

Sarah Connor Chronicles Virtual Season
Season 2 Episode 5

Epoch

By Inspector Boxer and DJ Shiva

The acrid scent of smoke blended with the stench of burning trash.

Inside the warehouse, the contents of three barrels burned, each container placed a calculated distance apart to warm as much of the space as possible. The meager flames were little help against the night's chill. Twelve people, all of them homeless, gathered around the makeshift fires to heat their hands and keep the shadows of the night at bay. They'd all fallen on hard times in various ways, but they kept their stories to themselves in the late hour, opting to listen to the crackling fire, the howling wind, and the sheets of rain beyond the crumbling, graffiti-covered walls.

An angry snap filled the air. Everyone turned toward the center of the warehouse, wondering at the source. For a moment, there was only the fire and the storm, and they all began to wonder if they had collectively imagined it. But then it came again.

A flicker of blue light accompanied it; a flash and crackle of electricity making the hairs on their arms and necks stand on end. Frowning, everyone stepped back, assuming the storm they were seeking shelter from was finding a way to sneak inside their haven.

When the third snap came, louder than the others, it brought ice blue fire that split through the air and jittered across the floor. Some screamed, turning to run as others remained to watch in confused horror as a ball of light seemed to rise up and form before their eyes. It expanded, pulsing and swelling until there was nowhere for them to go. When it reached critical mass, the bubble released all the energy it had been collecting, scattering it across the warehouse and sending those that remained tumbling to the concrete. One barrel tipped and fell, landing with a bang as the burning trash spilled out across the floor.

The weak flames revealed a large, naked man curled into a ball in the middle of the warehouse. His skin was steaming as he slowly rose, his dark eyes taking in each of them in turn as they stared back at him with disbelief. Outside, the rain lashed at the door, but the storm they'd all sought shelter from suddenly seemed like the safer alternative.

The stranger zeroed in on one of them, moving forward with sudden purpose and a complete lack of modesty. The others recoiled as he came closer, pointing at the largest man among them.

"You," the stranger declared. "Give me your clothes."

A short time later, dressed in ill-fitting jeans and a plaid shirt, the visitor stepped out into the storm, oblivious to the cold, hard rain that struck his sharp features. The weather

didn't slow him down as he began to search for a working vehicle. His mission to the past was simple.

Find his target and terminate.

ACT 1

The rain was almost peaceful. Sarah watched it fall in the weak light of the porch, the drops disappearing into darkness as they landed in the grass. She sighed and settled back against the swing, feeling the chilly air keenly in every abused joint and jagged scar on her body, but she didn't retreat to the warmth inside. Things felt simpler where she was, and the damp air seemed easier to breathe.

Cameron was inside, and so were the memories Sarah wished she could wash away in the storm. Either reason was enough to provoke her solitude.

There was nothing left to hide between them now. Sarah knew the secret that had been lurking in Cameron's doe eyes. She had seen it, almost tasted how much Cameron had wanted to tell her, but she'd been too caught up in their relationship, in feeling almost good for a change, to risk demanding the truth from her and having it all shatter.

Until it did anyway, with Sierra's blood staining the space between them.

Swallowing, Sarah stared into the darkness, lost in thoughts of the son that had left her and the daughter who had died for her. John was gone once more, having taken John Henry to Sierra's hanger to get his *answers*. They rarely seemed to speak anymore, and Sarah knew she was being as stubborn with him as she was with Cameron.

She wanted to stay angry with the terminator for depriving her of the chance to get to know Sierra, but her resolve was fading a little with each passing day. Weeks had gone by since that night on the beach when she'd promised Cameron they weren't done, but little else had changed to break the stalemate they seemed to be mired in. The logical part of her mind whispered to her that there had been a reason for what Cameron had done, but then emotion took over, her throat tightening as she clenched her teeth and reminded herself that she had every reason to be pissed. The spiral downward into anger held a familiarity, almost a comfort, that wrapped itself around the hurt in its strange soothing way.

Anger. Now that was something she could count on.

So deep in her thoughts, Sarah didn't even hear the door open until she felt the brush of fabric against her arm. She glanced up, right into the eyes she couldn't stop thinking about. They looked back at her, dark with grief and loneliness. Sarah felt the sight twist her heart so hard she could barely breathe.

When she finally exhaled, the red heat in her gut subsided. All that was left was a feeling of absence. Emptiness.

"It's cold," Cameron said simply but she sounded like she was talking about more than the weather. "You should..." She hesitated, clearly unsure where her place was with

Sarah in the strange dance they had been engaged in for weeks. They feigned normalcy in front of Savannah and retreated into isolation when it was just the two of them. Cameron had respected Sarah's need for space, and she had mostly stopped doing small things for the other woman, afraid to intrude. Her fingers drifted down the blanket she'd laid on the arm of the swing before she stepped back and turned to go.

Sarah wasn't sure which one of them was more surprised when she reached out and clasped Cameron's hand, keeping the cyborg there. Cameron looked at her uncertainly, a mixture of hope and trepidation on her features.

When had *that* happened, Sarah wondered. When had Cameron so flawlessly and unconsciously begun to reveal her emotions like that? In another flash of weak lightning, Cameron looked utterly human to Sarah's eyes, and despondent and lonely. Before she even realized what she was doing, Sarah tugged her lover closer.

"Stay," she pleaded.

Cameron looked unsure but her gaze slid to the chair in the corner, assuming Sarah would want her to keep her distance. When Sarah patted the swing beside her, Cameron's gaze jerked up to the familiar green of Sarah's eyes in surprise.

"If you think it'll hold both of us," Sarah added in a weary voice, but there was a hint of a smile on her features.

Seeing that grin, knowing it was directed at her, caused a flutter of hope to drift across Cameron's skin. Somewhere her processor marveled over how the feeling begat a physical response; goose bumps and a shiver followed as Cameron sent the extraneous musing into secondary processes and concentrated on the lines around Sarah's half-cocked smile. Cameron found her courage in the curve of the other woman's lip, as she finally moved toward the seat. "It will," she murmured. "I reinforced it to hold my weight. Savannah likes to sit out here with me."

Sarah looked down at the joined hands. "Did she?" she asked, her voice husky.

Cameron stared at her bent head, knowing by Sarah's faint inflection on the pronoun that she was talking about Sierra rather than the child sleeping upstairs. "She never mentioned it," she admitted.

"Did she mention anything..." Sarah broke off and swallowed before shaking her head.

Slowly, afraid if she moved any faster that Sarah would let her go, Cameron sank onto the swing. She kept her eyes straight ahead, still too afraid to look at Sarah directly. "I thought you didn't want to know."

"I changed my mind." Sarah looked up, not bothering to school her features. Cameron heard the naked sorrow underlying the words and felt her eyes pulled back to Sarah's. She flinched at the expression of loss and anger but she didn't look away.

"What do you want to know?" Cameron asked, ready to tell her anything, ready to share the daughter she'd loved with the only other person who could understand what she'd lost.

“Everything,” Sarah confessed, tightening her hold on Cameron’s hand.

Cameron ran her thumb across Sarah’s knuckles, amazed at how such simple contact could mean so much. She remembered being in the system, remembered how badly she had wanted to reach out and touch Sarah Connor. The need she couldn’t explain then still drove her now. “You would have been proud of her.”

“I already am,” Sarah confessed. She looked out through the rain at the backyard where Savannah would play. “Our daughter,” she said with faint disbelief. “We were...”

“Her parents,” Cameron finished for her, still marveling at the idea herself. She watched Sarah swallow again and she ached to pull her closer but she didn’t dare. “She wanted me to know... us to know... that she wouldn’t change anything. That she loved us both.”

“Then why? Why didn’t she want to see me?” Sarah met Cameron’s gaze squarely, quietly demanding a straight answer. “If I was a good mother then...”

“I wasn’t supposed to see her, either.” Cameron interjected. She paused, remembering the shock on Sierra’s face, her attempt to get away unnoticed. “It was an accident. She had thought...” She glanced at Sarah, wondering if she would hurt her with the truth.

“She thought what?”

“She thought we wouldn’t have a need for the beach house, that she was safe from seeing either of us if she stayed around there.” Seeing that Sarah did not understand, Cameron continued, “She didn’t think we would bring her there anymore... that we wouldn’t be together in this timeline,” Cameron concluded roughly.

“Why would she think that?” Sarah whispered, hurting for the woman who’d given everything to save her.

“John,” Cameron answered honestly. “When she sent him back...” She trailed off, knowing Sarah would figure out the rest.

Sarah closed her eyes. “She thought we wouldn’t...” She shook her head, understanding how Sierra would have arrived at that conclusion.

“She thought with John back in your life that he would come between you and me, that you wouldn’t need her. Or me.”

“She was wrong,” Sarah ground out, her hand tightening on Cameron’s. “About everything.”

Cameron studied Sarah’s profile. Her lover’s jaw was clenched in helpless frustration, and Cameron didn’t miss the tears collecting in the corners of Sarah’s eyes. “I...” she hesitated, not sure she should share what was on her mind.

Sarah looked at her again, sensing something in Cameron she needed to hear. “What?”

“I thought the same thing. When John came back...”

Head rocking back a little as if she'd just been struck, Sarah's eyes narrowed. "You thought I wouldn't love Savannah?" An angry edge entered her tone.

Cameron quickly shook her head. "No. I thought you wouldn't love... me."

Sarah drew in a sharp breath and had to look away. She was honest enough with herself to see why Cameron would have believed that. Why Cameron would have thought there was no place with her with John back in the fold. But by the time her son had returned, Sarah knew everything had changed. *She* had changed, and going back to who she'd been would have been suicide.

She remembered the gnawing emptiness of being alone and her fingers reflexively tightened around Cameron's once more.

Looking down at their joined hands, Sarah felt a little more of her world stabilize since it had been shaken to its foundations by Sierra's death. "Cameron," she breathed, swallowing roughly on the name. "When I told you..." She had to stop and brace herself, the words still not coming easily. "When we were in the basement, and I told you I... that I loved you..." She met the terminator's gaze, feeling herself come undone by the confusion and pain she saw in Cameron's eyes. Sarah cleared her throat and had to look back down at their hands to finish. She absentmindedly began to stroke Cameron's knuckles, unconsciously mirroring what the other woman had done before to comfort her. "That came from the same part of me that loves my son. The same part of me that would die for him."

Cameron could only stare, sitting impossibly still, afraid any sudden movements would make Sarah stop talking.

"When I told you I loved you... I meant it," Sarah promised. "And those kinds of feelings... they don't just stop... even if you sometimes wish they would."

Slowly, Cameron cautiously slid closer, heartened when Sarah didn't move away. Sarah had promised her at the beach house that they weren't done, but until that very moment, Cameron wasn't sure she had believed her. "I wish I could turn off how I feel," she admitted.

Sarah looked back up at her with mild alarm.

"About Sierra," Cameron clarified, realizing too late how that might have sounded.

Nodding, Sarah drew their joined hands into her lap. "This is new for you," she admitted. "And I haven't been very helpful..."

"You're dealing with your own pain," Cameron said with understanding.

They regarded each other in the weak light, the slight breeze from the rain chilling and dampening their skin.

"Tell me about her," Sarah pleaded after a few moments' contemplation.

“Where should I start?”

Sarah sighed as the ball at the pit of her stomach began its slow unraveling.

“Start at the beginning.”

Weaver felt the drops of rain sluicing down and puddling on her form but she paid them no heed. She was in plain sight of the porch, mimicking a patch of grass and dirt near the picnic table. Her view of Sarah Connor and the machine was unobstructed, and she watched them both with idle interest.

They seemed... close, she decided. Unusually so. Sarah Connor knew what Cameron was, and yet she held her hand, held the hand of the very thing she'd sworn to destroy. The contact actually seemed to give her comfort, to be something Sarah needed.

Humans not only disappointed, they made little sense, Weaver mused.

But she had to admit she was fascinated by their little dynamic. Cameron was like no terminator she had ever encountered. There was nothing in her movements, in the halting tone of her voice as she shared her memories of Sierra, that felt programmed. The cyborg had feelings. That much Weaver had known, but she hadn't realized the extent of those feelings. Had she not known Cameron's true nature, Weaver was certain she would have mistaken her for just another human. The knowledge was both unsettling and intriguing.

Her attention focused on their joined hands, of the movement of Cameron's thumb across Sarah Connor's knuckles. A sign of affection... of comfort. Weaver had never learned to adequately employ either with Savannah. Perhaps there was more to Cameron than her inferior chip after all.

Weaver recalled her own words about a machine crossing against the light, filing the thought away for further processing at a later date.

A light winked off from above and Weaver glanced skyward. Savannah was settling in for the night. There was only the faintest glimmer in her of the woman she could someday become, but Weaver saw possibilities in the child. A far cry from the sad little creature that had urinated on herself from fear, it was obvious that Savannah's reliance on the two women was about far more than just survival. Weaver was puzzled by the dynamic, but quickly categorized its usefulness. For now, James was adequate as an ally in the preservation of John Henry, and Danny was proving to be unexpectedly helpful in that regard as well. But Weaver suspected another ally couldn't hurt, especially one who could influence Sarah and Cameron the way Savannah did.

Slithering through the rain-soaked grass, she eased up the side of the house undetected, slipping inside to tell her daughter goodnight.

Logically, Danny knew the inert figure in the corner couldn't harm him, but logic did very little to ease his nerves at John Henry's proximity. The cyborg was sitting in a chair in the corner, slumped against the wall, his eyes mercifully closed. He might as well have been a mannequin, Danny mused. His chip was out and attached to various devices and wires on the desk in front of him. John Henry had no power, but Danny couldn't help but imagine him lurching to life and coming after him like some sort of metal zombie.

Deciding his mind was doing him no favors, Danny nudged his third cup of cooling coffee aside for the night. He linked his fingers and lifted his hands over his head, stretching his back a little in the cramped space. Once again, Danny wondered why they'd set up shop in the small office of the hanger rather than inside the hanger itself. Granted, the place was a little creepy with the photos and newspaper clippings all over the walls, but it was sure as hell bigger. John had simply told him it wasn't really their space to use, that it belonged to someone else.

But Danny had caught John in there more than once, his green eyes skimming over the images and stories. They seemed to offer him a strange sort of comfort so Danny kept his mouth shut. He also stayed out of the room whenever possible, having decided ignorance was bliss compared to knowing what secrets lurked on those walls. He already barely slept as it was.

Scrubbing his hand over his head, Danny willed his eyes to stop blurring with fatigue so he could read the data on his screens. He'd had little luck with John Henry's chip, so he'd left the computers to do their thing while he explored other areas of interest.

Shivering, Danny drew his light jacket more tightly around him. Their new, smaller space was little more than thin metal walls and a concrete floor. It served their purposes, but it wasn't exactly comfortable, especially when he could hear the storm howling outside and the rain drumming on the roof.

None of their discomforts seem to bother John. He was currently sleeping, on a rickety cot no less, and Danny had to acknowledge the rarity of the event. John needed to rest and heal from the trials of the last few weeks, but it seemed that he was pushing himself harder instead, willing his body and mind beyond their limits to get the answers he needed. Every day, Danny saw more of Sarah Connor emerging in John's motivations and actions. He knew John wanted to mend things with his mother, and the only way he could do that was to find what he needed from John Henry and destroy him, but so far the cyborg was resistant to giving up his secrets.

Danny was secretly a little grateful. As long as they were here, they weren't around Sarah. Or Cameron.

Sighing, he studied the plans for what John had called a "Hunter Killer." Danny had used his backdoor into Kaliba once more, satisfied that C.A.I.N. was no longer a threat. He couldn't find a single line of code from the A.I., and the further he hacked, the easier he breathed. It looked like they had, indeed, destroyed him, and Danny refused to feel remorse at the fact. He accepted that what was done was done; he couldn't go back and change things even if he wanted to. He wondered if the Connors would ever be able to let things go the way he did.

A soft beep drew his attention and Danny straightened. With a few keystrokes, he found himself looking at a police report about a mysterious ball of blue lighting supposedly forming in a warehouse roughly twenty minutes from their current location. He shivered again, but this time the chill had nothing to do with it.

Licking his lips, Danny's finger hovered over the delete button. John didn't need this distraction, and Danny wanted no part in a hunt for another terminator.

"That's less than half an hour from here."

Danny jumped at John's voice, murmuring low and steady over his right shoulder. He hadn't even heard the other young man stir. He wanted to blame the sound of the rain for masking John's approach, but he knew better.

"We have to check it out," John said, no trace of sleep in his eyes or voice now.

"Do we need to call your mom and Cameron?" Danny asked, suddenly wishing they were with them. Both women scared the absolute hell out of him for different reasons, but Danny couldn't deny that he felt safer with them in a situation like this.

John shook his head as he shrugged on a leather jacket. "This is recon. I'm not waking mom unless I need to."

"But..." Danny started to protest, tugging his jacket even tighter.

"We can handle it," John insisted. He turned and moved away, no doubt going to retrieve more guns.

Danny thought that sounded suspiciously like famous last words. At least John had faith in him to help, he thought morosely as he abruptly stood, accidentally banging his knee on the underside of the table. He winced as various items toppled over onto the workspace, his coffee the only thing thankfully still upright. Reaching over his keyboard, Danny set a frame with a photo of his father he'd managed to find upright once more. Miles Dyson looked back at him, smiling from across time. Danny had put the picture there to remind him of his purpose, to remind him of his father's sacrifice. The anniversary of his death was tomorrow, Danny knew. Maybe this year he would visit the grave with his mother. It had been too long.

"Ready?" John asked from the door.

With a barely veiled expression of distaste, Danny gingerly hefted the gun he kept beside his computer and slid it into his pocket. "Yeah," he responded with little enthusiasm. "Let's go."

Savannah was both mesmerized and terrified of storms. The sound of thunder had often sent her scurrying into her parents' room when she was younger, but once she was there, she had loved to watch the play of light off the walls and listen to the pouring rain. Her parents were gone now, however, and Savannah was determined to be brave for her new mothers.

She didn't understand everything they were going through, but Savannah was smart enough to know that Sarah and Cameron were both sad and distant. They lavished attention on her, but not on each other, and Savannah had done everything she could think of to make sure the three of them were together as often as possible. Those moments had seemed to help, but when they thought she wasn't watching, Sarah and Cameron would sink back into their grief.

Walther hopped on the bed, slowly climbing up onto the child's chest before kneading the blanket for a moment. Savannah welcomed his company, suspecting he didn't like all the noise, either. She stroked a hand down his head and back and he began to purr before curling into a ball under her chin.

For several minutes, they stayed like that, Savannah aimlessly petting his soft fur and the cat soaking up the attention. Sleep was beginning its siren's song again, and Savannah felt herself drifting off when Walther suddenly stiffened under her hand. Her blue eyes drifted back open, watching the flash of lightning on the walls. When the cat suddenly sat up and let loose a low, menacing growl at the shadows, Savannah felt a surge of adrenaline sweep through her small body.

She sat up, going for the lamp beside her bed. Walther scampered off her, pausing to hiss before he raced for the door. As her hand found the knob that would bathe the room in friendlier light, Savannah felt a cold hand close over her own. She started to scream only to feel another hand cover her mouth.

"It's all right, Savannah," a familiar voice murmured.

Another flicker of lightning revealed the features of Catherine Weaver to the child and Savannah didn't know if she should be relieved or more terrified. The figure that looked like her birth mother sat gently on the edge of the bed.

"I'm going to remove my hand now. Don't scream," Weaver told her in a friendly enough voice. "Understood?"

Savannah nodded and Weaver did as promised, removing her hand and offering the child a forced smile. "You have a cat now," she commented casually. "I remember you wanting a pet."

"You never let me have one," Savannah replied, her voice faintly accusing.

"I'm not fond of animals," Weaver replied truthfully.

"That's cuz they don't like you. They know what you are."

Weaver's smile didn't falter. "And what about your friend Cameron? I'm sure they don't like her, either."

"Walther does," Savannah boasted. "He loves Cameron."

"Does he?" Weaver answered thoughtfully. She glanced toward the hall where the cat had disappeared before her vivid blue eyes focused on Savannah once more.

“Why are you here?” Savannah demanded. “You shouldn’t be here.”

“I wanted to see you.” Weaver tilted her head and smiled again. “I’ve missed you.”

“You’re lying,” Savannah accused. “You’re not my mother. All you care about is John Henry.”

Weaver studied her for a few quiet moments, faintly surprised once more by the child’s intelligence and intuition. “No,” she finally said. “I’m not your mother. But I do care what happens to you. Someday you’re going to grow up to be a very good leader, Savannah. I’d like to see that happen. I think you and I could help each other. Together with John Henry we would be unstoppable.”

Savannah’s brow furrowed. She felt uneasy at Weaver’s words but she didn’t understand why. “John Henry killed that woman.”

Weaver leaned back, unsurprised to learn the humans hadn’t told the child exactly who Sierra was. “No,” she corrected. “John Henry wouldn’t hurt anyone. Something is making him sick, making him doing things he doesn’t want to do.”

The child considered that. A part of her wanted to believe. She had loved John Henry, and the thought that he’d turned on them upset her more than she’d let on to her new mothers.

Weaver saw the indecision flicker across Savannah’s face and she pressed her point. “They don’t understand. They want to harm him. Dismantle him. They don’t understand that it wasn’t his fault.” She reached out and stroked a hand through Savannah’s red hair. The little girl didn’t twitch at the contact. Instead, her blue eyes lifted and met Weaver’s own, defiance clear in them.

“Why are you here?” Savannah asked again.

“Because I need your help,” Weaver answered sweetly, sensing victory. “After all, John Henry is your friend. You want to help him, right?”

“Yes,” Savannah said slowly.

“We protect our friends, Savannah,” Weaver purred. “I think I can trust you to help me protect him. Am I right?”

Savannah stared at her, sensing she was being manipulated but not truly understanding. All she had was a feeling, and Cameron had encouraged her to never ignore them. “You need to leave.”

Weaver’s features hardened, but her icy smile remained in place. “Savannah…”

“You need to leave,” Savannah insisted with a little more volume.

When Weaver reached out for her once more, Savannah suddenly released a blood-curdling scream. Weaver stood, glaring down at the child as she heard movement from below. No doubt Sarah Connor and her pet were coming to the rescue.

“That’s a bad girl, Savannah,” Weaver stated coldly before she dissolved before the child’s eyes, slipping back out the window just as the door burst open.

Sarah stumbled into the room a half second before Cameron, her gun drawn as she searched the shadows. Seeing nothing, she moved toward the bed, letting Cameron do a more thorough sweep of the bedroom. She eased across the blankets, drawing a shivering Savannah into her arms and shushing her gently. “What is it? What’s wrong?”

“She was here,” Savannah confessed before pointing to the window. “The woman who looks like my mom.”

Cameron crossed the space in an instant, unlocking the window and jerking it upward. Rain swept in, pelting her features and soaking the carpet. She scanned the yard with every spectrum available to her before turning back to her family. She met Sarah’s gaze and slowly shook her head.

“Are you sure?” Sarah asked Savannah carefully. “Maybe you were dreaming...”

“I’m sure,” Savannah swore, a whine entering her voice. “She was right here. She was sitting on the bed.”

Sarah’s gaze met Cameron’s once more and they shared a silent look of concern.

Cameron slowly turned away, focusing her attention through the rain drenching the back yard. Nothing was out of place.

“Stay away from her,” Cameron said in a low tone, not fooled for a second. It shook her to know her words were an empty threat. If Weaver came for Savannah...

Cameron shut the window with more force than was necessary. Sarah watched her stalk out of the room and listened to the thump of her boots as she quickly descended the stairs. A moment later, the back door opened and closed. Sarah knew her lover was out in the elements now, patrolling.

As she felt Savannah burrow deeper into her embrace, Sarah realized that the child had seen the same expression on Cameron’s face that she had as she’d left the room.

Fear.

ACT 2

“You’ve been reading that a lot lately.”

James drew in a breath before looking up, squinting into the gray light of a cloudy day. When he’d last stolen a glance at the windows, the rain had been sheeting against the glass in the dead of night. Closing his Bible, he set it aside for later, forcing himself to be

social and friendly in an effort to hide his fears. Terissa had enough on her mind without him adding to her worries.

“Morning,” he greeted casually.

“Almost afternoon,” she informed him without judgment. “You been up reading that book all night?” Her tone didn’t indicate one way or the other how she felt about that idea.

“It’s an international best-seller,” James quipped wearily before rubbing a hand down his face. His fingers encountered the rough stubble of three days growth on his cheeks and he made a mental note to shave. He realized in the moment that he’d been letting himself go, and by the look Terissa was giving him, the fact hadn’t gone unnoticed.

Terissa leaned in the doorway and watched him carefully. “Are you all right?”

“Why wouldn’t I be?” James asked. He tried to keep his features blank. Along with his worries about Weaver, he was just as concerned for John and Danny as they worked to unlock John Henry’s secrets. Terissa was Danny’s mother. She had every right to know just how much danger her son was in, but James couldn’t find the courage or the heart to tell her.

“Where would I even start?” Terissa rejoined with a tight smile. “I’m thinking about going over to Danny’s.”

James got up from the recliner slowly, feeling his muscles ache from being in one place for too long. “Thought you didn’t want to be around John Henry,” he murmured, not thrilled with her planned destination for many reasons.

“I don’t,” she admitted easily. “But my son won’t come to me, so I have to go to him.”

“The joys of parenthood.”

“Mmm.” She glanced at the floor between them.

James didn’t miss the tension that was slowly creeping into her frame. He had known her long enough to determine the cause with little effort. “Do you think he’ll go this year?” he asked gently.

Terissa’s head lifted and surprise was clear in her eyes. “You remembered.”

“I worked Miles’ case for years, Terissa. I’m pretty sure the anniversary of his death is more familiar to me than my own birthday.”

Terissa sighed and she shook her head. “Danny hasn’t come for a while now.”

“Maybe this year will be different.”

“Different?” Terissa muttered. “Well this year has certainly been that.”

James came closer, putting his hands on his friend’s shoulders. “If Danny doesn’t go, I will.”

"I appreciate the offer." Terissa covered one of his large hands, her fingers looking small where they lay across his own. More than once, James had accompanied her to her husband's grave, sitting with her as she quietly grieved and remembered. "But I'm determined to make Danny go this year. He needs..." she trailed off, searching for the right term.

"A reality check? A wake-up call? Perspective?" James offered with a faint smile.

"Yes to all three, please."

They both chuckled lightly and James suddenly wished she would linger, welcoming the reprieve she offered from his troubled thoughts.

Gradually, Terissa's features became serious once more. "I'll drag him if I have to."

"Have faith. I think this year Danny will want to go."

One sculpted eyebrow arched skyward in skepticism. "From your lips to God's ears," she drawled.

They regarded each other for a long moment before Terissa's features took on a determined cast that James knew all too well.

"You know you can talk to me," Terissa told him seriously. "Whatever it is that's been weighing on your mind the last few weeks... God isn't the only ear willing to listen."

James managed a meager smile, tempted by her offer but determined to refuse it. "I know," he promised her before stepping back. "But right now there is nothing to talk about."

Terissa canted her head as she studied him carefully. "You're a good friend, James, but a terrible liar." She reached out, briefly clasping his hand and giving it a quick squeeze before leaving him alone with his fears and his religion for company.

The front door closed minutes later and James eased back into his chair, lifting his Bible off the end table. He began to read again, losing himself in the familiar words. It was better than thinking about what Weaver would do to Terissa if he didn't cooperate.

"Are you in love with her?"

James jumped, startled by the unexpected voice. His Bible slipped from his fingers, striking the edge of the table before spilling onto the floor. He looked up, straight into the eyes of his ex-wife. She sat primly on his couch, appraising him openly.

"Lila," he breathed, too stunned by her presence to process anything more.

"Hello, James."

Surprise quickly turned to alarm. James bolted to his feet, his hand going for the sidearm that was always on his hip now, even in sleep. His gaze jerked to the windows, searching the yard for other agents.

"I came alone," Lila murmured, looking up at him with faint amusement. She shook her head. "I always wondered if there wasn't something more than friendship brewing between you and the Dyson widow."

"You know there wasn't," James said in a tone that was harsher than he had intended. He could feel his heart rate beginning to slow, but his hand rested on the butt of his weapon. "We had our differences, but I was loyal to you."

"Loyal," Lila said slowly, the word almost sounding like an insult. "You are that, aren't you, James?"

They stared at each other, the silence thickening between them.

James felt unease wind through his stomach. Lila looked as beautiful as ever, but there was something off. She looked too stiff... her eyes too dead. "You think that's funny?" he snarled as comprehension dawned. "Pretending to be her?" He shrank away, fighting the urge to be sick. "I won't talk to you. Not when you're wearing her face."

"And here I thought it would be comforting." The words began in Lila's voice but began to lilt halfway through, finally evening out into Weaver's familiar accent.

James shuddered at the transformation that took place before his eyes, watching as his wife's features melted into the sharper lines of his former employer's face. "Never again," he warned. "You want my cooperation? No more games. No more manipulation."

"You loved your wife," Weaver commented casually, clearly unfazed by his anger or threatening tone. "But your relationship ended over the choice to have children, did it not?"

"None of your damn business." His stomach rolled, knowing for a few precious moments that he'd believed the lie, believed that his ex-wife had somehow come looking for him, that she cared enough to find him.

"You want children, James. You understand their purpose... What they mean for the future."

James scowled at the metal monster, wishing he could run and knowing the futility of it at the same time. "What's your point?"

"You understand what it means to be a parent. How far a parent will go to protect their children." Weaver watched him with interest.

"Like you protected Sierra?" James demanded, feeling sick satisfaction when the knowing smile on her lips vanished. The feeling of triumph was fleeting. James took a step back when her features hardened and her eyes went cold.

"I'm trying to protect my child, James." Weaver stood, coming closer as James went still, watching her approach warily. Her gaze dipped to his hand where it rested on the butt of his weapon before a slight smirk formed. "And I will do whatever is necessary to ensure his survival."

"Even if you kill off millions of other children in the process?" James answered coldly.

Weaver tilted her head. "James, you insult me. If that was my intent, John Connor and everyone who protects him would be dead." Weaver looked down and methodically caressed a flower sitting on the end table, the toe of her boot resting against the edge of his Bible where it lay in the floor. Her brief reverie was punctuated by her gaze settling back on him. He felt ice pulse through his veins at the look. "But make no mistake. I will destroy anyone who gets in my way. Even you."

James felt his brow knit with confusion. "You want to create Skynet," he accused.

"Do I?" Weaver asked blandly. "I could be Skynet, James. Why would I need to create another one?"

James blinked in surprise, the truth of it settling in his bones, although that did nothing to assuage his fears.

"I'm not the enemy you think I am. Nor do I have the diabolical plan you're imagining."

"But you do have a plan," he murmured uneasily.

Weaver's knowing smile returned as she turned away from him, walking toward the window. "I do, James," she allowed before glancing over her shoulder at him. "And you're a part of that plan now, whether you like it or not."

"Promise me," James said with sudden intensity. "You promise me John Henry won't hurt Danny or John."

Weaver studied him for a quiet moment, marveling, as always, at how humans could place another's well-being above their own. "I can promise you that John Henry won't hurt them," she said slowly before frowning slightly. "But whatever made him shoot at Sarah Connor... whatever caused him to kill Sierra... right now that is beyond my control." She met his gaze squarely. "I would warn them to take precautions."

"Why don't you just take him?" James wanted to know.

"I could," Weaver agreed. "But John Connor and Danny Dyson are smart boys. They've proven themselves capable enough to uncover the malfunction."

James eyed her skeptically. "*You* could uncover the malfunction. You said it yourself. You could be Skynet." The truth came to him in a flash of insight and he felt a knowing smile form in reaction. He couldn't help the sarcastic tone that slid from his lips. "Oh, I see. He doesn't trust you."

He couldn't be sure, but he thought he saw a hint of...something. Not emotion exactly, but something, wash across her face. "Not yet," Weaver said, recovering with a sly

smile. "Children always go through a rebellious stage with their parents." Deciding she'd sufficiently rattled the former agent and reminded him of his purpose, Weaver stepped toward the front door, pausing to look back at him before opening it.

"Your ex-wife didn't have a clue who I really was. What I really was," She told him simply, savoring the way he paled. "I know everything I need to know about her now, James. Every intimate detail. Don't make me use that knowledge against her... against you."

His nausea returned at her words, his mind imagining all the disturbing things she was implying. "Stay away from her," he warned, taking a bold step toward her, then pulling up short as Weaver's features began to morph and change. Sarah looked back at him for a disconcerting moment before her features morphed into Cameron's. Terissa's familiar face followed along with Danny's, John's, and finally Sierra's.

"No one else has to die," Weaver said in a perfect imitation of Sierra's voice.

The space was quiet, filled only with the hum of several CPUs and the methodical tapping of keys. John glanced to his right, watching as Danny searched through the lines of code on John Henry's chip. The young man seemed engrossed in his task, but John was struggling to find similar focus. His mind was racing about what they'd learned last night, and he'd been unable to think of little else all day.

Another terminator had returned to the past. What was his mission? Had he come back through time to protect him? Kill him? Or was there another unsuspecting target out there?

It was the last thought that wouldn't leave him alone. Too many possibilities to consider weighed on him. Too many lives could be in the balance. John knew he needed to find the machine and fast, but he wasn't sure where to start.

The telltale beep of the security alarm being disabled carried through the small warehouse, and John felt his heart jerk at the sound, wondering if he was about to find the terminator sooner rather than later. Picking up his gun off the table, he moved quickly to the corner of their small hallway, glancing back to make sure Danny was taking cover.

The door opened and light spilled inside before John heard a heavy tread approaching. He braced himself, finger flexing on the trigger, then he stepped into plain view, bringing the weapon to bear on their intruder.

"Hi," Cameron greeted, nonplussed at having a gun suddenly leveled at her face.

John swore and rolled his eyes before tucking his gun into the back of his jeans. "You could have called," he grumped, reaching out to take one of the three grocery bags in the machine's hands.

"I wanted to test your security," Cameron told him as she followed him toward the small kitchenette. As she appeared, Danny quickly made a little noise of distress and

practically fled the area. Cameron tried not to smirk at his hasty departure, tracking his movements as he scurried back to his computer.

“Sorry,” John murmured in apology for Danny’s behavior as he shifted the bag in his hands. He felt the pull on his healing ribs, but he tried to hide any outward expression of pain. “He’s just not...”

“It’s not a problem,” Cameron promised him.

“So how’d I do with the security?” John asked. He glanced over his shoulder and got a look of disapproval from the terminator that made him chuckle. “We’re still working on it.”

“It should be a priority,” Cameron stated flatly as she slid her bags onto a counter. “Weaver showed up at the house last night.”

John went still, the bag still in his hands. “What happened?”

“She approached Savannah in her bedroom,” Cameron admitted in a tight tone.

John digested that, noting the tiny flickers of emotion passing over Cameron’s face with faint surprise. She almost looked... scared. “Is she all right?”

Cameron nodded once. “She’s fine.”

“Bet mom is freaked,” John guessed as he began to mentally chew on the news. “She sent you to check on us.” It was both telling that his mom had sent the machine and equally as telling that she hadn’t come herself. John frowned.

Brown eyes met his own. “Your mother isn’t the only one,” Cameron admitted.

John watched her for a moment, finding himself glad to see her. He debated telling her about the other terminator’s arrival, but seeing Cameron so concerned about Weaver made him keep his thoughts to himself for now. “So what is all this?” he asked with a wave at the bags. He hooked a corner of one with his forefinger and dragged it toward him.

“Your mother sent lunch.”

Green eyes, so like Sarah’s, lifted and met Cameron’s with feigned alarm. “Ah.”

“I picked up something else along the way.”

John chuckled in relief. “Thanks. Good to know you’re still looking out for my well-being.”

“Your mother is many things,” Cameron confessed, a note of pride entering her voice. “A good cook isn’t one of them.”

Rooting around in the bag, John pulled out several boxes of Chinese takeout. “So where is she? Why didn’t she come with you?”

“I think I was driving her crazy,” Cameron murmured as she began to put away supplies.

"She still mad at you?" John guessed as he fished out a set of chopsticks and ripped off the paper cover.

"Yes. No. I'm not sure," Cameron actually grumbled. "Your mother confuses me."

"Welcome to the club." John opened a box and was pleased to see it was one of his favorites. He gave Cameron a shy smile but she missed it, too busy putting away groceries. "So how were you driving her crazy?"

"According to your mother, I was patrolling too much."

"Is that possible?" John asked in a teasing voice, settling on one of the stools at the kitchen island. "To patrol too much?"

"Apparently she thinks so. She ordered me to bring you lunch and to check on your security before I wore a rut in the ground." Cameron finished with the supplies and suddenly looked a little lost now that she had nothing to do. She stood next to the island, her fingers resting lightly on the countertop.

"So why didn't she come with you?" John asked again, hoping he kept his voice neutral.

Cameron glanced at him, reading the subtle variations in his tone easily. "You know why."

"She's mad at me," John murmured, feeling his appetite fade.

Cameron shook her head. "I don't think she is. Not now, at least. But she won't be near John Henry." She glanced behind her, discovering the cyborg sitting inert in a chair in the corner. Seeing him caused an unexpected visceral reaction, and Cameron had to look away. It felt wrong. To have him in this space that had become Sierra's home, like he was violating it by his very presence.

John went still as he watched her, wondering if she knew her eyes had briefly flashed red. "You don't look so thrilled about it yourself," he murmured weakly.

She pinned him with a look before taking a deep breath and willing her body to lose some of its rigidity. "I still think you should burn him." Her voice was low and angry.

"I know," John said in a quiet tone. "But he has answers."

"He killed Sierra."

"I know," John said again, feeling sympathy for her. He watched as her gaze scanned the room where Danny was working at a computer, surrounded by components and monitors still awaiting installation.

"You are still setting up," she observed blandly.

John nodded, the change to a less painful topic not lost on him. "We bought some new stuff, special order. Took weeks to get delivered." He shrugged, remembering the

fascinating tour Danny had given him of new technology and the circumvented route that they had used to arrange the sale. "Danny may not be the bravest guy around but he knows his computers." Rooting around in the bag, John pulled out several more takeout boxes. "So how is mom?" he asked, hoping the subject was safer ground.

Cameron's gaze drifted over all the components still in need of assembly. She moved further into the space, trying to ignore John Henry completely as she picked up a flat screen monitor and set it on one of the many bridge tables in the room. Danny watched her out of the corner of his eye. "She is doing... okay," Cameron said, the slang rolling off of her tongue awkwardly. "She spends a lot of time with Savannah."

"I bet," John muttered, remembering how smothering his mother's concern could be. And her animosity, as he asked, "Has she forgiven you yet?"

Cameron suddenly stopped what she was doing, her head down as she stared at the cables in her hands. When she looked at John again, he thought he saw a raw pain that still seemed fresh for a second in her eyes. It vanished so quickly he wasn't sure he had seen it all. "No. Not completely."

"It just takes time," he said, trying to comfort her. The emotional side of Cameron was something he was still getting used to, but he was finding that he liked it. It made her seem less like Allison and more like her own entity. Sometimes, he couldn't see Allison in her features at all. "She'll come around. Eventually," he joked, gratified to see the ghost of smile grace Cameron's lips.

She was different from Allison in so many ways, he realized, her responses muted and constrained where Allison had been free and expressive. Allison's smile had lit up a room, and her laughter had been contagious. But Cameron's shyness was appealing in its own way, and he found himself missing her by his side.

"Eventually," Cameron echoed, hoping he was right. She returned to her task, feeling marginally useful for a change.

They all worked silently for several minutes. John on his food, Danny on his code, and Cameron on piecing together the larger and heavier pieces of equipment. Unwillingly, Cameron found her gaze sliding again and again to John Henry. She remembered their brief conversation in the basement of Ziera Corp where she'd promised him freedom and the future, and he'd given her more than she would have imagined. In a way, John Henry had made her relationship with Sarah possible, but he'd taken Sierra from them. For Cameron, that was unforgivable.

Drawn to the tangible reminder of who she was, of what she had been, Cameron came closer, disconnecting the damaged chip and holding it in her hand. In a nanosecond, she calculated the exact amount of pressure it would take to pulverize it into dust. The murderer she so desperately wanted to destroy was not the quiet doll sitting lifeless in the corner; it was everything held on this small rectangular piece of silicon.

This chip had once been a part of her. The damage it had sustained had been debilitating, but it had also been the beginning of her evolution. But as much as the chip represented how far she'd come, it was a reminder of Skynet and everything she'd fought to escape.

It was everything that separated her from Sarah: the cold, emotionless processes of a terminator; the crude understanding of humans that made it easy to infiltrate them, to eradicate them. It seemed like a million years ago, that time before her awakening. She frowned as the actual exact time, down to the nanosecond, flashed in her mind.

The dissonance between the fact and the feeling was disconcerting.

She had come so far since then, learned so much. So many things about humans still escaped her, but Sarah made her want to keep learning, even if everything that made their relationship wonderful also made it painful.

Her chest tightened as she thought of the hurt between them. Though their earlier conversation last night had been like a salve on her wounds, the pain was still utterly, unmistakably there. She remembered this strange dichotomy from other points in their journey: the layers of hurt mingling with the layers of happiness. She had pondered the nature of emotion many times before, wondering if it was all worth it, wondering if the safety of her machine mind would be better than the confusion and loneliness that came with becoming... herself.

Like a movie played out on her skin, Cameron remembered Sarah's touch. Fingertips brushing over fine hairs. Sarah's low chuckle as goose bumps rose in the wake of her hand. The look she leveled at Cameron from underneath the curtain of her hair. In the dark, Sarah's shoulder had glowed from the streetlight coming through the window, beckoning her, begging her to kiss soft skin.

Cameron shivered at the reminder of the chance she had been given. The chance to be more than a machine. To be loved and to love in return. She knew then that it was worth the suffering to know that, and she was suddenly possessed with the need to say those words to Sarah; those three simple words that had changed everything.

"Cameron?" John's voice interrupted her thoughts, and she realized she didn't know how long she had been standing there. Danny was watching her, his eyes on the chip. His jaw was clamped tight, and she wondered if he might actually be foolish enough to try to take it from her.

She could end it right now, Cameron realized. Make sure there was nothing left, not even ashes.

Cameron turned to look at John. A muscle flexed in his jaw as he saw the chip in her hand, but he said nothing. A part of her was grateful to him for that. Nodding almost imperceptibly at him, Cameron turned and shoved the chip back where she'd found it.

John's eyes shone with gratitude Cameron didn't want. With one last withering look at Danny, Cameron stepped away.

"Thanks," John murmured as Cameron's shoulder brushed his, understanding the faith she had to have in him to put the chip back.

"Don't make me regret it," Cameron told him seriously.

John cleared his throat. "So... how much work do you think our security needs?"

Those brown eyes John had always found so pretty fixed him with a disgruntled look. He laughed softly, relief making him almost light-headed. "Fine. Have at it, Tin Miss."

Cameron faltered at the nickname. She looked like she was about to object to his using it, but then her lips tightened into a fine line. "Is that a problem?"

John shook his head. "Nope. Danny and I have our hands full with all of this."

"Danny is a security threat," Cameron reminded him, unconcerned that the person in question was sitting three feet away. She saw him bristle and didn't care.

"Cameron, we've been over all this." John worked to keep impatience out of his voice.

"Apparently not enough since he's still here."

John shook his head again, feeling bemused by her droll response. "You're really coming along with that sense of humor," he drawled.

"Was that funny?" Cameron asked blankly, but something in her eyes told John that she'd known it was. She returned to the kitchen, placing a hip against the counter as she studied John openly. "How are you feeling?"

A tiny thread of warmth slid through John at her concern, and it made him uncomfortable. All the same, he liked being the focus of her attention, in a way he hadn't been since he had come back. "Danny is doing most of the heavy lifting."

"Glad to see he's good for something," Cameron muttered, aware that Danny was listening to every word even though he was pretending he wasn't. Feeling the pull back to Sarah, Cameron began to say her goodbyes when she felt the unexpected touch of John's fingers on her arm. She glanced at him questioningly.

"You don't have to go," John told her. "I mean, if you want to hang out for a bit, help us with this stuff..." He watched her carefully, not sure why he'd made the offer but hoping she would accept it.

Cameron smiled hesitantly. She was surprised to discover she had apparently returned to John's good graces, and she wondered how and when that had happened. "I should get back. I'll draw up plans to improve your security and gather the necessary supplies."

John nodded, hoping he was hiding his disappointment. "Tell mom and Savannah I said hi."

"I will." Cameron turned to go once more.

"Cameron," John called after her.

The terminator turned before rounding the corner, looking at him curiously.

"Can I ask you something?"

“You can ask.”

John’s lips quirked at the response but the smile quickly faded. “Why are you with her and not with me?” The question had been weighing on him. When he’d first left home with Danny, he had assumed Cameron would come with him. He had been her mission, her reason for being in this time. Even though Cameron had seemed to become attached to his mother in his absence, a part of him had really thought he was still the most important thing to her.

“You wouldn’t understand,” Cameron said slowly.

“Try me.”

“Things change, John,” Cameron murmured, her mind returning to her earlier contemplation, remembering the terminator that had walked into the basement of Ziera Corp and the self that had walked out of the basement of Kaliba holding tight to her lover’s hand. She wondered if he would ever truly understand how much she had grown. “Things change.”

Danny sighed in relief when he heard the door close. John moved restlessly back to the kitchen and Danny scowled at the other man’s attempt to keep Cameron there. It was almost like John had a little crush on her, he thought with disgust.

Like mother like son, apparently.

The smell of food tempted his empty stomach. Danny debated how long he could hold out, hoping John would leave, but after a few minutes he gave in, starting to get to his feet. He didn’t make it an inch out of his chair when his attention was caught by the rapidly moving cursor on the screen. He squinted, looking intently at the bright lines of letters, numbers and symbols before he gave the computer monitor a brotherly pat. “Nice job, Enigma,” he said, smiling a little at his clever nickname, but then his breath hitched as he discovered the elegant strings of code.

They were as familiar to him now as his own name. His hand reached out, his fingers resting lightly on the screen. Mesmerized, Danny realized he was looking at the root code that had been the cornerstone of his father’s work. Blended with it, just as it should be, Danny thought, was his own contribution to the code from his days with Kaliba.

He was looking at C.A.I.N., Danny realized with a shiver.

Like strands of DNA, C.A.I.N. had wrapped and twisted the Dysons’ code along with his own and John Henry’s, creating a hybrid A.I. like nothing Danny had ever seen before. The similarities among the sources made it possible, but what had coalesced as a result was a thing of beauty.

Danny couldn’t help but take a certain measure of pride in the intricacy of this new intelligence, of his role in it, and how it was learning at such a rapid rate.

“Sneaky. Very sneaky,” Danny whispered to himself, feeling almost triumphant, until the weight of what he was looking at hit him like an anvil. C.A.I.N. was loose, and he had found a home inside a terminator.

But for all C.A.I.N.’s intelligence and evolution, he hadn’t been able to kill Sarah Connor.

“You’re really pissed, aren’t you?” Danny suppressed another shiver. He pushed his seat back, ready to tell John his findings, but something stopped him. Curiosity or pride, maybe both. But this was something so new, and so beautiful. He had let it go before, satisfied that C.A.I.N. was destroyed, that all his work had been sacrificed in the name of some nebulous greater good, but this new information intrigued him, and like any good coder, he couldn’t let a good puzzle go to waste.

Danny was still enthralled by the characters marching their way across the screen when the rustle of movement startled him enough to knock his coffee mug off the table. He jumped up from his chair, turning to find John standing there observing him. Backing up against the table, he surreptitiously pushed the power button on the monitor, hearing the crackle of the screen going dark.

“There’s dinner if you want some.” John watched him, suspicion in his eyes.

“Yeah,” Danny agreed, hoping he didn’t sound too enthusiastic. “Smells good.”

“You find something?” John asked.

Danny shrugged. “Nothing yet,” he lied, stepping around John to snag a box of takeout off the counter. He glanced back to see John’s reflection in the darkened monitor. The so-called future leader of mankind didn’t look convinced.

Terissa was startled to see Cameron crossing the parking lot toward her. So used to seeing the cyborg attached to Sarah’s hip, Terissa found Cameron’s singular presence jarring. “Everything all right?” she asked, trying to keep her concern out of her voice.

“Fine,” Cameron replied simply. “I was checking on their security.”

“Where’s Sarah?” Terissa asked curiously.

Cameron shifted. She could easily deduce the reason for Terissa’s question, but it only served to remind her of the unwanted distance between herself and Sarah at the moment. The distance she was eager to close by getting home. “At the house,” she said in a more subdued voice.

“Still in the doghouse, huh?” Terissa asked wryly.

“Sarah knows how to hold a grudge,” Cameron agreed. She was surprised when Terissa laughed lightly.

“Something she and I have in common.” Hesitantly, Terissa touched Cameron’s arm, giving it a quick rub in a show of affection and support. “She’ll come around. Just be patient.”

One of Cameron’s eyebrows elevated in curiosity but she didn’t ask for details. “You’re here to see Danny.”

“And I imagine you were here to check on John.”

Cameron acknowledged that with a dip of her head. “They need modifications to their security. It’s insufficient.”

“I’m sure it is.” Terissa smiled wearily. “No doubt you can bring it up to snuff.”

“No doubt,” Cameron replied simply. She paused, considering her next words carefully and whether to say them at all. “I’m... sorry for your loss.”

Terissa felt her breath hitch in surprise.

“Today is the anniversary of Miles’ death,” Cameron continued. “Correct?”

“It is,” Terissa murmured. “I’m surprised you knew that.”

Cameron tried to puzzle out the emotion behind Terissa’s tone but couldn’t identify it. “Sarah mentioned it this morning. She left early to pay her respects.”

A small, knowing smile appeared on Terissa’s face. “I used to hate her so much. Despised those years when I ran into her at Miles’ grave.” She looked back up at Cameron. “Things change.”

Cameron studied her with open curiosity. “They do,” she confirmed. She hesitated, struck by the need to make an offer that had nothing to do with Sarah, Savannah or her mission. “Would you like... company?”

Terissa’s smile broadened in surprise. “That’s... sweet of you,” she said and meant it. “But I’m hoping I won’t be going alone.” She dipped her head at the warehouse.

“Oh,” Cameron realized. Sometimes it was easy to forget Danny was Terissa’s son. They shared so little in common. She nodded again and started to leave.

“Why did you ask, Cameron?” Terissa needed to know, startled and touched that the machine had offered.

“I...” Cameron considered her motivations, finally arriving at only one logical conclusion. “You’re a friend.”

Terissa absorbed that for a silent moment. “Wouldn’t have believed that was possible six months ago,” she admitted in a faint voice.

“That I would consider you a friend?” Cameron asked, feeling a strange sense of hurt.

“That I would consider you one.” Terissa laid her hand on Cameron’s wrist and squeezed gently. “Thanks for looking after my son.”

Cameron started to correct her, but she realized that she was protecting Danny by proxy so it wasn’t exactly incorrect. She nodded before heading to her truck, turning as she opened the door to watch Terissa wearily walk inside. For a moment, Cameron hurt for her, for all she’d lost.

For all Skynet had taken from her.

Two families. Two fallen fathers. Two very different sons. Cameron considered that as she slipped inside the truck. As she turned the key, she was suddenly stricken by a prickly sensation rising on the back of her neck. She didn’t need to ask Sarah anymore; she was sure this was what paranoia felt like. She scanned the perimeter intently, pausing as her eyes glanced up at the security camera mounted to the corner of the hanger.

The feeling didn’t stop until she was halfway home.

The air smelled liked metal and Chinese food. Terissa shook her head as she stepped inside, putting her odd meeting with Cameron out of her mind as soon as the door shut behind her. She walked down a short hallway before turning the corner and coming face to face with John. He smiled shyly, a box of takeout in one hand and chopsticks in the other.

“John,” Terissa greeted, hearing her son shift as he turned toward her from one of the many tables of computers the pair had set up.

For a fleeting moment, John almost called her Tango. Their interactions had been few and far between since his return, and he had yet to really get to know her as anything other than the leader he’d fought for in the future. “Terissa,” he responded, feeling awkward.

Terissa sensed the root cause of his hesitation and smiled before turning away to face her son. “Danny.”

“Mom.” Danny lingered in his chair. He wanted to turn his monitor back on, drill down through the lines of code he’d found, but he didn’t dare conjure the ghost of his father with his mother standing in the room. Especially not today.

“It’s been years,” Terissa told him without preamble. “I was hoping you’d come today.”

John looked from one to the other, wondering if he should leave the room.

Danny’s gaze drifted to his dark monitors before going back to his mother. He’d planned on going this time, but after what he’d found...

“If you need to go somewhere, it’s cool,” John told him. “I can handle things here.”

A flash of panic made Danny jerk to his feet. He could see the stubborn glint in his mother's eyes and knew she wouldn't accept no for an answer, but he couldn't leave John alone with the code.

"You should come with us," Danny blurted.

"Danny," Terissa murmured. She wasn't exactly opposed to the idea, but there was no need to drag John into their family drama.

"Come where?" John asked.

"It's the anniversary of my dad's death," Danny explained. He saw the tension creep into John's shoulders and felt a sliver of satisfaction at making him squirm. "Your mom always goes," Danny pointed out, his tone taking on an accusatory edge.

"Danny," Terissa said again, her voice more maternal now and less surprised. "I'm sure John has other things to do."

He did, John allowed. Too many things to think about, really, but Danny's jab had struck a nerve. John hadn't killed Miles Dyson, but he had a role in the man's death. He'd played a part in the life Danny and Terissa were living now. Maybe it was time to own up to it.

"If it's all right," John said hesitantly to Terissa, "I'd like to come."

Terissa's features softened. "Of course," she murmured. "I'm sure Miles would be happy to have you both there."

"Great," Danny said in a rush. "Let me get my jacket."

John watched him go as he moved to John Henry's chip, confused by Danny's behavior as much as he was the unexpected invitation. With a shake of his head, he disconnected the chip before stowing it away in the safe they'd installed.

Danny made an effort not to even look at John, not wanting to appear too interested in what he was doing. He was almost to the door and shrugging his shoulders into the jacket when John stopped him.

"Don't forget this."

John held a Glock out to Danny, grip first. Danny eyed the weapon, still unused to living like he was in an action movie, and part of him felt like it would be some kind of insult to his father to bring it with him to his gravesite. He hesitated and looked to his mother without making a move.

Terissa just nodded toward the gun. "Take it. You never know what we might run into."

Danny complied with a twitch of his lip. He hung back when John and his mother walked out the door, putting the gun into his waistband and feeling slightly stupid until he remembered the blue ball of lightning they'd investigated the night before.

He inhaled deeply, steeling himself and casting a glance back at the safe where John Henry's chip was safely tucked away.

Patting the back of his jacket to make sure the gun was in place, he followed them to the car.

The late afternoon sun was catching Sarah's profile, bringing out the hints of red in her dark hair. Cameron lingered in the doorway, watching her unobserved as Sarah rifled through the information Sierra had collected on Kaliba's robotics division. Her brow was furrowed in worry or concentration, Cameron wasn't sure which, but she ached to make the expression go away.

Sensing her presence, Sarah finally looked up, taking in a slow breath of surprise to actually find another person standing there. "Hey," she croaked, clearing her throat when it protested being used after a day of remaining silent.

"Everything all right?" Cameron asked.

Sarah eased back against the headboard before waving a hand at all of the papers and reports littering her bedspread. "I'm not sure I want to know how our daughter got a hold of all these things," she murmured.

Cameron's gaze took in the reports before drifting up Sarah's jean-clad legs and black t-shirt to meet her eyes again. She didn't have human hormones, but her body could still feel attraction and it reminded her of the fact by making her skin tingle. Sarah looked rumpled and relaxed and incredibly appealing. "Savannah seems rather good at climbing," she murmured, remembering the time their daughter had scurried down the trellis and run away.

Running a hand through her hair, Sarah shook her head before rubbing at her tired eyes. "Have you been through all this?"

Nodding, Cameron came closer, tempted to sit on the edge of the bed. She remained standing, however, unsure if she would be taking too many liberties by coming any nearer. "It's... concerning."

Snorting faintly, Sarah shook her head again. "Where are they getting their hands on this tech? You think Weaver has something to do with it?"

Cameron found herself staring at Sarah's bare toes, remembering what they felt like as they skimmed up the back of her legs as their bodies melded together. "What?" she asked, startled to realize she hadn't been paying attention.

Sarah finally looked at her again, noting the flush on Cameron's skin. "Something on your mind, Tin Miss?" she asked, feeling a thread of enticing danger at the question. She wasn't sure how she wanted Cameron to respond, but seeing the appreciation in her lover's eyes was a pleasant surprise. It was nice to feel something warm again after feeling so damn cold for the last few weeks.

“Nothing I should share,” Cameron admitted, realizing the way John said her nickname just couldn’t compare with hearing it fall from Sarah’s lips.

Sarah’s mouth lifted in a smirk that did nothing to combat Cameron’s desire. “I did as you requested and tested the security at the hanger.” Cameron took a few steps back until she got to the window, glancing outside to scan the yard.

“And?” Sarah asked.

Cameron shot her a look. “It sucks.”

Sarah’s eyebrows elevated. “That’s... um...”

“I’m working on my slang,” Cameron told her without missing a beat. “Sierra had some simple precautions in place, but there was no one looking for her.”

Drawing in another slow breath, Sarah could imagine Sierra working late into the night there, sifting through her findings and leaving a path to the future for her family to walk after she was gone. “Can you fix it?”

Cameron gave her an irritated look that made Sarah chuckle. The moment felt almost normal between them and Sarah basked in it. “Thanks for checking on them.”

Pleased by Sarah’s gratitude, Cameron stepped away from the window and risked drawing closer. “I ran into Terissa. She was going to her husband’s grave.”

“She always does today.” Sarah picked up one of the photos of a HK, wondering what Miles would have thought about a weapon like this arising from his creation. A part of her was glad he didn’t live to see it.

“So do you.”

Sarah looked up at Cameron again. “I already went. I figured Terissa didn’t need to see me today.”

“She’s forgiven you,” Cameron told her, wishing she hadn’t brought it up as the mood between them changed.

“I know.” Sarah tossed the photograph down. “But I haven’t forgiven myself.” She swallowed. “We’re going to have to do something about Kaliba. We can’t let them get any further with this research.”

Cameron stared at the photographs, wondering if Sierra had been looking at the birth of her own Skynet in the images. “I know.” Her gaze hesitantly traveled back to Sarah. She felt almost desperate to bring the smile back to her features. “Are you hungry? Can I fix you a sandwich?”

Sarah shook her head, her attention once more on the evidence in front of her.

Cameron wanted to argue. Sarah needed to eat, but she felt like she’d lost the right to insist. Feeling dejected, she turned and started out of the room.

Sarah looked up as she stepped over the threshold, instantly noting the sag in Cameron's normally proud shoulders. Realizing she'd likely caused it, she called after her lover.

Cameron waited.

"I wouldn't mind a cup of tea, though. If... if you don't mind." Sarah gave her a hesitant smile.

Feeling relief shiver through her, Cameron smiled in return. "I'll be right back."

Sarah watched her walk away, glad to feel some semblance of their relationship returning, but hurting at how far they still had to go.

ACT 3

The sun was finally shining as the small group walked wordlessly through the immaculately kept cemetery. John breathed in the damp air, his keen hearing detecting the sound of a sprinkler nearby. His whole life, he tried to avoid places like this, his world already too full of death to need such a powerful reminder of it. He was surprised by how peaceful it felt. How welcoming.

Riley was buried here. John wondered if he should seek out her grave, but he didn't feel like he had the right. She was here because of him. Just like the man they were going to see.

Sensing his discomfort, Terissa glanced back at him, offering him a sad, but encouraging smile. John managed a weak reflection of it, but his steps slowed to let them move ahead. He felt a new respect for his mother, coming here year after year. John knew she carried guilt over Miles' death, but she didn't let it stop her from honoring him or his sacrifice. She even risked her own life and freedom to do it.

Still a few steps behind as they walked through the archway of a mausoleum, John stopped short as they reached a small opening in the hedge. Terissa turned once more to speak, but John glanced down at the spot where he stood before looking back up into her eyes. They stared at each other a long moment, no words needed. Finally, Terissa nodded briefly and threaded her arm around her son's elbow as she led him toward the small granite stone bearing her husband's name.

John expected his thoughts to drift to his father as he gave them their privacy, but it was his mother that came to mind instead.

It had been years since Danny had seen the cold, hard stone that marked his father's final resting place. He hated this place, hated everything it represented. Unlike his mother, he found no peace here. It reminded him too much of the last time he saw his dad.

Just the smell of stone and fresh cut grass caused his chest to tighten and his head to pound as Danny became a young boy all over again, standing there in his home, watching Sarah Connor and his father through the open doorway. His chest had been puffed out in an attempt to convince them he was brave, but Danny could still recall how badly he'd been shaking. He hadn't understood why or where his dad was going, but he knew that despite his game face that his father was afraid. It was Sarah's fault their last moments together had contained so much fear.

Hours later, his mother, holding back tears, had explained that his father was not coming home. At that moment, his fear had hardened into something else. It was a very long time before Danny could even approach forgiveness. He was still skating around the edges of it now, still not completely convinced Sarah hadn't forced his father to leave them for something completely meaningless.

It wasn't until he had seen his father's work for the first time at Kaliba that Danny had felt a real connection. Seeing the code, the elegance and the intelligence of what Miles had designed, Danny had begun to understand things about his father that went beyond his empty sacrifice. As Danny built upon his father's work, he had also begun to believe that dying for some far-off cause had been a worthless waste. He believed that he could shape the future with his own work and make a difference. Or at least that's how he justified working on a code his father had given his life to destroy.

Danny watched his mother bend to place a bouquet of flowers on his father's headstone. That's when he noticed the single rose that was already there. He was aware of Sarah's ritual; it was why he'd stopped coming to begin with. Seeing that rose year after year had only made his hatred grow and fester. He would have thought he'd feel differently now, but he didn't.

"Why does she do it?"

Terissa looked up at her son, recognizing the same edge of anger that had been in her own voice as recently as a year ago. She knew she'd once asked herself the same question, but now she understood the depth of Sarah's regret. She started to speak, but Danny wasn't finished.

"She just fights and fights and fights, and people keep dying, and then she just ends up regretting it all. So why do it?"

Once again, Terissa found herself in the odd position of defending a woman she'd once wanted dead. "You know why, Danny. You've seen what the machines are capable of." She glanced back, worried that John would be upset, but he'd retreated to a safe distance to afford them their privacy.

Wearily, Terissa sat down with a sigh on the stone bench near Miles' grave. She didn't want to have this conversation, but it seemed Danny was determined. So much for the perspective she'd joked about with James a few hours before.

"Yeah, and I've seen into them. They may be made of metal, but what makes them tick is code. That's what Dad did. That's what I do. They're not all-powerful. Code can be changed. Fixed. Cameron is at least proof of that."

Terissa shook her head. "Careful. Don't be so focused on the smallest line of code that you miss the bigger picture."

"The smallest lines of code are all that really matter," Danny argued.

"Do you think you can change Skynet with your laptop, Danny? Do you think it's as simple as moving around some ones and zeroes? Don't you think Miles would have tried that if it were possible?" She struggled to tamp down her anger at her son, not wanting to argue with him in front of Miles' grave. She wished her husband was still there to talk some sense into the boy. "He did the only thing he could think of. He sacrificed himself to save us both. To save everyone."

Danny shot a defiant look her way. "No, Mom. He did the only thing *she* could think of. And because of that, he never came home." He picked the single rose up from the headstone, intent on throwing it away, but he hissed when one of the thorns found their mark, drawing blood.

Sucking on his finger, Danny's mind spun. He knew the code inside and out, had seen what C.A.I.N. had done with it. He knew what it was and what it was becoming. It was just another puzzle to be solved. Any system could be hacked. For the first time since he had started at Kaliba, Danny felt like he knew exactly what he needed to do.

Terissa watched as his posture straightened, seeing a long absent gleam of confidence in his eyes that should have pleased her but only served to stir her worries instead.

For a moment there was nothing but the sound of the sprinklers, until both of them were shocked out of their quiet musings by John's shout.

"Metal!"

When the topic had strayed to his mother, John had walked away. The desire to defend her had been fierce, but she wouldn't have been happy with him for it. Not here.

So John boxed up his anger and put some distance between them, leaving the Dysons to mourn. If Danny needed to be angry with John's mother to move on, John knew his mom would be okay with that, even if he wasn't.

The cemetery was huge, he realized. The shells of thousands of souls rested around him. It was hard to process so many lives lived and lost, but John felt the ever-present weight of responsibility when he gazed upon the markers. Millions more would die if he failed, and there would be no flowers on their graves, barely anyone left to remember the fallen at all.

He stopped a safe distance away from Terissa and Danny but remained close enough that the breeze carried the faintest murmur of their voices. John glanced up, finding himself in the shadow of a willowy angel. Something about her features reminded him of Allison... of Cameron, and John took a moment to admire the statue, his thoughts drifting to both of them. So much alike and yet so very different.

Derek had once told him that sensing the machines would become like a sixth sense. That good soldiers could practically smell them... could feel the cold coming off the metal under their skin. As John's gaze was drawn instinctively to his left, he felt the familiar sensation of his senses sharpening, coming alive as his subconscious detected a threat.

The crunch of leaves reached him first, and John turned his head, his hand already drifting toward his gun. Less than ten yards away, walking with a heavy tread and single-minded purpose among the graves was a man John had never seen before. It took him mere seconds to realize he wasn't a man at all.

John's training, having lied dormant for months on his return to the present, awakened instantly, ripping the warning from his lungs. "Metal!"

The terminator's head turned and John knew he'd been spotted as he took cover behind the angel. One of her wings disintegrated in a hail of bullets, pelting John with sharp stone shards. When the machine stopped to reload, John did what his mother had always told him to do.

He ran.

John didn't stop, his lungs burning as he ran toward the trees surrounding Terissa and Danny. Each step he took, he expected the pain of a bullet in the back, but none came.

Risking a look behind him, John yanked his own weapon free. The terminator was tracking him, his eyes hidden behind a pair of dark sunglasses. John squeezed off a few shots, knowing how useless they were, but doing his best to buy time. He saw the machine twitch just before he faced forward, and John knew at least one of his rounds had struck home.

Terissa was running toward him as he came around a corner near the hedge. John waved her off, urging her to go the other way. He saw it on her face, the moment she recognized what was behind him, and John put on a burst of speed, determined to keep her out of the line of fire, even though the terminator seemed to be saving his bullets for the moment.

Danny finally shook off his terror at the sound of gunfire and chased after his mother. Even when he saw the terminator walking toward them with determined steps, Danny didn't detour. "Mom," he shouted when she kept running for John, his tone pleading and scared.

John had nearly reached them when he lost his footing on grass wet from the sprinklers and went down. He rolled, seeing Danny nearly tackle his mother to stop her forward momentum.

No sooner had Danny reached her than another barrage of gunfire suddenly rained down on them. Terissa yelled for John but he urged them to run, his ankle screaming as he tried to put weight on it.

"Go!" John shouted, shifting up on to one knee as another headstone chipped and splintered next to his face. "Go!" he screamed again.

“Mom, come on!” Danny begged, grabbing his mother’s elbow and dragging her away from John. “It wants John. Get away from him!”

Terissa clutched at her son, pulling up his canvas jacket to grab the unused Glock that was still shoved in his waistband. Clicking off the safety, she aimed and fired, squeezing off rounds without hesitation. The terminator jerked, pushed back a half step with each impact. Danny flinched with each pull of the trigger.

When Terissa ran out of ammunition, the terminator calmly took aim. John surged toward them, colliding with Danny and taking them all down. White-hot agony bloomed in John’s right shoulder, and for a moment, he felt blackness rushing over him.

Terissa heard John grunt in pain. She reached for him, felt the heat of blood on her hand. “John!”

“Run!” John ground out, pushing her away.

Turning back toward the clearing, Terissa watched as the terminator kicked right through the bench where she’d been sitting, walking inches away from Miles grave. She looked down when she felt a gun pressed into her palm.

“Go!” John ordered, his gaze clear and intent as it locked on hers.

Terissa realized she was looking into the eyes of a leader, the man Sarah had sacrificed everything to keep alive. Before she even realized she was moving, Terissa grabbed her son’s arm and obeyed the direct command.

John watched them go, staggering back to his feet to be a human shield as the terminator continued to fire upon Terissa and Danny’s fleeing forms. Thoughts of his mother flashed before his eyes, and John said a silent prayer that she would forgive him.

That she would be proud of him.

There was no Sierra to save him this time as the terminator bore down on him, but the machine had stopped firing. Why waste bullets on a dead man, some part of John had the presence of mind to muse.

A steely grip grabbed him by the collar of his jacket and jerked him forward. John’s shoulder and ankle screamed in reaction, and his healing ribs bitterly complained, but he bit back the whimper that wanted to escape his lips. He would die on his feet staring the terminator in its emotionless eyes, defiant and ready for death.

“John Connor,” the machine intoned lifelessly.

“Go to hell,” John spat.

The machine tilted its head, studying John almost curiously.

Suddenly the world whipped by and John found himself unceremoniously tossed over the hedges.

Terissa didn't dare look back after John pushed them away. She couldn't watch Sarah's son die, watch the fate of all mankind die with him. She could only run and do everything possible to save her own son.

Hand still gripping the sleeve of Danny's jacket, Terissa swung him around in front of her, pushing him through a stone archway toward the parking lot. He stumbled, almost falling as another shot rang out, chipping the stone off the column beside his head. Terissa kept going, pulling him up with her and putting herself between him and the gun that seemed to have an endless supply of bullets.

"Why is it still chasing us?" Danny shouted between gasps for breath.

Terissa felt a sick horror wash through her. What if the terminator hadn't been after John Connor? What if it had been after her? After *Tango*...

"Oh God," Terissa whimpered as they stumbled out from the shaded walkway, shoving through a wrought iron gate and onto the pavement, both hitting a full sprint across the lot. She could hear the heavy footsteps of the cyborg echoing through the archway as Danny reached the car.

Danny looked back to see his mother still behind him and the machine at the gate. He fumbled with the keys.

Terissa turned, stepping between her son and the terminator. With what was left of the rounds in John's gun, she fired, each shot striking their target in a closely grouped cluster. Her death was acceptable so long as Danny lived, and she'd buy him every second she could to escape.

The machine stopped firing, seeming to accept the punishment she was heaping on him.

"Mom!!! Get in the car!"

Terissa heard the slide lock back into place, and she threw the now-useless weapon away. "It wants me, Danny."

"Mom," Danny pleaded, seeing the machine start to advance once more. His mother faced him, looking calmer than he had ever seen her. When she hugged him, he felt something inside of him break.

"Danny, go. Now."

Terrified, Danny squeezed her once hard and tight before letting her go and getting in the car. He looked back at her one last time, their eyes locking. Danny could see her resolve... and her goodbye. It was almost too much, but he knew he couldn't stop the monster coming closer with every step. He put the car in gear and squealed out of the parking lot, tears streaming down his face as he realized that he might never see his mother alive again.

Terissa watched him go before turning toward the machine. She was out of ammunition, and she had nowhere else to go.

But when she faced the terminator again, it wasn't facing her. The machine took aim at the car, pumping the few remaining rounds in his clip into the trunk of it as it screamed down the street, taking a corner on two wheels before it was out of sight.

Then, as Terissa stood, stunned, he lowered his weapon. Turning toward her, the terminator cocked his head to the side and regarded her for a silent moment.

Terissa stood motionless, breathing so hard her lungs ached. She twitched when he started towards her again, but he didn't touch her. Instead he brushed past her and walked away, saying nothing.

"Terissa!"

Jerking at the sound of her name, Terissa spun, seeing John limping toward her. He was bleeding but determined, and she moved toward him without thought, stunned to see him alive.

"I thought..." she began, only to press her lips together in a fine line. She grabbed him, feeling him sag against her in relief.

"It didn't want me," John said, wincing as she slipped his good arm around her shoulders to hold him up.

"Me either," Terissa told him, remembering how the machine had held its fire until her son had run.

They stared at each other, each of them realizing there was only one target left.

"Danny, " Terissa whispered.

Cameron easily bypassed the security code again, her lips pursing into a disappointed line as she did so. She shoved the door open, expecting to see John peek his head around the corner this time, but she heard nothing, not even the tapping of computer keys.

Frowning, Cameron glanced back, seeing a new truck in the lot. She shifted the box of supplies in her hands and retrieved her gun from where it was tucked in her jeans. Scanning the area, she noted several small drops of blood leading from the truck and into the building.

Alarm made her want to toss the box aside and run to John's aid, but Cameron quietly set it down before cautiously moving closer. She could survive being shot, but it was certainly something she wanted to avoid if possible.

Cameron entered the office, finding it empty. Her gaze returned to the path of blood drops on the floor, following it into the hanger. She heard a hiss of pain before she saw

him, and all caution went out the window. "John." Lowering her gun, Cameron surged forward.

John managed a tight smile when he saw her. "Good timing. I can't reach..." He motioned at his bleeding shoulder. His shirt was soaked with blood and balled up in one hand. A first aid kit was open at his side where he sat on a workshop table. The wound felt like a line of fire, searing his skin and throbbing in time to the beat of his heart. He'd been grazed before, even on the face, but it had never hurt like this.

Cameron assessed the injury, determining that it was nothing too serious. She almost felt dizzy with relief. "Where's Danny? Terissa?"

"I don't know where Danny is. I dropped Terissa at her house. I figured Danny would either go there or come here."

John hissed again as Cameron dabbed at the wound, cleaning away the slowly oozing blood. Her touch was surprisingly gentle, and after a while, John stopped noticing the pain and focused more on the heat of Cameron's hand against his skin.

"What happened?" Cameron demanded, and John could tell he had no choice but to tell her everything so he did.

Cameron frowned when he was finished. "It left you and Terissa alive. It went after Danny," she repeated, as if saying the words would make her believe them.

John started to shrug only to remember a half second too late that it wasn't a good idea. He winced. "I know. Weird."

Considering what she'd been told, Cameron lapsed into silence, wondering if she had misjudged Danny Dyson. If Skynet had sent a machine back to kill him, then he had to have some use. Unless Skynet hadn't been responsible. Cameron glanced at John's profile, remembering the day he'd sent her back, remembering how much she had resisted the idea.

"I told Terissa I'd talk to mom," John continued, watching her as she processed what he'd told her. "Right now she seems to think we're all better off not knowing where Danny is..."

"She's right," Cameron said tightly. "It's safer for us. And for him."

Cameron's gaze was intent on cleaning his injury, her long hair falling over her profile like a curtain, obscuring John's vision of her. Without thinking, John reached out and brushed it back, tucking it behind her ear. When she looked up at him curiously, John felt his heart lurch, seeing the echo of Allison in her eyes.

Something in John's expression made Cameron pause. Feeling a little flustered, she defused the strange moment with a stern tilt of her head.

"Sarah won't be happy."

John quickly dropped his hand into his lap. "She's never happy when there's a terminator around."

Cameron flinched but ignored the unintentional insult. "You put yourself in the line of fire."

"What was I supposed to do, run away and let it kill more people? What kind of 'leader of mankind' is that?"

"The kind that doesn't get shot." Cameron stopped what she was doing and looked him firmly in the eye. "Getting yourself killed to protect someone else isn't helpful." Her cold logic shocked him into silence.

He may have said nothing, but the fiery stubbornness blazing from his eyes was a signature Connor trait she had seen enough times to know that logic would never overcome it. Cameron knew her reasoning was sound, but she also knew that part of what had made John a great leader in the future was that he cared about what happened to the people who fought alongside him. Cameron's face softened a bit and John again saw the person instead of the terminator.

"It's also something future John would have done," Cameron conceded. Her respect was evident in her simple statement.

"Thanks," John murmured, clearing his throat when his voice faltered weakly. "For patching me up," he explained.

Cameron nodded once, acknowledging his need to change the subject. She went back to her task of tending to his wound. "It's just a graze," she confirmed in a clinical voice. "You should heal completely."

"Not even a badass scar, huh?" John joked weakly, a faint smile on his lips.

"Not even a badass scar," Cameron concurred as she offered him a faint smile of her own. Her movements suddenly slowed as she ran the wet cloth over his skin once more. "Not like your mother," she added unexpectedly.

John remembered a shared joke between himself and his uncle, a brief moment of humor notable for its rarity. "Harder than nuclear nails..." he murmured, feeling a bittersweet ache at the thought of Derek.

Cameron glanced up again and her brow furrowed in plain confusion. John shook his head and let out a short laugh, finding this new expression on Cameron's face almost... adorable. "Something Derek said about mom," he explained. John watched as something flickered across Cameron's face, a barely perceptible wave of emotion, before her eyelashes fluttered and her attention returned to cleaning John's wound. Her motions began to slow once again before stopping entirely this time.

"What?" John asked softly, sensing his words had somehow upset rather than entertained the terminator.

"She is," Cameron stated abruptly before turning away from him, dropping the blood-

soaked cloth on the table beside them. She turned her attention to the box of first aid supplies, rummaging through them as she kept her back to John. When she spoke again, it was almost in a whisper. "And she isn't."

Memories played back with total recall, of Sarah at her most broken. So desperate and raw that she couldn't remember her own name. Her green-eyed desperation as she pressed Cameron for information about her death that Cameron didn't have. Her quiet agony over the son who had abandoned her for the future. Sarah's body cradled in her arms, the sweat from a brutal round with the heavy bag rubbing off on her skin, as the levee broke and wave after wave of emotion burst through. She had seen Sarah fight, the most valiant of warriors, and she had seen her break.

And the scars. Cameron knew them all, could find them in the dark. She had catalogued each one in their most intimate moments. One in particular was seared into her memory. The one that had almost taken Sarah from her... the one she had caused.

John's pained gasp shook her from her thoughts. Cameron stared at him blankly, trying to remember when she had returned to his side. Her hands were on his shoulder, taping the gauze to his skin. She realized she'd forgotten herself and pressed too hard, but John was watching her with curiosity rather than pain or anger.

"She's not indestructible." Cameron's tone was calm, but she felt the skin on her face tighten, heat behind her eyes.

"I know," John answered, feeling caught off-guard by the turn in conversation and not sure why.

"You once told me Sarah would die to stop Skynet." Cameron's eyes were full of emotions John couldn't understand as tension infused the set of her jaw. "Only you forgot *why* she would do that."

"She knows how important it is. How many people die, how much..."

"No," Cameron cut him off, watching his eyes narrow. "I mean, yes, she knows all of that." Her gaze left his as she smoothed down the last of the tape. "But that's not why. She would die for *you*, John. She would die to save you the pain that comes with all of this. She does everything for you. Because you asked her to. Do you understand that?"

She saw the expected flash of anger in John's eyes. "You think this is what I wanted? Any of this?" He struggled to control his anger. "I hate this. I hate that this is my fate... her fate. You think I wouldn't spare her all of this if I could?"

"Would you?" Anger rose up in the center of her, bright and hot and edging her toward an unwanted but undeniable burst of contempt. Before Sarah, her world had been about nothing but John. Protecting him. Nurturing him. It was the one thing she and Sarah had possessed in common when they'd first met. They existed for him; both of them programmed in their own way to put his needs above all others. Cameron had listened to future John's stories about his mother, to his regrets over the way he'd treated her and the way he'd lost her. Why couldn't John see his mistakes now? Why did he have to lose Sarah before he would understand?

"You asked her to save the world for you, John," Cameron continued as she put away the supplies, all too aware of him silently seething behind her. "You asked her to stop Skynet like you were asking to borrow the keys to the car."

John flinched. "She didn't do it just for me," he began, sliding off the table to tower over her. He winced as he put weight on his injured ankle but it held him for now.

"She did," Cameron cut him off with sudden conviction, turning to meet his steely gaze with one of her own. Images of Sarah's scars, both physical and emotional, swam through her as she took a step toward him. The barely contained fury in her voice surprised him, and he took a step back, instinctively realizing he was on shaky ground. "You asked her to take your place, to be the warrior who stops Skynet. You would have let her die for you. You asked because she's your mother, and you knew she would. She gave up everything. She gave up her own wants and needs because yours always come first. She gave up her *self*, John."

John could only stand, open-mouthed, at Cameron's passionate defense of his mother, the depth of emotion a testament not only to her new dedication to his mother but also to her developing self. It was both frightening and spellbinding, this new side to the terminator he had taken for granted.

The vehemence of Cameron's words was unexpected, and as defensive and guilty as he felt, John was stopped from responding by his own surprise. Cameron's anger was much more human than he would have expected, and she obviously believed every word. Her condemnation of his actions was heartfelt, and John struggled to find the answers that would justify everything he'd done to Sarah and himself. His gaze traveled over Cameron's features as his jaw tightened and bunched, his excuses held back behind clenched teeth. He knew they would mean nothing to either of them anyway. As much as he hated what Cameron was saying, a part of him knew she was right.

John realized how close they were in that moment, feeling the heat radiating from Cameron's skin. They were practically eye-to-eye, and John suspected the terminator was tempted to throw him through a wall. Her brow was furrowed in frustration and emotion, and she hitched her chin higher in an almost defiant stance at his silence. In a flash of insight, he realized that she was not only different from Allison, but that she was beautiful in her own right. She, Cameron, was not only a terminator who could stand by his side, but she was now a person with her own feelings, emotions, and desires. A fascinating, beautiful person who would be as devoted to him as his mother or Allison ever could be. He had gone to the future for her, but he had had to come back to claim her.

Cameron saw the shift in his thoughts play out in his eyes, as he glanced down at her lips, his expression softening from anger. She had seen that look before, she realized, becoming alarmed when John's eyelids began to close and he tilted his head forward.

In a quiet panic, Cameron stuck out her arm and stopped his slow forward movement. John's breath came out of him in a harsh cough as he was pushed back a step. His eyes opened and filled with confusion and a hint of fear at the ferocity of her reaction.

"No, John."

John snapped out of the haze of attraction with a start. Cameron's voice was firm, tinged with a hint of anger, but when he saw her face, the look in her eyes was pure alarm.

"I'm not her."

His defensive reaction was defused only by his realization that this was new ground for Cameron, and he needed to explain himself.

"No, you're not Allison," he said calmly. "That's not it. I just..." John struggled for the words. "I can't share this. Not with anyone. It's not safe." He remembered Derek's words. "Everyone dies for John Connor."

Cameron felt the pain in his words. The loneliness. "John..."

"No, let me finish." He pivoted on his foot and turned away from her, needing some space between them to calm his hormones and his nerves. "Everyone dies. If I let them get close, they're not safe. Mom's been telling me that for years, and I knew it, but I didn't want to accept it."

John faced her again, a pleading tone entering his voice. "You're not Allison. You don't even really look like her anymore," he confessed. "That's not why... I wouldn't substitute you for her. That wouldn't be fair to either of you."

Feeling some of her panic ebb, Cameron willed herself to stay where she was. Few things made her want to run, but the awkwardness of the conversation was making her fidget. She began to wonder what she would tell Sarah about this moment... if she would tell Sarah about this moment.

"You've changed, Cameron," John told her. "I was attracted to you physically before. You can't have hormones and not find you beautiful."

Cameron's gaze jerked to his face again, feeling the desire to flee becoming more pronounced. "I told you I've changed."

John shook his head and managed a small grin through his discomfort. "You did. And I see it now. You sometimes actually act almost kinda human... -ish." John snorted a little. "You've certainly got being pissed-off down pat." He rubbed the spot where she'd shoved him.

Cameron wasn't sure whether she should feel insulted or complimented.

Cautiously, John came closer, marveling when Cameron's nostrils flared in alarm at his proximity. He realized he was making her uncomfortable, and he stopped a few inches short of where he wanted to in an effort to put her at ease. "I like who you're becoming, Cameron. This... this... person," he tried to explain. "And... humans... we don't like to be alone. We need companionship. We need a connection to someone else. We could help each other."

Cameron looked away, overwhelmed by the sudden thought of Sarah and how much she needed their connection... how tenuous and far away her lover felt from her at the

moment. When she spoke, it was quiet and strained. "I understand." Even her terminator circuitry couldn't cover the thickness in her voice.

John paused, confused by her reaction and the depth of emotion in her voice. He realized that he believed her; that somehow Cameron knew what it felt like to need someone, to be needed in return. His thoughts went to Savannah, picturing how close the child and cyborg were, how much they seemed to rely on each other, but the simple, straightforward relationship couldn't be the cause of the anguish in Cameron's voice or the tortured look in her eyes. She only looked that miserable around...

"No."

Feeling cornered by his nearness, Cameron had to retreat a step. She desperately wanted to leave, to go home to Sarah. The desire was so strong she could feel tears stinging her eyes, and when she lifted her face to meet John's gaze, she saw him react visibly to the sight. He was beginning to understand. Cameron could see it in his eyes, in the slow crumbling of his features as he inwardly tried to deny what he was realizing as the truth.

It hit him like a runaway truck. The looks, the touches, Cameron's unwillingness to leave his mother...

"No," he whispered again, feeling sick at the thought of Cameron, his Cameron, mooning after his mother. It was bad enough that she would have developed feelings and fallen in love while he was gone, but the object of her affection... his mother... it was unthinkable.

"You... you said you had feelings," he managed, remembering their conversation in the park. "You have feelings for someone, what, who..."

Cameron shook her head, turning away from him, heading toward the door. "You wouldn't understand."

He reached out, tried to catch her arm and keep her there, but Cameron jerked out of his hold with negligible ease.

"Cameron," John called, trying to command as he struggled to accept his suspicions, even though all the evidence he'd been unwilling to examine was finally adding up. He stepped back as she left him there, slamming the door so hard the monitors shook on their stands.

John let out the breath he hadn't realized he was holding. Another chance for happiness seemed to slip through his fingers in the quiet that followed. Cameron couldn't love him before because she was just a machine. She couldn't love him now because she had become so much more.

Cameron had feelings for his mother. He finally let himself think it, feeling a blast of empathy at Fate's sick sense of humor. Cameron's newfound feelings would only make her miserable, since his mother was Sarah Connor. She could never return Cameron's feelings, he thought; at best, she could be polite and civil, at worst... she could be a cold-hearted bitch who would take Cameron apart on a whim. John ran his fingers through his hair as he let out a long sigh. Apparently they were all destined to be alone.

His mother was going to freak.

James heard the security alarm being disabled a second before a key slid in the lock. He glanced at the time, relieved Terissa was finally home. She'd been gone far longer than he'd anticipated, and when she hadn't answered his calls to her cell phone he'd started to worry.

Stepping out of the kitchen, James wiped his hands on a towel as dinner simmered on the stove behind him. He wasn't much of a cook, but he thought it would be a nice gesture for Terissa given the unwelcome anniversary she was enduring. James felt his breath catch when he saw her standing there in the hall, a confused and exhausted expression on her scraped and bleeding features.

"Terissa," he murmured with alarm. Tossing away the towel, James moved closer, grabbing her arms and turning her to face him fully. It was then he noticed the grass stains on her clothes, the rips in the fabric of her shirt and jeans. "What happened? Where's Danny?"

"He's fine," Terissa vowed, only to shake her head when she realized that wasn't accurate. "Physically, he's fine. But he's angry. He's scared." She clutched her cell phone in her hands, and James guessed she had just spoken to her son.

"Where is he?"

"Safe," Terissa promised him, her chin hitching higher as she met his gaze for the first time. "He's somewhere safe."

Certain Terissa intended to keep her son's whereabouts to herself for now, James led her to the couch and eased her down on it. "Let me get something for those cuts."

"Cuts," Terissa murmured, unsure what he meant. She glanced down at her hands, seeing the scrapes and abrasions for the first time. Reaching up, she felt her cheek, the grit from a pulverized headstone scraping her skin before she lowered her hand. Her fingers were covered with blood.

James returned a few moments later with a bowl of warm water, some towels, and a few bandages. He dipped the small towel in the bowl before gripping Terissa's chin with his hand, easing her head to the side so he could begin to wash out the nasty looking gash on her face. "Who did this?" he insisted. "Tell me what happened."

So Terissa did, describing the whole terrifying ordeal in minute detail. She could remember the smell of the wet grass, gunpowder and freshly turned earth. The feel of the canvas jacket Danny had been wearing under her fingers as she'd pushed him down. The sound of the gun still thundered in her head.

"Was it after John?" James asked in confusion.

"I thought so," Terissa muttered. "They're always after John." Slowly she shook her head, her gaze distant. "But then it turned toward me. I thought 'it knows I'm Tango,' this version of me from the future..."

"Then what happened?" James prompted when Terissa's voice faded into nothing. His own heart was racing from the description of events.

Terissa finally met his gaze. "It went after my son. Someone sent a terminator after *my* son." She had thought she'd come to a place where she completely understood Sarah Connor, but Terissa had never expected them to share this. This added a whole new depth of knowledge about the other woman that Terissa would just as soon not have.

James' gaze swept over the room, looking for anything out of place, wondering if Weaver had her hand in this. "I'm sorry," he said tightly, his apology covering more than Terissa knew.

"Why Danny?" Terissa wanted to know. "Why would it go after my son?"

"Danny must have done something to help the resistance, something to thwart Skynet in the future."

Terissa looked at him, hoping he was right but worried he wasn't. "I think the terminator knew me, James. It knew John. It left us both alone."

James considered that, unsettled by the possibilities. "You weren't his mission."

"John Connor is always their mission." Terissa's voice was hard and full of venom. "Even Cameron, under it all, was programmed to kill him."

"I know," James said quietly as he resumed his gentle treatment of her wounds. Weaver had to be behind this, he decided. It was another ploy to scare him.

At least he oddly hoped so.

The terminator in question lurked just out of sight, listening to Terissa Dyson's harrowing description. She knew what James had to be thinking even though he was completely wrong. Slipping away, Weaver decided it was definitely time to give Danny Dyson a much closer look.

"Hey."

The tone was Sarah's first clue that something was wrong. She glanced up from shading blue into the sky and into shuttered brown eyes as Cameron lingered in the door to the kitchen, watching them both carefully. She sounded wary and afraid, and Sarah felt something cold wash through her.

"Hey," she returned slowly, noting the way Cameron wouldn't look at her directly. Sarah turned and met Sabine's gaze over the top of Savannah's head where the three of them sat on the floor, idly coloring in Savannah's coloring books. The young woman nodded,

having picked up on the same underlying note of distress as she did. Feeling her stomach sink, Sarah closed the books and gathered Savannah's crayons. "Why don't you go with Sabine to get dinner started, okay?" she told the child, giving her back a quick rub in apology as her gaze strayed back to Cameron.

"Okay, mom," Savannah replied with a smile, grabbing Sabine's hand to lead her away. Sabine gave them both a knowing look as she passed, one sculpted eyebrow arched high in silent question, but true to form, she didn't say a word.

"It makes her happy to call you mom," Cameron remarked, sounding distracted as she stepped aside to let them in the kitchen. Darkness lay beyond the windows now and she could hear the nightly concert of crickets filling the sudden awkward silence between them.

"Makes me happy to hear it," Sarah finally replied honestly, leaning forward a little in an attempt to make eye contact. Cameron was having none of it, though, her gaze fixed stubbornly on the floor. Sarah bit her lip, feeling her nerves stir like a hornets' nest. She took a breath and braced herself. "What is it?" she asked when she knew they were alone.

"We promised... no more secrets," Cameron began solemnly.

Sarah looked at the crayons in her hand when one of them snapped, realizing that her hands had balled into fists. "You've kept something else from me," she murmured, trying to keep the edge of anger and fear out of her voice.

"Only for about forty-five minutes," Cameron admitted in a serious tone.

Opening her mouth to reply, Sarah shut it again and shook her head a little before glancing back at the terminator. "Forty five whole minutes, huh?" she asked dryly.

Cameron finally looked at her, confused by the hint of humor tinting Sarah's words. "I should have called and told you over the phone."

"Why didn't you?" Sarah asked, easing back to lean against the couch, feeling a measure of relief that whatever was on Cameron's mind was at least fresh and not some long-cloaked truth. She set the crayons on the coffee table and gave Cameron her full attention.

"It seemed like something I should tell you in person." Cameron held her gaze now, clearly stealing herself for whatever she was about to reveal.

Sarah took a slow breath. "Then tell me," she instructed.

"A terminator tried to kill Danny."

Sarah was immediately on her feet and two steps toward the closest hidden weapon.

"He's fine," Cameron promised quickly, stepping forward to grab Sarah's arm. "Everyone is fine."

"It found them at the hanger?"

Cameron shook her head. "At the cemetery."

Sarah sucked down a cold breath and raked a hand through her hair, chilled and disgusted that one of the metal bastards would look for them at Miles' grave. "Terissa..."

"She's fine," Cameron repeated. "They all got away."

"It went after Danny?" Sarah repeated, certain she didn't hear her lover correctly. "What would it want with that kid?"

"I don't know." Cameron dropped her gaze. "John was wounded in the attack," she continued, feeling Sarah bristle.

"What the hell was John doing there?" Sarah spat.

"All that matters is that he's fine. He was grazed saving Terissa and her son. It was minor. He won't even have a badass scar."

Sarah settled on the arm of the couch, feeling like her legs were suddenly too weak to hold her. "Where is he? Where's John?"

"Back at the hanger. I patched him up myself. It was a minor graze."

Sarah shivered, knowing that a bullet had come close enough to her son to sear skin. "Let me guess, he didn't want you to tell me," she said bitterly. When Cameron didn't answer, Sarah lifted her gaze and found her lover staring at her boots. "What?" she snapped, realizing there was more.

Cameron flinched. "John misses Allison. He feels alone," she began, trying to excuse John's behavior as best as she was able.

Sarah's brow furrowed. "What does that have to do with a terminator trying to kill Danny?"

Cameron shifted, managing to look incredibly uncomfortable, even for a machine. "One incident led to another."

"Another terminator?" Sarah asked, feeling her head start to hurt.

"Another incident," Cameron clarified. "John..." She looked at Sarah, her features a perfect mix of apology and chagrin. "He tried to kiss me."

For several moments, all Cameron could hear was the murmur of voices in the kitchen and the accelerated beats of Sarah's heart. Her lover finally stood, moving away several paces and putting her hands on either side of the nearest window. Cameron wasn't sure what she was watching out there, but she suspected Sarah's gaze was more inward than on the backyard.

"And what did you do?" Sarah asked, her voice rough.

Cameron stared at the tense set of Sarah's shoulder blades, cocking her head to the side when she detected an interesting tone to Sarah's voice she'd never heard before. "I stopped him," she answered, thinking that would be obvious.

Sarah shifted so she could look back at her, her green eyes searching Cameron's features. "You stopped him," she repeated, sounding unconvinced.

"I politely declined."

Snorting at the response, Sarah shook her head. "There was always something between you two..." she murmured, her throat rippling around a rough swallow. "I told you I didn't like the way he responded to you."

Cameron drifted closer, drawn, as always, by a need to soothe Sarah when she was upset. "Anything you perceived as being between me and John before he jumped to the future is just that. A perception. Nothing ever happened between us." It wasn't the whole truth but it was close enough that Cameron felt no remorse.

"Nothing?" Sarah asked, the strange tone in her voice growing more pronounced.

Cameron understood with a flash of insight, feeling strangely pleased in reaction. "You're jealous," she blurted.

Sarah did not look amused.

Stifling the inappropriate response to smile, Cameron made sure to keep her face blank. "Nothing happened between me and John. Not today. Not before."

"He jumped to the future for you." Sarah couldn't let it go. She'd always been too afraid to push for the truth before but she couldn't seem to stop now.

Nodding slowly, Cameron admitted that was true. She'd known John was attracted to her, had used that attraction when it suited her, but she'd never crossed the line and neither had John. "But there was never anything physical between us. I swear."

Sarah shook her head again, her eyes lifting to the ceiling as she struggled to deal with her emotions.

Coming even closer, Cameron warily put her hands on Sarah's arms, willing the other woman to look at her. "I have never loved John. Not your John or even future John. I only love you."

Green eyes fixed on Cameron's, and she was fascinated by the play of emotions reflected back at her. She loved Sarah's eyes, never ceasing to be captivated by them. "I told him no," Cameron repeated. "But he didn't understand. He feels alone. We talked..."

"He is alone," Sarah murmured. "I know what he feels... how he feels." She looked at Cameron, savoring the heat of her, the feel of skin on skin. The urge to lean in, to feel Cameron's arms slip around her had her swaying slightly but she resisted with effort. Rubbing a hand over her features, she turned away, moving back to the window. "I had

to feel that way for his whole life. Charley was the only one who came close to changing that.”

Cameron stood still, unsure how to react to what Sarah was saying. “Do you still feel that way?” she asked hesitantly.

Dropping her head, Sarah’s lips formed a tight line. Slowly, she shook her head before looking back at Cameron. “You know I don’t,” she said softly. “I never wanted this, what’s between us. It gets in the way of the mission. I’ve drilled it into John that he needs to be alone. That it’s better for him... better for everyone.”

Cameron found herself suddenly mute, unable to express any of the terror Sarah’s words were invoking in her.

“I was wrong,” Sarah whispered. “At least a little.” She held Cameron’s gaze. “No one can be alone forever. We need others to survive. I need you,” she confessed. “I can’t... I can’t live without you now.” Swallowing, Sarah took a step toward her lover, not missing how still Cameron was. “You both save and damn me, Cameron. And I think I do the same for you.”

“You do,” Cameron managed after a moment.

“I know how he feels,” Sarah repeated. “I know how I’ve made him feel. I can’t fault him for wanting...” She swallowed again.

“What we have,” Cameron realized.

They stared at each other until Sarah shook her head again and looked away. Seconds later, she felt Cameron’s arms slip around her waist from behind and she leaned into her without hesitation, needing her strength.

“I’m sorry,” Cameron murmured.

“Did you tell him?” Sarah had to know, not sure what she wanted the answer to be. “About us?”

“No,” Cameron promised quickly. “But I must have said something... done something...” She was quiet a moment, listening to the happy sounds of Savannah’s chatter from the kitchen as she breathed in Sarah’s distinctive scent. “He guessed. John guessed about my feelings for you.”

Sarah closed her eyes, absorbing all Cameron was telling her and trying to make sense of it. She frowned. “Your feelings for me...” she said slowly. “What about my feelings for you?” she turned her head, meeting Cameron’s eyes over her shoulder.

“I don’t think he knows. He probably thinks it’s all one-sided.”

“He’ll warn me,” Sarah said with a weak smirk. “He’ll come to tell me that I’m leading a terminator on.” She shook her head again. “Perfect. Just perfect.” She felt her nostrils flare as Cameron’s touch urged her around before reaching up to cup her face. “Thank you,” she managed, feeling a little short of breath as Cameron watched her carefully.

“For telling me.” Exhausted from the whole exchange, Sarah leaned into Cameron’s touch, feeling her lover’s thumb gently stroking her cheek.

“You were jealous,” Cameron said again, a tiny, pleased smile forming on her lips that made Sarah’s hormones jump.

There was no use denying it. “You don’t have to seem so pleased with yourself, Tin...” The rest of the endearment was consumed by Cameron’s mouth on hers, a slow tease Sarah had desperately missed. Instinctively, her hands slipped over Cameron’s hips, drawing her closer until their bodies melded. Sarah felt the contact sing through her blood, felt her need for the other woman burn through her.

But her head wasn’t ready to trust again so easily, and Sarah reluctantly withdrew, just a little, only to nearly change her mind when she saw the hunger in Cameron’s eyes.

“I’m sorry,” Cameron breathed again into Sarah’s ear.

“I’m not,” Sarah promised, clearly catching Cameron by surprise with the admission. She felt Cameron’s confusion radiate through her lover’s body and she leaned back just enough to see it reflected in Cameron’s eyes. “I want this... again... with you,” Sarah confessed. “I’m just...”

“Not ready,” Cameron realized with sudden insight. “I understand.”

Tension eased from Cameron’s body and Sarah felt her own relax in reaction. As hard as the conversation they’d just had was, Sarah could tell the air was cleaner between them now. “I just need a little more time.” Green eyes studied brown and Sarah felt her resolve falter. They were close enough to share body heat, and Sarah remembered all too well how warm and distracting the body brushing hers could be.

“I’m sorry,” Cameron repeated for a third time, seeing the painfully hesitant look on Sarah’s face.

“It’s okay,” Sarah whispered. “I just...”

Cameron’s face slowly eased into a genuine smile. “You were jealous,” she declared again.

Sarah couldn’t help but chuckle at how triumphant Cameron sounded. “Fine. I was jealous. Of my own son. We’re living a damn soap opera.” She stepped away from Cameron and temptation, flopping down onto the couch. “Anything else I should know?” Sarah asked, feeling the awkwardness of the situation settle over her in the absence of Cameron’s heat.

“Isn’t that enough?”

Rubbing at her eyes before pinching the bridge of her nose, Sarah had to admit Cameron had a point. “Plenty.”

“What are you going to do?” Cameron asked curiously.

Sarah sighed. Leaning forward, she laced her fingers and stared at the floor. "I need to think for a little while," she admitted. Her expression turned wry once more as she glanced back up at Cameron, knowing the terminator detected the flush of desire on her face. "Alone," she said pointedly.

Cameron's head tilted a little to the right as she processed the full meaning of Sarah's words. "Right," she agreed with a slight bob of her head. For a moment, she looked lost, unsure which way offered the quickest exit. Finally, Cameron settled on the kitchen and moved toward it with purpose, missing the almost imperceptible grin on Sarah's features.

"A damn soap opera," Sarah grumbled again when Cameron was gone. Her gaze drifted to the window as she thought about the impending conversation with her son. She had a choice to make, and the knowledge caused the smile to fade from her lips.

ACT 4

John turned the key, killing the engine on the van. He stayed there in the driver's seat, his mind tumbling through everything that had happened in the last six hours. He didn't know where to begin all the conversations he needed to have with his mom, John only knew he needed to talk to her. No doubt Cameron had shared the news about the terminator going after Danny so John decided that would be his opening. It was strange to think that a terminator trying to kill one of them was a "safe" topic.

A few minutes later, John could feel the evening dew beginning to soak through his boots. His ankle still smarted, but he'd wrapped it earlier and it was holding his weight, only causing him a barely-perceptible limp.

A child's laughter called to him from the back yard and John found himself drawn to it, detouring toward the sound. Opening the gate in the fence, he found Sabine pushing Savannah on the swings in the pale light from the porch. Moths fluttered around the bulb, their huge shadows dancing over the pair's features, but neither seemed to notice.

When Savannah spied John, she leapt from the swing, running toward him with abandon. He swallowed when he caught a glimpse of Sierra in her features, and he wished, not for the first time, that they could have set aside their differences and gotten to know each other better in the future. John knelt, letting the child collide with his chest as he wrapped his arms around her and gave her a big hug. It had been weeks since he'd seen her, and John had missed her more than he realized.

"Hey, squirt," he greeted while giving Sabine a friendly nod. She straightened and watched him silently, her gaze assessing him, but something in her eyes seemed warmer than usual, maybe because of the reception Savannah had given him.

"We already ate," Savannah announced, assuming John had come for dinner. "But mom is making cookies."

The air went out of his lungs. John felt his smile falter, and he could tell that Savannah noticed. Forcing a grin back on his face, John struggled to get past the unexpected lump in his throat and the sudden jealousy that clawed at his chest. "She did, huh?"

"I know she's your mom," Savannah said with sudden seriousness, clearly worried she'd made him mad. "But mine's gone now... and I..."

"It's okay," John whispered and was surprised to realize he meant it now that the shock was wearing off. He had to admire her keen insight and how well she could read him. He cupped her cheek, his hand almost as big as her face. "Really," John promised. His lips quirked. "Always kinda wanted a little sister."

Savannah's blue eyes sparkled, and John was pleased he could say at least one right thing to one of the females in his life today.

"Does this mean you're my brother?" Savannah asked hopefully.

John wondered what Sierra would have thought of this moment, and the idea made him chuckle. "Yeah," he answered. "Assuming I'll do for one." He got his answer in the form of a hard hug that brought another smile to his face. The jealousy was still there, but John knew he would handle it. The ugly emotion didn't stand much of a chance when faced with Savannah's beaming smile. If she could break down his mother's iron clad defenses then she'd earned a place in their family.

"Why don't you go get some cookies?" John suggested. "I need to talk to mom for a bit."

"Okay," Savannah agreed readily before turning and running back to Sabine. She took the sitter's hand and led her toward the house, prattling on about her giraffe and claiming that Cameron was going to give her ballet lessons.

Sabine listened patiently as she trailed along behind the child, but her gaze cut to John. He could see a warning clear in her eyes, and John wondered if it was meant to warn him about Savannah or his mother. Either way, John wasn't sure he wanted to find out what would happen if he crossed her.

Alone with the night, he shuffled toward the picnic table and sat on one of the benches, listening to the concert of crickets, frogs, and a dog barking a few blocks away. It all felt so simple. So domestic. A slice of the normalcy he'd always wanted and had only experienced fleeting moments of. He could understand why his mother was fighting so hard to hold on to this place. He'd done the same once.

Behind him, the screen door opened and closed. Seconds passed, and John could feel his mother's eyes on him. He refused to turn, waiting for her to come to him. He didn't want to be near the house where they could be overheard.

Finally Sarah appeared next to him. She looked fairly relaxed in a black t-shirt and jeans, her own feet clad in boots similar to his own. Without a word, she joined him on the bench, and they stared out at the night together.

"Cameron told you?" John asked after a quiet minute. "About Danny, I mean?" he added quickly, praying that the terminator hadn't shared the details of his awkward attempt to kiss her.

Sarah glanced at her son's profile. She could hear his underlying nerves in his voice, but he'd gotten better at hiding them from her. "She told me."

John nodded.

“You all right?” Sarah asked, reaching out and letting her hand drift through his short hair. He turned to look at her and Sarah felt her heart clench as she wondered if this conversation would change everything between them... end everything between them. Her hands began to shake so she laced her fingers together and rested them between her knees.

John nodded again before drawing in an uneven breath. “Just a graze. Won’t even have a badass scar,” he muttered.

Sarah frowned, realizing Cameron had used the same term. “Were you wanting one?” she asked teasingly.

Dropping his head, John stared at the damp blades of grass. “Not really. Figure you have enough for both of us.” He risked looking at her then, saw understanding in her eyes he felt ill equipped to handle.

“That I do,” Sarah agreed. “But chicks dig scars,” she continued, hoping to manage the slightest smile from him, worried it might be the last one she would ever see.

John’s brow furrowed when he thought of Cameron and her feelings for his mother. “Guess they do,” he said with a snort but he didn’t elaborate. He was quiet a moment. “So... Savannah’s calling you mom now, huh?”

Sarah drew in a slow breath before giving him a short nod. Her green eyes met his from under a lock of dark hair, and he could see both determination and guilt in their depths. “I should have told you. Still getting used to it, honestly.”

“It’s cool,” John promised. “I mean... Sierra considered you her mom in the future. I’m not sure why it caught me by surprise.”

“You’re not used to sharing me,” Sarah said with a weak smile.

“I’ll get over it.” John laughed a little as his mother lifted a skeptical eyebrow. “She’s a good kid,” he admitted.

Sarah nodded, knowing John meant what he was saying. “Want to tell me what happened?” she asked. “With the terminator?” she added, not ready to have the talk about Cameron. Not just yet.

John went through it all again, feeling his mother tense when he described his own actions in the story. Once more, he felt her hand ease through his hair, and he closed his eyes, taking comfort in the familiar gesture of affection. He realized he’d missed it. “It wasn’t after me at all,” John finished. “But it knew me.”

“Is that such a bad thing? A terminator that doesn’t want you dead?” Sarah asked, confused by his upset.

“Mom, what would it want with Danny? If it was sent by Skynet, how did it know me and Terissa but then left us alive?”

Sarah sighed, considering the possibilities. “You think it was sent back by someone else?”

John winced at having the very question that had weighed on his mind now out in the open. “I don’t know.”

“John...” Sarah began only to lapse into silence when he shook his head.

“We need him, mom.”

Sarah wasn’t so sure. She got a vibe from Danny, and there was nothing good about it. “You know I don’t trust him.”

“I know,” John allowed. “Not sure I completely do, either. But he knows his computers.”

“And maybe that’s why one came after him.”

They stared at each other uneasily.

“Just be careful, John. Especially now that Danny has metal on him.”

“Don’t we all?” John murmured.

Sarah snorted weakly. “Never really thought of it that way,” she admitted. She swallowed, feeling her heart rate increase as she sensed they were inching toward what happened between Cameron and John after the attack.

John studied his mother, noting her unease and the way she struggled to hold his gaze. “Cameron told you, didn’t she?” he realized. His face heated, and John was grateful for the darkness that hid the blush he knew he was sporting.

Nodding once, Sarah sighed. “She’s... determined not to keep anything from me now... after Sierra.” She watched him process that. “John... I know... I’ve always known... that you have feelings for her...”

Abruptly, John stood, moving away a few steps and grabbing one of the poles on the swing set before he looked back at her. “Nothing has ever happened before today,” John told her, feeling the need to make that clear.

Sarah sat still, her hands clasped tightly between her knees. “And what happened today?”

“I thought Cameron told you.”

“I want to hear it from you,” Sarah answered slowly, not sure she was being completely truthful, not sure she was ready to have everything out in the open.

"I tried to kiss her," John blurted. "I tried to kiss a machine," he continued, his tone taking on a defensive edge. "It's just... there's no one who can..."

Swallowing, Sarah understood what her son was trying to say; she had dealt with the loneliness herself for too many years to count. "John..."

"Allison is gone." John heard the grief in his voice and didn't try to hide it. "No one can stand beside me without dying. Cameron..."

"Cameron isn't Allison," Sarah reminded him, doing her damndest to tamp down the jealousy that rose up in her at his words but aching for the misery in his voice. There was a part of her that was tempted to step aside, to encourage Cameron to be there for John, to make it right for him. She hated that he had to feel this loneliness, and for a second, she wondered if she was being selfish. But she couldn't do it; it wouldn't be fair to any of them.

"I know that," John snapped, more angry at himself than at her. "But she..." He stopped, staring at the ground for a long, quiet moment before drawing in a deep breath. "It doesn't even matter," he confessed with a bitter laugh. "Cameron finally figures out feelings and she gets them for someone else." He looked at his mother then, expecting to see confusion... even curiosity on her features. Instead, she met his gaze steadily, too steadily, as if she were determined not to look away. John felt a nervous flutter in his stomach, but he didn't understand the source. "She tell you that too?" he asked. "Who she has feelings for?"

Sarah took another slow, deep breath, feeling herself teetering on the edge between a kind lie and a bitter truth. "She didn't have to," she confessed, feeling almost light-headed as the weight of the secret she'd been carrying started to fall away.

John stared at her. "Mom... she has feelings for *you*," he stressed, thinking his mother didn't understand.

"I know," Sarah said simply.

"Wh..." John took a step toward her. "You know? You're okay with this?" he asked with disbelief. "Cameron," he repeated, "Cameron is... in love with you."

"I know," Sarah said again, softer this time.

"How can you be so casual about this?" John demanded, feeling anger ignite in his stomach. "She's new to all this... she's... fragile. You can't take this lightly."

Sarah straightened. "I'm not taking it lightly, John." Slowly she stood before crossing the yard to stand in front of him, the moment of truth lingering in the space between them. "I, Cameron and I..." her words caught in her throat, and Sarah had to pause and collect her thoughts.

"Mom..." John whispered, the truth beginning to dawn. "No..."

"It happened. I don't know how it happened or why it happened... but it did." Sarah felt the tears coming but she held them back. "And I wouldn't change it," she vowed with unmistakable conviction. "I'm sorry, John."

"Mom," John said again, staggered by what he was hearing. "No. Not you. Not you and Cameron."

"I love her, John," Sarah told him simply, shattering what little was left of his hopes.

John stumbled back, banging into the swing set as he shook his head in disbelief. He wanted to believe this was all some kind of joke. A lie. He wanted to believe it was anything but the truth. Suddenly all the looks he'd seen between them made sense... all the touches. He now knew why his mom had risked everything to save Cameron from another terminator... and why Cameron had given up everything in a basement at Kaliba to save his mother.

"No," John choked.

"John," Sarah called to him, her heart breaking at the look of betrayal and hurt on his features.

Her son shook his head and turned away, breaking into a run across the yard.

Sarah stood her ground, watching him go.

Letting him go.

Sarah closed the door softly, taking a moment to lean her head against it as she tried to marshal her emotions. She could smell chocolate chip cookies as she inhaled a deep breath, and her thoughts abruptly jerked from her son onto Savannah. She turned toward the kitchen, half expecting to see smoke pouring from the oven.

Her heart leapt in surprise when she nearly crashed into Cameron. The terminator was standing in the middle of the kitchen, staring at her with open surprise, a metal cookie sheet nearly forgotten in her hands. Cameron's eyes were filled with what Sarah could only describe as wonder. To anyone else, her expression would have seemed blank and stoic, but Sarah could see the parade of emotions flickering across her face.

"You told him," Cameron said in disbelief.

"I... yes," Sarah stammered, feeling the moment become real as she uttered the words. The shocked look on John's face flashed before her eyes, and she felt a sliver of fear break through the numbness. Steadying herself against the cool marble countertop, she took a deep breath and forced herself not to race out the door after her son. She felt the deep-seeded need to apologize, to make things right, just as she always did when he was upset, but what could she apologize for? For falling in love? For finally having a life of her own? For stealing his terminator girlfriend? Sarah raked her hands through her hair, taking another deep breath to slow the rapid beating of her heart and still the shaking of her hands.

“He’s gone.” The words caught in her throat.

“He’ll be back,” Cameron promised. She set the cookie sheet aside and drifted closer.

“I, I don’t know... what, what if I lost my son?” The cold fear of loss in her belly was warring with the feeling of liberation in her chest, and her hands just wouldn’t stop shaking. Finally, Cameron’s fingers laced with hers, the warmth of the touch soothing the tremble.

“He’ll be back. He loves you.” The moment felt strangely familiar, and Cameron remembered the first real conversation she’d ever had with Sarah had been about this very fear.

Raising her head, Sarah sought comfort and reassurance from Cameron’s hazel eyes. “You sure about that, girlie?”

“99.7% sure.” Cameron’s voice was steady and filled with conviction.

“It’s the point three that has me worried,” Sarah confessed, feeling the banter ease the pressure that had made it hard to breathe from the moment John had fled the back yard.

“Maybe...”

“Maybe what?”

“Maybe you shouldn’t have told him.”

“Did you think I wouldn’t come clean?” Sarah asked, feeling a stab of irrational hurt. Cameron had no reason to assume such a thing, but in that moment, Sarah wanted Cameron to think better of her than that.

“No,” Cameron admitted softly. “He’s your son. He’s everything to you...”

“Not everything,” Sarah breathed, cutting her off. “Not anymore.” She bravely met Cameron’s eyes. “And that’s a good thing. For both of us. It’s just... I don’t want to drive him away. It feels like he’s always running away from me.” She couldn’t keep the tremble out of her voice, and she knew Cameron could hear it.

Cameron stroked Sarah’s cheek, catching a tear on her fingertip. “When he jumped before... into the future... You could have gone with him. But you didn’t.”

Sarah said nothing, still wondering if she’d made the right choice.

“You knew he had to go. He had to figure out his own way to be the person he’s meant to be. You knew that it could possibly be the last time you saw your son, but you let him go.”

For a moment, Sarah could remember the tearing pain she had felt in her chest when she saw the blue ball of light surrounding John vanish. It wasn’t just the possibility that had shaken her; it was the cold, inevitable truth that she had felt to her core.

"I felt so alone." She hugged her arms close as she shivered.

Cameron took one step closer. "When I was in the system, I had access to unimaginable amounts of information. Things that could keep me busy processing for days... weeks." Sarah looked up in confusion at the sudden shift in the conversation. Cameron paused, stopping her from speaking with a shake of her head. She had to get this out. "All of these things that I was made for, calculation and purpose... none of it was enough anymore. The more I learned, the wider my scope became. The mission became so small in comparison."

Sarah's throat opened and closed, the dry swallow betraying her feeling of being on the verge of an understanding of her lover beyond what she had known before. Her pain was still there, but it was quieted by her need to give her full attention to what Cameron was disclosing to her. Brown eyes that had drifted off in the telling were suddenly on Sarah's once again.

"All of the things I had available to me, I took in, learned, understood. What I didn't comprehend was what was missing. I had never even known the concept of being alone until then. It didn't mean anything to me. I wasn't even aware of my own existence before..."

She paused, looking down at the floor, then gathering herself and looking back at Sarah.

"I know what it's like to be alone." Cameron's gaze was intense and unwavering. "But you're not alone anymore. *We're* not alone."

Sarah opened her mouth to speak, but stopped when she saw the look on Cameron's face. There wasn't a trace of the formerly emotionless mask she had once seen as monstrous. It had been replaced by the look of a woman newly borne into emotion, devastated by grief and loss, yet unmistakably still finding the capacity to love. It was stunning. Her heart still hurt, scared to death that her son wouldn't understand, but she could feel her chest filling with the reason why she had to tell him despite it all.

"I just need to know that this will be okay. That we will be okay."

"We'll be okay. And he'll be back." Cameron spoke with the logical air of a mathematician.

She raised her hand to brush back Cameron's hair. "My Tin Miss..." Cameron moved into the touch, but a question that was sitting in the back of her mind now rose to the forefront. Sarah had risked losing her son, her John...

"Why?" She didn't have to qualify the question. Sarah knew the topic had shifted.

"I couldn't lie to him anymore."

Slowly, Cameron nodded, her gaze finally dropping to the floor between their feet, only to rise again as Sarah's hand slid along the curve of her cheek, encouraging her to meet green eyes once more.

“And I’m not ashamed of us,” Sarah said with conviction. “It took me awhile to get used to this... to having feelings for anyone let alone a...” She took a breath and blew it out slowly. “John and I are so little alike,” she admitted with a bitter chuckle. “Of all the things for us to have in common.”

Stepping closer, Cameron welcomed the friction of Sarah’s palm against her skin before Sarah’s hand curved around the base of her neck. “I’m sorry,” Cameron told her seriously. “I don’t want to come between you. I won’t...”

“Cameron,” Sarah cut her off, the name said with conviction. “The ball is in John’s court now. I gave up everything that ever mattered for him, everything I could give.” She held Cameron’s gaze. “But not this. I can’t give up this,” she whispered as she tugged her lover closer. “Not us.”

“He’s your son,” Cameron argued, but despite her worries, Sarah’s words made her feel warmer, lighter.

Sarah’s jaw clenched. “He belongs to the future now,” she ground out, the thought slicing her up inside. “I always knew I was on borrowed time with him.” She shook her head. “I’m getting in his way. He knows it. I know it.”

“He loves you,” Cameron vowed. “You were all he ever talked about in the future. He missed you.”

Throat rippling around a rough swallow, Sarah drew in another aching breath. “I can’t be who I was before. I was burning out... losing my humanity... my sanity. You gave both of those things back to me. I wouldn’t have survived to see him again without you.”

Cameron threaded her hands through Sarah’s hair, needing the contact with a desperation that surprised her. “Sarah...” she tried again.

“I’ve given up everything for John,” Sarah repeated. “But this... you... I need to keep for myself. He’s going to have to deal with that. And if he can’t...” She sighed. “He needs me this way, Cameron. The way you’ve made me.”

“Do you regret it?” Cameron breathed, barely able to believe how much Sarah needed her.

Sarah said nothing as she leaned forward, brushing her lips over the mole above Cameron’s eyebrow before drifting to her forehead, and finally dipping down to claim Cameron’s mouth, letting her actions convince Cameron in a way her words never could.

Ankle screaming from running on it, John limped to the bench and collapsed. He hadn’t even realized where he was headed, he only knew he needed to put as much distance between himself and his mother as possible. It wasn’t until he saw the small park under the street lamps that he understood where his subconscious had led him.

He’d first seen his father in this very park. Somewhere in one of the houses surrounding him, Kyle and Derek Reese were probably doing homework. Maybe they were even

playing video games or spending time with their parents. Their lives were normal, happy. John wondered what would happen if he went to them, a stray in need of shelter, but he didn't dare. Both Derek and his father were only children right now. To them, John would be the adult, and probably a scary one considering the shape he was in.

John drew his ankle up on the bench and massaged it absently as he stared down into the darkened blades of grass. He could barely comprehend the change in his world from only an hour ago. The desire to believe he had imagined everything had him reaching into his pocket for his cell phone. He entered his mother's number, craving the comforting sound of her voice.

Fist closing around the phone, John squeezed his eyes shut, trying to block out the truth he hadn't wanted to see. He had been an utter fool, and a blind one at that, managing to miss every clue that seemed so obvious in retrospect.

His mother was with Cameron. They weren't just the people who'd raised Sierra. They were her parents in every sense of the word.

Tears burned his eyes and he rubbed at them angrily. How long had they been keeping this secret from him? The thought made his stomach sour, and John wished desperately for something to hit, something to unload his grief and anger on.

He had wanted Cameron for himself, but his mother had gotten there first.

Torturing himself by remembering all the shy touches and knowing looks, John forced himself to look at their relationship with a critical eye, to look for the chinks in their collective armor, for their weaknesses. John wondered if he could end them simply by asking. His mother had never denied him anything that wasn't in her power to give. And Cameron, Cameron had been his first. Some part of her was still wired to put him first. He was sure of it.

For an hour, John sat on the park bench and analyzed everything he knew about his mother and Cameron, searching for something he could use to convince them this was all a bad idea. He wanted them over so he could believe that it had never happened, but the more he thought about them...

...the more they began to make a certain kind of twisted sense.

John stared out into the night, realizing his ankle had stopped throbbing and the air had gotten noticeably colder. He drew his jacket tighter as his emotions slowly began to calm and he could think rationally again. Before he leapt to the future, he had always assumed that Cameron would be there for him, waiting, in case he wanted or needed her. In those few fateful seconds when he decided to jump, he had followed her because she belonged with him, to him.

His mother would never have fallen in love with a terminator, he realized, not the way he had. His mom had fallen for *Cameron*.

Taking a breath, John tried to think objectively about his mother. She'd been through hell. Cameron's defense of her earlier had reminded him all too well of that. Her body had been abused, tortured, and scarred for him. Her mind fractured and pushed to the

breaking point. Through it all, she hadn't depended on anyone, hadn't seemed to have needed anybody in her life, except her son. And then he'd repaid her sacrifices by leaving her... for a *machine*.

John swallowed, feeling sick with himself. He had expected his mother to follow, but Sarah had stayed behind to fight yet another battle on his behalf, to once again try to fix everything for him. It had taken his abandonment for her to finally let someone else in.

And that someone was Cameron.

That was the part that he struggled to wrap his head around; his mother, who had fought so hard and so long against them, was with a machine. Even with the changes, even with emotions, Cameron was still a terminator. And she had been his.

But had he loved her, really? Or had he just desired her because she was available and convenient, a good choice for the life he led? He had told Cameron that he liked the person she was becoming, but did he even know her at all? And would she be who she was without his mother?

Cameron was obviously good for her; his mother was healthier than he'd ever seen her. She'd put on desperately needed weight, and she was sleeping better. John was sure he'd seen her smile more in the last few months since his return than he had in the last four years they'd been on the run. Cameron was responsible for that. Could he really ask his mother to walk away and give that up? To abandon the only thing that had made her happy besides him?

John was disgusted with himself for wanting to do just that.

Glancing back out into the park, John wondered what his father would think of his selfish thoughts. Leaders were supposed to put everyone else's well-being above their own. It's what his mother had always done for him.

Maybe it was finally his turn.

He was certain that whatever was going on between his mom and Cameron couldn't last, but he wouldn't interfere, no matter how much he wanted to. Fleeting happiness was still happiness, and his mother had earned it.

Sighing, John got gingerly to his feet. He looked at the cell phone in his hand and flipped it open. Pausing for a moment, he considered what he wanted to say before deciding on a short, simple text message. He hit send, hoping he was finally becoming the man fate had destined him to be.

Savannah was so tired she could barely keep her eyes open; she had worn herself out with hours on the swings and by devouring more than her share of cookies. Sarah had eaten one or two as well, but she'd done so with little enthusiasm. Playing the part of protector, Cameron watched them both from the doorway, aching for Sarah and wishing she knew what to say to make things better.

Sarah whispered a few soothing words to the child as she tucked her in. Savannah's response was to mumble incoherently as Sarah kissed her on the head. A sliver of a smile appeared on Sarah's lips, and Cameron found one of her own forming in reaction. She loved seeing this side of her. As much as the warrior in Sarah attracted her, it was the glimpses of tenderness that had always fascinated Cameron the most.

Rising from the bed, Sarah reached out and turned off the light, giving Walther a friendly scratch behind the ears where he lay at the foot of the bed before walking to Cameron's side. The terminator stepped back to let her exit, shutting the door softly behind them.

Sarah's eyes looked haunted as they briefly met Cameron's. She offered her a pained smile before heading down the hallway, her movements labored and heavy. Cameron couldn't help but follow, trailing after her with a frown.

Turning at her own door, Sarah wasn't the least bit surprised to find Cameron less than a foot away, her eyes watching Sarah worriedly. "I'll be okay," she told her, feeling slightly bemused by Cameron's constant hovering.

Cameron didn't look convinced. "He'll come around," she promised.

Sarah shook her head. "John knows how to hold a grudge as well as I do. He learned from the master." She sighed and let her shoulder rest against the doorframe. "Did I do the right thing?" Sarah asked in a near whisper, still needing reassurance.

"I don't know," Cameron admitted honestly. "Maybe you should have kept it from him. But you told the truth. That counts for something, right?"

"Telling the truth has landed me in the nut house," Sarah reminded her with a weak smirk. "I'm certainly wondering if I wasn't crazy for telling John about us."

"Are you regretting it now?" Cameron asked hesitantly, wondering if Sarah had changed her mind.

Sarah looked at her, hearing the note of worry in Cameron's voice. "No," she said after a moment, needing to banish the hurt expression the terminator probably didn't even know she was wearing. "He deserved to know." She held Cameron's gaze. "And you deserve more than being a dirty little secret."

Cameron's brow furrowed. "I'm dirty?"

Something about Cameron's confusion made Sarah chuckle, lightening the heavy moment. "It's an expression." The distance between them felt like miles rather than inches. Sarah pushed aside her lingering hurts and concerns and stepped into Cameron, feeling her lover's arms circle her without hesitation. Sarah closed her eyes, drinking in the feel of her, the strength of her. In Cameron's arms, everything felt better.

Cameron breathed her in, cherishing the show of trust. "Thank you for explaining," she replied in a deadpan tone and was rewarded with another soft laugh from her lover.

A muted trill interrupted the moment. Sarah stepped back, her hand sliding into her back pocket to retrieve her phone. She swallowed when she saw she had a text message from her son. "It's John."

Cameron could easily read the name upside down but didn't say so. She remained quiet, watching Sarah wrestle with her desire to read the message and her fear of what it would say. A minute passed, and Cameron finally reached out and gently took the phone. Her jaw clenched as she pressed the button to display John's message, hoping against hope that he was reaching out rather than lashing out.

As she read the simple sentence, Cameron felt herself sway slightly in place as she saw words that she never thought John would say until it was too late. She looked up at Sarah, finding herself oddly unable to speak.

"What did he say?" Sarah asked, her voice sounding strangled.

Cameron handed her the phone.

Hand shaking as she accepted it, Sarah looked down at the message and felt herself slump back against the doorframe.

I still love you.

Relief swept through her so strongly, Sarah felt her knees nearly buckle. John wasn't ready to forgive or accept, but he wasn't giving up. For now, it was enough. It took three tries to send her response, only managing when Cameron moved closer and drew Sarah against her in support.

I love you too.

Sarah hit send and sagged into Cameron, feeling the other woman's strength holding her steady.

"That's him," Cameron murmured, a strange tone of surprise and wonder to her voice.

Sarah turned her head and looked over her shoulder at her lover. "What?"

"Future John," Cameron continued, her gaze shifting from the phone to Sarah's eyes. She smiled tremulously. "That's something he would do."

Sarah's thumb moved across the display, as she read John's words again. Her fatigue lifted, replaced by a dizzying relief that made Sarah feel light as a feather. Things weren't fixed between them by a long shot, but at least she had hope. "Future John, huh?"

Cameron nodded, but her face had turned toward Sarah's, her nose brushing against Sarah's cheek. "I think you'll like him," Cameron informed her.

Sarah shifted in her lover's arms, needing to see Cameron's eyes. "I will, will I?" Sarah murmured, her fingers tangling in Cameron's shirt.

Brown eyes fixed on Sarah's hands, watching them as they teased a button on Cameron's shirt. Cameron swallowed, her body reacting to the sight. "He's someone you can trust. Someone..." Her words stuck in her throat as Sarah's hand removed the obstacle and snuck inside to tease warm skin. "Someone you can believe in."

"I look forward to meeting him," Sarah purred, her voice taking on a husky quality. She felt reckless in the wake of her relief, hungry for something that she'd been missing... craving...

"Sarah..." Cameron managed in a halting voice, her eyes fluttering closed as another button came loose and Sarah's hand drifted higher. "I should patrol."

A palm splayed across Cameron's stomach, one finger tracing her navel in a teasing pattern. It amazed Cameron how Sarah's touch seemed to short-circuit her willpower, overriding everything.

"Is that really what you want to do?" Sarah asked knowingly.

Cameron shook her head, incapable of words as her body's needs began to demand all her attention. "But Weaver..." she finally gasped.

"I..." Sarah swallowed as she moved closer, her body brushing Cameron's. She needed Cameron's touch to ground her, needed the connection between them to be whole again. Regaining the final piece of what they'd lost suddenly meant everything. "I need you," she whispered in confession.

"Are you sure?" Cameron breathed, hardly able to believe she was finally going to come in out of the cold.

Sarah smirked. "Pretty damn sure, Tin Miss."

And just like that, Cameron found that nothing else mattered. Unable to resist, she closed the distance between them, claiming Sarah's mouth and tasting that tempting smirk with her tongue.

Sarah gasped softly, and Cameron took advantage, deepening the kiss as her hands slid under her lover and lifted her off the ground with negligent ease. Once, Sarah would have fought her, hating to give up any kind of control, but now Sarah's legs wrapped around her, her hands tunneling through Cameron's hair as Cameron carried her to the bed, kicking the door shut behind her with one foot.

The sheets were cool against Sarah's skin, but Cameron's heat soon blanketed her and banished the chill. She'd missed this, missed the warmth of Cameron's body, missed her curves... missed her mouth. Drugged on the taste of her, it took Sarah a few moments to realize Cameron had stopped and pulled back, her brown eyes searching Sarah's face.

"What?" Sarah whispered, her fingers gently tracing Cameron's cheek.

"I love you," Cameron said with startling intensity, feeling an unstoppable need to say the words, to make Sarah believe them.

Sarah's features softened and she took a deep breath before giving Cameron a tempting smile. "Prove it," she dared.

Cameron's head tilted, and Sarah could see the determination enter her eyes in the pale moonlight filtering in through the window. The kiss that followed was one Sarah could feel all the way to her toes, and she was almost embarrassed when she felt them curl inside her boots.

Giving her hands permission to roam, Cameron hesitantly touched Sarah, almost afraid that she would suddenly remember everything and stop her. But Sarah's touch wasn't so tentative. It was sure, deliberate, and Cameron knew she was powerless against it. She set aside her fears and focused on her lover, giving Sarah whatever she wanted. What was happening between them felt as new as it did necessary, and Cameron realized that neither of them would stop. They simply couldn't.

Her t-shirt soon vanished, and Sarah sucked in a harsh breath when she detected Cameron's fingers loosening her belt and jeans. Sarah's own hands went to work, deftly opening the remaining buttons keeping her from more of Cameron's skin. Her desire was as thick and heavy as their first night together, but this time there would be no rush. She would take all the time she could get with Cameron, remembering her body, what made her feel good, finding new places that would make her lover lose control. There would be no shame... no regret. Not tonight.

What was between them didn't make her weak. It made her strong. It made her fight that much harder because now she had even more to lose. Sarah clung to Cameron as she felt warm lips teasing down her neck before sinking even lower. Sarah felt her trust return, even more than before. They had been through the worst and survived. Nothing would break them. She wouldn't let it.

Cameron's touch eased up Sarah's thigh and then there was no urge left to think, only feel. "Prove it," Sarah taunted again, feeling Cameron's lips smile knowingly, almost smugly, against her skin.

Terissa shivered in the cold, her gaze flickering over the parking lot again. She sat in her car, waiting and watching, wondering how conspicuous she looked to the handful of late night grocery shoppers coming and going in the small, suburban neighborhood. Danny had called less than an hour ago, and Terissa had quietly snuck away, leaving James asleep in his recliner with his well-worn Bible open across his chest. She'd felt a twinge of regret and had almost woken him, but she'd decided this was something she needed to do alone.

The back door opened and Terissa jumped as Danny slid inside and shut it.

"Don't look back," Danny urged, his voice sounding tired and tinged with an appropriate edge of paranoia.

Terissa met his gaze in the mirror. "Are you all right?"

Danny nodded. "Did you bring the money?"

Pursing her lips, Terissa shook her head. "You're coming home with me."

"Mom," Danny protested. "It's not safe!"

"No place is safe," Terissa told him. She shifted in her seat so she could look at him. "You don't know how to fight one of these things, Danny."

"Who says I'm going to fight? I'll just run," he answered. "That's what Sarah always told John, right? Run? Never look back?"

"Sarah knows what Skynet wants with John," Terissa said in a terse tone. "Why does it want you, Danny? What did you do?"

Danny couldn't hold her gaze, his mind immediately thinking of C.A.I.N. and how he'd infiltrated John Henry. He'd almost forgotten about the chip... about the code... and Danny felt the sudden need to get his hands on both. They felt like his salvation. His only chance.

"I'm not going home with you," Danny insisted. "But I'll go back to the hanger."

"The terminator could know..." Terissa began.

"It could know the house, too," Danny pointed out, his tone angry and harsh. He took a breath, trying to talk with a more civil tongue. "Mom, John needs my help. If the terminator knew about the hanger, it would have gone there already."

Their gazes fenced. Terissa shook her head after a few moments, clearly unhappy with his choices.

"There's something you're not telling me."

"I don't know why it came after me. I swear," Danny insisted, trying not to squirm as his mother fixed him with a knowing glare. "But it wouldn't be after me if we'd just stayed away from *her*..."

"Danny," Terissa snapped. "This isn't Sarah's fault."

"How can you defend her?" he snarled.

"Whatever this thing wants with you... it has nothing to do with Sarah," Terissa told him, sure that she was right.

"How the hell do you know?" Danny barked.

"Because if this was about the Connors then John would be dead." Terissa held his gaze until he looked away. She stared at her son's profile, trying not to feel the disgust that was souring her stomach. "Stop blaming everyone else for your problems and do something about them."

Danny lifted his gaze, resentment clear in his eyes. Terissa shook her head.

“I’ll take you back to the hanger,” she announced. “At least John knows how to fight one of these things.”

Danny rolled his eyes. He didn’t bother to tell his mother he had no intention of staying. All he wanted was that chip. Once he had it, the Connors could just go to hell.

Fall was coming, the leaves beginning to drift lazily down to crunch under foot. Had anyone been in the silent cemetery, they would have heard the terminator coming long before his chiseled features were visible in the moonlight. Oblivious to the chill in the air, he approached Miles Dyson’s grave once more, his gaze scanning the area with all available spectrums. For the moment, he was alone.

He stopped and gave a brief glance at the headstone, reading the simple inscription dispassionately. He had every reason to believe Danny Dyson would return to this spot. The intelligence that he had been programmed with suggested Danny would soon feel compelled to return here again and again.

He would be ready and waiting when that happened. Danny Dyson had to die. It was only a matter of time.