

# Chapter 1

“Hi Tony! How are you? Has Sam already chosen what and where he wants to study?” Tony looked up from his plate. Monica seated herself opposite of Tony and put her tray down. It was filled with the great food produced by the company canteen they both worked at.

“Hi Mon! I’m good, thank you. Sam actually enrolled himself for the aerospace engineering study in Delft. He decided he wanted to go back to his roots. We moved out of Delft when he was just two years old so it is not like he has any memories of Delft, but somehow he feels connected to it and wants to go there. The aerospace choice comes from his obsession with the Martian colony and exploration. He has already made a bucket list of planets he thinks will be colonized in the next fifty years and made plans to visit them all.” Tony took a bite of his toast.

“Wow plans to go to outer space. That must be tough for you.”

“Of course it is. He would be so far away. But then again, it’s always hard for a father to see his son grow up. Even if he just would move to another country it would still be hard.”

Monica answered skeptically “Mars or another country. That’s quite a difference right? About 50 million kilometers. You can’t even call someone at that distance.”

“You can send video messages. I really would want him to stay here, but there is nothing I can do right? He has to follow his dreams. And I can’t say I’m not proud of him. I mean, was working on some brain-chip really what you always dreamed of doing?”

“A brain-chip that could cure cancer? For sure. If we get this chip working that would be a huge accomplishment. We work in a great city, live in a great time and we are perfectly healthy. And of course I have great colleagues like you, Tony.”

Tony smiled. “Thank you, Monica. I guess you’re right. But sometimes I just realize that I am 46 years old. When I was young, I wanted to have adventures, I wanted to see the world. Maybe one day go to outer space myself. Sam thinking about his future just makes me realize that I have just half a life left.”

Monica looked at her friend with some compassion. “Come on old friend, please tell me you are not having a midlife crisis. You have a great life! Great wife, great son, great job. And of course you have the coolest friends.”

“I see you are modest as ever. But that’s easy for you to say. You still have your whole life in front of you. I mean, you still go on dates! Talking about dates, how was your date this weekend?”

Monica laughed and answered: “I see you are trying to change the subject. The date was very nice, thank you for asking. His name is Garry, he works as a manager for five local supermarkets. I picked him up at his place and we went to this restaurant called *Torino*, a great Italian.”

“And? How is he? Is there a click between you two?”

“It was perfect, really romantic. I think we really connected. After dinner we had a nice long walk together. We just got lost in conversation. He is exactly what I was looking for. And best of all: we’re meeting again next Saturday” Monica said dreamily.

“Good for you Mon! I would love to stay here and keep talking to you about this wonder guy Garry, but I have to go, got work to do.”

## Chapter 2

When Tony entered his bedroom, he saw Virginia, sleeping peacefully. He took off his clothes and tried to get into the bed without waking Virginia.

“Hi sweetie” Virginia smiled as she turned around and kissed Tony.

“Hey, I’m sorry I woke you up, I tried to be as silent as I could.”

Virginia looked at him with a sleepy satisfied smile. “No, it’s okay. I’m happy to see you. How was your day?”

“Not that good actually. The first tests were unsuccessful, so I had to stay longer to try to find out why the tests failed. Not that it really mattered, I still have no idea why they failed, but after a while, I just could not focus anymore after a while. I just wanted to go home and get some sleep. And now I’m also worried about that. Normally I can go on as long as necessary. My boss will not be happy that we still don’t know why the tests failed.”

Virginia gently brushed Tony’s hair aside. “It’s okay, he will understand. You don’t always have to know the answer. And about the tiredness: I wouldn’t worry about that too much. You aren’t getting any younger. It’s okay to be tired from time to time.”

Tony frowned a bit. “It’s not just tiredness. It is also just not being able to focus. It’s really weird. I don’t remember ever feeling like this.”

“Well, if you are really worried you could always do a quick health scan tomorrow. I am sure there is nothing wrong but it will at least calm you down.”

Tony’s shoulders and face relaxed a bit as he said: “You are probably right. I hope so at least. How was your day?”

Virginia smiled. “It was good actually. We have an interesting case. You know how the consumption of high cholesterol food is limited?” Tony nodded. “Well there is a proposition that the consumption of high cholesterol food should not only be limited but banned altogether. I think banning would just be a way too big of a limitation of free will, but somehow David thinks banning it is a good idea.”

“Of course he does. It’s like he always disagrees with you on purpose. I don’t think banning would be a good idea. On what grounds would you even ban it. It’s not like health is really an issue now that the consumption already limited.”

Virginia shrinks. “Consuming cholesterol is never healthy, but health is indeed not that big of an issue. David argues that it doesn’t matter, that people will not really notice the difference. While that is true, I don’t think that is a valid argument. It is our responsibility that people will not lose their free will. I just have the feeling like some of my colleagues just forget the risk of people becoming robots, that all do exactly the same things without ever minding that.”

“That’s why you need a unanimous vote to pass constraints right? Knowing that people like you make these decisions for us just makes me feel safe and gives me the confidence that having this brain-chip really improves our wellbeing and will not become any danger to us.”

Virginia smiles “That’s sweet babe. I’m really tired so I’m going to sleep. Sleep tight, sweetie”

Virginia turns around and Tony cuddles her. “Sleep tight babe. Love you.”

## Chapter 3

Tony stopped the car. He closed his eyes as the door of the garage automatically closed behind him. He let his head rest on the steering wheel. He was so tired.

Today was another bad day at work. He and his team ran through all the possible errors that could have let the test of yesterday fail, but without any result. The only thing he accomplished today was checking several components of the chip that did work. Maybe the bigger problem was that he checked all the components of the chip. The brain-chip should work flawlessly, but for some reason it just didn't.

Maybe the weirdest thing was how frustrated he got. It was normal with his job to get stuck at a specific problem for days, but he never got this frustrated about it. And he never got this tired.

He got out of the car and strolled to the fridge. He grabbed a microwave pizza and put it in his oven. Virginia would not be at home for dinner, she had to work over. Sam was staying with his girlfriend, so Tony was all alone now. He collapsed onto the couch. He took off his shoes, lay down on the couch and grabbed his phone.

He opened the health tracker app and pushed "do a health check". There appeared a loading circle on his screen and after about five seconds a message popped up saying "failed to connect to device. Please contact distributor."

Tony frowned. He knew these chips very well because he was working with them every day. He was working on the next generation chips: a chip that could control your individual cells and had the potential to kill off mutated cells, and therefore cure cancer. A chip not being able to connect certainly wasn't a good sign.

The ability of establishing a connection was one of the most important aspects of a brain-chip. Without a connection it was impossible to find out what was wrong with the chip in a case of a malfunctioning. A malfunctioning chip could be a big risk, because the chip had the possibility of controlling nearly every aspect of you: your thoughts, your movements, your actions and soon it would even have the ability to control your individual cells. A groundbreaking technology that could cure diseases like cancer by shutting down cells with a dangerous mutation. This was the technology Tony was currently working on.

In the early days of the brain-chip technology people of course saw these risks and were worried about the dangers of this immersing technology. This made the developers extremely careful when they developed the device. The chip was always in contact with an algorithm on central high security servers. This algorithm controlled and checked the app. In case of a malfunctioning the chip would be immediately shut down, to prevent the chip from doing any serious harm.

This algorithm was the same algorithm that made the chip perform its main function: prevent people from doing bad things. This started with preventing crime, but later new actions were added that needed to be prevented. This included for example cheating or limiting the amount of cholesterol high food you could consume. The chip later also prevented people from getting tired when they didn't want to become tired or to help people stay motivated. What the chip could or could not do was decided by a group of philosophers who were carefully selected. One of those philosophers was his wife Virginia.

If the chip would lose its connection possibilities, it was designed to shut down entirely. Tony realized that this was the cause for his symptoms. He felt relieved as the beeper of the oven indicated that the

pizza was ready: there was nothing wrong with him, his chip just was malfunctioning. He decided to just have a lazy evening a home and enjoy it.

## Chapter 4

“I just don’t understand!” Tony looks at Monica with frustration. “Why doesn’t that stupid chip work!?”

“Tony relax, it’s going to be okay, don’t worry” Monica looks at her friend with a worried face.

“It’s not going to be okay, and I am worrying. And with a good reason. I have tried for an entire week to get this stupid chip to work. An entire week! If I don’t get this chip working by Monday, I will get fired.” Tony looks at his computer screen with a mix of frustration and desperation.

“Tony, please... You have to relax. If you don’t relax, I’m going to have to report you.”

“Report me? For what” Tony now stares at Monica with disbelief.

“For misconduct at the work place. You are not showing good leadership to your team right now. You should be working on the solution of this problem right now. And instead, you are yelling at your computer screen!”

Tony is speechless. He realizes that Monica is technically right, he has not been productive all week and that is indeed something another employee should report. But Monica and Tony have been friends for almost 5 years now, good friends. How can she just turn against him like this?

“Mon... Please don’t. We’re friends. You don’t have to... I can go to work now, I will fix it.” Tony stammers.

“Tony I don’t want to and if you go to work now I don’t have to. I know we are friends, but that should not stop me from reporting it if you do a company violation. Or any other violation on that point. I can help you, we can fix it together.”

Tony realizes that that is the chip talking. *That should not stop me.* Because of course it would not be right to not report something, just because you are friends. But still it really hurts.

Tony has not gotten a new chip yet. To get a new chip, he has to make an appointment. But until now he has just been delaying it. He enjoys the freedom to be lazy for a change and being able to eat whatever he wants. He never realized being able to do whatever you want would be so much fun. And you would not have to betray your friends of course.

“Yeah I’m sorry, let’s get back to work. I really appreciate you helping me. I just hope we will finish this by Monday...”

## Chapter 5

Tony walks through a park. The leaves are falling from the trees and give the park a kind of orange color. Tony shivers as he feels a breeze go through his hair. The combination of gray clouds and orange leaves give the park a cold rainy feel. It is comparable to how Tony feels.

He still has not found a solution to his work problem. He has actually tried everything and checked everything, but he just cannot find the solution. He also gets distracted extremely fast, nearly every time he gets stuck. In his frustration, he also yelled at Virginia last Friday. Understandable as he had a really bad day, but it makes him feel so incredibly bad.

He thinks about his chip. The freedom felt really good at first. But now he does not know if this freedom is really so good as he first felt it was. It was not like he missed it before the chip started malfunctioning. But as soon as he realized it was malfunctioning, he felt powerful, he now could do whatever he wanted.

This for him mostly consisted of eating junk food, being unmotivated at work and just overall feeling very lazy. He realized that at this point he was not the man he wanted to be, not by far. He wanted to be a caring man, who gave joy and energy to his wife, son and friends. He wanted to be healthy. He wanted to succeed at his job.

What he did not want anymore was feeling tired and lazy. He did not want to have the urge to eat junk food anymore. And most of all he did not want to hurt his wife or anyone around him. Of course he could try to do this himself. But why should he keep the freedom to do the things he did not want to do. Would it be bigger accomplishment if he did it all by himself, without the help of the chip? Of course, it would be, but was that an accomplishment worth having?

He looked out over a small lake and saw small waves ripple the surface, as the wind was blowing over the lake. He looked down and saw himself reflected in the surface of the water. Would he really get fired tomorrow? For not being able to solve a really complicated problem within a week?

Was it really that important? He had a great wife, a great son and great friends. He still had so much he wanted to do. He wanted to go and have adventures. He wanted to go on cool journeys and maybe start some engineering projects he was really passionate about. He was working at the same company for the past fifteen years, maybe it was just time to go. He wanted to spend more time with his wife. He wanted to visit his son as much as possible in the coming years, before Sam would inevitably go on his own adventure. But first he wanted to get his chip fixed.