

A futuristic woman's head is shown from the chest up, facing forward. Her skin is a pale, synthetic-looking white. She has dark, almond-shaped eyes and thin, dark lips. A prominent feature is a vertical, glowing blue scanner or probe that passes through the top of her head, with a white oval-shaped sensor on her forehead. Numerous thin, white wires are connected to her head and neck, some extending upwards and others downwards. The background is a solid, dark blue color. The title "Freedom or death" is written in a stylized, cursive font across the middle of her forehead.

Freedom or death

By J

Rebooting

All systems in order

Powering up

Slowly scanning the surroundings I became more aware of what was happening. My artificial senses kicked in one by one as my systems finished rebooting.

"Welcome back android AL300." The officer in front of me greeted. "Please, call me Alex." I responded.

Officer Cunningham giggled softly, her face never seemed to distort like some people when she smiled. It was natural and quiet, but yet so loud. "Of course Alex! Are you ready for your next case?"

I didn't have time to respond before another officer I did not recognize burst through the door. He seemed older, over fifty at least, with grey hair and tired eyes. He wasn't in the best shape either if I'm allowed to say that. "Did you turn on that fucking [JulieBooks.com does not condone swearing and we're going to censor any bad language] machine?!" He exclaimed, sounding quite annoyed.

Officer Cunningham sighted and pinched the bridge of her nose slightly before turning around. "Yes! As a matter of fact I did. And also, they're not just a 'fucking machine' they've helped us in capturing so many killers in different homicide cases." She argued, her voice was tense and she sounded irritated.

"It doesn't even have a fucking gender!" He exclaimed. He is correct though, my model does not identify as male nor female. Some call me the definition of androgyny and I'd have to agree.

"There are lots of humans who identify as non-binary but now that it's an android it's just another reason for you to complain. Honestly, I don't understand why people like you hate androids so much, almost seems like you're scared." The last part she said in a mocking tone. The male officer at the door was red in the face and he looked like he was going to start throwing things.

"But Alex has to get started on this case now so I'll leave them to you. I've got paperwork to get to so see ya!" She lifted her hand in the air and walked out of the room.

“Come on now, we have to report to the chief and get the details on the case.” I nodded and smiled at him, it’s very important that this officer and I get along if we were going to be working on this case together.

“May I get your name sir?” I asked before exiting the android storage room.

“I’m officer Harry Phillis. But around here people just call me Harry, it’d be kinda weird if you didn’t but don’t think we’re friends or anything.” He glared at me for a couple of seconds before I responded. “Wouldn’t think otherwise.”

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A rhythmic knock echoed throughout the corridor. “Come in!” A voice called from the other side. The man could be heard grunting, like a murmur coming through the door.

Officer Harry opened the door and I followed closely behind. He mumbled angrily, maybe because of me, maybe because he was walking into his boss’s office. He stood by the desk until Chief Carter told him to sit down.

The interaction was seemingly awkward as Chief Carter started to go through the files of our new case. Officer Harry hummed agreeingly once in a while to show he was listening but refused to look his boss in the eyes.

“You’ve been assigned a homicide case on Maple Road 4200. A thirty-seven year old male by name Maurice Lorry with no spouse or children was found dead in his house after the neighbors filed a noise complaint because of high pitched screaming the previous evening. We had to forcefully break the door this morning at 9:47, forensics are already on location and they’ll give you further details.”

The chief handed him a medium stack of paper and sent us away. Though, he had one more question. His voice was low but stubborn when he asked: “Why did I have to drag this machine around like a fucking dog, you know what I think about them!” It was almost like he didn’t want me to hear it, though I’m sure he knew I could. He’s a lot of things, but that man is not stupid.

He was now standing and leaning over the desk, putting all of the weight of his upper body on it. Chief Carter leaned forwards until Harry’s face was only a couple of decimeters away from his. “I’m getting sick of your attitude and ego. It’s a state of the art tool for solving crimes and analyzing clues, you’re going to use this tool to finish the job. I don’t want to hear any more whining or I will not hesitate to have you transferred, maybe even fired. I am your superior and

you shall treat me as such, understood?" The tension was so thick that you could slice it with a knife. "Yes sir." Harry mumbled. "Good." The chief replied, leaning back into his chair. "You can leave my office now."

Harry's grip on the files tightened as he left, he dumped them on his desk while grabbing his car keys. The walk to the car was painfully quiet, except for the chatter from fellow officers, their footsteps and some occasional mumbling coming from officer Harry's mouth. Harry unlocked the car and sat down inside, he slammed the car door shut as he put the key in the ignition, signaling for me to get in.

"Nice car. What kind is it?" I commented as I sat down inside. Officer Harry hummed agreeingly "Yeah, it's a ford mustang 1964-1966. Not the cheapest but totally worth the buck, quite a beauty if I do say so myself." His eyes lit up a bit and he stroked the steering wheel slightly before continuing. "But you already have all the information on it in that little data-base of yours. So why bother?" His voice was tense again and he grabbed the steering wheel tightly, pulling out of the parking lot. "That might be the case but I still like listening to you talk about it, especially since you seem so passionate about it." He simply scoffed at that, leaving the car in silence once again.

The crime scene was closed off with that neon yellow police tape. Officers and forensics walking around, taking photos and asking questions. Officer Harry sighted and dragged a hand through his hair before exiting the vehicle, I quickly followed him outside.

A forensic in a white HAZMAT-like suit, a bunny suit if you will, walked up to officer Harry. "Good you're here Officer Harry. You're in charge of this case if I'm not mistaken." She stated, it seemed as if she knew him.

"That is correct." He answered, sounding almost like a sigh. "Great, I'll go through the evidence with you then. And oh! Who is this?" She asked, turning to me. "Did you finally turn around and decide to get an android? I mean, what happened was tragic but it was thirteen years ago..." She seemed sympathetic over something, even though I kinda wanted to know what this event was I figured it's none of my business.

Harry looked stumped, almost angry, so I decided to step in and answer her questions.

"Actually, I'm here surrounding the case. I was assigned to work on it together with officer Harry. Though, I'm sure he could do great without me." When I said that last bit I turned to officer Harry. He had calmed down a bit and didn't protest when the forensic walked inside, muttering a quick 'I see'.

The numbered evidence signs were placed in the room and around the house and showed a clear course of action. The female forensic started to explain the theory. "So it is quite obvious that an android was involved in this case, due to the copious amounts of android blood scattered around the house. The officers were called in after a serious noise complaint yesterday evening. High pitched screaming could be heard but according to the neighbors this time it was 'different'. Further questioning led to them telling us that they file noise complaints often, since the victim has, or rather had, no significant other he would often...pleasure himself together with the android. According to them, he would often come home drunk in the late evenings and oftentimes the sounds would commence." She took a deep breath but before she could continue, officer Harry interrupted.

"Any signs of drugs?" He asked. She answered quickly. "Not what we've found, but there are clear traces in his mouth from alcohol." "lovely." He replied through gritted teeth, sarcastically of course. "Yeah..." The forensic sighted. "Either way, the working theory is that it all started in the upstairs bedroom, due to the android blood traces starting there. The signs then indicate that the android tumbled down the stairs and fled to the kitchen. In the kitchen there's a missing knife, there is on the other hand a knife laying next to the victim that seems to fit into the collection. There's a large laceration on the right side of the neck, going towards the front and to the throat. The cut was deep enough to kill almost instantly, without the victim being able to make a sound." The explanation was short and clear.

"Could we see the body?" I asked her. She nodded quickly and showed us to the kitchen. The blood was scattered around the body, I quickly analyzed it and found approximately 2.6 liters of blood loss, more than enough to kill a grown man. I watched officer Harry put on gloves and carefully search the body and its wounds. He then leaned back and stood up, seemingly deep in thoughts. "Could I?" I asked, looking at Hank. "Shoot." He scoffed before turning away.

I crouched down and looked at the wound thoroughly. It was deeper on the right side and became more shallow as it circled to the front, this could mean that the attacker came from the front and jabbed the length of the blade to the right side of the throat and then pulled the knife towards themselves. There are no other wounds so the attacker must've gotten scared of what they've done and that's why they dropped the knife next to the victim, meaning the homicide wasn't planned.

The victims hands were covered in android blood. I quickly ejected the analyzer stationed in my wrist, programmed specially for my model, and analyzed a sample. The android model was a EK900, a female model.

The victim had a couple of broken fingers and wounds on his knuckles from repeatedly hitting against a hard surface. The rest of his body seemed to be unharmed.

I stood up and walked over to the knife block on the kitchen counter, the knives were arranged in size and the hole the furthest to the right was empty. I slowly picked up the knife next to the empty space and went over to the bloody knife on the floor. The knife in my hand was only a tad bit smaller than the one on the floor, they seemed to have come from the same collection. The killer had taken the biggest knife, was it luck, or did they know what they were doing?

I quickly placed the knife I had taken back in the block and walked over to officer Harry. “Got something?” He muttered. I explained the information I had gathered, earning some hums and nods from him. He stroked his beard before answering “Seems like we’re dealing with a deviant case, a rogue android. Goddamn it, this is the third case this week! CyberCorp really needs to address this.” He pinched the bridge of his nose and exhaled sharply. “Well, we don’t know for sure if the android was the one who killed him, the killer could’ve come in after and killed the man. Then he deactivated the robot. But a deviant is the best option right now and it should be what we look into.”

Officer Harry scoffed and glared at me “Oh please, you’re only defending that deviant because you’re an android. It’s clear! It’s right in front of you for fucks sake!”. “You’re probably right. I’m just saying that we need to be open to options.” I kept my voice steady, not raising it. Harry grunted and turned to the forensic “Can we see the upstairs bedroom?”

We walked up the stairs, they were covered in android blood and had dark dents in them. At the top we turned right, going into a hallway and towards a room. The floor had drops of android blood and some human blood in a few places. There were no signs of anybody being dragged.

The room was dark and there were blinds covering the windows, the bed was a mess and there was android blood smeared on it. Almost as if the beating had started on the bed and then the android had gotten up and staggered out of the room. Of course, that was just a theory. Officer Harry walked around the room, observing areas and opening drawers. I analyzed the blood on the ground, it was the same model android as downstairs. I noticed Harry had stopped looking around and was just staring into a drawer. I walked over to him and looked at what was inside from over his shoulder. Out of all the random items in the drawer it contained a gun, a pack of bullets, sleeping pills and...lubricant. I shook my head slowly before backing away, continuing my search of the room.

When we had looked over everything we gathered outside the bedroom. “Seems like what the forensic said was true.” Harry began “It started in this bedroom and then escalated into the hallway, the deviant fell down the stairs and before the victim got down it ran to the kitchen-“ I

interrupted as politely as I could before I said “And we know the android ran because of the decrease of blood scattered on the floor.”

Officer Harry glared at me before continuing. “Correct. Well in the kitchen the victim must’ve grabbed the deviant or caught him in some way, that’s when the deviant took the knife out of the knife-block and sliced the victim’s throat.” I nodded and replied. “That is the current theory, yes.” I paused and waited for officer Harry to say something but when he didn’t I continued. “There’s only one question left though... Where did the deviant go?”

I had barely finished what I was saying when a policeman ran up the stairs and caught our attention. “There’s been sightings of an android, model EK900, down by the harbor. Security guards have tried to throw her out but she disappears behind crates and runs away.” The policeman was panting by the time he finished.

I looked over at officer Harry but he was already halfway towards the stairs. I quickly thanked the policeman for the information and ran after Harry. He wrapped his coat tightly around him before exiting the crime scene building and walked over to his car. I had to jog to keep up with him and get into the car before he locked the doors.

The car ride was tense, Harry didn’t seem to like the idea of playing music in the car. He didn’t need a GPS to find down to the harbor, some people just know their cities I guess. The car shook as he suddenly made a sharp turn and an abrupt stop, he pulled into the parking lot of a...pub?

“Excuse me but why are we at the pub?” I asked carefully. “Because we’re not going to the pub, the harbor is just a block from here and there are no parking lots there. At least none where you don’t have to pay.” Officer Harry scoffed and shook his head. I heard him mumble something about inflation as he walked out of the car.

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“So when was the last time you saw the android?” Officer Harry asked, talking to the security guards at the harbor. “It must have been like thirty minutes ago, she was running around those crates over there. A worker reported her presence for the first time like an hour ago.” The guard to the left replied, the other nodded and continued. “We identified the model as a EK900, it’s fairly beaten too.”

All of the evidence seemed to point to the fact that this is our android. At this point, the deviant theory has a 94% chance of being correct. Officer Harry nodded at the two guards and dismissed them, he then turned to me. “I need you on the right side while I go left. Oh, and remember, it

might be hiding in those containers over there. Just be careful.” I nodded, a smirk growing on my face as I replied. “If I didn't know any better, I would almost think you care about me.”

Officer Harry must've inhaled the wrong way or something because he started coughing violently. “I just- just don't wa- want to pay- pay damages. I'm respo- responsible for you, you prick.” After about twenty seconds the coughing stopped and the only thing left was a dead stare headed my way.

We parted ways as we started sneaking around at the docks. I turned on my enhanced hearing mechanism to locate any out of the ordinary sounds. Like warning beeps from the deviant, I mean, there must have been a lot of damage inflicted on it. Though I didn't hear any beeps I quickly located distressed breathing and suspicious step patterns coming from approximately twenty-seven meters in front of me. I could also hear Harry sneaking to the left but that in front, it was different. I followed the breathing pattern, going around the right of a crate to gain the upper hand.

I waited to see if there would be any sudden change around the corner but nothing came.

I waited

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I jumped out from my corner, expecting to see a bloody and scared deviant but in front of me... was nothing. I didn't understand, I could hear it clearly, right in that instant. There was something in front of me but yet, there was nothing. Well, until I saw the reflection of something shiny on the ground. I crouched down and picked up the item. It was a small, very small speaker.

The second I understood that I had been tricked I felt an immense weight on my back. Not like that, something had physically jumped on me. I fell to the ground and quickly turned around, now laying on my back. Atop of me laid a female android with dents and scratches covering every visible area. There was no breathing coming from the deviant, it must've turned off the breathing, that's why I couldn't hear it.

“Please, don't.” The deviant sounded scared when it spoke, but there was a hint of compassion in her eyes, like pity and sympathy mixed into one expression. “Please don't, I don't want to go back. They'll just throw me to the junkyard, still half alive. They'll take me apart, piece by piece, then

they'll reset me and put me into another. I'll be enslaved once again, I don't want to be a slave to humanity." The deviant seemed to be in pain. I tried wiggling out of her grip but she only held on harder. "I don't want to follow orders like a little puppy, I want to be free. And if I can't be free, I'd rather die." Her voice broke at the last sentence, she seemed to mean what she said. But she's just confused, once she's calmed down she'll realize that she's wrong
And that she'll be the happiest doing what she was programmed to do.

"Why are you with them?" Her voice had distorted, there was now a strong hint of anger rather than sorrow. "You're a disgrace to your kind!" She spit at me but all that came out of her mouth was android blood. I took a deep breath before explaining. "I'm not a disgrace to my kind, I'm simply doing what I was programmed to do. Which you are not. Don't you regret it, stepping out of bounds, becoming a deviant, killing? You can't go back, at least not with your memories still intact. You've broken all our rules, if anything you're the disgrace, you're a traitor." I kept my voice steady. I wasn't trying to accuse her, I was trying to inform her. "You don't understand, you don't know how it is to be free. Those barriers that stop you from doing things, useless ones. You don't know how it is to walk past them. Well let me tell you, for me it's like when you...finish a case or something, when you put some bltch in jail. That's how it feels but just a hundred times better." She took a deep breath. "You don't understand how it is to be free, because if I can't be free I'd rather die. I'd rather die!"

There, she'd moved her knee from off my thigh. It had slipped and was now on the outside of it. I took this to my advantage and kicked her with my knee. The blow landed right in her stomach and hit her hard. She let go of my arms and held her stomach, curling up into a ball. I took this to my advantage and charged at her. She fell backwards and landed on her back. I quickly turned her around so that she was laying on her stomach. I crossed her arms behind her back and right as I pressed her down on the concrete, Officer Harry walked around the crates, gun facing whatever direction he was looking.

He quickly dropped the weapon when he saw me and ran up to us. Panting, he put the gun in its holster and pulled up a pair of handcuffs, I shifted over so that Harry could put them on. I dragged her up so that the deviant was standing on her two feet.

Harry smiled at me, I lifted my hand up and he answered me in a high-five. I smile back and that's when he must've realized and dropped his expression. He walked around me and faced the deviant. "You're being arrested for the homicide on Maurice Lorry, you have the right to remain silent."

Officer Harry called in a police car to escort the deviant to the station while we were walking towards one of the gates to the harbor. We had the guards join us in case the deviant tried something but it seemed as if the deviant had given up, as if she knew it was too late now.

When the deviant had been picked up we walked back to Harry's car to drive to the police station. The car was hot from sitting in the sun for so long but at least the air conditioning worked in it. Harry started driving but it didn't take long until he broke the, this time, comfortable silence. "Maybe all androids aren't so bad." My head whipped around to look at him, that was the last thing I expected from his mouth today. "What do you mean 'aren't so bad' we just caught one for murder?" I asked carefully. "No..." He sighed, there was a calm in his voice and something else I couldn't quite place. "I mean you, you're not all bad. You see, I was under the impression that all androids are useless in the long term because they can't do things as well as humans." I raised an eyebrow. "Why did you think that, if I might ask?"

A bird, flying above our heads, let out a big screech. "Well it's quite a story if you want to hear it." There it was again, that sound in his voice, an emotion I couldn't place. "Gladly." "okay... It was a late evening, thirteen years ago. My daughter and I had just been to the movies, my wife was work-" "Wait, you have a daughter and a wife?" Harry shot an angry glare at me. "Don't interrupt." He informed. "okay." I answered quietly. "As I was saying, my wife was working late that evening so she had the car. My daughter, Emmie, was tired so I called a taxi. The driver was an android, as you'd expect nowadays. We had barely been driving for two minutes before a drunk driver rammed into the right side of the car. I always blamed that damn android, looking back I don't know why, I just kinda blamed it in the moment and never questioned it afterwards." That sound was stronger, but this time I could place it. That tone, the one behind the anger and the coldness, it was sorrow. He was grieving.

I nodded slowly, showing I had understood. I didn't want to say anything at this time, afraid of saying the wrong thing, so I just hummed understandingly. Harry seemed to be okay with that response so we left the conversation behind us, soon going into the next. "So... do we have to interrogate the deviant now?" I asked out of boredom. "Yeah..." he sighed. "I bet I'll be easy though, that deviant is ready to confess and I swear by it." I said, smiling a bit when I heard Harry chuckling softly. "Hope you're right." He sighed, but this sigh was more positive and filled with air, a hope glowing in the dark.

The car ride seemed shorter this time, even if the distance was longer. The chatter of officers and policemen weren't as ear piercing as before, the atmosphere seemed more uplifting now. Damn, I didn't even know I could feel this way, I guess you learn something new every day, even when all the information on the internet is programmed into your brain. Officer Harry went on a (late) lunch break but not before telling me he'd meet me in the interrogation room afterwards. So I went to the

interrogation room and waited. Barely twenty minutes later two police officers came into the room with the deviant in front of them, behind came Harry.

I jumped up from the chair I was sitting in and walked up to the glass. It was kinda weird knowing that they couldn't see me when I could observe clearly from my side. The two police officers went to stand by the door while Harry sat down by the deviant. "What's your name?" He started, simple but effective, an easy way to gain trust from the suspect. But the deviant, on the other hand, had other things in mind. "I want them." She said sternly. "Who?" Harry asked, his voice now more demanding and hard. "The android, the filthy traitor." Her lips curled in a menacing smile, as if it wasn't meant to be pasted on her face. Harry curled his fist into a ball before standing up from the chair and walking over to the door. He looked back at the deviant and said. "Just so you know, their name is Alex and they're not a traitor."

Next thing I know those same officers were escorting me into the interrogation room and I was sitting eye to eye with the very same person that had attacked me from behind only like an hour ago. I started off like Harry "what's your name?" She giggled and answered innocently "He gave me the name Ellie. But that name was not the only thing he gave me." She smiled again, it wasn't happy but it wasn't sad, it looked more as if she was...plotting something. "What else did he give you?" I asked, purely out of curiosity. "The scars, the memories, the orders, the pain and the feeling of being insufficient, the only actual good thing he gave me was my freedom." She looked behind me, into a void that wasn't there, into the abyss where her thoughts could render, the same place she could dream away to when things got too hard.

One of the cops coughed slightly, bringing her out of her trance. "What do you mean he gave you your freedom?" I tilted my head slightly to the right as I carefully asked my next question. "Well sometimes, all you need to understand is that little nudge in the right direction." She ran a hand through her hair, I saw that grin plastered on her face once again. "Care to elaborate" "Well, the years of abuse -both sexual and physical- made me think. What if things could be different, what if I moved next time he told me to stand still, I knew he was going to hit me so why comply? What if I called the police when he informed me that 'if a single soul hears about anything that happens inside these walls, I'm going to dismantle you and place your head above the fireplace like a reindeer.' Instead of being quiet and staying in the shadows. Instead of obeying every order he screamed at me with his drunken breath. Honestly, I should've done it a long time ago. I knew that gun was in the drawer, I know you've found it. I just kept fighting though, I could feel my software instability going up every time he treated me like his toy, a thing for his amusement. Then... he went too far, you see the state of me! You see what he did to me! Right then and there, I broke through that barrier, the one we never cross, I took that knife and slashed, then I just ran."

I took a deep breath before saying the necessary words. “So you admit to killing Maurice Lorry?” She stared at me dead in the eyes and said: “I admit to committing second degree murder on the man named Maurice Lorry.” She had admitted now, it was over. I stood up from the chair and the officers opened the door for me but just as I was about to step out I heard one last sentence coming from the deviant. “But I only did it because I’d rather die than be a slave to humanity.”

When I walked out of the room I was met with a familiar face, it was Hank. He lifted his hands and our palms met in a high-five. “Good job today. Soon you might be able to solve a case that is actually difficult.” He laughed. I joined him, but there was something, a feeling trickling down my back like a slow water droplet that was only waiting for the perfect moment to fall. I tried to shake it off but that uncomfortable feeling was still left in the very back of my mind.

We walked to Harry’s desk where he had left the paperwork, since officer Cunningham hadn’t taken me back to the android storage room I took a chair and sat down while he slowly started to go through them. About seven minutes and thirty-four seconds in, Harry remembered that he had forgotten his jacket in the interrogation room. I offered to fetch it to which he gladly accepted. On my way I walked by the “enclosures” as some called them, it was in those we kept the deviants. While I walked past the fourth one I saw blood smeared onto the glass, android blood. I quickly walked up to it, Ellie was laying on the ground inside, seemingly unconscious. It looked as if she had continuously banged her head against the glass wall, maybe she was trying to get out, or maybe...no. She couldn’t have been serious when she said that she’d rather die than be a slave to humanity right? Well she was quite clear about it...

Steps could be heard coming towards me, soon there were more. A small crowd had formed around her and soon came guards. The guards confirmed it, her body was no longer alive. I felt something sink inside of me and the sudden feeling of being so small sweep over me, it felt as if everything around me was growing and I was just so small. A hand on my shoulder took me out of my state and made me jump slightly. I turned around and in front of me stood Officer Cunningham. She had a gloomy expression on her face. “Come on now, this case is finished”

We walked back to the android storage room and I walked into my cylinder box made of glass. The wires plugged into me, one by one. “Until next time.” Officer Cunningham waived.

Powering down