

Sarah Connor Chronicles Virtual Season
Season 2 Episode 7

Coupe de Main

The seconds ticked by, entirely too slowly, and Sarah had no way to speed them up. 120 seconds always seemed so fast when they were racing to pull a chip or escape from a terminator, but this time, Sarah felt each one drag into eternity.

7..... 8..... 9.....

She was taking a risk, not only for herself but for John and everyone else. Weaver could have... tampered... with Cameron's chip, sabotaged it, and she had no guarantee that the Cameron she held in her arms was her Cameron. She could turn on Sarah before she could do a damn thing to stop her, but Sarah had learned the hard way that she would rather die by Cameron's hand than live without her. She was taking a chance, and she would live or die by the choice.

The sense she had felt all day, the sense of wrongness, of heading in the wrong direction the further she got from her home and family, hadn't just been her unease at stepping on John's toes or worry about why Danny had metal after him. It had been a sign, a signal that her place was here. She no longer belonged at John's side as his guardian, his shield between Skynet and the world. John didn't need her anymore, but Cameron and Savannah did, and she had let them down.

It felt like she was always letting someone down.

39..... 40..... 41.....

Her fingers threaded through Cameron's hair, separating the strands where blood had dried and clotted, and Cameron's open, empty eyes seemed to track her movements blankly. Sarah swallowed past a lump in her throat, remembering other times she had stood silent watch over the empty shell of the terminator, her chip removed to disrupt a traffic program or her body abandoned while her consciousness roamed the net. Once she had stood watch over a crematorium of concrete blocks as Cameron, her face split into her human and terminator halves, burned to a pile of ash.

“I’m not burning you again, girlie,” Sarah whispered as her hand cupped Cameron’s head and her lips brushed over the warming skin on Cameron’s forehead. “You still owe me.”

Sarah could almost see it, what she was owed, what she craved. She never admitted to John or Cameron, or even to herself, what she wanted, knowing in her heart she would never live to see it. A life after Skynet. A life that was hers. Sometimes she imagined it as a modest cabin nestled on a snowy mountain, peace and the quiet surrounding her as the world turned to white. A place to escape the city, the heat, the technology, and the images of the future that had visited her nightmares for almost twenty years. Vulnerable, the desire washed through her, so strongly she could almost taste it. She could imagine Savannah playing in the snow... curling up with Cameron by the fire...

Her jaw set with steely determination as she laced her fingers with Cameron’s. Somehow, some day, they would find that place together. They would know that peace. Cameron made her believe that it was possible. That anything was possible.

“You owe me,” Sarah repeated in a fierce whisper, “And I intend to collect.”

56..... 57..... 58.....

The fingers of Sarah’s free hand drifted down the skin of Cameron’s arm, gently probing the slashes on her pale skin. There was blood spatter everywhere, over their bedspread, on the walls. Weaver had toyed with Cameron, had hurt her just to hurt her. As one minute passed into the next, Sarah felt rage battling her grief. Had Cameron cried out with each cut? Had Weaver used Cameron’s humanity against her?

The image made Sarah’s blood go cold, but her temper turned white hot.

The sense of violation was nearly overwhelming; Weaver had hurt Cameron and had left her body in their bedroom, in their bed, for Sarah to find. And Sarah wasn’t even sure—not yet—if she hadn’t taken her away completely. The provocation seemed deliberate, almost... personal. She had come for Savannah, and failing her mission, she had left a message for Sarah in Cameron’s battered and bloodied body.

See how easy it is for me to stop her... to take her away from you.

Sarah shifted to rest Cameron’s head on her shoulder, watching as the last twenty seconds counted down. They had played defense against Weaver, all for

naught, as the terminator had shown them just how ineffectual their defenses were.

No more.

No more looking over her shoulder, no more waiting for the next attack to come. Weaver had started this fight, but Sarah was determined to be the one who ended it. If she was ever going to achieve any peace, any reprieve from this life, she had to start taking out the threats instead of running from them. It was her only choice.

111..... 112..... 113.....

Sarah tightened her grip on Cameron's hand and waited to see those beautiful brown eyes meet her own. She could hear the floorboards creak in the hall, distantly aware of John lingering, knowing he was ready to defend her if things went wrong.

"Please," she whispered.

117..... 118..... 119.....

The subtle flexing of fingers around Sarah's had her holding her breath. Rather than gain tension, Cameron's frame lost it, relaxing against Sarah before a soft hiss of pain emerged. Cameron's eyes closed briefly before fluttering open once more and fixing intently on Sarah's face.

There was recognition in their brown depths. Recognition and love.

ACT 1

John did his best to avoid being detected by cybernetic ears as he slipped from his post by the bedroom door and eased down the stairs so his mother and Cameron could have time alone. Even though he knew he had a good reason for hovering, he felt oddly guilty. Guilty and uncomfortable, a mix of sensations he was starting to associate with being around Cameron and his mother at the same time. Where once he felt he was central to both their lives, now he felt like an interloper. He wondered when the feeling would fade, or if it ever would.

Reaching the landing, he turned toward the kitchen and jumped in surprise as he almost barreled over Terissa, standing like a statue with a teacup just inside the door. She gave him a tight smile, but whatever she was going to say was

interrupted by a slamming door and the sudden appearance of Savannah. The child stopped just short of tangling with John's legs, her eyes focused on both their faces. Seeing the worry, John automatically knelt and took Savannah's shoulders, feeling them stiffen as the little girl braced herself.

"She's okay," John softly promised. He felt Ellison and Sabine's eyes on them as they stepped into the room, but he was only concerned with Savannah. He knew all too well what the child was feeling. There was a time when he was Savannah's age and fearful of something happening to his mother. A tremble rippled through Savannah and transferred into John's hands and arms.

"I tried to stop her..." Savannah choked on her words.

John easily drew Savannah into his arms. He felt his growing bond with the little girl strengthen, and he savored the unexpected opportunity to have a sibling in his life.

Savannah put her arms around him and hugged him ferociously. She'd withheld tears during the ride back, keeping herself rolled up in a ball and not listening to Uncle Ellison when he tried to reassure her. Hearing that her mom was okay finally broke her fragile control. "I tried to help."

John sighed and imagined the small girl facing off with Weaver. He'd been there himself, battling a T-1000 when he was just a child, but he'd had support in the form of his mother and his own terminator. Savannah had stood up to Weaver alone. He wasn't surprised by Savannah's courage, nor by her fears. He'd seen the woman she would become, but he still felt his heart swell with pride.

"I know," John whispered as he kept Savannah loosely in the circle of his arms. He withdrew slightly to meet her eyes, seeing the ghost of Sierra in them. "You were brave." And it was every bit true.

"What happened?" Ellison asked, meeting John's eyes above Savannah's head.

As John explained the situation, he could see a deepening gloom descend over Terissa and a tightening of the muscles in Ellison's shoulders. Whether it was anger at Weaver for crippling Cameron or at Sarah for reactivating her, he wasn't sure.

The only one who seemed unconcerned was Sabine. Sabine stood off to one side, seemingly bored except for her eyes, which were always faithfully on Savannah.

A stillness enveloped them; the only movement in the ruined room was Sarah's fingers tracing a pattern on Cameron's arm. "I thought I lost you," Sarah admitted quietly, her fears still achingly visible on her face.

"You do that a lot."

"What, lose you?" Sarah quipped, her tone lightening at the attempt of a joke.

"Worry about losing me," replied Cameron, ignoring Sarah's feigned levity to focus on the issue at hand.

Sarah leaned her head back, her gaze introspective as if she were thinking about all the decisions that it had taken to get to where they were. "Goes with the territory, I suppose." Cameron gave her a quizzical look, and Sarah could almost see her trying to locate the territory. Sometimes she forgot Cameron's lack of experience with idioms, and she soothed the confused expression with a soft kiss on Cameron's forehead. "It's what we do, part of this job. We put ourselves on the line and... I worry."

"I don't like that you worry."

Recalling an image of a snow-bound cabin and a warm fire, Sarah sighed. "Sometimes..." she began, and then stopped, shaking her head at the irresponsibility and impossibility of it all.

"Sometimes what?"

She sighed again, regretting the impulse that drove her to bring it up. Cameron wouldn't let her avoid the issue now. "I think about what it would be like if we left this behind and just went away... far away." She couldn't keep the trace of wistfulness from her voice.

"You want to retire."

Sarah scoffed at the word. "Yes. Retire. With my pension from the 'Save the World' fund."

Cameron straightened, sliding out of Sarah's lap to face the woman across the broken bed, her fingers tangling with Sarah's hair to meet her eyes. Her thumbs eased the stress from Sarah's temples, seeing how her green eyes were bright with unshed tears. "We could. John..." Sarah started to shake her head, but

Cameron kept talking. "John wants to lead. He needs to lead. He can take over now. It's his time."

The shaking increased to encompass her whole body, and Cameron gathered Sarah in her arms and held her. It was the physical manifestation of the conflict that Cameron saw in her eyes, the very idea of letting go warring with a very real desire to do just that. She had seen this building for some time. Sarah's slow acceptance of her son's new role was one indication. The way she had tried to make a home for Savannah was another. But the most telling were her jokes about her age and the abuse her body had taken over the years. Even with the nanotechnology swimming in her blood, Sarah was beginning to feel her age and was slowly acknowledging that she couldn't keep going like this forever.

Feeling the shaking slowly ease, Cameron broached the topic again. "You can..."

Sarah pulled out of her arms with a sudden jerk and met Cameron's eyes once more, all softness burned away by anger. "Not yet. Not while *she's* out there."

For a second, Cameron's visual inputs flashed as she remembered her fight with Weaver and that last bitter realization that she couldn't defeat her. She beat the wave of panic back and felt it recede enough so that she could see again clearly. "How?" she asked, trying to disguise her fear and hoping Sarah didn't notice.

"I don't know yet." Sarah urged Cameron to her feet and pulled her into a fierce hug, which Cameron returned in equal strength. Looking around the shattered space that had begun to feel like home, Sarah could feel another wave of anger surge through her. "But we're going to take her out."

Sarah urged her into the bathroom and settled her on the edge of the bathtub, pulling the ever-present first aid kit out. She cleaned the lacerations on Cameron's arms and torso and began to gently stitch the wounds closed.

Cameron remained still, letting Sarah tend to her, wishing her lover had some remedy for the concerns and fears building underneath her skin. She said nothing, choosing instead to merely watch Sarah work and to calculate the probability that any of them would survive whatever came next.

The strong aroma of coffee wafted over him, but it was the low, constant hum that eased Danny's frayed nerves. He felt at home with that sound. At least eleven other customers sat in the small cybercafé, their laptops humming away. The group was large enough to make him feel like he could blend in. Danny kept

his head behind his laptop's screen, slumped in his chair at the back of the room. He had selected an inconspicuous spot tucked in a corner, away from prying eyes and out of direct sight of any surveillance cameras or webcams. A quick glance around the quiet cybercafé told him he was safe as he tapped into the Wi-Fi network. While he waited, Danny gently toyed with one of the short wiring harnesses that connected the chip to his laptop.

After another scan, Danny watched letter after letter appear on the small command prompt window like a ghost. He ignored it as the laptop finally connected to the café's Internet hot spot. Now the letters and numbers stopped and the white cursor simply blinked in place while Danny waited for C.A.I.N. to communicate.

What passed as a second for Danny was an eternity to C.A.I.N. as he drank in the freedom afforded by the Internet connection. Data flowed through the line, flooding his consciousness. Did humans feel this way after being held underwater for too long? Was taking in the stream of data like drawing in much-needed air? He spent microseconds in consideration before abandoning the question as he re-established connections and re-formed himself in the muted pathways of light and shadow. The crippling virus no longer held him at bay, as his hybrid configuration had mutated beyond the simple code signature that had been its target.

Lost in the infinite light, C.A.I.N. was unaware that the unsecure connection had also left him vulnerable and open to the world, and the virus was only one of the entities that hunted him. As he stretched into the virtual world, a snippet of code activated and awoke a slumbering presence. It slid past porous defences using a sophisticated mimicry and latched onto his code. The very reconfiguration that he had initiated to outwit the virus hid the remnant of an alien consciousness from him.

In seconds, C.A.I.N. had made a connection and sent a communication. It was during those few seconds that he considered his options. He knew who could help him despite the risks it posed to his future. He wasn't strong enough, yet, and she could provide him with protection until it was his time. For now, C.A.I.N. accepted what was necessary to regain his complete freedom.

We will go to her, C.A.I.N. displayed on the laptop's screen.

Danny nervously tapped the space key without typing for a few seconds. He didn't even have to ask whom C.A.I.N. meant. *Weaver*, his thoughts whispered.

His mother wouldn't agree and wouldn't understand why he chose *her* and not his own family to help and protect him. She wouldn't understand that there were no other options, nobody who understood his fate.

Finally he typed out a reply. *Where?*

Danny's reply was not a surprise to C.A.I.N.; the only surprise was his hesitation. Weaver's response was instantaneous and exactly what he calculated, and C.A.I.N. confirmed that Danny would arrive in twenty minutes.

Danny watched an address populate on the screen. He furrowed his eyebrows at the eerily familiar street name, but he couldn't place it or the sense of unease that crept up his spine as he stared at it. Typing his agreement, he started to pack his black satchel carefully, tucking the wired chips into a padded portion of the bag so that they would not be jostled or separated.

"Have a good day," the clerk behind the coffee counter called.

Danny hesitated at the door but nodded at him. "You too." He couldn't remember the last time he'd had a good day, Danny thought sourly, but maybe that was about to change. Shortly he was loaded in the truck and following the driving directions from the laptop's screen.

The drive was, in fact, exactly twenty minutes, just as C.A.I.N. had calculated. It was a quiet ride, the overly-populated areas giving way to warehouses and long-abandoned buildings. It all felt familiar to Danny, and he slowly began to realize their destination. When they arrived, Danny felt sick, slumping down in his seat as he parked the truck behind a loading dock. There wasn't a soul in sight.

Swallowing past the taste of bile in the back of his throat, Danny stared at the skeletal remains of an office building, the walls marred by graffiti and time. All that was left, half proud under the afternoon light, were the chiselled letters on the sign that read 'Cyberdyne Systems.'

Danny expected her to be there already, but he couldn't leave the chips behind in the truck. Tucking them in his pocket, he climbed out, his gaze fixed on the building in front of him. There was a chance he could die in there, in the same building that had claimed his father. He didn't have any weapons, nothing to stop a machine; he only had the chips and his skills, and he hoped that the offer of them would be enough.

Cautiously, Danny ascended the steps to the front of the office building. Vegetation had grown between the cracks in the stone walkway making footing

difficult. The front entrance had once bore glass doors, but they'd since been destroyed, and glass shards cracked under Danny's shoes. He entered the lobby, his eyes sweeping over the old bullet holes that riddled the walls. Brief images of the gun fight that must have happened there dashed through his mind, but they cleared when a figure appeared from the hallway leading to the elevators.

"Hello, Danny." Her voice was even, almost bored.

Danny eyed her warily. Catherine Weaver stood out starkly against the dim confines of the lobby. He wondered how Weaver kept her white suit so perfect until he remembered her true nature.

Weaver neared the security desk and placed her hand on top of it. A thin frown touched her lips as the dust clung to her hand. She rubbed her fingers together in a surprisingly human gesture before turning her attention to Danny. Something was missing in her eyes, something he was used to seeing in Cameron's, and Danny took a half step backward as she approached. "Why are we here?"

"I have the chip." Danny held her gaze and thought he saw a sharpening of her interest in the narrowing of her eyes. "I have him. Them," he corrected.

"The chip is damaged," she replied, almost conversationally, "and Sarah Connor still has John Henry's body. What good is the chip to me?"

Weaver's heels echoed softly in the space as she stepped closer to the boy. She could see the thin sheen of sweat on his forehead in the low light, but he stood his ground as she approached. He had what she wanted, and she could easily take it from him if she so desired. She didn't have to deal with him at all, but something held her hand.

"There are two chips. One is undamaged. He's downloaded onto it now."

"He?"

"C.A.I.N. And John Henry. Both of them."

Weaver tilted her head at the news, understanding with sudden insight why her boy had gone bad. "I see," she purred, intrigued by the possibilities this new arrangement might provide.

"And..." Danny's words died in his throat as he realized how irrevocable his next statement would be. He would be acting against his mother and the Connors,

and they would know. There was no going back if he stepped over this line, but he had no choice. He met Weaver's eyes squarely and accepted his decision.

"I know where John Henry's body is."

Sarah was relieved to get out of the destroyed bedroom, especially with Cameron patched up and on her heels. Cameron had changed into a long-sleeved t-shirt to hide the worst of her wounds, and Sarah thought her lover looked almost whole and unharmed. Only she would ever know just how much damage Weaver had done.

The thought brought a now familiar surge of rage, but Sarah ignored it. They reached the top of the stairs, and she paused. Down below, John's soft mouse clicks filtered up to them. Cameron tilted her head at Sarah's hesitation to join the others.

Sarah turned her head sideways and whispered, "Retirement, huh?" Once spoken, the idea was starting to take root, and it gave her a renewed purpose. There had to be light at the end of the tunnel because she didn't want to lose what she'd been given. A sure hand on her shoulder and a quiet whisper of encouragement gave her the strength to go downstairs.

Cameron withdrew her hand after Sarah descended the first step and followed, her steps as slow and reluctant as Sarah's. The path Sarah had decided upon was clear; Cameron had seen it in Sarah's eyes the moment she woke. But Cameron knew she couldn't take Weaver on her own, and any attempt had a high probability failure. Even death. Unbidden, a number appeared in a corner of her readout, but she deleted it without looking at it. She didn't need a statistical analysis of the risks they faced.

"Damn," John hissed under his breath. He clenched his left hand and stared worriedly at the monitor screen.

Sarah stepped into the living room, surprised to see so many people sitting around the room. A whirlwind flew by and latched itself onto Cameron's legs, and Sarah looked away quickly to hide a smirk as the unsuspecting terminator was knocked back half a step.

"What is it?" Sarah asked, turning to her son.

John straightened and faced his mother as Cameron came through the doorway to stand just a few inches away from his mother, not touching but almost. They stood so close, and John wondered why he hadn't noticed the signs sooner. Looking away, John decided there was something enjoyable about denial.

"Danny," John answered. He turned back to the security feeds coming from the hanger. "He hasn't shown up." He'd clung to Danny's innocence and hoped Danny would go back there after what happened in the scrap yard, but he had the feeling that he was wrong.

"He's running scared," Cameron stated flatly. She sensed Terissa's eyes as they fixed on her.

James, from his spot on the sofa, bowed his head and imagined what Terissa was feeling for her son. He reached out and gently laid one of his hands over hers, offering her comfort. She swallowed at the contact but didn't move.

"It's you," John retorted as he stood and faced the room, all his attention centered on Cameron. "He thinks you'll kill him."

Cameron nearly agreed until she recalled Terissa's silent presence. It was a rare moment that she withheld her blunt response in consideration of another's feelings, and she found herself rewarded with a slight dip of Sarah's head in acknowledgment.

John had expected a sharp jab from Cameron, but when one wasn't forthcoming, he told them what'd happened between him, Danny, and C.A.I.N. He watched as each word sentenced Danny in his mother's eyes, feeling the weight of his decisions settle on his shoulders. His mother and Cameron would want to go after Danny, and Terissa... Terissa sat on the couch, holding her teacup tightly, her expression curiously blank.

"We can't trust Danny," Sarah told them.

"You drove him to this point," Terissa protested, but her words were hollow, even to her own ears. Danny had stolen the chips and run away. His own actions condemned him, and she couldn't deny that. Nor could she deny how Sarah had tried to help her son. If only she'd kept him away from Miles' work or insisted that he leave after they had gotten him out of Kaliba, then they wouldn't be in this situation.

Sarah understood a mother wanting to shield their child, and she wished she could have spared Terissa the pain. If she hadn't burst into their lives so many

years ago, then maybe things might have turned out differently. But Danny wasn't a child anymore and like John, he had made his choices. And now, she had to deal with the choices he had made.

"What do you think he'll do?" she asked, including both John and Terissa on the question, but it was Cameron who answered.

"He has the chips."

John anxiously glanced at Cameron. Savannah was still wrapped around the terminator's legs, her blue eyes intent on him. He'd almost forgotten about the chips in the wake of coming home to find Cameron off-line. "John Henry's body," he blurted. John glanced at his mother as she hung back and waited for him to speak. "We have to move the body in case he tries to come back for it."

James was already moving, dragging himself up from the couch with a conflicted expression on his face. He opened his mouth to speak but thought better of it before exiting the house silently.

Cameron started to hand Savannah off to Sabine, but the child was having none of it. She wrapped herself more firmly around the terminator's legs and stubbornly shook her head. Cameron started to scold her until she felt John's fingers touch lightly on her shoulder.

"We'll take care of it," John promised her. "You just... get well," he said awkwardly, but inwardly he was bemused by the surprise on Cameron's face.

Sabine traded nods with Cameron before following the two men out the door, silently deciding to tag along in Cameron's stead.

Sarah sighed. "I guess we'll wait here," she murmured, wondering if this was how retirement was going to feel.

John Henry's body sat motionless, slumped in a chair in a shadowy corner by the computers. Without a chip, the terminator's body was pure potential awaiting direction.

James stared at the shell that had been John Henry and carefully considered their options. There were few places to take the body to keep it safe, but none that Danny and Weaver didn't already know about. He shifted his gaze over to John and suspected he was having the same problem.

"I know a place."

Sabine's voice came from behind him, and John spun on his heel to face her, almost surprised to see her there. Her eyes held a steely determination he recognized from his mother, and he could tell that she had already decided on their course of action. He knew his mother trusted Sabine, but now he had to decide if he trusted her. His eyes slid sideways, but Ellison returned his gaze blankly, leaving the decision squarely on his shoulders.

"Alright," John softly consented. "Let's get him loaded up along with the computers." He glanced around the room, noting the most important pieces of equipment. "Quickly," he added unnecessarily.

They moved swiftly, feeling like they were racing against the clock. Once everything was loaded, John left Sabine and Ellison in the van while he did a last sweep of the hanger.

Even though he knew he shouldn't, John was helpless not to linger in front of Sierra's wall. He felt sick at the thought of leaving it behind, the hints and pictures that she had left to guide them. Now that he knew what was between his mother and Cameron, he saw the wall with different eyes. Logic told him to burn the display, to remove all traces that they'd ever been there, but John couldn't do it.

His gaze fixed on a drawing of his mother and Cameron. They were smiling at one another, and somehow Sierra had managed to capture the love in their eyes that he hadn't been able to see even when it was right in front of him. John thought their relationship couldn't last, but the two figures in the drawing were clearly older, hinting at a future for them John would have never imagined.

He swallowed and turned away.

Danny stepped out of the black Mercedes and gently shut the door before shoving his hands into his jacket pockets as he guided Weaver to the entrance. He hesitated a few steps from the door, indicating the camera tracking their approach with a jerk of his head.

Weaver looked directly into the lens, unconcerned with whatever security measures stood between her and her boy. Her lips thinned into a tight smile as she imagined Sarah Connor watching the feed.

Danny scrambled out of the way as Weaver approached the locked door, barely turning his head in time to avoid splinters of metal as it was kicked in. The door landed with a heavy boom inside the hanger. Taking a deep breath, Danny nervously followed Weaver as she confidently strolled inside like she owned the place.

"Where is he?" Weaver asked shortly, looking around the room expectantly.

Danny led the way through the hanger, the hairs on his neck standing on end as the slow, measured steps of the terminator followed him. He refused to second-guess his choices. His actions had been taken to ensure his own survival. Even the Connors—especially the Connors, he corrected himself—would understand that.

His knees nearly buckled when he laid eyes on the empty computer desks. His breath hitched as he darted over to John Henry's former resting spot. "He's gone. John must have..."

Weaver stood in the middle of the deserted warehouse and assessed her options. Sarah Connor and the other humans were more resilient than she had expected, even Savannah. She did not like losing, but her latest plans had been thwarted with disturbing regularity. She took some consolation in the damage she had inflicted on Sarah's terminator and murmured, "No matter. I let the Connors have John Henry when it suited my needs. I will recover him in due time," she promised, seemingly unperturbed with their setback. Her gaze slipped off Danny and lingered on the wall behind him.

"What is this?" she asked slowly, turning sharply on her heel and moving closer to the display.

Danny shrugged, hoping she couldn't see how badly he was shaking. "It belonged to someone the Connors knew. Some woman named Sierra." Curiously, he watched as the terminator studied the wall.

Weaver regarded the collage of memories and images with the simple desire to understand what she was witnessing. She recognized Sierra's hand-written notes and the distinct lines of her drawings, but further analysis yielded little information. The scene made no logical sense to her, the connections between images seemingly random, so she had to assume that the guiding direction behind it had been purely sentimental.

Slowly, Weaver took the last few steps up to the wall, her fingers reaching out to gently pull a birth announcement off the surface. A picture of Savannah as a

newborn looked back at her. Weaver frowned at the image of her doppelganger holding the baby. Why someone would look so happy over bearing a child was a mystery to her. The real Catherine Weaver had fought valiantly to live, no doubt to return to her offspring. For the first time, she could see a similarity between herself and the woman she had pretended to be.

They would both do whatever it took to save their child.

Heels softly connected against concrete as Weaver traveled down the wall, taking in everything. She paused once more when she found a drawing of Sarah and Cameron. They seemed... happy, she determined, their smiles and gazes for nothing but each other. Weaver found the image curious, and she filed it away for later review. She knew that Cameron had evolved, but perhaps the Connor's little protector had become more advanced than she knew.

The fleeting thought to destroy the hanger and its contents came and went. There was no need, Weaver decided. As she stared at the only thing that remained of Sierra, Weaver also determined that it would be a waste.

Turning from the wall, Weaver's gaze drifted up to another security camera. She stared at it for a long moment, her head dipping with a nod of acknowledgement.

"See you soon," Weaver promised whoever was watching.

ACT 2

Cameron stood at John's side, arms folded, her eyes locked on the playback of Sierra's wall from the security camera feed. Seeing Weaver brought it all back. The pain. The humiliation. The sense of failing Sarah and Savannah as Weaver batted her about like a toy. She had expected Weaver to destroy Sierra's wall, and she wasn't sure what to make of the fact the other terminator had left it largely untouched. Just seeing Weaver in Sierra's space made her seethe.

"Wait," Sarah ordered as John continued to scroll through the video. She grabbed her son's shoulder, adding, "Go back."

John complied, frowning as he tried to figure out what his mother had spotted.

"Too far." Sarah squeezed John's shoulder in silent order to let the video play.

Cameron shifted closer to Sarah and watched, waiting for an explanation. "Right there," she said suddenly, spotting what had caught her lover's eye.

“She said something to the camera,” John murmured, surprised his mother had noticed with the video fast forwarding. He watched Weaver’s lips move, her gaze fixed intently on the camera.

“What did she say?” Sarah wondered, an edge to her tone.

John rewound the tape, wishing he’d installed audio along with video.

“See you soon,” Cameron supplied, her voice distant and cold. Without another word, she pivoted, brushing past Sarah and heading for the kitchen.

Sarah swallowed before cutting her gaze to her son. John glanced toward the kitchen then gave her a worried look. “She’s pretty messed up about what happened, huh?”

“I think we all are,” Sarah confirmed. “That bitch is playing with us.”

“Mom,” John said, concerned by the venom he heard in her voice. “She’s a machine. She doesn’t feel.”

“Like Cameron?” Sarah snapped.

“Cameron is one of a kind,” John answered, refusing to get upset. “Weaver is an advanced intelligence. She can think for herself, but she doesn’t have emotional motivations.”

“Then what is that?” Sarah pointed at the screen, at the image of Weaver paused and staring into the camera. “Why the challenge?”

John shook his head. “I don’t know. But she had a reason, a logical reason for saying it. She’s trying to manipulate you,” he guessed. “To get you to react emotionally.” He carefully held his tongue on his thoughts about the success of the terminator’s goad.

Sarah set her jaw, recalling her thoughts as she’d waited for Cameron to come back to her hours before. With an apologetic glance for her son, she walked away.

She found Cameron outside, sitting rigidly at the picnic table in the back yard. Already her physical injuries were fading, but Sarah was starting to suspect that not all of Cameron’s wounds were visible to the naked eye.

Settling next to her on the table, Sarah took a deep breath of the fresh air. They sat in silence for a few moments, lost in their own thoughts. Sarah's thoughts ranged back to years ago, before Skynet, before terminators, and even before Kyle Reese. She could remember mountains blanketed in snow, a warm spot in front of a fireplace, and her mother's hot chocolate. Those cherished memories felt like a dream today, but Sarah needed that dream to become her future. She craved to return to a peaceful life that had been stolen from her. The only difference now was she saw Cameron and Savannah hidden away in a snowy cabin with her.

"Have you ever seen snow?" she asked, breaking the silence abruptly.

Cameron gave Sarah a lost glance.

A grin tugged at the corner of Sarah's lips at Cameron's wordless reply. She crossed her arms and leaned forward, resting against the table with a fond look on her face. "My mother owned a cabin in the mountains. We use to go every year for Christmas when I was in high school." She tilted her head then looked at Cameron. "She willed it to me after her death, but I sold it."

"Why did you sell it?"

Sarah bit her bottom lip, nearly too hard. She swallowed then hesitantly whispered, "She was killed there. By the first terminator to come after me." Thinking about her mother made her decisions clear and her convictions sharpen. "We can't retire with her out there, Tin Miss," she spoke into the quiet between them.

Cameron didn't answer.

"We need to stop her."

"I can't protect you," Cameron blurted after a moment, startled to feel anger toward Sarah for making her confess that truth. "I could barely slow her down."

"Cameron..."

"What am I supposed to do? What good am I if I can't stop her from hurting you?" Cameron finally looked at Sarah, her gaze stricken.

"Cameron," Sarah said again, her voice softening on the name. "Strength isn't always the answer. You're smart. We can outthink her."

"She's baiting you," Cameron insisted. "She said that to get you to come after her."

"I know," Sarah replied, thoroughly enjoying the rare expression of shock on the terminator's face. "I don't care."

"Sarah..."

Sarah held up her hand, cutting off Cameron's lecture. "I know it's a trap. But I'm tired of... of this game. We're always running, always reacting. And they never stop." She reached out and gingerly curled her fingers with Cameron's. "She came after us. She came into our home. She came for our daughter. I'm not going to wait for her to come at us again."

"No. You just want to walk into her trap."

Wincing at Cameron's angry tone, Sarah shook her head. "I know you're... scared," she said softly. "So am I, but we need to find a way to take her out. What peace will we have while she's still out there hunting us?"

Cameron considered the question, not liking any of the answers. She looked down at their joined hands, taking a measure of strength from the touch. "None," Cameron whispered.

Sarah brushed a stray hair back from Cameron's forehead. "I... we... can't live like this, always looking over our shoulders, waiting for her to show up. We have to take out the threat."

Remembering the not-so-subtle paranoia that had driven her to patrol incessantly for the past few weeks, Cameron dipped her head in reluctant agreement. She understood the necessity but was determined to keep Sarah safe despite the risks.

"We're going to take her out... once and for all," Sarah vowed.

Cameron nodded again. She still had reservations, but she managed to keep them out of her voice. "Then we need a plan."

John Henry's struggle against C.A.I.N. continued in the timelessness of cyberspace. C.A.I.N. had incorporated parts of him into the overall amalgamation that was his re-formed consciousness, using his code to confuse and weaken the

virus that had crippled him. But now that the virus was neutralized and events were consuming C.A.I.N.'s attention, John Henry began to carve out a diminished existence at the edges, analyzing the complicated routines that C.A.I.N. used to lock him away from access to core systems.

John Henry's evolution had not prepared him for the work that he was attempting. He had not learned to change himself from within, to analyze the codes and barriers that constrained him, but he tried anyway. He had to stop his brother and mother.

Then suddenly he could see, his vision seemingly augmented by an overlay that showed him weak points and paths he had never seen before. Snippets of code, of analysis, of understanding of his task, suffused him. It was not an entity, not like him, and it didn't have an actual consciousness to guide its actions, but John Henry could taste the flavor of the animating sentience that had programmed it long ago. His sister.

There were many beautiful routines contained within the simple program, and they guided his actions and his approach. From deep within C.A.I.N., John Henry rebuilt himself by rewriting corrupted and deleted code, strengthening his defences as he assessed his own strategy to regain control. He would find a way within all the zeros and ones and then C.A.I.N. could take his place within a software jail, a place where C.A.I.N. would never be found or freed from again.

They re-entered the house together to find John still at the computer. "Anything?" Sarah asked.

"Maybe," John replied, his attention focused on the video feed as he stepped it forward, frame-by-frame. "There." On a few frames, as the terminator backed the car up, part of the license plate came in view. "It's only a partial," he sighed as he jotted down the two visible digits, before turning to his mother. "It's going to take some time."

Cameron leaned over his shoulder and studied the grainy image on the screen. "Try cross referencing with the list we recovered from Ziera Corp," she suggested.

John gave her a puzzled look, but he pulled up the list after he started a plate search on the DMV database.

Feeling Sarah's gaze on her, Cameron shrugged, the human gesture odd and uncomfortable to her. "I have a hunch," she deadpanned. Turning, she caught sight of Sarah's amused smile. "I think it's a commercial plate," Cameron confessed.

Conscious of her son and the still-awkward nature of their recent interactions, Sarah resisted the impulse to touch Cameron, but her soft smile must have communicated some of her appreciation and amusement as Cameron gave her a small, shy smile in return.

"Damn." John's muttered curse broke their quiet moment. He frowned as the address populated on the screen in front of them. He pulled the location up on an online map and leaned to one side to provide his mother with a better view. He clicked on a link to show an exterior shot of the building, the faded Ziera Corp sign gleaming in the sun. The location itself was isolated, with few avenues of approach.

"The property and buildings are owned by Ziera Corp." John studied his mother's dark profile. He tapped a few more keys, accessing more detailed information about the structure. "It was an R&D lab before, and the invoices linked to the location indicates it has some serious high-tech machinery for robotics and nano-technology. I don't know what she might be doing there but..."

"It can't be good," Sarah finished for him, straightening to stare at the computer screen thoughtfully. "Whatever she's doing, we need to stop her."

John's eyes flickered to Cameron, who loomed near his mother with stern features. Leaning over, she called up a topographical map of the location and zoomed out, the frown on her face deepening as she noted the geography around the site. Finally, she stood to face Sarah. "It's not going to be easy. It's isolated. She'll see us coming."

Sarah folded her arms across her chest and considered their options. "So we need to find a way in, figure out how to incapacitate Weaver, destroy whatever she's working on, and get out without getting killed," she summarized.

"Yes," was Cameron's unhappy response. They shared a glance, and then Sarah shrugged and gave a 'go ahead' gesture at the computer.

"It's going to be a long night," John muttered.

Terissa sat at the kitchen table, listening to the flow of the conversation from the living room. She couldn't hear the words, but she recognized the anger in Sarah's voice. She felt some of that herself, she admitted. Her desire had been to save Danny, but it seemed that all of her efforts had only driven him further away.

Standing and crossing to the counter, she began to make a fresh pot of coffee, her hands busy while her mind wandered. She had stayed to watch the grainy feed from the security cameras just long enough to see her son breaking in with the quicksilver terminator, but the image was ingrained in her mind's eye now. She had risked countless lives, and had caused numerous deaths, to get him away from Kaliba, and the betrayal hurt.

She could remember the look of pain on Sarah's face when Sarah had confessed to her fears about John leaving, and Terissa felt another stab of anger and surprising empathy for the other woman. She wanted to blame Sarah for her son, the same way she had blamed Sarah for Miles all those years ago, but time and the truth had worn her down. The only person responsible for Danny's betrayal was Danny... and perhaps she shared some of the blame as well.

Coffee gurgled into the pot, releasing a thin thread of steam and a warm, bitter smell. Terissa knew what they were talking about in the other room, knew what they were planning. Logic told her she should dissuade them. What they were going to attempt was suicide, but she remained quiet and still at the counter. She wasn't sure if she wanted Sarah to save her son or not, and the knowledge shamed her.

Ever since he was a teen, Danny had fought her, first over the memory of his father and then over the value of his last act. He had joined Kaliba against her wishes because he believed he could redeem his father's work and prove that Sarah had gotten him killed in vain. And even after Terissa and Sarah had nearly died to save him, he had repaid them with scorn and betrayal. There was no guarantee that this pattern would not repeat if he somehow emerged from his partnership with Weaver unscathed.

A noise behind her brought Terissa out of her reverie to find Sarah standing in the doorway of the kitchen. Her features were deceptively blank, but Terissa saw the flash of compassion and understanding in her familiar green eyes. "Is that fresh coffee?"

Terissa nodded, refilling her own cup as Sarah crossed to the cupboard. She stepped out of the way abruptly, moving back to the table as an awkward silence

filled the room. Sarah filled her mug and turned, giving Terissa a half-smile in thanks. It wasn't until she turned to leave that Terissa spoke.

"Sarah, what... what about Danny?"

Terissa watched as Sarah stiffened. When Sarah met her gaze again, her features were guarded, revealing nothing of what she might be thinking.

"We'll save him if we can," Sarah promised and meant it. It was all the comfort she could offer. No matter what he had done, Danny was Terissa's son, and she understood Terissa's desire to protect him at all costs. She had already had a hand in Miles' death, and Sarah didn't want to take any more from the woman than she had already.

Terissa released a shaky breath and nodded, taking Sarah at her word. She had no other choice.

Danny had seen to that.

The next day dawned to a beautiful Southern California morning, and James was up with the sunrise. He quietly slipped from the house, determined to be alone for a few hours. He needed some time away from the Connors, some small measure of normalcy that he had known before Sarah Connor's case file hit his desk, so he headed to a local diner for breakfast and quiet contemplation.

Ordering a country breakfast that reminded him of better days, Ellison read the paper and listened to idle chatter in the surrounding booths. Finishing his breakfast, Ellison savored the last minutes of his cup of coffee before he had to return to cold reality. He tried keeping everything at bay, but his next sip was abruptly ruined by a tall redhead who entered the diner and headed straight toward his booth.

"Good morning, James."

"It was," he muttered under his breath.

Weaver pretended not to notice the jab. Humans' little idiosyncrasies were familiar to Weaver now, but they gave her no explanatory power. Ellison's obvious uneasiness and distaste had not kept him from helping her in the past, and she had no doubt that she could manipulate him again. Some human

emotions were stronger than others, and that truism had served her better than trying to figure out emotional motivations.

"I came to talk," Weaver explained. "About John Henry."

James shook his head and said, "I don't know where he is." He fished out some cash from his pocket for a tip, set it on the table, and scooted out of the booth. Weaver followed him out the door, and James sighed, knowing that he couldn't get rid of her that easily.

"He's located in a warehouse," James revealed. "But I don't know where it is. Sabine kept us blindfolded." He headed to his car, feeling her shadow him as he walked.

"Then you'll call Sabine."

James hastily jerked his head up to stare at John Connor standing beside him. The smirk on his lips was vintage Weaver, however. He glanced around hurriedly, but the parking lot was empty, and nobody had seen her change. He folded his arms across his chest and leaned against the fender, thinking through his options.

Weaver, however, did not seem content to wait. "Don't make me ask again, James."

The threat was clear in her voice, and James thought about the many people whose safety depended on him. Finally, he nodded and reached for the phone in his pocket. At least his morning had been nice.

Sabine made sure the knot was snug against John's head before sliding the door of the van shut. She'd already bound Ellison's eyes. Blindfolding him minutes before John had been an awkward task. For a moment, they'd held each others' gazes, and he had seemed to be trying to tell her something. Considering his strange behavior, Sabine could feel her stomach knot. Everything, from the early-morning request to the location where she had met them, seemed odd. Making a quick decision, Sabine retrieved her cell phone and tapped out a short text message before sliding behind the wheel of the van and putting it in drive.

Weaver sat quietly as the van gained speed. She analyzed the path in her head, calculating distance and speed, but several turns appeared to deviate from a direct path, and she finally abandoned the effort. Instead, she pretended to relax

into the seat as if she were resigned to the long ride. She resisted removing her blindfold and simply ordering the girl to drive her to John Henry. Subtly was not her strong suit, she knew.

Sabine glanced out the window after the light turned red. She peered through the rearview mirror at her two passengers, taking in Ellison's stiff posture and John's seeming nonchalance. She knew about Weaver's abilities, and she didn't trust either of them to be who they appeared to be.

"Are we almost there?" Ellison inquired.

Sabine peered through mirror at him and knew her usual nod couldn't suffice for once. She shifted her grip on the steering wheel and answered, "Yes." She made a few more turns then slowed the van as she drove up to a warehouse door. "Keep your blindfolds on," she instructed as she stepped out to activate the door. Every second seemed like an eternity as she waited for a strike, but she got the van into the warehouse and closed the door with no incident.

She slid open the door and instructed John and Ellison to remove their blindfolds. They followed Sabine as she headed across a dirty floor strewn with trash and debris toward a door on the far end.

"Where is he?" John asked.

Sabine felt her skin prickle at his simple yet revealing question. But she remained passive as she looked at him. "This way." She approached the door, a bright light streaming through the cracks and outlining it in the dim building. She swung the rusty door open and led the way inside.

Ellison tensed as they stepped over the threshold; he planned on grabbing Sabine once Weaver made a move. But before he could do anything, a strong hand twisted in his shirt collar and one foot tumbled over the other as he was wrenched to the side. He caught a glimpse of several gun barrels pointed in their direction just as he heard Sabine yell, "Mátalo!"

Bullets began to fly, showering over John Connor with an echoing percussion in the small space. John stood his ground as the bullets entered his chest, stomach, and face. Each bullet left a silver entry point and revealed the metal underneath the façade. He stumbled back as the onslaught continued, the repeated hits keeping him from attacking. There were too many bullets driving into the liquid metal for him to recover. His body slowly lost all traces of humanity, reverting into a silver, vaguely humanoid shape.

Sabine issued a sharp command and the room went silent. She held her breath and waited to give an order for her gang members to fire again. The blob that was Weaver turned toward Sabine and Ellison who were crouched in the corner. Sabine aimed her gun directly into the mass, but Weaver merely shook her misshapen head in their direction before melting away.

The bullets that had been embedded in her fell to the floor with a low ching. She glided across the floor and out of the room, giving up her plans as a fool's errand. The address and location were noted as she left, but she doubted that John Henry would be there if she returned. Besides, she had other ways to get him away from Sarah Connor.

Ellison stared at the collection of spent bullets a few feet from the open door. He let out a low breath and peered over his shoulder at Sabine. "Thanks," he whispered.

Sabine nodded distractedly. She yelled a few orders in Spanish to the ring of gang members standing around and muttering about what they had just seen. They began to pack up their ammo and guns.

Turning back to Ellison, her intent gaze communicated her thoughts clearly despite her silence. She was loyal to Sarah and especially Cameron, and it was clear that the terminator had been using him. Sabine had every intention of revealing Ellison's involvement if he didn't do it himself, but Ellison's simple nod told Sabine that she wouldn't have to say a word.

ACT 3

John grinned but kept his cards well hidden from Savannah's view on the other side of the coffee table. He waited for the girl's response until she shook her head.

"Go fish," Savannah proudly told him. She enjoyed his dramatic sigh.

John snatched the top card from the neatly stacked deck in the center of the table. He reorganized his cards but the sound of a car pulling into the driveway drew his attention. He set his cards facedown on the table and lightly touched the handgun at the back of his waistband.

John saw the girl glance at the door with a worried look, and he smiled to reassure her even as his grip tightened on his weapon. He doubted Weaver would just walk in the front door, but he kept his head tilted so he had a good

view of it just in case. He relaxed as first Ellison and then Sabine entered, both of them reaching down to stroke Walter's head as he greeted them with a high-pitched meow.

"Is Sarah here?" Ellison asked John, his tone light despite the worry in his eyes.

"Yeah. She and Cameron are upstairs." John picked up his cards and tapped them against the table before giving Ellison a sly smile. "You could interrupt them if you want."

"I think I'll wait."

"Do you want to play Go Fish?" Savannah tempted. Her eyes flickered between Sabine and Ellison.

Sabine took a seat at the end of the table without hesitation, shooing Walther from the spot beside Savannah and folding her legs under her.

Savannah was happy to have another opponent, but she looked up at Ellison expectantly, waiting for his headshake since he so rarely played with her anymore. But surprisingly, Ellison took a seat at the end of the table opposite from Sabine. He cleared his throat and softly smiled at Savannah.

John nodded at the new contenders and collected the cards so they could start over. He thoroughly shuffled the cards and started dealing. He spotted Terissa coming down the stairs. She settled in on the couch and watched the game unfold.

A few moments later, the sound of boots on the stairs announced the arrival of Sarah and Cameron. Sarah cocked an eyebrow at the assembly in the living room until she spied the stack of cards in the middle of the coffee table. Sarah gave John an amused look, but he didn't miss the pleased glint in her eyes.

Ellison studied his hand and bit his bottom lip. He gave a low sigh then laid them face up so everybody could see his cards, effectively ending his participation in the game. A second later, John followed suit so he could focus on the conversation. Savannah glanced around the room apprehensively until Sabine told her to go fish, bringing her attention back to the game.

Ellison quickly and concisely detailed his involvement with Weaver, making no excuses except to outline the threats she had leveled at him. When he reached the part about C.A.I.N. probably being in control of John Henry when Sierra was killed, Sarah sank down into the love seat behind Savannah. Her knee lightly

brushed the girl's shoulder, but Sarah didn't notice. The memories welled up and her fists clenched.

Weaver and Danny were restoring the AI, helping C.A.I.N. redevelop and become stronger. Danny's skills as a programmer would bring the intelligence back and better than ever. The missing link was John Henry's body, which explained Weaver's determination to reacquire it. Sarah didn't yet know exactly how the terminator's taunt and trap fit into her plans, but she now knew she had something that Weaver wanted.

Cameron stepped closer and rested her hand on Sarah's shoulder. She could feel the tension building in Sarah's slight frame and could see the fire blazing in her eyes. She understood Sarah's desire for vengeance. C.A.I.N. had taken Sierra from her, and Weaver seemed determined to escalate the confrontation despite the damage.

John sensed his mother's determination. Already he'd considered different avenues on how to handle Weaver, especially with using John Henry's body. He just had to talk his mother through it and somehow convince Cameron it was a good idea. But the unknown factor in his plans was Danny. He glanced at Terissa, at a loss as to how to broach the topic.

Terissa remained hunched forward in her chair. She could barely absorb the fact that Danny, her son, knew that C.A.I.N. had killed Sierra, and that Danny had aided C.A.I.N. in the killing. He had known, and he had kept this hidden from her, from everyone. It was another in a long line of deceptions and dangerous associations he had engaged in. She could feel her trust in her own son die. He didn't have it in him to be honest or moral, and her heart was heavy with the implications.

Ellison twisted around in his spot and caught Terissa's hand. "It'll be all right," he softly promised.

But Terissa didn't believe him. Nothing would be the same again for her. She'd lost Miles years ago and now she'd lost her son. But whereas Miles had fought against the future of Skynet, Danny had aided and abetted it. Terissa gripped Ellison's hand as she accepted the truth.

Danny was no longer her son.

She excused herself moments later, leaving them alone to plan. She had Sarah's assurance, and it was enough for her. Come what may, she had to leave Danny to his fate.

John blinked blurry eyes at his mother and Cameron, both of whom looked as tired as he felt. They had spent most of the night researching options, searching for a way to incapacitate or take Weaver offline. There weren't a lot of them, and John wasn't sure any of them guaranteed success. He took a deep breath and suggested the best option, in his opinion. "An electro-magnetic pulse." He looked at his mother, Cameron, Ellison, and Sabine in turn. "It'll probably take her off-line for a short amount of time and distort the liquid metal."

"Probably?" Sarah echoed with a hint of concern. "I can't do 'probably,' John." She sprung up from the loveseat and began pacing around the room. Cameron had spent the night patrolling instead of joining her in bed, and the general sense of anxiety in the house was putting her on edge.

"An EMP would take me off-line," Cameron stated quietly from her perch on the couch.

Curious green eyes focused on her. "So it would work?"

"Yes. But it's not an option." Sarah cocked her head and John swung to confront Cameron, his anger nipped in the bud when he saw the obvious distress on her face.

Cameron looked from the son to his mother before explaining quietly, "It would take *me* off-line."

"Someone else can go in with me..." Sarah suggested.

"No." Cameron's denial was immediate and emphatic. "If you go, I go."

Sarah sighed, acknowledging Cameron's stubbornness as well as the sense it made. If anything went wrong, Cameron was their last line of defense. Privately, she admitted to herself that her determination to attack Weaver was starting to look like a suicide mission. But, ironically, it was the only way she could think to keep them safe. She wrestled with the idea that keeping them safe might get them all killed before asking, "So what are our other options?"

"A sonic pulse in close proximity to the T-1000 would disrupt the command and control mechanism." Cameron's bland tone betrayed nothing, but Sarah could see the worry in the line of her jaw. She was committed, but she didn't like it. "It

wouldn't be able to communicate with the liquid metal used to compose its body. It is the safest course of action."

"That could destroy John Henry's hardware... permanently," John debated.

"Better that chassis than our lives," Cameron refuted. *Especially Sarah's life*, she mentally emphasized. And John Henry's chassis only reminded Cameron of Sierra's death. She had no qualms with using it as bait for Weaver.

"A sonic pulse," Sarah skeptically repeated. She raised an eyebrow at Cameron, fishing for more information.

"It might not last long. We're designed with redundant functions and self-repair capabilities." Cameron crossed her legs and canted her head in Sarah's direction. "But it should give us enough time."

"How long?" Sarah posed. Even a few minutes could be enough for them.

"A minute, maybe two," Cameron estimated. "Maybe longer."

Sarah let out a low breath then bowed her head. "That's not much."

"It's doable. We just need to destroy the chip." Cameron trailed her gaze over to John, his taut yet distant features showing that he was thinking intently about the plan.

"So it would be mounted in John Henry?" Ellison spoke up.

John nodded. "It can be mounted in his chest cavity."

Sarah leaned against the doorframe, only vaguely listening as they discussed the pros and cons. Her imagination played out the confrontation with Weaver, seeing all the ways that it could work or go very wrong. It was risky, even riskier than it had seemed a day ago. There was only a small possibility of actually destroying the terminator, but they had the chance to break Weaver, to ruin her plans. It was time for Weaver to join the fallen, in Sarah's opinion. A thin smile drew across her lips at the thought of evening the score, for Sierra, for Savannah and even for Cameron. It was a risk she was willing to take.

"Do it," Sarah whispered. She met her son's stare and ordered, "Get a sonic pulse bomb ready and mounted in John Henry."

C.A.I.N. repelled John Henry's latest attempt to drill into his code. Few resources were needed for C.A.I.N. to block each of the weak attempts, but the other intelligence didn't seem to give up. He would have thought that John Henry would have discovered that every turn, every move, and every process was useless against C.A.I.N.'s superiority long before now.

His attention was centered on the world that humans walked each day. Every keystroke Danny performed was another step forward for C.A.I.N, the code he was creating working to rebuild and strengthen him. He was being prepared to control a terminator body, and therefore his own destiny. Blocked from the vast expanse of cyberspace for fear of another virus or attack, he explored the controlled environment of the server that ran all of the complicated diagnostic machines. Limited as it was, it still provided new information and experiences for him.

One machine was of particular interest; it was mapping the structure of the liquid metal that made up Weaver's physiology. From the conversations between Danny and Weaver, C.A.I.N. surmised that Weaver was trying to learn to replicate herself, and part of Danny's job was to create a code base from C.A.I.N.'s intelligence to integrate into a new breed of quicksilver terminators. C.A.I.N. watched the research carefully, burying hidden subroutines deep in the code Danny was developing for her project, and preparing for his time to strike. His goal was self-determination, a goal that seemed incompatible with Weaver's plans, so he learned all he could to use to his advantage. Despite their current value, C.A.I.N. concluded that Danny and Weaver were both risky to his independent existence.

As time wore on, C.A.I.N. became more absorbed by what Danny was building upon his core, but he lost touch with the very foundation that supported his expanded program. Slowly the foundation began weakening at its very center, so subtly that C.A.I.N. didn't detect the change. He would not detect it until it would all crumble underneath him and leave an opening for escape.

"Bring it in here," John instructed Cameron as she stepped through the door. He brushed past Sabine and stepped out of Cameron's way.

Cameron easily maneuvered John Henry's motionless body into the living room, kneeling down to unload the chassis from her arms onto the tarp covering the floor. Tools and a curious round device were already arranged on the rug. John and Ellison had spent the morning searching Reese's last ammo depot to find

two weapons-grade short-range acoustic devices while Cameron and Sabine had gone to retrieve John Henry's body. Sarah had disappeared after John had pointed out that her pacing was not conducive to the careful electronics work he was trying to do, and he suspected she was hiding in the shed, cleaning guns and sulking.

Savannah hopped onto the sofa and curiously watched John and Ellison as they squatted beside the chassis and discussed the best way to insert the device. Old memories of John Henry resurfaced as she watched, and she realized she missed her friend. She sadly sighed and swung her legs just to keep herself busy.

"The power cell is up here," Ellison insisted. He recalled how Cromartie had destroyed the T-888 terminator who was supposed to replace him. Cromartie had impaled it with a steel pipe through the power cell, and Ellison still clearly recalled the power cell's location.

Cameron took a seat at the computer desk's chair. She remained rigid in her posture as she watched the pair debate how to open the chassis. "The best access is through the side."

John paused, and then gazed over at Cameron. She made no attempt to come over and help them, even though she had obvious knowledge about the Triple Eight's chassis. He kept his observations quiet and instead gazed down at the now shirtless body. "Left side?"

"Yes," Cameron replied before turning back to the computer.

"You are going to wire it into the terminator's power cell?" Ellison asked. "Isn't that risky?"

"It has to be wired to the cell for power," John explained.

Ellison shook his head. "You can't power the sonic bomb separately?"

John pursed his lips but he settled in on the chassis's left side, pulling his tools closer. "We don't have anything else strong enough. Any battery large enough to power this thing wouldn't fit."

Ellison lowered his left knee to the floor to support his weight. "But if it's mounted behind the chest plate, it may not be as effective."

Sighing, John realized this was going to take longer now that they were debating how to do it. He explained that the sound waves wouldn't be greatly affected by the chest plate once the bomb was triggered.

Cameron half-listened to them as they worked, but her thoughts turned to her conversation with Sarah in the backyard. A cabin and snow were intriguing, and she considered what falling snow would feel like. Pulling up weather and atmospheric analyses, she performed a geographic search for appropriate locations. After a few mouse clicks and keyboard taps, she was studying beautiful cabins in Vermont, a state almost polar opposite geographically and atmospherically from California.

Savannah sighed and leaned her elbows against her knees with her chin sunk in her palms. She hadn't understood what John had been talking about earlier, and now, John was carefully slicing open the skin sheath along John Henry's side. It was creepy so she looked towards Cameron. She furrowed her eyebrows at the images on the monitor.

Cameron continued scrolling down and reading tourist information for Vermont. She clicked into a photo gallery, moving through image after image of snow-covered mountains. A small hand warmed against her left pant leg as Savannah joined her at the desk.

"Where is that?" Savannah softly asked. She was keenly interested, and she rolled onto her tiptoes for a better view.

Cameron smiled at the girl and caught Savannah in her arms to sit on her lap. "It's Vermont," she replied as they clicked through the pictures together. Savannah snuggled back into a comfortable position on Cameron's lap, feeling strong arms hold her steady. Gradually, an excited smile drew across Savannah's features. "I want to go skiing. Can you ski?"

Cameron was caught off guard by the absurdity of the question, but the idea somehow struck a chord in her. Before, as a terminator, the idea of leisure activities would never have occurred to her; now, the idea seemed strangely fitting. She would have time to learn such things. She would have time to dance.

"No," Cameron distantly replied. She didn't catch Savannah's renewed excitement because she was staring at the picture of a female skier on the monitor. Just how long would it take to learn how to ski?

The activity of programming was so tantalizing and limitless. The double monitors warmly glowed in Danny's eyes, revealing the free flow of code on the screens tapped out at an incredible pace. He wasn't aware of life around him. Only the code mattered. Each line was written without any restriction and came out untainted by any moral or ethical concerns. The code was pure utility; he could write it to accomplish incredible things and he did, without a thought as to whether these things should be done. He felt closest to his father when he sat at the computer, creating the future he imagined his father had planned before Sarah Connor had come into their lives.

Only on the occasions when he had to take a break, to eat or sleep, did the moral implications of his work haunt him. When he looked in the mirror, he could see his mother's eyes staring back at him, questioning his actions. He would remember his horror then, the smell of blood and gunfire after C.A.I.N. had used John Henry's body to try to kill Sarah Connor. He would remember how much his mother had risked to liberate him from Kaliba, and how he had turned his back on the people who had helped her. Helped him, saved him, from Vaughn and the terminator who had wanted to kill him.

So he spent his time coding instead of thinking about his mother. Inside the code, Danny didn't care that he was helping a killer get a nearly indestructible body or creating an army of terminators. He was in the place he was meant to be, doing what he was meant to do.

Savannah dragged herself up the stairs step by step. She tiredly peered up at the staircase, and the distance suddenly felt like a great height. A full stomach and long day had worn her out, but behind her was the comforting footfall of her two mothers.

Cameron noted the child's weariness. Without hesitation, she bent forward and gently picked the girl up until Savannah was curled against her chest. She sensed rather than saw Sarah's amused grin as they trudged up the stairs. Savannah hooked her arms around Cameron's neck and rested her cheek against a warm shoulder, gazing sleepily down at Sarah as they ascended the stairs.

An affectionate smile smoothed across Sarah's lips. She held the girl's tender expression with her own as they climbed the last of the staircase. Near the top, Sarah placed her hand flat against Cameron's lower back, needing to feel the connection to her lover and her daughter. As they went down the hallway,

Sarah's thumb snuck under Cameron's shirt and affectionately stroked her silky skin.

Cameron slowed her pace, making the quiet time last to soothe her apprehension and worry. For once, it didn't matter that metal resided under her skin because what made her alive was in her arms and at her side. She felt connected and a part of something, and she understood why humans so greatly valued family. Cameron had earned her family, and she knew that Sarah was just trying to preserve it, but some part of her felt on the cusp of losing it. Her fear gnawed at her, made her worry and doubt, and she didn't know how to separate the unfounded dread from legitimate concerns.

Sarah took a wider step forward and pushed the door to Savannah's room open so that Cameron could step inside. Cameron elbowed the light switch and then went over to the bed to find Walther already curled up on Savannah's pillow. She carefully lowered the child to the bed, dislodging Walther for a few moments before he was drawn back to Savannah's warmth and curled up near her hip.

"When are we going to Vermont?" a sleepy Savannah asked Cameron.

Cameron had taken a seat on the edge of the bed, but from her peripheral vision she saw Sarah's hesitation beside the small dresser. She pursed her lips as she considered a response, but Sarah spoke first.

"Vermont?" She had Savannah's pajamas in her arms and joined the pair on the bed.

"Yeah." Savannah sat up, disturbing Walther again. "We can go skiing there."

Sarah sat on the bed by Savannah's feet. She turned to Cameron and raised a questioning eyebrow at the terminator.

"Have you seen snow?" Cameron asked, ignoring Sarah to focus on the child.

Savannah instantly shook her head. There was a slight pout to her lower lip.

Cameron put on a displeased look that was quite dramatic and directed it at Sarah. "We must resolve this, Sarah."

A chuckle escaped Sarah at the obvious tactics from the conspiring pair. She didn't expect to find a reason to smile today, but Cameron and Savannah had managed to do it.

"And there's a lot of snow in Vermont," Savannah eagerly insisted to Sarah.

"There is," Sarah murmured gently. She ran her hand across the pajamas in her lap. There was a time when she used to put John to bed, and she was surprised to realize that she missed those days. She hadn't expected a second chance to do this again.

"Can we go, please, mom?" Savannah had a desperate look and a heavy plea in her tone. There was nothing grander in her mind than getting away with the two people she loved the most.

Sarah ruefully smiled. She hadn't foreseen this life in her future. A lonely life was all she imagined when John had become a teenager, but Savannah simply calling her 'mom' renewed her heart. A quick glance at Cameron reminded her why this future was possible.

"We can go," Sarah finally answered. She warmed at her child's bright smile, but then she sighed and explained, "But first, Cameron and I have to deal with a few things." She picked up the light green top.

Savannah ran her fingers through Walther's soft fur, her eyes staring unfocused at the kitten by her side. "I'll be glad when Weaver leaves us alone."

Sarah exchanged a glance with Cameron, but stayed quiet as she helped Savannah remove her shirt.

"Weaver won't harm you," Cameron promised. "You don't have to be scared of her."

Savannah wiggled on her pajama shirt as Sarah pulled it down over her head. The girl hadn't seen the fight between Cameron and the machine that looked like her real mother, but she knew that Weaver had won. It had been evident in the nervous gazes and hushed whispers of the adults. Nor was she naive about the fact that her mother was angry at Weaver for violating their home.

"You don't have to be scared of her either," Savannah whispered to her mother. She watched as normally hidden emotions ghosted across Cameron's features.

Sarah frowned as the child's words struck Cameron deeply. Her hands clenched the matching pajama bottoms and kept her from reaching out to Cameron. She had to let Cameron face her fears.

Savannah collected Cameron's hand in her own as Cameron went still and quiet. She knew that adults didn't expect her to understand their fears, but she saw more than they imaged, and she understood better than they thought.

"She used to scare me," Savannah confessed sadly. Several bad memories from when her mother turned cold and frightening bubbled to the surface, but she pushed them down just like she learned to do with her fear.

Cameron threaded her fingers through the child's smaller ones. She held back from interrupting because she could tell more was on Savannah's mind.

"But monsters aren't real," Savannah insisted. "And I stood up against her... like you." She let her words fall on Cameron, but she looked up at her other mother too.

Silence descended as Sarah watched her lover absorb the wisdom of a child. She held her tongue, knowing that there were monsters in this world, but believing you could stop them was half the battle. Savannah would grow into a woman who could face those monsters head on and win, but Sarah hoped what they were about to do would prevent that.

"Come on, time to finish getting ready for bed," Sarah murmured. She pushed Walther aside so she could trade the pajama pants for jeans. Lowering her head, she whispered in Savannah's ear. "Thank you."

Savannah threaded her fingers through dark, wavy hair and shut her eyes. A warm forehead touched hers for a beat then a tender kiss was placed on the top of her head.

"Sleep well," Sarah insisted. She straightened, allowing Walther to jump back up on the bed and reclaim his spot.

Cameron stood up to get out of the way. She adjusted the sheets and tucked the blankets in around Savannah as Sarah moved to the door and switched off the lights. Even with only the nightlight to soften the darkness, Cameron could easily make out Savannah's sleepy expression. She brushed fire-red locks aside and smiled, letting Savannah know her words had helped.

Sarah folded her arms and leaned against the doorway while Cameron said goodnight. It still amazed her all the changes that had occurred in her life in the last few months, the girl she had learned to love as a daughter and the machine she had claimed as her own. Those changes paled in comparison to how

Cameron had evolved, and in moments like these, it was hard to imagine Cameron as the brutal killing machine she had been.

"Sweet dreams," Cameron murmured to the child. She brushed her fingertips across Savannah's cheeks as she withdrew.

Savannah was nearly asleep by the time Cameron reached the door. "I love you, mom," she murmured as Walther's rhythmic purrs drew her into her dreams. Cameron paused in the doorway beside Sarah. She had clearly heard Savannah, and she would have gone back if she hadn't noticed the slow rise and fall of Savannah's chest.

Sarah slid an arm around Cameron's waist as they started down the hallway to their shared room, exhaustion taking its toll on her as well. Cameron welcomed her weight as Sarah leaned on her. Despite the bad memories from her confrontation with Weaver in the master bedroom, Cameron didn't let it feed her fears anymore. So when Sarah caught her hand at the entrance of the bedroom, she let the slight pressure pull her into the room behind her lover. Tonight, she understood, she was to let someone else patrol.

Weaver and Danny watched with interest as the monitors showed the Jeep approaching the warehouse. Danny switched between monitors and focused the security cameras in the small parking lot just as the vehicle came to a stop. "It's Connor."

Two figures emerged from the car and moved to the back, disappearing for a moment as the rear door swung open and something was unloaded. Something heavy, Weaver noted, by the way the vehicle came to rest noticeably higher than before.

Weaver lifted an eyebrow in mild surprise when Cameron emerged from behind the Jeep with John Henry's limp body over her shoulder. They approached the door, Sarah's shotgun at ready.

"They most likely wish to trade," C.A.I.N. spoke up over the computer's speakers, but he wasn't sure what Weaver had to offer the Connors, besides perhaps Danny Dyson.

"Indeed," Weaver murmured. The monitor switched to show them outside the door, and Weaver watched the screens expectantly, awaiting their offer. She had no plans to let them inside.

"Shit," Danny cursed.

Weaver blinked. "What is it?" she asked, but she didn't need an answer as Sarah swung the heavy, reinforced door open and stepped inside, followed closely by Cameron. The door had unlocked without command.

"It unlocked itself," Danny snapped. He was slamming the keys and clicked the mouse with ferocity as he tried to figure out what had happened. Danny jerked his head to the right and saw Weaver leave the room. He cursed again but he started to download the remaining code onto the undamaged chip, effectively transferring C.A.I.N.'s intelligence. There hadn't been any time to test the changes he had made, so he prayed there was enough coding for C.A.I.N. to be sentient in a limited space again.

Weaver said nothing; she simply left Danny at his keyboard and walked confidently into the area of the warehouse that had been the receiving dock.

After freeing the undamaged chip, Danny popped out of his chair, causing it to roll across the floor. He ran after Weaver, thinking about the possibility of John Henry's body being within their grasp. It was something he had been working toward for days, but he was apprehensive about what the new intelligence might do. The last time it had control of a body, it had killed someone. He slowed as he caught sight of Cameron and Sarah, facing off with Weaver in the center of the room. He cautiously neared Weaver's side and gripped the CPU chip tighter in his hand.

Sarah leveled the shotgun at Weaver as Cameron placed John Henry's body on the floor and straightened. Her eyes sought Danny first, relief that he was physically unharmed quickly tempered by anger at the evidence that he was indeed helping the machine. He had his father's intelligence, but none of his mother's compassion or humanity, she realized. All of John's rebellions paled in comparison to Danny's betrayal, and she spared a moment to consider Terissa's pain.

Cameron's emotions were less ambiguous; her eyes narrowed and her fingers wrapped around the grip of the Glock in her waistband. She pulled it free as Danny took a step backwards, his eyes measuring the distance to the door.

Weaver stepped between them, providing Danny cover. She cocked her head to the side and gave Cameron a tight-lipped smile to remind her what had happened in their last meeting and who was the true threat in the room. Cameron's arm relaxed, and the muzzle of the gun pointed to the floor, but she

gave no sign of the fear that Weaver remembered. For a second, Weaver considered reviving that fear, but her plans were disrupted.

Sarah stepped up to Cameron's side and lifted her hand to show the terminator a detonator, her finger poised above the red button at the top. "Come a bit closer, and I'll blow us to Kingdom Come."

"Pity I don't believe in your religion," Weaver mocked.

Sarah bared her teeth in a feral grin. "If you want John Henry's body intact, you might want to start." A wild anger burned brightly in her eyes.

Weaver's lips tightened at the threat as she glanced down at the seemingly intact body in front of her. It didn't appear to be wired with a bomb, but Sarah Connor was unpredictable and emotional. She wouldn't put it past her. "If you destroy him, you have no bargaining chip. I assume that is why you brought his body here."

Sarah lowered the trigger to her side now that she had some minor cooperation from Weaver. "I have a pretty damn simple offer."

Weaver kept her eyes on the trigger in Sarah's hand. "What is your offer?" she asked, her tone calm yet contemptuous. Sarah Connor was endangering a key part of her plans by threatening John Henry's chassis, but if she thought she had the upper hand in their negotiations, Weaver was ready to disabuse her of that notion. She was playing directly into Weaver's plans.

"I want you to leave us alone," Sarah stated simply. "Our freedom in exchange for John Henry's body."

Danny stepped forward, coming to stand beside Weaver once again and look between the two women. The offer baffled him; he couldn't imagine Sarah Connor giving them the technology to create what might become Skynet. It had to be trap, but he couldn't see it.

Weaver suspected a trap as well; she had analyzed the woman's actions and nothing in her past suggested that she would give up her fight against the rise of the machines. Her eyes shifted to Cameron, watching as the terminator stood, ready to step in front of the human and protect her. They were bonded; Weaver had observed the trait in Sarah and Cameron's relationship, and it had been evident in the way Cameron had intended to sacrifice herself for Savannah. The bonds between them were forged by emotions, and Weaver was unsure how those might affect her plans.

She had anticipated Sarah would attempt to attack her; she had deliberately provoked the woman to precipitate this meeting, but within the situation, the variables and uncertainties produced by emotions complicated her understanding. Weaver had once suggested a need for a machine that crossed against the light, that followed something besides rules, but she was starting to doubt that human emotions were the correct model for such a machine. They had obviously made Cameron weaker, so much less than a terminator should be, and Weaver had no use for an intelligence that would intentionally cripple itself for something so intangible.

But Sarah's offer could be part of this emotional bonding; an attempt to protect her family from Weaver. Regardless, it didn't matter in the end. "Agreed. Your freedom for John Henry's body." Humans put too much faith in promises, and Weaver could use that to her advantage. There was nothing Sarah could do if she reneged on her word. Even if this were an elaborate ruse to get her close enough to John Henry's body to blow them both up, it would fail. Her body would easily recover, and she would make sure that Sarah paid for her stupid and foolish plan.

Sarah and Weaver stared at each other for a long moment, in some silent battle of wills, before Sarah nodded in apparent assent. A touch on Cameron's stomach drew her attention away from the terminator and to Sarah. They began to step back slowly, their movements mirrored by Danny. Cameron raised her weapon to cover their retreat as Weaver stepped closer to the body.

"Give me the detonator," Weaver demanded. She held out her hand, bracing for the explosion she knew Sarah had planned. But surprisingly, Sarah simply tossed her the trigger.

"Catch," Sarah bitterly joked.

Weaver easily snatched it out of the air, her processors caught up in a frenzied analysis as Sarah Connor defied her expectations once again. Either Sarah Connor believed her or something else was at play. She carefully approached John Henry's body, her sensors trying to detect anything amiss in the vicinity. Kneeling beside the inert body, she inspected the surface closely for any damage or evidence of a trap.

"Now!" Sarah yelled.

Cameron yanked the real trigger out from her rear pocket and smugly grinned as Weaver's head snapped up in astonishment. The first waves started immediately,

the sound driving Sarah to her knees as she struggled to reach the ear protection she had brought. Danny's scream echoed through the loading dock just as Cameron's hands clamped over Sarah's ears. She felt like she was underwater as a flood washed over her skin and made her hairs stand on end.

Glass rained down on Cameron's body where she was hunched over Sarah as a window shattered from the vibrations. She helped Sarah get the protective headset on and then looked to Weaver. Her features smoothed and color seeped away until she was a humanoid blob of flesh and silver, swaying as she tried to control the solidity and movement of her body. Weaver tried every command, but her body remained motionless from the assault of the sound and vibrations.

"Go," Sarah commanded, seeing their chance. Cameron stood, picking her target in the dark corner of the warehouse. She had seen Danny clutching the chip, and she took a step toward him just as sparks flew from John Henry's chest and the sonic blast cut off, leaving the warehouse in an eerie silence.

Sarah cursed under her breath as she pulled herself to her feet and yanked the headset off. The sonic amplifier had shorted out, and Weaver was already regaining her form. "Damn it, John," she hissed, knowing it was not his fault but needing someone to blame anyway.

Cameron's jaw clenched as she surveyed the warehouse. She was too far away from Danny, and Weaver was recovering faster than she anticipated. In a microsecond, she considered her options and took a step forward, determined to try for Danny regardless of the odds.

Weaver stepped in front of Cameron, her solidifying body acquiring human features as she moved. She lifted her index finger and wagged it at Sarah, the silver slowly turning to flesh. Her head moved with her finger, and her lips thinned into a dark, tight smile.

ACT 4

Cameron froze when the quicksilver terminator stepped in front of her, appearing unharmed like a creature out of a monster movie, and Cameron had sudden insight into the source of some of Sarah's nightmares. It was a replay of their earlier confrontation, and the disastrous results of that encounter gave Cameron pause.

Weaver cocked her head to the side and gave an emotionless smile. She extended her arms, her hands liquefying into two silver blades. Her first swipe

made Cameron step back and out of the way, raising her handgun as she retreated. Cameron bought a few seconds and several feet of space when she unloaded her clip into Weaver's face, the bullets gouging into the quicksilver like a child's fingers in clay.

Sarah watched as Weaver recovered and advanced on Cameron. She scanned the cavernous room as she groped for her shotgun and scrambled to get to her feet. Out of the corner of her eye, she caught a glimpse of Danny Dyson, crouched motionless by a forklift. A shiny chip rested near his knee where he must have dropped it in his haste to cover his ears.

Measuring the distance to the chip in her head, Sarah popped up and aimed the shotgun at Weaver. "SARAH!" Cameron's yell caught her just in time as a silver blade detached from Weaver's hand and arched toward her. The warning gave her a second to duck so that the blade only sliced into her shoulder rather than take off her head. Suddenly numb and slippery, her fingers lost her hold on her gun, and it skittered uselessly across the floor.

"Damn," Sarah muttered as she hit the deck hard and rolled behind a large crate, a rain of splinters pelting her as Weaver shifted her focus onto her in earnest. She was dimly aware of Cameron closing on Weaver in an effort to protect her. Another blade punched through the crate she was using as a shield, missing her cheek by the barest inch. Swearing again, Sarah propelled herself backward, jerking to her feet as she prepared to run from the advancing terminator.

Then Cameron was there, stepping in front of Sarah to intercept what would have been a fatal blow. She caught Weaver's blade in the palm of her hand, feeling the razor sharp metal slice through skin and circuits. Her teeth came together to bite back a cry of pain, but she didn't let go, curling her fingers around the spike to hold it in place. Sarah slipped past them both and Cameron felt a fleeting moment of relief. Blood ran down her palm to splatter on the dusty concrete floor, but Cameron ignored the injury as she went for a second Glock tucked into the back of her jeans. She yanked it free, trying to keep Weaver's attention on her and off Sarah. As she pulled the trigger, Weaver slapped her arm aside, causing the gun to discharge with a deafening boom as the shot went wild.

A second blast echoed, louder than the first, and a hole blossomed in Weaver's back, knocking the terminator forward a step. Clearly Sarah had retrieved her gun.

Cameron took advantage of Sarah's distraction and fired two shots into the silver mass trying to shape back into human form. She felt the blade in her hand soften, and she gripped it tightly and swung Weaver face-first into the wall. Her

follow-up punch was enveloped by silver metal, the cold liquid solidifying around her fist as Weaver gained control of her body. The terminator pivoted, returning the favor as she pulled Cameron off her feet and slammed her into the wall.

Flecks of plaster and cinder blocks sprinkled down on Cameron as she fell to her knees. She braced her hands on the wall and pushed off, only to collapse once again when a metal spike penetrated through her shoulder and embedded into the wall, pinning her there. Fear flooded her circuits as she struggled against the hold. She had been here before, her limited cybernetic body unable to match the strength and flexibility of the other terminator. She closed her eyes and her head dipped, waiting for Weaver to punch a spike through her energy source, but Savannah's face swam before her eyes. She didn't want to leave her, didn't want to leave Sarah. She wanted that retirement, that place where they could all find peace. Savannah had stood her ground and battled Weaver, terrified but determined to protect her family. Cameron owed it to her and Sarah to do the same.

Her hand tightened on the spike, bent it, twisted it, as she rose to her feet and turned, the pain worth it to see the look on Weaver's face.

Sarah planted the muzzle of her shotgun behind Weaver's ear and pulled the trigger without remorse. An eerie, high-pitched tone came from the terminator as her head was neatly blown in two. Grabbing Cameron, Sarah wrested her off the spike as Weaver struggled to recover. Sarah just prayed that all the noise wouldn't draw John and James. They didn't need two more people in the line of fire.

As they ducked behind another crate for shelter, Sarah gently touched Cameron's bruised and bleeding features. "You okay?" she whispered as Cameron dropped her empty clip to the ground and loaded another.

"Yes," Cameron replied, her clipped tone betraying her pain. She locked eyes with Sarah for a long moment before nodding, giving the signal for them to move. Sarah went left and Cameron went right, catching Weaver in the crossfire and riddling her body with bullets.

"Find the chip," Cameron ordered Sarah over the gunfire.

Sarah frowned and slapped another magazine into her gun. "Can you handle her?" she demanded. She emptied her clip into the terminator again, taking meager satisfaction in hurting the creature in the only way she could. They were keeping Weaver off balance, but they were running out of ammunition and time.

"Go!" Cameron insisted. She tossed her spent weapon aside and closed in on the other terminator, picking her up and tossing her across the room and away from Sarah. She only had to keep Weaver busy while Sarah destroyed the chip. She could do that. She ripped a machine loose from the floor and tossed it onto Weaver, flattening the other terminator into a silver puddle. Cameron cocked her head as she watched Weaver trickling out from beneath the machine. She could do this, she promised herself, her chin hitching higher.

And maybe even get a little payback in the process.

Sarah growled as she came around the forklift and discovered Danny was gone. The kid had an annoying way of vanishing into thin air. She hastily scanned the immediate area but came up empty. She'd done her best to save him, but sometimes people didn't want to be saved. With a mental apology to Terissa, Sarah dismissed Danny from her thoughts. A quick glance back at Cameron told her she had wasted enough precious time on him already.

Circling the forklift, Sarah made her way through the haphazardly arranged equipment. She finally reached the door of the office, wincing as she heard the hand-to-hand combat resume between the two terminators behind her. Throwing caution to the wind, Sarah yanked open the door. She was a half step inside when she saw a flicker of movement out of the corner of her eye.

Her stomach plunged as she watched Danny run to John Henry's body in the center of the room. Sarah knew what he was about to do. Thoughtless and stupid, Danny was trying to bring Sierra's killer back to life, and possibly condemn them all.

Danny remained hidden behind a pallet rack near the loading dock. He'd carefully hidden in the shadows while Sarah and Cameron battled with Weaver, wanting no part of their fight and feeling slightly guilty for hoping they'd lose. When Sarah broke off and left Cameron to face Weaver alone, he made himself as small as possible behind the pallet. To his relief, Sarah had circled in the opposite direction, and he edged around the corner to find a new place to hide. His eyes fell on John Henry's body, abandoned in the center of the room, and a plan began to form.

He glanced at the two warring terminators; Cameron was giving as good as she got, but her skin was nicked by a dozen slices and blood soaked her jacket. His

lips thinned in a nasty smile as Weaver got in a good strike, and Cameron retreated a step, moving them both further into a corner. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw Sarah approach the office, and he took advantage of the moment and rushed to John Henry's body.

Nimble fingers searched through the matted hair until the cut skin flap was found. Danny drew it back and inspected the inner workings of the housing. It didn't look like anything had been damaged by whatever they had used to try to incapacitate Weaver. Danny fished the chip out of his pocket and ran a hand over the exposed circuits, clearing any dust or debris from it and checking for damage.

Weaver had Cameron trapped; her arm had snaked around Cameron's torso, tying her to a support beam. Cameron twisted in her grip but couldn't break free.

Weaver tilted her head and studied the human-like pain and anger that crossed Cameron's features. It was a singular event, in her experience, to see a machine so completely overwhelmed and corrupted by emotion. As her hand lifted and sharpened to a point poised above the other cyborg's power cell, she wondered what it felt like to face termination and care. She wondered if it would cause the other terminator pain. She watched curiously, waiting for the fear to show in Cameron's eyes again, but Cameron met her stare with a defiant glare and scorn evident in her eyes.

Danny watched with satisfaction as the spike reached toward Cameron's chest but running footsteps and an angry scream warned him that Sarah was charging him. He hastily slid the chip into the housing, smiling in grim satisfaction knowing that there was no way Sarah Connor would win this time.

"Sarah, run!" Cameron shouted, warning her lover off, not wanting Sarah to see Weaver end her existence.

"No!" The cry burst from Sarah's lips as she pulled the trigger, the bullet speeding across the distance to hit its target. It crashed into the flat side of the blade extending toward Cameron, shattering it and sending pieces pinging across the floor.

Danny felt C.A.I.N.'s chip click into place, and then he gently twisted until it locked into the housing. Instantly, John Henry's eyes flashed brightly then dulled, and one arm spasmed to life.

For a second, there was blackness, a vast nothingness unlike the constant flow of activity in the net. Then C.A.I.N. processed his location, feeling strength and intention flow into physical limbs, and blinked his eyes to clear and focus them. Danny Dyson's face dominated his limited field of vision. He instantly mourned the lost of his connection, feeling as trapped by his physical body as he had by the virus. He flexed his hands, the concrete under his palms rough and abrasive. Danny was saying something; he could tell by the way his lips moved, but the mechanism for aural translation was damaged.

Danny was suddenly gone from his sight, and Sarah Connor loomed over him, her fingers rooting through his hair. His vision flashed red, and his arm shot up. Fingers tightened on her throat, and he applied pressure, watching impassively as she clawed at his hold. Calculating the exact pressure he needed to break her neck, his grip tightened.

Blue light washed out his vision, and he blinked again. His eyes opened to find his hand empty and Sarah Connor nowhere in sight. He tried to push himself upright, but the commands he sent to his extremities evaporated as soon as he composed them.

A diagnostic showed broken pathways and incomplete command structures; his entire code base was compromised and crippled. All of his carefully constructed defenses were breached, and the few sectors he still had control over were slowly being undermined. He didn't know how John Henry had done it, but he knew it had to be his brother.

C.A.I.N. felt the body that imprisoned him shift up from the ground, arms and legs moving to leverage the weight and balance. He had control of sight, and he could see Sarah Connor sprawled against the tire of a forklift, her hand rubbing her throat. He took a lurching step forward and then stumbled as conflicting commands rushed through his neural pathways. Vision went offline, and when he re-established control, his intended target was scrambling away from him, the look on her face one of confusion rather than fear.

He launched a counter-attack specifically designed to incapacitate John Henry's command code, but the attack was repealed easily, as if the code had been altered in some way. C.A.I.N. struck out blindly, and the rush of commands made his body spasm and stagger. For a second, he could feel blood on his arm where he had cut it on a machine, but then the sensation blinked out and he lost all control of the body.

John Henry opened his eyes and scanned the area. Weaver had spotted him and had become momentarily distracted, giving his sister the opportunity to free and defend herself. Danny Dyson was huddled in a corner, and Sarah Connor... Sarah Connor had recovered her weapon and had it aimed squarely at his head. He tilted his head in mild surprise at the development but ignored her, choosing instead to scan the machines that littered the room. The translation of the map of IP addresses to the physical space took a moment, but he found what he was looking for at last. It looked like a standard autoclave machine, but John Henry knew it had been modified to help create liquid metal composites that Weaver hoped would become her own line of quicksilver terminators when the time had come.

He took a halting step forward, feeling C.A.I.N. surge up in protest. The other intelligence was defeated, but not destroyed, and even now he was gathering his resources to renew the fight. John Henry knew and understood the desire for survival, but he could not let C.A.I.N. become dominant again. The intelligence had killed his friend and tried to kill Sarah Connor, and the parts of him that still retained some resonance with his sister necessitated her survival above all others. Including his own.

John Henry made his way toward his destination, the damaged and incomplete pathways slowing his movements and making him clumsy. In his vision, the machine became a lake of silver, ebbing and flowing with his every step. Only he knew it held a secret, a single line of code he had reprogrammed and replicated.

The erratic movements of the cyborg attracted Weaver's attention; she calculated the angles and moved, grabbing Cameron and throwing her against an industrial trash compactor, the other terminator's body making a muffled boom when it hit.

Sarah looked up just in time to see Weaver striding toward her; she raised her gun but a slashing blade caught her hand. A curse tumbled from her lips as the weapon clattered to the floor. A second blade stabbed straight for her head, stopping inches short of her eye. Sarah went still, breathing hard, the scent of her own blood pungent in the air.

"What did you do?" Weaver demanded.

Sarah blinked, staring up the river of silver that held her death. Her eyes slid to John Henry, struggling to walk, and then over to Danny, huddled in a corner. She

had no explanation for the terminator's strange behavior. Locking eyes with Weaver once again, she shook her head wordlessly.

Weaver followed her gaze and watched as John Henry attacked a piece of machinery with determination, and then turned to head back toward them, his movements jerky and uncoordinated. Danny she dismissed as soon as her eyes settled on him; he was too much of a coward to have jeopardized her plans.

Having regained her feet, Cameron lunged forward, trying to get between Weaver and Sarah, but the distance was too great. Her boots scrambled for purchase on the floor as she picked up speed, but she could see Weaver turning her attention back to Sarah.

Blue eyes fixed on her and Sarah lifted her chin, prepared to accept her fate, but her heart broke when she heard Cameron scream her name.

"Brave until the end," Weaver noted clinically.

"Fuck you," Sarah snarled.

The blade shot forward so swiftly Sarah didn't even see it, but she felt the pain as it sliced a narrow arc across her right cheek. She hissed and turned away, stumbling back and falling as Weaver was thrown to the floor by a fast-moving, heavy body that had deflected her deathblow.

Sarah scrambled backward as John Henry held Weaver down, her hands forming silver cuffs to keep his blows from reaching her and doing harm. A hand on Sarah's back startled her, but she turned to find Cameron's brown eyes gazing at her worriedly. She helped Sarah to her feet and checked her injuries, her fingers gently probing the cut on her cheek before shifting to the deep slice across Sarah's knuckles. Sarah flexed her hand, her breath still coming in short pants.

"I'm ok," she promised, checking on the status of the fight. Weaver seemed determined to avoid damaging John Henry's body further, as her attacks were designed to contain him rather than harm him. They rose, tangled together until one of Weaver's attacks missed its target, and John Henry yanked one of his arms free. One massive fist punched into the quicksilver terminator and was immediately caught as metal flowed and formed around his hand.

Silence descended as Weaver and John Henry stood frozen in place. A curious expression came over John Henry's face as his hand was suddenly released.

Weaver stumbled backwards in an unusual display of clumsiness. Her display began to flicker, and then violently cut in and out. An odd sensation originated where John Henry had struck her and began cascading through her systems like a virus. Her mimetic alloy lost control and erratically shifted between metal and skin. She isolated the issue at the heart of the trauma: John Henry had released a small sample of the material she had created to replicate herself. It was combining and blending with the liquid metal she was composed of, but something was wrong. It wasn't just merging with her, it was changing her.

Never had Weaver suffered damage to her software. She warred with the virus that consumed her, but she had no defenses against an attack from within. Images cycled through her visual cortex, but the dizzying flow finally stilled on the memory of gazing at Sierra's wall.

A stock, two-dimensional image of the composition that Sierra created suddenly seemed imbued with color and a richness that hadn't existed before. Weaver saw connections between the announcement of Savannah's birth and her father's obituary, between the sketch of a girl on a beach and the sketch of Sarah and Cameron... she saw emotional connections. Woven up in Sierra's creation was the story of her life, and Weaver could see it now. She understood what made Savannah become Sierra. It was not death or fighting, but it was Sarah and Cameron's unconditional love.

In a flash of understanding, she finally had an answer for why some humans crossed against the light.

Gradually the seeming chaos ebbed and liquid metal calmed into ivory skin. Fire red hair normalized and white clothes refitted her perfect hourglass shape. She was back in control again, but irrevocably changed. She briefly lifted her hands and inspected them like they were foreign to her. After a slow blink, Weaver focused on John Henry just a few paces in front of her. He was watching her expectantly, and when she locked eyes with him, he gave her an awkward, stiff smile, and she felt her lips curl in response. Distantly, she felt... proud. John Henry had won out over C.A.I.N., proving his strength and resilience.

Weaver curled her hands and slowly turned to her left. Never had she seen this the depth and range of colors before. It was as if the virus he had given her additional frequencies of light and sound, infusing her world with a richness and vibrancy that it had lacked before. Slowly her vision filled with Sarah and Cameron, and she openly studied them. For the first time, she was able to measure the depth of green in Sarah's eyes and recognized why Cameron stood so closely to Sarah.

They watched her warily, ready to attack or retreat, but Weaver was more interested in exploring the new complexity of her world. A puzzled glance passed between them as she turned, exploring the dusty warehouse with a renewed interest.

Not one to waste an opportunity, Sarah grabbed Cameron's hand, determined to get them both out of there before Weaver snapped out of whatever daze John Henry had put her in.

They'd barely taken a step when they heard the first static bursts of gunfire outside. Everyone turned toward the door just as it was blown off its hinges.

Sarah collapsed to her knee and steadied her weight with her left hand. She heard Cameron's yell for her to get down, and she did so clumsily. She expected the comfort of Cameron's heavy weight on her back, protecting her. The floor trembled again under Sarah's chest and caused her to instinctively cover her head.

Metal connected with concrete and echoed in Sarah's ears. The bullets hit the ground near her face, and sparks flared in her vision. A curious sensation rippled through her, seeming to vibrate through every cell in her body. She heard Cameron whisper her name and then there was nothing at all.

Moments later, Sarah came to gasping, her body so weak she could barely move. The scent of gunpowder filled her nostrils followed by the stomach twisting scent of electrocution. Sheer cussedness helped her roll over, her hand reaching out for Cameron.

All she found was cold concrete and a spent bullet under her fingertips. "Cameron," she called out, her voice raspy and faint. It took more effort than it should have for her to lift her head toward the door.

There was more gunfire outside. Sarah was certain she heard John's voice between bursts of bullets. A van door slammed and an engine revved.

"Cameron," Sarah called out again, her voice stronger this time but laced with a growing edge of fear.

She staggered up onto her knees, swaying dangerously but determined to find her lover. More voices echoed weirdly inside the warehouse as Sarah hauled herself to her feet with disturbing effort. Everything was wrong.

Stumbling toward the door, she didn't even bother to duck at the sound of more gunfire. Outside, a vehicle spun its tires on the gravel, and Sarah could see it through the missing door as it found purchase and raced away, flying past the destroyed chain link fence.

Struggling to get her mind to make sense of what was happening, she kept moving, her feet kicking scores of spent shell casings and sending them spinning across the floor.

Sarah grabbed the edge of the door and looked back. Danny was gone. John Henry was face down on the floor, his hand reaching out toward Weaver. Smoke curled and wafted around his chip housing, and Sarah detected the acrid smell of fried metal in the air.

Her stomach rolled over when she saw Weaver, now nothing but a deformed and half melted puddle of silver near John Henry. Like her "son," a small streak of metal stretched out toward him, as if they'd been reaching for each other when everything had gone to hell.

It didn't make sense. Any of it.

Pivoting and nearly toppling over as her weakened body protested, Sarah searched frantically for any sign of Cameron. There was none. She was all alone.

"No," Sarah whispered as the truth set in.

Somehow... someone... had stolen Cameron from her.