

The Gray Area

The nape of my neck was still raw. I felt the cold alien-like metal chip lurking under the thin strands of string holding my skin together. I took each step shakily, the blue gown swaying with each step, with an IV drip following closely beside me. Traversing through the overwhelmingly white hallway, I could now see the multitude of content that was not visible before. Approaching the front desk, replacing the computer that was once there, a hologram appeared asking for my credentials, as well as a payment for the surgery they performed. I held out my wrist, facing it upward towards the scanning device. With this, the barcode engraved into my wrist was scanned, and my family had roughly five thousand dollars less than I walked into the hospital with. I was a part of the new, “perfect” world now. I was looking at the augmented world now - the overlaid virtual world overlapping and bettering everything in my line of sight. All I could do was smile, despite the negligible feeling of dread itching at the back of my head. It felt like something was ripped from my skull, even though something was added to it.

Walking through the once bland, and empty streets, I was now being invaded by a constant stream of advertisements and news flooding my vision. Windows on an office building each had an individual advertisement on it. Looking up at the sky, there wasn't any blue or white anymore - but instead, a massive, yet familiar, billboard reigning above the city. “Be forever happy with the all-new NeuraChip 3!” said the poster, with a picture of the microchip sitting next to the text. That same microchip that was now implanted in my brain too. The same chip that was now required by the government for the population to have. After the long walk back from my local hospital, I opened the front door to my house, still slightly overstimulated from the onslaught of content thrown at me on my way home.

“Welcome home Brahm, how did everything go?” my mother asked as I set foot into my home. She had the television on, showing the news.

“It was ok I guess.” For some reason, I didn’t feel any emotion - not happy, which was advertised, nor sad. I simply felt indifferent to the new, metal part, of myself. It felt like I was stuck in an endless loop, unable to leave - unable to express my true feelings about this life-changing event. It was as though I was a hamster running circles around a treadmill. I couldn’t get out of this feeling of nothingness.

“That’s just lovely. Why don’t you make us some lunch? ”

“Of course.” I was so unenthusiastic. It felt forced. I wasn’t even happy about seeing my mother. My flesh and blood.

“Well that’s interesting,” my mother remarked, “the television just said how there was another mass homicide. It was a school this time.”

“Yeah. I wonder why there have been so many more serial killers lately. It hasn’t been this bad in years,” I blandly said.

“There’s been so many lately. Thank god for the new implementation of the NeuraChip, right Brahm? I would’ve been having panic attacks every day at this point if it weren’t for the chip.” My mother preached, sounding slightly grateful. She’s always had pretty bad anxiety problems. Through the years, my mother’s been through dozens of different prescribed medications for her anxiety, but none of them have seemed to work. That is until the government imposed the NeuraChip. That’s the one thing I’m probably most grateful for - since I don’t have to worry about her anymore.

Waking up in the morning, I looked outside, seeing the white world outside - it snowed overnight. It had been about two months since I’d had the Chip. Feeling no need to hurry, despite

waking up late, I got ready for school, brushed my teeth, and washed my face, but every time I looked back up into the bathroom mirror, I could barely see my reflection - it was covered with loads of perfume and toothpaste adverts. Every ad was the same. The same brand, the same shade of gray, the same boxy, plain shape - there was no uniqueness about anything. Maybe my chip had a bug? Even though my vision was being corroded with other peoples' greed, for some reason, it didn't bother me too much. I was used to being force-fed information. Schooling and social media just have seemed to condition me that way.

Ever since my classmates have gotten the chip installed into them, they've all been quite violent. Maybe violent isn't the word - just more... They've been more intense - unforgiving.

"Hey! Brahm! What do you think you're doing here?" Exclaimed Chuckie, who's gotten the most out of control from the rest, after his surgery.

"I -uh -" I stammered, "I was just going to the bathroom."

"What happened to that money I gave you?"

"Oh - I forgot to give you the change. Here it is," I held out my hand, with the couple of bucks I owed him, and instead of taking it, I ended up taking his fist to my gut.

"How's that?" Chuckie exclaimed proudly. He was smiling - his face bright red. I couldn't breathe - Chuckie was half a foot taller than me, and built, too. Instead of fighting back, I didn't feel anything. I simply curled up, covering my head, and took each punch, kick, and throw, as long as I could handle.

"Come on... come on...Come on now!" Chuckie was in a state of frenzy. It seemed as though he was experiencing a high from hurting someone. From hurting me. "Look if you're not gonna punch back, I'll do the punching for you too!" He just kept punching and punching, kicking and kicking me. How in the world could he feel more alive, by beating the life out of

me? At some point in the beating, I felt something in my neck crack - like something popped out of place. I didn't think much of it though and simply waited for the beating to stop.

I know that this chip is meant only to keep you happy, but it just seems like my classmates - Chuckie - are simply searching for something to make them feel something. Feel anything. With each blow, I felt as though they were transferring something into me - I felt like a balloon being blown up. Every time they added some air, I felt closer and closer to popping.

Walking back from the long day, I felt my knees buckle slightly. My head hurt, ribs hurt, legs hurt, everything was hurting - everything hurt just a little more than it normally would. It's not like I can't handle this though, usually, I just put some ice on whatever aches, and the next day I forget about it, besides the dark spots left behind. But why did this all have to happen to me? What did I even do to deserve this? Something didn't *feel* right. I just felt too much.

Chewing on my lower lip, I looked up, keeping a well with overflowing water at bay. Looking up through a newly formed wall of water, I saw an eagle. It was free - flying at its own pace, with no one else in the sky to hunt it. It was at the top of the food chain. That - that lifestyle - I yearned for it. It felt like every particle in my body was being attracted to the sky.

"Huh?" I mumbled, arriving at my home. There was a squad of police officers walking around my street. I glued my eyes to the cracked asphalt below me. A pair of black shoes entered my vision, obscuring the cracks in the asphalt, making it appear as though it were perfect.

The shoes spoke in a monotone voice. "I'm sorry sir, but this is a crime scene, you may not pass this line."

Looking up, it felt as though my eyes were traveling up a mountain, clawing at the peak. I locked eyes with the officer's almost blindingly blue eyes.

“Um,” pausing for a moment, my eyes darting anywhere besides the officers’ eyes, I continued, “this is my house though, did something happen?”

“There was another homicide-” I cut off the officer. Even though I knew I shouldn’t have, there was this inexplicable *thing* bubbling up inside me. It was pushing the words out of my mouth, and I couldn’t reign them back in.

“My mom is in there! Please, let me through, I need to make sure she’s ok!”

“Please calm down sir, there’s no need to be worried,” the officer said, with not a single shred of emotion on his face.

“Please! Please, please, please, please!” I was frantic. Uncontrollable. My mask of sanity was slowly fading.

“Sir, please calm down. The situation is under control.”

How was this under control? A homicide was something that happened previously, not something they could prevent now. I began to lean forward, pushed forward by my worry.

“Hey! You can’t enter!” The Officer was chasing me into my home. I laid my hand on my doorknob - cold to the touch, I swiftly swung the door open.

“Hey! Don’t go in there! I’ll have to arrest you!”

Disregarding the officer’s words, I looked around the door, seeing an oblong object. I looked closer. It was my mother. She was torn at the hands, mangled by the face, with her jewelry covered in red. My home was stained with blood. The blood of my mother.

“Why me? What did I do?” I screamed. My vision once again began to become blurry, obscuring my vision with a wall of water. Something inside me denied the red smeared across the floor, and I begged. “Mom! Please! Wake up! Please!” A leather glove gripped my arm.

“Sir, please, do not make this any harder than it already is,” the glove remarked. I swung around, ripping my arm from its grasp. I slipped back out the door, only to be greeted by a metal needle, clamping into my back. A jolt went through my body, I had no control anymore. No control over myself - my own body.

“Nice shot, Chief Davis.”

“Thanks. This guy’s chip seems to be broken, he’s crying and moving uncontrollably.”

“I guess there’ll just be another victim to this homicide then.” The Chief chuckled at this remark, still gripping the taser, electrocuting me.

“Yep. I guess so.” He pulled out his carry, cocking it.

“Light’s out for you, boy.”