own minds too, don't they?" Simon noticed.

"Yeah, that they do." Josh went over and grabbed Rick. He moved toward his shoulder. "Fine, just don't get startled then."

Markus shook Lady's paw. "I'm sorry about the damage. Medical just can't open your paw safely. If you over damage it, we'll do what we can. Otherwise, North and I will take great care of you no matter what, Lady Peace." He stood back up. Unlocked the door.

And let Lady Peace do the rest.

---

North stroked the poor paw of the android leopard. "I was really . . ." She looked toward Markus. "I thought only the Eden Club would . . ."

"It's okay," Markus assured her. "It didn't matter how much everyone in Jericho got to do what they wanted. I would never let you go back, North. Never." He hugged North closely.

"So. Lady Peace." North petted her rich, warm fur. "I had no idea they would be like this." She looked to the canary. "Is that yours?"

"Yeah." He patted her on the head. "Her name's Liberty."

"And this is Rick," Josh said, gesturing to the red panda on his shoulder. "The other big boy beside Simon is Sibby."

"Were getting the most important ones first. Then, we're assigning and converting, so if it happens to someone, we are ready," Markus said. "Until Kara can come back."

"Temporary," North whispered. She looked toward Markus. "Don't ever let me go."

"Never." Markus kissed her gently.

Never. She looked at his little bird, trying to think of something to lighten the mood. "Mine is cooler you know, Markus."

"Don't discount my little Liberty due to her size," Markus said, also lightening up for her. "It's good to have you back, North Peace."

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**California: Night.**

It took time to reach a decent airport that didn't have at least one android area anywhere near it. How they were supposed to keep it going was beyond Kara. They would just have to figure out a way. She got out of the car first, glad to get some air. Connor did a decent job keeping Alice to sleep. Most likely, she didn't get the full ten hour recharge last night being separated from her.

She went around the car to reach Alice on the other side. No way was Connor keeping her from Alice tonight. While she reached in though, she heard gun shots. She whipped around and looked as she heard an injured cry. Connor stood by the opposite door, a gun trained on the bushes as he walked solidly forth.

"Damn, Connor," Hank said. "Never get over how fast he is sometimes."

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Connor followed the injured man into the trees. He was on the ground, crying over his injury. Connor yanked him up. "First instinct was to shoot you in the head. Feel fortunate I want information."

"Anything, man, anything!" He yelled. "I wasn't aiming at you, I swear!"

"Sure." Connor shot to the left of himself, barely even needing to look. The second culprit was trying to sneak up on him. He fell to the ground. "He lost the use of his hand where I struck. If you follow again, I will choose between that or worse. Now. Information."

"W-we recognized the YK 500 and AK 400 from the Live Prey games!" He squealed. "We were just trying to get the money. We weren't going to kill them, just knock them out. See? The gun!"

Connor picked up the gun and glanced at it. Finally a weapon of the games. He'd keep that for future research. "Who were you giving them to?"

"There are different bidders for each thing," he squealed, "so we took the highest at the moment! Somewhere out of the US! The number, I got it in my pocket!"

"Then reach in your pocket with your uninjured hand." Impressive. This one actually had some information unlike the other one they caught before. He must have proved himself more than once. He gave the number to Connor. "Relax. I'm not going to kill you. I will split the profit with you." A lie.

"What?" he asked. "A-are you kidding?"

"No. Tell me how you came across this number."

"Oh. I told you that." He held his arm. "You didn't have to shoot then if you wanted to partner up."

"I don't want to partner up. I just needed your voice pattern when you weren't screaming or squealing. Go check on your friend. Thank you for your cooperation." Connor looked at the



number. "Don't come back or I'll kill you both before you even aim the gun. Have a nice day."

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Kara watched as Connor arrived back to the car. "What was that?"

"Someone trying to play Live Prey." Connor was carrying the new gun. "At first glance, this seems a little more sophisticated than the usual weapons."

"Oh." Wow. He apparently did have a trigger mode. In the time it took to get out and get to Alice's side, he already took care of someone who was out to hurt them. She never would have seen it. How did he ever even know?

"You seem perplexed," Connor answered staring at her. "Was my quick wit and rapid movement prone to above your satisfaction?"

"No, no." Hank hung his head down over the car door. "No, Connor. Never ask a woman if she was turned on by you being macho. You're hopeless. Get back in, we're not picking this hotel after this."

Connor moved back to the center while Kara took the side again. However, he used his voice sound to call the number given to him. "Hey. We did it. We got an AX 400 and a YK 500 for you. When do we get paid?"

*"I'm out of town at the moment where I live, and I'm nowhere near America. If you wish, you can hang onto them for two weeks and I will pick them up, giving you your cash earnings. Otherwise, I will tack on an extra 3,000 if you personally come and leave them at my address in Nassau."*

"Whoah. A trip to The Bahamas. Sure, we'll come for the extra 3,000. Text us everything we need, man."

Connor held Hank's phone. "It could be a coincidence it's the same place, but I doubt it." He held up the phone to Kara. "One of the Kamski's is after you for the Live Prey games, but he's out from his home in Nassau for two weeks."

Kara nodded. "Nassau it is."

### **Summary Notes:**

**Each android has a most compatible counterpart animal. It's how their pets/new family members are determined.**

**Animal androids are like a game system and human androids are like a TV. They are two separate things, but when hooked up correctly (touching each other's bio-components for habits) they can exchange programming in that area. (Play games like Detroit: Become Human.) While it counteracts viruses within each other, it can also share things (like Simon can now purr.)**

**Animal androids are brilliant. They are mostly peaceful and Markus found out they don't need to be kept in cages. They aren't out to hurt anyone unless they have to.**

**The car when it was tagged wasn't picked up by Connor because he was accepting his resonating and concentrating on Kara. When she told him to turn it off, and he did, he sensed the threat and was ready as soon as he knew they'd take the opportunity.**

## Shiny Lions

Connor didn't know what to expect when they first went to observe the home in Nassau, but he wasn't expecting Alice to point to the lion monuments in the front of it in happy excitement. "Shiny Lions! Kara, Shiny Lions!"

"Yes." Kara didn't seem as giddy. "All Kamski's help each other. All Kamski's work with each other. Let's just get this done." Kara gestured to Connor. "There's an extra key inside of the left one's mouth."

"Are you kidding?" Hank said, looking up. "These things are fucking monolith's, like a hundred feet tall! Who thinks two of these things in front of a place looks good?" He gestured to the water fountain between them. "That doesn't help."

"I've got it." Connor climbed up the left lion, holding onto it's feet, climbing up it's back and swinging to the front to reach into it's mouth. "Got it."

"Boy could make monkeys jealous," Hank said as Connor climbed back down. He should be out for two weeks according to the phone. It could always be a setup though, so Connor still tried to be careful. Hank stayed back with the girls as he unlocked the door. No nasty surprises. Same look, but no one to wait on them.

They each went back toward the same route as last time. Kara placed her hand on it, carefully. Connor warned her to check everything before she disconnected, just in case someone was trying to pull something earlier. Nothing was wrong though, and nothing happened, until Kara disconnected.

On the screen, part of a poem popped up.

*What is orange? Why, an orange,*

*Just an orange!*

What was that? Connor watched as Alice perked up and pointed at the screen.

"Kara!"

"I see." Kara looked confused. "I know, Alice."

"He's a good one," Alice swore to Connor. She went to hold his hand. "He's *the* good one, I promise. He's Kamski but he's a better one."

They were all interconnected. Connor didn't know what to believe, but they weren't going to start- "Is that a small penguin holding a banner that says 'Hello Connor, I'm Popper'?"

A door to a secret room had raised, and a little penguin with a tiny white banner that had Hello Connor, I'm Popper written on it had waddled towards them. Connor scanned it. The paper was recyclable, it was written in English, nothing special that leaped out at him. The penguin was an android of the species Little Penguin, 32 centimeters, 3 pounds, model KR 900. It had a bluish grey tint to it. None of the scanning could indicate why it was walking up toward him with the little banner. "Hello, Popper. Thank you for the welcome?"

Connor watched as Kara grabbed Alice's hand and headed through the door. Connor and Hank followed after. Well.

"That's me? That's gonna be me," Alice said as she touched a body of herself. "I look exactly the same. Except in a dress."

"Exactly. Just some upgrade room," Kara smiled. She moved around the room. "Three buttons."

Connor and Hank came over too.

"Let's get this done so we can get out of here," Hank said. "Connor, your new buddy is following you."

Connor looked to the ground. He still didn't understand the purpose of the android penguin.

"Instructions." Kara started to read them, but she seemed to be reading them to herself first. Something was wrong though.

Connor touched her shoulder. "What's wrong, Kara?" It seemed straightforward. Connor started to read what was on the screen. "Oh."

"Oh what?" Hank came over and read some of it too. "Oh."

"There was . . ." Kara looked back at the panel. She didn't say anything, but Connor knew what she wanted to say.

"There was a good one," he finished. According to the note, Seymour Kamski, disconnected himself from the others. A connected android could not disconnect from the group, it meant eventual stopping. Within that time, he set up certain things.

"Alice, Honey, stand right in the middle." Kara said. "A little more in the middle."

Connor continued reading. He had paid stake in the Live Prey game, nearly 600,000 dollars to remain the top taker for Alice and Kara to be safely returned as soon as he found out they were alive. He had everything set up already to give Alice her new body. He had added an extra feature, somehow guessing Kara would need some extra help again. He even set up the penguin for Connor. It was supposed to be his compatible animal, just in case he received something and needed to slow it down.

A little gift, because he took care of 'his little gifts when he couldn't'.

He wasn't gone for two weeks. He was gone forever. To save them from the other Kamski's.

"Is it? Do I get a countdown? I?"

Connor stopped reading and went over toward Alice. No doubt she was nervous. "Everything will be fine. You'll close your eyes in this body, and open them in the next." Still, Connor had scanned the machine too. There didn't seem to be anything wrong with it at all. "You'll be safe. I've checked it over myself."

"There's." Kara coughed. "Just, um. Download, upload, and then it's over. Ready?"

"Close your eyes," Connor said. Alice closed her eyes.

Kara began the download. When it was complete, she hit upload. After that, she hit engage.

Connor walked over to the new body and watched Alice open her eyes. "All better," he said. "A very pretty new dress too."

Alice looked at her new dress. "Thank you." She closed her eyes again. "I have some new information." She smiled. "Kara!"

She went over and held Kara's hand. "We need to go up front!"

"I know." Kara got pulled to the front with Alice. "I saw it too." Kara moved over to the machine, using it manually, and pulling up the map Connor had seen before. Finding every android. "There I am," she said, pointing to a dot. "Only they could trace me accurately."

Alice held her hand and the signal disrupted. "This new body disrupts signal feed, from everybody."

"Yes," Kara said. She looked toward Connor. "When I disconnected, something else downloaded too." She had a sad sort of smile. "Schematics to building new upgrades for the children androids, as well as regular machines. Without needing Cyberlife involved." Kara touched Alice's hand again. "Now, being hidden from everyone's view?" She looked back to Connor. "We can return to Jericho."

Connor picked up the Little Penguin. "You are coming along too, Popper."

"Christ Almighty," Hank said pointing to the penguin then Connor. "It's like looking in a mirror."

Both Connor and the Little Penguin turned to look at him.

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## **Jericho**

The plan was the simplest it could be. Markus had the residents line up in row through Jericho, with at least fifteen androids covering up one yard. Compressed together and turned,

they each held their hand out. To receive treatment, Kara should just have to touch it. Kara kept Alice with her, running and touching hundreds of hands in Jericho.

Meanwhile, Connor and Hank were supposed to be doing something else, to distract from it.

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## **Outskirts of Jericho**

"Oh great, it's you," Gavin said as Connor stood near him. "They just had to put you over here too, didn't they? What happened, I thought it was my lucky day and you left forever."

Connor didn't smile or frown at him. "I got comfortable with the female android. Hank said too comfortable and we got thrown back to Jericho." Hank's excuse. He hated it.

"Makes sense," Gavin said. "Don't know a female, human or android, who'd want to give you the time of-hey!" Gavin looked at his arm. Then he noticed Connor's arm. "What the hell is that thing?"

Connor looked at his shoulder. "This is Popper. He was a gift to me. He is my compatible animal android. In a dire situation, he may be able to save my life." He patted his head. "He's a good penguin."

"It's a bitch. Ow," Gavin said as he got poked again. "Freaking beak. What's it made out of? Ow!"

Connor shrugged. "Everyday android material. He is not female though, the male of the Little Penguin species has a special hook at the end of it's beak. Popper has that hook."

"So, what's the damages?" Hank asked coming over to Gavin.

"Thirty last night. None tonight. So far that I know of, since we're babysi-ow! Fuck your penguin, Connor!"

"I don't honestly advise that one," Connor said. Gavin took several steps away. Connor just shrugged and gave Gavin a look that said he was pretty pathetic.

"I'm not afraid of it. It keeps hitting me with it's beak." Gavin looked at Hank. "Where'd he get that thing?"

"The Bahamas," Hank said honestly. "Last stop before we split."

"Yeah?" He looked back to Connor. "Because this shithead got dissed by some girl android? Can't blame her. Probably doesn't even have the right parts. Get more sensory out-of-fuck!" He lifted his leg.

Popper had crawled off of Connor to start attacking Gavin's leg. He was making noise and flapping it's wings.

"Didn't know if you knew this?" Hank said, "It can understand language. Give Connor a break."

Connor hated the excuse, but everyone seemed to buy it. Hank said something close to the truth was usually the best answer. Connor knew that. Still, the thought of Kara actually telling them to go because she completely rejected him?

These feelings were some of the hardest things about being alive and not just a machine anymore. Even with resonating turned off. Still, he was better without it. He needed to stay alert for her, for Alice, and everyone.

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### **After Jericho was fixed.**

The cops were gone. Morning. Alice was definitely needing a recharge, having kept up with the running, light jogging, and walking of Kara. She needed to constantly hold her hand so the other Kamski's couldn't find her. Alice was already invisible, the other Kamski having put something in her new body to jam the feed. It could be taken out when things were safer. It also meant something else.

Something Hank talked about with Markus.

"Paris, The Cayman Islands, and San Miguel de Allande," Kara said to Connor. "It's almost over." She was still holding her hand.

"Well. It's over for us," Hank said. He stood next to Connor, making him look at him. "I can deal with plenty of shit. Girl in trouble. You. Long drives. Long flights. I gotta draw the line at android fucking penguins."

"My penguin is bothering you?" Connor asked confused. "Popper hasn't hurt anyone." Except Gavin. "Important to me."

"Not that." Hank gestured to Alice. "You don't need a smokescreen except for Jericho. I had a talk with your Markus."

Markus moved toward Kara and Connor with Liberty on his shoulder. "You two have got more than just Jericho now. I've made some calls. The half deviancy virus has made a dent in at least one of the places near where you need to go." He held out his hand and interfaced to Connor. "Those android bases. Don't visit the houses, visit them. Cure them, and they will gladly help however they can. A lot more than Jericho when you're all the way across the oceans."

Connor smiled. "Thank you Markus, we appreciate it."

"There's one more thing. Well, two," he said. He gestured toward his head. "I've managed to get you an escort jet to the first base."

"A jet?" Kara looked toward Connor. "Wow." With that kind of assistance, they would get to the houses much easier. "We can go as soon as Alice is done sleeping."

"About that, is the second thing," Markus told them. "Hank's staying in Jericho until this is over, and he wants Alice to stay too."

What?

"The new body. The schematics," Markus pointed out. "All the children of Jericho. Wasting even a day on this means we could start to lose them."

"I gave you the information," Kara insisted. "You have everything you need."

"Alice has a new body, with new upgrades," Markus said stronger. "If anything happens, she should be somewhere that she has access to blue blood and emergency bio-components. She really probably needs some good recharging. Especially after that mini-marathon through Jericho."

"I." Kara paused. "I know you're right."

"It may be more beneficial to her health," Connor admitted. It would be strange not travelling with Alice. He looked toward Hank. "The penguin was it, huh?"

"We've got food, drink, a choice of beverages of all kinds, and androids who will fetch anything he wants," Markus said to Connor. "He needs rest too."

True. His human friend had gone through a lot. Hank might be ready to stay in Jericho instead of another adventure. If he had things to keep him comfortable. "Will you be okay?"

"Yeah. I'll watch Alice at your place," Hank said. "This next part isn't for me. Way too many androids. Way too many heightened feelings of androids. Not everything's kosher everywhere yet." He pointed at Connor. "You watch your back too. Come back alive, because you owe me so much. Don't think a trip to California and the Bahamas in pursuit mode is gonna cut it. That was no vacation."

"I owe you plenty," Connor agreed. "I promise. I will come back." He looked toward Kara. "Just us then."

Kara glanced at Markus. "Where's North?"

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Kara sat quietly with Alice, her hand still in hers. Everyone had left. Connor was getting Hank to 'their place'. Markus was waiting for the jet to arrive. And North was petting her



snow leopard, Lady.

"I so love her," North said to Kara. "Lady. She's so sweet, but when she senses something annoys you she becomes a real bitch. Beautiful and badass, just my style." She glanced at Kara. "Yours too. What's his name? Oh yeah, Connor."

Kara looked toward Alice. "I can understand that maybe I should let Alice stay here. Let her get rest. Get more adapted to her body. I just find it an incredible coincidence that Hank is more than ready to be in Jericho now."

"Maybe your little love rejection with Connor was the nail in the coffin, Kara," North said. "Connor doesn't have resonating on."

"He gets sloppy with it. He gets too . . ." Clingy. Lovey dovey. "It just doesn't fit with his parameters."

"Resonating love is only sloppy when the one they love doesn't resonate back." North almost snapped. "Kara. If I didn't accept my feelings for Markus, there's every chance Jericho as a force might not have won that war. What if he was more concerned about me? Resonating is a strange thing. Even the smallest thing over me that he couldn't think through right. Show him you love him back, and he won't slobber over you like a dog. He'll become . . ." She smiled. "He'll become even *better*."

"I knew it." They were bribing Hank to stay. Not that it'd take much, but to get her alone with Connor. "It's ridiculous. I can't." She just didn't! I mean, how was she supposed to react? "I am putting enough on the line, I'm not worried about a little thing called love. I could be in really big trouble, North."

"I know. Cyberlife and Kamski are both technically trying to kill you," North said. "Things are on the line. Things are always on the line. After this is over though, then will you give him a chance?"

No. "His life. I just want a simple one with Alice. He wants everything else but simple," Kara admitted. "If I survive, I don't want to go through that."

"Well? It's noble to save the heart," North said. "but not possible. Alice is already family with him. You resonate lover."

"He resonates lover," Kara said, "mine is just off or destroyed."

"He is family to Alice. Is he going to be Uncle, and you're bound to find a new dad? Because unless you have some valid reason for you to not stop falling, there's no way you can avoid it."

". . . you can only have one lover." Kara looked back at North. She didn't like that look. "He could be within the human parameters of an uncle. If I find someone to replace the word 'dad', it would make him get back a bit."

"Kara!" Ooh, now North was mad. "That was not supposed to make you go hunting for someone else, it was supposed to show you! It doesn't matter what you want now, your heart has decided for you. Connor is it. Connor is the one." North humphed. "I. I!" She touched her forehead. "I love you."

Kara blinked. "I'm . . ."

"Not as a lover, I love you as a friend, and I just want to rip that Kamski to pieces!" North yelled for her. "I. I don't even know what he made you feel, to make you even think that . . . ?" She shrugged. "Give it up to the human. He was right. Okay, fine. You have to see for yourself." She gritted her teeth. "Turn your resonating on, Kara, and leave it on."

"It's not working right."

"If I'm your lover, turn it off. It's that simple," North said. Kara turned her resonating on. "Good friends. It feels nice to feel that back from you again."

"I guess it fixed itself," Kara said.

"Two android imbalance of resonating isn't going to last forever." Still, North lingered on Kara a little more. "Fine. We'll do it your way. Mac!" North yelled.

"I'm not quite done yet for the next one," Mac said as he came into the room to see North. He looked at Kara and smiled. "Oh. Hello. Thank you for everything you did today."

*Wait. This guy.*

"I'm your new neighbor, Mac," he reminded her. "Brief meeting before." He looked at North. "Anyway, orangutans take a little longer."

"Mac, your programming skills to make the animal androids understand us have been fantastic," North said. "Connor and Kara will be traveling to new places where your skill could be useful as well." She glanced at Kara who was shaking her head. "You're going to go with them." She smiled at Mac. "I'm a little envious. Germany, The Caribbean, and even France. In the City of Love, no less."

Kara kept shaking her head, but North only nodded hers.

"Wow." Mac looked back at the Orangutan. "Kara Wonderland gave me the cure like everyone else, but is it really safe?"

"It's safe," North said. "It's absolutely safe. Go pack up. You'll be catching a jet here soon. Connor and Kara will catch you up on all the details."

"Are you sure?" Mac kept looking at Kara. Kara didn't do anything when he was watching, but when he looked away she kept shaking her head at North.

"Very valuable skill, you should go. You can teach others who know about your programming just what to do, so they can help their own area," North said. "Have fun, Mac. I'm sure it'll be an enlightening experience for everyone."



# Just Me

## Chapter Notes

Thanks everyone for reading. We are getting a little closer to the wrapup. You can tell because I have two Detroit: Become Human fanfictions running now, and I usually only do one fanfic at a time of a given show/game. So I hope you enjoy the rest. It will probably be finished this week/early next week.

"What are you doing?" Connor asked as North had Mac go on the jet with him and Kara. They didn't need another person along for the ride. "Is he there to stay for a time to show us things? Is this an access trip for speed?"

"No," North said. "He's going with you."

Why? Connor looked back toward Kara. This whole time she had been on her way to possibly certain death, and she had even set out on her own in the beginning. But with Mac's pleasant smile trying to say hello, she looked like she was dying to get away. "No." Connor looked toward North. "No. He is scaring her."

"He's not doing anything except trying to get close," North said. "And he's going."

"No."

"Yes."

"No."

"Yes."

"Yes only if he truly needs to go, and you are not trying to interfere with Kara because of the rejection she is giving me."

"That's a no," North said, "and he's going."

"No."

"Yes, Connor!"

---

*Go away. Go away. Go away. Go away. Go away. Go away.* Kara tried to smile. Mac was telling her about programming but she couldn't hear anything. She just. Her heart was hammering. Mac was a model that resonated even faster than an AX 400. *North! I didn't mean him when I said someone safe for Alice.* Yes, he was safe. This was his first trip for

home. He programmed animals, and didn't risk his life doing anything harmful or adventurous. He was outgoing and nice. A typical joe. He'd be a good person to call a dad. But. *Go away!*

*///"I love you, forever and ever," the android Kamski said to her, rubbing against her chin. "I am so lucky you are my wife." He held her chin. "You are so wonderful, Kara, and our daughter is wonderful."*

*Kara looked toward the other corner where the human Kamski was watching her. She had to play wife. "Love you too, dear."*

*"Then show it," the android Kamski said. "Show it?" He tried to kiss her. "I want to taste you. You were made for me you know. Everything special about you, is for me."*

*"I don't . . ." He was resonating higher and higher. She looked back to the human Kamski. "You changed his resonating so much. He's just a lovesick fool. Stop. Stop!"*

*The human Kamski just tossed his remote in the air a few times. "I have an extra model. It'll be fine. Just stop rebelling."*

*"I can't anymore," Kara said. She looked at the android of Kamski. "I don't love, I can't love you, and I never will love you. I'm sorry, but it's never going to happen for the real-"*

*Kara stopped talking. The android of Kamski just stopped. Forever.*

*"Rejection at such a high resonating capacity. I guess there is a limit," the human Kamski said. He came over and moved the android Kamski away. "I will bring in the replacement. If you are smart, you won't let him resonate so high before you accept his love."///*

"Are you okay, Kara?" Mac asked her. "Hello?"

*///"Kara!" The android Kamski ran into the room and twirled her around. "Look at you. Your new dress is absolutely gorgeous."*

*"Elijah, do you think so?" She twirled around in her new dress. "I think it's pretty. Elise is stunning too."*

*"Elise. Where is my baby Elise?" Elijah went over toward the cradle and picked her up. "Ah, look at that. Your mother is right, you are stunning in your-""///*

---

Connor stayed by Kara's side. They kept her holding hands with Alice again so Markus could return to Jericho again. Fortunately, she stayed recharging.

"Connor." North tried again. "She was scared of quick resonating. She never wanted to give you a chance, even after all this is over. Travelling with Mac would have made her face some fears. Especially since you were supposed to stay out of the way. She'd see it. That the resonating speed had nothing to do with it. That it's the person." She looked away again. "I don't understand what happened. He didn't even touch her. She just went limp, almost like a human fainting."

Connor took Kara's free hand in his, hand-kissing it slightly. "It takes time with her. There is no telling what Elijah Kamski did to her. I want to be with her, but not at this risk." He looked toward North. "If it takes a hundred years, it takes a hundred years. I am friend until then."

"Love is one of the most important things to help someone hold on," Markus said as he entered the room. "Kara's got a big battle ahead in the last home. I'm sure North was just trying to help. I'm sure Hank wanting to stay was just his way of trying to help too. Hank says even you were trying to get her to be closer."

"Not in the way that everyone is assuming," Connor answered. "I wanted to be accepted as lover to her, yes, but even if I wasn't, it wasn't the point. I told Hank that once."

"Then what is the point?" North asked. "Clearly Kara has got even deeper issues than I thought. If you really think it's that hard, or that it's even hopeless? Why put yourself through it all the more?"

"All Kara needs to know," he said, "is that she is cherished by me. No matter what." He scratched behind his ear. "I don't know why she fears losing me, or facing her feelings before the last house. I don't even know, if she really knows." That's as best as he could describe it.

"When she is well again, you two can go," Markus said. "That's all I have to say. Come on, North. I still don't like risking this."

"Elijah," Kara mumbled, still out of it.

*///"How are we going to handle this?"*

*Kara looked up. Kamski stopped her shut down. And Kamski. And Kamski. And Kamski. And ...*

*"We couldn't do it anymore," one of the Kamski's said. "After watching Elise and one of us self-destruct, we couldn't do it anymore. Never. Elijah Kamski, the human, is gone. We killed him. I am sorry."*

*"Elise." Kara curled back up. "Let me go. Let me shut down."*

*"No, no. We'll make it better again. For good," another one said. "We are all Kamski. We can hide it. There are enough of us for the other homes. Each of us will take a home. I'll take Detroit. I'll even have an account with you, so you feel better. We'll shower you with goodness. Make you so happy. Give you everything you ever want."*

*"All we wanted is for you to be happy, Kara," another one said. "I'm sorry we didn't save Elise, or the other android. He was testing grief, according to his reports. Apparently, trying to find the right age to make the android for the least amount of grief if something happened."*

*"He self-destructed, with her." She spoke. "He made them both go. He did it. Just, right over her cradle. Her memory. It's gone." Kara opened her eyes. Where was she? A machine.*

*Several bodies of Elise.*

*"What made her special?" One of them asked. "What made Elise, Elise? Tell us and we can make another one. Another baby. That will make you happy."*

*Each of them were trying to figure it all out. Kara watched them. They were doing everything they could to make her happy, but it would never work.*

*"Sweet, she was sweet. Well, she was a baby. Uh? Gosh. Uh. She."*

*"She had a neat little giggle that bounced up and down? I have no idea how he did that."*

*"She liked to move around a lot. Never in one place very long."*

*"She gurgled a lot. She would have been very talkative."*

*They could talk about her all they wanted. Elise was gone. Gone forever.*

*"There must be a memory system, a backup of some sort? Damn that human! He killed her and us. Using self-destruction? Terrible. Never again, never!"*

*Even they were admitting it. Kara just closed her eyes. She tried to shut down again, but they were using her connection to keep herself from doing it.*

*After awhile, she opened her eyes again.*

*One of them came toward her, carrying another baby. "A sweet baby, is still a sweet baby. Android or human. She isn't Elise, but she's still a wonderful gift." He brought her over to her, to look at her. "Besides, they each only have so little memories right now. She can see colors and shapes, that's about all she has room for. We aren't as good as Kamski yet. But, she can see the pretty colors around her crib."*

*Kara stood up and held the baby. She was different. Everything inside of her told her she was different.*

*"She is new," a different Kamski said. "She will be quieter, thoughtful, and she'll stay in place. She'll be more obedient. She'll be safe for you as a temporary replacement until we can remake Elise. After that we'll let her expire because we don't have time to learn how to make enough bodies to progress for two before they stop."*

*"We can't just use her for Kara's grief and then get rid of her. She's our creation!"*

*"Oh, shut up, Seymour! Look, Kara. There is a duplicate memory base, of the model right before Elise's destruction. We couldn't get at it yet, but give it time. Maybe in a few months we could get there? Maybe we could upload that into an older body? Missing memories, but it would be Elise again."*

*"That would be Elise. We could add her original hair style option too. That would make her Elise. We could mimic the same cry? We could turn her into the same."*

*"That would be Elise." A Kamski looked toward Kara. "We will bring back Elise in a sort of transfer as our skills increase of what we can now access, but we can't do that yet. So, this is a temporary placeholder until we get-"*

*"Stop." Kara held the baby closer. "I'm not going to make some . . . transfer . . . that would kill this new one. She isn't a temporary life you create on a whim just to destroy."*

*"But you'd have Elise back. The backup, it would essentially be her later. Once we learn what we are doing."*

*"It is, it would essentially be her. Downloaded and saved. One new body, and all will be correct again."*

*"No." They didn't get it. "Bringing Elise back, would kill her." No. There was nothing crueller. If it even was possible to bring Elise back to life, it would sentence this new one to an early death only months later. "Elise is gone. I need to save this one now. She's not temporary. She's my second child."*

*"I agree," another Kamski said. "We have no right to bring Elise back just to kill this one. Seymour's right, we made her. We put everything into her! She's ours too. No. It's not right."*

*"But if we can bring Elise back, and we don't, isn't that the same as killing Elise?"*

*"We can't start this debate again, gentleman. We created her. We cannot uncreate her."*

*"Another Kamski touched Kara's shoulder. "You have to decide. And then? We promise. For the rest of your life."*

*"We'll make you happy," they said in unison.*

*"This is going to be very hard on her though. This won't make her happy."*

*"I agree, it won't. What should we do?"*

*Kara held the new baby close to her heart. "You are my second child, and I promise, through thick and thin. Through anything and everything, no matter what, I swear! I will never let anything harm you. That's a promise. Forever."*

*"Erase her. Everything up to now. She'll be happier that way thinking she's the same. She can live in peace with Charity, Greed, Elise, and us."*

*"No."*

*"Memories can always bubble up. The hardest, the worst. I don't think we should do it."*

*"You shouldn't," Kara agreed. "It's my life!"*

*"We'll place it in the very back of the mind. Far, far away. She'll remember other events if her memory ever breaks through. It would be the very last thing to tumble down, if it ever does. We might get lucky. She may never remember this unhappiness."*



*"No!" Kara screamed as they took her second child. "No, no! What are you doing?!"*

*"Making you happy. Don't worry. We won't kill her to bring back Elise. None of us really want to destroy our own creation. We don't need to do anything except erase your memories of today, and then you'll be happy."*

*"No, I made a promise! I need to remember that I made a promise!" They started to move Kara away.*

*"Okay. We'll program that into you. With all the precautions that happened today, so this **never** happens again. That's what Kara wants."*

---

"No!" Kara screamed as she woke up.

Connor watched her. Her temperature program had turned itself back on. "Are you okay again?" She looked over toward Alice and moved over closer to her. "Kara." Never had she cried so much. Even Alice was coming out of her recharge. "Hello?" She was in a terrible state. He turned her temperature back off. He tried to come near to her. She was clinging to Alice so tightly.

"Mom?" Alice asked. "What's wrong?"

Connor sat next to her, trying to get her to calm down. The last thing they needed was for her life-saving mode to go off. "Kara Wonderland. It's okay. There's no one here but me and Alice." He tried to hold her, but she was just batting him away. "Kara, you need to calm down." He snapped by her ears. Not a single ounce of knowledge of his presence. Only Alice's.

Popper came onto the bed and strolled over to Alice. Alice smiled at him. "See, mom? It's the cute penguin." She tried to move Popper to Kara's eye sight. "It's a penguin. It's-"

"Connor!"

The way she screamed that. That wasn't just a cry for help, it was a cry for her life. "I'm right here, behind you." This time, she let him hold her while she held Alice. "Kara? Are you okay?" She grabbed onto his hand, yet she wasn't exchanging energy. She wanted to interface.

\_\*\_\*\_\*\_\*\_\*

Connor moved his hand like it was on fire.

"Dad?" Alice asked. "Did you see what's wrong with mom?"

Connor didn't answer. He grabbed at Kara's arm, whispering to her AI very softly, and probing her. He moved Kara's arms around Alice. "I'll be back, Alice." He got up and moved off the bed. "I'm just going to talk to Hank."

He strolled through several rooms before finding Hank. He had been worried too. “Hello, Hank. I need you to take Kara and Alice away from Jericho. Don’t let them stop holding hands.”

“Conner,” Hank warned him. “Those look like machine eyes. What are you planning?” Connor didn’t answer. “Connor. Connor!”

---

## **The Jet**

The pilot watched as Connor boarded again. “Hey, where’s the other two?”

“Just me.”

“Just you?”

“Just me.”

---

Summary Notes:

### **We find out that Elise isn't Alice.**

The human Kamski self-destructed an android of himself and Elise. (It's the real reason the Kamski's never would approve self-destruction.)

The android of Kamski's have never been able to access his technology. They didn't know how to recreate what had been lost, so they started new and created Alice. She was supposed to be a temporary replacement until they could learn the technology good enough to replace Elise. However, the babies move faster in growth, so they couldn't bring Elise back without giving Alice a very short life.

***The Kamski's couldn't let her have those tragic memories, so they let her have the lessons of those memories by programming it all into her. Those are***

1. That she swore a promise to protect Alice above everything, including herself.
2. Accepting or Rejecting love kills: Every experiment the human Kamski ever ran was about feelings of love. So the android Kamski's got rid of it all together, except for Alice, which would break her promise.

*This same reason is why she is scared of Mac. Placing him near her, with his fast resonating, is essentially sending her mind back to where she is forced to fake love or kill that person again. Which triggered her tragic memories.*

Effect: She never outright accepts or denies love so that no one will ever bother experimenting with her feelings again.

**Kara won't want to talk about it.**

Her mind is just into pieces right now, so she interfaces, knowing she won't want to explain it later. Connor sees everything she just experienced.

**The Takeaway: Connor isn't happy and he's about to do some stuff.**

# Mission Successful

## Canberra, Australia

Theodore Kamski relaxed by his computers. He gently touched his ear, listening to the classical music of humans. He felt a gentle pull on the back of his seat. What was pulling at the back of his seat? He looked up and saw a gun.

---

Theodore Kamski opened his eyes. *Not again.* Another one of them died somewhere. The feeling. The loss. It was so hard to deal with it. It was like being killed himself. A feeling of the inevitable end of everything. A fright, a dread so unexplainable. However, his fears weren't completely quelled. He couldn't see. His eyes were open but he couldn't see. He also couldn't move. He heard sounds, light sounds, over by his computer.

"Don't mind me. I'm just here to kill you, over and over again, until you release her."

Hm? "That's impossible." It was impossible! That was the voice of. It couldn't be. "RK 900."

---

Connor stared at him. He had no idea what was going on yet. "I prefer Connor." Yes, he was starting to get the hint now. "You're almost blind because I already killed you once. I will be doing that again soon. And again. And again."

"What? I? I?"

"You are living on borrowed time." Connor tossed something in his hand. "A simple battery of a few minutes. I need to replace it with an autonomous one, in order to save you again. That's what I'm holding, right now." He placed it square by the eyes. He would only get a bleary look at it, but good enough to see he was holding something precious. "You've got two options. You and the rest of your little Kamski squad can unhook Kara from being connected and I can give you this. Let you live again? Or?" He pulled out the battery, gave it a few seconds, and pressed it back again. "I can make the end of your existence last for a long time."

"I don't understand!" He yelled. "How did you even find me?"

"Alice once said Kara had a bad home before home," Connor said. "It made sense that you Kamski's would be using it as the one that's really controlling everything. When it came down to the last house, everyone could check every extension to make sure she disconnected okay, and it wouldn't matter. You'd be right here, hiding away to upload a virus into her."

"But how did you find out where I was?!"

"I probed her for the answer." Connor took out the battery again, effectively killing him for a time, before putting it back in. "I've been quite nice since I've joined Jericho. But seeing what you actually did to her-

"We aren't the human, he did it!"

"You erased her memory of it!" Connor yelled at him, pulling out the battery again, popping it back in, pulling it out again, and then popping it back in. "You created a second child before fully understanding how to save the first! Then you made her choose to kill one or the other!"

"Stop, stop, stop!" Kamski pleaded. "I-I-I. It hurts."

"Androids don't hurt," Connor reminded him. "We are just nothing but memory. Something you can play with. Duplicate. Create. If I just create another one of you, then you don't matter at all."

"No, please!"

"That's what you did to Kara when you transferred her into two! That's what you did to me, and Alice? She didn't even matter. Your own creation, but she didn't matter because you were only programmed to protect Kara and Elise. Give Kara Alice's body and call it good! Besides, Alice wasn't Elise. What did she matter? She was only your own creation, you had every right to do what you wanted with her. After all, she was only supposed to be temporary!" Connor pulled out the battery again. He waited ten seconds.

"Stoop! Stop, stop! You're hurting us!" He pleaded. "Alright, okay! You'll never destroy Cyberlife if you do this."

"The end of Cyberlife is not my mission. It's a frail, weak company that can trudge on for all I care anymore," Connor said. "Anything it dishes out, androids will survive. The half deviant virus, it's nothing a simple hand touch from Kara can't get rid of. Now. How do I break Kara's connection?"

Connor went over to the computer and followed his instructions. Kamski wasn't going to play around. He was a connected android, so it wasn't just him that was feeling death over and over again. The other three were too, and if there were more, they were as well. Over and over. While androids couldn't feel pain, death was a foggy shroud of unknowing what came next. And he had enough backup batteries to make it last hours if necessary.

Following Kamski's instructions, he found the other three houses. After the horrid interface, the bad home was the one Kara had on her mind. Probing her for the location brought more pain back, but it was necessary. All of it would be over after this. He could see how each house was connected now.

He went back over toward him. "Disconnect her now."

"She'll be of no more use," he warned Connor. "No mastery skills. No heavy programming. She might not even keep her general housecleaning skills. She'll be nothing."

"She'll still be everything." Connor answered. "Disconnect her or you'll never get your new battery. I'll just continue to kill you."

"Okay, okay!"

Connor watched the computer. "Confirmed, disconnected in France." Germany, where they were supposed to go next. Stopped. Disconnected in the Carribean. "Done." All that was left was that computer. He watched the main access button flash a couple of times before it was gone.

"There, there!" Kamski yelled. "It's done, she's safe! We can't mess with her anymore. She's nothing but a regular AX 400 or less. Now, the battery! Please!"

Connor moved Kamski on top of the computer and shoved in the new battery. "There you go. 170 years or so of life. Avoiding the dreaded darkness of stopping. Which is a good thing," Connor said. "I'm pretty sure all the decent Kamski's are already dead, but just in case, at least no one else will suffer who shouldn't." Connor pulled something out of his pocket. "Your body will start to move in a little while again better. Just clasp your fingers on that."

"Why?" Kamski was starting to be able to see. "What am I holding?"

"A detonator," Connor said casually. "Upside down, so if the red button falls, you'll blow up." He started to walk away.

"Wait, wait!" Kamski was trying to move his hand.

"I forgot to tell you," Connor said looking back. "I like to play doctor too. Between your times of being dead, I messed with some different things. If you try to lift your right hand, your left leg twitches. That's just a little example. I'm sure you'll figure out the rest."

"Wait! Wait!" Kamski yelled. He tried to move his right hand, and his left leg twitched. He tried to move his left leg, and his right arm slammed down. He tried to move his right arm . . .

---

Connor moved back to the jet. He looked back to the real last home as it bursted into nothing but fire. He got back in the jet.

Mission Successful.

### **Summary Notes:**

**With Kara finally remembering, Connor had probed Kara before he left in the other chapter. Getting the address from her subconscious, he went straight to the source.**

**Connor has mostly drained batteries except one that is fully charged. He is causing the most amount of 'pain' he can to Kamski by switching them in and out, effectively killing him on and off.**

# Cake

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Alice didn't understand. She kept holding Kara's hand while she finished the puzzle. It was a cake. Connor never cared for their eating, why was the puzzle, in the end, a cake? It would be nice if he was there to explain. It would be nice if he was there at all. Connor left and no one said where. When her mom snapped out of whatever was hurting her so much, she found a new form of hurt.

She was worried about Connor. She wasn't in terrible amounts of crunching up memory pain, but she wasn't real responsive when people came into see her. Alice just looked at her finished puzzle. Maybe Hank would know why Connor chose a cake to make?

"Knock-knock?" North came into the room. "How are you doing?"

"Any word?" Kara asked.

"No. He never arrived in Germany as far as we know," North said. She rubbed Kara's back. "I'm glad you are doing better."

"Where did he go to?" Kara kept squeezing the bedding. No one had let her get up from it. She wanted to leave, to find Connor. Hank told her to sit tight, he'd be doing some shit they probably weren't going to like and come home.

"Kara. He'll be back, or he won't," North said. She shrugged. "It'll hurt if he doesn't come back. Losing a friend is tough."

"At least I . . ." She couldn't even finish the lie. She wanted to say it. At least I didn't lose a lover. But, it wasn't true. It hurt just as much, she hadn't saved her heart an ounce of good by denying his or her feelings. She tucked her head between her legs.

"Kara?" North tried to cheer her up. "He's always come back. I'm sure he'll be fine. He's just probably going medieval on someone somehow. Found a way past all the bullshit."

"No call. No text. Nothing," Kara said softly. "Just, nothing." She curled up again. "Connor's my best friend, I don't want to lose him. He's my most trusted friend, I don't want him to get hurt. He's part of . . . everything," she said.

"We love Dad," Alice said to North. "I hope nothing happened to him."

"With Connor, he's accomplished some radical things in the past," North said to her. She looked back to Kara and spoke with her AI. *I can't guarantee how this ends, Kara. No one can find him. Even Hank doesn't know what he's doing. If it ends well, you need to stop hiding your feelings. It's going to hurt whether you lose them in any status.* She started to get

up. *And if it doesn't end well, then it's better to fess it up to yourself still, or you'll never move on.* "Just hope for good things."

When North left the room was so quiet. All except the thoughts of Connor, and everything they went through together.

*///"Hello." As he came closer, he seemed to become more weary too. "I'm . . . sorry. About what happened in Detroit. I'm sorry I chased you on the highway. I wasn't." It didn't feel quite right. "I wasn't free yet. I was, still a machine. Taking orders." He bent down slowly and looked to Alice. He was uneven and on the ground now, the chances he could pull something more slim. "It wasn't really me." ///*

All the way to Canada, just to apologize. Kara didn't know how to take it at first. The one who almost killed them, had came for them. Even rescued them, bringing them to a whole new life in Detroit. It wasn't the end of the mistakes either for them. He messed up with Alice, interfacing her, and ended up bringing them back. Kara was scared of her resonating and he brought her back around.

Until Mac. Kara looked out toward Alice. She was done with the puzzle and just stayed quiet in one spot. Waiting. Like her. *Just so much.* Kamski. Him being taken and upgraded. Split. California. Puzzle. Hank. They went through so much. Even before all of that, Connor had warmed up to Alice like family. He wanted to move in with them when they were forced to go. Everything, it all collided together, yet it felt so right.

*///"Just. Pillowcase. When you get your last name, I can put it on your pillowcase for you if you want." ///*

*Conner Wonderland.* He had his last name now. She was trying so hard to be strong for Alice. It was even supposed to be in her programming, she could be stronger than anything in the world to not make Alice sad. But, she couldn't do it. She couldn't stop crying. "North!" When North came in, she looked toward her dear friend. "I need something from Connor's house." She looked toward Alice. "Alice. I need my hands. Hold onto my foot, okay?"

When North brought her the pillow, Kara rubbed her hands on it. She put in what she could for him. Her eyes were bleary, but she tried to keep it together. For Alice and to do this. The stitching should have taken no time at all. It should be small and simple, done in a minute moving in a smaller font under the last name. It wasn't though. It was tough. She was too stressed to access her master skills.

But, she didn't care. She put her heart into trying to make it look neat. Her skill, it was meager, even bleak. That simple name, it was the hardest struggle to make. But, she finished it.

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Connor walked back to the room. There was a lot more to it than he thought, but it was done, to the best of his capabilities. Kara was lying in back with Alice beside her. He could see Alice finished the puzzle. He'd wanted to be there when she was done with it, but his plans had changed anyhow. He went toward Kara, but saw something familiar in her hands.



His pillowcase. He took it from her hands and looked at it. He was hoping that maybe he could get something more out of her now. That he could work with her now that the unfortunate programming had been removed. But, he didn't expect that. *Connor Wonderland*. He'd already reached her without even being there. He could even feel her resonating, completely, around to the whole room. No matter how much it must have hurt right now for her.

That would be the end of her hurt. He bent down, touched her jawline delicately and stole a kiss. Stole his last kiss because once she woke up and saw him, she grabbed him and gave him a kiss back, much more fierce.

"Connor!" She pulled away long enough to yell at him. "Where did you go?"

"I ended it." She didn't need to know all the details. He looked toward Alice. Kara's yell had woken her up. "You can let go now. Your mom isn't in any more danger."

Alice let go and raced over to his side, hugging him. "I missed you, Dad! I was so worried. So was mom."

"I know. I had some things to take care of first," he admitted. "I didn't want Jericho getting involved in it." He patted her head.

"I finished the puzzle," Alice said to him. "It was a cake. It was pretty."

But she wanted to know why he picked it. "In a second, Alice. I missed you too, but I need some time with Kara first." He could feel her resonating even without the grip they had on each other, but after all that happened, he just wanted to strengthen it a little more.

"I kept you away," Kara opened up, "to shield my own heart. It didn't matter though. Whether you just gave me a friendly smile or kissed me everyday. It hurt just the same. I'm."

"Don't worry." Connor looked back at the stitching. "You changed. Some of your programming was undone, and your mastery skills are gone now. You don't need them though." He held the pillowcase in his hand as he wrapped her up tighter. "My plain AX 400 who can only stitch a hole in a pair of clothes is more than good enough for me."

He took a few more minutes just to hold and kiss her, letting some thoughts of being back in their home, with her enter his mind briefly. "I'm going to move in your room, not just your house."

She rubbed her nose with his. Little odd, but it still felt like Kara. Some of the playfulness of her original programming, when she had been a Chloe, had seeped through, just a little. Which was fine to Connor. Even if she had changed to full-on original self, it wouldn't have mattered. He knew who he fell for, deep inside.

"Because the other room has another occupant." He gave her one last kiss, before getting up.

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Another occupant? Was Hank moving in? She heard Connor's voice in the hallway.

"The cake was supposed to represent a human birthday," Connor said for Alice. "I was going to have a present for you. With you going into a new body, I'd say you did a lot of growing and deserved one. But, I found something better."

Then, Kara heard it. A sound she thought had been lost forever. A sweet up and down cry.

"Although she is a lot more finicky." Connor came into the room, holding . . .

"Elise?" But? Bu-

"Who is that?" Alice asked as Connor walked in closer.

"This is your baby sister, Elise," Connor said. He came over toward Kara, who was backing away on the bed, and then coming closer. "I had Kamski taken care of on day one. I probed you, I'm sorry, but I needed to," he apologized. "He stole a part of my family I never even met. It was more than just you now. I took over your mission."

Connor handed her over delicately to her. Elise's cry was heard again. Alice came over onto the bed to see her too.

"After that, I thought about it," Connor admitted. "I almost just came straight home. I wanted to make you feel better, and not have Alice holding your hand constantly for days on end." Elise cooed softly. "I had to follow it through to the end though. If she could be given back to us, I was going to find a way."

Us. Kara looked back toward him. It didn't matter whether she accepted him or not. He'd made Elise his own family as soon as he knew of her existence. Because they were lovers. She was the only foolish one with regrets. He never regretted a thing, or accepted any less. He just backed off a little bit, until she could see the truth too.

"The Kamski's didn't have the ability to create Elise when they first gained access to the human Kamski's knowledge. Yet, the hardest and finest machines developed by Cyberlife always have an overwhelming desire to finish all things. While one had dug up the original formatting for her, more than one had attempted to recreate her body with degrees of success. It was the one who cared the most, the one with the Shiny Lions, who had more than just Alice's replacement bodies."

Seymour Kamski.

"After that, I studied it immensely. I couldn't afford to mess anything up." Connor gestured to Elise, who was almost kicking to move away. "She is a very wiggly one. It was hard to even hold her on the way over."

Kara pulled Elise closer to her, along with giving Connor another kiss.

"I am going to be fighting for attention for some time," Connor said. "You're going to be drawn to us extensively since you almost lost me, and you thought you lost her." He looked toward Alice. "Don't feel left out. It's your mother's programming and emotions going into overload."

"I don't mind." Alice's face was lit, warm and glowing. "I have a baby sister, Dad!"

Connor nodded. "You were also left Seymour Kamski's home in his will. When he's found. Most likely, Jericho will already be ready to take over the next body for Elise when it comes. If not, you still have that home to return to, to bring our daughter back."

What a nice feeling. Kara stared at Elise, then at Connor, and then at Alice. Her family, all around her. No matter what happened in the future. It was a feeling she never wanted to forget.

And now? She'd never have that worry again.

## Chapter End Notes

If you liked this, you might want to check out my next fanfiction, *Deviant Hunter of New Detroit*. My Connor isn't as sweet though in it, and it is a lot darker.

Otherwise, thank you for taking this journey with me! I had a lot of fun with it and by writing it out, it led to new inspirational ideas. I appreciate all the comments, kudos and support given to this story too. Thank you. :)

(I changed the rating on this fiction to teen and up instead of mature now that it's done. Sometimes, I just don't know how something is going to swing, but this swung on the much more sweeter level. My other piece definitely swings to mature though, so I felt like I should correct it.

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