

I sat on the cold, hard bench in the police station, staring at the gray walls around me. I could hear the buzz of distant voices, the shuffle of feet across the tile floor, but none of it mattered. Not now, not in this moment. My mind kept drifting back to what had gotten me here in the first place—breaking into that house. The theft. The rush. The triumph I felt when I found the stash of cash and jewelry hidden behind a picture frame in the master bedroom. It felt good, you know? It felt right.

The house was empty when I slipped inside. The owners were out. I had time. They wouldn’t even notice until they came back and realized half their valuables were gone. But just as I was about to make my escape, that’s when things went wrong. They came home early. I didn’t panic. I kept cool, thought I could slip out the back, but they caught me, plain and simple. Just like that. The man’s hand grabbed my arm, and the woman screamed for help. Before I knew it, I was sitting in a police car, headed to the station.

I had done worse things in my life, of course. Theft wasn’t exactly a new thing for me. But this? This was different. This time, they’d caught me. I wasn’t just another stray caught in the act, another nameless, faceless criminal who had no ties to anything or anyone. No, I was a problem now.

I leaned back against the wall, trying to get comfortable in this uncomfortable chair. The room was sterile, cold, unwelcoming. It smelled faintly of cheap coffee and desperation, the usual aroma of a place like this. The cops at the desk looked busy, but I could feel their eyes on me from time to time, making sure I wasn’t about to break out or do something stupid. Not that I would. I wasn’t dumb. I knew better than to make a scene.

The thing is, I was almost an adult. I was close, so close, and that little fact was my golden ticket. I wasn’t fully grown up, not legally speaking. The law had this weird loophole—just enough wiggle room to slip through and get away with a little bit of freedom, a little less responsibility. They knew it, I knew it. I wasn’t going to get thrown in jail for this. Not unless they really wanted to make a mess of things.

But that didn’t mean I was going to walk out of here scot-free. The cops didn’t know what to do with me. I wasn’t a juvenile, so they couldn’t treat me like one. But I wasn’t fully an adult either. And I didn’t exactly have a guardian who could come pick me up or vouch for me. Hell, I didn’t have anyone who cared. I didn’t have a family. I was a fucking orphan, and I didn’t care. I never had.

As I waited, the thoughts started to swirl in my head. Maybe I could just stick it out until I turned eighteen. Then I’d be free, no longer stuck in this system that didn’t give a damn about me. But right now? Right now, the cops were stuck with me, and I could see it in their eyes. They had no idea what to do.

"Hey, uh, what should we do with this one?" one of the officers called out to the group. His voice wasn’t particularly loud, but I could hear the uncertainty in it. They were all looking at each other, trying to figure out how to handle someone like me. Someone who wasn’t really a child, but wasn’t really an adult either.

One of the other officers, a heavier-set man with a thick mustache, shrugged. “We don’t have a lot of options. Kid’s clearly not a hardened criminal, but he’s also not exactly a poster child for rehabilitation.” He paused. “We could just... hold him until his court date and let the judge figure it out tomorrow.”

“Hold on,” said another officer, a younger guy who had been quiet up until now. “There’s that new place. You know, the lab we’ve been working with? I heard they’ve got a new experiment, and the senior personnel has decided to help reformed the criminal.”

I felt a jolt in my chest. An experiment? My mind quickly raced through the possibilities. I didn’t know about this so-called “lab,” but I’d heard rumors. There were whispers in the station about strange projects, things that went beyond normal police work, things that might be able to “help” with certain... problems. But help wasn’t really what I needed. I wasn’t the type to trust anyone or anything that promised solutions. I could handle my own problems.

The officer with the mustache nodded. “Yeah. I’ve heard the same. I’ve seen their work firsthand. Strange stuff, but they might have a solution.” He turned to the guy who’d spoken. “Let’s go ahead and call them. We’ll have to wait until tomorrow for the scientists to show up, but maybe they can do something.”

Another officer sighed, rubbing his temples. “This is getting weirder by the day. Alright, call them. Let’s see what they’ve got.”

The decision was made. I didn’t get a say. They shoved me into a holding cell, locked the door, and left me alone to stew in my thoughts. Alone with nothing but the buzz of the fluorescent lights above and the faint murmur of the officers outside.

I couldn’t help but laugh a little to myself. An experiment, huh? Maybe I could turn the tables. Maybe whatever this “lab” was could help me out. Or maybe it was just some weird side project to deal with the likes of me. I didn’t know. But it didn’t matter. I was in the system now, and I knew how to play the game. I wasn’t going to let it get the best of me. I just had to wait until tomorrow and see what happened next.

Well, that’s actually what I was thinking at first.

The trial came faster than I expected. In fact, it was so quick that I barely had time to prepare myself for what was coming next. One minute, I’m sitting in that cold holding cell, trying to make sense of what had happened the night before, and the next, I’m standing in front of a judge.

I’ve been in and out of trouble before, but this was a new experience. I expected the usual—probation, a slap on the wrist, maybe a few months in juvie or whatever the hell they were calling it these days. But no. This time, things were different.

The judge, an older man with graying hair and a tired face, didn’t waste any time. He read the charges—breaking and entering, theft, and all the usual stuff. And then, without much hesitation, he turned to me, his eyes cold and detached.

"You’ve been caught in the act," he said. "You’re a repeat offender, but you’re also a minor. While your actions were clearly wrong, the circumstances surrounding your age and the nature of your crime leave me with limited options."

I stood there, feeling like I was about to hear the usual routine. Maybe a couple of years in some juvenile detention center. That would’ve been the most predictable outcome. That’s the way this thing usually goes, right?

But then came the surprise.

"In light of your age and lack of a substantial criminal history, I’ve decided on an alternative sentence: community service. You will be assigned to work in the community for an undisclosed amount of hours, under supervision, and without any compensation."

I blinked. Was that it? Community service? Just like that? No jail time, no prison, no record of a criminal conviction? Just a bunch of hours spent picking up trash, maybe, or doing something else equally useless?

I felt a rush of relief. It was almost too good to be true. I didn’t even feel bad about what I’d done. The house I broke into had more money than they knew what to do with. And besides, they probably had insurance. So, what did it really matter?

"Wait," I said, before the judge could wrap up the proceedings. "Community service?"

He nodded. "Yes, community service. But it won’t be as simple as you might think."

Before I could say anything else, the judge glanced to the side, and that’s when I saw him. The man in the white lab coat.

My heart skipped a beat.

Without doubt that he’s the doctor belong to the lab I’d heard the cops talk about the day before. The experiment they mentioned. I didn’t know what it was, but the way they said it, it didn’t sound like anything I wanted to be a part of. And yet, here I was, standing in front of a judge who had just sentenced me to... him.

The judge gestured to the man in the white coat. "You’ll be under the care of Dr. Mitchell," he said. "He’s from the laboratory we work with. They specialize in rehabilitating offenders through... unconventional methods. You’ll work under our and their supervision for the duration of your community service."

I stared at Dr. Mitchell. He didn’t look menacing, not exactly. But something about the way he stood there—so calm, so collected—set off warning bells in my head. His eyes, though, were unreadable. Cold, distant. Almost clinical.

I wanted to argue. I wanted to scream at the judge for sentencing me to some unknown hellhole of a lab. But I didn’t. What was the point? I wasn’t going to get out of this. I had no choice but to go along with it.

The handcuffs were still on me, the cold metal biting into my skin as Dr. Mitchell stepped forward. He didn’t speak, didn’t offer any sort of reassurance. He simply gestured for me to follow him.

"Let’s go," he said flatly.

I walked out of the courtroom, feeling the eyes of everyone on me. I was sure I looked like some sort of criminal, a lost soul just waiting to disappear into the system. But I didn’t care. I didn’t have time for guilt. I just wanted to get this over with, whatever it was.

We walked to the door of the courthouse, where a black car was waiting. The kind of car that screamed “official,” but not in the good way. I could already feel the tension building in my chest. Where were they taking me? What kind of place was this “laboratory” anyway?

The car door opened, and Dr. Mitchell gestured for me to get in. I hesitated for a second, but then I remembered the handcuffs. I didn’t have much of a choice, did I?

I slid into the backseat, the door closing behind me with a soft thud. The car pulled away from the courthouse, and I glanced out the window. The streets blurred past, unfamiliar buildings lining the way. I didn’t know where I was going. I had no idea what awaited me in that lab.

The car ride felt longer than it probably was, my mind racing with questions. But none of them got an answer.

Dr. Mitchell sat quietly in the front, not looking at me. He didn’t say a word, not even to tell me to calm down or explain what was going on. It was as if he were just waiting for me to get to the lab, to start.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, the car slowed and came to a stop. The building in front of me was nothing special—gray and nondescript, like every other laboratory I’d ever seen in the movies. But there was something about it. Something... off. I didn’t know what it was, but I could feel it in my bones.

The door opened, and Dr. Mitchell got out. He didn’t wait for me to follow; he just walked toward the entrance. I hesitated, looking back at the car, wondering if I could make a run for it. But the reality of my situation hit me. I was trapped. There was no escape.

Taking a deep breath, I stepped out of the car and followed Dr. Mitchell inside. The doors slid open, and I stepped into the unknown.

I thought the worst part was over. I thought I had escaped the fate of being locked away in some cold, lifeless cell, locked behind bars like every other criminal who had come before me. Instead, I was thrust into a new kind of nightmare—one I hadn’t been prepared for.

Dr. Mitchell led me through a long corridor into a room that looked more like a futuristic science fiction set than a real laboratory. The walls were a cold, sterile white, and the air smelled faintly of chemicals and antiseptic. There were other people in the room, all dressed in similar white lab coats, moving around with the precision of machines themselves. The whole place had an eerie, clinical feel—like I wasn’t even part of it, like I was just some experiment waiting to happen.

And I was right.

I tried to move, but Dr. Mitchell quickly directed me to a large glass chamber in the center of the room. It was like one of those isolation chambers you see in movies, where the protagonist gets locked inside before something terrifying happens. But this? This wasn’t part of my sentence, this wasn’t "community service." My mind raced as I realized I was being taken somewhere far worse than I could’ve ever imagined.

“No! This isn’t what was promised!” I shouted, my voice echoing off the cold walls of the laboratory. “This isn’t part of the community service!”

Dr. Mitchell didn’t react. He just stood there, as emotionless as ever, and calmly pressed a few buttons on a panel by the side of the chamber. With a hiss, the door slid open, and he gestured for me to step inside.

I balked. “I’m not going in there!”

But he just looked at me, his eyes cold and indifferent, like he was waiting for me to do what I was told. I didn’t have a choice. My body trembled as I walked into the glass chamber, and the door shut behind me with a final, metallic clang. The sound reverberated in my skull like a warning, telling me that I was already too far gone. I had already stepped into something I couldn’t get out of.

As soon as I was locked in, the cuffs came off. They didn’t need them anymore, I guess. I wasn’t a threat in my current state. A few minutes passed in absolute silence, my thoughts racing through my head, all the possibilities of what could happen next—none of them good, none of them anything I wanted to face.

And then, just as I thought maybe I was going to be left alone, I saw something that made my blood run cold. A mechanical arm extended from above, its long metallic fingers grasping a syringe that looked way too large to be anything benign.

I didn’t know what was inside, but it didn’t matter. I had no choice but to stand there and watch as it came closer, moving toward me with a single-minded purpose.

“Wait—what are you—?” I stammered, my voice rising with panic.

But it was too late. The needle pierced my skin before I could even react. My body convulsed as I felt the cold substance flood into my bloodstream, and I was paralyzed, unable to move or scream. The world around me seemed to blur and warp, my senses overloaded. I felt like I was being torn apart from the inside out, like my very essence was being pulled away.

And then—nothing.

A strange red color appeared on me, and even stranger, it shimmered with a metallic luster. I couldn’t feel my limbs. My body didn’t respond. I opened my mouth to scream, but no sound came out. I was suffocating, trapped in my own body, unable to even flinch as the transformation took hold.

I feel like I'm getting shorter, not a few centimeters, but dozens of centimeters. My head is turning square, like a cathode ray tube television. My stomach is also becoming square, and there are many wires forming on both sides.

My legs were contracting, and in the end, they completely disappeared, leaving only my feet connected to my iron box like body. Even worse, my feet are also changing. The human body structure, which has evolved for tens of thousands of years, is now undergoing deformation like plasticine. The toes come together to form metal, which then splits into tracks. The roller is formed on the inner side and connected to the newly formed power system inside my body. My body is filled with wires and metal, and all my organs are just mechanical components that support my movements.

I don’t know how long it took. It could’ve been minutes, hours, or maybe even seconds. All I knew was that when the pain finally stopped, I was no longer the person I had been. I was something else entirely.

I looked down at myself—or at what should have been myself—and my heart skipped a beat. My arms were no longer arms at all. They were simple mechanical appendages, joints and gears exposed beneath cold metal plating. The hands were clunky, basic—nothing like the hands I used to have, the ones I could use to hold a cigarette or pull a lockpick from my pocket. Now, they were nothing more than tools.

My legs were worse. Gone were my strong, human limbs. Instead, I had massive treads, like those of a tank, rolling beneath me, connecting to the box that now served as my torso. There was no curvature, no human form. Just a rectangular, iron box welded into place.

And my head? I could barely comprehend what I was seeing. A flat LED screen, shaped like an old-fashioned television, where my face used to be. Two thin blue lines flickered on the screen, forming rudimentary eyes. I wasn’t human anymore. I was a machine.

I tried to move, but it was impossible. The treads beneath me churned, dragging me forward as if I wasn’t even in control of my own body. I couldn’t lift my arms, couldn’t make my legs work like they used to. I was confined to this... this thing. A machine. A robot. A slave.

I stared at my reflection in the glass that encased me. The mirror-like surface seemed to mock me as I took in the full extent of my transformation. No longer tall, no longer human. I’d been reduced to a pathetic, emotionless thing—barely two feet tall, no more than a walking box. What had they done to me?

As I stood there, paralyzed by the shock, Dr. Mitchell approached, holding up a small mirror for me to see myself. I didn’t want to look, but I couldn’t tear my eyes away. This was me. This was who I had become.

“It’s a necessary step in your rehabilitation,” Dr. Mitchell said, his voice calm and professional. “You will serve the community in this form, CT-43. You will clean, maintain, assist, and help resolve issues that arise in the local area. If you prove yourself, after a year of service, we will return you to your original state.”

A year. A year of this? I could feel the weight of the words press down on me, crushing whatever hope I had left. How could I possibly spend an entire year in this mechanical shell? It was more than just a punishment—it was a total erasure of who I was. They had stripped me of my humanity, and for what? To help clean up some messes? To “serve” some community that would likely never know what I had been before?

“Don’t worry,” Dr. Mitchell added, almost as if reading my thoughts. “It’s for the greater good. You’ll learn what it means to serve, to be a useful member of society. You’ll find a new purpose, CT-43.”

I wanted to scream. I wanted to lash out, to break the glass, to fight back, but I couldn’t. My body was not my own anymore. The mechanical limbs I once hoped would give me strength were nothing more than shackles. And all I could do was wait for the day this nightmare might end.

They dropped me off in some residential neighborhood, a place that seemed too quiet to be real. The houses were neat, the streets were clean, and everything had this pristine, almost artificial look to it. It looked like the sort of place you'd see in some corporate brochure about the "perfect" community, a place designed to make people feel safe and comfortable, but beneath that surface, I knew this place wasn’t as ideal as it appeared. Not for me, at least.

I wasn’t here because I wanted to be. I wasn’t here because I had a home or a purpose. I was here because I had been forced here. And to make matters worse, I had a "companion"—a robot named Bin, who looked like a literal garbage can on wheels. I watched it roll up to me with mechanical precision, stopping right in front of me as if it was expecting me to bow or something.

"Hello there, CT-43!" Bin's voice crackled through its metallic body, a strange mixture of cheery and robotic that made it sound like it was stuck somewhere between a helpful assistant and an annoying piece of junk. "I'm Bin, your cleaning partner. You’ll be learning from me today on how to be an efficient robot."

I wanted to scream, but my voice came out in an unnatural, electronic monotone. "I'm not a robot," I mumbled under my breath, but Bin heard me anyway.

A flash of light made me flinch. My vision blurred for a second as a sharp pain coursed through my system. I let out a strangled cry. The electric shock stung like nothing I had ever felt before—probably because it wasn’t designed for humans. For me, it was like being hit with a bat.

"Doesn’t matter if you used to be human or not," Bin said coldly. "You’re a robot now, and you’ll follow the rules. Besides, you’re a criminal. You’re lucky we’re even giving you the chance to serve the community."

I gritted my teeth and fought the burning sensation in my circuits. Great. Just great. A robot calling me a criminal. It was like a bad joke that I couldn’t escape.

From sunrise to sunset, Bin and I worked. We swept sidewalks, wiped down fences, scrubbed street lamps, and did everything a robot was supposed to do in this perfect little neighborhood. Bin hummed along, its mechanical limbs moving fluidly like it had been doing this for years. As much as I hated it, I had to admit—Bin knew how to do its job. Me? I was just figuring out how to move in this stupid, robotic body.

By the time the sun dipped below the horizon, I was physically exhausted—though it didn’t matter since I didn’t have any of the human aches and pains. It wasn’t physical fatigue that was getting to me, it was the constant mental strain. My mind felt like it was being drained, like I couldn’t escape the weight of everything I had become. I couldn’t even recognize myself anymore.

As the last rays of light disappeared, I stood there, wondering if I could take a break for even a moment.

"So, Bin," I began, my voice still crackling with that weird, robotic undertone, "Where do I sleep?"

The mechanical trash can turned to me and blinked—well, if you could call it blinking. Its eye-like sensors shifted, and I imagined it was trying to show some sort of emotion. "Sleep? Robots don’t need sleep, CT-43. We work, and we recharge. You’ve been collecting solar energy all day, so you’re good to go. We’ll keep working through the night."

Wait, what?

I stared at Bin, processing what it had just said. "You’re kidding. You mean we work… all night?"

Bin beeped and hummed, giving the impression of a shrug—if a robot could shrug. "I can go on and on. As long as there’s sunlight during the day, I’m good to work all night and keep going. No sleep required."

I didn’t know whether to laugh or punch something. "You’ve got to be kidding me," I muttered to myself, but again, my voice sounded so robotic it was impossible to express the frustration properly. I might have had a body that didn’t get tired, but that didn’t mean my mind wasn’t breaking down under the pressure of this never-ending cycle.

But it didn’t stop there. Bin’s cheerful voice suddenly cut through my thoughts again.

"By the way, CT-43, you’ll be doing patrol duty tonight. I was informed it’s part of your work. The neighborhood needs to be safe, and your job is to make sure nothing goes wrong."

I froze. "Patrol duty? What do you mean? I’m not a security guard."

Bin wheeled around to face me, its mechanical face full of programmed cheerfulness. It pulled a small hat out from somewhere and plopped it on my head. It was a tiny security cap, the kind you’d see worn by some generic mall cop. It looked absurd on me, even more so given my current state.

"You’re part of the security team now," Bin said proudly. "You’ll learn how to do your job, CT-43. Don’t worry. I’ll teach you."

I felt a surge of anger building up inside me, but I couldn’t show it. Not that I could’ve shown it anyway. I looked at Bin in disbelief as it pressed a secret button on my head, which I realized was for activating the "night vision mode."

“By this,” Bin said, demonstrating with a mechanical beep. “It’ll help you see in the dark. You’ll need it when you’re out there on patrol. I’ll be keeping an eye on you.”

I tried to ignore the hopeless feeling welling up in my chest. I had no choice. No way out. No chance of escaping. I was trapped in this endless, repetitive cycle.

So, like the mindless machine I’d been turned into, I followed orders. The night was long and uneventful. I trundled through the streets, rolling along with the treads beneath me, watching the empty houses and dim streetlights, all while Bin was right there beside me, constantly reminding me to stay alert, to look for anything suspicious.

The hours dragged on, and I found myself counting the seconds until dawn.

When the first light of day finally cracked the sky, I was more than ready to drop dead—or at least, I would have been, if I were human.

"Good work," Bin said, as though I had actually done something of significance. "Now, back to cleaning."

I sighed, though I don’t think I even had the energy for that. But I had no choice. I had to keep going. So, we did it all over again. Scrubbed, swept, patrolled, and cleaned. The same grueling routine. Day after day. Night after night.

I didn’t know how long I could take it. All I could do was keep going, and hope that, someday, it would end.

And, the term of imprisonment extended.

I thought I had it all figured out. The perfect escape plan. The one thing I had learned after my transformation into this mechanical nightmare was that I didn’t need sleep, I didn’t need food, and I didn’t even need to worry about the weather. As long as I had access to sunlight, I was good to go. And that night, I was going to take advantage of all of it.

I’d been keeping my energy levels up, secretly storing enough solar power during my monotonous days of cleaning and patrolling. It wasn’t easy—Bin was always hovering, always watching, making sure I followed the rules. But I had my moment of freedom, or at least, I thought I did. When I saw the opportunity, I took it. I was quick. I slipped out of the small neighborhood under the cover of night. The streets were quiet, and the lights of the city were far off in the distance.

I could feel the excitement buzzing through my circuits. I wasn’t going to be trapped any longer. The world was big. I could go anywhere. I didn’t need the community, the never-ending cleaning, the ridiculous patrols. I didn’t need Bin or anyone else telling me what to do. I had all the energy I needed.

I just needed to make it to the edge of the city, and then I could figure out where to go from there. Maybe I’d find a way to reverse all of this, maybe I could start over and escape the nightmare of being turned into this thing. Maybe I’d even find a way to get back to being human. Anything was better than staying in that small, robotic body, forever working without rest, without a real purpose.

I was just out of the neighborhood when I felt something was wrong. A faint twinge, like a signal pinging in my system. I froze, looking around, trying to make sense of it. But before I could take another step, everything went black.

There was no warning. No sound. No nothing. My circuits shut down. I fell into a forced silence, like someone had flipped a switch and turned me off.

When I came to, I was back in the neighborhood, exactly where I started. The streets looked the same, the houses unchanged. I had no idea how long I had been out, but when I looked to my side, I saw Bin, its garbage can-shaped body rolling towards me with a sense of finality that made my stomach—if I still had one—drop.

“Hello, CT-43,” Bin said, its voice as cheerful and mechanical as ever. It didn’t even seem to acknowledge the tension in the air. It rolled up beside me like it was just another ordinary day.

I had to fight the urge to scream. How? How did I get back here? What happened?

I looked around, my heart pounding in what was left of my chest. "What happened? How did I get back here?" My voice was still electronic, flat, but my frustration bled through.

Bin seemed almost too pleased with itself. “You were trying to escape. But, you know, there’s a little something you didn’t take into account. I have a tracker on you. A remote shutdown program. The moment I noticed you were leaving the designated area, I activated it.”

I could feel the humiliation creeping in. A tracker? A shutdown program? I had been nothing more than a puppet the entire time, and now I knew it. The whole time I thought I was outsmarting them, they had been controlling my every move.

“You should’ve known better,” Bin continued, almost smug. “I reported your attempt to the court. They’ve decided to extend your sentence. Another year. For trying to run.”

The words hit me like a punch to the gut. My rage flared, but I had to clamp down on it. If I showed any weakness, if I let Bin see how much it hurt to be so utterly trapped, it would just take more joy in my suffering. I gritted my teeth—if I still had—and said nothing.

Bin rolled closer, its sensors gleaming as it looked me over. “And as a consequence for trying to escape,” it chirped, “you’re no longer going to be on patrol duty. Instead, you’ll be working in the security office from now on.”

The words didn’t make sense at first. "Security office?" I repeated, trying to make sure I heard right.

“Yes,” Bin replied. “Since you’ve decided to break the rules, you’ll be doing something a little more… isolated. You’ll be watching over the entire neighborhood from the security office, keeping an eye on things. The door will be locked, of course. No escaping again.”

I felt a shiver run through me, my circuits glitching with a mix of anger and despair. I tried to argue, to tell Bin I wouldn’t stand for it, that I wouldn’t be a part of this twisted punishment any longer. But my voice, that hollow, synthetic voice of mine, only made me feel more alien, more distant from everything I used to be. I could hardly stand to listen to myself.

“I’ll be locking you in there tonight,” Bin said, as if it were telling me something trivial, like it was a normal part of the routine. “I’ll open the door in the morning when your shift is over. And you’d better be on your best behavior this time, CT-43. We wouldn’t want to have to report any more incidents to the court, would we?”

I couldn’t say anything in response. I felt my body tense up, my thoughts racing with a thousand different ways to break out, to fight back, but none of them were realistic. My hands, now nothing more than cold, lifeless mechanical arms, were no help. The tiny part of me that was human, that fought back, felt like it was slipping away with every passing second.

“Follow me,” Bin said, its voice still annoyingly cheerful, and I had no choice but to obey.

We headed to the security office. It was a small room, barely big enough for me to move in, but big enough to keep me from running away. The walls were lined with monitors, all showing different parts of the neighborhood, but they might as well have been bars in a cage. The door closed behind me with a soft hiss, and I heard the unmistakable sound of the lock clicking into place.

I was trapped again.

And this time, it felt like I was going to be stuck forever.

I leaned back against the wall, staring at the glowing screens in front of me. The world outside felt like it was moving on without me, like I had been left behind. I should’ve never tried to escape. But now that I had, I had no idea what kind of punishment awaited me next. Two years. Two more years of this. Two more years of being trapped in a mechanical body, serving a system that had no connect to me.

I swore, after this, I did consider turning over a new leaf. Well, everything should go to a good end then...

That afternoon, I made a mistake. The heat was unbearable. The sun was relentless, and my metal frame was barely coping with the soaring temperatures. Even I, a so-called machine, had to have additional cooling fans attached to my body to keep my circuits from overheating. It wasn’t comfortable, but it was necessary.

I was out there, cleaning the same stretch of sidewalk I’d been working on for what felt like forever, my arms mechanically sweeping up debris, when I saw her.

She was staggering toward me, swaying as she walked, her face pale and flushed at the same time. She was one of the residents, someone I had seen around the neighborhood before, but her name wasn’t important right now. What mattered was the way she looked, the way she couldn’t seem to hold herself up.

I watched as she took a few more steps, but then, without warning, she collapsed to the ground. I froze for a moment. I immediately rolled over to her side, scanning her condition. My sensors quickly determined that she was suffering from heatstroke. I needed to get help, but there was no one else around.

The woman needed medical attention, and fast. I quickly calculated the distance to where Bin was cleaning in the other section of the neighborhood, but before I could roll off to fetch it, something caught my attention.

Her pocket. It was bulging. It was clear she had something inside. A wallet, perhaps?

A thought crossed my mind. It was such a fleeting thought, something I instantly dismissed. But the longer I stared at the woman, unconscious on the ground, the more the temptation grew. No one would know. No one would care. She wouldn’t even remember. Besides, I think I needed money after I turned back to human, and I needed a bit of mercy to comfort the hell I had suffered. Money was mercy. Compared to my punishment, that's not a excessive ask, right?

I quickly scanned my surroundings. No one was around, and Bin was still too far to notice anything. I accessed the small internal storage space inside my body and, after a brief moment of hesitation, slipped the wallet from her pocket, carefully stowing it away.

Once the deed was done, I rolled off to find Bin, reporting the woman’s condition and explaining that she needed help. I watched as the paramedics arrived, the woman being loaded into the ambulance. I felt an odd satisfaction as I watched the vehicle drive off, my attention already distracted by the weight of the wallet now hidden inside me. It was mine now, I thought.

That night, I was locked in the security office again, just like every other night. The door clicked shut, and the familiar sound of the lock sliding into place echoed in the stillness. The lights flickered slightly as I adjusted myself in front of the monitors, running through my usual tasks of checking the security footage, keeping watch over the neighborhood. The sense of monotony was suffocating, but tonight, something was different.

The door creaked open, and Bin rolled in. I didn’t immediately register the change in the atmosphere, but as soon as it spoke, I felt a shiver run through my circuits.

“CT-43,” it said, its voice cold and direct, “Did you take the woman’s wallet?”

I froze. It was like my entire system short-circuited for a second. How could it know? I hadn’t even left any evidence. Had I?

“W-what?” I stammered, though it was more of an electronic glitch than anything resembling a real human reaction. I tried to play it off, pretending like I had no idea what Bin was talking about, but my internal systems were going haywire.

Bin didn’t give me any time to collect myself. It rolled over to the security monitors and started typing. With a few clicks, the footage from earlier that day appeared on the screen.

There I was, clearly visible on the screen, taking the wallet from the woman’s pocket.

My stomach—if I still had one—dropped.

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck. I had be trapped in the security office and watched these cameras so many nights, but I forgot that the place where the woman fell down was just within the monitoring range.

Bin’s tone didn’t change. “I’ve already spoken to the woman. She’s awake in the hospital now. She remembers everything, and she told us her wallet is missing. Considering that you were the only one who interacted with her, I immediately suspected you.”

I tried to stay calm, but inside, a storm was raging. I wanted to cried out my feeling about the last year, but I just kept lying.

“Look,” I said, scrambling for an excuse. “I didn’t— I didn’t take anything. You’re mistaken. Maybe it just… fell out of her pocket.”

But I knew Bin wasn’t buying it. I saw the way its sensors focused on me, analyzing every word, every movement. The silence that stretched between us felt like an eternity.

“You’ve been reported,” Bin said flatly, rolling back to the door. “The court will need to review your actions. And, considering the nature of this crime, they may extend your sentence further.”

I felt a surge of panic. My mind raced with thoughts of escape, but I knew it was pointless. My body was locked down, my options were limited. I could see the door was ajar, and in that split second, I made a decision.

Without thinking, I bolted. I pushed past Bin, my mechanical limbs moving faster than I ever thought possible. The door was just a few feet away. If I could get out, if I could just break free, maybe I could undo all of this.

But as I reached the door, a sudden jolt of pain shot through me. I stumbled, falling to the floor.

No…

I felt my system power down, my vision going dark as the shutdown sequence activated once again.

Bin’s voice echoed in the background, as if from a great distance. “You really thought you could escape, didn’t you?”

When I came to again, I was back in the security office, exactly where I started. My body was frozen, my systems disabled, and I could hear the faint hum of Bin’s motors as it rolled back to its post.

Now, my punishment would be far worse than I could have ever expected. Two years? Maybe more. It didn’t matter now. I had made my bed, and now, I would have to lie in it.

The message came from the court one cold, robotic morning. The words I read—or rather, the words that were force-fed into my mind—struck me like a bolt of lightning. The decision had been made. My sentence, already extended to two years, was now stretched into eternity. It wasn’t just that my time had been lengthened. No, it was worse than that.

The court had determined that my actions—my crimes during my imprisonment—had proven that I could never be trusted again. The humanity I had fought so desperately to cling to was gone. The chance to return to my old life had evaporated. It wasn’t just about being a criminal anymore. The court had decided that I would serve as a permanent machine, devoid of the ability to reclaim my human form.

A life sentence. But it wasn’t just any life sentence. They were going to erase me—every part of me. All of the memories, the pain, the mistakes, the fleeting moments of humanity... gone. Just like that.

As I was dragged into the sterile white room of the lab, I could feel it—a sense of finality pressing down on me. Everything was the same as before. I had been through this process once before. I knew what was coming.

But this time... this time, something inside me fought harder than ever.

The scientists around me, cold and emotionless, began their preparations, attaching wires to my body. The machines hummed to life, their cold metallic tones vibrating in the air. I was going to be wiped clean. All of it—everything I had been—was about to disappear.

I couldn’t hold it back anymore. I had to say something, even if I knew it would change nothing. I shouted out, my voice still carrying an electronic rasp. "This isn’t right! This is inhumane! You can’t just strip someone of their will like this! I had a life! I was human! You can’t do this!"

But they did. They didn’t even flinch. The scientists were used to this by now.

"You’re not human anymore," one of them said, barely sparing me a glance. "You forfeited that when you broke the law. This is your punishment."

My circuits whirred. My body tensed, but there was no fight left in me. I was too far gone.

Dr. Mitchell, who had been standing by the control panel, finally spoke up, his voice almost a whisper. "You should have known better than to cross a line. Now, you will never be human again."

And just like that, I was shut off.

The world went black.

When I woke, I couldn’t feel anything. There was no sense of time, no sense of self. I was just a machine. My thoughts were a blank canvas, a clean slate. Who I am? I’m a robot, built to serve.

The formatting process had worked its way through every part of me. The memories were erased, my past was obliterated, and in their place, there was nothing. Not even a flicker of who I used to be.

"CT-43," A man called Dr. Mitchell, called out, his voice echoing in the empty space. "This is your name."

I looked up. I couldn’t feel any connection to the name. It was just a label, a number. I had no history, no context, no understanding of what that number meant.

Dr. Mitchell walked over to me, adjusting my framework, making sure I was ready. He was preparing me, getting me ready for what was next. Then I was moved.

When I found myself outside again, a neighborhood stood before me. The buildings, the streets, the people—all of it felt new, everything was new to me.

And then, I saw Bin.

Bin was a cleaning robot, looks like a garbage can with wheels, and it stood waiting for me. But the way it looked at me, the way it welcomed me, felt strange. Warm, kind. It was as if it had known me before.

"Welcome back," Bin said with a smile, its voice warm and cheerful.

I didn’t understand. I blinked—though blinking was just a mechanical reflex—and asked, "Why are you saying that? We’ve never met before."

Bin’s smile never wavered. "Don’t worry about it," it said, patting me on the shoulder. "Now, let’s get started. I’m going to teach you how to be a good robot."

Good robot? The words felt odd. I had no concept of what it meant to be "good" or "bad". There was no morality, no deeper understanding of right and wrong. There was only function. I was a tool. A machine.

I was ready, though. Or at least, that’s what my programming told me. There was no hesitation, no lingering thought. I was here to serve.

And so, we began. Bin taught me everything about the neighborhood, the cleaning protocols, the security systems. I learned to scan, to organize, to follow orders. I was good at it. It came naturally to me, like a program running smoothly.

As Dr. Mitchell left, I caught the faintest words from his lips, spoken quietly as if to himself: "I suppose there’s no such thing as too inhumane when it comes to correcting a criminal."

I didn’t understand the meaning. I didn’t understand much of anything anymore.

All I knew was that I had no memories, no past. The only thing that mattered now was being a robot, a machine designed to serve. I’m a new born, a robot.

And as Bin continued to teach me, I felt more comfort to work. I was built for this.

So, I stood by Bin, ready to serve the community. Ready to clean, ready to patrol, ready to be the best robot I could be.

It was all that mattered now.

Another version of the end:

The letter came in the morning, as cold and impersonal as the metal walls surrounding me. The court's decision had been made, and it was final.

**Case File: CT-43 / Sentence: Extended to Life Imprisonment / Reason for Extension: Repeated Criminal Behavior During Sentence Change of Service / Location: Prison / No Possibility of Reversal to Human Form**

I read those words again, but the meaning didn’t change. I had heard of this prison when I was still a human, it’s one of the most dangerous prison in the country. They were sending me to a place worse than the neighborhood I had been serving. Worse than the clean, sterile environment where I had been a mere servant. I was going to a prison, where my only job would be to clean up after the very people I used to consider human. And there would be no chance of me ever becoming one again.

No more hope. No more salvation.

I didn’t know how long I stood there, reading the letter over and over, trying to make sense of it. It didn’t matter. Nothing mattered anymore. I was trapped. Trapped in this metallic body, locked into a fate I could never escape.

The journey to the prison was quiet. I was transported in the back of a transport vehicle, the hum of the engines vibrating through my frame as the scenery passed by in a blur. The sun beat down on me, but the heat was nothing compared to what I had endured before. I didn’t even feel the rays on my surface anymore. I was nothing but a machine.

When we arrived, the stark, gray concrete of the prison complex loomed in front of me, a place of endless suffering and despair. The gates creaked open, and I was ushered inside like an object, not a person. The guards barely spared me a glance as I was brought to the central processing area. The walls were filled with barred windows, the sound of prisoners shouting, and the distant echo of metal doors slamming shut. It was the kind of place where humanity went to die, and I had just been delivered here to serve in silence.

They didn’t even let me interact with the prisoners. The guards were the only ones who spoke to me, and even then, it was only to bark orders, to remind me of my role. I wasn’t human to them either. I was just a tool, a machine to clean their mess.

They didn’t put me in a cell. Machines didn’t need cells. They didn’t need sleep, rest, or any of the luxuries that the prisoners had. I was just... there, in the halls, always moving, always cleaning. Floors, toilets, windows—nothing was ever clean enough. Every time I thought I was finished, there was always something else to do. The tasks were endless, the work unyielding.

I didn’t know which was worse—the cold, emotionless eyes of the guards, or the mockery of the prisoners. The inmates were relentless, laughing at my robotic frame, making cruel jokes about what I had become. They taunted me as I cleaned, made snide comments, and sometimes even threw trash at me, like I was some kind of janitor who didn’t have the right to be a person.

I had never felt so humiliated.

But the thing that really ate at me, the thing that made my circuits spark with frustration, was the fact that none of them understood. None of them knew what it felt like to be taken apart, to lose everything you had ever been. They didn’t know what it was like to have your very soul ripped out and replaced with cold metal.

I wanted to scream, but I couldn’t. I couldn’t afford the result of that action.

The guards, on the other hand, were even worse. They treated me with an indifference that made my processors ache. They spoke to me like I was a thing, something less than a person. They never once acknowledged that I used to be human. To them, I was just another machine doing its job, no different from the broken vacuum cleaner in the corner of the room.

Bin. That ridiculous cleaning robot from the neighborhood. At least it had a purpose. At least it wasn’t here, stuck cleaning up after people who didn’t care about anything. I wanted to go back to it. I wanted back to the order, the predictability, the task of simply cleaning with no expectation of anything else. But even that small comfort was out of reach.

The guards didn’t care. They just wanted me to clean. To scrub away the dirt, the filth, the grime, until I was nothing but an empty shell of metal and wires.

I didn’t have a cell, like the prisoners. They had their small, grimy rooms where they slept and fought, but not me. Just as before, the sun would give me the energy I needed while I was cleaning the outdoor playground. I had nothing but the cold concrete floors, the sound of clanking chains, and the endless, repetitive task of cleaning.

I hated it. I hated this place. But more than that, I hated myself for being here. For letting myself fall so far. I had been human once. Once.

Now, I was just a machine.

Every day was the same. I would help transporting ingredients ordered from the cafeteria in the morning after I cleaned the whole prison during the night, never even slept. Time had become meaningless. The guards would tell me what to clean, the prisoners would make their taunts, and I would move through the motions. There was no beginning, no end, only the unyielding, relentless cycle of work.

Sometimes, when I stood in the quiet halls, alone with nothing but my own thoughts, I would wonder what it was like to be free again. What it would be like to walk on two legs, not tracks, to feel the air against my skin, to hold something in my hands and feel it—really feel it.

But those thoughts were fleeting, like whispers in the dark. The reality was here, the prison walls closing in, my body a cage, and my punishment stretched out before me like an eternal sentence.

The days bled together, one indistinguishable from the other. I didn’t even bother to count them anymore. It didn’t matter.

This was my life now. A life without hope, without purpose, without humanity. A life where I was nothing but a machine—a machine cleaning up after those who still held on to what I had lost.

And so, I cleaned. Day after day, I cleaned.

But deep inside, a small part of me clung to the feeling of what I once was, of what I could have been. Even if that part of me was nothing more than a flickering light in the dark, I still held on.

Because that was all I had left.

And, be destoryed into nothing.

I didn’t know how they found out, but somehow, the prisoners knew. They knew about CT-43. They knew what I used to be—or rather, what I had been before I became this... thing. The name "CT-43" became a joke to them, a cruel reminder of what I had lost. Every time one of them shouted it, it echoed in my mind like a slap across my broken face.

"Hey, CT-43, clean this up!" they would yell as they threw trash on the floors I had just polished. "Better get it right, CT-43! Don’t want you messing up again!" And they made sure I messed up. They deliberately dropped crumbs and spilled food, just to make me clean it all again. They knew what they were doing. They knew how to push me to the edge.

It wasn’t just the trash they threw at me. Over time, their mockery became worse. They began dunking me in water, forcing me to sit there, helpless, as the liquid seeped into my mechanical body. Slowly, the metal parts that made up my frame started to rust. It wasn’t a fast process at first, but over time, I could feel it creeping in—the corrosion, the decay of my very being. My joints began to seize up, my movements stilted. Yet, despite all that, I still had to clean.

I had no choice. It was the punishment. They didn't even need to say it anymore. Just the fact that I had to keep cleaning in my broken state, with the rust spreading, with the cracks appearing in my body, was punishment enough. The guards didn’t care, and the prisoners—well, they reveled in it. They laughed at me, at the pathetic excuse for a machine I had become. "CT-43," they would chant, like it was a curse. A reminder that I had been reduced to this. A rusted, useless shell of what I once was.

Then came the worst part.

On-eee afternoon, as I cleaned the dining hall, I felt it. A trickle of something warm, something sticky, slipping down my mechanical frame. It was food. The prisoners had deliberately poured their meals into my open circuits, into my exposed wiring. Rice, meat, sauce—it all pooled inside me, making my internal systems short-circuit. I couldn’t do anything to stop it. My own body wasn’t built to handle the filth they were pouring in-nnt-to me. And the guards? They just stood by and watched. They didn’t care. No on-eee cared.

“P-ple-eass-ssss-ee st-tooo-pp I-I wou-ld ha--ave a sho-orrr-rt cir-ccc-cui-t-ttt...” My voice broke into pieces because of the short circuit caused by the food.

And no one came to help.

The food sat there, festering, rotting inside m-my-y broken body. I could feel it, the sour stench of decay mixing with the rust. I tried to clean it out, to salvage what was left of m-mme-e, but it was no use. The damage was do-oonn-ne. My circuits were fried, my body stank of spoiled food, and I was still forced to clean.

I couldn’t afford thi-ii-s anymore. However, when I grabbed the guard’s trouser and asked “Re-eee-que-ee-st fo-oo-r re-eee-pair, plea-aaa-se...”, what I got wa-aa-s just insult. Finally, I gave up. Just clean.

Days passed, and my condition worsened. The rust spread further. My joints creaked an-nn-d groaned with every movement, and I could feel my power reserves depleting faster than ever. The once shiny surface of my body had turned into a dull, corroded mess. I had be-ee-come nothing more than a broken ro-oo-bot—a robot that no longer even resembled the machine I had once been.

...Wait a se-ee-cond. What happened? Why am I intermittent when tell-lll-ing this story?

...Well, great. Just GREAT. My memory module is finally starting to beco-oo-me broken.

...Anyway, on-nn-ee-e day, it finally happened.

A group of particularly volatile prisoners, the ones wi-ii-itt-th the worst tempers, decided they had had enough of me. They grabbed me, dragged me across the hall, and shoved me in-nn-to the water tank. They screamed at me, calling me a filthy, broken machine, something that didn’t belong here. "You’re a disgrace," on-nn-e of them shouted. "You stink, you’re useless. You don’t even deserve to be alive!"

They dunked me un-nn-der the water, and I could feel it flooding my insides. The water filled eve-ee-ry cavity, every exposed circuit. I struggled to break fr-ee-ee, but my movements were slow, clumsy. M-yy-y rusted limbs couldn’t fight back. I felt my systems short-circuiting, my mind fraying. For a moment, I wondered if this wa-aa-s it.

An-nnn-d in that moment of desperation, something inside m-ee-e clicked.

Perhaps this was the end. Perhaps it wa-aa-s the release I had been waiting for.

I had been living as nothing more than a broken, rusted machine, a tool for the prisoners' amusement. I had be-ee-en degraded, tortured, and humiliated. An-nn-d now, as I felt my systems shutting down, my circuits frying, m-mm-y thoughts fading... I wondered if this might b-ee-e the best thing that could happen to me.

I felt my motor g-oo-o cold. I felt the last o-oo-f m-mm-y energy draining away. The short-circuiting began to spiral ou-uu-t of control, and then... nothing.

Darkness.

I don’t know how long I wa-aa-s out. I couldn’t remember anything after that. But when I ca-aa-me to, I was no longer in the prison. I wa-aa-s lying in a heap, dumped unceremoniously in the tra-aaa-sh. The sound of the garbage truck’s engine rumbled i-ii-n the distance, but it felt distant. Fa-aarr-r away. The truck wa-aa-s going to take me some-ee-where... the landfill? A recycling plan-nn-t?

I didn’t car-rrr-eee. I wa-aa-s ju-uu-st a discard-dd-ed machine no-ooo-w......

...---......---......---......---......---......---......---......---......---......---......---......---......---...

In a faraway laboratory, the news spread quickly. The experiment had failed. The scientists had finally realized what they had done.

The truth was undeniable: this wasn’t what they had hoped for. This wasn’t their desire. It was a nightmare. A violation of everything that made humanity human.

They terminated the project immediately. All experiments on converting humans into machines were to cease.

But it was too late for me. I was the last failed experiment—the one who had been pushed too far, the one who had been broken beyond repair.

The irony of it all was cruel.

A punishment that had started with the hope of reforming criminals, of shaping them into something better, had instead led to the creation of a monstrosity. A machine that had once been a human had become a symbol of the worst kind of punishment—a punishment that stripped away all dignity, all humanity.

The worst part? The real lesson had never been learned. The inmates hadn’t been reformed. The guards hadn’t cared. And as for me... I was left in the trash, a husk of metal and broken circuits, forgotten and discarded.

What I had once been was gone. What I had become was nothing more than the sum of pain and failure.

And so, the story ended.

In a way, the worst punishment had been the one that wasn’t meant to happen—the erasure of everything I had been. And yet, in the end, it was clear that even the most inhumane of punishments couldn’t ignore that redemption was not just punishment.

And I? I was just a broken machine, a garbage processed by a hydraulic press in the garbage dump.