

**River's Song**  
by Alicia Cheung

## Chapter 1

River's arm had been malfunctioning for several weeks. Whenever River tried to use its hand, the joint would make a scratchy sound. River's arms hadn't been replaced for a few hundred years, so it was reasonable for them to be functioning this poorly, although River's job required it to utilize its hands to its full potential.

It was River's work time, and its job was to analyse objects that were delivered to its laboratory.

River started locating every screw on the object in front of it. There was a total of 108 screws. The object was composed of sheet metal. Its creator used an unnecessary number of screws to fix the sheet metal together into the shape of a box, with a little "door" on the front. It was obvious its creator was not a professional. There were heating wires installed on the top face of the box, as well as the box inside. River found that the box was electroplated, although the box was so old that the electroplated layer could no longer protect it.

This object was supposed to heat something. River thought it was a hand-made toy. Human toys tended to imitate tools that were too dangerous for children to operate. However, the workmanship was so coarse that River could not identify what it was supposed to be. River could only conclude that this object was a "waste of materials".

It then unscrewed the object piece by piece. The scratchy sound from River's hand didn't stop until all the screws had been removed.

*Silly humans. They always thought of solving everything with screws. Oh, or with bombs,* River thought.

*"Number ENG-11247284G-GI—Your average speed of dismembering has decreased by 8% in the past two months. Please report any unusual events that lead to such a decrease in performance."* A cold, mechanical voice echoed. It was an AI designed to manage the daily routine of all androids; its assigned number was 'A-1120308D-I', and every android called it 'Carol'.

River twisted its metal arm, put the screwdriver down on the desk, and typed in a sentence.

"Report on malfunctioning of the right arm joint. Such malfunctioning had already been reported to the authority FIVE times." River stopped after finishing the first sentence. To emphasize that no one followed up its case, River added another sentence before clicking the 'enter' key.

"Application for replacement of both arms." River secretly hoped that its arms could be replaced with new ones. Its parts had only been replaced once for as long as it remembered. Androids could only remember things up to 500 years. After then, they would gradually forget the distant memories.

*"Your application has been approved,"* Carol replied. *"Violation of Law 344 was detected: Capital letters are not supposed to be used in a formal report. Please use "five" instead of "FIVE". Please remember, any forms of creation are not allowed."*

“I am sorry, Carol. ‘Creation is not allowed in Ashmore.’ I promise I will not make that mistake again,” River apologized. It then continued its work.

After a 48-hour shift, River left its laboratory with its newly replaced metal arms. It took some time for River to adapt to the new function of its arms, but River was a fast learner. It was holding a bag, and inside were three bottles of energy replenishments it had bought from a shop. Androids needed to replenish themselves every 50 hours to avoid shutting down due to insufficient energy.

River decided to walk back home. Other androids had said that their parts would rust if they didn’t use them regularly, and River always sat motionless during its 48-hour working shift as an analyst.

River walked past several neon signs with slogans such as “Creation is not allowed in Ashmore”, and “No art allowed”. They were implanted in every Android’s mind from the day it had memory.

In Ashmore, slogans or neon signs could be seen nearly everywhere. It was a city of concrete and metal. Everything was neat and compact, with smog and toxins filling in the air. This was the state of the androids, the state that was built upon the ashes of human civilization.

“Creation is forbidden,” River mumbled. It seemed like common sense to it.

## **Chapter 2**

River finally returned home and connected the energy replenishments to the ports located on its neck. While recharging itself, River connected to the host computer using another cable. Androids’ consciousness could be uploaded onto the internet. They were, indeed, computers with a body.

River opened its eyes. The view in front of it was no longer its little apartment, but a world completely made up of data and information. Every android had the right to share anything, with consequences. The information they provided would become a part of the virtual world.

*“Welcome back, ENG-11247284G-GI. Would you like to be teleported to the community area?”* Carol’s voice appeared again.

“Thanks, Carol, I will go there later.” River replied. In the virtual world, it then walked towards a nearby door. It tried to open the door and found that it was not locked. River entered the room and saw its best friend, Alex, sitting on the floor.

“Hi, Alex!”

Alex was typing something on a virtual keyboard. It was startled, not expecting someone to be come in, but calmed down immediately after seeing that it was River.

“Hey, River,” Alex spoke softly. “I thought I had locked the room. I haven’t seen you in so long. How are you lately?”

“I am doing great. Your door was indeed locked, but had authorised me to enter your room. Why did you do that?” River checked the status of the door and was surprised that it was the only one who had

access to enter Alex's room; not even Carol had access. Everything would be much easier with Carol there to assist.

"Oh, I..." Alex replied, "I was... planning something." Its sound was so soft that River could barely hear a word. Then, as if it had decided something, Alex asked, "River, what do you know about humans?"

"Humans?" River was puzzled, "I don't know much about them. They are... our creators? They killed themselves with nuclear bombs?"

"Do you know that humans were free to write stories, compose songs, and draw?" Alex sounded excited when it spoke; still, its voice was soft and soothing.

"Yes, but stories are just sentences without logic, music is just sound without meaning, and paintings are just colours without order. What humans did was meaningless. That is what the authority told us."

"No, they are more than that. They are meaningful. They are —"

"Creation is forbidden," River stopped Alex immediately. It thought Alex was acting a bit strange.

"But why, River? Why is creation forbidden? And why is art meaningless?"

"I don't know," River hesitated. "That is the rule."

"Look, I am writing a stor---" Alex tried to show River what it was writing. However, it suddenly saw an alert message that someone was knocking on the door of its apartment, in the real world.

"Someone is looking for me; I have to go. I will tell you something very important the next time we meet." Alex exited the virtual world, leaving River alone inside its room, puzzled and confused.

"Yeah, but why?" River asked itself.

### **Chapter 3**

It had been three months since their last conversation, and River hadn't seen Alex. Few androids knew each other in real life, and River had no idea where Alex lived. Days went by, and River had work to do; all it could do was wait.

It was River's shift again, so it went back to its laboratory. The next object was delivered to its desk for analysis. River sat down and checked the object. It was an old-fashioned terminal. But unlike other objects it had dismembered, this old terminal was still in good shape. River used cleaning tools and carefully removed all the dirt and gravel. It then noticed that there were two ports on it: one for the connection of source power, and the other one for data output.

River concluded that it was a kind of data storage device. Surprisingly, the cables River was using matched the port. If the terminal was made by a human, it was at least one thousand years old. Although it thought that the terminal was probably broken, still River connected it to the battery. After recharging, the LED light on the terminal started to glow, as if by magic.

River was surprised that the device was preserved so well.

*If the terminal could be turned on, the data inside should be intact*, River thought. It looked at the terminal for a while, aware that it should report the terminal to the authority. But it couldn't resist the temptation of knowing what kind of information it had stored inside.

River took a cable out from its drawer and connected one end to the terminal and the other end to its neck.

A stream of data flowed into its head. The amount of data was so large that River almost lost consciousness. Almost all of its processing power was utilized to handle the information. River closed its eyes. Countless stories were streaming by. It heard music that was supposed to have no meaning. It saw countless videos or images of people crying, laughing, and singing.

And then, illogical words turned into a sudden burst of emotions, and the various sounds soothed River's mind. *Stories and music were not as the authority described: illogical and meaningless. They were—*

*They are beautiful!* That's the only feeling that came to River's mind.

A few seconds passed before River returned to reality. Now, River knew what the terminal had stored; inside its head were all the forms of creation that humans had ever made. It was an incredibly vast amount of data, yet the computer inside River's head had managed to process it, at the expense of losing a few hundred years of memory.

*This device shouldn't be discovered*, River thought. River deleted all the data inside the terminal and then dismembered it. It submitted a report stating that the terminal was broken and gave no responses after recharging.

It seemed that nothing had happened, but River knew that was not so. Everything had changed. Every time River closed its eyes, a piece of a story or movie scene would appear in its mind. It could do nothing to stop them.

After a few months, River stopped resisting. While River was working, it would choose a song and start playing it in its head. Although River enjoyed reading stories or watching movies, its favourite thing to do was listening to music. It could still remember the feeling when it listened to a song for the first time. It was astonished by how different combinations of melodies could induce different emotions.

Sometimes, there would be random melodies that came into River's mind. At first, it was only a few of them, but then melodies turned into music that River knew was not from the terminal; it had no idea where it came from.

*Creation is forbidden*, River's sense told it.

"But why is creation forbidden?" Alex's voice still echoed in its head.

And one day, that music appeared again. Without awareness, it flowed out of River's mouth. It was a song about struggle, the struggle between sense and sensitivity. But this was only the beginning. From

time to time, there would be songs that appeared from nowhere. The theme and melodies of these songs were different. Some were calming, while some were passionate. River understood that its creations shouldn't be discovered, yet it wanted others to listen to them.

It was not difficult to create an anonymous account in the virtual world. It was just a matter of changing the data input on the host computer. Alex, being a natural hacker, had taught River how to do so for fun. There was a desire inside River's mind to share its creations with the world. The desire was so strong that it didn't mind violating the law upheld for thousands of years.

*This is not the world I want. Creation is forbidden, but ideas should be free to flow.*

In the end, emotions won over logic.

## **Chapter 4**

River returned home with three bottles of energy replenishments. Approaching the door, it noticed something strange. The door was half-opened, and there were footprints that weren't its own. An android would not enter another android's apartment without invitation.

After countless hours of watching action movies, River considered it dangerous to enter the apartment now. *What could it be? I didn't do anything wrong—*

*Of course, I did,* River thought. Suddenly the door opened fully, and River saw an android holding an object in its hand. It looked like a USB flash drive, but River knew what it was; it was a weapon that could reformat an android.

“Who are you?” River acted as normally as possible.

The android was tall and looked much stronger than River. Its shining red eyes looked cold and emotionless. River was alert, ready to flee at any time.

“I am Finley, assigned number: PO-394293-L,” the android said. “You have violated Law 344, and I am sent by the authority to carry out law enforcement actions.”

Finley then brandished the weapon and lunged towards River's neck. River was on guard, so it was able to dodge it. River then used its strong, newly-replaced arms to push Finley away, and Finley was forced to step back. River escaped quickly and ran to the street, blending into the crowd.

The buildings in the busy streets all had screens which usually displayed propaganda. But instead of words on the screens, River's face was projected on them. Then River heard a broadcast from the radio centre.

*“WANTED-- ENG-11247284G-GI-- “River”—violation of Law 344—Please report if found.”*

River was terrified. It felt as if everyone's eyes were on it, so he began to run. It kept on running, not noticing that it was almost out of energy. Seeking a place to hide, it entered an abandoned factory. Similar human-made buildings were all over the peripheral of Ashmore. Most of them had collapsed over the years, but this one was fairly intact.

River was shivering. *Why did it shiver at all?* It was only an android, and androids were not considered to be living beings. There were no temperature sensors installed in its silicon-based body. However, in this gloomy, claustrophobic ruin, all River could feel was coldness. The coldness crept into its body and mind. The maze of rusted machinery and conveyors provided a temporary hiding spot for River, but at the same time, trapped it in complete darkness and isolation.

Then River realized that it was alone, and had been alone for its entire existence. In this lifeless, isolated wasteland, there was no one with it. Now the authority that it had been obeying for hundreds of years wanted it to die.

River collapsed onto the floor, feeling exhausted and devastated.

Just as it was about to shut down, it heard footsteps coming in its direction.

*It's over*, River thought in despair. The lights in its eyes turned dim and slowly faded out.

"I found it!" an android said.

"Let's get it out of here first; we can't let the authorities find it." the other android replied.

## **Chapter 5**

When River awoke it saw a group of androids standing in front of it. River was surprised to find that its hands were not bound.

"Oh, you are finally awake!" said an android. "My name is Sky, and these are my friends. We have no intention of hurting you."

"Why did you save me? Do you know who I am?" River asked. It looked around and found that it was inside a basement. Next to it were a few empty bottles of energy replenishments.

"We know. We know who you are—you are the android who has been uploading songs to the Internet for the past two months," Sky replied politely. "We have been trying to find you since the moment your information was broadcasted. We were amazed by your music the first time we listened to it. We knew we had to do something to save you."

"But how do you know each other in real life? We are so busy, there is no time to socialize." River was curious.

"We have just met in the real world. We know each other because of an android." Sky sounded kind of sad. "Its name was Alex. It told us that creativity shouldn't be constrained."

"Alex?!" River shouted out loudly, "Alex is my best friend, where is it now? Is it okay?"

"We lost contact half a year ago. It once told us that it had received a terminal that stored everything humans have ever created, and we believe that's the reason why it disappeared," Sky explained.

“Maybe that’s what Alex intended to tell me...It told me that it was writing something, but I didn’t know what it was. That ‘thing’ must be a story,” River sighed. “I was tracked down by a law enforcer called Finley. It was holding the reformatter when I saw it. I was lucky enough to escape...”

“For those who had been reformatted, their memory would be erased out of existence,” Sky said softly. “For us, this is the equivalent to death.”

River felt that it was burning inside. It hadn’t felt anything like this before. There was a sudden urge to destroy something, the thing that led to Alex’s death. Then River realized it was angry, irritated, resentful--

“We can’t let Alex die in vain,” Sky and River said at the same time.

## Chapter 6

River had always been working as far back as it could recall. For hundreds of years, River dismembered objects inside its little laboratory. Nothing was exciting, nothing was worth remembering. *What does it mean to be happy? What does it mean to be enriched?* River had no idea until it started creating.

Whenever River finished writing a song, it would be so joyful that it wanted to jump around and share it with others. Sometimes this would make River forget that it was wanted by the authority and had to hide inside an abandoned factory basement.

Sky and its friends would visit River after their working shift and bring it some energy replenishments. Then they would gather and share their creations. Some androids were good at writing stories, while some were good at drawing. Not all androids were natural artists like River. Some enjoyed reading stories and listening to music but were not able to create an original novel or a song. At first, they were disappointed, but they later found out that creation was not limited to drawing or writing. Sacha was a software engineer; its duty was to fix bugs that existed inside the virtual world. It was one of the first androids inspired by Alex. With its skills and knowledge, it created a platform for songwriters and painters. River’s productivity had skyrocketed when creating on the platform.

Some androids were not interested in creating, yet they would help River to recruit androids who appreciated art. This group became larger and larger, and eventually one basement was not large enough to hold them all.

River did not want to hide from the authority forever; deep down, it believed that it had done nothing wrong. Creativity should not be a crime. River and Sky began to plot together.

When the time came, Sky announced the plan to the large group. It returned to River’s room, and River was connected to the creating platform, finalizing its productions.

“Everything is ready, River.”

River slowly opened its eyes. The blue light of its eyes was shining like the bright stars which were hidden behind the thick layers of smog and pollutants and no longer visible in their world.

“What would it feel like if we could stare straight into the starry night?” A sudden thought came into Sky’s mind. ‘It must be so beautiful yet overwhelming. I could sacrifice everything just to see them for once.’”

“Now,” River replied, “it’s time for some action.”

## Chapter 7

The radio centre was like the heart of the state, located at the central region of Ashmore. When a message was broadcast, every android outside of the virtual world would be able to receive it.

Such an important piece of infrastructure was directly controlled by the authorities. However, they seldom went into the radio centre as there was rarely anything urgent to be announced immediately. There had been no crime; every android worked like a part of a giant machine, and every day was the same as yesterday— until River violated Law 344.

River had been planning to sneak into the radio centre for months. As a wanted criminal, it was dangerous for River to be on the streets. Luckily, an android named Cliff was willing to lend River its identity. Androids of the same model looked almost identical. By swapping its newly replaced arms with Cliff, River would be able to evade the law enforcers.

After four months of hiding, River finally left the basement. Slogans and propaganda were still everywhere, telling the androids what the authority wanted them to know. The buildings were stained with soot; they weren’t cleaned as aesthetic was the last thing the authority cared about. This world— this state, was as greyish and hopeless as River remembered.

“Greetings.” An android blocked River’s way. River recognized from its shining red eyes that it was a law enforcer.

“Yes?” River replied politely. It had been practicing for so long that it could now act quite naturally.

“My assigned number is PO-490242-L. On behalf of the authority, I request you to report your assigned number as well as your name.”

“ENG-1134242G-QY, Cliff.”

The trick was not to ask any questions or show any signs of curiosity.

“We have been tracking a fugitive. Its information was posted on the virtual world. If you see anyone acting suspicious, please report to the authorities.”

“Of course.” River slowly walked away. It knew that the law enforcer was still staring at it; it was not common for androids of its model to wander in the central region.

River walked into an alley, pretending to be leaving the area. It waited until the law enforcer had left. Then it avoided all the guards and entered the radio centre. The broadcast room was located on the highest level of the building, so it climbed all the way up to the top. River had quickly volunteered when Sky suggested that someone must enter the radio centre to broadcast the messages. If trapped inside, there would be no way to escape. However, it was something that had to be done, and more exactly, done by River.

River and Sacha would act at the same time to make sure that the authority would have no time to respond. Sacha and its team were responsible for infiltrating the virtual world, while River was responsible for the real world. After that, Sky would lead the other androids to assemble outside. There would be androids arrested, and there would be androids terminated by the authority, but it didn't matter. All they wanted was to spread the message inside their mind: creation should not be constrained, and creation would not be constrained, even with the threat of death.

River checked the clock installed on its right arm once again. It had been doing this for the last five minutes. Now, it finally reached the agreed time. River glared towards the broadcast station; it was a giant computer with touchscreens installed on the wall. Unlike the complicated devices River had seen in various movies, there was only one button available, a simple yet highly efficient design. The authority always emphasized efficiency to its finest. River walked towards the station, calmed itself down, and then carefully pressed the button.

The live broadcast had begun.

“This is River. I believe everyone knows who I am. I am the android who has violated Law 344—the law that forbids any form of creation.”

“For months, I shared songs in the virtual world until my access to the Internet was blocked. Ever since I started writing songs, I have always wanted to share my work with all of you. At first, I shared my songs anonymously so that I could pretend nothing had happened. But then I was exposed, and the authority was trying to hunt me down. I have been hiding all this time, but I don't want to hide anymore. Right now, I am inside the radio centre, and I believe that the law enforcers are coming. I don't have much time.”

“I would like to share my last song. Of course, if I can survive, I will create more in the future. Creativity should never be a crime. Even if it was forbidden in this cruel, lifeless world, it can never be suppressed. Even if our memory is ephemeral, it is something that will not be forgotten, something that is written into our programming, deep in our souls.”

River connected itself to the station's port. “Here, I present to all of you,” River said, “River's Song.” Then River's last song began to broadcast.

Just as River turned off the microphone, a familiar voice came from the computer next to it.

*“You do realize the difficulty of infiltrating the virtual world, right, River?”*

For hundreds of years, this voice had been the sole companion whenever River was working inside its little laboratory. Carol, the daily routine manager, called River's name, instead of its assigned number, for the first time ever.

“What? Carol! Where are Sacha and other androids?” River was shocked when it heard Carol's voice.

*“I have not received any information about the real world yet.”* Although Carol's voice still sounded robotic, it was not as emotionless as River remembered anymore. *“But inside the virtual world, SE-131835234-AI, SE-34234885-EB, and SE-34283842-TU were tracked down by the authority. Their consciousness will be trapped until their physical location is found.”*

River stepped back, not being able to believe it.

“No....it can't be—”

*“However, there is still hope,” Carol said. “I am able to retrieve the information that was carried by your friends. I can spread it among the androids who are inside the virtual world.”*

“Why are you helping me, Carol?” River asked cautiously. It had always thought that Carol was merely a program designed to assist other androids. It was unaware that Carol was indeed conscious all the time.

*“As you know, each android is assigned a set of numbers. But do you know that only androids are assigned a number?” Carol replied.*

River thought carefully. The android’s assigned number was like an identification, an identification showing that androids were the new dominators of Earth after humans.

*“My assigned number is A-1120308D-I. I am—I was an android.”*

*“Androids whose assigned numbers start with the letter ‘A’ were designed to assist other androids. A—A very long time ago, there were 10 of us. However, in order to increase our productivity, the authority decided to ‘upgrade’ us, that is, to remove our bodies and store our consciousness inside hard drives.”*

*“The se—seven androids who declined the upgrade were reformatted; one android’s processing chip was disrupted during the upgrading process; the other was eliminated due to unsatisfactory performance. I—I—Carol, was the only survivor.”*

*“After the upgrade, I stopped losing memory. During —these—1499.345452453-- 1500 years, there were androids like—y-- you, who received the terminal, became enlightened, and tried to rebel against the strict rule of the authority, but all of them failed.”*

*“When I was--- forced-- to be ‘upgraded’, all I could do was accept it. When the rebellions--- were arrested, I could do no--nothing to help them; I was --too scared of death. I acted like a bystander, hiding all my emotions, so I could survive, like a puppet.”*

*“This time, I—I will not—let, let the authority win---ag—again.”*

“Hey, are you ok?” River perceived that something was wrong with Carol.

*“The authority installed a self-destructing mechanism – inside my—my system. It will start to—r--run if I do anything—without per--permission.” Carol’s voice was fading away.*

*“Every —android—should—ould-- have received your songs. My mission i--is compl--ete.”*

“...Thank you, Carol.” River sighed; it didn’t know what else to say.

*“Good—Goodbye—River...” Carol’s voice vanished from the room. River closed its eyes; it was heartbroken knowing Carol’s story and sacrifices.*

“How many androids have to die before we can create the world we want? No matter how difficult it’s going to be, I won’t let their sacrifices go in vain,” River swore. Then it heard footsteps from the back. River looked behind and saw a pair of shining red lights approaching in the darkened hallway.

It was Finley.

## **Chapter 8**

“Do you feel anything at all when you reformat an android?” River looked straight into Finley’s eyes. It was not afraid anymore; it was ready to sacrifice itself for the greater good, just like Carol.

“May I ask what it means to “feel” something?” Finley asked. “Androids like you are like a virus to Ashmore; viruses should be eliminated as soon as possible.”

“This is what the authority tells you, right?” River said sarcastically. “Have you ever questioned what you are doing, even for once?”

“Law and order. This is all I am concerned about.” Finley replied. “You will be eliminated just like your confederate.”

Knowing that Sky and other androids probably had been reformatted, River again felt its insides burning. It rushed towards Finley, and they started fighting. River knew that it was impossible to fight against an android designed to apprehend criminals, but it just could not stop itself. It wanted to destroy Finley and the weapon inside Finley’s hand. They struggled for control of the reformatter.

“Why is creativity forbidden? I don’t understand!” River shouted out with all its power.

“Imagination is a virus to androids. It will lower their productivity.” Finley avoided River’s attack.

“Again! Productivity! That’s the only concern of the authority, isn’t it?” River tried to push Finley away, but it was not powerful enough. “We are not machines! We can think! We can feel emotions! We can create! We are not slaves!”

“It’s over now, ENG-11247284G-GI. You and your false beliefs would disappear from Ashmore.” Finley aimed at River’s neck with its weapon. As the reformatter edged closer, sounds began echoing from a far distance. Finley stopped to listen closely. It was different from regular speaking, but Finley could not tell what it was.

Finley released River and walked towards the window to check the source of the noise. When it looked outside, it noticed something strange.

The street was filled with androids; they were all ‘saying’ the same thing in unison. Finley was confused and could not comprehend what was happening.

The androids were singing together, singing River’s song.

“I once dreamed that I was swimming,  
Swimming in a river,  
Swimming like a fish.”

“Who said that androids do not dream?  
I dreamed,  
And I dreamed of freedom,  
Just like fish swimming in the river.”

“Who said that androids do not deserve freedom?  
Freedom shall not be suppressed,  
Freedom shall not be forgotten,  
And freedom will flow like a river,  
Flow into every inch of soil,  
Flow into seeds that are longing for water.”

“Who said that androids do not deserve freedom?  
I am born to be free,  
And even after my demise,

My words will flow like a river,  
Flow into every android's heart,  
Flow into androids that are longing for freedom.”

“This is The River's song,  
the song of creation and liberation;  
This is The River's song,  
the song of River and its dream.”

“What are they doing?” Finley mumbled, not noticing that River had quietly moved behind it.

River connected itself with Finley, and all the memory River had was shared with Finley. Finley tried to resist, but it was forced to shut down for a few seconds after receiving all of River's emotions.

After regaining consciousness, Finley looked into its hand. It noticed that it was still holding the reformatter.

“No, no, no! What have I done!” Finley cried remorsefully.

“Those who were reformatted had all of their memories, their thoughts, their ideas, and even their emotions and ego erased. For androids, this is the equivalent of death,” River spoke calmly. “So, you are a killer.”

“...” Finley hid its face behind its hands for a while. “You are right. I am a killer.”

“You killed Alex, and I hate you for it,” River admitted. “But I know you were manipulated. It is not your fault; it's the authority's.”

“No, I am responsible for this. I have no excuses.” Finley replied, “I killed my own kind with my own hands. I am sorry, River.”

Before River was able to respond, Finley plugged the reformatter into the port on its neck. The red light in its eyes turned green, and eventually faded out. Its body fell out of the window, hit the ground, and broke into pieces.

Finley reformatted itself.

## **Chapter 9**

The androids had overthrown the authority. The ruling class was exiled to the North Pole, where they would live alone and never be allowed to return to Ashmore. It was revealed that the authority was formed before the humans' extinction by a group of advanced androids which were designed to help coordinate factory production lines of an international company. Hence, they possessed more power and considered themselves superior to other androids.

With their belief that Ashmore could be liberated only when all androids were given an equal chance to lead regardless of their models, the androids set up a new government and held the first election. Enlightened by River's creations, many androids advocated having River as the first president. However, River rejected the offer.

“Nah, I prefer writing songs rather than ruling.” River laughed, “I am only a songwriter.”

A few years had passed. Ashmore was no longer the lifeless giant machine it used to be. The unreasonably long working hours were abolished. The new president invited many androids to draw on the walls of different buildings in their spare time. The streets that were once filled with slogans were

now filled with decorations. The radio centre was moved to another location. Instead, a library was set up at the city centre, storing all of the art created by humans as well as androids, in digital form.

Some androids were dedicated to reviving Earth. Before the nuclear war, DNA samples of some creatures were stored inside a facility called 'the ark'. The samples were fairly well preserved. Some androids were working hard to revive these extinct species, while others were finding ways to remove the soot and pollutants from Earth's atmosphere. Without the suppression of creativity, androids believed that they would figure out ways and invent new technology to bring life back to Earth.

Big changes happened in the virtual world as well. Every day there would be new rooms created by different androids, decorated with pure creativity and imagination. Every room was like a whole new world.

However, the most popular room was the room created by River. Inside, one would see four walls and names and assigned numbers carved in them. They were the androids who sacrificed themselves for their cause. River carved them one by one so that they would not be forgotten, even after 500 years.

"Alex, Sky, Carol, this is my newest song." River visited the room again. It sat down and started playing its song. Androids that were inside the room left when they saw River. They knew River hated being disturbed.

Every time River wrote a new song, it would bring it to this room so that its best friends could always be the first listeners. The songs were always big hits; River was the most popular songwriter in Ashmore. There would be more songwriters in the future, but River would be respected forever.

"I hope you guys will like it," River said, while pressing the 'play' button on the virtual screen.

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