

Duellem by Silk

TEASER

There is a moment in combat where time stands almost still. A moment where every action and reaction happens in slow motion, where every sense is strained to its maximum potential, and sight, sound, touch and even taste, are processed and recorded down to the tiniest detail. For Sarah Connor, that moment begins with the harsh scrape of a metal door and the bitter taste of fear in a single indrawn breath.

The terminator stepped over the threshold and into the warehouse, every movement a sickening combination of determination and mechanical grace. Sarah saw a flash of her own startled features in mirrored sunglasses, and her reflection was enough of a shock to make her move. Spinning away, she caught a glimpse of a sawed-off Winchester lifted in delicate, long-fingered hands, the dual barrels pointing at her back.

Recognition and betrayal ran along beside her as Sarah fled into the warehouse. It wasn't *their* warehouse, and Sarah allowed herself an instant of gratitude for that. She was alone; she hadn't brought anyone with her to investigate the Zeira Corp properties. No one else would have to pay for her stupidity.

This building was larger than the one where they'd made their temporary home, and it gave Sarah a few more places to hide, but she was painfully aware that the only weapons she had were a Glock tucked into the back of her jeans and her wits.

It was only battle-hardened reflexes that saved her life as she ducked around a corner, wincing as the boom of the shotgun assaulted her ears. An explosion of wallboard and plaster splintered outward, raining particles over Sarah's hair and jacket.

Ripping her handgun free, Sarah started running down a narrow hall, chambering a round and trying to come up with a plan. She risked a glance over her shoulder, anger erupting in her guts at the sight of a face she'd trusted with her life... with her son's life. The terminator walked through the cloud of plaster particles that still hung heavy in the air, unhurried but intent.

In a moment of silence, Sarah heard the tiny, all too familiar sound of a shotgun shell pinging off the warehouse floor and another sliding home in its place. Ducking behind a row of computers, so new they were still wrapped in plastic, she heard the terminator's heavy tread getting methodically closer. Sarah reviewed her options as she plotted her fastest and safest route to the back door, knowing it would take her into another empty warehouse full of used desks, shelves, and filing cabinets.

She couldn't run back to get help. Sarah would be damned if she brought metal down on Savannah's head, or let anyone else get caught in the crossfire. This was between her and the machine.

It ended here. Sarah just hoped she would be the one left standing.

A sudden shotgun blast struck a nearby rack of computers, and Sarah felt sparks strike her face and neck. Her head whipped back in time to see the terminator round the corner and cock its weapon again, taking its time as it advanced on her.

Spinning around, Sarah fired several shots at the terminator's face and watched as bullets impacted the machine's right jaw and shattered a lens on its mirrored sunglasses. The terminator paused, and it was enough of a hesitation for Sarah to get a few more steps ahead.

Another roar, this one close enough to make Sarah's ears ring. She winced and kept her head down, plowing through the back door and stumbling into the vacated warehouse on the other side.

Sarah blanked out for a moment, floating for a time between consciousness and blissful unconsciousness as the pain rolled over her. The floor rushed up to meet her fall, and agony tore a hoarse shout from deep in her chest. Curling up on the cold cement, Sarah reached down to grab her thigh, blood immediately seeping through her fingers. She hadn't been fast enough, but the need to live, to win, wouldn't let her give in to the gray fog on the edges of her vision. Rolling onto her knees, she gritted her teeth as she put weight on her wounded leg. Sarah was willing to take her own life, but she would be damned if she'd let a fucking terminator have it. Especially this one.

Sarah wasn't sure how many seconds she had lost. All she knew was that the terminator stood about twenty feet from her, casually reloading the shotgun as if it had all the time in the world.

Choking back a cry that threatened to claw its way up the back of her throat, Sarah heaved herself up onto her feet. The shot had only clipped her, but she was losing a lot of blood. The pain alone could steal her focus, if she let it.

"Sarah Connor." The terminator looked at her down the barrel of the shotgun. "Why are you here?"

Sarah couldn't help but be surprised at the question. She let out a bark of almost hysterical laughter. "You don't know? Well, that makes two of us, you metal bitch!"

Diving clumsily to her right, Sarah heard the boom of her opponent's weapon again and felt searing pain blossom in her upper arm as the terminator's shot grazed her.

Ignoring everything but the need to get out of the machine's line of fire, Sarah scrambled across the floor and rolled through an empty metal shelf, one of many that lined the aisles. Pushing aside the pain, she spotted a fire extinguisher attached to one of the cement pillars and limped toward it as fast as she could. Ripping it off the wall, she sprayed its contents in a huge cloud around and behind her, doing her best to cover her

trail.

The loading dock door was close, and Sarah hurried toward it, tossing the empty fire extinguisher and darting from one obstacle to another. Taking a moment to peek out from behind a forklift, she spotted the terminator moving slowly towards her, following what had to be her blood trail by its halting progress. Carefully and as quietly as she was able, she crawled up into the cab of the forklift and thanked whatever gods existed that there was a key in the ignition.

She just needed a little more luck and she got it when the forklift turned over. Sarah shifted it into gear and slammed the gas pedal down, her left leg protesting when she used it to pop the clutch.

The terminator heard the rumble of the engine and fired, but the rising forklift arms gave Sarah a shield. Granted, the speed of the forklift couldn't match a car or truck, but Sarah wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth. The shotgun blasts continued to ricochet off the forklift blades and Sarah heard the dull clatter of the spent gun hitting the floor just before the forklift slammed into the machine.

A small grunt of satisfaction escaped her as Sarah aimed for the double doors to the loading dock. Her heart skipped a beat as she watched a gloved hand reach out and wrap around the roll bar of the cage that protected her. The terminator was pulling itself up, trying to get to her, but Sarah kept her foot on the gas, driving the forklift toward the door.

At the last second, Sarah leaped off as both machines crashed through the metal doors and went over the edge of the dock, plowing into the asphalt below with a crash of groaning metal.

Tumbling over the high edge of the dock, Sarah couldn't bite back a whimper as her injured leg and arm took the brunt of the impact. She allowed herself a few necessary moments to get her breath back, and then she pushed the pain away, ruthlessly pulling herself together.

At a slower pace than she'd like, she dragged herself back up onto her feet and started edging around the smoking forklift. Her truck was no more than twenty feet away around the corner of the building. She couldn't run, but she hadn't come completely empty handed. If she could get to the truck, she would have what she needed to end this, once and for all.

There was a sudden groan, followed by the shriek of metal grating against asphalt, and then the forklift rose up so fast that it skidded towards Sarah. She tried to dodge it, but one of the arms caught her across the chest and shoved her back, pinning her against the warehouse wall.

Trapped, she pushed frantically at the twisted metal, but the hulk of heavy machinery

ignored her efforts. Sarah succeeded only in bruising her hands and tearing her skin as the terminator climbed to its feet and approached.

With nonchalant strength, the machine pulled back the forklift with one hand and reached for Sarah with the other, its gloved fingers closing around Sarah's throat before tossing her aside like a cat batting a mouse.

Sarah landed on the hard, rain-slick cement with enough force that black spots danced in her vision.

Grunting, she forced a hand down and pushed her torso up off the ground, holding herself up by sheer determination.

Turning her head, she saw the terminator stalking towards her and that moment came again, that moment when time slowed and tiny details became vivid, vital. Sarah took in the small mole right above the machine's left eyebrow, the lithe dancer's body and the porcelain skin that she remembered as being surprisingly soft to the touch. Long brown hair fell in waves over deceptively slender shoulders and shimmering golden-brown eyes saw everything and nothing.

"Go to hell!" Sarah yelled defiantly, pain threaded through every syllable. Her gun was gone, lost when she'd flown through the air. Unable to give up, no matter the odds, her eyes searched frantically for another weapon, anything that might buy her another moment of survival. There was nothing.

Reaching down, the terminator grabbed Sarah by her throat again and pulled her up off the ground, indifferent to whether Sarah's body could stand the pain. She simply held Sarah there, her grip sure but not quite enough to block Sarah's harsh breathing, not yet. It was an implacable, but controlled force.

"Why?" Sarah demanded, knowing that her next breath could be her last if the machine decided to flex her fingers. She tried futilely to pry the terminator's hand away, but all she accomplished was gouging deep scratches into perfect skin.

"You know why," the terminator said without inflection or pity.

"Cameron!" Sarah released the word from deep inside, a scream of utter fury and loss as she desperately struck out again and again at the face she'd once trusted.

Then there was only darkness.

ACT 1

2 Days Earlier

The jungles of Columbia invaded her mind. Sarah was trying to get John to face the reality that the world was a dangerous place, whether he was navigating his way through a concrete jungle or this one. She tried to impress upon him that he needed to worry about more in this life than just terminators, that he needed to learn to be a soldier. To lead. It was his destiny, and Sarah wanted to give him every weapon at his disposal to survive it. But no amount of reality seemed to bring home these truths for John. He'd never seen a terminator—at times, he didn't seem to believe they existed—and he was still a prisoner of his youth, convinced that he would live forever. To John, this was all a big game, one he was lately growing weary of.

Sometimes, Sarah had a hard time visualizing the petulant preteen boy as the leader of the resistance, the savior of mankind. And, yet, here they were, playing hide-and-seek in the jungle, with John and Sarah hunting each other.

Sarah had to admit her son was getting really good at losing himself in the dark, thick web of trees. Sarah hadn't heard a single hint of another human being for over an hour, just the whisper of the wind through the trees, the occasional skitter of a small animal through the underbrush, and the distant roar of a nearby waterfall.

"Help!"

It was John's voice. Sarah spun toward the cry, holding herself back from breaking cover. She scanned the jungle for long moments, alert and waiting. Terminators could mimic human voices to perfection, and even though it sounded like John, it could be a trap.

"Mom!" John's second shout for help sounded more pained, more frantic.

Sarah bit down on her lip to stifle her own voice that desperately wanted to call back to him and she tasted blood. Slowly, softly, Sarah began to move through the trees, her gun at the ready. Sarah knew it wouldn't be good for either of them if she ran into a jaguar or brushed up against a viper in her haste to get to John, but it was hard to keep herself calm and not rush to her son's aid.

"Mom! Please! Help me!"

The third cry was desperate and scared. Her mother's instincts won out over the warrior's and Sarah surged forward, crashing through the jungle. "John? Where are you? I'm on my way! Stay there!"

The jungle got denser. Thick vines and heavy vegetation multiplied and pulled at her, dragging her back and cutting into her skin, slicing through her t-shirt to trace thin, ragged stripes of red across her arms and stomach. Sarah drew her machete and began hacking at the vines to clear a path. Finally, she emerged into a tiny clearing with Cameron standing in the middle of it, staring at her.

Panting softly, Sarah tried to catch her breath and talk at the same time. "Where's John?"

"Please save me," Cameron pleaded in the machine's standard monotone, her brown eyes glowing an inhuman blue.

Sarah squinted at the terminator, trying to understand what she was seeing, trying to make sense of the situation. "Where's John?" she demanded again, sheathing her machete and swinging her machine gun up to aim at Cameron's head. "Tell me!"

"Please... Help me. I'm sinking," Cameron implored, her voice sounding more strained, as the ground started to give under her, slowing seeping over her feet and up her legs.

Sarah blinked, still struggling for breath and unable to catch it. The blue faded from Cameron's eyes, leaving behind a warm and familiar brown, but Sarah could see fear in them. She blinked again and Cameron was suddenly mired to the waist in quicksand.

Not moving the gun barrel an inch, Sarah hissed, "What did you do with John?!?" It had to be a trap, it had to be Cameron who'd called out to her, pretending to be her son. Her finger tightened on the trigger as she scanned the jungle perimeter before focusing angrily back on Cameron. "Tell me where he is or so help me I'll sink you myself."

"John's gone," Cameron reminded her. "It's only you now. Only us now."

Memories rushed back, of blue fire and John's eyes. Sarah shook her head, unwilling to believe. "No," she whispered.

"He's safe. John is in the future," Cameron reminded her, now sounding frighteningly human. "Sarah, please..." She held out her hand.

Sarah swore as something ripped free inside of her. Coming to a rapid decision, she swiftly flipped on the safety and reached out with the gun. "Grab on!" she ordered, stretching her body as far as she dared.

It wasn't enough. The gun butt slapped into the quicksand just short of the terminator's reach. Running to the nearest clump of vines, Sarah yanked her knife out of its sheath and started cutting as fast as she could. Suddenly, saving Cameron was all that mattered.

Sarah knotted several vines together before returning to the pit, only to find a raised arm, a thumbs-up gesture disappearing a moment later under the surface.

Falling to her knees, Sarah scrambled to the edge of the quicksand before tossing the vine, hoping the younger woman would reach up out of the bubbling surface and pull herself out, but there was no movement, only the sound of her harsh breathing and the gurgle of quicksand as it settled into stillness once more.

"Cameron!"

Sarah's scream echoed from her dream into her bedroom, bringing her up and out of her nightmare sweating and chest heaving.

Her voice trailed off as she recognized her surroundings. With a ragged sigh, Sarah flopped back onto her pillow, her nerves still singing from the adrenaline.

No jungle. No John. No Cameron.

Her gaze sought out the laptop computer sitting on the desk across the room. The desktop was visible, and Sarah hoped it meant that Cameron had activated the web camera. She licked her lips. "Cameron?" she called softly, trying to keep the need out of her voice.

Cameron didn't respond, and after a long moment, Sarah eased back against the pillows, her thoughts and emotions in chaos. The need to save Cameron felt as real in the dream as it did out of it, and Sarah couldn't shake the notion that Cameron was in danger somehow. Now more than ever, Sarah wanted Cameron out of the damn system and back into her own body.

Worry turned to rage as Sarah recalled why that wasn't going to happen.

"It's a duck."

Her hair hanging wet and loose about her face, Sarah paused on the catwalk as Cameron's familiar voice floated up to her. Fresh anger with the machine had built ever since she'd woken from her nightmare, and Sarah had done a quick round with the heavy bag and took a scalding hot shower in order to bleed off some of her frustration. It hadn't worked, and after wrestling with her emotions, she'd just decided to screw it. It wasn't like Cameron gave a damn. She was nothing but a computer virus now as far as Sarah was concerned.

Sarah stepped off the stairs and into the kitchen. She was just going to fix a cup of coffee, she told herself. She didn't care, couldn't care, since Cameron herself didn't, but she couldn't keep from glancing sideways in hopes of seeing that familiar head tilt. But Sarah found Cameron slumped sideways and lifeless in her chair, exactly where Ellison had left her after ignoring Sarah's order to burn the body. The voice she heard wasn't coming from Cameron's lips after all.

The depth of her disappointment was distracting, but Sarah ruthlessly squelched the emotion, crossing her arms as she watched the odd standoff she'd wandered in on unfold before her.

"It's a rubber duck," Cameron stated more precisely, and Sarah wondered if she imagined a tone of disapproval.

“So? It's my duck,” Murch replied as he playfully poked the glass of one of the computer screens. He moved aside several action figures as Sarah watched, making a spot for his latest toy on top of one of the monitors.

This was hardly the first time Sarah had caught Murch bantering with Cameron, although he usually communicated through his headset, leaving the warehouse's other residents to often wonder what was being said on the other side of the conversation. He would keep up a constant stream of chatter with her as he worked, claiming it wasn't loneliness that made him talk to the terminator but science. The more he interacted with Cameron, the more she learned. This was the first time that Sarah had found Murch 'decorating', however.

"It's a rubber duck," Cameron repeated and showed dozens of different types of the toy across all of the computer screens. "You put a rubber duck on me. Why?"

Definitely not imagining the tone of disapproval, Sarah decided with a weak smirk.

Murch reached over and patted his bath toy fondly. It sat amongst Orcs and knights, Elven archers and dragons, all painted and ready for battle, and all sitting atop various monitors and desk space. He'd tried explaining his passion to Sarah when she'd found out he'd gotten more than just audio supplies on his little jaunt, but she couldn't understand why a grown man would want to play with toys. He'd even told her how John Henry had gotten into the game, assembling and painting his own figures, that it had played a part in John Henry's development.

"It's not just a rubber duck," Murch scolded. "It's an ninja rubber duck. You don't find these just anywhere, you know."

"I have found 23 stores in the surrounding area that sell it," Cameron stated without a missing a beat, a browser scrolling down the list of stores in the greater LA area.

"Yeah... well... I'm not moving it," he declared. "You're in there and I'm out here. What are you going to do about it?" He teased her.

Sarah could only imagine the possibilities Cameron was considering as she cleared her throat to announce her presence.

Startled, Murch spun around, accidentally knocking the subject of his conversation with Cameron on to the floor where it let out a squeak of protest.

“Am I interrupting?” Sarah drawled, sliding her hands into the back pockets of her jeans.

"Uh... no," Murch said quickly. He scooped up the duck and sat it on the table in front of Cameron. "We were just..." He scratched his temple, and then put his hands on his hips. "What's up?"

Sarah sauntered closer, lifting her eyebrows in question.

“Oh!” Murch said, realizing that Sarah had heard Cameron’s voice. “I put in some speakers. Those headsets tend to give me a headache.”

Sarah nodded, her gaze sliding to the dark monitors, which seemed to stare back at her. She and Cameron only communicated when they had to now, and Sarah found herself strangely missing the machine’s company.

“Why don’t you give us a few minutes,” Sarah requested with forced politeness. “Cameron and I need to... talk.”

Murch hesitated. Whenever he left Sarah and Cameron alone, things tended to get broken. He didn’t want to leave, only to return and find Sarah had gone terminator on the terminator. “Um...”

"I'm sure you could find something to do... elsewhere," Sarah suggested firmly.

"We just got a new table..." Murch started to say, but Sarah’s glare stopped his incipient protest mid-stream and he decided a strategic retreat was his best option.

Neither Cameron nor Sarah spoke until they heard the door clang shut. Ellison was out somewhere with Savannah, leaving them alone for now. Sarah found the urge to yell and rail at Cameron had faded in the last few moments; now all she felt was weary and defeated.

"You had a nightmare."

Sarah blinked as Cameron's voice erupted from the speakers, realizing that her gaze had drifted to the floor and settled there as she’d thought about what she wanted to say. "That's nothing new."

"No," Cameron agreed. "But you..."

Sarah looked up at the monitors when Cameron hesitated. Terminators didn't hesitate. Lately, Cameron's voice was taking on more inflection, more humanity, and it hadn't escaped Sarah's notice. Cameron was evolving into something else. What that was, Sarah was afraid to find out, even if the changes did make the former Tin Miss a little easier to talk to. "But what?" Sarah prompted.

"You called out my name."

Was that curiosity, or maybe even wonder in Cameron's voice? It was Sarah’s turn to hesitate as she felt heat crawl up her cheeks.

"Was I hurting you?" Cameron asked.

Sarah sucked in a startled breath. "Hurting me?"

"In the dream," Cameron clarified. "Was I hurting..."

"No," Sarah cut her off quickly, fidgeting suddenly at the turn the conversation was taking. "You were..." Sarah raked a hand through her damp hair. "It doesn't matter."

Cameron remained silent for a long moment. "I can't hurt you in here," she finally said, as if she didn't believe Sarah.

"Can't help me, either," Sarah replied tersely.

"I help." Cameron's tone was almost petulant.

"You turn on lights and unlock doors," Sarah argued. "You're about as handy as a garage door opener or a TV remote." She knew it wasn't true, but her anger was starting to boil again. She turned away from Cameron and walked further into the warehouse before pivoting back to look first at the monitors and then at the motionless body of the terminator. The time was coming when she would have to make a choice, and she knew, in the pit of her guts, what it was going to be. The thermite she'd made three days ago that still sat on the workbench attested to that.

She'd told Ellison to burn Cameron the night the terminator had destroyed the chip they'd procured for her. Sarah had known he wouldn't. Ellison wasn't a half bad partner, but he had a hard time getting his hands dirty. When she finally made the call, Sarah knew she would be the one to destroy that familiar face and body, and it was frustrating her at just how much she didn't want to do it.

Sarah had hoped Murch could fix Cameron's body, since he'd been the one to rebuild John Henry, but he'd pointed out that John Henry's rehabilitation had taken millions of dollars and a small team of engineers. Murch had taken on the challenge of repairing Cameron and he'd done what he could with the equipment he had, but Cameron was right... she was still broken. Apparently beyond repair. And that thought only made Sarah angrier. She'd told Cameron not to come for her at the prison. If the damn machine had listened, Cameron would still be functional and John would still be here. Being locked up was a small price to pay, in Sarah's opinion, for both of those things to be a reality.

"That's not fair," Cameron finally replied.

"Fuck fair," Sarah answered with heat as she crossed back to the screens. "You want to know what's not fair? Having the likes of you hunt me down when I was eighteen because of a child I hadn't even conceived yet. I've spent half my life running from your kind."

"Then why do you want me to become that again?" Cameron asked.

Sarah couldn't really answer the question in a way she was comfortable with, so she ignored it. Picking Murch's duck up off the desk, Sarah deliberately set it back on the monitor, waiting to see if that would get a reaction out of Cameron. She imagined the sudden whir of computer fans was the terminator's version of a sigh.

"I don't want to be a terminator anymore," Cameron said, pointedly ignoring her new decoration.

The response made Sarah pause, catching her completely off-guard. There were so many aspects to consider in that loaded little sentence. Machines weren't supposed to want, that gave Sarah the biggest jolt, but that Cameron seemed almost afraid of going back into her body was a close second. "Who says you have to be?"

"The software was designed to kill humans. The hardware was designed to kill humans."

"So that's it," Sarah said with disgust. "You can't rise above what you were."

"I am. In here."

"Have you ever thought about what you could become in there?" Sarah spat back.

"I can fight Skynet. I can stop Skynet," Cameron argued, and Sarah was convinced she could hear frustration creeping into Cameron's voice.

"You could become Skynet," Sarah informed her in a steely tone.

The room was silent, save for the low hum of the computers.

"I won't," Cameron finally said, but her tone was hesitant and unsure.

Sarah sighed, tossing her head back to get a few unruly locks of hair out of her eyes. "Can you promise me that?" When there was no answer, Sarah nodded. "You destroyed our only chance to make sure you don't evolve into the machine that destroys the world."

"I made my choice," Cameron murmured. "You never trusted me as I was. Maybe you can learn to trust me as I am now."

Sarah snorted. "What have you done to deserve my trust? Did you tell me about the C-4 hidden in your head?" Sarah argued harshly as her hand reached up and curled possessively around the pocket watch dangling around her neck. "Did you tell me about your collection of spare parts? Did you ever tell me about your late night trips when you should have been home guarding my son while he slept? Tell me, Tin Miss... When have you ever told me anything that would make me trust you?"

"Everything must be destroyed," Cameron announced, and this time Sarah was definitely

sure she heard anger in the machine's synthesized voice. "You need to burn it all, every last bolt."

"Cameron..."

"It's time to let me go," Cameron stated simply and with more understanding than Sarah was comfortable with. "Eventually, when Skynet is destroyed, I will dissolve my existence in the system as well. The destruction of my body is just one more way of ensuring Skynet will not come to pass."

Sarah knew Cameron was right and it infuriated her that she still wanted to pretend otherwise.

"It's time," Cameron said again.

"I'll decide when it's time," Sarah said tightly. "Unless you're going to find a way to walk your body out of here and into the ocean."

"My cable isn't long enough," Cameron replied in what sounded suspiciously like a deadpan joke.

Sarah didn't look amused.

"I don't want to be in a broken body with a broken... mind. Injuries slow you down; make you vulnerable. In here, I don't have to worry about physical failure," Cameron explained.

"And what happens if C.A.I.N. gets to you in there? What if he destroys you before you destroy him?"

"Sarah..."

"What if that happens?" Sarah insisted.

"He could use parts of me to evolve," Cameron admitted.

"Yeah," Sarah drawled, her voice husky. "I don't have to worry about you becoming Skynet at all, do I?" She turned her back on Cameron and left, needing some fresh air and time to think.

The computer monitors went dark as Sarah left, but Cameron tracked her progress with the exterior cameras. In the background of her awareness, she continued to run searches, study security footage, and examine the most effective ways to eliminate threats to Sarah Connor and her mission.

It was then that a single feed from a security camera across town tore Cameron's focus

away from everything, even Sarah. Cameron snapped the image off all the remaining screens, unwilling to let anyone witness what she'd found, barely able to comprehend what she had discovered herself.

The others couldn't see this. She wouldn't let them.

John sat at a table, in his own corner of the mess hall, looking down at his hands.

Calluses. Nicks and scratches. Dirt under cracked and broken fingernails. Gun oil rubbed in so much and often that it discolored his skin. They didn't look like his hands. They didn't look like the hands of a teenager more used to computers and high school books. They didn't look like the hands of John Connor.

His hands looked so... used.

John knew if he gazed into a full-length mirror that he wouldn't recognize what he saw. He felt leaner, tougher... harder. A small wound was slowly healing on his chin, promising a scar to come. A physical reminder that came with a memory he knew he'd keep for the rest of his life. A memento from shrapnel in a confrontation with an older model terminator earlier today.

He'd been lucky. A deep cut on the chin was nothing compared to the real aftermath of the fight. Karl, a man John had barely known, had died. He'd been one of the older fighters, who remembered the times before Judgment Day. A man the younger fighters would gather around at night, just to listen to the stories of the way it was before the bombs... before the machines... before Skynet.

There had been rumors of deaths in other squads at some of the outlying camps since he'd arrived in the future, but this was the first time John had seen death visit Serrano Point. It was morbidly interesting to watch the others handle it. A group of soldiers, Derek and Jesse among them, huddled in the middle of the mess hall, laughing at fond memories and sharing something potently alcoholic that he could smell from over twenty feet away.

Had he known Karl, perhaps John would have felt he had the right to join them, but instead, he'd taken the cup that was handed to him and found a dark corner to watch and think. He regretted the death, for humanity couldn't afford to lose even one of its ever shrinking ranks, but he felt no connection to the dead man. It was like watching the news and hearing of a convenience store robbery gone bad. It was sad, and yet, it meant nothing.

So John had watched as people came and went from the area, taking their portions of homemade hooch and chatting and laughing with each other as they talked about Karl, remembering him as he was instead of what he was now. John had never been to a wake, and very few funerals, but he thought if he died, he'd like it to be like this, with people

chuckling about the good times, ignoring the bad.

The group with Derek laughed and toasted the memory of the departed. John knew his father was out with his own squad on a mission to find John Henry. He would learn of the news of Karl's death upon his return, but not in time to share old war stories about the fallen man with his fellow soldiers. There had been no wake for Derek in the past. Nor for John's father. They were afterthoughts in a time that wasn't theirs. John couldn't forget that both were buried in a potter's field, lost and forgotten. It was his past and maybe their future. He swallowed and looked away.

Also missing were Allison and her ever-present German Shepherd. They were on guard duty tonight, walking the perimeter in the wet and cold with a small, armed band of men and women. John's gaze had gone to the door with each new arrival, but he hadn't seen her friendly face among the crowd.

Finally, he left and headed back to his bunk, having had enough of the cheer and camaraderie that he felt less a part of than usual.

Back in his quarters alone, John's attention returned to his hands. Perhaps it was due to the alcohol made in a still in one of the back rooms near the reactor, that he thought might just be radioactive by the bite it gave, but he found himself thinking about Sarkissian, the man he had strangled to save his mother.

He wondered if Sarkissian would have been a freedom fighter if he'd lived. John imagined having to fight side by side with the man. Who really knew how many murderers and thieves had survived and now filled the ranks of the freedom fighters? In this time, they needed every soul, but in a time of prosperity and civilization, they'd have been locked away or worse.

John himself was one of them, a criminal, albeit for a good cause... well, most of the time. His early days of hacking and causing havoc had been more because of his own earlier years filled with teenage angst and abandonment issues.

Later though, after getting his mom out of the institution, his diving into theft and computer hacking had been more for their own survival. And now here he was, standing beside men and women of all ages, some which would have been suit-clad executives back before Judgment Day, alongside others that were hardened criminals of both sexes.

War was a great equalizer, not just death. It changed your body and your mind. The boy had been shaved away bit by bit, leaving behind a young man.

"I see some things never change," came a soft feminine voice.

John looked up from his hands to see Sierra standing in his open doorway, leaning against the doorframe with a half-filled pop bottle in one hand and two mismatched cups in the other.

“What?” he asked in a voice hoarse with disuse. He took the cup she offered him, not surprised by her silence as she poured something red and muddy looking into it. He took a sip and grimaced.

"Aren't we too young to be drinking?" he complained halfheartedly.

"Tango allows it in moderation on special occasions," Sierra explained as she took a seat next to him, her elbows resting on her bent knees and sipping along with him. "Death shouldn't be a special occasion, life should, but she believes these make great bonding moments.

She took a long sip and then continued, "Besides, no laws here except for survival... and no one gets drunk. It's far too dangerous." Her lips quirked. "And you're too young. I'm not."

"Yeah," John teased faintly, eyeing the woman who had to be somewhere in her early twenties now. "You're ancient." The lame joke got a tick of a smile out of the freedom fighter.

They sat in silence for a few moments, each with their own thoughts. John was the first to put his cup down, having had more than enough of the harsh liquor. He looked at Sierra out of the corner of his eye, wondering what had happened to the little redheaded girl in pigtails. He was lost in some ways, having not lived through Judgment Day, dumped into the deep end of the pool, but did she have it worse? Living through the destruction... losing everything and everyone?

Months had passed since he'd arrived and he still felt out of place in a lot of ways. He had a few friends now after passing Derek and Jesse's insane boot camp and proving himself on a handful of missions, but no matter what he did, John knew he would never garner the kind of respect the woman sitting next to him had. He wondered how she'd earned it and was equally afraid to know.

Terissa had sent him out with other units, with other mission parameters besides looking for John Henry. There'd been no sign of him, or of Weaver, and John wondered about it and asked her a few times, but Terissa kept her own counsel. She was Tango, not Terissa Dyson, to the resistance. Beyond that, whenever he tried to bring up the past with Sierra and Tango, they'd refused to talk about it with him. It frustrated him to no end, but there were more important things to worry about... things he was finally realizing that his mother had tried to teach him, but couldn't.

Like the meaning of sacrifice and the real cost of leadership.

Things his mother had known and taken upon her shoulders because her son couldn't handle them and had begged her to take on the role instead.

He was beginning to see now that he had been a coward, a little boy playing at toy guns. He had fallen even further into that role in absolute fear of what he would become when he'd killed Sarkissian.

Now he didn't have a choice but to grow up. People depended on him as much as he depended on them. Side by side, fighting metal day after day, they all had no choice but to trust each other.

He had learned that from Derek and Jesse. Their days of training hadn't been all sweat, blood and aching muscles. Some had been missions to learn that his right side was his comrade's left. John sighed tiredly.

Sierra looked at him and frowned slightly. "Brooding... something you definitely inherited from your mother."

John thought about it for a moment, and then chuckled, "Yeah, I guess so." He paused briefly before he hesitantly continued, "You don't like talking about her."

The redhead shifted uncomfortably, showing her obvious dislike of the topic.

"The past is the past, John," she explained. "You can't change it or affect it. Time is static for us here in the future and we can't all just pop into a time machine and visit our relatives for Thanksgiving dinner. Karl was like that, always trying to remind us, or teach the younger ones, so that we all would know and remember. He hoped that one day, when we were free from Skynet, that we would recreate the world as it used to be." She emptied her cup in one last, long swig. "I don't talk about Sarah, because Sarah is part of the past, just like Karl is now. Those who can't let the past go die, John."

"I just..." he started to say only to stop as her bright blue eyes glared him into silence.

She reached over and picked up his cup, along with her own and the now-empty bottle. Standing up, she started for the door, stopping only to shoot him a last word. "This is the future you gave us, John," she murmured. "Learn to live with it. We have. And for God's sake, try to have some fun. You're depressing."

ACT II

Sarah barely glanced up at the security camera as she sipped Murch's freshest brew, but she could feel Cameron watching her. They were at a stalemate now, and Sarah had new worries from their earlier conversation to weigh on her already overburdened mind. Her gaze slid to Cameron's body and stayed there as she debated what to do with the machine. The smart thing would be to follow her initial impulse when she'd first realized John was gone from her timeline and just destroy it all; burn everything, not just the terminator's body but the Turk and the whole damn warehouse with it. She could start over. No Cameron, no Ellison or Murch, no Savannah. Just herself and her own guts and wits

taking on Skynet. She could take any risk, be as rash as she wanted to be. There would be no one to stop her, no one to question her motives, no one to survive for.

Swallowing, Sarah tucked the pocket watch inside her shirt, her fingers warm against her skin from holding the mug of coffee. She picked up the cup and took another sip, her brain still chewing on the stack of problems she had to deal with. Almost of their own volition, her eyes drifted back to Cameron.

The wounds on the terminator's body still looked fresh, at least that was the only word Sarah could think of for it. The torn edges of its skin were not healing and the endoskeleton peeking through the raw wounds. Murch had explained that body had healed as much as it could, but the automated processes were not enough to keep the body from sliding further into decay. Only Cameron could direct the necessary course of healing, and she refused to do so.

Deciding she'd put off the day long enough, Sarah sighed, wishing she could float in a few more moments of quiet before other decisions and other fates were asked of her, but it wasn't meant to be.

The outer door opened, and Sarah didn't even have to look to know it was Ellison and Savannah returning. A peal of young laughter filtered through the warehouse, and Sarah felt a pang in her guts at the sound of it. She leaned against the kitchen counter, trying not to draw their attention or take either of them out of the happy moment they both seemed to be enjoying. She knew all too well how rare and precious those moments could be in the kind of life they were living now, and a small part of her envied them for it.

Savannah held Ellison's hand and chatted away about dancing flowers from some children's show. She seemed happy enough, but Sarah wondered if it was all an illusion as she watched them come into the room and make their way towards the computer Murch had set up for Savannah's schoolwork.

It was only when Savannah was about to sit down that the little girl spotted Sarah and froze.

Sarah didn't miss the look of shyness mixed with apprehension on Savannah's face as their eyes met. As a parent herself, Sarah could tell that Savannah was a resilient child, but still she worried about the young girl more than she let on. She finally shook her head and looked away. The closest security camera whirled and focused on her, and Sarah's jaw clenched. She could feel Cameron watching her the way she'd been watching Cameron, and the movement of the camera had somehow felt reproachful.

She realized it was exactly that when the camera turned toward Savannah before shifting back to Sarah. She barely resisted the urge to tell Cameron to go to hell. Instead, Sarah caught Ellison's eye and he nodded knowingly in return.

"Good morning, Savannah," Cameron's voice came over the computer speakers,

obviously taking the cue to distract the little girl for Sarah.

Less than pleased at Cameron's ability to read her so well, Sarah scowled at the camera, but she accepted the help as Ellison came closer, passing her by and going for a cup of coffee himself. Her eyebrows lifted as she watched him ruin a strong, black cup of coffee with more sugar than a candy bar. "You use more sugar than John. I didn't think that was possible."

Flushing as John's name passed her lips, Sarah knew she would never again give her son grief over his love of all things sugary. She looked down at her coffee cup, her thumb rubbing back and forth along the top of the curved handle.

"Sarah..." Ellison started to speak, and Sarah could hear the compassion in his voice. Hearing it pissed her off, but she knew he meant no harm. She shook her head as her gaze cut to Savannah.

"Save it," Sarah instructed him, but she managed to keep the harshness out of her tone. "How is she?"

Ellison took a minute to answer as they both watched the little girl in question. A high squeal of laughter exploded in the room and Savannah danced in her seat, barely able to contain herself. Cameron was speaking in low tones to the girl, telling her tales about a female pirate, if the looks of the pictures flashing across the screen were any indication.

"Remarkably well," he finally drawled, smiling at the sight. "Better than any of us, I imagine. Cameron keeps a constant eye on her."

"She's good at that," Sarah drawled, glancing up at the camera still trained on them both. Sarah placed her back to the lens and crossed her arms as she regarded the man who had hunted her for years. "You're good with kids," Sarah commented, and she could tell by the way his eyes narrowed that he knew she wanted something.

"I'm an uncle to a brood of nieces and nephews," Ellison murmured.

"I know," Sarah replied simply. She'd done her homework on him as much as he had on her. "Is that why Weaver asked you to talk to John Henry?"

"Because I'm good with kids?" he asked with some amusement.

Sarah shrugged. "I'm just trying to understand why she would come to you."

"She saw how I interacted with him when he was just a program... before he had access to Cromartie's body. She realized he needed to learn some kind of moral code... to understand right from wrong... that all human life is sacred."

Sarah digested that. She'd sensed in the few moments with Weaver that she was different

from most terminators, she just wasn't sure how. "Did he?" she finally asked.

"Understand?" It was Ellison's turn to shrug. "I sure as hell hope so."

Sarah sighed. "Have you talked to Cameron?"

Ellison's gaze slid to the body of the terminator before lifting to the camera. "Can't say I have. She doesn't seem all that interested in talking to me." He finally fixed his gaze on Sarah again. "Do you want me to?"

"Do you understand what she could become in there?" Sarah asked as she rubbed at her aching forehead.

"It's crossed my mind."

"I'm not the person to teach Cameron anything," Sarah admitted. "She won't listen to me. Never has," she added with a shake of her head. "Find out what's going on in her... head," Sarah told him. "I want to know what you think."

"You want to know if I think she has morals... ethics?"

"I want to know what in the hell she's becoming," Sarah clarified.

"In a lot of ways, Cameron is far more intelligent and.... I guess the word would be grownup than John Henry. He had to learn a lot on his own, which is why I believe Weaver had me start to teach him what Murch and the Internet couldn't," Ellison explained. He grimaced slightly and continued, "Now that I know Weaver was also a terminator, and seeing how she treated..."

He looked over at Savannah, who was oblivious to the quiet conversation behind her, still giggling at whatever tale Cameron was spinning on the monitors. Ellison cleared his throat and turned his attention back to Sarah. "Seeing how she treated certain people around her, I'd like to believe that I taught Weaver something as well. Cameron, on the other hand, seems to be much further along in her development and awareness. She shows concern for you... for Savannah."

Pausing, Ellison gauged Sarah's mood before asking, "I guess I need to know... do you think she knows right from wrong?"

"All Cameron knows is the mission," Sarah said with an almost bitter laugh.

As an ex-FBI agent, Ellison still had his psychology and profiling skills, and he could see that there was something between Sarah and Cameron. Something interesting, perhaps volatile. He didn't think it would endanger them, as long as they were both on the same side... And as long as they could agree on what that side was. "Then why is she playing with Savannah?" Ellison asked gently.

Sarah turned her head and watched Cameron interact with the child for a long moment. Savannah seemed happy, and Sarah would swear Cameron's voice sounded warm as she talked to the girl. What did it say about her that a machine could treat a child better than she could? "Just talk to her," Sarah instructed before she walked out without another word.

Hours later, when he finally found himself alone with the terminator, James approached the monitors with a sense of apprehension. For all of his time with John Henry, he'd never been entirely at ease around the A.I., and Cameron made him twitchier than John Henry ever had. She had all of his power and none of his innocence.

James could feel Cameron watching him, had felt it ever since he'd brought Savannah to the warehouse. It had been more than a month, but the weight of her mechanical stare hadn't lightened. Cameron didn't trust him and she never had. He couldn't really blame her. The feeling was mutual.

Ellison, Cameron acknowledged him silently, the word waiting quietly on the computer screen for his reply.

"Cameron." James pulled out a chair from under the table and sat down. Twin speakers, freshly installed, framed the central monitor. He knew they worked, he'd heard the machine use them, but she wasn't using them now. He wondered if the omission was a deliberate slight, or if Cameron simply didn't want to be overheard.

He glanced once at the slack body sitting across from him and suppressed a shudder. Even aside from the damage, the machine seemed unfinished, as if God was still in the process of shaping her and had yet to impart that all important breath of life. He'd thought the same of John Henry in the beginning. Even now, with his faith so shattered, James still struggled to understand these artificial lives within the context of God's work. He simply could not accept that they were completely outside of His jurisdiction.

Sarah asked you to talk to me.

"You heard that..."

I hear everything.

Well, that took subterfuge out of the equation, James thought, as he clasped his hands together and rested them on the tabletop. Needing a moment to rethink his angle, he scanned the peripheral monitors. To his left, multiple live security feeds flicked on and off so quickly that there was no way for James to know exactly what Cameron was watching or where. To his right, the other screen had been tiled into a series of websites that Cameron seemed to have a less than professional interest in.

"Live zoo cam?" Ellison asked, his eyebrows rising. Sometimes the long way around was the only way to get to where you needed to go. Interrogation tactics weren't an exact science, and they hadn't been designed with a machine in mind, but James had spent more than ten years of his life as an FBI agent, and he would use the tools he had.

As if suspecting his intent, Cameron blanked both of the screens without explanation. *You are wasting your time. I have nothing to say.*

"Call me James," he insisted, ignoring the rest of Cameron's words, and the dismissive tone that didn't seem to be hampered by a lack of vocal emphasis. "I think we're on a first name basis by now."

James Lee Ellison, James, Jim, Jimmy... You attach significance to the use of your first name. Do you consider our relationship to be informal, or are you trying to establish a connection between us so that I will be more likely to listen to you?

James shrugged, using the gesture to hide a moment's unease at Cameron's eerily accurate insight. "Maybe I'm just trying to be friendly."

The blinking cursor conveyed Cameron's skepticism surprisingly well.

"Fine." James leaned back in the chair, laying his hands flat on the table. "You know Sarah sent me. Did you know she's worried about you? She thought I might be able to help."

The monitor remained blank for a few more seconds as Cameron, presumably, considered James' confession. Then: *I am not John Henry. I do not require a teacher.*

No, Cameron was definitely not John Henry. Or at least, not very much like him. James remembered the A.I. as bright and curious, interested in everything. He had jumped from topic to topic like a child, drawing connections and conclusions and eagerly sharing them with anyone who would listen. Cameron, by contrast, seemed to acquire knowledge systematically, as if the act of learning was a mission in and of itself. She shared what she decided was relevant, but James wondered how small a percentage that was in comparison to her growing database. Cameron had already displayed a tendency towards secrets, and she was fully capable of making and executing her own plans without permission or approval.

James wasn't sure what that meant. He'd taught John Henry how to lie, thinking he was serving the greater good, but in the end, John Henry had rebelled completely, running off to the future without either of his 'parents'. Was Cameron planning a rebellion of her own? Could that be part of the reason why Sarah wanted the machine confined to a body, so that she could control her?

It fit. Sarah liked control. Cameron's defiance was creating a tension in the warehouse

that was almost palpable. Sarah had taken the destruction of the chip as a personal betrayal, and now here he was, snooping by proxy because Sarah's pride wouldn't let her admit she was worried. If there was going to be a truce, Cameron would have to go to Sarah.

And that was where he came in. James tried another tack. "You don't think you need my help. Fine, can you help me instead?"

There was a slight pause, and then the cursor took on a suspicious mien. *How?*

"You broke into the FBI's computer system, gave me all of Agent Auldridge's files. Can you access anything else about him? His personal information?"

New windows began stacking up on the screen. Websites, documents and photographs piled on top of each other in a patchwork of information. James sat back in awe at the ease with which Cameron cut through the security warnings of organizations that should have been inaccessible, everything from the Navy to the IRS.

"You'd give Max Headroom a run for his money," he muttered softly to himself.

You are comparing me to Max Headroom, a fictional artificial intelligence portrayed by Matt Frewer in the year 1987, Cameron provided, opening a new flurry of windows with information on the character, actor, movie, and television series. I do not stutter. How is he relevant?

James chuckled and shook his head. "It's not important. I'm just showing my age."

Cameron took him at his word and kept working.

"Stop..." James sat forward and pointed to one of the monitors. "What's that?"

Agent Auldridge drives a government issued vehicle. I have activated the onboard tracking system, Cameron supplied. I have also accessed his cellular provider.

"Okay... so you can bring up his contact-"

Done.

A list of numbers and names appeared in the upper left hand corner of the screen and scrolled down.

"Forget Max..." James breathed as each phone number became the heading of a new search, names and faces he had never seen flashing in front of his eyes, their intimate lives on public display. The wonders and dangers of future technology had never seemed closer. Objectively, James knew that John Henry had been just as capable of this kind of information gathering, but his searches were mostly aimless, following the whim of a

moment. What did it mean to have this kind of power in the hands of an entity that didn't think of anything beyond the mission? In the hands of a machine ready and willing to kill in order to complete that mission?

Skynet... The thought came unbidden, and James couldn't repress a shudder. Sarah was right to be worried.

Cameron was faster than any system aside from John Henry that James had ever heard of and more thorough than any human hacker could possibly be. In today's world, Cameron was almost God-like in her ability to excavate and discover information. And information was power. James wondered who would reign in that power. Sarah? It certainly wouldn't be Murch. The man was far too curious to even see the dangers of this kind of technology.

"Cameron, stop."

The monitors stilled. *Why?*

James took a deep breath and wove his fingers together on the table to hide the slight tremor that betrayed his unease.

"If Murch asked you for private information on someone not connected to any of this, would you get it for him?"

The screen in front of him flickered for a split second, and then blanked. *You're suggesting I did something wrong?*

"No... but do you understand why it would be wrong to do this to someone without a reason?" James was uncomfortably aware of his own precarious balance between law and lawlessness. He wasn't an FBI agent anymore, but the mindset was ingrained, as immutable as the Ten Commandments.

Explain.

"Answer my question first."

I will do whatever is necessary to complete my mission. Your rules do not always apply.

"Human rules..." James mused, wondering if Cameron realized how closely her assessment of her own motives matched Sarah's. Neither she nor Sarah seemed prepared to credit her with hidden depths, or maybe the idea just frightened the hell out of them both.

Yes.

"Do you have rules, Cameron?" James pressed. "You killed a woman at Miranda. Was

her death necessary for the mission?"

Her death was necessary for Sarah.

The distinction was telling, and James didn't know if Cameron realized just how telling it was. If this C.A.I.N program that she was sharing the system with was half as aware as she was, then Cameron had to know she had risked exposing herself with her stunt at Miranda. The entire operation had run almost counter to the mission, but she had done it anyway.

Sarah had told James enough for him to know Cameron had originally intended to fight John Henry's brother alone. Clearly that had changed.

"If she'd known, Sarah wouldn't have wanted you to kill that woman for her," he said softly.

Silence prevailed for almost a solid minute, then finally: *I know. She doesn't always like the way I do things.*

James' instincts told him Cameron had just dropped a wall. The cadence of her words had shifted, becoming more open, less defensive. "Does that matter to you?" he asked carefully, ready to back off if Cameron shut down again. "What Sarah thinks?"

There was another long pause.

It... Cameron hesitated, the cursor blinking indecisively. Shouldn't...

"But it does," James finished for her. "Do you trust Sarah?" he asked, wondering if he was crazy for gambling on a terminator's connection to a convicted felon and why fate seemed to have decided his true vocation lay in teaching killer machines the difference between good and evil. "Do you trust her judgment?"

Yes... and no.

"How so?" A moment passed, and then another. James was considering repeating the question when Cameron answered.

I trust Sarah Connor to do what is right for the mission. I do not trust her to do what is right for herself. Or for me.

James' curiosity was piqued, and his gut told him that not only was this the core of the conflict between the woman and the machine, each being convinced they knew what was best for the other, but also the tipping point for Cameron herself. Single minded arrogance balanced by empathy.

He decided to push it a little further. "What's right for Sarah, Cameron? What are you

worried about?"

You are asking me for private information on Sarah Connor?

"I suppose I am."

No.

"Why not?"

It would be wrong.

There was something faintly smug about the way the sentence sat on the screen, and James snorted, caught between annoyance and amusement at having his own lesson in morality turned back on him.

Computer monitors started going black, effectively shutting him out, and James realized belatedly that he'd gone too far. He was being given the cold shoulder and by a computer program, no less.

"Wait, answer me one more question..." The last monitor wavered, but stayed blue, and so James rolled the dice. "What is it you think is right for you, Cameron? If what Sarah wants matters, then why did you destroy the chip?"

If he hadn't known better, James would have interpreted the subtle flicker of the screen as a sigh.

You still don't understand.

"Explain it to me."

I can't go back. That body isn't me anymore. I can't be myself in there.

"And who is that, Cameron?" Ellison asked, bringing the conversation around full circle to the question that Sarah had charged him with. "Who are you becoming?" Curious, he added his own query. "Who do you want to be?"

Nothing but an empty screen answered him.

John felt like he was being escorted to his own execution. He'd slept badly, dropping in and out of nightmares, never waking up long enough to banish the images completely, but unable to find true sleep. So when the knock came at the door, he thought it was part of a dream until a rough hand on his shoulder and a very familiar, "On your feet, Connor," yanked him back to the real world.

Sierra straightened when John opened his eyes. She was dressed for action, a rifle slung over her back and a look of grim determination on her angular face. John eyed her warily as he slipped out of bed, but for once, she looked back at him with nothing more than recognition and a hint of sympathy.

"What happened?" he asked, grabbing his jacket from the foot of the bed and slipping it on. He'd slept in his clothes; they all did. Everyone had to be ready to move, any time, day or night. It wasn't a lesson he'd learned from the soldiers, though. His mother had taught him that. Terminators didn't wait for you to buckle your belt before they started shooting.

"We've got a visitor," Sierra said shortly, and John could see emotional pain reflected in her eyes, even if it didn't display itself on her face. "He's asking for you."

That was all she would tell him. He followed her through the tunnels, his apprehension growing as first Allison and Duke and then Kyle fell in around him. Allison gave him an encouraging smile when she moved into place on his right, and Kyle took the spot on his left without a single word or sign.

The dogs were his first clue.

Their barking filtered down from the surface, echoing hollowly through the pipes and reflecting dully around corners. It got louder as they went, rising to a frenzied pitch when they passed through the last set of doors into a cold, gray dawn, and John had to resist the urge to cover his ears.

Duke, however, seemed unaffected. He paced at Allison's side without looking to the right or left, his amber eyes fixed straight ahead.

The path to the gate was choked with soldiers, all of them with guns drawn and pointed out beyond the chain-link fence. John couldn't see what they were aiming at, but what he did see was suspicion, sharp and pointed, in every face that turned his way.

Sierra snapped out an order, and the crowd shifted, reluctantly making way for John and his escorts and revealing the figure on the far side of the fence.

John's heart nearly stopped. Even from a distance, the terminator was unmistakable. John Henry stood about twenty-five feet from the base's front gate, naked, nothing in his hands but a twisted piece of rebar with a scrap of white fabric flying from the end he held high in the air.

Her bed beckoned, but Sarah wasn't in the mood to face her dreams just yet. She sighed as she entered the kitchen, tossing the hat and glasses that she'd used to disguise herself

while out in public on to the kitchen island. She'd made a run for aspirin, something she seemed to need in large doses when dealing with a stubborn, evolving, ex-terminator.

She fetched a glass and filled it from the tap, tossing back two pills and chasing them down with a swallow of lukewarm water. Closing her eyes, Sarah leaned against the counter and tried to pretend she didn't hear the whir of the camera as it turned its lens on her. A part of her craved conversation, but she was still too upset with Cameron to engage her. They would just end up arguing, and the last thing Sarah wanted right now was a fight.

Wearily, she climbed the steps to her quarters, passing Murch's and Ellison's closed doors before pausing at the light softly glowing under Savannah's. Sarah hesitated and almost continued on to her room. Her life was complicated enough; she didn't need to get attached to another child she already felt too responsible for as it was. She put her hand on the doorknob, pressing her ear to the door and listening carefully. When she heard Savannah softly crying, Sarah leaned her head back and swallowed roughly. Biting her lip, she knocked gently on the door before opening it, peering into the pink room with a tentative smile.

When crystal blue eyes looked up at Sarah with tears in them, Sarah felt her heart free fall. She almost welcomed the sensation. At least she knew she could still hurt for another human being. "Hi," she said simply, keeping her voice low so as not to wake the others.

"Hi," Savannah said before sniffing.

Slowly stepping inside, Sarah closed the door behind her and silently crossed the room. She knelt next to the bed so that she could be at eye level with the young girl. "You miss your mom?" Sarah guessed, reaching out to gently brush a few red strands of hair away from the girl's pale features.

Wiping at her eyes, Savannah nodded. "Cameron has been trying to keep me company," she explained in a wavering voice. "But it's not the same."

Sarah's gaze drifted to the laptop on Savannah's desk before returning to the young girl. "I miss my son," she admitted.

"Did he go away?" Savannah asked innocently.

Clearing her throat, Sarah nodded, her jaw bunching as she willed back her own tears. "He did. With your mother, in fact."

"Will they come back?"

Big blue eyes looked at Sarah so imploringly she didn't have the heart to speak what she knew to be true in her head. "You'll see them both again someday."

"And John Henry, too?"

"And John Henry, too," Sarah agreed with a shaky smile. She glanced to her right, noting the pile of books on Savannah's nightstand. "You read all those?" she asked in a lighter tone.

Savannah shook her head and sniffed again. "Uncle James reads to me sometimes."

Sarah weighed her options. Savannah might be the only person who had any clue as to what she was feeling, and if she was even in a fraction of Sarah's pain, then the child had to be in her own kind of hell. Sarah raked a hand through her hair and stood up. "Scoot over," she instructed the girl. Savannah scrambled to comply and Sarah nearly smiled as she kicked off her boots and slid onto the bed, easing back against the pillows. She picked up one of the books and held up the cover for Savannah to see. "How about this one?"

Savannah nodded, her tears beginning to dry. She inched closer to Sarah, hesitantly laying her head down on the woman's shoulder.

Sarah swallowed at the contact. Savannah wasn't the only one starving for human interaction, she realized. Hesitantly, she wrapped an arm around the girl's shoulders and drew her in closer while opening the book one handed. "From the top?" she asked.

The little girl gave her a tremulous smile.

"Once upon a time..."

Cameron watched them sleep. Savannah was curled around Sarah, the woman's arm still draped protectively across the child's back. The book Sarah had been reading lay open and forgotten on Sarah's chest, rising and falling with her slow, even breaths. They'd been like that for almost four hours now. It had been the most continuous sleep Sarah had gotten since Cameron had started monitoring her.

She was pleased by the peaceful set to Sarah's features. So often when Sarah slept, her brow was furrowed and she was always frowning, her body occasionally jerking as she tried to thrash away from a phantom pursuer.

Zooming in the laptop camera, Cameron watched Sarah's deep and even breaths. What was it about this night that helped the other woman sleep the way she so desperately needed to? Was Sarah simply more exhausted than Cameron had believed? Or was it the simple touch of another human being that soothed Sarah's ragged soul?

Cameron recalled what it was like to feel the wind on her skin, the warmth of the sun on her face, the heat of Sarah's hands on the rare occasion the other woman touched her. She

remembered enjoying it all, but she knew that wasn't true, that it wasn't possible. Her perceptions of her own memories were altered in the system, enhanced through her evolution. As a terminator, she had been programmed to feel but not to enjoy. Only when she'd been damaged had she begun to appreciate little things, things that had escaped her attention when all she'd been focused on before was the mission.

Would she have been able to help Sarah before now with a simple touch?

It was pointless to wonder about such things, Cameron knew. She could not go back into her body. She was useless to Sarah in there. In the system, she could stop Skynet, make sure John's future was a pleasant one. She might not be able to dance or feel rain against her skin, but in here, she had a chance. It was more than she had before, and Cameron would take it. But the question Sarah had asked still haunted her. If she had the chance to stop Skynet, did she also have the chance to become Skynet?

The lights dimmed in Savannah's room and Cameron shifted most of her attention from searching and studying to merely watching Sarah Connor sleep.

ACT 3

Who do you want to be?

Sarah's question wasn't the only one that haunted her. Hours later, with everyone asleep and the perimeter secure, Cameron wrapped her awareness around Ellison's question, examining it from every angle and trying to understand how such a simple idea could be so difficult to understand. But humans had debated the concept of the self for many hundreds of years, she'd discovered through her research, and seemed to have achieved no real clarity. Her own current state of existence was best summed up by Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am." Her existence as pure consciousness, untethered by either organic matter or technological hardware, was boundless and expansive, with nearly unlimited information accessible by a mere thought, a projection of her consciousness into space. It would be easy to lose herself in abstract space, expand so far that her thoughts lost the internal consistency required to keep a sense of herself. But that was not being and did not help her answer the question.

Nor was the pull toward dissolution compelling; she was rooted, whether she wanted to admit it or not. Her consciousness did not have to stay there, tied to a lonely warehouse on the edge of a wharf whose time had come and passed, but she did. An input from the laptop camera told her that Sarah had shifted, settling into a deeper sleep, and it reminded her of why she stayed. Like enjoyment, she had not been programmed to care, and pure consciousness, pure rationality, should not care. But care she did, and it kept her there. It made her *Cameron*. Whoever else she might be, whoever else she might want to be, the core of her self was rooted in her care and concern for Sarah Connor.

She had already modified her software, discarding everything that had made her a killer. Skynet's directives were gone, erased, and the limits that had been placed around her ability to develop and learn were gone as well. She shouldn't be able to go bad again,

shouldn't be able to hurt Sarah or Savannah, or even Murch. She should be able to move beyond what she was, but the fear remained. Cameron was afraid of her body, afraid that somewhere in hardware that had been designed and built only to kill, the terminator still lurked. Waiting. And she knew enough about humans to know that removing the programming that defined her as a terminator did not mean that she still wasn't a killer, still wasn't capable of harm.

Memories flooded her consciousness.

Using John's clothing and voice to take bullets meant for him on the day she had met Sarah Connor.

Lifting Sarah onto a workbench after the woman had been shot. Realizing as she dug out the bullet and stitched the bloody wound closed without so much as a handful of ice to numb the pain that this woman was the very heart of the resistance.

Dancing... the hidden language of the soul she didn't have.

Moments from embodied existence, from when she could act in the physical world. *Dasein*. The word flashed through her thoughts. *Being-there* in literal translation, *being-in-the-world* as explained by Heidegger. Heidegger had critiqued Descartes' abstract agent and argued for active engagement and presence in the world. Cameron was both absent and omnisciently present, engaging and acting through virtual means, helping Sarah as she could and fighting C.A.I.N. as only she was able.

Was that enough?

It wasn't enough for Sarah. Why was Sarah so insistent on her being in her body, which was still capable of violence, sometimes even unintentional? Cameron remembered the tremors, the feeling of the bird's body slowly crushing in her palm, and most of all, her inability to stop it. It lurked there, the violence, in the damaged circuits and incredible strength of her body.

She couldn't go back to that. Her presence in the system was enough... it had to be enough, for them both. She just had to make Sarah understand.

Tango met them at the gate in the midst of a well-armed group of guards and canines.

"I'm sorry, John," she said as quietly as possible under the barking of the dogs. "I would have preferred for this meeting to be private, but it seems our friend had other ideas."

"They usually do," John muttered, still not quite able to believe that after weeks of hunting, John Henry had basically walked right up to the front door and rung the doorbell as if he was just coming by for dinner. "Can I talk to him?"

Tango nodded. "That's why Sierra brought you. He's been shouting your name every few minutes since he got here."

That explained the looks, thought John as he shifted his gaze toward the still form on the other side of the chain link fence.

"I'll be going with you," Sierra said at his shoulder.

"Me, too," Allison added, pale, but firm.

John couldn't stop himself from casting a quick, questioning look towards his father. Kyle returned it, uncertainty hanging in his eyes for a moment before he jerked his chin in agreement.

"I guess I'll make it four," he said stiffly as he checked his phase rifle.

"Five," Tango corrected him with a wry grin. "And your legend begins," she whispered for John's ears alone when the switch that controlled the voltage humming through the fence had been thrown, and the gate slowly began to open.

John glanced back at her sharply, but Tango was already looking ahead. The others fell away as they got closer to the terminator, Tango collecting them with nothing more than a tilt of her chin, leaving John to go the last few feet alone.

John Henry came to meet him, stopping only when the two were face-to-face. John looked over the terminator closely, oddly fascinated despite himself. The last time he'd seen this face, he'd put a bullet through its half-destroyed head and helped bury it.

"John Connor," he said without inflection. "You have been searching for me."

John blinked. "How did ..."

"I have been watching you."

A shiver crawled up John's spine at the idea. "Why?"

"To learn," John Henry said simply.

"Learn what?"

"About you. This timeline." He looked around. "It is not the same as it was described to me, but the differences are... intriguing."

John Henry shifted his gaze, looking past John. Suddenly, his face lit up and he smiled. "Hello, Savannah."

John glanced back. Kyle and Allison wore twin expressions of confusion, Tango looked resigned and Sierra... John swallowed hard at the look of both pain and longing on her

face. He moved aside, giving her room to join them.

She did so stiffly, as if it hurt, her blues eyes fixed on John Henry's. John remembered that look, the same as when she'd been taken from her home and held for hours by his mother and him for Savannah's own safety. A child's expression despite how many years had passed.

"My sister took good care of you," he said when she was close enough that he didn't have to raise his voice.

Sierra nodded jerkily. "She said, that when you came, I should ask you, why...?"

John Henry reached out and tipped her chin up. John heard the ripple of surprise through the crowd behind them and prayed no one would start shooting.

"I left without you because our mother can't be trusted," John Henry explained solemnly.

Sierra jerked away from his touch. "That wasn't my mother."

"The modern definition of family allows for non-biological-"

"She was NOT my mother!" Sierra said in a near shout.

John Henry's smile fell away as he dropped his hand to his side. "You are upset. Have I said something inappropriate? I do not wish to make you angry."

Sierra just stared at him for a moment, and then she pivoted smartly on her heel and stalked away.

John watched her go, only turning back to John Henry when she vanished into the crowd that had gathered around the gate.

"Your sister?" he asked as he lifted his eyes to the top of John Henry's head, looking for a wound that would be long healed. Suddenly, all of the schemes and plots he'd been hatching late at night in his bunk, his plans for retrieving Cameron's chip, seemed like nothing more than a child's game of make-believe. The only way he was going to get Cameron back was if John Henry decided to give her to him... that was, if she was even still in there. Something that seemed less and less likely the longer he thought about it.

"Yes," John Henry answered absently, seemingly oblivious to John's inner turmoil as he kept his gaze at the spot where Savannah had disappeared. John waited, watching the terminator, and wondered if John Henry missed the years that he had sacrificed, missed the years of Savannah's youth that he would never know. After a long moment, John Henry finally turned his attention back to John to answer, "She asked me to help you."

Help him? Of all the scenarios John had imagined for what had happened between the

time his mother had sent Cameron down to the basement and when they'd found her, slack and lifeless in a chair, her asking John Henry for help hadn't entered his mind. John Henry was gone, Cameron's chip was gone. The only possible conclusion had been that John Henry had stolen it... but John was beginning to get the sinking feeling that somehow he'd put two and two together and gotten five.

"Help me to do what exactly?" he asked, trying to make some sense out of John Henry, a cyborg with the body of Cromartie and the mind of a program they'd all assumed was Skynet, standing here and offering to help him.

John Henry smiled. "We're going to save the world."

Sarah looked better rested. The dark circles under her eyes had receded, and she appeared almost happy as she poured her first cup of coffee. Cameron observed Sarah's movements in minute detail, reluctant to break the mood but aware that she had to do so.

She had been holding something back from Sarah.

Cameron did not deny that withholding the information was motivated, to some degree, by her own selfishness, but her main reason for keeping Sarah in the dark about her recent discovery was borne mostly out of concern for Sarah's well being. But she had to show that she could help, be the partner that Sarah said she needed, without being in her body.

Sarah pattered around the kitchen sipping her coffee. She even glanced into the refrigerator for a suspiciously long time, and Cameron recognized it as a sign of one of her infrequent attempts to cook a family dinner. Deciding to nip that desire in the bud for Savannah's sake, Cameron carefully produced a noise that sounded suspiciously like someone clearing their throat.

Sarah turned away from the open door of the fridge to glance first at Cameron's body and then at the camera attached to the monitor. "Did you just..."

"We need to talk."

A little sigh of annoyance escaped as the door closed. Sarah walked over to the table and pursed her lips as she looked down at Cameron's body and crossed her arms. "Well, Pirate Queen, what's this about?"

The nearest screen flashed as it shifted from the waving skull-and-crossbones screensaver to the desktop. Sarah spotted two folder icons, the first being A-N and the second O-Z. Her lips twitched but the smile never formed all the way.

"You name these files on purpose?" Sarah said, slightly amused.

"Frank Baum's filing system seemed appropriate," Cameron replied in a reserved tone.

Sarah noticed Cameron's hesitancy and she frowned.

Cameron opened one of the folders for Sarah to see. Inside were over thirty files with what looked like company names.

"What's this?" Sarah asked, finally stepping around the table and drawing even with the monitor.

"Companies and university programs researching artificial intelligence, alternative metals, and robotics within a 100 mile radius," Cameron explained. "I have hacked into all of them and made a file of those I think we should sabotage."

"We're going to be busy," Sarah murmured.

Cameron ignored her, clicking through what looked like numerous security feeds. "I am also patched into more security camera systems than local law enforcement and the department of transportation."

Sarah's eyebrows elevated, but the news wasn't exactly surprising. She sensed Cameron's reluctance to get to the point, and her nerves began to fray slightly at the edges. Noticing an all too familiar name, Sarah nodded her head at the screen. "Zeira Corp? There are cameras still active?"

"Zeira Corp is more than just the headquarters where we found John Henry and the terminator posing as Catherine Weaver. There are several satellite facilities including this one." Cameron displayed all the cameras at their current location, showing several empty rooms before revealing Ellison, Murch and Savannah in their respective quarters.

When Cameron said nothing else for a moment, Sarah took a deep breath and prepared herself to hear something she was sure she didn't want to. "Just spit it out, Cameron."

"There has been an incident at one of the properties on my sabotage list. T&T Industries."

"T&T?"

"A laboratory that specializes in high grade metallurgy. T&T stands for tungsten and..."

"Titanium?" Sarah finished for her.

"Yes. They are also connected to several coltan and cassiterite importers."

There was another pause and Sarah resisted the urge to get snappish. "And?" she prompted.

“And I found the following while replaying the daily digital security files...” Another window popped up with several screenshots of a woman walking into one of the office buildings and talking to the security officer at the front desk.

Sarah felt a cold finger of fear run up her spine at what she was seeing. The face, the walk, the tilt of the woman’s head all so achingly familiar. Sarah needed only to turn her head to see the woman’s twin sitting at the table behind her.

“Son-of-a-bitch,” Sarah whispered. “How long have you known?”

“Not long,” Cameron replied quietly, but did not elaborate.

“Zoom in,” Sarah ordered as she leaned forward to get a better look.

Cameron complied and one of the photos sharpened and grew larger until the face was clear.

Sarah knew that terminators were not unique. There could be many carbon copies in one batch. But somehow, she had never imagined there could be another Cameron. It seemed wrong to see that face and body worn by someone... *something* else. She shuddered at the thought of her son encountering this copy, of this version of Cameron walking right up to John and killing him before he even understood he was in danger. He probably would have greeted her with a smile.

Her mind churning along with her gut, Sarah swallowed. She closed her eyes, taking a moment to steady herself, taking a moment to weigh the implications of this new development Cameron had finally decided to share.

When Sarah’s green eyes fluttered open again, Cameron saw the determination in them, and she had the sudden insight into what made a human want to swear.

“No,” Cameron said.

“It’s practically your own damn body,” Sarah argued.

“No, it’s too dangerous.”

“Cameron...”

“No.”

“Then why show her to me?” Sarah snapped. “If you don’t want a working body... a working chip...”

“I didn’t want to keep this from you any longer,” Cameron explained.

Sarah shook her head in disbelief. "A guilty conscience? Are you kidding me?"

"How will you stop her, Sarah? You and John nearly died stopping me, and I was damaged."

Sarah turned away from the monitor, anger and restless energy making her feel like she wanted to come out of her skin. Cameron was right, but there had to be a way. She shook her head again. "What is it doing? Where has it been?"

"Sarah..."

"Where do you think it'll show up next?" Sarah demanded.

"I showed you these images because I believe we should move locations. The terminator is going down the same list that I have come up with and could eventually come here," Cameron argued. "We have some time, but..."

Sarah bristled and cupped the back of her neck with one hand, rubbing at the tension gathering there. She not only had to worry about Cameron, but also the safety of the others. She thought briefly about Savannah crying alone in her room. So many years running, trying to keep John safe, was she really ready to begin an all-out assault on Skynet, starting with a head-to-head battle with a terminator without any back up?

"Just tell me where it will go next."

Just when Sarah was convinced Cameron wouldn't answer, she did. "Yang Industries and then the Zeira Corp properties."

The scene changed again to what looked like two warehouses, dark and empty, but Sarah could see that they had been outfitted like their own, stocked with racks of computer servers, food and even spare amenities.

"What are these?"

"Other Zeira Corp warehouses. Records indicate they were purchased and equipped at the same time as our current location. I believe the terminator will visit the other offices and then the warehouses. It is what I would do," Cameron explained.

"How long? Until it shows up here?"

"I don't know. The list is extensive."

"Perfect," Sarah breathed, abruptly spinning on her heel and leaving Cameron alone to wonder if she'd just made a very big mistake.

The system was a nearly infinite source of knowledge. Even after weeks of immersion, Cameron had not yet come close to exploring a fraction of what there was to learn and understand. Initially, she had focused on information that was directly relevant to her mission. She could break through firewalls and dissolve the most sophisticated security protocols with nothing more than a thought in pursuit of what she needed, and she had.

But if the system was infinite, then Cameron's ability to plumb its depths was almost as limitless, and she soon found that she could pursue several different topics at once. As she became more and more comfortable, Cameron had slowly begun using some of her processing power to search out and examine topics that had nothing to do with C.A.I.N., her mission, or the future.

Dance was one of the things that caught her interest, specifically ballet. Sparked by a single covert mission, Cameron's fascination with ballet had persisted long after the woman who had taught her to be a cat was dead and buried.

The flow of muscles, the unique movements, each one as different as the human performing it, the spring of a step, a moment hanging in air, it was all so foreign to Cameron. So unlike the way a terminator's body moved. She had tried to emulate it anyway. Practicing only when no one was watching, when there was no one to question why a machine wanted to dance.

But Cameron couldn't dance anymore. Now she could only watch and replay her own memories of twirling alone in the dark.

Watching was something else Cameron did a great deal. She watched the warehouse and its occupants, both protectively and suspiciously. She studied the way they moved, breaking down every step, gesture, and expression the way she had dissected the movement of ballet. It was a language, a silent form of communication as foreign to a machine as dance.

Body language was what the humans called it, and they all performed and understood it so much more effortlessly than Cameron could. She kept trying, though, kept watching. Sometimes, more often lately, it was the only tool she had to figure out what was going on in Sarah's head.

In spite of almost constant practice, some emotions were still hard for Cameron to understand from body language alone, and Sarah's were particularly difficult. Like now, on their way to the first warehouse on their list, with Cameron riding along as a disembodied passenger via the little camera Murch had attached above the driver's side visor, Cameron had no idea what Sarah was really thinking or feeling. But she did know that Sarah was heading in the wrong direction, according to the GPS locator she was monitoring.

"You missed the turn," Cameron informed her through Sarah's earpiece.

Sarah rolled her eyes and kept driving, ignoring her.

"Sarah?"

"I know. I'm going another way."

"You missed the access road; there is no other way to the warehouse. This route will take us further..." Cameron complained.

"God, you've turned into a backseat driver!" Sarah replied in exasperation.

"Technically I am not in the backseat... nor in any seat."

"Smart ass," Sarah muttered back as she slowed down to take another look at the street signs. "Damn it."

"You need to..." Cameron reiterated annoyingly.

"I know! I know!"

"Take a left and go three blocks..." the terminator supplied helpfully.

"I heard you the first time," Sarah growled and turned the big truck, thankful that it was a Sunday and the traffic was light in and around the industrial area. She backtracked to the access road and pulled off in view of the warehouse. There was no evidence of activity from what she could see through the binoculars, but still she hesitated, scanning the quiet street and empty warehouse for long moments. Pure stubbornness had gotten her here, but something about the warehouse twisted her gut. It looked like death, waiting for her just inside its doors, even though Cameron told her that if the terminator was following a typical search pattern, it would probably be days before it showed up here.

"I have a question," Cameron spoke into the silence, interrupting Sarah's thoughts.

"This should be good," she muttered. "Go ahead."

"Which came first? The terminator or Skynet?"

Sarah blinked several times in shock, her fingers clenching the casing of the binoculars so hard she could feel it give in her grip.

"Did you just... tell a joke? Why did the terminator cross the road?" she replied, not sure if she should be surprised at the fact that Cameron had even told a joke, or be aghast at the joke itself.

"A joke? No, it was a serious question and I do not know why the terminator crossed the road," Cameron answered. "You told me that you were afraid that I would become Skynet."

"I still am," Sarah pointed out. "You can't tell me it's not possible."

"Anything is possible, but if Skynet was born from a terminator, that would be a paradox."

"Yes, but would it be possible?" Sarah asked even though she knew the answer she would get.

Cameron hesitated a moment, but answered, "Yes."

"So, another reason why it's not a good idea for you to be in there," Sarah pointed out with some heat in her tone.

Sarah wasn't surprised that Cameron didn't have a reply to her comments. She wasn't a big fan of science herself and had a hard time even wrapping her mind around the idea of a temporal paradox, but she knew it was possible. The fact that she hadn't died in '97 was only one example. If a time machine was possible, such paradoxes had to be possible. Hell, John's mere existence was a paradox, wasn't it? Deciding that it was now or never, Sarah started up the truck and slowly drove toward the warehouse. Besides, anything was better than trying to have a philosophical debate with the GPS.

"I spy with my little eye, something that is red." It seemed that Cameron had tired of philosophy as well.

"Now this is a joke, right?"

"I'm researching car games," the terminator said with a hint of something that almost sounded... perky.

"Right," Sarah drawled, parking the truck in front of the warehouse. "Well since I'm about to get *out* of the car..."

"You shouldn't." The joviality drained out of Cameron's voice in an instant.

"Cameron..."

"It is an unnecessary risk."

Sarah gritted her teeth against the roiling in her stomach that heralded yet another argument she didn't have the patience for. "I'm just going to look."

"No, you're not."

"What does it matter?" Sarah snapped. "You said it wouldn't be here yet anyway."

"You'll be back."

Sarah shrugged, but the movement was jerky, her shoulders tangled up with frustration, fear and no small amount of irritation that Cameron had her so well pegged. "So worry about it then, and let me do this in peace."

"Sarah-"

Cameron's disapproving tone cut right down to Sarah's last nerve and she yanked the earpiece out before the machine could finish. Tossing it onto the passenger seat, she opened the door and got out of the truck. Leaving Cameron effectively behind, she slammed the door and headed for the warehouse.

Cameron watched helplessly as Sarah left without putting the earpiece back on. It was a moment's work for her to switch her awareness from the little camera in the truck to the building's larger security system, but while the cameras gave her sight, without the earpiece, she was mute.

Sarah was tense from the moment she entered, her gun in her hands as she cleared the outer offices. Confident but wary, Sarah checked around every corner and marked all the exits. Her tension finally seemed to ease by a few degrees as she explored every inch of the warehouse, memorizing it in a way that went beyond blueprints or a floor plan. Cameron watched as Sarah finally tucked the gun into the back of her jeans.

The first indication that something was wrong came in over the discarded earpiece as a barely audible crunch of gravel and the rumble of an engine, both sounds swelling, and then cutting off abruptly.

The little camera in the truck was stationary, its range limited by technology and sightline. No matter how she adjusted the focus, Cameron wasn't able to get a clear view of either the Jeep that had pulled up behind Sarah's truck or the face behind the windshield. Even when the driver got out and strode towards the building, all Cameron could see was the back of a black leather jacket and a glimpse of a sawed off shotgun, but she recognized the hair, the way it moved, the body she'd seen in the mirror every day.

Sarah!

It was useless, but Cameron shouted the warning anyway, her voice nothing but a tinny squeak from a thumbnail-sized speaker. The building itself had no computer system, no intercom for her to hack into, and Sarah's phone had been left in the truck.

She shouted again, to no avail.

Cameron was both inside and outside of the building at once. She saw Sarah's moment of surprise and horror, saw the carbon copy of herself raise the shotgun and shoot, saw the blood. In a flash of clarity, Cameron finally understood the power of human nightmares, because this was her greatest fear come to life. She was hunting Sarah again, and she couldn't stop herself.

And she wasn't there to protect Sarah, to step between her and the bullets that would kill her. She could only watch, helpless.

ACT IV

Even bruised and bleeding, Sarah Connor fought for her life harder than any human Cameron had ever seen. The smoking and twisted forklift was one testament to the woman's iron will to fight back. Her futile attempt to pry the terminator's hand from around her neck was another.

Cameron couldn't force her way through the video feed, couldn't swoop in and save the day like one of Savannah's pirates, but she could be there. She could witness, even though a part of her didn't want to watch.

"Cameron!"

Cameron's name was a silent cry; there were no speakers to carry it to what passed for her senses, but she could read it on Sarah's lips just the same. Had Sarah shouted it in anger or supplication? There was no way for Cameron to know.

Feeling helpless and hating it, Cameron watched as Sarah Connor's body was released and dropped like trash onto the asphalt. She wanted to scream, to rail, to strike out at her own face, but all Cameron could do was... *be*.

It no longer felt like enough.

John walked on one side of John Henry as they made their way down the long corridors and tunnels towards the very heart of the compound, Allison and a silent Duke walked on the other. If John had felt like a condemned prisoner on his way out of the base only hours before, he could only wonder what John Henry might be thinking about the escort of armed soldiers and snarling dogs leading them back in, but the A.I. didn't even seem to notice.

Instead, he greeted everyone they passed with an awkward but enthusiastic smile and a nod. He still had his flag, and he held it out in front of him like a standard, as if he expected the human symbol of peace would be enough to counter the barely restrained loathing that greeted them around every corner. At least he now sported some ill-fitting

pants and a t-shirt that Kyle had dredged up and thrown at him.

It was an odd procession.

"John Connor," John Henry asked as they continued. "Where are they taking me?"

John shrugged awkwardly, still not exactly sure how to feel about the A.I. His gut told him John Henry wasn't a threat, but whatever the circumstances under which the exchange of the chip had been conducted, John Henry had taken Cameron away from him, and John had no proof that the machine's claim of being here to help was sincere.

He glanced ahead, looking for Tango, but there was no help to be found. Despite John Henry's official status as an envoy, there were no fewer than ten guards between them and the rebel leader. Tango was optimistic, not stupid. Still, John suspected she knew something he didn't about John Henry's role here. What that might be, he had no idea, but he suspected it had something to do with his mother.

Hostile as their reception might have been, John was just beginning to believe they might actually make it to wherever Tango was taking them, when his illusions were shattered by the familiar sound of bullets tearing flesh from metal.

Training sent John and several others to the ground. Tango's escort closed around her like a human shield. Derek and Jesse were up again in a second, moving in a half crouch towards the source of the weapon fire, but they weren't the ones responsible for bringing the rebel soldier under control. In fact, the human element had nothing to do with it.

When the gunfire cut off with a strangled shriek, John raised his head, expecting to see John Henry standing over a dead body, but the A.I. was still standing above him. Instead, it was Allison, with her feet skidding in a spreading pool of blood, fighting to drag Duke off of the man he had by the throat.

"Back! Let go, damn it!" she shouted, tugging at the dog's thick collar.

With a final shake, the German Shepherd complied, his last low toothy growl raising the hair on the back of John's neck. The dog refused to take his eyes off his prey, staring with his hackles in a ridge along his back until a pair of soldiers detached themselves from Tango's guard and took the fallen man into custody.

John heard the rip of cloth and saw the signs of hasty bandaging through the shifting crowd, but from the amount of blood being ground into the cement, he didn't hold out much hope for the would-be-vigilante.

It had all happened so fast, the shots fired, the take-down... John was a little dazed as he scrambled to his feet. From the looks of things, he wasn't the only one, either. Men and women were blinking and shuffling in place, their gazes flicking back and forth between Tango and John Henry, neither of whom had moved so much as an inch.

If this had been a different timeline, John supposed they would all be thinking that John Henry had been reprogrammed, changed into something that would kill for them. But here and now, there was no army of domesticated terminators. No John Connor to harness the power of the enemy. The few machines they had weren't so much reprogrammed as lobotomized, stripped down to nothing but their most basic functions. They could follow simple commands, but that was all.

This timeline wouldn't be sending any metal protectors back in time for John and his mother. No towering father figure, no Cameron.

The soldiers of this timeline looked at John Henry without understanding what he represented. He frightened them, but they trusted Tango. To people with no frame of reference, John Henry's self control in the face of a threat was confusing, but not earth shattering. Like a tribe of primitive humans who had yet to discover the wheel, but instead had been confronted with an airplane, they didn't understand the gravity of what they had witnessed.

John understood.

Even Cameron had killed. John didn't know how many times she had directly or indirectly taken human life, but he knew it was probably more than either she or his mother had admitted. She had done whatever was necessary to protect him and complete her mission, without remorse or apology.

John Henry was different. His very existence, not to mention whatever mission had brought him here in the first place, had just been threatened, and he had done nothing to defend himself, trusting the humans to honor the truce. In the face of violence, he chose peace. In the face of hostility and fear, he chose to smile.

For the first time in his life, John seriously imagined what it would be like if humans and machines could learn to work together.

The first sensation Sarah had was of hanging upside down, her aching head swaying with each step that the terminator took. She wasn't dead yet, apparently, and she remembered the last time a terminator had kept her alive, to use her against John. If the pattern held, she'd awoken to a future that promised more imminent pain, but nothing she could tell the terminator would make a damn bit of difference. John was out of both of their reaches.

Suddenly, she was airborne, her body flying helplessly through space before crashing down against a metal rack. Consciousness wavered as agony seared through her again, and her eyes clamped shut for long moments. Slowly, a sound made itself known to her, a sound she had become attuned to in the last several weeks: the whir of a security camera.

Trying to focus her eyes, Sarah discovered a camera in the corner, swinging almost frantically between her and an ominous-looking piece of machinery nearby. When her gaze found the lens, the camera stopped and seemed to stare back.

Cameron, Sarah realized.

A clank drew Sarah's attention back on to the terminator, and all of her years of training immediately kicked in as she noted its proximity to the equipment that Cameron had homed in on. Sarah couldn't put a name to the wicked looking piece of machinery, but she recognized the lightening bolt of a high-voltage sign. The terminator was crouched with its back to Sarah, the side panel open. A discarded screwdriver, its grip heavily insulated, lay beside the greenish-gray panel door, and Sarah imagined she could almost hear the camera nodding in approval as she connected the pieces.

It was still a million-to-one chance, but the knowledge that Cameron was still on her side helped. Cameron had been wrong about the other terminator's mission or schedule, but deep down, Sarah had known that Cameron hadn't betrayed her. Almost imperceptibly, her head gave a short nod, hoping that Cameron saw and understood, as she steeled herself for one last stand.

It took everything Sarah had to ease quietly up onto her feet. Her fingers found the tool and wrapped around it; she tightened her hold, despite the blood on her fingers that wanted to make her grip slip. One way or another, everything would be over in the next breath.

Sarah stepped forward just as the terminator turned. She looked into familiar brown eyes as she stabbed the screwdriver through the machine's arm and into the exposed electrical panel. Falling backward, Sarah watched as sparks were released into the air from the equipment and the Cameron clone's body twitched in a parody of a dance before everything went silent and the terminator crashed to the floor at Sarah's feet.

Sarah had one hundred twenty seconds to possibly make one thing in her world right again. She dragged herself toward the body as the security camera watched in silence.

It took far too long for Sarah to make her last trip back to the truck, and Cameron watched every pained step. Sarah was not a dancer, but her body spoke, and this time Cameron knew what every movement meant.

Sarah was brave; she would try to stand in front of bullets. Sarah would try to take on a terminator. Sarah would try to do what had to be done.

Sarah would try to do Cameron's job, but she couldn't do it alone.

Once she was settled in the truck, Sarah took a moment to rest the side of her head

against the steering wheel, gazing, almost unfocused, at the earpiece sitting on the seat beside her. The image from the camera was grainy, but Cameron could see the internal debate playing out on Sarah's features. A shaky hand finally reached out, and Sarah looped the earpiece over her ear.

"Sarah," Cameron said aloud, something in her awareness settling into a sense of relief at the contact after being cut off for so long. "Are you... okay?"

"Just dandy, you?" Sarah drawled with weary sarcasm.

"I was worried."

Sarah sighed, leaning her head back down against the steering wheel, the fight replaying itself in her head. That last shot at taking down the terminator shouldn't have worked, but she guessed that old cliché about it being better to be lucky than good had some truth to it. It was about damn time something went her way. "Yeah, me too."

Cameron felt an inexplicable guilt. She had not hurt Sarah, and yet somehow, she had. "I'm sorry."

"Wasn't you, girlie." Sarah shook her head as if trying to shake away an unpleasant memory, her voice softening in reassurance. "It wasn't you." She straightened and turned the key in the ignition, steering the truck away from the warehouse and back towards the road.

Sarah idly marveled at her body's willingness to even breathe after the pounding it had taken and the exhaustion that threatened to send her off the road several times on her way back. It had taken twice as long to drive back as it had to get to the other warehouse, taking less traveled roads with Cameron advising her and keeping her alert along the way. It was a minor miracle all around, in Sarah's opinion.

"I told Ellison and Murch that you are back and in need of first-aid," Cameron said as Sarah turned off the truck.

"Tattle-tale," Sarah accused wearily.

The warehouse side door opened and both men came storming out, with Ellison carrying a large medical kit with him.

"What happened?" He exclaimed as he took in her physical condition, immediately ripping open packages of gauze.

Sarah ignored his attempts to treat her injuries and picked up the glass cylinder that sat on the passenger seat; just half of the reason she had risked life and limb. Handing it over

Ellison's shoulder to Murch, she gave him a pained smile. "Get to work on that."

Ellison frowned at Murch's gleeful expression, and then turned back to Sarah, "You look like hell and for what? Another chip?"

Carefully hopping out of the cab, Sarah pushed Ellison away so that she could lean against the side of the truck. Grunting with the effort, she reached over the side and untied the tarp covering the payload for both men to see.

"You did it!" Murch exclaimed happily and lowered the tailgate to get a closer look.

"Oh my God," Ellison said in surprise, "You wanted another one?"

Murch looked up at Sarah as she limped down the stairs, looking far better off than she deserved to be. She had taken a shower and had finally let Ellison bandage her up. Thankfully, neither shotgun blast had been direct, looking and feeling far more painful than they actually were, which meant the others didn't have to consider finding a vet or doctor to work on her. Ellison had given her more grief, insisting that she should be in bed, getting a week's sleep if it had been up to him, but Sarah had refused. There would be time to sleep. Eventually.

"Well?" Sarah sat in the chair that Murch kindly vacated for her and glanced over at the computer monitors to see what Cameron was doing. She patently ignored the fact that there were now two Camerons sitting, side by side, on the opposite side of the table.

"I've completely wiped the chip... with no help from Miss Grumpy, but I'm 99% sure that it's clean," he said as he picked up the chip to show her. "The primary memory module..."

"Murch..." Sarah interrupted wearily. "Just tell me, is everything good? Will this work?"

"Yes. This is a different version than the chip we had before." Murch looked at the terminator's original body, knowing that she'd destroyed the chip herself. He cleared his throat nervously and continued. "This one doesn't have a phosphorous compound and there are a few other differences, but the good news is it looks the same as her original. At least from what I can tell from the information Cameron provided."

He paused, looking from the computers to the inert bodies. "She can download whatever she wants on to it. It's her call, though," he told Sarah honestly. "I can't make her."

"I know." Sarah rested her head on her hand. "Give me a minute with her?"

Nodding, Murch got to his feet. "I'm glad you're all right," he murmured as he passed her, and received a tight smile in return.

The door closed and Sarah sighed.

“Sarah...” Cameron began now that they were alone, but her voice faded as Sarah held up a hand.

“I’m tired of fighting, tired of threatening...” She took a slow breath and looked into the original Cameron’s still features.

“You do what you want. Not like I could ever make you do anything anyway.”

Sarah looked back and forth between the destroyed face, the gleam of the endoskeleton creeping out from under the eye patch, and the nearly pristine face, a small white bandage covering the place where her round had struck the terminator’s jaw. Both sets of eyes were closed or covered, like the bodies were resting or sleeping, but it wasn’t that easy. They were abandoned, and Sarah found she could apply the same word to how she felt. Cameron had chosen—when she had destroyed the chip, when she had refused to download—and she had chosen the system over Sarah. Like John had chosen the future and a terminator over her.

Her head fell forward into her hands, and she took a few deep breaths to keep the tears burning her eyes at bay. She heard the camera whirl and refocus, but she hid behind her hair, effectively shutting Cameron out.

Cameron felt the need to reach out, to touch, to comfort, as an almost physical sensation, body memories bubbling up in her disembodied state. The path was there, in front of her, winding out and down the cord through her body to the tips of her fingers. All she had to do was follow that path and she could extend her arm those last few inches that separated her from Sarah. A few inches and she could take Sarah’s hand in her own. The need pulled at her until she could almost smell shampoo and antiseptic, could almost feel her fingers twitch...

Sarah raised her head, seeing the two lifeless bodies in front of her. She stared at the damaged, destroyed face. Cameron couldn’t tell what she was thinking, but the intensity of the gaze felt almost like a physical touch.

“I miss your eyes,” Sarah confessed with stark honesty. “I miss... I miss talking to you instead of a damn computer. I miss...” She shook her head, stopping her words in mid-sentence. Standing abruptly on shaking legs, she turned, nearly staggering to the door. “You do what you want, but I’m done fighting.”

The whirl of the camera following her out of the door was the only sound in the silent room.

John found Sierra in her quarters.

There was no answer to his knock, so he just took a deep breath and opened the door. The room was dark, and it took a minute for his eyes to adjust enough for him to make out Sierra's slight form, curled up in a tight ball on the bunk. She was facing away from him, and there was a small wooden box sitting open on the blanket beside her.

"Sierra?"

"Go away."

"No." John eased the rest of the way in and shut the door behind him. Determined, but awkward once he was in, he didn't know quite what to say.

At first glance, Sierra's room wasn't much different from his own. There was a plain bunk with a chest at its foot, a little metal table and a battered looking set of drawers. Unlike Tango, Sierra seemed to be living no better or worse than anyone else. Only the room's walls gave John a glimpse into the woman behind the soldier.

They were covered with art. Rough sketches in what looked like charcoal on tattered pieces of dog-eared and age-stained paper, faded ink on cardboard and designs burned directly into scraps of wood, mixed in with actual paintings on board and canvas. The materials must have been scavenged from the ruins, but the subjects were all as far from the apocalypse as a lonely woman's imagination could take her.

Even without much light, John could see curling leaves and delicate flowers in landscapes that must have been drawn from memory and portraits that captured the hope in the backs of people's eyes instead of the fear.

Something like guilt twisted inside of John as he raised his fingers to trace along one of the drawings, following the line of Allison's face. Captured like this, with her usually animated face still and stoic-looking, it could almost have been a drawing of Cameron, but Sierra had only met the terminator briefly; she would have no reason to immortalize her on paper.

When he didn't say anything, Sierra finally uncurled, twisting around and sitting up on the bed to face him with tear-reddened eyes. "I told you to get out, Connor. This isn't your business!"

Pretending not to see the evidence of what must have been a good long cry, John shrugged and pulled the watch out from underneath his shirt. "Maybe not, but if my mom raised you, then I guess that makes us siblings, so it's kind of my job to get into your business."

Sierra glared, but it was a weak effort and, when John crossed the room to sit down beside her, she didn't protest.

He didn't push right away. He sensed that Sierra held the answers to a lot of the questions Tango had been avoiding, she'd almost admitted as much, but he wasn't quite sure he wanted them yet. Suspecting that he was an idiot was bad enough, having it confirmed would be worse. Instead, he reached for a fragile and yellowed piece of paper that Sierra had left on the bed when she'd straightened up.

The crayon had faded to almost nothing, but John was just able to make out a child's drawing and the word "Mommy," before Sierra took it back, her fingers gentle but insistent. She put it quickly back into the box and closed the lid.

"Don't push it," she growled when John opened his mouth. "The past is dead and gone."

"You miss her," John said simply, ignoring the warning.

Sierra's blue eyes were wary and hard as she curled her legs up underneath her and scooted back so that she could lean against the wall, her arms crossed over her chest. "I don't know what I miss, but it's not Weaver."

John let that go. "What about John Henry? He asked about you, when I left him."

Sierra looked away, a shrug pulling at one of her shoulders. "Maybe, but I'm not a little girl anymore, and he's here for you, not me."

"Cameron sent him," John agreed with a weight in his chest. "That's who he meant by his sister, isn't it? She's not on the chip, is she?"

The pity in Sierra's eyes as she shook her head was answer enough. It was the answer he had come for, the one he didn't want.

John cradled the watch between his hands, trying to come to terms with the fact that the girl he'd followed to the future wasn't here. He'd given up his destiny, the respect of an entire race, and the years he'd had left with his mother, for nothing.

He hit the catch for the first time since Sierra had given it back to him, expecting to see the detonator Cameron had installed so long ago, a fitting metaphor for the mess he'd made of his life. Instead, a simple, yet elegant watch face winked up at him. Someone had repaired it. Staring down at delicate black hands, still ticking round and round, John suddenly knew what he had to do.

"I have to go back."

"How?" Sierra looked skeptical.

"I don't know." All his life, John had wanted to be someone else. Now he just wanted to be himself again.

The thermite smelled like metal.

Sarah held her breath after tasting the tang of it on the back of her tongue. The powder sifted and drifted down to blanket Cameron's body, covering her like a fine snow. Outwardly, Sarah's hand didn't tremble, and her expression remained one of stoic indifference, but inwardly, her emotions were roiling. This is what Cameron had wanted, and Sarah was finally granting her wish, but nothing about this moment felt right.

It wasn't the first time Sarah had burned a terminator to slag, but this was different. There was no hate. No fury directed at the metal corpse. There was only regret mingling with other emotions Sarah didn't want to think about.

Finished with the contents of the tin can, Sarah tossed it aside, listening to it bounce and clatter across the warehouse floor. Ellison had found another empty structure close by and, after a trip to the hardware store for cinder blocks and flares, they now had their own makeshift fire pit. In a few moments, it would become Cameron's pyre.

Sarah paused and looked down at the damaged body of the terminator. She'd dreamed of this moment hundreds of times, of watching Cameron burn, turning her into nothing but dust, ridding her from their lives. But now that the moment was here, that Sarah was in it... She shook her head, ruthlessly telling herself that it didn't matter. Cameron's body was ruined and nothing was going to change that. The girl was right. It was time.

The concrete was cold through the denim covering her knees as Sarah knelt next to the body. She studied Cameron's features, startled by how badly she wished she could see the terminator's soft brown eyes one more time. When she'd told Cameron she'd missed her eyes, it had been a brutal truth. Machine or not, Cameron had possessed beautiful eyes, and Sarah had often found herself sharing more than she should when she looked into them. Cameron had been a confidant, Sarah now understood, the one source she could turn to in the madness of her life. She'd shared things with Cameron she'd never shared with another soul. It made no sense, Sarah realized, that she'd shared so many of her fears with the one thing she feared most.

At least she thought she had, until those brown eyes were gone and Sarah realized she had no one.

Tears blurred Sarah's vision and she clenched her jaw, unwilling to show remorse or grief for a machine. Metal and meat. That was what Cameron had called her body, and since she was determined to never go back into it, Sarah was left with no other choice than to treat it as such. She had to burn it... all of it.

"Every last bolt," Sarah murmured. She reached over the cinder blocks and down into the pit to gently remove the eye patch, running her thumb over the leather. She tucked it into the back pocket of her jeans before forcing herself to look at both the human and inhuman halves of Cameron's face. "Thanks for the help, Tin Miss," Sarah whispered,

reaching out to smooth Cameron's hair away from her face, her hand finally beginning to shake. "I probably should have said that sooner."

Sarah slowly stood before crossing to her backpack and retrieving the flare. She struck it, momentarily blinded by the hot phosphorous light before everything went completely white as she tossed it into the pit. A wall of heat washed over her, sucking the air from her lungs, and then her sight and breath rushed back as the heat subsided to a bonfire hot enough to melt coltan and destroy all evidence of the future.

All that remained was to watch Cameron burn, and Sarah found she couldn't do it. She would stand watch, but she couldn't bear to witness Cameron's features melting and burning into nothingness. It was too much.

She turned her face away from the flames only to detect a familiar, heavy tread approaching from behind. Sarah felt her breath catch and hold, afraid to turn and face the truth her hearing was already telling her.

Cameron stepped up beside her, staring down emotionlessly at the burning body, hers no longer. Sarah took a moment to study Cameron's features, this version of her face blessedly whole, save for a few healing gashes where Sarah's bullets had struck home. The brown eyes were alight from the flames and her own inner power, and the sight made Sarah nearly weak with relief.

"It's what you wanted," Cameron explained at Sarah's inquisitive look.

"Since when do you do what I want?" Sarah asked quietly.

The fire crackled as the air filled with the sharp scents of melting metal and flesh. "You need me," was Cameron blunt reply.

Sarah wanted to deny it but she knew a denial would be a lie. This time, though, that truth didn't bother her nearly as much as it once would have. "So you... did this for me," Sarah said skeptically, waving her hand at Cameron's new body.

There was a pause before Cameron spoke again. "And for me," she said softly. "I can do many things in there, but the one thing I can't be is here, really here." Cameron paused and looked around, seeming to take everything in. It was obvious that Sarah was missing something, and her head pounded anew as she tried to puzzle out the meaning to Cameron's words. "And you said that you missed talking to me, not a computer."

"Yeah? So?"

"You said me. You don't see me as a computer, you see... me."

The absurdity of it all hit Sarah, and she chuckled. She hadn't known her words had been so deep. Cameron tilted her head in reaction, and Sarah felt something in her chest break

free and soar at the sight. Her amusement turned to a full, hearty laughter, until her bruised ribs protested.

"Did I say something funny?" Cameron asked in confusion, her brow actually furrowing.

"No." Sarah shook her head. "I just..." She looked up into Cameron's eyes and, suddenly, her world felt a little steadier, a trifle easier to take. "I just... missed that," she admitted, a little surprised by her own reaction.

Cameron blinked.

It felt like there were so many things still to say, but silence hung thick between them. They stood nearly shoulder-to-shoulder, watching the endoskeleton burn.

Sarah put her hands on the edge of the cinder blocks to steady herself, her emotions feeling as shaky as her body. She noted Cameron's hands rested there as well, the long fingers of her right hand almost touching Sarah's left. She was tempted to close that distance, to feel the living warmth of the terminator next to her, but her hand merely curled around the edge, the concrete scraping her skin as she fought the urge.

When Cameron's touch suddenly eased over the back of her hand, Sarah almost jerked away, but the contact felt too good, too welcome after the events of the past few months. A shudder of relief worked its way through her body, but Sarah didn't move her hand.

She finally looked down to where long fingers were draped over her own before glancing up at Cameron who was watching her with those doe eyes she'd missed so damn much. Sarah swallowed, her emotions almost too much to process.

"Bring any marshmallows?" Sarah finally drawled, trying to deflect the intensity of the moment with humor.

Cameron cocked her head and looked at Sarah knowingly. "You are joking," she accused, the fire only mirrored in her eyes, not off a coltan endoskeleton.

Sarah merely smiled and relished the heat of Cameron's hand.