The Androgynous Strain

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Nothing else matters.

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The Androgynous Strain : Chapter 1

The Androgynous Strain 1
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ï¿½
"Been thinking about it since before fourth grade."
"August to April.ï¿½Nine months.ï¿½Like pregnancy."
ï¿½
Some had just found a summer job.ï¿½Some had to quit when school started.
ï¿½
Sugary sweet.ï¿½Fat kids.ï¿½Insulin needle prick.
ï¿½
"If you express anger, I'll punish you.ï¿½Parents have problems too."
The teen's fists tightened.ï¿½Silence.ï¿½Guilt.ï¿½Shoulders slumped.ï¿½Alone with no friends.
ï¿½
ï¿½
"I can't go.ï¿½Got to take care of you, grandmother."
"Go.ï¿½I'll be okay for one night." she said to her grandson.
"I know how you think.ï¿½You'll try to kill yourself because you think you're a burden."
The sound of a sigh.
ï¿½
ï¿½
Four people to a room in apartment and rental house bedrooms designed for one person.
ï¿½
"Rape crisis hot line.ï¿½I'm your counselor."
Sobs.
"Take your time.ï¿½I can wait."
"I just got raped." said the young voice.
ï¿½
Drive-by shootings.ï¿½The commute from Simi Valley was always a traffic jam hassle.ï¿½By the time the few cops reported for duty, they were openly racist against the people they were supposed "to protect and serve."
ï¿½
Asthma-causing smog, nasty tasting tap water, and chemical smell dirt.
"My mom has cancer."
"Everybody here has cancer."
ï¿½
Music blasting from boom boxes and cars.ï¿½Heavy street and freeway traffic. Jackhammers and jets taking off.
ï¿½
"You say you attended community college but the records were lost?"
"Yes sir."
"It's a demanding job and I can't offer you a big salary."
"The wages are still better than what I earn as a waitress."
"Well okay Sarah . . ."
"Baum.ï¿½Pronounced like bomb."
"Okay Sarah Baum.ï¿½You can start today.ï¿½Go to HR."
"Thank you so much."

He handed her paperwork and looked at her as she left his office.ï¿½Pretty woman.ï¿½Nice suit.ï¿½Skirt too short.
ï¿½
ï¿½
Tremor.ï¿½It wasn't the big one.ï¿½Mud slides in the canyons.ï¿½Fire in the hills.
ï¿½
A father deployed to war.ï¿½He dies but his Type A personality genes live on in his children.
ï¿½
Migraines.ï¿½Anxiety.
ï¿½
"What's wrong with that kid?ï¿½He looks like an old man."
"Progeria.ï¿½Might not live to see graduation."
ï¿½
Crips.ï¿½Bloods.ï¿½Bullies.ï¿½Fear.
ï¿½
psychology teacher: "Cognitive dissonance.ï¿½Nice people worry about hurting others.ï¿½Evil people feel no strain."
a student: "Explains the world."
psychology teacher: "Nice people are honest and committed but circumstances beyond their control can prevent them from keeping promises and then they are perceived as dishonest and incapable."
student: "I can use that excuse when I go with someone else."
ï¿½
Injuries. Greenstick fractures.
ï¿½
Jesse: "Get yourself pregnant by John Connor.ï¿½No one else.ï¿½I can get a paternity test done to make sure."
Riley: "I don't want to do this."
Jesse slaps her.
Jesse: "Half the girls at Campo de Cahuenga must be unwed teen mothers.ï¿½Do it."
ï¿½
ï¿½
John looked around.ï¿½A mother dominated by her dissolute college-age son bringing home beer for the house party.ï¿½ï¿½ Some kids were using drugs.ï¿½A sudden appreciation for his overly strict mother.ï¿½He dragged Riley out of the house before any cops busted the place.
ï¿½
Riley was into cutting.
ï¿½
"Is someone hurting you?" asked Cameron.
As usual, Riley's eyes widened in fear of Cameron and she backed away.ï¿½Riley had robotphobia like Sarah and Jesse.
ï¿½
"John, one day you'll listen to me.ï¿½Riley has been in the bathroom too long."
"Stay out of my life Cameron."
Nevertheless he checked.ï¿½Blood all over the floor.ï¿½Slit wrists.ï¿½Emergency Room.
ï¿½
"Burglars." said Sarah.
"I guess Riley didn't set the alarm when she left." said John.
ï¿½
Cameron is pissed.ï¿½The thieves took her purple leather jacket.
ï¿½
"Derek, we're wiped out.ï¿½They got all the money." said Sarah.

ï¿½
The student in the psychology class is like many -- can't get a date after jilting the one they had.
ï¿½
"Mom's pregnant."
"Why would you say that?"
"Morning sickness.ï¿½An heir and a spare as the British royal watchers say."
"If I'm supposed to be the heir, then you're saying mom is making sure?"
"There is nothing to stop her from naming a second child John Connor if you get killed."
"What if it's a girl?"
"Girls can lead too."
ï¿½
Riley gets on her bicycle and pedals away after visiting John.
ï¿½
"John, dump this Riley girl.ï¿½She's dragging you down.ï¿½I bet she hangs out with stoners.ï¿½She's attracting social workers and police.ï¿½And she's brought this family to financial ruin."
"No!ï¿½I don't give up on people like you."
"Who have I given up on?"
"Uncle Derek and Cameron.ï¿½They are part of this family."
"They are fifty percent of my problem."
ï¿½
Loud arguments.ï¿½Not just in the Baum home.ï¿½Every home in the community.ï¿½Parents, brothers, sisters, friends, co-workers, boss.
ï¿½
"Do these."
The co-worker dumped her work on Sarah's desk.
"I help you with your work.ï¿½How come you never help me with mine?
"You're new."
Boss enters.
"Sarah, I don't pay you to argue with your co-workers.ï¿½Get this work done."
"Yes sir."
ï¿½
Tossing the pillow and turning in bed.
ï¿½
"Mom wants to pull me out of Crest View."
"We are out of Red Valley."
"What are you talking about Cameron?"
"That's in New Mexico.ï¿½You said mom wants to pull you out of Crest View."
"I said that?ï¿½I meant Campo.ï¿½One day I'm there and a substitute teacher shoots at me and the next day I'm enrolling at Campo.ï¿½Mom changes jobs and I change schools a lot but this was whiplash."
"Well we did jump over a decade."
ï¿½
Clang.ï¿½Cold metal bars.ï¿½Eau de puke and sweat was the perfume of the teen girls holding cell.
"What are you in for?" asked Jody.
"Being in a grocery store."
ï¿½
"You seen this girl?" asked John many times.
"Yes, she's over there."ï¿½Finally.
"Get away from me."
"Your name is Cameron Baum not Allison Young."
ï¿½
At work, Sarah was almost alone in the back office except for somebody from another department.

"Where is everybody?"
He made air quotes.
" 'Sick.'ï¿½Probably out interviewing."
"Why?"
"Merger."
ï¿½
ï¿½
TV commercials.ï¿½Everyone's new phone, game, and PDA was now obsolete.ï¿½Many had not been paid for yet.
ï¿½
ï¿½
Uncomfortable workplace.ï¿½Thirty-nine hours.ï¿½Not technically full time.ï¿½No benefits.ï¿½Then the boss piled on long boring hours.
ï¿½
Sarah: "Do I get benefits now?"
HR: "After you've been here a year."
Sarah: "When will I get training?"
HR: "You never got training?"
ï¿½
ï¿½
Tracking down the burglars and their fences.ï¿½Cameron shot the burglars point blank.ï¿½Sarah recovered the money and then beat the rest of the money out of the people who fenced the blood diamonds and the property stolen from the Baum home.
ï¿½
Tracking.ï¿½Stocking warehouses.ï¿½Setting up safe houses and alternate I.D.ï¿½Following every lead to find this Turk in hopes that it will take her to the technology that makes the Skynet artificial intelligence possible.ï¿½Protecting people that Derek says are future Resistance.ï¿½Shopping.ï¿½Preparing hot meals for John whenever possible.ï¿½Leaving a casserole in the refrigerator when not.ï¿½Keeping Cameron in line.ï¿½Paying the landlady.ï¿½Paying other bills.ï¿½Cleaning the house but delegating laundry to Cameron.ï¿½Cleaning guns.ï¿½Waiting in waiting rooms for appointments with doctors.ï¿½All while holding down the new job.ï¿½Over-scheduled.
ï¿½
ï¿½
Test anxiety.ï¿½Midterms.
ï¿½
ï¿½
A letter from the government.
"They've found us mom."
She opens it.
"An IRS audit.ï¿½How can that be?ï¿½I've never paid taxes before.ï¿½Always below the minimum.ï¿½Well, Los Angeles has been fun.ï¿½We'd better pack up and skip town."
"Bad idea Sarah."
"You agreed mom.ï¿½We'd take a stand."
ï¿½
ï¿½
ï¿½
flashback
Cameron: "You wanna find Skynet?ï¿½You wanna stop Skynet?ï¿½This is the way."
Sarah: "You don't know who builds it!"
Cameron: "No, but we know where and we know when.ï¿½We can go kill it before it's born.ï¿½You can stop running.ï¿½Stay in one place.ï¿½Fight."

ï¿½
ï¿½
ï¿½
After waiting for this appointment, Sarah shifted in her chair.ï¿½The IRS agent scrutinized the returns and scanty receipts.
"Only recently stopped working for tips at Mel's Diner . . . "
It was a comment not a question.
"Yes."
"Your return is thin but in order.ï¿½Start keeping receipts from now on."
ï¿½
ï¿½
Cameron had perfect hair and brought home perfect grades.ï¿½ï¿½ Other girls wanted the perfect body, the perfect dress, the perfect shoes, and the perfect night.ï¿½Hard to do when you didn't control your life.
ï¿½
At home, teens stopped talking to parents and started obsessing and worrying.ï¿½[When parents overheard phone conversations, the subject was always the same.]ï¿½At school, students only had one topic of gossip.
ï¿½

Chapter 2

The Androgynous Strain 2
"April, I told you not to wait until the last minute."
Misplaced keys. Locked out.
It was an accomplishment to find a dog that was not freaked out by Cameron.
Morris: "What's the matter now, man?"
John: "I think the neighbors poisoned our dog."
Morris: "Call the police."
John: "No proof and besides, our family never calls the police."
Energy drinks outsold everything else. Chocolate was in demand.
"Leave the thermostat alone."
"It's hot in here."
"No it's cold in here."
Sarah went in for surgery. Meanwhile, Cameron did not have juvenile arthritis but the pain in her leg had become more than data -- it was acute and chronic.
John had an unhappy childhood but at least he had one; Cameron had none. Unless you count trauma as childhood.
I screwed up. I have to do better. They're all depending on me.
Derek's teen years were spent scavenging and protecting kid brother Kyle from the H-K's.
Rainy season. Damp.
Siren. Flashing lights. Sarah pulled over.
"I wasn't speeding."
"License, registration, insurance, and turn off your engine."
The officer went back to his car. Sarah suppressed an impulse to start a car chase.
"There is a problem with your insurance, Sarah Connor."
Before she could reach for her gun or hit the accelerator, he had a gun to her temple.
"Relax. I'm Resistance not a terminator or a fed."
He put away his gun and returned her ID cards.
"Thanks. Who are you?"
"I can't say but I can tell you this. Derek Reese's squad was not the only one sent to the past. Get real insurance Mrs. Baum. Good day."
Young children aren't really bothered by getting up in front of a class to go to the board or do show and tell -- unless the other children laugh. Teens and adults are bothered by presentations.
The future.
Uncertainty. What if there was no Judgment Day in April 2011? John would graduate and Sarah had not gotten him ready to leave home and go to college. For that matter, Sarah had not gotten herself ready to let him go. It had been a mistake to break off the engagement with Charley Dixon. A woman had needs too.
Sarah and Derek fought. John and Cameron observed.
"I told you." said Cameron to John.
"Shut up."
Many teens had to take care of a baby. Their own or a baby brother or sister.
Uncaring teachers. Boredom.
Muggings don't just happen in New York City. Other cities too.
"Society expects you to fit in."
"Keep up buddy."
I.O.U.'s and not enough jobs for teens just when they needed extra overspending money.
Many students dealt with inconsiderate and rude fellow students by dissing them. One student avoided people (hard to do in a crowded school).
Pickpockets. The assistant principal intervened.

"That jerk stole from me."
"But you threw the first punch. You're suspended."
"But that means I'll miss the big night!"
"That's probably why they provoked you. To steal your date." said a friend of the student.
Half the students at Campo liked sad songs. The other half liked what the first called "bitch music." Bitching about bitches.
The school librarian noticed the books that were always checked out -- books about victims. Victims of the Inquisition during the Dark Ages. Victims of the Protestant Ascension in England. Victims of the Salem Witch Trials. Victims of the KKK. Victims of the Nazi Holocaust. Victims of terrorism. Victims of vampires. Victims of cults. Victims of Bhopal. Victims of Chernobyl. Victims of gang violence.
Sarah got shot while checking out UFO reports in the desert.
"Nobody walks in L.A."
"Only a nobody walks in L.A."
Those who didn't have cars took the bus to school.
Except for the Homecoming win, Campo de Cahuenga High School had an unbroken losing streak.
Frustration. Excitement.
"I can't wait!" became "I can't wait any longer."
Noise. John stepped back on the curb out of the path of the truck. Cameron was not there. So what? Cameron did not follow him into the boys' room at school either. He could slip on the floor, hit his head, and die instantly. That truck could have produced a new timeline. One with no John Connor.
Murphy's Law.
The best way to express emotion is through violence--not! Endless legal problems as certain teens discovered.
Certain viruses, fungi, and parasites flourish in the teen population. Especially here.
"Get up John. No rest for the weary. And clean up your room."
The technician sent by the school district physical plant department was finally changing the filters in the water fountains.
Principal: "How often are the water filters changed?"
Tech: "With budget cuts, once every ten years."
Principal: "How often should they be changed?"
Tech: "To be safe, once a month. And this unit has lead solder."
Sarah looked at the meat in the supermarket. A few feet away was a mother with her eight-year daughter who was developing breasts. Sarah looked back at the shrink-wrapped meat in the plastic trays and sighed. She left the store and went instead to an organic butcher.
Power lines hung over homes. Microwave ovens. Cell phones and other cordless devices. On wavelengths not that different from brain waves.
The fluorescent lighting at school buzzed. While some students had to study by a naked incandescent light bulb.
At work, Sarah was interrupted by interruptions that were interrupted.
At school, students sexted each other. On a social network was embarrassing information. A boy saw pictures of himself that he wished he had never taken and shared.
"John, we need to talk about your future."
"I think about the future all the time mom."
"Not THE future, YOUR future. It would not be the first time that Judgment Day or the inevitable got postponed. You haven't applied to any colleges and we don't have the money to send you."
"We have money for guns that don't stop terminators."
"You need to win a scholarship. I need to get you safely away from me so that you can pursue a political career without a criminal like me dragging you down."
"What brought this on?"
"Riley. She's dragging you down. Got me to thinking that I am too. Cameron can go to college with you. I can't."
"Why politics?"

"If you were a Congressman, then you could cut funding for the Skynet Project. And even without Skynet, a nuclear war or plutonium pollution will kill us all unless you stop it."

Some kids at Campo worried about climate change or other headline news. Some had parents trapped in cults or were in cults themselves. Weird religions. Some teens had to deal with domestic battering or sexual abuse. Some kids were HIV positive. Some parents pulled their teens out of Campo de Cahuenga so that they would not be exposed to AIDS.

As usual, John was skipping meals. Family outings were a thing of the past.

The AP teachers were loading down the college-bound and gifted students with homework. By contrast, other teachers didn't care. Their students weren't going to college so why bother to assign homework?

Chapter 3

The Androgynous Strain 3
One way boys (and girls) were looking better was holding in their stomachs. Others were dealing by hyperventilating to get more oxygen.
There is no hope.
"I don't understand what I'm feeling or why."
"Give up."
"Everything from the way I was raised to my DNA controls my life."
"You are powerless."
"I'm weak."
There is no way out.
No friends. Obstacles.
"You always come home late!"
"You never do what I want!"
Rolling of eyes.
Read the same paragraph over and over and just don't get it. DÃ©jÃ vu. Read the same paragraph over and over and just don't get it.
The words above the main entrance were Camp de Cahuenga High School. Some teens entering were rubbing their backs and grimacing. Some were holding their stomachs and talking about butterflies. Some could not breathe. Some asked to be excused to the rest room every few minutes to urinate. Some dragged their feet down the halls and sat in class yawning and trying to keep their eyes open.
Little children spin until they fall down. These teens did not need to spin.
Some snapped at friends. Some didn't talk as tears ran down their faces. Some had wrinkled foreheads. Some held themselves as stiff as a board. Some yelled at anyone nearby.
Some sluggish fat kids had dry skin, dull hair, and were not very smart. Some skinny kids were excited, restless, and seemed to have diarrhea. Some hyperactive kids could not sit still.
"Where's your paper?"
"I don't have it."
"Please don't tell me the dog ate it because only little children use that lie."
"I did it but I left it at home."
Some students no longer laughed at that line in the TV commercial: "I've fallen and I can't get up." Because when they fell, they couldn't get up. Some never found the commercial funny in the first place because they had grandparents or because they were in wheelchairs.
Some hadn't fallen down physically. They had run out of ways to help themselves.
"Are you listening?"
"Huh?"
"I asked you a question."
At bedtime when the rest of the family went to sleep, Cameron usually powered down when there were no chores to do. Powering down conserved her batteries. For all practical purposes, it was sleep. This week, Cameron's bed was never slept in. Other students were not cyborg but still could not sleep. Some could sleep but woke up every night screaming.
Some could not pass a blood alcohol test or breathalyzer test when stopped at night by the police. Some could not pass these tests during the day at school. Some tested positive for other, illegal substances.
"I need more muscles."
He took something to build his body.
"I don't look like the model in the magazine." said one girl.
"Of course not. She's a grown woman and you're a teen girl." said her mother.
The teen pointed to the article about the model.
"She's the same age as me."

The mother had no answer to that.
Some students blacked out. Some clutched their side and spat up blood. The paramedics took them to the ER. Some bit their nails. Some perspired even though they were not in Phys-Ed. Some held their forehead and then swallowed pills.
Many, like John Baum, left their bed unmade in the morning. Some left the water running. Some left the refrigerator door open and came home to a parent angry that all the food was spoiled and, in some cases, water all over the kitchen floor. Some left the door to their house open. Most of these were lucky that they were not robbed like the Baums and wiped out financially. Some left their locker open at school. Few wanted to rob you but you risked someone planting drugs in your locker and then calling the narcotics squad.
The blasÃ© rich kids had seen everything and would rather watch paint dry or watch grass grow than watch the clock as they waited to transfer to private school with the other rich kids. What a life!
Some teens just stared at the floor or into empty space. Some moped and brooded. Some stopped seeing friends and stopped talking to parents or siblings.
Some picked fights. Some tended to overreact.
Some girls had to see the doctor more often. Some boys had to see a male specialist. Some had inflammations. Some had an idea how the teen with progeria felt when their hair fell out and it wasn't chemo. Some had to see a periodontist.
"No."
"Please."
"No!"
Thwarted, some ground their teeth and had to see an endodontist.
Some shook and it wasn't epilepsy. Some thought everyone was out to get them. Some lost the ability to trust others.
"What's wrong?"
"My chem classroom was here yesterday.
"You're on the wrong hall." said the principal.
Cameron was not the only one who forgot who she was. Some zoned out. The doctors called it a "Transient Dissociative Episode." Some forgot their medication and freaked.
Derek Reese had survived what Skynet Forces had called a work camp. He now had a condition worse than simple PTSD. Derek disliked going near the high school. It reminded him of the adolescence that was taken from him by Judgment Day.
Some, like Cameron, felt shame. Some self-blame. Some felt permanently damaged while others really were permanently damaged.
"Nobody understands me."
In the future, the machines sent a cyborg on a mission to destroy the leader of their enemy. She was captured and reprogrammed by Doctor Katherine Brewster to believe herself evil and The Resistance good. Do good people engage in torture and brainwashing? Cameron even began to idealize the one who ordered this experimentation upon her -- John Connor. Then she met his mother.
"There is no meaning to life."
Sarah never understood why Cameron never protected herself by taking cover when bullets were flying. Sarah never told Cameron to duck because Sarah didn't care.
Food, feathers, dust, and pollen. At school, some had eczema or broke out in hives. Some had blackheads, lesions, and pus. Disgusting! Dermatology bills were high.
"You're too sensitive."
"Maybe if you didn't criticize me I wouldn't be."
Sarah came home late. Derek was not there. Laundry was piling up and Cameron had not done it yet. John's room was a mess.
"Do I have to do everything myself?"
Some students were annoyed. Some were agitated. Some were overwhelmed. Some numbed themselves.
The school nurse earned her pay but she wasn't a doctor.

Inspired by the show Jackass and the game Grand Theft Auto, some took to street racing, car surfing, and daredevil stunts. Some jumped from bridges into water. Some jumped from rooftop to rooftop. Some sought thrills in other ways. Boys succeed at suicide. Girls just want attention and are ineffective at suicide. A girl named Jordan Cowan succeeded. She jumped off the roof as other students chanted: "Jump! Jump! Jump!" No one thought it was fun afterward.

Chapter 4

The Androgynous Strain 4
Loud party. Disturbing the peace. Speeding. Speeding ticket. Carbohydrates. Overeating.
How-to-be-an-anorexic web sites. Starvation. Relatives visiting during the holidays and other times. Parents cosigning loans so that adolescents can buy a used car.
Hard as it may be for children of permissive parents to believe but not all kids are allowed freedom and privileges. Some parents actually care about their children. Some parents actually impose discipline. And some parents were inconsistent hypocrites. John was allowed to run wild while Cameron was kept on a tight leash.
Some teens were only now dating for the first time, visiting friends for sleepovers for the first time, going to a teen club for the first time, and going to a dance for the first time. Some Christian teens were forbidden to dance. Mormon teens were forbidden alcohol. Muslim teens did not freak dance. [The Middle East invented belly dancing.] And there were no Amish kids at Campo. Racist parents did not allow their children to bring home black friends -- nor even have black friends if they knew about it. Some teens went to their first movie at a cinema or theater!
Some teens joined ministries. Some dropped out. Some were new at the school.
John thought it was his imagination. Was she hinting? Then one day he found a note in his lab manual: "Please ask me."
It was typed and unsigned. It had to be Cheri Westin. She was his lab partner. Who else would slip a note into his lab manual?
After the old house burned down, the Baums moved to a new house. John and Cameron were pulled out of school. John got home schooling. Cameron got nothing.
On the job, Sarah believed that she deserved a raise but did not really want to be noticed because she was still wanted by the police. So she kept silent. Then trouble began. The boss gave her more responsibility without increasing compensation. In fact, it was more work after a cut in pay.
Some girls at school wanted the perfect dress. Some boys found that all the tuxedos had been rented and there were not enough for sale at an affordable price. This left two choices; either have their father's old tux taken in at the tailor's (if their father even owned a tux and if they could find a tailor who had the time during award season) or get a pattern and sew one from scratch.
"John, I told you back during Homecoming that you were not going. And as for you, the thought of one of your kind dating a human is disgusting."
Cameron abruptly went to her room not bothering to listen to the usual you're-a-machine bigotry. She was a cyborg not a robot. Half human to begin with and these days even more human. Some of her metal parts had dissolved and been replaced by flesh and new organs. She had tried to tell them that she was different and none of them had listened. When she had been built, she had a primitive alimentary canal and a primitive reproductive system. Now she had a heart, lungs, and even the beginnings of a liver.
"I have to hold the door? Why?"
Except for teens born in the South, many were manners-challenged. Some took etiquette classes. John had had these in summer camp.
Easter. Some teens had an older sibling getting married. Yet another reason to get new clothes.
The Baums rented a house in the canyons from the landlady. Other families, especially those out in the suburbs with long commutes, were saddled with mortgages and credit card debt and fuel bills for their gas-guzzling SUV's, trucks, and vans. Foreclosures happened and some families did not even wait for the sheriff's eviction. They got up in the middle of dinner leaving hot food on the table, the TV on, doors open, and leaving behind child's toys, insurance papers, birth certificates, and irreplaceable family photos.
Cameron never forgot her first attempt at making a friend. Jordan committed suicide. Her next attempt was Eric. Cameron realized that his cancer had returned and told him. He no longer wanted to see her and quit his job at the archives.

At Sarah's job, the merger went through but the business went into bankruptcy. Sarah was last hired and first fired. She immediately started asking around and applying everywhere. She started a new job as a taxi driver. While waiting for the dispatcher to assign her a vehicle from the fleet, she spoke to a fellow cabbie, a mother of teens like herself.

"Changes."

"You could get a Mohawk like Robert De Niro in Taxi Driver."

Blank look.

"It's a movie Sarah."

The police were closing in on Sarah Connor.

There were medications for everything. There were medications for young children. There were medications for teenagers. In the time since his friends John and Cameron had been absent from the Camp campus, Morris had been hassled by bullies who were off their medications.

John still wanted to go but his Homecoming date had been asked by another guy after his mother pulled him out of school. Riley was negative on all things high school and had no interest in going.

Sarah: "You're not going anywhere."

Cameron: "But John needs me."

Sarah: "John can identify Riley's body in the morgue without you. You know if I killed you, it would solve fifty percent of my problems."

In the old house, Derek had a room. In the new house, Sarah gave Cameron a room but left Derek to make do in the room above the garage. He spent some of his time with Jesse Flores but didn't bother to tell the others that someone new had arrived from the future. Sarah kept many secrets but considered others liars if they had any secrets. In other words, Derek and Cameron.

"If you ever lie to me again Derek . . . "

"Careful what you wish for Sarah."

The subconscious mind takes what you wish and makes it happen for real.

A Kaliba Group operative abducted Derek and used him as bait to capture Cameron. They found a j-peg (a photo) of Savannah Weaver, daughter of Zeira Corporation president Catherine Weaver, in his phone. Since Sarah felt it was her duty to protect people who might be important to The Resistance, Sarah was concerned that the little girl was going to be killed. Without thinking it through, Sarah decided to kidnap the little girl before a terminator killed her. Luck ran out. Derek was terminated while the family rescued Savannah. John grieved for his uncle, the brother of the father he had never met. Sarah didn't shed a tear. Fifty-percent of her problems were gone.

"Damn!" said Sarah stranded on the road. Derek had always taken care of keeping the cars well-maintained. Be careful what you wish for.

Some teens were adopted before they aged out of the system. Some teens had to give up or share a room when a family member moved in, not for a visit. Some teens were told that they would have a baby brother or sister. Some teens found out that a family member was mentally ill. If this was a single parent, then they became like an orphan. John had experienced this years before when he was put into foster care when his mother was in the state mental hospital. Sarah had never recovered from the shock of Kyle dying and finding out later that her mother was terminated also. Sarah told John golden stories about her parents, his grandparents. Sarah never told John that her parents first separated, later divorced, and then her father died in the military. He committed suicide.

Chapter 5

The Androgynous Strain 5
Because some teens could not deal with not finding a date, some teens turned gay. Some teens are grounded because of low grades; some teens are grounded because of misbehavior. Some teens turn to illegal drugs, some teens abuse alcohol, and some teens chain smoke cigarettes. Some teens keep going by taking cold showers.
"Not going? Why?"
"I don't have a date."
"Get one."
"I've tried."
"Not hard enough." "Everyone is spoken for."
"Then get someone from another high school or junior high or college. I heard of eight gals sharing one guy. If all else fails, then get a hooker or a gigolo. Just make sure they're tested for disease."
"My friend can't go."
"Make other friends and go anyway."
"I'm grounded."
"Sneak out. The worst they can do is kill you. And your folks are gonna do that anyway."
"I'm home schooled."
"No problem. Go with someone attending Campo who has tickets or can get tickets."
"My religion forbids it."
"Find another religion."
"I wimped out and lost the nerve to ask them."
"Man up or woman up as the case may be."
"It costs too much."
"Get your parents to pay for part of it. Get a job and pay for most of it. Clip coupons. Find discounts. Go halves with another couple and double date. Bust open your piggy bank. Pawn your guitar. Where there's a will, there's a way. That's the life lesson you're supposed to learn from all this."
"I'm in debt."
"So is the government and it's never going to shut down for long. Pay off your debts and then go."
"I haven't been asked."
"Then ask someone yourself."
"All the people there are going to hell and it's no big deal."
"Sour grapes. You aren't fooling anyone but yourself."
"The one I prefer already has a date."
"Then find your second most favorite person and go with them. If the one you preferred doesn't want you, then you shouldn't want them. They obviously don't appreciate a quality person like you. Go with someone else and be happy just to spite them. Or better yet, go and be happy just because happiness is a good thing."
"I'm too chicken to ask a girl because I'm afraid of rejection."
"Then get a friend to prescreen for you and to find several girls who will say yes. Then ask the one that your friend says will definitely say yes. Or get the word out that you would welcome the advances of a girl who was forward. Just be sure you like assertive girls. They're not like passive girls. They will not waste time with boys who are not receptive to them."
"I was banned by the principal for fighting."
"No problem. It does not have to be Campo de Cahuenga. Teens at other high schools would love to take a date from another school. Use your formal name or your nickname in case principals talk to each other in the district."
"I wasn't invited."
"Then advertise on the internet that you want to be invited."
"I got cold feet."

"A promise is a promise."

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"They got nothing on us. Did you know that some Hollywood stars missed it and still regret it? Imagine. Rich as they are."
"Of course. Everyone who missed theirs bitterly regrets it. They envy the fun and feel like a loser. You'll regret it if you don't go."
"My mother said she's sorry she didn't go."
"My dad said he could kick himself for not going."
"My aunt was hospitalized. She says that if she had known, then she would have gone on crutches or put off going into the hospital"
"My grandfather slept through it because he was tired from his job and didn't take No-Doze. In his words, he rues the day. My guess is unrequited love."
"Since they destroyed marriage, it's the only milestone in life between birth and death."
"It's a rite of passage. If you skip it, then you'll always be insecure and need therapy."
They were discussing the night of their dreams.
"No Oscars or Nobel Prize or Congressional Medal of Honor or party nomination or coronation even comes close."
"You need to make memories as a kid before you become an adult."
"You're leaving friends you'll never see again."
"We may never all be together again."
"It's a magic unforgettable night."
"It's the most important social event of your life."
"It's a very special day remembered forever as wonderful and amazing."
"You only get one chance to go. You don't get another chance. You only get one."
"It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience."
"Life is short. Why waste it?"
"It's a night to remember."
"I want to throw a killer party."
Cameron was in the next booth at the fast food place with John and overheard the conversation. Words like murder, death, and kill always perked up her ears. Ahhhhh, to be like Carrie, covered with blood and making knives fly through the air with only your mind. That would be a killer party.
Of course, Cameron did not actually want a bloodbath any more than people who read murder mysteries wanted to be murdered or people who went to slasher movies wanted to be slashed. But one fantasizes sick fantasies and Cameron, though an infiltrator, still had terminator in her heritage.
"Let's party!" said one with eyes wide.
"Too late to lose weight. Suck in your stomach. Wear a girdle or corset like those Rubenesque fat women of the past."
The only thing they were sucking down was cola.
The music committee had settled on all new music and only new music because no one wanted to hear old music. It was new music or no music at all. However, there would be a last waltz.
John was glad he learned how to waltz in summer camp -- not that mom was going to let him go.
Many waited until the last minute believing that if you shop early, it will be out of style. Many did not plan. Many did not commit to any group. And when some gals got busy, like bridezillas, the guy was left out. Many teens got so busy that they did not communicate with their friends. As much as he tried to block it out, John overheard the conversation too.
"Cameron, do you think we should contact Morris?"
The talk in the next booth continued. The topic was the same every day.
"It's a big night."
"It's going to be fun."
"I can't wait!"
"The essential thing is success."

"I just want to be popular."
"I just want good looks or at least to look good."
"I want to be pretty."
"I want to be beautiful."
"I just want to be wanted."
John got up and he and Cameron moved to another booth away from the conversation. In the new seats, there were teens nearby.
"I just want the perfect dress."
"The dress should be over two hundred dollars."
"Tuxedo, dinner reservations, corsage, limousine . . . "
"It's the one thing you should spend a ton of money on."
"You could never spend too much or put too much time and energy on it."
"The memories have to last a lifetime so do it up right."
They got up and left the restaurant to go shopping. The table was wiped off and soon another group sat down.
"This is as American as it gets. More than mom, apple pie, baseball, and the flag. Segregation? That's like the Klan. All that forbidden stuff is anti-American. They aren't really Americans."
"Fundamentalism is a psychosis."
"I just don't get Baptists being against dancing. The Baptist denomination started on the idea of freedom. There was dancing at that wedding where Jesus turned water into wine. Jesus knew how to party. He didn't get drunk but he did drink."
On the other side of them was another conversation
"They have a good reason for not going. No one wants them. They're ugly."
"They're worthless."
"They're losers."
None of these people were talking about John or Cameron of course. But they left the restaurant feeling shunned and excluded.
At home, Sarah repeated: "No, you can't go. Too dangerous. The last time I went somewhere, it was a blast and terminators showed up. The police and FBI are still looking for me."
"Cameron can go and protect me."
"And who's going to protect her from getting pregnant?"
"She can't get pregnant. She's a machine."
"Maybe you're right but you still can't go."
"Are you pregnant mom?"

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