

Ever watched helplessly as her brand new baby was swept away by the masked doctors. She had a flash of wild emotion. Wanting to cry out, to beg the doctors to let her spend a few more seconds with her baby before it was taken in for the mandatory and life expanding brain surgery. Just as quickly as the emotions came, they were swept away and an overwhelming feeling of gratitude replaced it. Gratitude to government, to the doctors and most importantly Gavin Settlan, the man who invented this revolutionary brain surgery. Ever was filled to brim with pride that she was part of this amazing republic, with this amazing government that in the year 2110 had made it a law that every single person got a surgery at birth that expanded their life by 30 years.

Ever rested her head against the pillow and sighed. *I am so lucky*, she thought, *so, so lucky.*

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Dr. Calla Rena was performing brain surgery on a baby. She used the probes to gently remove part of the brain. Not a big part, not an important part, mind you. Just a small portion of the Limbic System, the part of the brain that was supposed to enable you to feel emotions. We now know that the Limbic System is actually a pointless and unneeded part of the brain. By removing part of it and replacing it with a tiny piece of machinery, you can lengthen the life span by 30 years. No one knew exactly what the machine was. Well, no one except for Gavin Settlan, of course. This didn't worry Dr. Calla Rena. She completely and utterly trusted Settlan, and greatly appreciated all that he had done for the medical community.

As Dr. Rena continued performing the operation, she let her thoughts wander. She's completed this operation hundreds of times. She could do it with her eyes closed. Besides, even if she did mess up the tiny metal probes she was using would automatically correct the problem. Her thoughts wandered to the time of the Bleakness.

A time of terror and pain. It was the time before the year 2110. Before Gavin Settlan had graced us with new invention. People were so stupid back then, she thought. So naive. The life span had only been around 70 years.

70 years.

Dr. Rena's mother was 71 when she died.

Dr. Rena's thoughts began to wander to the last memory she had of her living mother. Her mother was lying in on the hospital bed, looking frail, like at any second she might break. Her mother reached out her hand and grabbed Rena's hand. She lifted her gray and tired eyes and stared strait in Rena's. Slowly, carefully she parted her thin lips and in a course and quiet voice she said, "Calla... emotions... emotions are the most powerful force on the planet. Emotions, sometimes they swallow you. They should consume you. You may not be able to breathe or speak or move because the emotions way so heavily on your shoulders. You may not be able to name them, you shouldn't always be able to name them. But... if you don't feel emotions like that.... then.... stop."

The doctors told Dr. Rena that her mother was about to die and she probably didn't even know what she was saying. Rena nodded. She believe what they were saying, but she couldn't get the words out of her head.

Back in the present, Dr. Rena was gently pulling the probes out of the baby's head. Her mothers words floated through her mind. *They should consume you.* Rena had never had an emotion "consume" her. Her emotions came in a neat and orderly fashion. As if they were on a conveyor belt. Her emotions came like they were being delivered by a machine.

She placed the healing pad over the hole in the baby's head. She was barely paying attention as the healing pad grew the skin back together. She wasn't sure what her mother had meant be "stop". Stop living? Stop feeling emotions?

Dr. Rena removed the healing pad and placed the baby in the tiny crib. *Your just like us now, she thought, just like us.*

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Gavin Settlan hated his invention. At first, he viewed it as a major medical breakthrough, much like everyone else. A surgery that could guarantee every one 30 extra years was the said to be the biggest medical breakthrough since Penicillin. He was elated.

Soon though, he started to notice weird tendencies in the test subjects. Once they got to the age of around 3, he noticed that there emotional growth seemed stunted. They seemed unable to feel (or at least express) any emotion but sadness, happiness and anger. They never seemed to experience hope or love or annoyance or any of the emotions your average three year old should feel.

This worried Gavin. He was afraid something in his invention had made it so none of them could feel emotions past what your typical infant felt. He brought his concerns to the government as he didn't want any more surgeries to be performed if it wasn't safe. He expected the government to shut down the procedure until the subjects had undergone further tests.

That didn't happen.

Instead the government threw him in cell. Well, it wasn't actually a cell but a fancy hotel room. But the doors were locked and the windows guarded so yeah, it was a cell.

The government ordered him to find a way to control the emotions. They didn't actually order him, more like ask him to find a way to control the emotions or else his cell would explode. So he found a way. He regretted it every day of his life but a man will do pretty crazy things with the option of death dangling in front of him.

He wished he hadn't. He wished he'd just died then. Because every day after that he wished he was dead.

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The envelope was thick and sturdy. It had a printed gold stamp on the top. Dr. Rena ran her hand over it, feeling the electricity buzz underneath her fingers. An envelope like this could only mean one thing.

She was invited to Gavin Settlan's next conference!

To be asked to attend the most brilliant man in the worlds conference was the highest honor anyone could receive. It was for the best of the best, the elite of the elite.

Dr. Rena couldn't remember the last time she was this excited. Her heart felt like it was going to burst out of her chest and snatch the envelope from her tightly-wound fingers. For a fleeting second she wondered if this is what her mother meant by "consume". She quickly buried the thought at the bottom of her mind. Not now, not at a time like this.

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He was exhausted. Not physically, as he was locked up in a cell the entire day, but emotionally and mentally. He felt... well, he was to tired to feel anything really. So, he was going to end it. Today. At his conference in front of millions of people he was going to expose the evil truths that the government has kept covered. He knew they would probably kill him and he didn't care. He'd been waiting for death for 30 years.

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The conference goers settled in to the auditorium seats. Hands folded in their laps, they waited anxiously for Gavin to begin. They couldn't wait for the most famous, most brilliant, most revolutionary man in the world be presented on stage. It was truly an amazing thought.

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The applause hurt his ears. It made his head reel and throb. He ached for a time when the applause meant everything to him. When every clap was turned into pure adrenaline. He remembered that feeling-- it was amazing. Every person sitting in that

audience was there for him. They wanted to see him. He wanted to go back there... to a time when everything was simpler.

He scanned the crowd, watching the eager faces blend together. Slowly, he ran a wrinkled hand through his thinning hair. It occurred to him that he should probably be nervous. What he was about to do.... it was basically a suicide attempt. He didn't feel anything though... he just felt numb. 30 years in prison will do that to you.

Standing in the middle of the stage, he thought of how funny he must look to audience. They expected some one powerful. Someone who demanded attention. Instead they got a balding 50 year old with bags under his eyes and shaking hands. That thought made him laugh.

Slowly, shakily he raised a hand above his head to silence the audience. A hushed whisper fell over them. He opened his mouth and coughed in an attempt to find his voice.

"Feel the emotions." He said. It was his trigger sentence. When he programmed the emotional control software he placed this trigger phrase that he hoped would temporarily suspend the control mechanism.

"None of you have ever felt a real emotions...." He sighed. A confused murmur erupted from the audience.

"What do you mean?" Someone called.

So he told them. And for the first time in a long time, he felt alive.

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Dr. Rena finally understood what her mother meant. The entire time Gavin was talking, Rena felt anger brewing in the pit of her stomach. Slowly, she felt the anger twist and crawl up her throat. With a cold and strong hand it grasped her heart. She couldn't breathe. The words she wanted to say, the things she wanted to scream got stuck in her chest.

With sweaty palms she grabbed a piece of paper and began to write down everything she was feeling at this moment. She didn't want to forget this feeling when the government turned back on the device.

All of the sudden Gavin stopped talking. He stopped talking because there was a bullet in his throat. From a government officials' gun.

Rena felt the cold fury from before turn into blinding, flaming rage. She felt her face flush and the blood in her veins grew warm. The anger exploded from her stomach and filled her entire body. And the words that had been stuck in her chest suddenly poured out in a steady river.

And then it stopped.

All of the sudden the anger stopped.

She was crying.

She was crying because it was so sad that one of the greatest men to ever walk this Earth had become mentally unstable and a danger to those around him so they had to shoot him.

She dropped the paper.

And kicked it away.

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With her baby balanced on her hip, Ever sadly read the front page of the newspaper. The entire story was about Gavin Settlan and his tearful death. It was so sad that such an amazing man had to die in such an awful way. She was so thankful that the official had gotten to Gavin before he had the opportunity to hurt anyone.

Ever placed the paper down on the table and kissed her baby's head. *Thank God for the government*, she thought, *they've saved us all*.