**The Chip**

“It’s a boy!” the doctor exclaims. “Now Ms. Sigmund, put in your ear plugs. The noise this boy makes could cause some serious headaches.”

She has only been a mother for thirty seconds and Jamie Sigmund already dislikes it. Watching her son’s first movements was so distracting that she completely forgot to put in her earplugs despite the big red signs lining the walls that said “WARNING: Infant wails cause headaches.” She narrowly escaped disaster since a headache would hinder all her productivity making her life unimportant.

“Why are babies such a hassle?” she thought. The only reason that she even had a child was because of the government. Two months ago, she, along with one hundred other women over the age of eighteen, was selected by the government lottery. About once a year when the population starts declining, the government selects about two hundred women to be sent to the Capitol so their uteri can be implanted with a fertilized egg. Each of these women is then troubled with the job of carrying a young life form in their stomach for a tedious two months. It is such an impediment on their ability to work, that every woman wishes her name will never be selected. Luckily, the government takes care of the baby after that, or at least the chip does.

It has been twenty years and Jamie can still see the outline of the chip on the underside of her arm. Jamie became the person she is today because of that little piece of metal with a “12346” glowing through her skin. Soon her son, John, will get one just like it with a flashy “134733.” In twenty four hours the chip will be accustomed to John’s individual brain waves and Jamie will be free of the burden the government has placed on her. At least they had the common sense of doing that, she thought. Everyone would be up in arms if they were forced to have a baby and then actually be responsible for it in the years to come.

When she was at the Capitol for her procedure she was shown a video on babies in the past which made her so grateful for the chip. Hundreds of years ago, people made babies just for the fun of it. Apparently they felt that creating new life was some sort of obligation towards society, but Jamie will never understand why. Furthermore, she was disgusted to discover the way these barbaric people went about making the babies since she could never imagine being that close to another person. What’s even worse is that not only did people love making babies, but they enjoyed taking care of them. After the baby is born the parents would care for the child by feeding it through another disturbing method, washing it, and even cleaning its excrement. Gross. Jamie cannot understand how anyone could enjoy doing something for someone other than themselves. Lucky for her, the government trained a neural network to become a fully developed person. With that process on the chip she just has to sit back and wait for the crying to stop tomorrow morning. Then she will be fast forwarded through the growth process so that John can function by himself and she can continue living her own life with increased productivity.

That night, little John cries and cries while Jamie dreams peacefully of a child free life. Tomorrow morning when the crying stops, she’ll be able to live that dream for real because, at that moment, her son will be a true citizen of 2110 and will be set to fend for himself.

As the sun rises, Jamie Sigmund wakes up to plastic painfully poking in her ears. Unfortunately this reminds her that she has a son. Walking towards the nursery she is anxious to find out if the chip has worked so that she can remove her annoying earplugs. They are not good for helping her focus and she wouldn’t work productively with them on. Inside the nursery, she is surrounded by four white walls and zero windows. She walks toward the one and only thing in the room, the crib, and peers inside thankful to find a silent little ball of blankets looking up at her. Now she can remove the uncomfortable earplugs and get ready for a successful work day. It doesn’t matter that she has no idea what to do with a young child because she has no responsibility from this point forward, only the chip does.

That same morning, Laura, another woman called to duty with Jamie, wakes up to be reminded that she has a daughter, Hallie. Like all the other women, Laura wants to remove her earplugs and bolts to the nursery to see if the chip has begun its development process. Laura is welcomed into the nursery by a blaring “Wahhhhh!” that hits her eardrum, a running a piercing pain across her head. This headache sends her productivity for the day down to zero.

All the handouts Laura received said the baby would be done crying by the morning after birth. The government had promised the women that if they gave life to new humans in order to stabilize the population, the government would be responsible for the rest of the child’s life. The chip was invented to uphold this and Laura is furious that the government has not kept its promise.

A week later, walking by the nursery does not trigger any memories of the past two months for Jamie. Even though John lives in her house, she never sees him and doesn’t acknowledge his existence. Every day he goes to the Academy with all the other babies to learn about living in 2110. While the chip develops their brains and bodies, the babies also need to be trained to behave properly in society.

Jamie is quite happy with the way the whole process worked. When she received the letter calling her to the Capitol, she was very uneasy and upset that she would be inconvenienced for such a lengthy amount of time. Now that it’s over, however, she does not mind that they took away two of her months. She is back to work and receives government evaluations reporting her highest rate of productivity yet! Getting back to her schedule, Laura can go back to forgetting about everything she went through and focus on her own life and her own job.

Hallie is supposed to be at the Academy by now, but instead she is still crying. Laura does not understand. She has had a headache for the past week and is pretty sure that it will never go away. The process is supposed to last less than one day; Hallie should not be her concern anymore and should be self-sufficient. Laura has taken to leaving her daughter in the nursery, hoping that if she avoids the girl the chip might work faster.

“Wahhhhhh!” the wailing continues. Desperate for some peace and quiet, Laura decides to try and put an end to the obnoxious noise. Haughtily, she makes her way down to the nursery. She shouldn’t have to do that at this point, but she needs to get rid of the killing headache.

Hallie’s nursery looks just like James’, which is very typical for 2110. It is the absolute only thing parents provide their offspring. Since the child becomes self-sufficient quickly with the chip, decorating the room is the child’s own responsibility. However, as Laura enters the noisy nursery, a worrisome feeling overcomes her and she begins to believe she is not any normal parent.

Right when Hallie locks eyes with Laura, her wailing slows to low sobs. Following instinct, Laura stops next to the crib and leans over the edge. As she does so, the young girl’s arms reach up toward her mother and Laura has to quickly pull her limb away to keep their hands from colliding. That is never supposed to happen between human beings. Ever. Quickly, Laura runs out of the room and as the door closes the wailing begins even louder. Her heart racing, Laura is thankful that she avoided contamination.

Back in her room, Laura reevaluates the disastrous event she barely escaped. She cannot tell anyone what just happened in that nursery. First of all, they would think she is abnormal for entering a room with a crying baby, and second they would find Hallie’s movement completely alien and try to dispose of the baby. If her daughter is taken, her name would be re-added to the lottery and Laura would be running the risk of going through hell again. However, she is fortunate that their hands did not actually collide, because if they did it would be much worse. Everyone would think Laura is contaminated and avoid her forever. She would also lose her job and have to move. To make sure that does not happen she must never enter that room again. At least until the chip starts working and Hallie is developed enough to begin the Academy and learn proper behavior. By then, Hallie will be out of Laura’s thoughts, and the events from earlier that night won’t even matter. Laura just hopes the chip kicks in very soon.

The next three nights, Laura got absolutely no sleep because of Hallie’s crying. But she didn’t dare enter the nursery again. Exhausted and distressed, she decides to research reasons for the chip’s failure. She is lucky to have such a large library that had a different screen on each wall to surround her with her research. After scanning her personal chip on one of the walls, a monotone voice echoes “Welcome 43802,” through the room signaling the startup of the machine. This connects her brain waves to the giant source of information so whatever she is thinking, the library will answer. As she thinks about her issues with Hallie, bubbles of data and answers begin filling the walls for her to read. Unfortunately, she does not find any of it to be very helpful. She is desperate to stop all the crying so thoughts of how to do so run through her head and are interrupted by the library.

“Before the chip was used to control baby’s impulses, it was common for mothers to ‘cuddle’ with their offspring,” the voice exclaimed.

“Cuddle? What’s that?” Laura thought. She is not acquainted with such a word and the video she was shown about historic parenting did not include this concept.

“Cuddle. Cuddle means to hold someone in ones arms as a way of showing love or affection.”

Now love is not a common word in her vocabulary either, but she is slightly more familiar with the idea. “So, mother’s loved their children?” she wonders, leading to the library response “Yes. Mothers had a special bond with those they gave life to.”

This thought is extremely strange to Laura and she ponders it for quite some time. She has never loved anyone before. What is that feeling? The library explained it as a “special bond,” but what does that mean? She hates the stupid chip for not working and making everything so complicated. While everyone else gave birth to a baby they never see, she is constantly reminded that she has a daughter. All this stress has been cutting into her productivity and she has been receiving her lowest reports yet. Life would be much better if the chip just worked!

The night after all of her research and pondering, Laura can still hear the screeching whines coming from Hallie’s room. The baby has been crying for three weeks straight, making Laura’s headache worse and worse and neither of them has been sleeping through the night. With such little sleep, Laura knows she may be slightly delusional but after a lot of thought her research still seems valid. It is not fair for Hallie or herself to live in such an unhealthy environment.

Her heart pounding on the way down to the first floor, Laura has convinced herself she needs to keep going. Like earlier that week, her presence in the room lowers Hallie’s wails to quiet sobs. Crossing the nursery, Laura is determined to stop the crying and get some sleep. This time when she looks into the crib, she stares directly into her daughters eyes. Then, before she can change her mind she takes a leap of faith. Reaching out, she lifts her daughter up in the same manner the videos in the library showed as ‘cuddling’. Right as their skin makes contact, Hallie’s crying stops and Laura’s headache disappears. The feeling of Hallie’s warm, soft, tiny body in her arms is unlike anything Laura has ever felt and she never wants to let go. At that very moment, Laura fell in love with her daughter.