



A Short Story

NIGHT
BLIND

KAY L MOODY

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Night Blind

A short story by Kay L Moody

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NIGHT BLIND

Destroy the servers. Avoid the fireworks. Be home before dawn. Things sounded so much easier in a list.

Nova tossed a handful of gritty sand into the air and watched for abnormal wind patterns. The sand glittered in the starlight and Nova had to force herself to ignore the beauty of it and stay focused on the task at hand.

“Are you going to tell me what we’re doing at some point tonight, Nova?”

Nova pressed a finger over her lips as the last of her tossed sand hit the beach. “This way, Finch” she said. “And I told you to whisper.”

Wet rocks peeked out through pools of churning ocean water. The taste of salt hung thick in the air. A strong breeze threatened to dismantle the messy bun on top of Nova’s head. In blew in the smell of wood-fired pizza from the shore, but it didn’t quite overpower the scents of seaweed and fish. The stars shone bright in the sky and a clear cerulean blue hue blanketed the ocean as night overtook the day.

Nova stuck her pointer finger in the cool ocean and wrinkled her nose. She knew what she was supposed to do next, but she questioned the validity of this particular test. She licked the ocean water off her finger and sure enough, it tasted metallic. At least she knew she was on the right trail.

“Nova, what are we doing?” Finch had his light brown hair slicked back so the sun bleached streaks stood out prominently. His beach shorts were paired with a white t-shirt. The shirt sleeves stretched tight around his biceps. Finch always said he wanted girls to appreciate his sculptures more than his muscles. Yet, he never seemed to miss an opportunity to make his biceps appear larger than they actually were. Nova personally found his razor sharp cheekbones peeking out from under his glasses to be more attractive.

“I brought you here to be helpful, Finch. Not get us caught. Now be quiet.”

Nova stepped over a pool of water toward a three foot high rock rising out of the ocean. It looked like a promising spot, but Nova worried it might be too obvious.

Finch planted his sandaled feet on a bit of rock and stuck out his jaw. “Either tell me what’s going on or I’m leaving. I’m missing my sister’s play for this. You said it was important.”

A crackle filled the air and Nova’s heart thrummed with anxiety. As she sucked in a breath, her sandaled foot slipped off the rock into a pool of ocean water. A heavy splash soaked her jumpsuit. The billowing pant leg now hung tight against her leg, up to the knee. Nova bit her tongue just in time to keep the words from spilling out.

Finch was at her side in an instant to help her back onto the rock. He grabbed her elbow and tucked his hand into the small of her back. She looked into the abyss of his

dark gray eyes, but quickly turned away when he returned the stare. She shook her elbow out of his grasp and reached for her soaking wet pant leg. “The Chargers are here in Asbury Park,” Nova said.

The casual curiosity in Finch’s eyes immediately turned to dread. He glanced over his shoulder as if the apocalypse was right there to greet him. “Where did you hear that?” Finch finally asked.

Nova squeezed the ocean water out of her pant leg and peeled off her sandal before shaking it out. “I read it on the internet.”

With a scoff, Finch rolled his eyes so far back, Nova worried they might never come back. “It’s 2058,” he said. “Everyone knows you can’t trust the internet.”

“It was the darknet,” Nova said nonchalantly.

Finch turned to her with a start. “That’s even worse,” he said. He stared at her with a look that bounced back and forth from frightened to impressed.

Nova looked out at the rocky, ocean landscape. Even at low tide, it would be tricky to find the hidden servers. Supposedly, they were covered in waterproof, plastic gel sheets and hidden inside compartments carved into the rock. The lack of sunlight would make it harder to locate the servers, but easier to avoid curious onlookers. Luckily, the plastic gel sheets were supposed to do weird things to nature, like attract the wind and make the ocean water taste metallic. That’s how Nova knew she was close.

Nova brushed a stray wisp of her hair off the bronze colored skin of her forehead. She wore a face of indifference because she knew it would annoy Finch the most. With one eyebrow quirked up, Nova said, “For your information, the darknet is surprisingly accurate *and* safe these days. Much safer than the regular internet. And everyone agrees, Asbury Park is the Chargers’ next target.

They already took out Manhattan. They want to take out the entire east coast before they head to Washington, D.C. and take over the capitol.”

Finch took Nova by the shoulders with a tender scolding in his eyes. Nova pushed him away, but that didn't stop him from talking. “Can't you get kicked out of law school for going on the darknet?”

Nova crouched down to stick her finger in another pool of ocean water. She waved a hand through the air and said, “Rules were made to be broken. The only reason I'm in law school is to get better at finding loopholes. And don't look at me like that, Finch. I know you think *the truth will set you free*. Obviously, I think you're wrong.”

Finch clenched his jaw and Nova sensed a great deal of self control as he kept his mouth clamped shut. He eyed the ocean and bent down to taste the water like Nova had. When he licked the water, a frown fell over his face. He glanced behind him at his car in the parking lot. With a gulp, he said, “I don't want to be involved in this, Nova. The Chargers are dangerous.”

Nova scoffed. “That's why we need to stop them from taking over Asbury Park.” Nova reached the three foot high rock and tasted the water surrounding it. The metallic taste was so strong, it forced her to spit the taste out of her mouth. This *had* to be the spot. She ran her fingers across the rock, looking for any sign of a hidden compartment.

As her fingers slid across the rock, Finch grabbed Nova's hand and pulled her around to face him. “I don't want to do this,” he said. “The Chargers are dangerous.”

Nova shimmied out of his grip and glared. “Do you want the Chargers to take over Asbury Park?” Nova glanced back at the rock and found a spot that looked promising. A glint of metal seemed to peek out from a

small crack. From her pocket, she pulled a steel spatula about two inches long and rounded off at the end.

“Of course I don’t want the Chargers taking over Asbury Park. I don’t want them taking over anything. But they’ve already gained control of five cities, including Manhattan. If we try to fight them, we could be killed. And how did you get my sculpting spatula? I’ve been looking for this.”

He reached for the steel spatula, but Nova pushed him away. “The Chargers don’t know we’re here. *They* aren’t even here. Everyone knows they do the first steps remotely. They put specialized instructions and protocols on servers that aren’t attached to any network. At least not until they enact the first steps of their plans. This makes it nearly impossible to stop the protocols until they’re already underway and it’s too late. But, they also don’t have a backup of the protocols anywhere else. Which means, if we can destroy the servers before they start the protocols, we’ll destroy all copies of their research and plans as well. If we destroy the servers before they start, the Chargers will hopefully leave Asbury Park and move on to the next city where they haven’t lost their research.”

Finch folded his arms over his chest, completely unimpressed. “It sounds so easy when you say it like that.”

Nova used her teeth to pick at her bottom lip. “There is one thing.”

“Shocker.”

Nova shrugged and shook her head without care. “It’s just a tiny, little thing. Barely even a concern really.”

Finch leaned against the wall with a huff. “If you say killer drones, I’m out of here and taking you with me.”

Nova pushed the steel spatula into the crevice of rock from a different angle. No matter how she pushed, she came to an unfortunate conclusion. This rock was just rock

and she was no closer to finding the servers. With a frown, she said, “The Chargers have fireworks that can make you go blind.”

“WHAT!” Finch jumped up straight and clutched his heart with a shaky hand. As a sculptor, Finch’s eyes were everything to him.

Nova waved away his concern and stuck the spatula into a different spot on the rock. “You’ll be fine,” she said. “The fireworks have UV rays imbued into them. But your glasses have UV protectant in the lenses. As long as you’re wearing your glasses, you’ll be fine.”

Finch grumbled a few choice words as he leaned back against the rock. Suddenly, he shot forward again. “What about you?”

“It’s fine!” Nova said. “I brought these.” She pulled a pair of sunglasses from the pocket of her jumpsuit. Her sunglasses also had UV protectant in the lenses. “Even with glasses, the UV rays in the fireworks might temporarily blind you so you can’t see in the dark. But you won’t be permanently blind, just night blind. And it only lasts a couple minutes.”

Finch’s fingers shook as he pushed his glasses closer to his face. “Let’s get out of here, Nova. It’s not worth it to get involved in this. I can’t go blind; I’m a sculptor. There are only two things in life I care about. One, creating sculptures. And two, finding someone who appreciates them.”

Nova put the sunglasses on top of her head and stuck the spatula into yet another promising looking crevice. She’d find an opening yet. She couldn’t bear to imagine what would happen if she didn’t. Nova managed a casual chuckle, which masked most of her fear. “Oh yes, I know all about your one rule. You don’t have any rules for being in a relationship except one. She has to appreciate your

sculptures.” Nova shook her head. “It’s not like it’s that hard. You’re better than Michelangelo.”

While a half smile curved onto his lips, Finch locked eyes with Nova. His piercing gaze caused a familiar flurry of heat through her veins. He leaned in, but Nova slapped her hand against his chest and pushed him back. “Don’t,” she said.

Nova turned back to focus on the rock. She tried tapping it to see if she could hear a hollow spot. Another crackle of sound filled the air, it’s source still unknown.

Finch’s eyes widened and he lowered his voice to a whisper. “I’m serious, Nova. We need to get out of here now. I’m not helping you do this.”

Nova ignored him and tapped the rock again. This time, she heard something strange. A sort of clang instead of the normal tap. “You’ve seen this go down in other cities,” Nova said. “They overload the power grid and the power in the whole city goes out. It takes twenty four hours for looting to start. Within thirty six hours, people start stealing power from any backup generators that exist in the city and mass chaos begins. By forty eight hours, the hospitals are dark and anyone on life support is dead. Only one hospital has regained power after the Chargers took over. We have a much better chance of stopping the chaos before it starts.”

Finch’s mouth dropped open and he blinked several times. “Life support?” His mouth fell into a deep frown which spoke more of empathy than words ever could. “Your dad?” he asked.

Nova stared at him for a moment, then turned to stare intently at the rock. “He’s getting better.”

Finch curled his fingers over her forearm to comfort her and this time she didn't pull away. "They said he's a good candidate for a mechanical heart transplant, but he has to stabilize first. He's been in and out of consciousness and still relies on life support, but he *is* getting better. He just needs a few more days." Nova dropped her chin to her chest and closed her eyes.

Finch squeezed her arm gently and Nova was just as comforted as she was angry that he had so much power over her. "Why didn't you tell me?" Finch asked. "Of course I'll help. What's the first step? You said we have to destroy some servers, right?"

Relief washed over Nova when she heard those words. She could have kissed Finch for being willing to help. Well... almost. With a sniff, Nova tilted her chin up and got ready to work. "There are four servers. A web server, an email server, a file server, and an identity server. The identity server is the most important one. It will probably be the hardest to find and likely the most difficult to destroy. They're hidden in this rock and covered with waterproof, plastic gel sheets. We have to find them, remove the gel sheets, and soak them with water until the servers short out."

Finch nodded as he tapped his fingernail on the rock. He pressed one ear up against the rock and squinted his eyes. After a few moments, he took the steel spatula from Nova and stuck it in at a different angle than she had. The rock started to jiggle and finally, a door-like piece of rock, popped away and revealed a hollow compartment with two servers inside. Finch twisted his mouth up to a suspicious glare. "Aren't these a little small to be servers?" he asked.

Nova, on the other hand, bit her lip with excitement. "Any computer running the necessary software can function as a server." She stuck her hand inside the

compartment with no regard for safety. She pulled the sticky, plastic gel sheeting off the servers. Once the waterproof sheet was removed, Nova saw the server lights blinking and heard the hum of technology. She bent down to a pool of ocean and scooped water into her palms. She jumped to her feet and splashed the water against the server before too much of it could slip through her fingers. The servers both sparked when the water splashed against them. Nova rolled her shoulders back with a satisfied smile. “Two down, two to go.”

Finch didn't look convinced. He narrowed his eyes and leaned an ear closer. With his cheek touching a server, he said, “This one is still on. The lights are out, but a fan is still going and I bet the electronics are still working. We need more water.”

Nova wanted to protest, but she knew Finch was right. Even though it pained her to admit it. Nova bend down to scoop more water into her hands.

“See,” Finch said with an air of superiority. “The truth will set you free.”

An electric pulse threaded through Nova's heart. She scoffed and said, “Oh really? What about when I told you I had feelings for you and I wanted to be more than just friends. It didn't feel very freeing to see you making out with a random girl twenty minutes later.”

With a start, Finch dropped the water in his hands. He wrinkled his nose when the water splashed all over his shorts. “I thought you were joking!” he said defensively. “We've known each other since we were kids. You've joked about it before. How was I supposed to know you were serious that time? I would date you in a heartbeat if you'd ever forgive me.”

Nova thrust the water in her palms so hard against the server, a few drops splashed back onto her face. The server

crackled and sparked again. “Nah,” Nova said. “We’re better as friends. I already decided I’m never dating you, ever in my entire life, no matter what. That’s *my* one rule.”

Finch grumbled as he splashed a handful of water onto the server. Under his breath, he said, “That’s a stupid rule.”

“What was that?” Nova asked

Finch bent down to scoop more water from the ocean. “You know what I said.”

The server sparked again from Nova’s latest splashing of water. A tiny burst of fire exploded from the top of the server. Finch threw a handful of water over the fire and the server finally died.

Nova nodded at the servers and lifted her chin in the air. “Now, two down, two to go.”

Before Nova could tap the rock to locate the next compartment, a crackling sound filled the air. It was louder and somehow more terrifying than before. Nova moved her sunglasses from the top of her head to down over her eyes. She bent forward toward Finch. “Listen, if you look at the fireworks even through your glasses, you might go night blind. There’s a trick you can do to make sure you’re just night blind and not permanently blind. You open and close your fist five inches away from your face. If you see flutters of light when you open and close your fist, then you’re just night blind. If you see all black, then it’s permanent. Try not to look at the fireworks, even through your glasses, if you can avoid it.”

Something in the air changed and danger seemed nearer than ever. Nova knew this mission wouldn’t come risk free, but she started to worry that the Chargers might have more at their disposal than just blinding fireworks. She tapped the rock and tried to ignore the sick feeling growing in her stomach. It didn’t matter. She decided before she got here that she would do whatever it took.

Another loud crackle filled through the air. Nova glanced over her shoulder, certain the fireworks were about to erupt. Instead, her eyes were met with a completely unexpected, but far more ominous, sight. A plastic covered android emerged from behind another tall set of rocks. The design was crude, but the android was made to look humanoid. The only difference was, instead of arms, it had what looked like flame throwers.

“Run!” Finch said.

They ran to the other side of their rock just as the android raised its flame thrower arm. Nova took several gulps of air before she could catch her breath. Finch’s shoulders shook as he turned his head in every direction. “You said we had to worry about fireworks, not androids.”

“They never said anything about an android on the darknet,” Nova said. “Maybe it’s new.”

“Maybe you should stop breaking rules and get your information from more reputable sources than the darknet.” Finch dropped to his knees and pulled a large rock from the ocean floor. “Maybe we can take it out with these. Where do you think its processor is?”

“Since it’s humanoid,” Nova said. “The central processing unit is probably in its head or its chest.” Nova peeked around the rock for a split second then turned back to Finch. “I’ll aim for the head since I have better aim, and you aim for the chest.”

“Agreed,” Finch said as he grabbed another large rock. He handed one to Nova and bent down to grab two more. “On three, we’ll jump out and throw the rocks.”

Though she hated him sometimes, Nova was glad Finch was here. His presence grounded her more than trying to save her dad ever could. Because now she wasn't just trying to destroy the servers. Now she was determined to keep Finch safe. And alive.

Finch counted down and on three, they jumped out from behind the rock. Nova took a mental note of the android's location. She closed one eye and reeled her arm back. She took a moment to study the android's movements as it plodded forward. Finch threw his rock, but Nova took one last second to account for the wind. The rock slipped from her fingers just as Finch's rock hit the android's stomach. Not quite where he meant to aim.

A moment later, Nova's rock hit the android squarely on the forehead. The android rocked back for a moment, then teetered. Nova held her breath as the android tipped and finally fell backward into a pool of ocean water.

"Nice shot!" Finch said. "Who knew all those years of football would help save your life someday. Aren't you glad I convinced you to try out for the team?"

She was glad. Finch's praise meant more to her than anything in the world. Maybe she *was* being a little stubborn for not forgiving him.

Nova brushed her stray hairs back with a flippant wave of her hand. She went back to the rock and tapped it carefully. "We still have two servers to destroy. Get your sculpt-y thingie."

"It's called a sculpting spatula."

"I don't care, Finch. We need to hurry. The Chargers might have other traps in place if case anything happens to the servers. And we haven't even seen the fireworks yet."

Finch flicked out the sculpting spatula from the pocket of his shorts. He used his fingernail to tap of the rock. They

found the next compartment and he shoved the spatula into the crevice. Nova tried to help pop the compartment open, but with her sunglasses on, it was too dark to see properly. She tipped the sunglasses up on top of her head.

“Put those back on,” Finch insisted.

“I can’t see anything,” Nova said. “I’ll put them back on if the fireworks come out.”

Finch glared, but Nova just stole the spatula from his hand and shoved it back into the crevice. Now that she could see, she got the angle just right and the door popped away. While she removed the sticky, plastic sheeting, Finch snatched her sunglasses and put his own glasses over his eyes.

“Is that better?” he asked. “Not so dark?”

“I can’t wear *your* glasses, dummy,” Nova said. “These are prescription.”

Finch coolly slipped her sunglasses onto his face. “My eyes aren’t that bad. I know it’s only a little blurry for you.”

Nova dropped the plastic gel sheeting to the ground and bent down for a handful of ocean water. As she threw it at the server, she said, “But how are you supposed to see anything without your prescription glasses?”

Finch scooped a handful of water from the ocean. “How are *you* supposed to protect your eyes if you won’t wear your sunglasses?”

Nova huffed. She wanted to flick him in the arm, but she was too busy destroying the server. She’d just have to flick him later.

“I’m fine,” Finch said. “I can see well enough without my glasses and I don’t mind how dark it is with the sunglasses.”

Just then, the server sparked with fire and Finch splashed water at it to extinguish the flame. Nova pulled

Finch's glasses off her face and held them out to him. Before he could grab them, a loud crackle filled the air.

Nova glanced over just in time to see the android rising to its feet. Finch was busy tapping the rock, looking for the last server. Before she could warn him, the android raised its flame thrower arm and pointed it toward the sky. A shower of sparks erupted from the android's hand. Nova reached out to tap Finch's arm because apparently her mouth was not working. The shock of it, too much to process. The android stepped closer and the shower of sparks was almost near enough to fall on them.

Finch had his eyes glued to the rock as he attempted to pop open the last compartment. Finally, Nova's hand made contact with his arm. She still had his glasses held tight in her other fist. Finch turned and gasped when he saw the android back on its feet. Then, he turned and saw Nova's face unprotected by glasses. She could still see fine, so she didn't think this shower of sparks was the fireworks that could blind. But Finch didn't look willing to take a chance.

He tore the sunglasses from his face and slammed them over Nova's eyes. He grabbed his glasses from her hands just as a loud bang exploded from the sky. Red sparkles snaked out into a large firework. Nova slapped her palms over Finch's eyes to protect him from the firework's UV rays.

Just as the sparkles from the firework began to dissolve, the sparks from the android's flame thrower arm were finally close enough to fall on Nova. Burns prickled all over her skin. The sparks burned worse than a sunburn, but not quite as bad as a fire burn. Even still, it hurt

enough that an involuntary scream erupted from her throat. Finch pulled her out of the line of fire then reached his hand up to put the glasses back over his eyes.

But just as he was reaching up, Nova was reaching down to grab a rock. She knocked the glasses out of his hand and just in front of the android's foot. Nova snatched a rock from the ground and threw it at the android's head. Her aim was far from perfect, but she managed to get a good hit to its face.

The android stepped forward and double the sparks started showering from its hand. Finch shielded his eyes as he stared at the ground, searching for his glasses. At last, he located them. But before he could reach for them, the android stepped on top of them and the lenses shattered in an instant.

Three more fireworks exploded in the air, even closer than the last ones. Finch was forced to slam his eyes shut. Nova managed to throw another large rock at the android's head.

The sparks showering from the android's hand again, got close enough to burn Nova. They had intensified in size and with them, so had the pain of the burns. Nova grunted as she tried to pop open the last compartment. Acid-like burns prickled on her arms as the sparks fell over her.

Finch pulled her close and lifted her feet off the ground. He ran until they reached the other side of the rock. He held her against it and used his own body to shield her from the sparks. It didn't take long for the android to catch up to them. A tiny spark hit Nova's arm and it sizzled with pain. Through she had never felt it before, this was exactly how she imagined acid rain would feel.

Except worse.

Definitely worse because the sparks showered down on Finch and his only reaction was painted gasps every few seconds. Each gasp made Nova sicker, but also more determined. She'd put a stop to this if it was the last thing she ever did. "Maybe the central processing unit isn't in its head. The Chargers are smart, maybe smart enough to put the processor somewhere unexpected."

Finch tried to nod, but it ended with a groan. Nova's heart exploded. Not only did he bear the full pain of the sparks, but he had also given her the sunglasses, sacrificing his own eye protection. No matter what happened now. She had to keep Finch safe.

Finch bent down with Nova to protect her as she grabbed more rocks from the ocean floor. She threw them anywhere she could think of. The android's arms, legs, stomach. Finally, a rock hit the android's foot and the android stopped and tilted its head back. Its arms jerked through the air and its two legs bent at a strange angle. But then, the shower of sparks died down and the android was left standing still. But even with it still, Nova could hear a quiet crackle filling the air.

"I got him," she said. "But I don't think it will last. I bet it's going to wake up again in a minute."

Finch sighed in relief, but he didn't move away from Nova. Instead, he pulled her into a tight embrace and breathed deeply into her messy bun.

"Okay," Nova said.

Finch pulled away just enough to look at her confused. She said, "I'll date you. But only if we both survive this. Got it?"

"We might not, Nova. You know that, don't you?"

Anguish gripped Nova by the shirt collar and shook her hard. But Nova wasn't about to go down without a fight.

“Not with that attitude we won’t. We can do this. We just have to destroy the last server.”

Nova left the safety of Finch’s arms and marched to the other side of the rock. Finch smiled at her determination, which only stoked the flames. Nova’s heart leapt, but this was no time for romance. She ripped the spatula from her pocket and began scolding Finch with a fierce tongue. “No more playing hero like that. You have to keep yourself safe, too. And you should have kept the glasses on your face. What are we supposed to do if more—”

Before she could say it, another firework exploded in the sky. She screamed and looked over at Finch. Luckily, his back was turned and his eyes were away from the sky. He frowned and said, “I went blind for a minute there, but I did that trick you said and I could still see flutters of light. It was just night blind.”

Nova closed her eyes and tried to shake the tension out of her shoulders. She tapped the rock and finally found the last compartment. She jimmied the spatula into the crevice. Before it popped open, a loud crackled filled the air. Nova heard groaning plastic as the android started moving forward.

“Take my sunglasses,” Nova said to Finch.

He shook his head as he ran toward the android. He grabbed it by the waist, attempting to tackle it to the ground. “Just destroy that server,” he called out.

Nova’s heart raced so fast she could barely breathe. She stuck the spatula into a crevice and popped open the compartment. This must be the identity server. It was larger than the others and had twice as much plastic gel

sheeting covering it. As she tore the sheeting away, fireworks exploded in the air.

Tears slid down her cheeks as she bent down for a handful of water. This server would take more water to short it out and this time Finch couldn't help. Nova splashed a scoopful after scoopful of water onto the server, but nothing sparked.

She glanced back to check on Finch. He had wrested the android to the ground, even with his eyes shut tight. But the sparks showered from the android's hand and Finch winced in pain. He pinned the android's shoulder to the ground, but the android retaliated by spraying the sparks at Finch's hand.

Not his hand! Finch needed his hands to sculpt. Nova racked her brain and searched the landscape for anything to help. She snatched a nearby rock and slammed it into the server. Through a nickel-sized slot, a tiny spark erupted. Nova reeled the rock back and slammed it against the server again. Next, she splashed a handful of water at the server, hoping to take advantage of its weakened state.

Finch screamed in pain and Nova jumped to her feet. The server could wait. Finch's hand could not. Nova grabbed a handful of sand from the ocean floor and threw it at the android. The wet sand seemed to disorient the android. While it was distracted, Finch managed to free his hand from the path of sparks. Nova bent down to get another handful of sand. This time, she aimed it at the opening in the android's hand. The sand fell into the opening and definitely blocked some of the sparks from coming out, but showers still erupted.

Just then, a large firework, even closer than any of the others exploded in the air. Just as the firework dissolved, Finch opened one eye, the tiniest bit.

"Don't you dare open your eyes!" Nova screamed.

He slammed his eye shut again and Nova threw another handful of sand into the android's hand. Two more handfuls and the shower of sparks finally stopped. Finch helped her tackle the android back to the ground and Nova knocked on its plastic body to find its central processing unit. She finally found it in the android's butt.

She shook her head and rolled her eyes. Who designed this thing, a teenage boy? She slammed rock after rock into the processor until she was certain it was dead.

Just in case, she pulled the arms and legs out of the android's sockets so the android couldn't go anywhere.

Finch peeked out through one eye again and Nova shoved her hand over his face. "Either keep your eyes shut or take my sunglasses," she said.

Finch forced his eyes shut and Nova led him back to the last server. Behind her, another firework exploded in the air. She grabbed a rock from the ocean floor and slammed it into the server. She immediately followed that with a handful of water. But this time, nothing seemed to change. Nova examined the server carefully and noticed the small slot a spark had come out of earlier. Nova tipped her sunglasses up to get a better look inside the slot. When she could see it clearly, she had an idea.

She squeezed her eyes shut and took the sunglasses off her face. At least Finch's eyes were also closed or he'd never stop yelling at her for this. Nova took one end of one of the sunglasses' arms and stuck it into the slot. A spark of electricity surged through the server, but it wasn't quite enough to short it out.

Nova kept her eyes narrowed as tightly as possible and pushed the sunglasses in deeper. When they wouldn't go in any more, she grabbed a rock to hammer the sunglasses deeper. Another surge of electricity pulsed and Nova knew

she was close. She slammed another rock against the server and splashed a handful of water against it.

At last, the whirl of technology came to a stop and the server shorted out completely. She fell onto her knees and sighed. “It’s done,” she said. “Let’s get out of here.”

Nova helped Finch turn to face the parking lot just as a cascade of fireworks erupted in the air. She caught a glimpse of one before she slammed her eyes shut. She grabbed Finch’s hand and started running for his car. It was difficult work to run with her eyes slammed shut but she wasn’t about to take a chance with those fireworks.

Soon, she felt her feet hit the pavement. She turned her back to the ocean, away from the fireworks and she slid her eyelids open.

Everything was black.

She felt Finch touch her cheek. Quietly, he said, “Nova.”

“I can’t see,” she said.

She felt, more than heard his body tense up, but Nova flipped her hand. “It’s fine,” she said. “I’m sure I’m just night blind. How long did it take for yours to wear off?”

“Less than a minute,” Finch said, his voice aching with fear.

Nova blinked a couple times trying to see a sliver of light, but everything remained black. She lifted her chin. “Then we’ll just wait a couple minutes and I’ll be able to see and everything will be fine. You’ll see.”

She stood waiting, but Finch didn’t say a word.

“Finch?” she asked.

She felt his body move slightly and Nova’s thumping heart sunk deep down into her stomach. “You’re doing the thing aren’t you?”

She heard Finch gulp.

Nova frowned. “You’re opening and closing your fist and I can’t see the flutters of light. I’m permanently, aren’t I?”

Finch slid his hand up her arm until he reached her shoulder. He pulled her closer to him until she could smell the salt in his hair. “You owe me a date,” he said.

“What?”

Finch pulled her even closer. “You said you would go out with me if we both survived this. Well, we stopped the Chargers, took out an android, and we’re both alive. You owe me a date.”

Nova pulled away and wiped the icy tears from her cheeks. “No, Finch. Not if I’m blind. What about your sculptures? If I can’t see them, how am I supposed to appreciate them? It’s your one rule.”

Finch kissed Nova’s forehead and pulled her into a warm embrace. “Don’t you know, Nova, some rules were made to be broken.”

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KayL Moody