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Spare Parts

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Alice X7 by Th

Spare Parts

Written by Sophie Lyon

Illustrated by Adam Wise

I sit in the waiting room of the tech repair shop, hoodie tight around my head, and arm cradled defensively in my lap. Skipping the software updates hasn't been much of a problem. There have been enough whisperings that they made old tech slow to scare me off. I already feel like I'm running slow these days. My stutter showed up a year ago, and shows no sign of letting up. I worry my memory is going foggy as well, but I suppose that's how aging goes. Maybe it was the last system update. The Company writes the issues off as out-of-date hardware. Most would be more than happy to get a newer model, old memories in fresh tech. I shudder to think what they do with the old bodies, unsure if being dumped in a landfill or torn apart for spare parts is a worse fate.

Replacement hardware is hard to come by. I've been careful, but the inevitable has finally happened. Finding this place wasn't easy. If The Company had their way, businesses like this (let alone customers like me) would not exist. The little shop brags services The Company won't provide, fixing out-of-date and jailbroken droids. When I called, the shopkeeper said fixing a broken arm should be no trouble at all. Such promises have left the waiting room well populated. A man, hat shading his face, sits beside a young woman dressed all in white. She shutters incessantly, blinking one eye, then the other. When she sees me staring, we both flush and look away, neither sure who caught who at what. An older woman sits beside a toned and tanned man. He rests his hand high on her thigh, making her gown ride up and show a wrinkled ankle. They smile, giggle, and wink like young lovers. A pair of women converse quietly with each other, one nervously fidgeting as the other soothes her. The

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fidgety one, blonde and fit, seems more bothered by the imminent appointment than the crushed in half of her face. Wires stick out; loops shoved helplessly back in to keep them from catching on anything. I sit alone until I am called to the counter.

"You didn't bring in the droid you're looking to fix?" The shopkeep adds wrinkles to his brow, further separating his thick glasses and thin hairline.

"It's complicated, I'm sure you understand." I can only pray he doesn't. "Can I fix it at home? You said the repair is simple, and I'm quite good at tech. I just need the p-parts."

"A left arm?" I nod. He sighs wearily, "What's the series and year?" When I tell him, he hums in approval, "Companion bot, good model. I've always had a soft spot for the classics. You know, for a young man, you look a lot like an Alice X7!"

I laugh nervously, "I g-get that a lot. My cousin was used as the face model."

He gawks, and I realize what I just implied. My circuits fizz, but he shakes off the moment and replaces his smile. This man runs his business on getting money from freaks, modded bots for crime, and sex. Just so long as he doesn't know what kind of freak I am. "Well," he coughs, "Sure you don't want to bring her in for me to fix? It won't take long at all."

I shake my head, "I really can't bring it in." Somehow the sting of "it" has become more bearable than "she."

He sniffs, "Ok then, I'll get you the parts and the instruction file. Good luck, kid. Don't hesitate to come back if you need a hand."