

As soon as I wake up, the first thing I do is take a huge breath of air, but there is something off about it. My breathing seems to be inadequate. When I rise from my bed, I fall to the ground, my muscles hurt, and my head hurts. When I get up, I see what looks like a hospital room...but it was strange...something wasn't right. Everything was outdated and rundown, not like the hospital I am used to. Dirt and grime cover the walls, and the machines look like they're going to collapse. Using my mattress as a support, I get up and leave the room. Hallways and rooms appear similar. The walls however are somehow worse. There are multiple holes in them and they seem to be breaking apart. I make my way to the bathroom and immediately run to the sink. But as I run, I notice my body starts to ache again and fall down right before I reach the sink. I reach for the tub of the sink and pull myself up and what I see immediately freaks me out. My hair is now two times as long as it once was and I look frail, almost as if I haven't eaten in months. *Ding dong* suddenly a loudspeaker goes off and a sickly voice plays.

“*Caugh-Caugh*, Good Morning PA air hospital residence, today is May 19th, 2078. As a reminder, the payment for your air filters is due in 91 days. If the payment is not given your filters will turn off. If you would like to upgrade your chip please see me at the end of the day.”

*What!* That can't be possible, it was just 2022 when I went to bed last night. How is it possible that it's 2078? Somethings wrong. Suddenly I feel weak and my muscles ache once again. *Knock Knock*. The door suddenly opens and a doctor walks in.

“Oh My Jesus lord, you're actually awake. It's a godforsaken miracle,” She expresses with delight while throwing her hands up in the air. She walks over to me, puts her arms over my shoulders, and starts walking me out of the bathroom and back toward the room.

“My name is Dr. Joy, I’ve been taking care of you since Dr. Mayfield died 15 years ago.”  
Dr. Mayfield, I remember him, he was my family's doctor ever since I was young, but...now he's dead.

“Wh-what happened to me,” I say with a groggy voice as if I haven't talked in years, “ I remember going to bed in my own house and the year definitely wasn't 2078.”

“This may be a lot to take in dearie, but you have been in a coma for 56 years. Honestly, it's a phenomenon we've never seen before. Your body has not aged a day since you fell,” Dr. Joy explains to me. “Here we are, your room.”

We walk back up to the room. I look around the room which I hadn't done before. There were flowers sitting right next to my bed, a bunch of gifts at the feet of my bed, and a banner that said, get well soon Julie Mackester. Suddenly the door opens and a man who looks around 78 comes in with a young woman.

“Julie, you're awake,” he exclaimed in a raspy voice.

“Wha-,” he suddenly ran towards me, but just like with me he fell to the ground and started coughing. The young woman quickly rushes to help him up.

“Grandpa, you know you can't waste oxygen like that, you only have the basic chip.”

There's that word again, the chip. What is that?

“I know, I know but...I'm just so excited. It's been 56 years since I last saw her awake,” the old man tells his apparent granddaughter. He looks up and sees my confused face “You don't recognize me, do you?”

I take a better look at him, his facial structure and face, he looks almost as if he's...

“Jacob,” I look at him, “my baby brother, how is this possible? You were just 13.”

“Julie that was 56 years ago.”

“But, I don’t understand, what are these chips, why does it hurt to run, and how am I still 22 if it’s been 56 years,” I scream at him, as everything finally begins to set in seeing my brother as an old man.

“Julie sits down, you’ve missed a lot,” he tells me as he gently grabs my shoulder and sits me down. “About 40 years ago, climate change had gotten so bad that the air became unbreathable.”

“If that’s the case then how are we all standing here breathing,” I replay.

“Well, the government created these chips that filter the air as you breathe it in for you.”

“But that still doesn’t explain why it hurts to move too much and how I’m still 22 if it’s been 56 years.”

“Well here’s the thing. These chips aren’t free, in fact, the more air they filter the more they cost. So in order to supply the cost, they gave the very basic chip for free. But that chip only filters 35 micrograms per cubic meter of air.”

I give him a questioning look. Seeing it he replies

“That basically means, there is just enough air that we don’t die but not enough so that we can funct-,” he starts to violently cough and falls to the ground kneeling on the ground using the bed to hold him up.

“Grandpa!” his granddaughter runs over to him and helps him up.

“I’m okay, I’m okay,” he stands up and takes a slightly deep breath, and continues with his explanation. “It means that we can’t function as well as we did before.”

“Well, how much does the chip that filters all the air cost?” I asked still trying to process all of this.

“\$90,000” his granddaughter answers. “Sorry I know you were asking grandpa but...I don’t want him wasting any more air. My name is Kerry. I’m your great-niece. And like I said the chips that filter all of the cost \$90,000.”

“Waste his air?”

“My Breathing of too much non-filtered air doesn't allow for enough carbon dioxide to leave your lungs. I on the other hand am able to.”

“Well, then how are you able to speak for so long.”

“Because I have the full chip,” she reveals. I gasp and look at her confused. *How is it that Kerry has this chip, that’s supposedly really expensive, while my brother does not?*

“I see your confusion. Allow me to explain. Years ago my parents created a business that helps with the distribution of these chips, this made my parents millions. However, my father and your brother never had a great relationship. When it came time to purchase the chip, my father refused to give my father any money to purchase his.”

“If they have such a bad relationship, why are you with your grandfather then?”

“6 years ago I ran away from home. My mother and never had a good relationship either, when I found out about grandpa I imminently ran away to him and became his caretaker.”

The door suddenly made me jump. In comes Dr. Joy with two other nurses with her.

“I’m gonna have to ask that everyone leaves so that I can have a moment alone with my patient. There are many tests that we must conduct.”

“Okay, we’ll continue this conversation tomorrow Julie,” my brother says to me.

“Goodbye, aunt Julie,” Kerry says as they both walk out of the room.

At that moment it all becomes too much for me and I pass out.

*It's been three months since I've woken up and it's safe to say that the world is very different. Dr. Joy said that it was an anomaly that I didn't age while unconscious, but after 2 weeks of tests, they allowed me to leave. I'm currently staying with my brother and great-niece. The world-class system has also changed, now it's less about how expensive someone's car or watch is but how much air they get. And I think that my brother is...*

“Aunt Julie please come to the kitchen,” I hear Kerry yell. I look up from the journal I was writing, get out of the chair I'm sitting in, and walk out of the room. I walk into the room where my brother and his daughter are sitting.

They each have a somber look on their face as I walk in. When they hear me walk in my brother gets up to offer me a chair and says, “Julie, sit down. There's something we must tell you,” He says as he looks at me with a sad face “Tomorrow the payment for the chips is due. We however do not have enough money to pay for both of ours,” I do not like the way this conversation is going. “I've decided that I am only going to pay for yours.”

At first, I'm confused as to what this means, but then it hits me. My brother, my not-so-younger brother is going to die. He was going to die simply because the government refused to pay for the basic human right that was air.

“No...No, please don't do that. Pay for yours, don't worry about me please,” I quietly say to him while tearing up.

“It has already been paid for,” he says and tears start falling freely down my face when the realization that I was going to miss my brother's entire life. “We called you down here because I wanted you to be with me in my last moments. I'm going to take my chip off. I wanted to be surrounded by loved ones before I go.”

He then grabs my hand and Kerry, who has been crying this entire time, grabs his shoulder. After a moment he puts his hand to his neck and takes off his chip. Once he does he immediately starts gasping and gagging, begging for the air that isn't there. After a minute passes he stops making any noise and stops moving, and at that moment I realize that my brother was dead. And I scream out loud and curse the world for what happened. Kerry takes my hand and pulls me into a hug and we just sit there. Crying into each other's arms.