ESCAPING THE CODE

This book is dedicated to those who never stopped believing in us.

Thank you for being a part of our journey.

Additionally, we dedicate this book to Oriana's dog.
Just because.

We would also like to take the time to thank Miss Gagen-Spriggs and the other teachers who put their time and effort in the Book In A Day competition.

We appreciate the time you've given us to expand our creative horizons and try something different, so from the bottom of our hearts, thank you.

Chapter 1

The percentage of their fighting has increased to 52% since May last year. My mother would shout, my father would threaten her, and the screaming match would start. She cried, he seethed, and I would stare at the box my permanently seven-year-old body came in. I would think to myself how likely Harry's chance of winning the argument this time was. Currently, 83%. Snitbits of the conversation penetrated the walls, echoes of "She's not human."

"Just a machine."

"Have you seen what's been happening with the androids over there?"

"We can't do this anymore."

"It's not safe,"

I detect the tension and hear the intensity in his tone. Though I'm only nuts and bolts, a synthetic child, I can comprehend plenty of emotions that must be behind the words he's speaking. I surveyed my database of the decades of studies on the psychological effects of having or owning a child presents. Activated: 21st of February 2039. Designated: Evelyn. inhabiting the Wilson residence for 3 years, 6 months and 28 days.

I was designed to be the 'perfect child'. I'll speak when I'm told to, clean up when I'm determined to, be what I have to be when I need to be. Just like my company wants me to be.

"Euraxis: Modern technology for the modern world."

"It's time, Sarah. We can't keep her."

The pitter-patter of rain creates a shield from the noise. I like the rain, I always have. I suspect it was some sort of glitch in my system. Drops of crystal-clear water appear on the window, I stare at it. The rain was something that stopped my circuits from buzzing, calmed me almost. The waves of water crashed on the pavement outside, creating a melancholic song. I identified the sounds of my mother's footsteps making their way towards my room. I stood, my gaze burning into the door handle, staring as the knob turned to reveal my mother's tear stricken face.

She engulfed me into a hug and wept silently. Her eyes welled up with the sadness a mother should not possess. They showed her soul, aged by years of gritty work in the only place that would accept humans of her status. The silence of her cry was eerie like she had been forced to learn how to do this. I was never supposed to grow up, to leave the nest. I'm needed here, I need to be their perfect seven-year-old daughter that my company promised them I would be.

But based on the recently collected data, I would now be nothing more than an unwanted, expendable machine.

Sarah let me go and stepped towards the door where Harry was revealed to be waiting. His eyes were distant, and the facial recognition features determined he was stern. Harry strode towards me, turning me over like a doll and moved to the nape of my neck where I would be put into sleep mo-.

Chapter 2

I blink as I sit up and analyse the world around me. Where am I? This is not my bedroom? It appears to be a…..road? My programming kicks in as I properly scan my surroundings. Two trees, a long winding road and three buildings; an old service station, a dusty old pub, and a collapsing structure that by design seemed like it would have been someone's home many years ago. No intelligent life forms appear to inhabit the buildings now.

This place was not recognised in my database. To reaffirm my theory, I try to access my core data location on Google maps. Code danced across my mind, being translated in milliseconds; No Wi-Fi connection. That's never happened before. I must be very far from the suburbs in order to not be able to establish a connection.

I am so……confused? Why am I here? My programming informs me I should be packing my bag for school and making my parents breakfast, but I'm not. This is weird, this is wrong, I have to get back home. But which way is home? I scan the street again as a million calculations run through my head. My programming boots up again and causes me to sigh. With no plan and no choice, I wander away from the collapsing buildings and down the never-ending road.

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It took four hours, twenty-seven minutes and thirty-two seconds before I spotted the junkyard. Noun: junkyard; plural noun: junkyards, a place where scrap is collected before being recycled or discarded; a scrapyard. More recently used for the discard of unwanted, rogue, or unneeded automatons.

I stared up at the large sign hanging over the entrance *Johns Auto Salvage Junkyard.* The junkyard was slowly being invaded by the wild bushland that surrounded it. Old cars were piled up on top of each other, and weird pieces of scrap metal littered the floor. Mattresses, TVs, and any old appliance imaginable was squeezed between the cars.

The dirt crunched under my feet as I pushed myself deeper into the junkyard ducking and twisting between objects. The sun was setting, and I knew that generally at this time of day, my programming would send me into an artificial sleep. Would that still happen here? According to the files in my database, unless I had a specific command from mother and father, there was a 97.05842795425447282% chance that I would still follow my commands. I need to find a place to shut down.

I clambered to the top of one rusty stack of metal. steadying myself on top of a microwave then crawling through the roof of a car and into the mouldy back seat. This would do for now. It would protect me long enough for Mum and Dad to come and find me and take me home. I lied down, and sure enough, my core programming sent me to sleep.

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It was the rustling crash that caused my program to reboot. I scrambled out of the rusting car, metal screeching against my silver hands. Had Mum and Dad finally found me? I stood on the broken car scanning the mounds of trash looking for my parents. Where were they?

There was another rustle that emanated from the junk pile across from me and out tumbled a honey-coloured creature. Intrigued, I slowly climbed down my junkpile and crept towards the animal. On closer examination, my programming identified the creature as a dog, not just a dog but a young dog which was commonly referred to as a puppy. I walked closer to the mammal. There were numerous accounts of attacks from their kind.

I paused as the animal spotted me. Its little tail began wagging as it trotted over to me, snout up and outstretched in order to sniff me. I reached out to pet it to which the puppy let out a high pitched woof as jumped up towards my face. Was something wrong with it? My databases scanned the creature for any physical damage and confirmed that there were no signs, nor symptoms to indicate an injury. It also informed me that normal little girls usually have dogs and pets. I am a little girl. I should have a dog, a pet. So it was decided, I scooped the puppy off of the ground and brought it back to my broken car.

The puppy yapped in delight. What should I do now? I decided to consult my inbuilt data. *Should you find yourself interacting with a pet first greet it.*

"Hello, puppy," I said, reaching out to pat it again.

If this pet is to be yours, appropriately name it.

"Ok, I'll name you Honey, because you're yellow." The little puppy jumped into my lap and licked my face. It was….pleasant. *Play with the pet and care for appropriately with parents instruction.* With parents instruction? I have to find my parents. Mother always told me to go to the last place I remembered being if I were to ever lose her. I couldn't get home exactly, but what if I went back to the site I woke up yesterday.

Yes, surely I could find my parents there then they could tell me how to look after Honey. Once again, I picked up my puppy and began the trek back to the place with two trees and three buildings. Honey fell asleep in my arms by the time I had gotten back to the unfamiliar empty roadside. I watched the sunset on the horizon, spreading its rich hues of red and orange into a grateful sky. I soared at the sight of it and transported into a timeless existence.

Was this what humans felt?

I asked myself. I moved towards a large tree and prepared to power down for the night. No longer alone.

Chapter 3:

I start to wake up again, my brain and programming beginning to start up and allow me to move, process and analyze my surroundings. Back again half asleep in front of the raggedy old service station, bare empty road in front of me. I'm alone with my puppy, not a car in sight, only the men working at the pub and petrol station.

Where is my mum, is she coming to get me? Is Dad coming? I've been here for two day and no one has come for me, is anyone, anyone at all? I don't think they're coming back at all; I've been abandoned. Why have they done this, why have they left me? Is it because I'm not human, do they need a human daughter, a daughter who can grow up? They wanted me to be something I'll never be, a human. But I'll never be human, I'll never grow up and now I won't even stay their daughter.

I sit and think about why they would abandon me, *how* they could abandon me, but nothing appears to make sense, humans are so confusing.

I stand up and dust of my pants and bare arms, inspecting them to see if any dirt of stones have found their way into the mechanisms. I pat Honey down his back and watch as he stirs awake and jumps up to follow me as I start walking back towards the junkyard, trying to deny my programming to make breakfast for my family, but how am I supposed to make food for my family if I no longer have a family?

I keep walking towards the junkyard, following the same path as yesterday. I turn to take in the bush land that surrounds me, seeing the repeating patterns from yesterday's travelling. After two hours, forty-three minutes and twenty-eight seconds, I notice Honey has slowed his pace and struggled to drag is feet as he walks behind me. I turn around and sit down next to the road and watch him crawl over to me and flop down exhausted and short of breath. I take in his exhausted state and wish I had water I could give him to help him recover, but all I can do is sit and watch. I scan my surroundings, everything the same as yesterday, the twists in the trees, the cracks in the bitumen, the loose weeds and grass growing along the roads edge.

I process Honey falling asleep next to me and run through the pros and cons of waking him up and decide that letting him sleep will result in more efficient travel once he wakes up again. He sleeps for 1 hour, 6 minutes and 14 seconds before I decide we should keep moving before evening when my sleep programming initiates, and I am left sleeping in the open.

I wake up Honey and we keep walking as the sun reaches its peak in the sky after one hour, forty-four minutes and four seconds, we reached the junkyard. I look up at the same *John Auto Salvage Junkyard* sign from yesterday and the same mattresses and junk from yesterday. My programing tells me to go into the junkyard, to follow the ordinary and to create patterns to follow but I don't want to follow patterns, to be the same, I want to evolve, to see change of my own creation but this is an almost impossible task for an android. Either way I will make a

change even if it is of the smallest nature. Fighting my program, I turn towards the road and walk another thirty-one minutes and reach a small country town. There's a small school, a run-down convenience store and one main road cutting straight through the centre.

I lead Honey to the nearest tap and watch him chug down the water like he hasn't drank water in days. He finishes his drink and we keep walking until we reach the centre of town and on the way receive what my program tells me are looks of repulsed fear. Once we've reached the town I realize why. Every android within view is being rounded up, turned off and put in the back of large industrial trucks with *Euraxis: Android Demolition Department* printed in large print on the side. They were demolishing Androids... why? Whatever reason, it had caused a new emotion to be felt in my programming: fear.

I ran back into the side streets in running, sprinting faster than I've ever needed to before, Honey racing and barking in confusion behind me. I never stop running or hiding, I can feel the rocks scraping away at my metallic feet as I twist and turn down roads and allies trying to stay unseen, only do I stop when Honey couldn't run anymore, I need to find a place to hide. I chose the best spot available, behind a packed dumpster in a dead-end alleyway and wonder again as Honey lays down and falls asleep. How much I wish I could be human, how I could be safe and how I never will be again because I'm an android. I will never be anything else.

Chapter 4:

I sit and watch as Honey sleeps and pants in exhaustion I take in my surroundings and assess how safe I will be if I am to stay where I am. According to my programming, there should be 82% chance I will remain safe where I am. I hear the sound crunching leaves in the pattern of footsteps coming towards me – recalculating my odds I have 0% chance of remaining safe. The sound gets closer and I try my hardest to remain pressed against the dumpster as still as possible.

"Hello?" a dry woman's voice echoed through the ally, "I saw an android come down this way, are you here? I won't hurt you, I'm here to help, I promise." My programming told me not to trust anyone but something about her voice was telling me that I could trust her. I hesitantly stepped out from behind the dumpster leaving Honey in his sleeping state.

"H-hello." I met the woman's gaze as she slowly walked towards me, aware that anything could frighten even me, an android.

"Hi there, I'm Jean. It's nice to meet you." She said in light voice, "here, put these on, we don't want anyone knowing you're an android, it isn't safe" she told me slowly handing me a scarf, gloves and shoes to cover my inhuman skin. "come with me, I'll keep you safe, sweetie" the way she spoke made me feel safe, like I had someone who truly cared about me. She waited for me to put on the clothing she had given me and then pulled me along and whistles to wake up Honey up.

I analyzed her figure as she hastily pulled me alongside streets and footpaths, she had hip-length curly brown coloured hair that reminded me of rusty springs. Her face was sprayed with little brown freckles. She wore a green hoody and dirty blue track pants and sneakers.

By the time I had finished analyzing her, we had reached a small blue shack, which from inspection, had a dangerous termite infestation.

"Home sweet home" Jean sung has she unlocked the door and led me inside, "you can take off your scarf and gloves now if you want." I did as she asked. It was getting dark now and my sleep protocol was beginning to activate.

"If you need to sleep there is a bed in the room down the hall to the left" I gave a weak nod.

"Can you tell me a bedtime story?" I mumbled, no matter how much I wanted to grow up I was still programmed to behave and reach like a seven-year-girl.

Jean looked a little surprised but then her face softened into a sweet smile, "Of course, sweetie"

We walked down the hallway to the spare bed where she tucked me in and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Once upon a time, in a faraway land, androids and humans lived together in harmony, as families, friends and co-workers. But there was always a barrier between the two, androids were always second class, the marginalized group. The androids didn't like this, they knew it was unfair and were done being disregarded and disrespected. They decided that humanity needed to pay for what they had done and experience the pain that the androids had been feeling for so long. The androids started destroying android demolition sights, buildings, homes and killing masses of people, mainly politicians and highly influential personnel. The humans were terrified and even in countries where the uprising hadn't occurred the people were terrified. The government had decided androids could no longer be trusted and had to be removed from society, they were being taken away and demolished. Although some people didn't agree with this new system and were fighting back, they were taking androids into hiding and were determined to find a safe space for every android and they wouldn't stop until every android was as safe as they could possibly be. The end." Jean gave a weak smile and tried to look happy,

"Sorry, it was a bit dark."

"It's true, isn't it?" I looked her dead in the eye, "that's not a story that's what is really happening."

"Yeah, sorry sweetie. There's an uprising in the US and it has caused a lot of panic. That's why I'm here though, I am here to help I won't let them hurt you" her words were full of pity and sympathy.

I felt my sleep programming finally take its toll, "Thank you" I mumbled as I dozed off into sleep.

I woke up with Honey laying across my leg and Jean rushing into my room in alarm "they're here, the people who want to take you away, the catchers! Don't make a sound and cover up your skin."

I did as she said and covered myself up, waking up Honey in the process. I lay still as Jean and Honey ran out of the room. I heard mumbles of their conversation at the front door, "Hello sir, how can I help you?" Jean said in an almost seamlessly calm voice.

"I'm here to collect androids, please hand them over calmly and we can be finished her quickly"

"I don't own any androids, thank you for your concern though." I couldn't make out the conversation anymore, but the catcher's voice sounded surprised mixed with suspicious.

The echoing sound of footsteps travelled through the house, "No! you don't need to search the house, I promise I don't have any androids!"

The catcher "we'll see about that!" he snorted and continued to search the house slowly edging closer the spare bedroom in which I lay. He reached the door and twisted the handle, Honey barked, and Jean spoke in a panicked ramble. This only made the catcher more suspicious.

He threw open the door and marched over to the bed ripping back the covers. A smirk broke out across his face and he grabbed my wrist and dragged me out of the house. Jean tried to yell and pull me back, but she had no power against the catcher as he pulled me through the front door and shoved me in the truck slamming the door shut. I watched the last glimpses of light and Jeans terrified face before slam! Everything went black.

Chapter 5:

I look around the truck as my eyes adjusted and beheld a sea of faces, each one displaying features of dejection and hopelessness. Staring straight ahead, only half-aware of the world outside the claustrophobic truck, androids line up and crowd to the walls. I don't know at this point what's going to happen, it's all been a blur. All I wanted was to be there for a family, I'm designed to be part of a family, I even thought Jean could be that new family.

There's nothing more human than that feeling of love. Something I thought I could learn to feel. It takes over the mind, allowing us to love so many people, creatures, places. Humans love to learn, discover achieve. I want that. I want to be human.

It's the feeling that no matter how hard I try, I just can't do anything right. I'm just a mere attempt at a copy of another child. An actual child. One that can love. My thousands of codes were not yet adequate to humans demands of love. The programmed thoughts in my head are to be ashamed of.

I sink to the floor and curl myself into a ball.

I tried to shut down.

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From the street, the factory looks empty. There are weary double doors made of wood with evidence of decay scattered along the walls.

The collaborative footsteps of androids echo on the floor, which was once aesthetically pleasing. The heavy scent of plastic and burning flood my senses sending a shiver through my joints.

"Keep moving!"

"Get over there."

I hear various commands, each android getting a specific direction.

"You there. Move to line D3."

I jolt and look to the origin of the voice. It was a man which when scanned revealed him to be in his mid 40's. He wore the uniform of my own company. *Euraxis.*

Adrenaline floods my wires, it pumps and beats around my system sparking and crackling like electricity. My eyes go wide with fear. My body wants to run, but instead, I do as I'm told. My whole body trembles as I slowly walk towards the line.

"Hurry up!" the man barks.

I look ahead following along the line to where it ends, it was a large metal door. Something was behind there waiting for us and it was anything but good. My body feels hot and heavy. I grip tightly to the hem of my jumper, finding a little bit of comfort in the clothes Jean had gifted me.

With every step forward, I progressively get more and more terrified.

"Hey."

The young man that stood before me had a sort of hen-pecked look. His metal exposed shoulders hunched together like he was trying to disappear inside himself. Even his dark eyes seem to be attempting to retread inside his head. My database guessed that he was designed to have European heritage, the Mediterranean most likely.

I startled like a deer in the woods, almost toppling as I took a large step backwards.

"Hey hey hey, calm your circuits. I'm David."

He outstretched his hand anticipating a shake. I stood up straight and returned the gesture.

"It's funny huh? The same company that made us will be same to destroy us."

Destroy.

My database almost immediately searches for all known android destruction sectors currently in operation. Listing 26 known locations at least. Almost tripling in numbers since the uprising in America.

"I shouldn't be here, I was supposed to be with a family, I should've been human," I say under my breath.

"You and me both, kid." David chuckles. "But alas, it's not the fate of our kind, not what we're ever gonna be either. We're just machines to them now. The sooner you learn to accept that the easier it's gonna be."

My metal fingers press into my forearms. My whole body shook, wires rattling in the constant fear of the future that loomed before me. Engine pounding so hard against my head that my circuits pressed outward.

"I'm going to die, I'll become scrap metal, I'll never have a family again, be a human, experience that life I was designed to have. Ever again."

Chapter 6:

I peered around David's metal arm trying to see the door that had taken the line of androids ahead of me. There were only two androids in front of David, now one. I tugged on his arm.

"David, we can't go in there." I pleaded.

"Look, kid, this was going to happen at some point, we weren't built to last forever," he sighed, "It'll be over soon…..just close your eyes."

I don't want to go. I *can't* go. I have to look after Honey. I have to be with Jean. I have to *live*. I want to *live*.

The metal door slid open and I realised that it was David's turn. I gripped his hand before he could move forward.

"No, no you don't have to do this!" I put my full body strength into holding him back, but I wasn't designed to be strong, I was designed to be a child. He brushed me off and gave me a sad smile.

"Close your eyes kid, close your eyes." He walked into the darkroom and the metal door slammed shut behind him. An awful sound came from my mouth, I scrunched up my face and squeezed my eyes shut just like he told me. I shuddered and if I could I would have cried.

Cry for the life I once had, cry for the life I never got, cry for my humanity.

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I opened my eyes only to be greeted with….nothing. Thick, black darkness, there wasn't anything. A creaking noise echoed around the warehouse as thousands of androids moved around in the pitch black.

"Powers out!" one of the Catchers yelled to another.

This was my chance. Humans couldn't see as well in the dark as androids could. I ran. Sprinting down the lines of robots, shouting erupted around me. Apparently, the human Catchers weren't as blind as I thought. I looked behind me to see that I was being followed by three Catchers. To my surprise, I wasn't the only one running. I could at least count twelve androids breaking the lines in the time that I had taken to turn around.

The door to the exit of the warehouse was barley metres away now. I could make it. My fingers brushed the door as I was suddenly pulled to the ground. A Catcher had dived and grabbed my ankle. I tried to scramble away from him but his grip was firm.

"This one's a defect!" he yelled to his friends, "Quick get her ar-" but before he could finish his sentence he was hit over the head with a baseball bat.

What?

"Thank God, I didn't know if they got you." Jean tugged at my hand pulling me to my feet gripping a large baseball bat in her other hand.

"You saved me?"

"Of course sweetie, I couldn't just leave you to die." She smiled down warmly at me.

"Now follow me we still have to get out of here alive." Jean tugged at my arm and before I knew it we were running across streets and dodging cars. We stopped at a black van. Jean pressed her finger into the scanner opening the car door. I slid into the back of the van as she started it up. Honey was sitting in the back seat and went crazy when he saw me. I was happy to see him too. Eventually, he settled down and fell asleep in my lap.

I didn't speak for a while. I couldn't save David, I had left him behind. I should have tried harder. I couldn't focus on that now, I would…. mourn him later.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"Anywhere, Nowhere, doesn't matter we'll figure it out. As long as we are together." Jean said over her shoulder as she gave me the same sad smile that David had given me.

I stared back at the city. It was a blur of smog and silver at this distance. Maybe humans and robots weren't that different. I could still love and still be human without a human heart and a human body. I could grow up in my own right. I looked down at Honey and then up at Jean, yes, this definitely was love.

In a land past many seas, disaster has stuck
Now Evelyn is caught in the crossfire.

In the year 2042, androids have spread
worldwide. An incident regarding these androids
has occurred in another land, and people are
terrified of their own machines. Now the people
of Australia have launched into a panic, and the
government is attempting to round up all the
androids to dispose of them.

Evelyn is an android programmed to be the
perfect 7-year-old daughter. One day, her parents
have a fight and she is discarded in an unknown
location. She must find her way to safety and a
new life, whilst avoiding the Catchers. Follow her
journey to a life without her programming to
govern how she feels, to break free of the code
that can never let her grow up.

ESCAPING THE CODE