



The air was always still during the autumn.

The trees sang with the promise of upcoming snows, glittering and layering carelessly all over the land, icing over what was once a fruitful creation of nature, sprouting for decades and decades only to be snuffed out by a frigid winter chill. Life itself covered upon the earthly terror of the winter, rabbits and foxes both digging frantically to curl beneath the delicately warmed earth, watching what was once their home morph into an icy landscape.

Tranquil was a better word for it, he tried to reason. The old man stood outside a rustic, small city building looming above him, the property in such bad shape it was a crying shame that the authorities weren't called to destroy the hazard of a structure. The once beautiful lab was sinking in on itself in an eggshell white mess, patched with little effort by the one who dwelled inside and called this place his own. The coppery scent of

rust made the white-haired elder squint his crystalline blue eyes, his long locks ruffling slightly in the fall breezes whistling past him. He shoved his hands into the cotton lined pockets of his umber vest, and gave an uneasy sigh.

Beneath his jeans and vest lay an ache the man would rather forget. Harsh injuries from weeks upon weeks prior, still scarred and healing from the life-changing event. He had been lucky to crawl away with his life, gasping for air as blood dribbled down his chin, his vision whirling and blurring like a camera lens stuck in the pelting rain of a storm. He didn't know how he got to the nearest hospital, but the facility had offered him a peaceful environment to heal, so he had no further dwellings on the matter.

What stung worse than the deep burns and gashes, however, was the overwhelming sense of betrayal.

To see his own labor of love, his own creation he had worked his whole life to bring forth- an empathetic, artificial being who could express compassion and love to the playful youth- twisted and contorted into a battle ready monster ached deeper than any injury. To see his own product of his tireless nights of studying attack him, and cause him so much ceaseless agony, when she should instead be gently and softly embracing him...it pained him more than any of the bones he had broken and fractured in his career.

But even if what had taken place churned at his stomach and twisted his chest until he felt bile sting his sinuses, he couldn't leave her in such an undignified wasteland of rust and soggy beams barely supporting the inner structure of the walls. She had already been trapped in her own personal hell for years, left in a vacant building that was

once filled to the brim with hyperactivity; no matter what *he* had done to her, he couldn't just abandon her and leave her to the potential threat of preying vermin ripping apart her soon to be wilting body for nest scraps.

With only a deep inhale to satiate the tightness clenching within him, the man took a pace forward and pressed his hands against the heavy steel doors, pushing them open with a shrieking caterwaul of the built up rust and grease, protesting against the movement against the bolts. He squinted into the paley lit rot, before stepping in with a clack of his brown leather shoes, worn from years of wandering and work. He heard the dripping of water, as if a faucet had been turned on by slippery fingers that forgot to turn that miniscule last inch on the dial, making the water squeeze down below.

He knew exactly where she would be. David was still healing from his own injuries- the old man had figured out the vile person who had modified his loving bot had been attacked by her soon after he awoke in the hospital. Word travelled around of a stumbling individual with thick blood running down his face, clotting his auburn brown hair and making him look like "an extra straight from a slasher movie"- as his informant had stated. Which meant the marvel he had created by his own hand years ago was most likely slumped somewhere with nothing much to quell her inevitable boredom.

And, as he had assumed, he caught sight of her within minutes of peering down halls and wearily turning on his heel once he nearly slammed nose first into slick walled dead ends within some of the unfinished inner infrastructure. He wrinkled said nose at the absolute reek of the infested environment, narrowly avoiding an inhabited cobweb that

hosted a disgustingly large arachnid. The moment he caught sight of *her*, he let the tiniest of whispering breaths escaped his clenched teeth; she was safe...physically, at least. David didn't have the nerve to rip her apart and leave her wires sparking all over the moist, concrete floors, lighting gas fires and burning the remnants of what once was an artificially intelligent bot that rivaled even the most softspoken and caring of humans. She was leaned against a table, the chair crashed and broken against the floor long ago. She was idly tapping her foot, the animatronic feline growling lowly to herself- the sound deep and rumbling, echoing within the cavities of her fluffy cream chest, once white a decade ago.

Her brown fur was absolutely filthy from her roaming around- the magenta tabby markings were darker than they should have been, and her faux fur was mangled and tattered, reflecting her current, stinging neglect. She flexed her newly metallic claws, clicking them against the table and scraping off a few curling splinters of mahogany wood. Her deep purple eyes, dull and once filled with internal cheer and gratitude towards her existence, were focused distastefully on the flooring, filled with a never ending bitterness glazed over with sheer malice and ice.

The mere sight of her pathetic condition made his heart ache, and he clutched his chest, the fabric of his vest worn thin by the sudden pressure. It deeply irked and distressed him that this had happened to her, that he hadn't been able to cease her suffering and take her back home with him- to the place she truly belonged. Not this filthy excuse of a property. She didn't seem to notice his presence in the shadows at all, her purple ringed ears swiveling and twisting as she dug her claws into the table, the old

wood giving way easily as she dented jagged holes into the surface.

He would risk harm just to bring those familiar eyes onto him once again. Even if they were filled with morbid glazes.

"Oakly?"

His voice shook against his will, and he felt his whole body instinctively twist with unease as those purple eyes snapped up to him, her magenta brows furrowing in instant disharmony upon seeing him. Her white muzzle shifted as she scowled, baring her sharpened teeth and snarling like a rabid dog inflicted with rabies, thrashing its head and howling for the screaming reverberating in its skull to stop.

"Oakly," the robotic feline hissed out with seething fury, her ears flattening against her head. "What are *you* doing here?"

"I've...come to rescue you. From this place." Oakly felt like the back of his neck was blistered in flames from how heated and nervous he felt, his long white locks clinging to the skin and plastering due to the building sweat as he faced such a threatening posture. "I've come back for you, Oakly. I'm sure you've seen what...what David is really-"

"Shut up!" Oakly lurched forward suddenly, dirtied cream paws extended, claws curling with the promise of ripped flesh and gushing blood, pumping directly out of his arteries as his heart tried to cope with the hit. Oakly stepped back rapidly, his hand darting to his jeans pocket and the lump that awaited there, feeling like this object was his only

defense against a futile argument that was destined to end sourly. "Don't you *dare* come in here and think you're any better than him! You're the reason why I'm stuck like this! You left me to be degraded and tortured for *years*! Defenseless for your amusement-!"

"You misunderstand!" Jenny's blue eyes were wide with shock and distress as the feline animatronic only prowled closer. He pleadingly tried to speak again, but the bot seemed to decide she was done for him as she aimed to knock him into the ground. He gasped, twisting to narrowly avoid her full body blunt slam, his fists clenching as she stumbled for a moment and fiercely attacked air, expecting it to be the elder she was aiming for with his delicate butterfly flesh.

Jenny decided to take the opportunity after his mind fumbled for a split second. He darted his hand into his jeans pocket, the rough fabric catching his skin in a fashion that would give him a rash or blister later- but he didn't much care. What he drew forth was a sharpened black stick of sorts, the tip spiked with steel conductor spines lines with virtually invisible curves that cut and sliced at the surrounding fabrics. Without any hesitation, before Oaky could turn herself around, he practically launched for her with agility he didn't know he still had within him, stabbing the spines on the sticks directly into her back, just below her shoulders. The following ripping and static sounds pierced Jenny's ears, but it was all ended and faded back into stuffy, groggy silence as Oaky slumped limply, the man not able to support her full weight as she half slumped to the ground like a puppet thrown to the trash after the puppeteer decided it no longer wished to perform with the particular sculpted being.

That was when Jenny allowed himself to relax, and breathe uneasily as he

withdrew the stick with a yank, glad the forceful system override had worked in his favor. He deposited the handy device back into the safety of his pockets, straightening up to wipe the sweat off his brow with the back of his hand.

He could fix this.



He ruined
HER

The image shows the words "He ruined" and "HER" written in a black, hand-drawn, slightly slanted font. A red blood splatter is positioned between the two lines of text, appearing to drip down from the word "ruined".

By the time Jenny was able to haul the excruciatingly weighted bot back to his own pristine lab, he was trembling over the ceramic, marbled counter tops, panting and dry heaving from the nearly unbearable mission. But he knew he had to get to work, if he was to salvage what remained of his beloved creation and proudest work. He gathered his bearings as fast as he could, looking around rapidly at his desk and the steel lined door across the room. He needed to remove her dangerous modifications and half-wipe her memories- he really, *really* hoped that was an option, and he dare not think about a full cleanse of her inner core.

He set to work- propping her up against a supported chair and using bolts to keep her mouth temporarily open as he moved aside the faux fabric tongue, using his rotary blade to dull back her teeth to the semblance of their former rounded glory. Once he was

done with that, he carefully cut open the underside of her arms, as if he were a surgeon working on the most important member of the government with the most difficult complications. He removed all traces of the deadly lazer and the mechanisms that released it, before he stitched the fabric back together, twisting her arm to make sure all was in order.

After that process, he painstakingly carved logs of wood to replace her steel claws with rounded, smooth wooden ones unable to do any harm whatsoever. He did so as fast as he was able, and removed her inner chip to plug into his monitor to wipe her memory file- at least, to the extent he desired.

Once he messed with the coding for just a few moments, he seemed to find a way to do things his way. He removed the chip from his computer and placed it back within Oaky, booting her on and biting down hard enough to make his jaw tremble upon his fragmented nails.

In an instant, Oaky raised her head, all of her limbs and facial features twitching with new found power. Her dull eyes were blank, no longer filled with such hateful kindles promising death upon the beholder. Jenny felt a joyful smile ease onto his face, and he started shaking with eagerness- was she back? Was she really back? He could hardly believe it, and he wasn't realizing he was holding back his breath until his lungs began screeching for intakes of oxygen. Oaky began to blink slowly and look around the brightly lit room, staring at the cushions and blankets in the corner of the room and raising her brows, twisting her paw idly against the arms of the padded chair. Jenny

opened his mouth to ask how she felt, but Oaky beat him to the speaking as she turned her full attention to him in languid movements.

"Who are you, sir? I seem to be in a new environment unfamiliar to my database. Do you need any assistance?"

In that moment, he felt everything shatter.

For a moment, he only stared at Oaky, jaw agape in confusion, poised to ask her if she was joking around. He took in a sharp inhale, feeling the room around him cool as he became aware of the blood rushing within his ears and head, bursting like a torrent preceding a hurricane ready to destroy the coast. He couldn't hear, speak, breathe, see- he became absorbed in his own world of stillness and an evergrowing sense of...of anguish.

Oh, how it hurt. How it hurt when bile splashed up to the back of his throat, how he gasped pitifully for air and clutched his chest as if he were trying to smother and suffocate the ache and agony in his heart. He felt dizzy, and he couldn't stand- no, he was never standing, what was standing? He was on his knees now, and all he wanted to do was bash his head into the floor and never rise again.

He couldn't even fathom what was going on- his own thoughts were racing by too fast for him to sort through, and he wasn't physically able to register the concerned touch running down his spine. The edges of his vision were darkening, and he felt hot tears spill down his cheek like searing candle wax melted by pure molten lava, never to harden again.

His hands became wet, too wet with his tears, and he choked on his sobbing as he wept, as he felt the world rumble around him. He grasped frantically for something, anything, but was only meant with vacant space.

Jenny couldn't breathe.



Sparky blinked his cerulean eyes open at the sound of rustling, and his gaze turned to the dark, linen lined bed beside him. There the taut face of Jenny was visible- the man having passed out crying all over himself and wailing in grief as...as *she* desperately asked what was wrong with this man she had never seen before.

All the plastic yellow and black splotched canine bot was able to gather from the fumbling mess of his creator was something about a memory wipe going wrong- but he stayed apathetic to the whole thing, not able to feel any empathy for the man. He brushed a fingered paw over his collar and scowled, the dented claw marks over his right eye

glinting in the faint light of the room.

Hearing something crash from the main lab area, Sparky heaved himself up and clenched his teeth, opening the door with raining thundercloud emotes glittering in his gaze like the ghosts of what once was. He was met with the sight of a tabby bot frantically picking up a dropped piece of scrap metal, huffing as she placed it precariously upon the countertop in the exact position it had been in before.

Upon seeing her, Sparky felt a deep, seething anger alight within his chest.

The betrayal was worse than anything. The fight where he had so desperately wanted her to snap out of it was still fresh in his mind, as firm as a tree as old as millenia, never able to be taken down and spreading its roots all over the surface of the Earth until it was consumed by nothing but its gnarled bark twisting beneath the soils and sands of the world.

To think this was the same individual he had willingly cuddled against.

Tch. How foolish.

He wouldn't be able to forgive her for what she did. For the pain she brought to him as she fearlessly slashed his face with the intent to leave him mangled on the slick concrete...

It was too much. He turned away from the tabby as soon as she curiously turned towards him; and he retreated to the room.

To think he once cared for that traitor who stole his "heart".