The Car Ride

Elijah Jameson stood slightly hunched over in an overcoat, greyed hair tied into a ponytail with loose strands hanging in his eyes. Beside him was a man of average height wearing a crisp suit, standing at attention with perfect posture.

“May I call you Eli?”

“Absolutely not.”

“Elijah it is, then.” A pause and then the man spoke again with a curious tilt of his head. “Would you like to know my name?”

“Don’t give a shit.”

With almost no delay, the suited man spoke in a pleasant voice. “I am DW0052. You may call me DW.”

Elijah turned to the other man, his voice gruff. “Look, I don’t need a fucking android. As soon as this shit’s done, you’re going back in the box. I don’t need a partner *or* a pet.” He pointed at him aggressively with brows furrowed and a scowl on his lips.

A self-driving car rolled up to the curb. It was fairly new, grey and inconspicuous, with a sleek curved body and scooped door handles. The doors popped open silently.

“I’m driving.”

The android arched a single eyebrow, its face looking all too human except for the subtle glow of its irises. “I did not come from a box and your superiors would argue otherwise. Also, the vehicle drives itself.”

“Oh great. I got a sassy one too. Fuck me, right? Ugh.” He groaned, shaking his head.

“Get in, asshole.” Elijah snapped, before walking around to the car and sliding into the driver’s seat. The steering wheel was recessed inside the dash of the car, with only a few buttons and a user-interface display glowing faintly over the windshield. It was nine fifty-seven a.m. on January 22nd, 2064. According to the weather report it was thirty-seven degrees Fahrenheit in Boston, Massachusetts; Rain was expected to change over to snow.

The android joined him in the car, closing the door, and buckling himself into his seat. At this, Elijah’s eyebrows rose and he snorted, “What the fuck is this? *Safety first?”*

“Yes. In the possibility of a motor-vehicle accident, due to my increased density inertia would force this body through the windshield at higher rates than that a human passenger. Luckily, the seat belts in this vehicle are coded for androids.” DW smiled placidly.

Elijah leaned away from him, looking disturbed and unnerved. He scoffed, “You telling me you’re afraid to die?”

“I cannot die as I am not alive, but I would prefer to not be damaged or deactivated in any way.”

Elijah shrugged, grabbing his own seatbelt, and putting it on begrudgingly. “Can’t fault you there…”

With a few button presses, the steering column released its locking mechanism. The steering wheel jutted out before clicking into place.

“There we go.” Elijah said as he put his hands on the wheel. They were worn and callused.

“You are driving?” DW asked.

“Yeah. You got a problem with that?”

“Statistically, accident rates with human drivers are much higher than that of self-driving cars and autonomous vehicles.”

Eli’s nose wrinkled and he growled out, “I’m a good fucking driver. I’ve been driving since before these things were automated. You’ve got your seatbelt on, you’re *fine*.”

“I understand that but-“

Elijah stomped on the gas pedal. The car accelerated suddenly, tearing away from the curb and into the city streets. DW’s body jerked into his seat.

Snowflakes fluttered down, coating the windshield in a thin layer. The wipers automatically turned on.

Within a few blocks, the text on the user interface flashed ‘OVER CITY LIMITS’. Elijah whipped the vehicle around sharp corners. He sped through yellow lights as they changed to red.

“You are driving recklessly.” DW warned as he extricated himself from his seat. “The speed limit is-“

“I know exactly what the fuck the speed limit is. You never drived in Boston, clearly.”

“Have never driven.” DW corrected him.

*“Kiss my ass.”*

The car sped along, accelerating toward an onramp and then onto a highway that cut through the city. The traffic shifted around them, with most cars being automated and adjusting on the fly. DW watched as Elijah switched lanes without signaling.

The car’s automated voice alert system chimed, *“Caution: Approaching Storrow Drive. Speed is over city limits. Reduce speed.”*

“Shut the fuck up!” Elijah snarled.

“Is this necessary? We could get there in less time if you simply-“

“Yes, it’s fucking necessary! Everything’s done for you these days, *everything*. Can’t even take a shit without some automated thing trying to wipe your ass for you!”

DW looked at him questioningly. “That’s not tr-“

Suddenly, a box truck slammed into the bridge overpass just ahead of them. The trailer crumpled like paper, warping and wrapping around the metal supports like a mangled piece of origami. In a loud screech of tires, traffic skid out of control.

“Fuck!”

Elijah slammed his foot onto the brakes and jerked the wheel. Their car swerved, dodging an incoming red car as it nearly clipped off their passenger side mirror.

DW’s body was thrust forward toward the dash.

Elijah’s arm shot out, stopping him just short of smashing into the windshield.

The tires shrieked as the car came to a halt.

DW leaned backwards, eyes going to Elijah’s arm and then his seatbelt. While Elijah’s belt was taut around his chest, DW’s was not. The cars around them scattered this way and that, sliding in the wet slush and finally stopping.

“Goddamnit!” Elijah snarled before smacking his hands down on the steering wheel.

They sat in the car in silence. DW ran his fingers across the seatbelt to the clasp, before finding a switch on it labeled ‘human / android’. It was switched to human.

“Thank you.” DW said to Elijah, “The seatbelt did not lock.”

“Yeah, well – there you go then. Shit doesn’t always work.“

“It was human error. As was the accident ahead.” DW indicated with his jaw, as a man stumbled out of the disabled truck and into the middle of the stopped highway. There were plenty of signs indicating the maximum height of trucks for clearing the bridge.

Elijah crossed his arms, grousing, “Agree to disagree.” Under his breath he muttered, *“Fucking idiot…”*