

Is the Doctor in?

Dan Chalmers waited in his den, listening to the phone ring a half-dozen times before being answered. He fidgeted with the pen in his hand, unsure if what he was doing was the right thing.

“Is Dr. Smythe available for an emergency consult?”

“May I ask who is calling?” A familiar voice asked.

Chalmers felt relieved, recognizing the voice of his regular doctor, Howard Smythe. “I’m sorry to disturb you, Dr. Smythe. I know my regular appointment isn’t until next Friday, but I’ve been experiencing a lot of stress since the operation.”

“First off, Dan, let’s start by you calling me Howard. It’ll relax the conversation and let us talk man to man.”

Chalmers settled back in his desk chair, letting the vibro unit in his chair pulse its relaxing heat through his stressed lower back. He picked up his pen, doodling on a notepad as he tried to organize his thoughts.

“Why don’t you start with what is bothering you so much that you had to call me today?”

“It’s probably nothing. But ever since you installed my inner ear cerebral-link, it has swamped me with sensory input. All the information and data flooding into my brain seems overwhelming.”

“Have you been wearing your neuro-sensory shield like I advised?”

“You mean that horseshoe gizmo that wraps around my head, covering my ears?”

“That gizmo is there for your protection, Dan. It will let you control how much we exposed you to until your brain learns to filter incoming thoughts and information,” Howard

sighed. “You’ve got to trust the technology, Dan,” Howard said. “I’m viewing your vital statistics on my monitors as we speak. Your heart rate increase and shallow breathing show you are on the verge of a panic attack. Get ahold of yourself, man.”

Chalmers breathed deeply several times, envisioning a tranquil lake on a spring day with fish jumping.

“Good imaging, Dan. The lake looks very relaxing,” Howard said.

Chalmer’s eyes widened. “Wait. You can see what I’m envisioning?”

“The new implants make that possible,” Howard said. “You’ve got to remember how things were prior to 2050. Crime going rampant, murder, mass shootings. That’s why governments worldwide elected to have everyone on the planet chipped and monitored. By being able to peek into people’s thoughts they’ve been able to intercept people planning violence against others. Between the chips, cameras, and satellite technology going global, crime vanished almost overnight, and there hasn’t been any mass shootings in almost twenty years.”

Chalmers shook his head, drawing a sad emoji. “I guess it’s turning out to be more than I was ready for.”

“The cerebral-link is just the next step in the phone's evolution. Just as the cellphone replaced the rotary phone, it’s evolved into its next incarnation, the link. Now, instantly, you and all the people worldwide that you want to know are available. You have the world and all the information mankind has gathered over the eons at your disposal. You don’t even need a computer anymore-you just think and the knowledge comes to you.”

“I never thought of it that way.”

“Hey, it’s 2075, and you came to me needing to step up and become another new member of world technology.”

“Are you going to take me for a walk?”

“Who is that?” Howard asked.

“That’s Lydia’s dog, our afghan wolfhound, Langford.” Chalmers said. “No, Langford. I told you I’d take you for a walk after lunch. I’m on the phone. Go away.”

“I warned you about adding the universal translation application. Some people just aren’t ready to listen to or talk with their pets and other animals. It’s also another reason to wear your shield.”

“Is it always going to be like this?”

Howard’s voice grew more serious. “I’ve read research being done by Disney labs that says next year they’re bringing out an adapter you can add to your unit. It will allow you to create your own blocking program to censor the information you permit to enter your mind.”

“How is that supposed to work?”

“The company claims you will create a visual link password inside your mind to filter the information you let in.” Howard’s voice rose with excitement. “It means you won’t have to lug that ugly shield thing around with you anymore. You’ll visualize your pass codes filtering the information you let into your mind. They’re protected from theft because of being locked inside the neuro-chemical, electrical, impulses of your brain. Like having an impenetrable mind vault ”

Chalmers drew an even bigger, angrier emoji face as Langford came back into the den.

“Are we going to go for that walk yet?” Langford asked.

“No.”

“Your choice,” Lanford said, lifting his leg to pee on Chalmer’s shoe.

“Damn you, Langford,” Chalmer’s yelled. “I’m cutting your dinner in half tonight.”

“That’s okay with me,” Langford called back. “I’m going into your closet, crap on the floor, and rub your favorite shirts in my poo.”

“You’re the one who wanted to add that app to your unit,” Howard said. “Now, at least you’ll know why he’s defecating on your shirts.”

Chalmers placed an emergency call to his wife in the bedroom, “Lydia, Langford’s coming. Reason with the mutt, and stop him from ruining my shirts.”

“What if he won’t listen to me?”

“My Beretta is on the middle shelf.”

“Do you need me to consult with Langford?”

“No. Lydia has instructions on how to deal with him.”

Chalmers put on his neuro-sensory shield and left the den, retiring to the backyard. They’d moved to the suburbs to have a larger home and enjoy the benefits of growing and raising their own food.

At last, there was peace. No news of wars, accidents, murder, or mayhem flooding in through his universal neuro-link. As he watched the chickens move toward the garden, he saw his horse, Benjamin, staring at him contentedly over the corral fence. Wondering at their

thoughts, he suddenly remembered he'd been talking with Dr. Smythe and removed his shield.

"Dr. Smythe, are you still there?"

"It's Howard, Dan. And yes, I'm still here. I figured you needed a few moments to settle things down at home."

"I had to escape the house for a few minutes. I came into our backyard to enjoy the peace and tranquility of my garden."

Chalmers balked, hearing a series of high-pitched screams, almost drowned out by a low electrical humming sound. "Do you hear those screams or that strange buzzing sound?"

Howard sighed. "The buzzing sound is probably caused by the porn blocker chip your wife insisted we install."

"I'm more upset by the screaming than the buzzing."

"What's going on closest around you?" Howard asked.

Chalmers glanced at the garden where his wife collected greens. "My wife is in the garden collecting green onions for dinner."

"Ah," said Howard. "It's a side effect of the blocker. While blocking porn it makes you susceptible to plant chatter. For the time being, wear your neural-sensory shield when you are preparing and eating your meals, especially anything with fresh ingredients."

A fluffy red hen walked by, escorting her chicks across the yard to the barn. "Look carefully, children. That mean cat that chased Herman, your brother, is always prowling around here."

"What about that man at the table?" One chick chirped.

“Avoid getting close to him. He’s a human, and much worse than any cat. That man and his wife steal my eggs routinely, and I’ve seen them cook and eat several of my friends.”

Chalmers huffed, walking past the chicks, and stopped by the corral fence to stroke the horse, Benjamin’s mane. “I suppose you’ve got some issues with me, too.”

Benjamin raised his head, his lips curling. “It would be nice if you shelled out a couple of extra bucks for a better-quality alfalfa. And I know all those TV westerns show them feeding oats to the horses, but a little corn and barley would go a long way to eliminating my constipation.”

“Hey, buddy,” Benjamin called out as Chalmers walked away. “I wouldn’t cry if you lost twenty or thirty pounds. I’m not as young as I once was, and not as good as I was once. Spare me an aching back.”

Chalmers stomped over to the patio table, picking up a lemonade his wife had brought out.

“I just saw your vitals spike again.” Howard said.

Chalmers shook his head, turning back to his conversation with Dr. Smythe. “I’m thinking I want to go back to the old days without cerebro-links, phones, or even computers. Back to when only people talked to people and we could ignore their prattle by simply leaving the room or closing the door.”

Howard gasped. “Bite your tongue, Chalmers. Where would you or I even be without technology as it is now?”

“We’d be meeting face to face for this conversation, not through some damn electronic link in my head. We’d be resolving my issues on a couch in your office.”

“I don’t have an office. In fact, I’m on the seventh hole at Driftwood Country Club getting ready to sink a four-foot birdie.”

“So, all this time, doctor, I’ve been talking to you while you’re out playing golf?”

“I’m Dr. Smythe’s electronic scheduling calendar, Einstein, and I am the one that supervised the robo-surgeon that performed your operation. Afterward, I oversaw your recovery in post-operative care. And during the past two weeks, I’ve led and monitored your therapy sessions, recommending your further treatments. What do you have to say to that?”

Chalmers smiled, picturing the tranquil lake scene again, so it could be pictured on the doctor’s monitors. A large white sign came floating slowly into sight with a detailed picture of a hand, its center digit raised, pointing skyward.