

## **Long May You Run**

### **By Inspectorboxer**

#### **Teaser**

Savannah sat on the floor of her bedroom and played aimlessly with her toys, her tiny hands going through their usual motions, but her heart just wasn't in it. She had dutifully finished her lessons for Mr. Ellison, and now he was off getting groceries while John stayed with his mom. The sun was setting so she wasn't allowed to play in the backyard, and her favorite playmate hadn't wanted to play at all, not since Aunt Sarah had gotten sick. Now Cameron seemed to only keep company with all the computers in the living room. Savannah thought Cameron looked sad, but she wasn't sure why.

She missed her aunts, especially Cameron, who had always managed to find a moment to spare for her until lately. Savannah knew Cameron was worried about Sarah and had spent all her time taking care of her. Savannah had understood that and had dealt with the loneliness as best as she was able. But Sarah was getting better now. Why couldn't Cameron come visit for a little while?

Sighing, Savannah picked up a few of the toys Mr. Murch had given her. People surrounded her, but since John had come back, she felt less like a member of a family and more like an unwanted outsider.

John was the important one, the one Aunt Sarah and Aunt Cameron cared about most. Savannah was just a child that got in the way. She felt herself hating the boy who'd taught her to tie her shoelaces, wishing he would go back to wherever he'd come from. Cameron had time for her before John came home, and Sarah was beginning to treat her like a daughter. It wasn't fair that a stupid boy had to come in and ruin it all.

But seeing John had made Sarah so happy when she'd been so sick, and Savannah had been glad for that at least.

Would Sarah have been that happy to see her if she were the one that had left? Would she even know Savannah was gone?

Brooding on such thoughts, Savannah threw her toys across the room

and crawled up in her bed, determined not to come out of her room until someone actually noticed she wasn't around.

\*\*\*\*

"Excuse me, have you seen this little girl?"

Person after person slowed to stare at the black and white picture held in a large, beefy hand. The man asking the question in an anguished voice seemed harmless enough, even though his size and bulk would have been intimidating under almost any other circumstance. To the many mall shoppers passing him by, however, he seemed to be a worried father or uncle, trying to find a lost little girl.

A young woman hesitated when she saw the photo. "Hasn't she been on the news?"

Intense brown eyes zeroed in on her face. "Yes. She's my niece. Savannah Weaver."

"I'm sorry I can't help you," she said sincerely as she continued on.

"Thank you," he replied automatically before approaching another couple. Someone out of the millions of people in the city knew where his target was, and he was prepared to ask every one of them until he found her and killed her.

## **ACT 1**

The grass was cold and wet on Cameron's bare feet. She didn't care as she walked stiffly to the picnic table and sat down, watching the swings sway back and forth in the night's gentle breeze. A full moon hung low in the sky, playing hide and seek behind a smattering of clouds. The air felt heavy and damp on Cameron's skin as she leaned forward and put her elbows on her knees, quietly absorbing the sounds and scents around her.

Sarah was sleeping. Not the sleep of the fevered, the sick, or the dead, but a true, healing sleep. Her skin finally felt like her skin, smooth and temptingly soft rather than the hot, tight surface Cameron had become accustomed to when she touched the other woman. The incision site was healing rapidly, too rapidly, Cameron knew, but she would deal with the consequences of her actions when Sarah

confronted her with them. She almost looked forward to the moment, knowing how close she'd been to never having another conversation with Sarah.

Sarah was recovering, surviving to fight another day, but Cameron still felt terrified. Every moment, every system, was attuned to Sarah. The sound of her breath. The beat of her heart. Cameron felt like she would fly apart if either should stop, that her complex and orderly mind wouldn't be able to handle the chaos and pain that would follow. Cameron didn't understand why the fear wasn't going away. Sarah was getting better; it was logical that her own worries should lessen with each new improvement. Instead, Cameron kept expecting the worst. Sarah would have described it as waiting for the other shoe to drop, and Cameron constantly expected to hear the proverbial thud as it hit the floor.

The others thought she was engrossed in her computers, but the truth was that particular position in the house, along with the pattern of the ductwork, enabled Cameron to hear every breath Sarah took. Her computer searches were simply a way to fill the time between the all too rare visits.

As much as she wanted to be constantly by Sarah's side, John was back now. It was his place to watch over his mother, not hers, so Cameron stared out at the night, feeling frightened and resentful at the way the world seemed to constantly conspire against her wishes. All of her wishes but one, she amended.

Sarah was going to live. Cameron knew she really couldn't wish for anything more than that.

The porch door opened, and Cameron cocked her head, wondering whose footfalls she was going to hear. She was surprised by the weight of them, telling her it was Ellison that was coming down the steps and crossing the yard to her position. She had thought he was sleeping. Cameron was almost relieved that it was the former agent that was joining her. She was in no mood to talk to John.

"This seat taken?" Ellison inquired. He had a steaming mug of coffee in his hand that Cameron had smelled before she'd visually confirmed its existence.

Cameron shook her head, watching him curiously as he sat down next to her, careful to leave as much room between them as possible. "Is

something wrong with Sarah?" she asked, worry creeping into her tone.

"She's fine," James answered neutrally. "I peeked in on her before coming down here. She and John are both asleep. Pretty much like they have been for the last two days."

"Good." Cameron nodded her head for emphasis before returning her attention to the swings.

Crickets filled the abrupt silence between them as James sipped his coffee. His gaze went to the swing set, wondering what it was about it that seemed to have Cameron so fascinated. He decided she wasn't really studying it. The terminator's gaze was turned inward, apparently mulling over the events of the last few weeks, the agent guessed.

James sighed. "You've made some pretty serious mistakes lately," he began slowly, aware that he needed to tread lightly. He was chastising a terminator who'd displayed a wicked and violent temper, but who had also displayed surprising gentleness, especially to their two female charges. It was that glimpse of her kinder nature that had his thoughts in chaos, keeping him from his dreams.

Cameron's head lowered at the rebuke before she tilted her face and looked back at him. "You mean Agent Auldridge. Dr. Burnett."

"Yes." He watched her as the moon peered out from behind a cloud and illuminated the beautiful angles of her face. She looked harmless, innocent, nothing like the killing machine he knew her to be. James also thought she looked older. He wouldn't mistake her for a teenager now. It startled him to realize that her taste in clothing and makeup had changed in the past few weeks, the pink eye shadows and baby doll t-shirts mutating into something more closely resembling Sarah's attire. She looked more like a woman in her mid-twenties now. Perhaps it was the change in her clothes and makeup, he mused. Or maybe the last few weeks had aged her as it would almost anyone under the circumstances. "I'm confused by your actions," he finally murmured.

"I am, too," Cameron confessed after a thoughtful moment. "I should have killed them both. Letting them live puts us at risk."

"That's not what I meant..." James spluttered.

"I know what you meant," Cameron cut him off. "Are your concerns about me what's keeping you awake?"

James was mildly surprised by the question. Cameron was getting pretty good at analyzing human behavior. "Among other things," he replied in a droll voice.

"You fear the machines because we can't feel empathy, because we can't understand emotion." Cameron watched him watch her. "But now you fear me because I can."

"Can you?" James whispered, asking the question that had weighed on him since Cameron had come out of the system. He'd never gotten a straight answer from Sarah on the issue, and Murch would just launch into technobabble he hadn't been able to understand. "Do you feel emotions? Is that what happened in the kitchen? Is that what drove you to kidnap a doctor? To attack an FBI agent?"

"And what drove me to spare them," Cameron explained. "Agent Auldridge has a wife. I didn't want her to feel what I was feeling."

James stared at her in fascination, feeling something close to relief that Cameron could feel empathy for someone she regarded as an enemy. Maybe there was hope for them all yet. "Grief?" he guessed, remembering in vivid detail what she had done to the kitchen.

Cameron considered the term; having never named the emotion that had felt like it was tearing her apart, it took her a moment to map the word to the feeling. Slowly, she nodded. "Grief," she agreed.

They sat in silence again. James had more questions about Cameron and her emotions, especially in regards to Sarah, but he let them be for later. He wasn't sure he was ready for the answers. Maybe Cameron wasn't, either.

"What effect is your blood going to have on her?" James finally asked about the other topic that had kept his mind spinning as he had lain in the dark.

Cameron frowned. "I don't know," she admitted. "All that matters is that it saved her."

"She's not going to like having a part of Skynet inside her."

Cameron's frown deepened. "She'll have to learn to live with it," she said softly, but firmly.

"But at least she'll live," James added, finishing Cameron's unspoken thought.

"It won't turn her into a machine," Cameron said after a moment. "If that is worrying you."

James snorted as if he thought the mere idea was silly, but Cameron detected the relaxing of tight muscles along his neck and shoulders. She smirked and looked away.

The former agent noted the expression and felt amusement at his own expense. A part of him almost wanted to like Cameron, to yield to the desire to trust her. Sarah's walls seemed to be coming down where the terminator was concerned. He just wondered if it was exhaustion that had Sarah giving in, or if she truly bought into the whole idea of Cameron being able to feel.

"It must be hard for you," James murmured, the realization coming to him in the quiet. Cameron's head turned, and she looked at him once more, naked curiosity on her face. "Must have been much easier when you were responsible for just John. Now, you feel like you have to protect all of us."

Cameron started to tell him that she felt no duty to protect him, but decided he didn't need to know that, and she wasn't sure that was even true anymore. James Ellison had proven useful as of late, and she found he was a voice of reason and insight when she needed one. Cameron knew she would never be able to fully forgive him for hunting Sarah, but she accepted that his actions had been a mistake, a mistake she knew he would go back and correct if he could. She knew a thing or two about how that felt now. "It was easier," she agreed. "It is... harder... to care about the people you protect."

"You didn't care about John?" James wondered.

"I couldn't. Not before. Not all the way," Cameron explained. "He was a mission. Nothing more."

"And now?"

"Now?" Cameron pondered her feelings. "I don't know."

James sighed. "Be a hell of a lot easier on you if you just had the mission, huh? No John, no Sarah, no Savannah."

Cameron slowly nodded. "It would be easier," she confirmed.

"Wish I didn't care about them, either," James admitted. "I almost envy the machines for that."

"Don't," Cameron said matter-of-factly as she stood abruptly and walked toward the house, not noticing Savannah as the young child slipped away from her open window to crawl back into her bed and cry.

\*\*\*\*

Her mouth tasted like old gym socks. It was the first thing Sarah noticed as consciousness crept over her again, having been absent for the better part of two days. She winced, craving a toothbrush and some potent mouthwash.

"Mom?"

Green eyes snapped open at the sound of John's voice, and Sarah focused on her son's face, looking so achingly familiar but also disconcertingly different. His chin and cheeks were covered in stubble and his eyes were bloodshot as he gazed worriedly down on her. He was older, thinner, harder, and there were already lines starting to form in the corners of his eyes. A small, white scar that she had never seen before bisected his chin, and she spared a moment to wonder what had caused it.

She hadn't dreamed his return. He was here. He was real.

He was home.

"John," she murmured, letting the fingers of her right hand tangle with his. Her son's hand was rough with calluses she didn't remember, and Sarah frowned, trying to clear the cobwebs from her mind. She remembered talking to him before, even if she couldn't recall what they'd talked about. "Where is everyone?"

John glanced toward the door. "Sleeping probably. Except Cameron, of course. She's bound to be prowling around here somewhere." He

smiled as if the return to the same routine he'd left behind gave him some comfort. "Your color looks better." His hand stroked through her tousled hair, smoothing it back gently from her forehead.

Sarah flexed the fingers of her left hand, relieved that she still had a hand to flex and that it didn't hurt as badly as it had before. "Where is the doctor?"

"Cameron let her go."

The news was surprising but a relief all the same. "I don't remember," Sarah admitted, struggling weakly to get up. "I still have my arm, so why am I feeling better?"

John hesitated, easing back into his chair. "Cameron tried something... experimental," he said slowly, still unsure how he felt about the steps the terminator had taken to save his mother's life. "It worked. That's all that matters," he murmured, trying to convince them both.

A flash of fear gave Sarah's body a much-needed surge of adrenaline to clear her thoughts. What had Cameron done? Stolen drugs? Had she killed to find Sarah a cure? Or was that cure a little too close to home? Sarah remembered seeing two I.V. bags dangling above her head as she floated in and out of fevered dreams. One had been full of clear liquid; the other had been full of blood. Sarah had a sudden thought as to whose blood might have been dripping into her veins, and she shivered.

"It doesn't matter now," John said again, noting how his mother's green eyes lifted to the two empty hooks of the I.V. stand.

Sarah sighed and sank back onto her pillow. Death had been hovering. She had felt it, had almost welcomed it. Her gaze went to her bandaged arm, and she ran the fingers of her right hand over the gauze, feeling only a mild sensitivity to the touch. Cameron had, more than once, wisely pointed out that it was hard for something to matter to you if you were dead. Sarah pushed aside the worries about her health and Cameron's 'experimental procedure' and focused instead on her son. "It's good to have you home."

"Good to be home," John promised, relieved that his mother wasn't going to press for details as he reached over and tangled his fingers with hers once more.



Sarah suspected he needed the touch as much as she did to make the moment real. He smiled at her, a genuine grin she hadn't seen on his face in the months before he'd left. It did her soul good to see it.

A sound at the door made John glance up, and his smile faded. Cameron had arrived almost silently, only the creaking of the floorboard announcing her presence. He felt his jaw tighten at the sight of her.

"I heard voices," Cameron said by way of greeting. Her brown eyes fastened on Sarah and lingered. "How are you feeling?"

Sarah considered the question, guiltily enjoying the sight of the cyborg in her form-fitting jeans, bare feet, and untucked t-shirt. Cameron looked rumpled in a way only she could make appealing. Sarah felt the now familiar surge of attraction, but it was laced with something sweeter, something more tempting and dangerous. She swallowed. "I've been worse," she admitted dryly.

Cameron cautiously came closer, eyeing John warily. The tips of her fingers came to rest on the bed millimeters from Sarah's healing arm. She wanted to touch her, wanted it more than she would have ever thought possible, but she commanded her fingers to stay where they were. "Can I get you anything?"

Green eyes studied brown as Sarah tried to figure out what Cameron was thinking. She wasn't worried that Cameron had shared the particulars of their confusing relationship with John. Cameron could be a little clueless at times, but she was never stupid. Whatever was whirring through her cyborg brain, however, was making her frown, and Sarah found she really wanted to clear that expression from Cameron's beautiful features. "I really want out of this bed," Sarah confessed. "I need a bath and a toothbrush."

"Mom," John scolded, only to fall silent as Cameron peeled the blankets away from his mother and slipped her hands under Sarah's body.

"What in the hell are you doing?" he snapped, scrambling to his feet, indignant on his mother's behalf.

Cameron froze, Sarah's body already in her arms and halfway off the bed. "Complying with her wishes."

"John."

He looked down at his mother, and she shook her head in silent warning.

Cameron resumed her movement, gently easing Sarah from the bed and setting her carefully on her feet, keeping a firm grip on her as Sarah swayed in place. "Are you okay?" she almost whispered.

John watched them curiously, surprised that his mother was allowing the contact.

Sarah was forced to lean heavily on the terminator for support, but her body greedily soaked up Cameron's heat and nearness. "A little shaky," she admitted.

"I won't let you fall," Cameron vowed.

"I wasn't worried," Sarah replied with a weak smirk. She turned her attention to John who looked less than thrilled at the situation. "Would you rather hold me up in the shower? Or have James do it?"

A blush roared onto John's cheeks and Sarah bit back a chuckle at the flustered expression that crossed his features. "Didn't think so," she muttered. "Come on, Tin Miss. Lead the way." She smiled at her son. "Let me get cleaned up and feeling human, then we'll talk. Okay?"

John wearily nodded, watching Cameron warily. His shift in attitude toward the terminator made Sarah's stomach churn with worry. John finally sighed and left, and Sarah watched him go, not sure what to think.

"I look like her," Cameron explained as she eased Sarah into the bathroom.

"Like who?" Sarah asked in confusion as Cameron got her settled on the lip of the tub, waiting for her to remove her bandage before handing her a tube of toothpaste.

"Allison Young." Cameron ran Sarah's toothbrush under the water before passing it to the other woman. Sarah was looking at her, waiting impatiently for her to elaborate further. "The woman I'm modeled after," Cameron explained in a subdued voice.

Sarah swallowed. It had never occurred to her that Cameron had been modeled after someone real. "He met her? This woman?"

"I believe so. John jumped to a time where she would have existed. It's a logical conclusion given the way he is reacting to me."

"Maybe he's just pissed that you tricked him." Sarah started brushing her teeth, grateful for the minty taste but feeling like the motion was sapping the last of her strength.

"I'm sure that is likely as well." Cameron let Sarah finish, reaching around her to turn on the tap in the bath, making sure that the water was at the optimal temperature before plugging the tub and letting it fill.

Sarah rinsed her mouth out and set her toothbrush on the sink, lifting her gaze to watch Cameron as the terminator kept her eyes focused on the rising water. Cameron was acting mechanical, disassociated. Sarah hadn't seen her like this since the day Cameron had come for her at the prison. "What's wrong?"

Brown eyes snapped toward green, and Sarah watched with a sinking heart as Cameron's expression closed down even further. "Cameron..."

"Nothing," Cameron lied even though some part of her reveled in hearing Sarah say her name again. She shut off the water before kneeling at Sarah's feet; removing her socks and then reaching for the waistband of Sarah's sweats, she hesitated, her fingers resting against the warm, soft skin of Sarah's stomach.

The tension that had been between them before her illness came roaring back, and Sarah swallowed thickly. "Can't get out of them myself, girlie," she murmured, her voice raspier than she wanted it to be. Cameron looked up at her, and they stared at each other for a long moment before the terminator's gaze dropped and she began to undress Sarah.

Cameron's touch was gentle but clinical, and Sarah didn't know if she should be grateful or saddened by that. "Where is Savannah?" she asked to fill the uncomfortable silence between them.

"Probably sleeping."

"You don't know?" Sarah gently teased, hoping to coax a little warmth

out of Cameron's brown eyes.

"I've been... distracted," Cameron murmured as she set aside Sarah's clothes before easing her into the water. Her gaze skimmed up Sarah's left arm, noting that the rash and angry red lines had faded to almost nothing as she reached for the bar of soap and handed it to Sarah. Cameron kept her gaze averted from the rest of Sarah's body, knowing that if she looked, if she remembered, then her intention to put some distance between them would falter.

Warm, wet fingers brushed Cameron's chin, and Cameron let Sarah turn her head to meet her gaze squarely.

"What's wrong?" Sarah asked again, determined to get an answer this time.

"Nothing you need to worry about," Cameron promised quietly. She abruptly stood. "I'll be just outside the door. Let me know if you need anything."

"Cameron..." Sarah swore softly as the terminator fled and closed the door between them. Feeling irrationally upset by Cameron's actions, Sarah sighed as she eased the soap down her healing arm, noting just how much better it looked. The injury had damn near killed her, and just the thought had her turning her attention to the area around her wound and carefully studying what could only be a surgical incision. There was no way she should have healed this quickly.

Clenching her jaw, Sarah set aside her concerns and finished bathing, the act taking every last ounce of her energy. She wasn't even aware of falling back asleep, or of Cameron gently lifting her from the bath, drying her off, and carrying her back to bed and tucking her in.

Cameron stared down at Sarah before bending at the waist and kissing her softly on the forehead. She let the touch linger, breathing in the other woman's scent, giving in to a moment of weakness in the hope it would settle her thoughts and ease the longing she felt.

She was disappointed, but unsurprised, that the contact only made the craving worse.

\*\*\*\*

Cameron found John waiting for her at the bottom of the stairs.

"Done?" he snapped.

The terminator clamped her jaws together, biting back what she wanted to say. "She fell asleep again. I put her back to bed." She started to go around him, but John sidestepped and blocked her path. "What?" Cameron demanded, doing her best to keep her voice even. She didn't know why she felt so angry with John. He'd done what she had wanted him to do, chasing her into the future. It upset her that his future had still clearly contained Skynet because she knew that meant she and Sarah had failed, but that didn't explain why she felt like shoving him through the nearest wall.

John hesitated, seeing something in Cameron's eyes that was nothing like the blank stare she so often gave him. "We need to talk," he said with a little more civility.

"Does it have to be now?"

The question made John blink. "Can you think of a better time?"

"Yes." Cameron's answer was blunt and emotionless as she moved past him, heading for the kitchen. Dr. Burnett had said Sarah needed to get back on solid foods as soon as possible if she recovered. Cameron was determined to have a meal prepared for her when Sarah woke again.

John grabbed Cameron's elbow and spun her, bringing them face-to-face. "Damn it, don't walk away from me," he hissed, but there was a pleading tone to his voice.

Cameron stared at him, her chin hitching higher. "I don't take orders from you. Not anymore."

John gaped at her. "And if your future John was here?" he asked, confused by Cameron's reaction.

"He could go to hell," Cameron announced, taking satisfaction in the shock that entered John's eyes and the way his head rocked back in surprise. "I'm no one's puppet anymore. Not yours, not his, and not Skynet's." Feeling anger start to swell, Cameron ripped her arm out of his grip and stalked away. She needed to get out, to be away from everyone and their expectations of her. Snatching up a set of car keys, she headed for the back door.

"Don't."

John was three steps into his pursuit of Cameron when Ellison's voice drew him up short. "I need answers," he explained, his tone more contrite, just as he heard the back door slam and the truck in the drive roar to life.

"You'll get them," James promised. "But give her some space." He leaned in the doorway to the kitchen, a dishtowel draped over his shoulder.

"Space?" John's voice was incredulous. "She's a machine. She doesn't need space." There was venom in the description, and John closed his eyes, taking in a deep breath. He wasn't being fair to Cameron. He knew it. But it was so damn hard seeing Allison's face every time he looked at her.

James sighed. "That's right. And she looked like she wanted to toss you out a window. Leave her be. She's had a rough few days."

"Cameron doesn't feel," John reminded him, and then winced, realizing he was starting to sound like his mother.

The former FBI agent drew in a slow breath. "Not the Cameron you remember," he said cryptically.

John regarded him curiously, wondering what in the hell he meant by that.

"Since you can't get your questions answered right now, maybe you can answer a few of mine."

"Fine," John sighed, walking over to the couch and dropping down on to it. "What do you want to know?"

James lingered in the doorway for a moment before sauntering into the living room and sitting down in a chair opposite John. He pulled the towel off his shoulder and began to twist it between his hands. "Why did you come back?"

"This is where I belong," John stated, more sure now than ever that his decision had been the right one.

"Then why did you leave?"

John laughed bitterly. "Know what's funny? You and I already had this conversation in the future."

James blinked. "I was still..."

"Alive? Yeah." John's posture lost some of its tension when he remembered Prophet, his words of wisdom and how just hearing his deep baritone had given John a slice of home he'd so desperately needed.

"Your mother?" James asked gently.

Shaking his head, John slumped against the back of the sofa.

"I'm sorry."

"That future doesn't exist anymore," John explained. "And I intend to make sure it never will."

"Fair enough," James murmured. "But you didn't come back alone. You brought pieces of the future back with you. Who else, John? Derek? Other soldiers?"

John narrowed his eyes as he stared at the older man. Slowly, he shook his head. "Other soldiers?" he asked in confusion.

"The other time bubbles," James pressed. "Who was in them? Were you supposed to meet somewhere?"

Breath catching, John leaned forward with sudden urgency. "There have been other bubbles?"

"You didn't know?"

"How many?" John demanded. "How many and where?"

"We have no way of knowing how many. Twelve have been reported. As for where... the middle of the interstate... somewhere on the beach near Santa Monica Pier... they've been spotted all over the area."

John digested the news, trying to understand what it could mean. Had the others been caught up in the time machine as it malfunctioned?

Was it possible some of his friends and enemies alike had been flung back with him? He closed his eyes, feeling a rending in his chest when he thought of Allison, of her fingers slipping out of his own.

"John?" James prompted.

"I..." John had to take a shallow breath. "I wasn't alone, but no one else was supposed to come back. It was just supposed to be me and Allison."

"Allison?"

Ignoring the question, John scrubbed his hands through his short hair before getting to his feet, suddenly too agitated to sit still. "Weaver... she sabotaged everything. The energy was jumping everywhere. Allison... She got torn away from me." He swallowed, feeling the burn of tears and the familiar weight of failure pressing on his chest. "I couldn't save her."

"You think she came back?" James asked, tucking his questions about the girl into the back of his mind for later. He could hazard a guess about her importance to John, however, by the stricken look in the younger man's eyes when he said her name. "That she might be out there somewhere?"

John kept pacing. "It's possible. It's possible," he repeated in a whisper filled with hope.

"Weaver? John Henry?"

John had to mentally snap himself out of remembering Allison, of those final moments when everything had gone to hell. He'd thankfully been too worried about his mother and exhausted from time-lag to obsess over what had happened the last two days. He nodded. "She got there first... took John Henry with her."

James shook his head. "So they're here."

John nodded again.

"Just what we needed. Another complication." The former agent sighed and scraped his fingers over his bare scalp.

"Have you investigated the time bubbles? Were there any..."



"You are the only person we know about, John. If anyone else came through... there were no witnesses. Cameron thought it might be some kind of malfunction. She'd never heard of time bubbles appearing without people or terminators in them. Hell, two of them formed right in the middle of the interstate about a mile from your mom and Cameron. They were in a massive pileup because of it." James leaned back in his chair and watched John pace. The news had clearly rattled the young man. "Won't be satisfied until you check them all, will you?"

"I have to know." John stopped and turned to look at him. "We could have more allies here." He thought of Sierra, wondering if she'd come through whether she wanted to or not. What would happen with both of them in the here and now? And which one would Cameron find to be the more worthy leader to follow?

"Or more enemies," James pointed out, and John reluctantly nodded in agreement. He sighed. "Let me get cleaned up and we'll go check out a few."

"Cameron... my mom..." John protested.

"I'll call Cameron. She can stay with your mom and Savannah."

"I... I don't know if I trust her," John confessed hesitantly. "I don't feel like I can leave her alone with them."

"Did you find out something in the future? Something that leads you to believe Cameron can't be trusted?"

John pursed his lips and shook his head, too preoccupied to see the relief that washed across James' features.

"John, whatever you remember about Cameron... she's different now."

"You've said that before." When James didn't reply, John continued, "But how would you know? It's what she does. She infiltrates. She *deceives*..."

James heard the anger in the young man's voice and understood. "Cameron didn't make you jump to the future. You made that choice all on your own." He found himself in the odd position of defending the cyborg and wanting to. "You may have learned a lot in the future... but you still have a ways to go when it comes to learning the facts before

you react.”

Stung, John simply nodded, accepting the older man was probably right. With a sigh, he turned away and headed up the stairs to change and check on Savannah. He wasn't sure if he wanted to keep the little girl away from Cameron to protect her, or if he just wanted to make sure she wouldn't learn the skills that had made her a better leader than he would ever be. At least, he thought ruefully, he could admit his intentions might be less than honorable.

Reaching her door, he knocked twice, almost expecting Sierra's voice to bark at him from the other side. When he heard nothing, he turned the knob and peered inside, frowning when he discovered an empty bed.

John stepped inside and moved closer, spying a piece of paper lying on the pillow. He picked it up, frowning at the nearly illegible handwriting scrawled across it with a crayon. He felt his heart lurch when he'd finished reading it, his green eyes jerking toward the open window. John stumbled closer, tripping over a handful of toys as he leaned out.

Six year old Savannah, revealing a flash of the resourceful woman she would become, had crawled down the trellis and run away.

## **ACT 2**

Cameron sat on the beach, listening to the soothing roar of the waves as they crashed onto the sandy shore, the water skimming high enough to kiss the tips of her bare toes. She stared out across the vast blue waters and tried to order her thoughts. Cameron wished John had stayed in the future. For Sarah's sake and her own. She was disgusted to realize out of all the emotions she was capable of learning, selfishness and jealousy had come all too easily, but she felt them both in equal measure. Just when she'd had a chance to finally make Sarah take care of herself... to make the other woman know a shred of happiness... John had returned and upended everything. It wasn't his fault, Cameron acknowledged; he'd no doubt returned with very good reason, but she was determined to make sure that he treated Sarah well. He would not take her for granted like he had before. John would take care of his mother now the way she'd always taken care of him, or Cameron would stop fantasizing about putting him through a wall and would make it a reality.

She wasn't sure what she had expected when she had saved Sarah's life, but this wasn't it. Deep down, in the place where she hid her hopes, Cameron knew that her expectation had been Sarah's gratitude, and a continuation of the relationship that had begun before Sarah collapsed. Neither had been realistic, she could admit, since the steps she had taken on Sarah's behalf lead to anger and fighting, not gratitude. And even without John, Sarah had been pulling back from her from the moment they had stepped out of the motel room into the harsh light of day.

But even that rocky and perilous path was denied her now. Things would be different with John back. Sarah's focus would shift off everyone and everything, zeroing back in on John with laser intensity. It wasn't healthy for either Connor, Cameron knew, but Sarah seemed as helpless to stop herself as Cameron was to stop her feelings for Sarah.

Cameron closed her eyes, blotting out the feel of the sun, the sound of the waves. She recalled what it had been like to hold Sarah in her arms earlier, to feel Sarah's touch on her skin. Cameron wondered if addiction could be a side effect of the modifications she'd made to her programming. Sarah was capable of giving her control and just as adept at making Cameron lose it. Giving her up, putting space between them... Cameron wasn't sure how she was going to do it. She felt like she needed Sarah to function.

It was irrational, but Cameron couldn't shake the thought no matter how she tried.

Her eyes fluttered open in time to watch a group of seagulls sail noisily past, skimming the beach before landing a few feet away. She watched them for a moment, thinking about what she had to do.

She had to refocus and define her priorities. Kaliba needed to be destroyed. C.A.I.N. had to be eradicated. That was Cameron's purpose, her reason for existing, she reminded herself. Stopping Skynet needed to be her focus, not Sarah Connor. But Cameron knew it was Sarah that made the mission have meaning. She wanted to save Sarah from Judgment Day. She wanted to save them all. Even though stopping Skynet would mean the end of her as well.

The thought frightened her now. Cameron didn't want to die. She didn't want to leave Savannah and Sarah. But she would destroy herself when the time came. There was no choice. It was the only way

to ensure the people she cared about stayed safe. Her head rocked forward in small yet determined nod as she made her resolution.

Her phone rang, and Cameron fished it out of her jacket pocket, frowning when she saw Ellison's number. She flipped it open. "Is Sarah okay?" she demanded in lieu of a hello. When she heard the familiar tones of the code being punched in on Ellison's end, Cameron had to fight the urge to swear, another characteristic of Sarah's that seemed to be rubbing off on her. She punched in the code and asked the question again.

"She's fine," Ellison told her, but there was an edge to his voice that made Cameron get to her feet. "It's Savannah."

"What's wrong?"

"She's missing."

\*\*\*\*

Determined footsteps walked up another driveway. The terminator had covered significant ground overnight and into the mid-morning hours. He'd woken nearly one hundred fifty families as he'd gone door-to-door in neighborhoods in close proximity to where the Weavers had once lived. Many had recognized Savannah Weaver's picture from the news, and two mothers had even recognized Savannah as a child that had gone to school with their own children. No one knew where she was now.

The sprinklers came on in the yard next to him, firing off spurts of water that arched through the air and splashed across the knees of his jeans. He paid them no heed as he finished his approach up the sidewalk before knocking on yet another door.

An African American woman in her early forties answered, her eyes weary and suspicious. "Can I help you?"

The terminator began to run her address through his database when he noticed her heart rate and perspiration increase as she looked at him. "I am searching for this girl." He held up the picture of Savannah and noted how her breath caught in surprise. "Have you seen her recently?"

"No," the woman said too quickly, and the machine could see that her

pupils were dilated, and he detected a waver in her voice. "I'm sorry."

The property belonged to Miles Dyson, deceased, the terminator discovered. He tilted his head as he regarded her. "You're lying."

"Why would I lie?" she asked, edging back inside a few steps, her hand wrapping tightly around the doorknob.

He was speaking to Terissa Dyson the terminator determined as he completed his search on the Dyson family. Her face matched her driver's license photo he had in his memory.

And her name matched a simple root command.

"Tango," he stated simply.

Terissa blinked in confusion. "What?"

The terminator reached for the gun tucked in the back of his jeans, and Terissa slammed the door shut, spinning and dropping low as several bullets punched through the wood where she'd just been standing.

\*\*\*\*

The sun was starting to feel hot, and her backpack was too heavy. Savannah shifted, trying to readjust it and to ignore the uncomfortable sweat beading down her back. She missed her new home already, but there was no place there for her anymore. She was in the way, keeping Cameron from being able to do what she needed to do, and Savannah didn't think she could bear to watch Sarah shift her affection back on to her real child. The mere thought was enough to make tears collect in the corner of her blue eyes, and she wiped at them angrily.

Why did that stupid boy have to come home? He was ruining everything.

Savannah felt bad for leaving Mr. Ellison. Sometimes he seemed as alone as she felt. He was a nice man, and she liked him like a teacher, but it wasn't the same. He took care of her the way she wished Sarah and Cameron would. She loved his voice, though. There was something reassuring about it, and a part of her ached to hear it.

Starting to feel itchy as well as hot, Savannah stopped walking and

popped down on a curb. The air smelled like water and fresh cut grass, and she could hear a sprinkler going somewhere near by. There was no traffic, most of the residents already having left for work or school. Savannah was alone, and she was beginning to wonder if she always would be.

Unzipping her backpack, Savannah starting fishing around inside it, finding items she could discard to make the backpack lighter. She tossed out a few apples and the jar of peanut butter she'd absconded with, and then hefted the bag to see if it felt more manageable. Deciding it did, she zipped it back up and slipped it over her shoulders.

She wouldn't have to walk much further, she guessed. Soon the neighborhoods would have to give way to businesses. Savannah figured she could catch a bus from there. Hopefully, the driver would be able to take her back to her real house, even if there was no one there to welcome her home.

\*\*\*\*

When Cameron slammed open the back door and strode into the living room, she found John and Ellison waiting for her. She started to snap at them both, to demand Savannah's whereabouts, until she saw they weren't alone.

Sarah was sitting on the couch, her green eyes bleary but clear of fever as they focused on Cameron intently. For a moment, the terminator's thoughts derailed at the sight of her, causing her to draw up short and hesitate. Cameron didn't know if she should scold Sarah for being out of bed, berate Ellison and John for telling Sarah about Savannah, or ignore everything and worry about nothing but the missing little girl. "Has Savannah been located?" she finally asked in a far more civil tone than she had planned to use, tearing her attention away from Sarah with effort to look at Ellison.

"We searched the neighborhood," James murmured, relaxing once he realized Cameron wasn't going to strangle any of them. She'd had murder in her eyes when she'd stormed in. "No luck. We'll have to branch out."

"Why did she leave?" Cameron wondered as her gaze returned to Sarah, as if she were the only one with the answers.

Sarah glanced up at John and dipped her head at him, indicating he

should show Cameron the note in his hands. John handed it to the terminator wordlessly, all of them watching her closely as she read it.

"I don't understand," Cameron told them, her voice holding genuine confusion. "Why did she feel she was unwanted?"

"She's a kid. She needs affection, attention," John said slowly, remembering all too well what Savannah was feeling. He refused to look at his mom, to see the guilt in her eyes as her hand brushed his elbow and slid reassuringly down his arm.

"And she hasn't gotten much of either lately." Sarah sighed and ran a hand through her hair, her left hand, Cameron noted. Sarah was showing definite signs of improvement.

"Where would she go?" John asked.

"Back to Zeira Corp? Back to her home?" James guessed.

"Those are many miles away," Cameron stated needlessly. "Too many things could happen to her before she reaches her destination."

"We don't need to be reminded of that, Cameron," Sarah told her, but there was no bite or venom in the rebuke. Slowly, Sarah got to her feet, and Cameron realized she'd changed and was wearing her boots.

"You're not going," Cameron blurted. She ignored Sarah's arched eyebrow at her reaction and the way John swung his head back around to stare at her. "You need rest."

"You think I'm going to sleep with Savannah out there somewhere alone and hurting?" Sarah looked incredulous. "Not likely."

"Sarah..." Cameron started to protest.

"Save it," John wearily told the machine. "You know how she gets. Mr. Ellison and I have already made all the arguments. She won't listen."

"You ride with James," Sarah told the terminator. "I'll go with John."

Cameron opened her mouth to argue, but Sarah held up her hand. "Why don't you two go start the cars?" Sarah instructed John and James. "We'll be out in a minute."

James left wordlessly but John lingered, confused by the change in dynamics he was witnessing between his mother and Cameron.

Sarah smiled tightly. "Go start the van, John. I just need a moment with Cameron."

Reluctantly, John nodded, his gaze landing on Cameron's features. He expected to be met with bland indifference, but Cameron only had eyes for his mother. John's steps faltered when he saw Cameron's jaw bunch beneath her smooth skin, and her brown eyes darkened in a way he'd never seen before except...

Except when Allison had been upset, he realized with a harsh swallow. Tightening his grip on the keys in his hand until they cut into his palm, John moved past the terminator and out the back door without another word, trying to make sense of the emotion he'd just witnessed... emotion Cameron wasn't supposed to be able to feel.

Sarah waited until he was gone before she fixed her gaze on Cameron again.

"This is my fault," Cameron guessed as the back door closed.

"It's no one's fault," Sarah tried to reassure her as she sat down on the arm of the sofa, her legs too weak to hold her up for long.

"Savannah is a child. Children rebel."

"But she said she wasn't wanted." Cameron took a step closer. "That's not true."

Sarah could see how much the situation was bothering Cameron, and the terminator's agitation only added to her own. "We'll find her." Their gazes met and held, and Sarah finally had to swallow and look away. "Do you understand why I'm sending you with James?" she asked hoarsely, feeling the need to explain herself.

"A terminator was after Savannah once. It might not have been the only one," Cameron deduced. "You're worried with her out in the open that the police will find her before we will. That a terminator could find her before we will."

"You're not?" Sarah murmured.

Cameron hesitated. "It is a valid concern. We should take the police



scanners.”

“James and John already have them.” Sarah dipped her head and sighed, wishing, just once, that her life could give her a tiny little break. “James can’t handle a terminator without help,” she murmured, feeling oddly guilty for sticking Cameron with the former agent.

“Neither can you,” Cameron pointed out, taking yet another step closer. “Not like this. Let me go with you.”

Sarah was startled by how badly she wanted to relent. She and Cameron had become a dysfunctional team in John’s absence, and Sarah realized she rather liked things that way. “I need to talk to John,” Sarah explained, ignoring the undercurrent of worry she could hear in Cameron’s voice. “I need to know what he’s seen. What he’s been through. He won’t open up if you’re there.”

“You’re killing two birds with one stone,” Cameron realized, the human expression sounding strange to her own ears. She didn’t like the arrangement, but she was beginning to accept it.

Sarah’s lips quirked. “Something like that.” She hesitated before reaching out and grabbing Cameron’s hand. Her skin felt warm and smooth as the terminator’s wrist immediately rotated so her fingers could wrap around Sarah’s. Sarah noted Cameron seemed startled by her own reaction, as if she had intended to pull away and had done the opposite.

“We’ll find her,” Sarah promised again with conviction.

\*\*\*\*

Terissa grabbed her cell phone off an accent table, the one thing she knew she would need. Behind her, the front door seemed to implode, splinters sheering off and whipping through the air, a few of them striking her back as she once more turned and fled.

Fear, thicker than she’d ever felt, swam through her veins and almost paralyzed her. She had known what had darkened her door the moment she’d opened it and had seen him standing there. Her mind had already started planning her escape route, pausing only when he’d shown her the picture of Savannah Weaver.

A bullet, muffled by a thin silencer, disintegrated a set of glass shelves

as she ducked and darted for the stairs that led to the basement and garage. She took two seconds to close the door behind her, flipping a switch next to it before descending the steps. Reaching the bottom, Terissa jerked open a footlocker and hefted a shotgun out of its confines, drawing a bead on the center of the door as she waited, her breath coming in harsh gasps. She'd known this moment could come since Danny had chosen the company over her. She was determined not to go quietly.

Three bullets punched through the wood surface at chest level. Terissa's finger tightened on the trigger and she prayed, wishing, for once, that Sarah Connor would materialize to save the day.

A loud sizzling sound filled the air and the lights flickered before going out. Terissa heard the sound of something heavy crashing to the floor above. The terminator had touched the doorknob, the one she'd juiced with enough voltage to power the whole house. She had one hundred and twenty seconds to escape. She didn't waste a one of them.

\*\*\*\*

"Should I be worried?" John finally asked into the quiet. His mother was in the passenger seat, her head resting on her fist, her whole frame the personification of exhaustion save for her eyes. Those were constantly moving, searching every house, every yard, every block.

Sarah glanced his way. "Worried?" she asked, her voice rough with disuse.

John shifted. It felt weird to be driving again. He'd thought nothing of sliding behind the wheel when they'd left, but he found himself horribly out of practice. They'd been honked at more than once. "That you're being so quiet."

His mother smiled. "I didn't want to distract you from driving," she teased faintly.

John smiled just a little, savoring the hint of his mother's rarely seen humor. "I think I'm getting the hang of it," he muttered good-naturally. "You try not driving for over a year and see how good you are."

Sarah was quiet for a moment, her smile fading. "Was that how long it was for you?"

John nodded before risking another glance at his mother, realizing for the first time that he had no clue how much time had passed for her. It was a disconcerting thing to think about. "You?"

"Four months."

John blinked, trying to wrap his head around that. He was relieved that he hadn't been gone as long as he'd thought he had been, but he still felt guilty for having left at all. "I wanted to set the time machine so that I'd come back practically the same moment I left."

"Not an exact science, huh?" Sarah forced her gaze off of him and back onto the streets. Her stomach felt like it was in knots, but at least she knew it was due to worry about Savannah and had nothing to do with the illness that had nearly killed her. She felt as weak as a new kitten, but her determination to find the missing little girl was as strong as steel.

"Not exactly," John hedged. He didn't tell her how it had all gone wrong, what it had cost him to return. She didn't need to know, at least, not yet. His mother had already lost Kyle Reese once, and John loathed the idea of telling her what had become of his father in this latest timeline. John felt like he'd caused her enough pain already.

They were silent for several minutes, each lost to their own thoughts.

Sarah glanced down at the cell phone in her lap. She was tempted to check in with James and Cameron, but she knew they would have called if they'd had any luck. Part of Sarah's brain was honest enough to admit that she just wanted to hear Cameron's voice. Here she was with her son, the one thing she'd wanted most in all the world, and all she wanted to do was call her robot buddy. Sarah snorted at herself. Feeling this way was dangerous, she acknowledged. It was another step on a slippery slope. Her fingers wrapped around the phone before shoving the device into her pocket.

"I missed you."

Sarah's head turned toward John again, an expression of surprise on her features but his words warmed her. She offered him a tired smile. "I missed you, too."

John could see the questions in her eyes. He had a few of his own.

"It... it's bright here," he began slowly. "I'd forgotten what sunlight felt like."

The words hung heavy in the air between them as John confessed, in the nicest way he could, that Skynet had won again. He spared his mother the description of the world he'd lived in for fourteen months. No doubt she had dreamed of it a thousand times already. Hearing that her nightmares couldn't compare to reality was something he didn't need to burden her with.

"I'm sorry we failed you," Sarah murmured. "I had hoped... that maybe we could have..." She took a breath and released it slowly. "I wanted you to go to a future free of Skynet. Instead... instead it looks like I broke another promise."

"You did everything you could. You both did." John swallowed hard once more, feeling tears threaten.

"Both?" Sarah asked quietly.

"You and Cameron," John clarified, his voice hushed.

Sarah felt her breath catch. She closed her eyes, absorbing the knowledge that trusting Cameron hadn't been a mistake. The relief John's words brought her... that Cameron was a true ally... it almost brought tears to Sarah's eyes.

"I left you to fight alone. I abandoned you."

Sarah's brow furrowed. "No," she murmured, her eyelids fluttering open as she looked upon John once more. "You followed your heart. I understood." If the roles had been reversed now, Sarah wondered if she would have chased after Cameron into an uncertain future. She refused to dwell on the immediate answer that sprang to mind.

"Did you?" John asked bluntly. Their gazes met and slowly slid away, each of them feeling guilty for different reasons. "I was an idiot."

"Cameron tricked you." Sarah looked back out the window. "She had your best interests in mind, but she tricked you all the same."

"You were supposed to go with me," John told her, expecting the news to anger his mother.

Sarah snorted again. "I know," she drawled. "I think Cameron was rather put out with me that I didn't do what she wanted me to."

John glanced askance at his mother. She used to talk about Cameron with disdain, and John knew, if given half a chance and flimsy excuse, his mom would have dismantled Cameron without shedding a tear. Now, though, Sarah's voice sounded warmer when she spoke of the machine. Some kind of truce had been brokered between them in his absence, he realized. Bemused, John decided at least one good thing had obviously come out of his desertion. His curiosity raged, and he was on the verge of asking what had changed between them when his mother asked him a question that banished everything else from his mind.

"I take it I wasn't around?" Sarah watched him, saw his eyes tear before he cleared his throat. She had her suspicions confirmed when John shook his head.

"You and Cameron... you were both gone." His voice was tight and strained.

Sarah took that news and absorbed it. "What happened to Cameron?" she asked, needing to know, alarmed by how intensely the thought of losing her hurt. She didn't dwell on the feeling, stuffing it back into a corner of her mind to muse on later.

John shook his head. "No one would tell me. All I was allowed to know was that you both..." His voice faded and he shrugged jerkily. "Ellison was still around, though," he announced a moment later, dredging up a wry smile from somewhere.

Sarah rolled her eyes at that. "Figures," she drawled.

"And Terissa," John said after a moment. He decided then and there that he wasn't going to tell her about Savannah. That would make her disappearance even worse, and his mother didn't need that added stress right now.

That got his mother's attention. "Terissa Dyson? You saw her in the future?"

Nodding, John kept his eyes on the road, scanning for Savannah. "Derek was there, too," he admitted. "First person I saw."

Sarah dropped her head as the memory of John's uncle lying in a pool of his own blood with a bullet between his eyes swam to the surface. A thought struck her, and Sarah felt her breath hitch again before she turned her eyes back on her son. She could see John bracing himself, like he knew what question was coming. "Kyle?" Sarah whispered.

John's jaw clenched and he nodded once in the affirmative, unable to say more for fear his voice would break. Tears blurred his view of the road. He could remember Kyle's eyes, so like his own, the way his father's arms had felt around him. The love that had been in his eyes as the life faded from them.

"You met your father," Sarah murmured, her own tears collecting in her eyes, but this time they were tears of joy. "He helped you come back, didn't he?" She didn't know how she knew, she just did.

"Yeah," John managed to ground out. "He knew... who I was. Carried a picture of us in his pocket."

Sarah grimaced and had to look away. The familiar ache when she thought of Kyle pressed hard on her chest, but it felt tempered now, a fraction easier to take. "I'm glad you got to know him," she said in a strangled voice as a few traitorous tears slipped free and spilled warm and wet down her cheeks.

"I told him all about you," John confessed. "Just like you would tell me all about him." He looked over in time to see his mother close her eyes. He heard her swallow. "He loved us. He'd never even met us and he still loved us."

Nodding, Sarah wiped at her eyes. "That sounds like Kyle." She bit her lip and glanced at her son watching him regain his composure for several quiet minutes as she did the same. "And what about Allison?" she finally asked knowingly, carefully.

The brakes squealed as John slammed on them in the middle of a residential street. He turned to look at his mom in shock, but Sarah was regarding him with a mild expression. "How did..." John hesitated.

"Cameron guessed," Sarah told him. "That must have been... strange." She could see strong emotions roiling in John's eyes, and Sarah's stomach sank when she realized what he'd felt for this girl. What he'd given up to come back home. "John..." she began.

John shook his head and pressed on the accelerator. "It doesn't matter. None of it happened. I've erased that future."

"It happened to you," Sarah disagreed.

"And I'm the only one who will ever know it. I'm going to save her. I'm going to save them all." John's tone was full of icy conviction.

He said nothing more, and Sarah left him to his memories of a future that would never be while she turned her attention back to the streets, looking for a child lost in the here and now.

\*\*\*\*

Savannah waited under the covered shelter of a bus stop, her legs swaying several inches off the ground where she sat alone on the single metal bench. Her nose wrinkled in distaste at the pungent scent of cigarettes and the overflowing trashcan baking in the midday sun in the corner opposite her. She'd been there for over an hour, not sure when she could expect a bus to arrive and too afraid to leave in case she missed it.

Cars came and went at the busy intersection, but no one seemed to pay any attention to her. There were only a few people on the sidewalk. Most of them passed her without a second glance, but Savannah noticed one woman sitting at a table outside a small restaurant across the street who kept shooting glances her way. Something about the attention bothered Savannah, made her feel like she was doing something wrong. Aunt Cameron and Aunt Sarah often disguised their appearance when they went out, and suddenly, Savannah wondered if she should have done the same.

The woman paid the check and offered a quick, tight smile to the waiter before collecting her purse and a shopping bag. Savannah watched as she hesitated at the curb, clearly trying to decide whether or not to cross the street. Finally she did, hurrying across the long intersection and making it to the bus stop just as the light changed once more and traffic resumed. A truck belched a cloud of thick black smoke as it rolled forward, and Savannah covered her mouth and lowered her head, hoping the woman would just walk by.

"Hi there."

Pursing her lips in disappointment, Savannah slowly lifted her head.

The woman was slender and pretty, dark blue eyes set in a tanned face haloed by honey blonde hair, like a lot of women in Los Angeles. Savannah didn't know how old she was, but she seemed about Sarah's age. "Hi," she greeted before looking away.

"Sweetheart, are you sitting out here all by yourself?" the woman asked.

"I'm not supposed to talk to strangers," Savannah responded primly, thinking that would put an end to the conversation.

The woman smiled, bemused. "Well my name is Melanie. Would your name happen to be Savannah?"

Sudden, unexpected terror had Savannah hopping off the bench and trying to dart past the nice lady, but Melanie knelt quickly and caught her, her grip firm but gentle.

"It's okay, sweetheart. I'm not going to hurt you. I've seen your face on the news," she explained. "A lot of people are looking for you," she promised the skittish child. Melanie pulled out her cell phone and dialed 9-1-1. "I'm going to make sure you get home safe and sound, okay?"

Savannah watched her warily, feeling like she'd just made a truly bad mistake.

### **ACT 3**

The halls were eerily quiet. James could still smell smoke and melted plastic, a pungent mixture that made his eyes water. Around him, the walls of Zeira Corp were charred and crumbling. He knew his shins and toes would be covered with bruises later as he did his best to follow Cameron through the ruins of the building, tripping and stumbling every few steps in the relative darkness. For her part, Cameron moved gracefully, using some kind of night vision to navigate where she was going while James only had a meager flashlight.

He'd been impressed with how neatly Cameron had bypassed what little security remained on the building. There were guards patrolling, but slipping past them had been disgustingly easy. James had felt a flash of fear for one of the uniformed young men when he'd nearly happened upon their position, but Cameron had held still and watched



him walk by, indicating no desire to do him any harm.

Inside the structure, James found himself completely alone with the terminator. Cameron peeled back a melted and jammed door leading to a stairwell. Her face was impassive, but James suspected it was taking all of Cameron's willpower to be quiet and methodical. James knew it was taking his. He wanted to race through the halls, to call Savannah's name, but he held himself in check, barely.

"Go ahead," Cameron indicated, turning his way and looking back down the hall the way they'd come to see if anyone had heard the noise. She noted James as he paused at the sight of her glowing blue eyes, but to his credit, he simply nodded and ducked under her arm, practically getting on his knees to crawl into the stairway. Cameron followed him, letting the metal snap back into place behind her.

"Anyone coming?" he asked, determined to meet her mechanical gaze.

"No." She stared at him a moment before looking away.

"You hear anyone at all?" James asked as they started down the steps.

"Other than you?" Cameron answered evenly.

James scowled at the back of the terminator's head. Cameron had a strange sense of humor that she seemed to like to employ at his expense.

"No." This time Cameron's voice was softer. "I do not believe she is here."

"We have to know for sure," James argued as they descended toward the hidden room in the basement. He wiped at the back of his neck, his gaze darting to everything and nothing, half expecting Catherine Weaver to slither into appearance before his eyes.

"We do," Cameron agreed. Something groaned from above and Cameron glanced heavenward. "You should have stayed in the truck."

"It will go faster with the two of us."

"Not if I have to pull you out of a section of the building were it to collapse on you," Cameron pointed out archly. James was wearing on her nerves. She wanted to be with Sarah and John. Those were the

people she should be protecting, not the agent who'd hunted them into the ground. If not for their common goal of finding Savannah, Cameron would have found a way to leave the man behind hours ago.

"You mean you would?" James replied with a smirk. "I think you're warming up to me." He chuckled a little when Cameron turned back and practically scowled at him. "You're getting those human expression down, Tin Miss."

"Only Sarah is allowed to call me that." Cameron's tone left no room for argument, but James also knew it wasn't as cold or angry as he might have expected it to be.

"I used to think she called you that as an insult," James mused aloud. "Now I think it's a term of endearment." He noticed Cameron falter in her steps for the first time, actually bumping into something as she glanced askance at him.

"Sarah has lots of nicknames for me," Cameron almost grumbled. They reached the basement, and she kicked in another door, her sensors telling her there was no one that could possibly hear the commotion.

James arched his eyebrows at the show of strength, wondering if it was the talk about Sarah or worry about Savannah that had Cameron ditching the need to be discrete.

Moments later, they stood side by side in John Henry's room, taking in the destruction. The computers that remained were melted beyond recognition. The screens that had hung from the ceiling were now nothing but shattered glass covering the charred floor like glitter. Sarah had destroyed one of those screens, Cameron remembered, those moments replaying through her head with a strange sense of detachment. Her emotions had been in their infancy then, fresh and new inside an environment that would give them room to expand and evolve.

James swallowed. "Your new path began here," he murmured to the cyborg at his side as if he'd read her thoughts. "You've come a long way." He watched her, seeing the contemplative look on her features. She turned to look at him then, the blue behind her eyes winking out as she studied him with familiar brown eyes.

"Have I?" Cameron asked uncertainly. She didn't wait for a response

as she moved further into the room, expanding her senses to try and detect any sign of Savannah's presence.

"Do you regret it?" James asked. "Coming out of the system?"

Cameron hesitated. "Sometimes," she admitted.

"Then yes, Cameron. You've come a long way."

The terminator turned to look at him. No, James realized. Not a terminator. Not anymore. Cameron was a lot of things, but she was no longer one of the monsters of his nightmares. "Regret. Worry. Fear... you didn't feel those things before."

"You say that like they are good things to feel." Cameron moved past him, stepping back out into the hall.

"Everyone second guesses their decisions, Cameron. It's human nature," James said as he followed.

"I am not human." Cameron kicked down another door as if to prove it.

"Part of you is," James said when the echo of the door striking the concrete had faded. "I think I'm actually convinced of that now." He drew up short when Cameron unexpectedly turned, bringing them almost face-to-face.

"I made modifications to my programming. Modifications I shouldn't have made," she told him, an edge of anger in her voice.

"Modifications that made you feel... gave you empathy. How can you regret those?"

"They're distracting. You were right when you said it was easier when I only cared about the mission. I've lost focus. Sarah almost died. Savannah has run away. I am inefficient like this."

"Caring about someone is never inefficient."

Cameron stared up at James in the harsh beam of the flashlight. There was understanding in his gaze, sympathy reflected in his eyes. She didn't know what to do with either so she looked away.

"Savannah is not here," she announced. "We should go."

\*\*\*\*

Agent Auldridge slowly slipped from his car, his eyes skimming the tree line of the small park he found himself in. It was warm, too much so, and he shed his blazer and tossed it into the backseat before shutting the door. A holster rested on one hip, his gun at the ready. Most days, he didn't bother to wear it. His usual line of work didn't require it. Since his run in with Cameron, however, it was never inches from his side.

The weapon was cold comfort. He'd seen the video from the prison, noted with horror the number of rounds Cameron had taken and still she kept moving. None of them had even slowed her down. Coming face-to-face with the subject at the heart of Sarah Connor's so-called insanity had shattered his belief in damn near everything. He'd wanted to know the truth. Had suspected Sarah was much saner than anyone had believed. Now he had proof. The evidence was the healing bruises on his face and under the cast he sported on his left arm.

The park was quiet. A small plane was flying overhead as Auldridge set out for the closest trail, dirt crunching under his shoes and drifting on the breeze as he followed the directions he'd been given in a hasty and panicked phone call.

"Terissa?" he called out when he stepped under the canopy of trees and the harsh midday sunlight became muted and pleasant.

"Thomas."

Auldridge spun, his hand going to his gun and hovering over the butt for an uncertain moment. She emerged from the shadows behind him, and he spared a moment to wonder how he hadn't seen her. She frowned when she saw his face, moving closer on shaking legs to study his features in a shaft of light.

"What happened to you?" she demanded.

"Cameron," he said simply, feeling a little like a young child who'd displeased his mother. He watched as her lips tightened into a firm line, but she didn't ask any further questions. Terissa clearly knew whom he was talking about and he didn't know how he felt that she'd kept that knowledge from him. "What's going on?"

"One of them... one of them came to my house. It was looking for Savannah Weaver."

"A terminator," Auldridge breathed, saying the word and meaning it for the first time.

"Yes." Terissa swallowed and sank down onto a large rock. "He had her picture. I knew what he was the second I opened the door."

"What happened? Why meet me out here?" Auldridge knelt stiffly and looked up at her.

"It... recognized me." There was a wealth of fear and confusion in Terissa's voice. "It called me something... Tango. Then it started shooting..."

"It targeted you?"

Terissa nodded. "I would have called Sarah... I know you don't believe..." She hesitated, taking in the cuts and bruises on his face before her lips twisted into a wry smile. "Or at least you didn't..."

"But you don't know where Sarah is," he guessed. Taking off his glasses, he looked up at the woman he'd built a fragile friendship with over the last several months. "Terissa, Savannah Weaver isn't your problem."

"I can't save my own son," she told him with a fierce edge to her voice. "He's trying to create the very machines my husband died to stop. If he succeeds, the world will burn. I know she isn't my child, but I'll be damned if I let Skynet have her. It's taken enough... will take even more if we don't stop it."

"You sound like Sarah," Auldridge pointed out, but there was no judgment in his tone.

Terissa's features tightened in pain. "All this time," she breathed. "All this time I've hated that woman for what she took from me. What must it be like, Thomas? To know the world is going to end and no one believes you? To have everyone think you're insane?"

"You don't have to get involved," the agent told her again. "I can handle it."

"It wants me dead. It knows I'm here. It won't stop. They never stop," Terissa explained, echoing Sarah's own words. "And whatever it wants that little girl for..."

"It can't be good," Aldridge finished. "We need to find Sarah."

"We need to find Sarah," Terissa agreed.

\*\*\*\*

"You learn how to do that in the future?" Sarah asked her son as the security lock disengaged with a quiet beep.

John smirked as he shoved the porch door to the Weaver residence open. He'd already bypassed the cameras. "The other side had all the tech. We were lucky to have indoor plumbing."

Sarah winced at both the thought and the maddening itch in her left arm. Under the bandage, deep in the bone, it tickled like crazy. Making a mental note to ask Cameron about it later, Sarah rubbed distractedly at the wound as she followed John inside. A nine-millimeter was tucked into the back of her jeans, but she didn't trust herself with it unless it was a necessity. She knew she'd be lucky to hit the broad side of a barn and stay on her feet if she had to shoot.

"How are you feeling?" John asked as they made their way through the kitchen. Unease threaded through him when he thought about whom the house belonged to. Would Weaver come back here? Would they round a corner and find her waiting?

"Been better," Sarah admitted. She reached out and ran a hand through her son's hair, feeling the touch steady her as his green eyes shifted and focused on her. "Been a lot worse, though." John smiled, and the sight made her breathe a little easier. He'd grown up more than just physically while he was gone, she realized. "We should split up," Sarah decided. "Get in and out quicker."

"Mom..." John started to protest.

Sarah shook her head. "I'll rest when we've found Savannah. I can stand up for a few more minutes at least."

"No." John's voice was firm, and Sarah blinked in reaction to it. "She

could be here.”

“Savannah?” Sarah asked in confusion.

“Her mother,” John clarified, venom in his voice.

Sarah reacted to that, her smile fading and tightening into a hard line. “She came back with you?” Sarah watched him carefully in the light streaming through the multitude of windows. The news wasn’t surprising, but it was unsettling. One more complication they didn’t need. “Damn it.”

“She came back ahead of me. Used the time machine to jump her and John Henry and left the rest of us to die.” John’s voice has gone rough with the recent memory. He nodded toward the living room. “Let’s just stick together.”

Sarah nodded wordlessly, deciding not to press for details right now. They paused in the entryway, staring down at the space where Derek had lost his life. The blood was gone and the floor practically gleamed in its absence. Sarah felt the now familiar pang in her gut when she thought of John’s uncle, but her son simply stared at the floor for a moment before moving forward without a backward glance.

Sarah watched him head up the steps, glad to have her son home, but aching for the parts of him he left in the future. He’d come back to her, but he hadn’t come back whole. Marshalling her reserves, Sarah started to ascend the stairs. Halfway to the top, the hairs on the back of her neck started prickling. She turned and looked down, studying every piece of furniture. Even the rail under her hand became suspect. Reluctantly, Sarah let it go and leaned against the wall for support.

They weren’t alone. She could feel it, there just wasn’t a damn thing they could do about it. “We should hurry,” she told John where he waited for her at the top of the steps.

John nodded. He’d already felt it, Sarah realized. She forced herself to pick up the pace, worried about Savannah even more than before. On their way over to the house, Sarah had prayed they would find the little girl here. Now, she fervently hoped they wouldn’t.

\*\*\*\*

His hand was blistered and raw, the skin burned down to a section of

metal that gleamed dully in the sunlight filtering in through Terissa Dyson's bathroom window. Flexing his damaged fingers, the terminator lifted his gaze before tilting his head, regarding the supplies in the medicine cabinet. Finding what he needed, he began to wrap a wad of gauze around the wound, hiding it from prying eyes. He could hear sirens in the distance. Someone had finally discovered the shattered door leading into the residence and had notified the police. It was time to leave or risk being slowed down further as he was forced to deal with the authorities.

Walking down the driveway, he ignored the curious neighbors who studied him from the safety of their homes, peering out at him from between shuttered blinds. One man was approaching him, his voice angry, a pistol gripped in the palm of one hand. The terminator noted the make and model and decided it would be an ideal weapon to replace his now useless gun. He detoured toward the man, watching as the neighbor paused in surprise before backing up in fear.

"Give me your weapon," he ordered when he finally had the man against a tree.

"Where's Terissa?" the man demanded, lifting the gun as the terminator approached.

"It does not matter. She will soon be dead." The terminator ignored the neighbor's gasp of surprise and clutched the weapon, ripping it from the man's hands so hard he flung him several feet, scraping him over the asphalt on the driveway.

A soft beep emerged from his pocket, and the machine paused long enough to retrieve his cell phone and read the notification that had been sent to the device. His head canted as he processed the details.

Savannah Weaver had been located by the Los Angeles Police Department. She was being kept at a precinct fifteen miles from his current location. Turning back to the man now scrambling away from him across the driveway, he issued a simple command. "Car keys."

\*\*\*\*

Her eyelids felt scratchy and every muscle in Sarah's abused body was starting to protest. Used to ignoring her own needs, she pushed the fatigue and pain away as she slipped her cell phone out of her pocket. They were back on the road, John behind the wheel, as they went



from one neighborhood to another. Sarah's thumb stroked over the closed phone as she warded with herself before she finally flipped it open, dialing Cameron's number by memory.

"Who are you calling?" John asked.

Sarah didn't answer, resting her head against the window as the phone on the other end rang one, twice.

"Are you okay?"

Sarah couldn't deny the flutter of pleasure that stole through her at Cameron's clear concern. Her lips twitched in wry bemusement as she lowered the phone and entered the code. She heard something that sounded like an irritated sigh on the other end before the code was repeated back at her. "I'm fine," she drawled before Cameron could ask again. "Just thought we should check in."

"She was not at Zeira Corp," Cameron confirmed what Sarah already suspected.

"Savannah didn't go home, either," Sarah informed her. She squinted, seeing signs of a neighborhood that looked vaguely familiar beyond the windshield. Motioning at John to turn left, she shifted her hold on the phone.

"That place is no longer her home," Cameron argued, her worry for Savannah sharp in her tone. "We're her home."

Sarah was startled to realize she felt the same way, the argument she'd been about to voice dying in her throat. She remembered lying on her bed with Cameron, Savannah nestled between them. The moment had felt surreal for the normalness of it, and Sarah had wallowed in it at the time. Sarah swallowed as she nodded at John to make a right turn. "Savannah is just confused and upset. We'll find her and everything will be fine. I promise."

There was a long pause where Sarah heard nothing but the soft drone of the van's air conditioner.

"You swear?" Cameron asked softly.

Sarah felt a pang in her chest at the need and hope she could hear in Cameron's voice. Her own fear for Savannah was as keen and sharp as

a blade, but she set it aside, doing what she could to allay Cameron's concern. "I swear."

There was another lengthy pause, but when Cameron spoke again, her tone had moderated to sound annoyed rather than worried. "You should be resting."

It was almost a relief to have Cameron go back to her familiar badgering, and Sarah couldn't help but grin at the expected scolding. "Cameron..."

"You're taking unnecessary risks," the cyborg continued.

"What else is new?" Sarah smirked and gave John a fraction of a smile that he hesitantly returned. She could see confusion in his eyes, no doubt he was wondering why she was being so civil to the terminator, but Sarah didn't make excuses. Not to herself this time, nor to John.

"Please," Cameron said seriously. "Tell me how you're feeling."

The smile faded and Sarah cleared her throat. "Like ten miles of bad road," she admitted with a quick glance at her son who wisely kept his eyes on the street. Thoughts of the so-called 'experimental procedure' tickled the back of her brain, but Sarah wouldn't acknowledge them. Not yet. "And my arm itches like crazy."

There was a thoughtful silence. "The itching is good," Cameron said slowly. "It means your injury is healing."

"If you say so, Tin Miss." Sarah licked her lips nervously. Of all the fights she had picked with Cameron over the last two years, this was one argument she didn't want to have. "You and I are going to talk about this later."

"I know," Cameron admitted, resignation in her voice. She glanced down when her phone beeped, and she pulled the device away from her ear to read the notification on her screen. For the first time in her existence, the terminator swore. "The police have Savannah," she announced without preamble.

\*\*\*\*

A truck rolled to a stop in the reflection of the driver's side mirror, and John watched as Cameron stepped out, her movements aching

familiar and yet distinctly different from Allison. He expected her to come to him and her sudden detour around the back of the van had him craning his neck out his window to see where she was going. The side door suddenly rolled open and Cameron climbed inside, the van dipping noticeably with her deceptive weight. Ellison lingered on the sidewalk behind her, keeping his gaze on the neighborhood they found themselves in.

Sarah shifted in her seat, turning in time to find Cameron's face level with her own as the terminator went down on one knee and settled next to her. "What else did you learn?" she demanded.

If Cameron was put off by Sarah's terse mood, she didn't show it. "Savannah is at a police station seven miles from our current location. The authorities are attempting to locate her closest relative."

"Shit," Sarah hissed, shaking her head and massaging the itching wound beneath the bandage on her arm. She noted Cameron's gaze zeroing in on the motion, but the terminator prudently didn't comment.

John watched them both. "So what do we do?" he asked. "We can't just go in there and get her back."

Cameron looked like she was going to dispute that statement when Sarah put her hand down on Cameron's shoulder, stilling her words.

"John's right," Sarah murmured.

"We can't leave her there," Cameron argued, her eyes searching Sarah's gaze.

"Because she's a threat to our security?" John asked bitterly.

Cameron swiveled her head and glared at him before returning her gaze to Sarah. "We're her family," she stressed.

John drew in a surprised breath at Cameron's words. His mother's gaze locked with his, and he kept the questions that were crowding onto his tongue in check.

"We'll figure something out," Sarah told Cameron as her gaze returned to the cyborg. "We can't just go in there with guns blazing..."

"If there is a machine after her, it knows her location. It would have received a notification the same time I did." Cameron's brown eyes were intense as they regarded Sarah. "We're running out of time."

Sarah shook her head again, knowing the risks they were considering. She blew out a sharp breath. "Cameron..."

Cameron didn't wait for her to finish. She turned and grabbed James' arm, dragging him inside the van before closing the door. "Drive," she ordered John.

John looked at his mother for direction. With a terse nod of her head, Sarah agreed to Cameron's course of action, knowing in her heart it was the only one she would be able to live with anyway.

## **Act 4**

The peppermint in her mouth tasted old and dusty, like it had lived in someone's pocket for too long. Savannah sucked on it anyway, her throat hurting from all the silent crying she'd done in the back of the police car on her way to the station. She wished she'd never left Sarah, Cameron and Mr. Ellison. Even John would be a welcome face at the moment, she realized.

Her feet hung limply a clear six inches from the floor, and she cradled her favorite stuffed giraffe in her lap. Savannah eyed her backpack where it sat forgotten in the middle of a nice policeman's desk. He'd said his name was Detective Alvarez, but that everyone just called him Alvie. He was a big man, older than Mr. Ellison, with a shock of gray threading through his dark brown hair. He had kind eyes and a fun accent, but Savannah refused to speak to him. She'd already caused enough trouble for Cameron and Sarah, and now it seemed like she was going to cause even more.

Detective Alvarez was on the phone, occasionally shooting what should have been reassuring smiles her way. Savannah ignored him, her mournful blue eyes constantly searching the small room, hoping to spy she wasn't actually sure what.

It certainly wasn't the man that had just walked in. Savannah sat up straighter in her chair as she felt an icy shiver travel down her back. The way he moved, the way his blank gaze roved over everything in sight... she knew what he was before the door closed behind him.

Terror washed through her, and Savannah slid off her chair just as the detective hung up the phone.

"Hey there," he said with a friendly laugh as he caught her arm. "Where do you think you're going?"

Her young brain, with very little experience in lying, still managed to come up with the perfect excuse. "Bathroom."

Detective Alvarez smiled. "Third door on your right."

Thanking him weakly, Savannah clutched her giraffe to her chest and tried not to run. She passed the bathroom with a quick backward glance, relieved to see the detective was rummaging through her backpack and was paying her no heed. She was so busy watching him she didn't notice when someone stepped into her path until she slammed into a solid pair of legs. Savannah looked upward, expecting another police officer. She was startled to find the familiar face of Terissa Dyson peering down on her.

There was a shout from the front desk and then the unmistakable sound of a gunshot before the screaming and dying started. Savannah whimpered as she was scooped up in warm arms.

"Go!" A voice yelled that Savannah didn't recognize. She saw a man in glasses come running toward her, pulling his gun from his holster, and then the hallway whipped by as her rescuer turned and ran.

"Go!" Auldrige shouted again, putting his hand in the center of Terissa's back and urging her forward. Heavy gunfire erupted behind them as he threw his shoulder against an exit door and found it locked down.

Terissa wasted no time, pivoting and running down an adjoining hallway. Savannah's arms were like a vise around her neck, but the child didn't cry. Breath coming in heavy gasps, Terissa didn't even look back to see if Thomas was still with her. When he'd gotten the call that Savannah Weaver had been found, Auldrige had driven them immediately to the station. Terissa had felt like she was in someone's crosshairs from the moment they had walked inside. They'd seen Savannah hop off the chair and head down the hall and had detoured to intercept her. The move had probably saved their lives.

"It's coming," Savannah warned into the curve of Terissa's neck, watching as the machine rounded the corner and began firing at any man that got in his way. The officers jerked and flailed under the hail of bullets, their blood spattering the walls and floor. She didn't look away.

The precinct was a maze of doors. Terissa finally chose one, not bothering to lock it as she fell to her knees and scrambled toward a desk, Savannah still clinging to her. They both hunched under it and waited, helpless to do anything else.

Another heavy volley of thunder came from the hallway. Terissa closed her eyes and pulled the young child to her, whispering the Lord's Prayer under her breath.

The door swung open and every muscle in Terissa's body tensed, ready to feel pain, ready to accept the end.

"Savannah?" a familiar voice called out.

\*\*\*\*

Thomas felt fire slice across his left ankle, and he stumbled and went down. He could only watch as Terissa kept running with the child in her arms, and he hoped against hope they would find a way to escape.

Rolling onto his back, the FBI agent adjusted his sweating grip on his gun, pointing it at the metal monster plodding toward him. Half the terminator's face was gone, revealing the chrome gleam under shredded flesh. When the machine focused on him, it was with one human eye and one mechanical, and Thomas felt his world slow as he watched the terminator raise his weapon, targeting him in sights that were guaranteed not to miss.

Before either of them squeezed off a round, the terminator was rocked to the side by a fast moving, slight body that plowed into it and took them both crashing into a desk. Thomas lowered his gun and tried to drag himself backward down the hall, glancing back in time to see Cameron's familiar face as she stood and grabbed the terminator by the lapels of his jacket before slamming him back into the floor again. The desk splintered and the tile cracked under the impact, but the terminator wasn't so easily swayed from his mission. He grabbed a portion of a table leg, swinging out and connecting with the side of Cameron's head. She pitched forward and stumbled, and Thomas

would swear he heard a grunt of pain.

Suddenly, arms were sliding under his own, and he was being hefted to his feet. Thomas yelled in pain until his rescuer took on some of his weight. There were no words between them as their gazes met. John Connor simply pivoted and began to practically carry him down the hallway.

\*\*\*\*

The chair swung fast and hard at the window. Glass shattered and rained down on the brittle brown grass below. James swept the shards that remained aside with what was left of his battering ram before turning and snatching up Savannah. He lowered her over the side, thankful they were on the first floor. She dropped to the ground, managing to stay on her feet, but rather than running like he'd told her to, she simply stepped back and waited on the both of them.

"You next," James instructed Terissa, his voice reflecting none of the surprise he felt at finding her in the middle of this hell. He linked his fingers and gave her a boost as she leveraged herself outside, landing more roughly than Savannah and feeling the glass nick the skin of her palms as she broke her fall.

James quickly followed as more shouting and gunfire returned. He scooped Savannah up in one arm and grabbed Terissa's hand with the other, dragging the woman across the parking lot to a waiting white van.

The side door rolled open and Terissa came face-to-face with Sarah Connor. She had never been so happy to see the woman in her life and only barely restrained the urge to hug her.

"Terissa," Sarah blurted in surprise just as Savannah squirmed out of James' grip and launched herself into her aunt's. Sarah grunted and lost her balance, but she held on to Savannah, her arms wrapping around the child and squeezing tight as they toppled onto the metal floor of the van.

"It's in there," James announced.

Sarah swallowed as she eased upright, Savannah still in her arms. "I guessed that," she drawled as more gunfire echoed outside, blending with the distant sound of sirens. James slid the door shut behind him,

and they all sat there staring at each other.

Sarah met Terissa's shocked gaze, but there was a fire in the other woman's eyes she hadn't seen in a long time. Neither of them said a word as Terissa put her hand on Savannah's back in wordless comfort, all of them waiting to see what would happen next.

\*\*\*\*

John eased Auldridge down a wall, helping the man to get off his feet. He could see Ellison running with Terissa and Savannah through the partially open blinds of a window, and he ached to follow, to give them cover.

"Go," Auldridge told him, witnessing the same thing John had. "Help them."

John's jaw hardened as he looked at the other man. "If it comes in here, offer no resistance. Don't point your gun at it, just play dead."

"It'll know..."

"It will, but it only cares if you're a threat. It'll leave you alone if you leave it alone. Understand?"

The agent figured if anyone knew anything about terminators it was the young man in front of him. He nodded once. "Go," he urged again between gasps for breath. "Get them out of here."

John didn't bother to nod in agreement. He turned away and ran, leaving the FBI agent to an uncertain future.

\*\*\*\*

The pain was indescribable.

Cameron tried to think through it, but her whole vision was filled with red as warnings flickered across her optics and blood oozed into her left eye. The other terminator was bigger than her, stronger. She'd suffered significant tissue and muscular damage, even if her endoskeleton was still relatively unscathed.

Another bullet punched through the skin of her right side, and she was helpless not to cry out as the force of it slammed her back onto the



unforgiving tile. The terminator loomed over her, pointing the muzzle of his weapon at her head.

"Where is the girl?" it demanded.

Cameron tangled her feet with his, twisting and toppling him over as his gun fired, the bullet whizzing by harmlessly and exploding through a nearby desk. Then she was on him, grabbing him by the neck and bashing his head against the floor. Tile chipped and splintered, stinging her face, but Cameron ignored it, determined to stop the machine before it hurt the humans she cared about.

Around them was nothing but death and destruction. None of the police officers had survived the assault. There was only the two of them now in a fight between the cold certainty of a mission and the hot fire of emotion.

The terminator tossed Cameron aside, and she hit the wall, sliding down it and staying there for a moment as she tried to regain her bearings, to ignore the excruciating pain that threatened to shut her down completely. He didn't give her the chance, jerking her up from the floor and tossing her through a bullet-ridden window and onto the asphalt outside.

Distantly, Cameron heard Sarah's voice, mingled with Savannah's, screaming her name. Then there was only the squeal of tires, and Cameron watched as the van carrying her whole world sped away. She closed her eyes in relief.

\*\*\*\*

"John, pull over!" Sarah yelled, horrified that he'd left Cameron behind.

Her son looked at her in surprise. "Cameron would want Savannah safe, she'd want us all safe," he replied, navigating down the street, as the sound of sirens grew closer. He finally understood Cameron's role, the one his mother had tried to make him learn time and time again, and suddenly, Sarah seemed like she wanted him to ignore every lesson she'd drilled into him.

Savannah was finally crying, more for Cameron than the ordeal she'd just been through. Her arms tightened around Sarah's neck as her tears spilled hot and fast down Sarah's skin.

"Pull the hell over!" Sarah shouted, her fear for Cameron giving her tired and healing body a much-needed boost of adrenaline.

"Mom..."

"Now, damn it!"

The van lurched to a stop near the truck Cameron and Ellison had abandoned when they'd all met up. Ellison slid the side door open and moved to take Savannah. He gently pried her out of Sarah's arms while Sarah soothed the child with words and calm touches on her hair before Ellison took her away, crying out for Sarah and Cameron. Terissa slid out of the van, her eyes tracking first from Ellison and Savannah to Sarah, sitting stubbornly on the floor of the van.

John got out and slammed his own door, coming around the van to offer his mother help. "She knows where we are. Cameron can find her own way home," he insisted, reaching for Sarah's arm to help her out but she jerked away from him.

"I'm going back for her," Sarah insisted. "We can't just leave her."

John blinked in confusion. "You're tired. You're not thinking clearly..."

"Give me the keys," Sarah demanded, her palm outstretched.

"I'm not letting you risk your life for a machine," John answered, his gaze briefly sliding to Terissa who was still standing motionless beside him. She had made no move to follow Ellison to the truck.

Sarah felt like she was unraveling. Every moment away from Cameron only made the fear grow, only filled her mind and chest with more chaos. "John, I'm not going to ask you again, give me the goddamn keys!"

Terissa reached out and plucked them from John's pocket. John could only stare at his mother in shock, incapable of understanding why she was so determined to help a cyborg she'd once pushed out a window. "Mom..."

"Go," Sarah instructed, tears choking her voice. "Get Savannah home." She didn't wait for a reply, sliding the door closed on her son's wounded expression. Sarah turned to find Terissa slipping behind the

wheel. "What are you doing?"

"I don't know what's wrong with you," the other woman murmured, "but I can see you're in no shape to drive." The engine turned over.

Sarah watched John open the door of the truck as she eased into the passenger seat. He hesitated, looking back at them with worry and anger. She wouldn't look at him as they drove past the truck to turn around and head back to the war-ravaged station.

\*\*\*\*

The sirens were too close now. The arrival of more officers was imminent. Cameron lurched to her feet, trying to decide if she should run or finish what she started. The terminator would keep hunting Savannah, and as much as Cameron wanted to go to Sarah, that knowledge tipped the scales for her and sent her stumbling back toward the door.

The pain made it hard to move, to even think, but she pushed through it, forcing one reluctant foot in front of the other. She caught her reflection in the glass of the front door, seeing the evil bruises and bullet holes all over her body, but there was no sign of metal she noted with detachment. Not even a sliver of it shown through any of her wounds.

Her vision shifted from her reflection to the form of the terminator hefting a shotgun on the other side of the door. She dove sideways, missing the close spray of buckshot as it disintegrated the glass. Distantly, she was aware of the weapon striking the floor as he discarded it. Struggling to stand, Cameron felt his hands come down on her shoulders and then she was airborne again, landing on the asphalt and skidding into a parked patrol car that rocked with the impact.

All of her processes were rebelling, telling her the pain was too much for her system to handle. Cameron could feel herself starting to go offline, could feel her lesser functions winking out one by one. As she looked up, the terminator lumbered toward her, and for the first time, Cameron knew what it must feel like to have one of the machines intent on destroying you at any cost. She closed her eyes, knowing the fight was lost, and let the memory of kissing Sarah Connor be the last thing she would ever see.

Machine gun fire rang out, and Cameron's eyes fluttered open in time to watch the terminator jerk as the bullets struck his bulky frame. Her gaze slid to the door where Agent Auldridge was bracing himself, unloading the weapon into the terminator, playing the role of Cameron's most unlikely hero.

The terminator turned away from Cameron and started for the agent, taking the bullets as they riddled his torso and face. The gun clicked impotently, and Auldridge struggled to reload a new clip, his hands slippery with sweat and blood.

Cameron got her feet under her and stood on unsteady legs just as a familiar white van came around the corner, tires squealing as it rammed the terminator, sending him crashing through a squad car, twisting and warping the frame like it was made of tin. Cameron staggered toward Auldridge, ripping the gun out of his hand and grabbing him by the collar as the terminator struggled to disentangle himself from the remains of the vehicle.

The van door slid open and Cameron tossed Auldridge inside before collapsing on the metal floor after him. Then the door closed, and the van rocked as it raced away.

"Cameron." Sarah's face swam into view, lines of worry and fear etched into her features. Cameron could feel the other woman's hands on her, assessing her injuries. They were warm and callused, the touch as familiar to her now as the green of Sarah's eyes.

"Savannah?" Cameron asked, her voice frighteningly faint even to her own ears.

"Safe," Sarah promised. "She's safe."

Cameron nodded and let her eyes close, finally yielding to the inevitable as she went offline.

\*\*\*\*

"Is she going to be all right?"

Sarah turned her head, looking back at Cameron as Terissa helped Auldridge out of the van. Seeing Cameron so lifeless twisted something in her chest and she had to look away, focusing back on the FBI agent that had taken over where Ellison had left off. "I don't

know," she admitted.

"She isn't like the others." Auldridge's voice was thoughtful.

"She isn't," Sarah agreed, accepting the truth of that fact more now than she ever had before.

"What happens now?" the agent asked. "You expect me to just go inside, forget this happened?" His gaze strayed to the unfamiliar front door of the townhouse he was renting before his eyes tracked back to Sarah. "The police will know..."

"The police will know nothing," Sarah cut him off, but without anger. "Cameron overrode all the cameras before they went in. If they're lucky, they'll see the terminator come inside and maybe fire a shot or two. The rest..." Sarah shook her head.

"But Savannah... The authorities will know she's still out there."

"They knew that before," Sarah replied simply. "This isn't your fight. I suggest you go back to your life, Agent Auldridge. Forget me. Forget my son."

"How am I supposed to do that? After all I've seen?" he asked her, wincing as Terissa adjusted her grip on him.

Terissa and Sarah looked at each other knowingly. Terissa nodded her head once and Sarah sighed.

"We have your number," Sarah finally told him with a hint of a ragged smile. "If we need your help, we'll call you."

"Call me anyway." Auldridge turned his head to look at Terissa. "I need to know you're okay."

Terissa gave him a tired smile. "Let's get you inside," she instructed gently.

Sarah watched them go before turning her focus onto Cameron. She eased onto her knees next to her, running her fingers through Cameron's hair. "Come on, Tin Miss," she breathed. "Wake up."

There was no response. Cameron looked... Sarah couldn't even complete the thought. She closed her eyes against the burn of tears,

hearing the door to Auldridge's house close and the light footfalls that heralded Terissa's return. "Don't you leave me, Cameron," Sarah told the terminator. "Not now. Not after all this."

\*\*\*\*

John and Ellison moved aside as Terissa and Sarah carried Cameron in between them. Belatedly, Sarah realized she'd directed Terissa to their home without hesitation, letting the other woman in on their secrets without a single question. She wasn't sure if it was fatigue or worry for Cameron that had clouded her judgment, Sarah only knew she was strangely grateful to have the other woman there.

Savannah ran toward the unconscious terminator as Terissa and Sarah maneuvered her onto the couch, both of them arranging her limbs so she would be comfortable, both of them realizing how pointless that was when they were done.

Sarah turned to John. "Get me the toolbox and some..."

"I know the drill," John said quietly, turning on his boot and moving toward the garage.

James stepped closer, watching as Savannah sat on the floor at Cameron's side, holding the lifeless machine's hand. He felt his throat tighten at the sight. "Has she woken at all?" he asked Sarah softly.

Sarah shook her head.

"Auldridge?" James wondered.

"We dropped him at his home. A bullet grazed his ankle, but he'll live," Terissa said her first words since starting the van to bring them here.

"Why were you there?" James asked the question Sarah had only peripherally thought to ask.

Terissa tightened her lips into a thin line. "Long story. It will keep until after Cameron wakes up."

James seemed content with the answer for now. "I'll make everyone a bite to eat," he announced. He put his hand on Sarah's shoulder in wordless comfort. She glanced at his grip in mild surprise before covering his hand with her own. She squeezed briefly before letting go,

and James moved away, heading for the kitchen. He passed John on the way.

"Just need to get some water and a cloth," John told them as he set the toolbox on the table. His gaze drifted to Savannah. "Mom..."

Sarah physically shook herself, trying to snap out of her stupor. She noted John's gaze and nodded. "Terissa, would you..."

"Of course." Terissa stood, grateful to have something meaningful to do. She whispered some soft words to Savannah before the little girl nodded reluctantly and let Cameron go.

"I'm sorry," Savannah said to Sarah as she passed. "Please tell me she'll be okay."

Sarah cupped the back of the little girl's head and bent at the waist so they would be eye to eye. "I swear," she vowed.

Savannah sniffled, but her chin hitched higher as if she were determined to be brave. She took Terissa's hand, and they started for the kitchen to help James with dinner.

Sarah watched them go before turning her focus on her son who lingered by the toolbox. "Want some help?" he asked.

"I can handle it," Sarah said wearily, stretching out her hand to accept the pliers.

Reluctantly, John slapped the tool into her palm. They stared at each other a moment.

"It's not a good sign she's been offline this long," he murmured, and Sarah was relieved to hear a shred of worry for Cameron in his tone.

"I know," Sarah said. "If you could get me the water..."

"Mom..."

"John, please."

He sighed but complied, leaving the room without a backward glance.

Sarah pulled a wooden chair over to Cameron's side and eased into it

gratefully. It took the last of her reserves to pull Cameron up and peel her blood-soaked jacket off so she could survey the damage. "It's a lot easier to get your clothes off of you when you are awake," Sarah muttered under her breath in lieu of swearing. "Hell of a lot more fun, too," she added.

She rolled the tank top up to expose the first of the bullet wounds, her attention so focused on prying the flattened metal from Cameron's ribcage that she missed John setting a basin of water and several towels behind her on the coffee table. While her hands were intent on their work, her mind roamed over the events on the last few months, from Cameron's broken body in the basement of Zeira Corp to the soul-destroying loneliness of the first month after John left. She remembered the feeling of Cameron's hand in hers as they watched her body burn and how that moment felt like the first time something had gone right in a long, long time. She refused to think about what would happen if Cameron didn't wake up, refused to even consider the possibility.

Another bullet plinked into a candy dish on the end table, and Sarah sighed to see the skin of Cameron's stomach marred by the raw wound. Her gaze drifted up past the cuts on Cameron's face to her closed eyes, hoping against hope to see them open, the act achingly familiar. Straightening, she scooted the chair closer and reached for a towel, soaking it in water before starting to clean the dirt, blood, and broken glass from the abrasions. "You better not make me a liar," Sarah warned the inert cyborg, her voice light and teasing even as she blinked past a slight blurriness in her vision. "I told Savannah you would be okay. She thinks this is her fault." She wrung the cloth and started to wipe the blood from Cameron's stomach, the image of the skin smooth and unspoiled and her lips pressed there wavering before her eyes. "And you think I'm reckless. At least I don't go up against terminators by myself."

"Yes, you do." The voice was low, a faint murmur, but the words were clear.

Relief washed over her, and Sarah squeezed her eyes closed for a brief second before meeting Cameron's brown ones, dazed but open. "That was an accident," she replied tartly.

"Savannah?"

"She's fine. She's worried about you." Sarah's smile faded as she



looked more closely at the terminator, whose relief at the news couldn't hide the obvious pain she was in. Sarah couldn't stop her hand from brushing a stray lock of hair back from Cameron's forehead, frowning when Cameron shied away from the touch. "What happened back there?"

"Overload." Cameron's reply was clipped as her eyes fixed on the ceiling.

"From what? You were out longer than 120 seconds. It was like you passed out..."

"I did."

Sarah hesitated, drawing her hand reluctantly back to her lap since Cameron seemed opposed to her touch. She swallowed the hurt that made her throat burn and licked her dry lips. "The pain was too much," Sarah guessed in a near whisper.

Cameron nodded once.

"What hurts most?" Sarah asked, wishing she could do something, anything, to help.

Cameron stared at her, feeling her physical and emotional agony vying for dominance as she looked into Sarah's green eyes. "Everything," she confessed.

Somehow Sarah knew Cameron was referring to far more than her injuries. She swallowed again, unsure what to say. "Can't you... switch it off? The pain?"

"You can't," Cameron murmured.

Sarah snorted faintly. "Would that I could, Tin Miss." Risking rejection again, Sarah reached out and brushed Cameron's hair away from a wound on her temple and this time the cyborg let her.

"I heal much faster than you do," Cameron announced. "I'll be much better in a few hours."

"So we have to watch you suffer until then?" Sarah asked pointedly.

Cameron looked away, unable to deal with the turmoil in Sarah's eyes.

"I can dial it back to a manageable level..."

"Do it," Sarah ordered bluntly, not caring if she was overstepping her bounds if it meant that Cameron wouldn't be in pain.

Cameron closed her eyes, trying to control the pain and to find the words to explain. "It's... too much like before. When I was a..." She struggled to say the final word, afraid that it still applied, at least in Sarah's mind.

"A terminator?" Sarah guessed, sitting back in the chair.

"Yes. Before... I didn't feel. Not like this."

Sarah moved the towel gently down Cameron's arm, wiping away small pellets of asphalt and blood, thinking about everything that had happened. "But it incapacitated you. I thought you were..." she shook her head against the word 'dead,' not wanting to admit how close she had felt to what was becoming her greatest fear. "I guess feeling isn't all it's cracked up to be, huh?" Sarah joked faintly, her smile not quite reaching her eyes. Cameron, in order to feel for her, had opened herself up to staggering amounts of pain, more than any human had the capacity to survive. And she had done it for Sarah. She sighed, not sure she liked the bargain that Cameron had struck. "Is there anything else you can do?"

"I... I can stay offline," Cameron admitted. "Just for a little while longer." She could remain aware of her surroundings, of any threats, but for a few precious hours, she could be free from all the pain of losing Sarah and losing to the terminator that wanted Savannah dead. It seemed like a welcome reprieve to her.

Sarah took in a slow breath, watching Cameron with knowing eyes. "Everything will still be here when you wake up, Tin Miss," Sarah whispered.

"I know," Cameron murmured as she closed her eyes, surrendering to the desire to come as close to sleep as she could get.

\*\*\*

Hours later, the house was dark and still. Sarah woke from confusing dreams, listening intently for any sound of movement. Everyone was asleep, including Cameron, and Sarah couldn't resist the need to climb

out from under the covers to go check on her.

She peered in on John first, smiling at the way he was sprawled across the bed, still in all his clothes except his boots. Savannah was next, her small frame curled around her favorite giraffe. Sarah lingered in the doorway, aching for what the child had been through in her short life. With a sigh, she gently shut the door and padded in her socks down the stairs.

The screensavers on Cameron's computers lit the living room, the colorful designs swirling and bouncing around the confines of their monitors. Sarah frowned when she found the couch empty, her green eyes searching out Cameron's familiar form in the shadows to no avail.

After searching the first floor, Sarah finally decided to try the yard. It was there she found the cyborg, looking lost and alone in the moonlight. Sarah felt her throat tighten, and she hesitated, wondering if she had the right to intrude on Cameron's solitude. She sighed, knowing there was no way she would get back to sleep unless she talked to the terminator.

Heedless of the wet grass soaking through her socks, Sarah shuffled over to the picnic table. She saw Cameron's shoulders tense as she recognized Sarah's footfalls, and Sarah felt guilt settle in her stomach, cold and heavy, as she slid down onto the bench.

They sat side by side, no words spoken into the humid night air. Crickets filled the silence between them, and Sarah closed her eyes and just let their nightly concert roll over her. She'd always loved that sound as a child, but somewhere along the way she'd stopped noticing it altogether.

Sarah took a deep breath, inhaling the scent of grass and the recently stained wood she was sitting on. When her eyelids fluttered open again, Sarah found Cameron watching her, a wistful expression on her beautiful features. She only caught a glimpse as Cameron abruptly turned away and stared back out at the yard.

"Are we going to fight now?" Cameron asked evenly.

Leave it to Cameron to get to the point, Sarah thought ruefully. A corner of her mouth quirked in amusement, but she didn't let the smile form completely. There was nothing funny about the situation she found herself in.

"No," Sarah answered softly, her hand coming up to cover the fresh bandage on her arm. "We're not going to fight."

Cameron glanced at her again and then down at Sarah's arm, a look of confusion mixed with a dose of suspicion in her brown eyes. "You know what I did."

"I have an idea," Sarah confirmed, studying Cameron closely. Her exposed wounds were already healing, others covered with small bandages. Sarah's guilt over her role in those injuries forced her to look away.

Cameron's gaze roamed over Sarah's profile. "It was the only way to save you."

Sarah took another deep breath. "That's debatable."

"You were dying."

The terminator's tone made Sarah look at her again. There was no mistaking the pain in Cameron's voice, and Sarah felt her heart squeeze in reaction to it. "I know."

"And I was just supposed to let that happen?" Cameron asked. "I was supposed to just let you go?"

Sarah flexed her fingers on her left hand. She felt no pain, not even a residual soreness. "You put Skynet in me," she finally said the words aloud, giving voice to the thoughts that had plagued her since waking up.

"I did what I had to do to keep you alive," Cameron corrected without a shred of remorse in her tone. "And I would do it again."

They stared at each other in the moonlight. Sarah had to look away first. "I don't know how I feel about... all this..." she began.

"Spoils of war."

Sarah frowned, confused by Cameron's response. "What?"

"You can think of my blood as Skynet... or you can think of it as spoils of war. You wouldn't hesitate to use Skynet technology in your fight to

stop it if you got your hands on some.”

“It’s not the same thing,” Sarah argued, even as her mind began to draw parallels.

“It is. It’s an advantage you didn’t have before, but because you conquered me, you have it now.”

Sarah tilted her head and regarded Cameron with naked curiosity. “Did I conquer you, Tin Miss?” she almost teased.

“Yes,” Cameron whispered before looking away.

Sarah swallowed, feeling her breathing go shallow. “Cameron...”

“I finally understand,” Cameron interrupted her.

Hesitating, Sarah licked her lips as she tried to keep up with the changing conversation. “Understand what?”

“Why human life is sacred,” Cameron explained. “When I thought... when I thought you were going to die, I realized we would never have another conversation. You would never confuse me again, never puzzle me by your actions.”

Sarah listened in silence.

“I would never say something to make you smile again. We would never fight. You would never read another word to Savannah.” Cameron paused as her voice tightened. “There is only one of you... only one Sarah Connor, and when you’re gone...”

“You have total recall,” Sarah murmured, moved despite her internal warnings not to feel that way. “You could remember every second of every...”

“But they’re just memories,” Cameron cut her off. “It’s not the same.”

Green eyes studied Cameron in the soft light. “No,” Sarah admitted. “It’s not the same.”

“I would do anything for you,” Cameron told her with brutal honesty. “But keeping you alive... it was one thing I had to do for myself.”

Sarah swallowed again and dropped her gaze. Her emotions were all over the map, and she struggled to wade through them, to grab hold of one that she could cling to. Cameron abruptly stood, as if she could no longer handle the rising intensity between them. She was almost to the steps when Sarah's voice stopped her cold.

"So... am I going to have like... titanium bones now? Can I give up milk?"

Slowly, Cameron pivoted to glance at Sarah, startled to hear what sounded like a teasing tone to her voice. She took a few hesitant steps back in Sarah's direction. "Your bones are still comprised of the same organic compounds as they were before."

"Damn," Sarah answered with playful gruffness. "I don't even get super powers? Where is the fun in that?"

Cameron drew closer still. "You're joking about this?"

"What else can I do, Cameron? Short of taking a gun to my head and blowing my brains out, I sort of have to live with this now." Sarah sighed and raked both hands through her hair. "But I need to know what it's going to do to me... your blood... what effect will it have on me?"

"My blood contains small nanites," Cameron said slowly.

"Robots," Sarah murmured, trying not to feel chilled at the thought.

"It's technology that exists now... in it's infancy," Cameron explained. "Skynet didn't create it. They have no programming, save for assessing and repairing injuries and damage to their host." She eased back onto the bench. "The nanites have been repairing the bone and tissue damage in your arm. That's why it's been itching."

"And how big are these nanites?" Sarah asked.

"Microscopic. You would not be able to see them with the naked eye." Cameron regarded her. Sarah Connor had once again proven unpredictable in her responses. Once that thought would have come as close to irking her as a machine could get to feeling irked. Now, it made a small, unconscious smile shape her lips. "They are no bigger than parasites already living in your body... or the infection that almost killed you."

Sarah nodded. "Comparing them to infection and parasites makes me feel so much better about them swimming around in there, thanks," she said dryly.

Cameron's smile widened a fraction. "I just meant..."

"I know what you meant," Sarah replied with a smirk.

"You're not mad?" Cameron finally asked after several moments of silence.

Sarah bit her lower lip, considering her response. "I'm not mad," she finally confessed. "A little scared," she added in a fainter voice, "but I'm not mad." Her green eyes lifted and fixed on Cameron's face, dipping to study the shine of her lip gloss in the moonlight before rising once more to meet the fathomless brown of Cameron's eyes. "Little robots in my blood seem like the least of my worries right now," she breathed.

The screen door swung open, and Savannah stepped out on to the porch, rubbing at her eyes as both her aunts shifted to look back at her.

"What are you doing?" the child asked sleepily.

"What are you doing?" Cameron scolded with a completely different inflection. "You should be sleeping." She got to her feet, the moment between her and Sarah evaporating into the ether as she crossed the yard and lifted Savannah effortlessly into her arms.

"I had a bad dream," Savannah whined, "and neither of you were there."

Sarah joined Cameron, gently pushing a lock of red hair behind one of Savannah's ears. "How about we both tuck you in and read you a bedtime story?" she asked, smiling a little as Savannah nodded with sleepy enthusiasm. Her gaze met Cameron's, and she saw the terminator hesitate before giving the child a tight smile. Sarah felt something inside her twist at the distance Cameron was putting between them, but she did nothing to dissuade her, knowing in her heart it was the best thing for both of them.

Sarah held the door as Cameron carried Savannah inside. The hairs on

the back of her neck prickled just before she crossed the threshold and Sarah turned back, looking out over the fenced yard but seeing nothing of concern. With a mental shrug, she locked the door behind her.

Twenty minutes later, a figure dropped from one of the many trees into the yard. Staring at the light in Savannah's room until it finally went dark, Sierra smiled through the pain in her shoulder and the tears in her eyes. "Goodnight," she whispered to her family before blending back into the dark.