

White Lies

Walking into the entrance hall, the first thing Jane notices is how bright and crowded it is. There is a whirlwind of activity as men and women in white suits go about their respective tasks. Knowing her own task to fulfill, Jane pushes past them into the house. It doesn't take her long to find the room she's looking for: a children's room covered in blood.

She's not sure why, but Jane finds this room being illuminated in light to be wrong, like the scene isn't abnormal. It's wrong. Such crimes should only exist in the dark. They shouldn't exist in the day.

Shaking her head, Jane collects herself before finally entering the room. It's best she doesn't linger on such musings. In the room are the bodies of the two victims. A mother and her daughter. Jane's partner, Detective Delano, is kneeling near the victims looking for trace evidence. The Detective turns to Jane as she approaches,

"Ah, Jane. Good afternoon."

Jane nods absentmindedly in response, preoccupied with looking at the victims.

"You don't have to be here if it makes you uncomfortable," the Detective said.

"Hmm? I'm fine. I was designed for situations like this." The Detective returns Jane's nod from earlier before carefully handing Jane a bloodied knife. "Here, this knife is likely the murder weapon. I want you to scan the handle for fingerprints."

Carefully turning the knife over, Jane activates her internal fingerprint scanner as the Detective gets back to work. From what she can tell, there are signs of multiple fingerprints. Not unexpected, but it does make her job harder. As she scans the handle - made of leather - her eyes

once again wander to the child. Jane has seen very little children, having been manufactured in a factory. Jane always wondered what being a child would be like.

The Detective follows her gaze. “Poor kid. These cases are always the worst.”

The Detective’s words jolt Jane out of her thoughts. Refocusing on the scan, the results become clear to her. They indicate that the person who used this knife was the mother’s boss. A man in his late 30s. Looking him up in Jane’s database, she quickly discovers him to also be a sibling of a powerful political figure. With her analysis finished, Jane hands the knife back to the Detective, saying,

“Here. The results indicate George Mckinsey being the wielder of the knife.” After saying her piece, Jane thinks back to the victims. A mother and her child. It almost doesn’t seem real. It doesn’t match what Jane idolized childhood to be.

She doesn’t hear the Detective’s question. After a couple seconds pause, the Detective taps Jane on her shoulder. “Jane, are you sure you don’t want to go outside for a bit?”

She’s not sure why the Detective keeps asking her this. Jane is a machine. It is true she was designed with limited emotional capabilities, but she should be able to handle this just fine. However, Jane relents, “fine, I’ll go outside for a little bit.”

“I’ll finish our work here, then I’ll meet you outside on my way to talk to George,” the Detective said.

“Okay.”

...

A couple of weeks have passed since that day. The Detective never actually met up with Jane after she left. Jane was instead told some time later that the Detective had an argument with

the police chief after she left. Then, supposedly, the Detective set out alone to an irradiated city a couple of hours away. Jane is not sure why she wasn't informed of any of this, or for how long the Detective would even be gone. In the meantime, she was also abruptly reassigned to a different detective, whom she's been told to call Detective Fields.

Jane finds herself deep in thought while she waits for Fields, who is late. As the weeks went on, Jane couldn't get the victims or the Detective out of her head. In fact, these distractions only got worse with time as Jane got more and more concerned. The Detective has never left for such a long time before. It doesn't help that Fields is rather difficult to work with.

Jane finds this behavior of Fields to be particularly relevant at present. Fields is walking her way looking ill-tempered.

"Fields-"

"Detective Fields to you" Jane tunes him out.

"-you're four minutes late."

"..."

"..."

That didn't seem to improve his mood. Fields is glaring at her now. He continues glaring at her for a second as he reveals a letter in his hand.

"I was stopped by the chief and given this letter. Get off my ass, Jane." She doubts it took him four minutes to receive a letter.

"Wha-"

"I'm not finished. The letter is addressed to you. Maybe your department friends are getting tired of your lack of results." Fields holds out the letter. Jane has always found it strange how much Fields talks about his perceived relationship between her and the department. Still, if

it's a letter from the department like Fields is suggesting, then it is likely their response to her letter.

A little less than a week ago, Jane's concern over the Detective grew to the point where it was interfering with her duties. She also started to see the faces of the dead mother and child during her work. They made her wonder if it'll be the Detective's face she'll see next, covered in blood at some crime scene.

Detective Fields had sent some complaints to the department about her being defective. In fact, Detective Fields started making more of his strange comments and asking why a robot designed for crime scene analysis would be having difficulties with such tasks. Those difficulties eventually led to Jane writing a letter to the department, requesting permission for her to follow the Detective. This letter is likely their response.

"Well? Do you want it or not?" Fields waves around the letter impatiently. Jane nods hastily, and grabs the letter.

Fields doesn't let go.

Confused, Jane instinctively lets go of the letter herself. She turns to look up at Fields, who leans down towards her, glaring again.

"I wonder just what kind of information you've been feeding them, Jane. You seemed pretty eager to get this letter. In fact, just what was the reason you gave that got them to make Detective Delano disap- Wh-?!"

Jane rips the letter out of his hands.

"Are you finished?" Jane asks. Fields looks at her for a moment, before he seems to lose interest in fighting over a letter.

“For now. I’m watching you.” Without bothering to respond, Jane walks away. They met here to work on a case, but that can wait until after she’s read the letter. She hears Fields start grumbling and working through papers behind her, but she can just tune his complaints out. Fields is capable of handling that case on his own for the time being.

Jane ducks into a secluded room and thinks back on the conversation. Fields can be really difficult to work with sometimes. He wasn’t always like that, though. When Jane first arrived, Fields actually used to be one of the few people who would speak to Jane. Fields was even the person who gave her the name Jane. This changed, however, after she carelessly exposed a genuine mistake Fields had made. Fields got in big trouble with the department, and Jane didn’t see him much after that. Whenever she did see him, Fields was much colder and started to behave like he is now. That doesn’t mean that he was ever particularly nice, though. It was the Detective who she actually got along with.

Jane’s thoughts turn to the letter. After having to withstand the faces and Fields for weeks, Jane just wants to talk to the Detective. The Detective always hears her out, whether it be her concerns or her questions. Jane is sure that the department must also be getting concerned with the prolonged disappearance of the Detective. Turning the letter over, Jane sees a symbol of the sun. This confirms that the letter is sent by the Department. With this in mind, Jane takes a second to temper her emotions, and then opens the letter.

To D0e07A22

Your request has been received. In response to your inquiry, the department has determined that at this time your request is denied. You are not to follow Detective Delano nor

are you to leave the city until future notice. Additionally, the department has determined that you are to report to maintenance on Dec 5th, at 8:00 pm.

Jane closes the letter.

...

Ask anyone from the city their opinions on snow, and without fail, you'll find that they detest it. This was a discovery Jane had made shortly after being activated for the first time. She asked the Detective about it during one of their first cases together. The Detective had explained that the snow is hated because it is deceptive. The beauty of snow distracts you from its deadly reality, and once the lie was revealed, people became resentful and angry. After Jane stated her confusion, the Detective further elaborated how this region used to never get even a fraction of the snow it gets now. This region simply isn't meant to handle snow. So, when the snow first arrived it was celebrated, until it decimated the wildlife. Snow is resented because it makes life much tougher when it was already tough to begin with. Apparently, there is a dark sentiment held amongst those in the city: where the nuclear war didn't kill us, the nuclear winter will.

This conversation about the deceptiveness of snow lingers in Jane's mind as she drives. How can something be so beautiful yet choke the life out of the things it touches? She's sure there is another deeper reason for people's anger at the snow, though. Currently, Jane finds the snow to be rather obtrusive when driving.

She is at the moment managing some files in one hand while driving with the other on her way out of the city. Shortly before she set off, Jane managed to figure out the Detective's

specific destination. The destination is in one of the files. It was an orphanage near the outskirts of a city a couple hours away that was hit by a nuke. Jane is not sure why the Detective would go to that city, let alone an abandoned orphanage. In fact, she finds it rather hard to believe that her superiors let the Detective go out there for such a long period of time when they were rather unwilling to let her go to the city for a presumably much shorter period of time. Jane was, after all, simply intending on confirming the Detective's safety.

Putting aside such thoughts, and her files, Jane refocuses on steering her way out of the city. It sort of felt very liberating, in a way. Thinking about it, Jane hasn't actually taken such a significant action of her own volition before. She can't remember the last time she'd chosen to do something that wasn't for the department. This might just be the first time she's done so. Additionally, Jane's only left the city once before and this time she's doing it against her department's wishes.

Admittedly, it's not like she's doing something that bad or she's shirking her duties. Sure, Jane was told not to follow the Detective, but it's not like they would care that much about what she does on her off time. This does mean she will miss her maintenance appointment, however, she's confident nothing is wrong with her. If anything, it was kind of weird that her superiors told Jane to go to maintenance outside of her usual maintenance schedule. There aren't many reasons for them to do that.

... after considering the matter for a moment, Jane shakes her head and looks at the road. The reasons for why her superiors do what they do aren't important for her to understand.

Jane hasn't been able to see the road or signs of trees for some time now. With the snow obscuring her vision, Jane could imagine herself being completely alone. A small pocket of

existence. And yet, in this empty expanse, Jane still feels like she can see the faces of the dead family in her peripherals.

When she checked the weather earlier, it did say there might be a blizzard but the odds were supposed to be really low. She supposes this might be used as another reason the people in the city don't like the snow. All the soot from the war probably made it a lot more difficult to track weather patterns. It's a good thing Jane thought ahead. Jane had already memorized the path to the orphanage on some maps before she set out. She's not worried about her relative blindness out here.

Hopefully Jane's superiors didn't send anyone after her, but she sees no reason for them to do so. More than anything, they likely haven't realized what she's doing yet. They never did pay much attention to her.

Looking out into the blizzard, Jane's thoughts turn to the room that she first woke up in. It was a similarly lifeless place, a factory. At the time of her awakening, all Jane could see in the room were two figures in the Department's signature white suits. The first figure was a scientist and the second was one of the Department's higher ups. At first, Jane can remember herself being strangely excited and expectant. Her excitement quickly turned into a small disappointment as the two completely ignored her. They only engaged with her for the occasional calibrations test. Jane is still not quite sure what it was that she was expecting then, but the cold treatment wasn't it. And now, whenever Jane thinks of her first few hours, the faces of the child and mother keep on replaying in her mind.

It's starting to get on her nerves. Why won't they leave her alone? Even during the hours of this drive to the orphanage, they refuse to disappear.

Abruptly, the car slams to a harsh stop. Massive amounts of snow blast over the windshields.

For a few moments, Jane just sits there. Her nonexistent heart plummeting.

Kicking open the car door, the first thought to cross Jane's mind as she exits is how did this happen. She runs a little bit away from the vehicle before turning to figure out what happened. The first discovery is that the blizzard is somehow getting worse. She can barely see her hands out here, much less the car. After moving closer, Jane notes that most of her car is submerged in snow. The crash was caused by an unseen snowdrift that shouldn't have been on the road.

There's... a very good possibility that the car is stuck.

That's bad, very bad. The distant, howling wind almost sounds like a child's laughter to Jane. She quickly retreats back to her car and attempts to maneuver it out of the snow. After 7 attempts, Jane is forced to give in. The car isn't even budging.

Everything is working against her. The organization, the ghosts, even her car. All Jane wants is to find the Detective. What is she supposed to do now?

Jane slumps and looks out the window, before jumping and almost punching it in surprise. In her reflection, Jane saw the dead child rather than herself. The bloodied countenance of a sad little girl.

Jane has had enough.

Why is she going to an orphanage of all places anyway? Why did the Detective decide to go there now? It's taunting her. For all of Jane's short life, she has always dreamed of being a child. A fact she'd tried so hard to deny. She desperately wanted a parent, someone who would

care for her and teach her about the world. Her denial was working, before the scene of a shattered family life took it all away.

It's wrong for an android like her to be haunted by these corpses. For her to desperately want what the corpses lost is wrong.

That's it. Wrong. That's right. Something must be very wrong inside Jane. Suddenly, she could feel it clearer than ever before. Detective Fields was right: Jane was actually defective this whole time.

She should've just followed orders and gone to the appointment after all. Not go on some chase to the middle of nowhere. Though, Jane is quite sure that the purpose of the appointment is not to fix anything. No, not at all. There were, after all, only a few reasons that stuck in Jane's mind earlier when she wondered why the department would order her to go to an unscheduled appointment in their letter. This reason would fit her previous experiences with her creators.

They never did care about her. The Department just left her alone when all she wanted was to be cared about.

Maybe the Detective is just like her superiors, maybe that's why the Detective left her without a single word.

Jane finally lets herself feel the emotions she's been fighting since the Detective left her waiting outside the crime scene. A feeling very reminiscent of the one she had after she was first abandoned. What use would the Detective have for a defective android.

Despondent, Jane limply stares out the window. Here she is, abandoned and alone in the middle of a blizzard with nothing but ghosts to keep her company. If this is what Jane could've expected on this journey, she might as well have not gone in the first place.

Jane's eyes are drawn to the Detective's file. No, there's no way Jane wouldn't have gone. There is a genuine chance that the Detective is not safe or needs assistance.

Well, that also means the Detective may not have purposefully abandoned her. Thinking back, the Detective certainly did take care of her. The Detective always answered her questions, made sure she was okay, and in their last case together the Detective sent her out of the room when she wasn't feeling well. The higher-ups from the Department never even pretended to do such things.

Jane opens the Detective's file. Why did the Detective choose to go to an orphanage? Something about the case or the argument with the police chief must have incentivised that decision. All the file mentions is that the Detective was sent to the orphanage to investigate. That implies the Detective was sent by the Department rather than choosing to go. But then that begs the question, why would the department send the Detective out to the middle of nowhere on such short notice?

Jane doesn't like the answer. It sounds too similar to the maintenance appointment.

The image of the dead mother flashes through her mind. Jane needs to find the Detective, and soon. There's no other option. The Detective cares about her, and Jane, defective as she is, cares for the Detective. She can't just leave this as it is.

Jane may be defective, but right now she wouldn't have it any other way. It would be wrong not to chase the Detective, no matter who or what will try to stop her. She'll make it to that orphanage on foot if she has to.

Grasping her car's door handle, Jane takes a breath before finally throwing it open. She steps back out into the blinding flurry of the blizzard. This time, she has no intentions of returning to the car. Jane feels almost excited as the snow swirls around her. It took some time

but Jane is finally certain of what she must do. Without hesitation, Jane takes her first steps into the long journey that is ahead of her.

Whatever may come, there is no turning back.