

The Cell

The soothing melody of my alarm gently echoed across my room. I opened my eyes with a smile on my lips. Today was the day! I excitedly dressed in my new uniform, made from light, temp-polymers that keep my body temperature regulated throughout the day. It makes working my fourteen hour shift much more comfortable. Glancing over at my holo-messages, I was delighted to see my Promotion Notice still projected on the screen. *March 13, 2054: Elantra Voiture has been promoted to the Interior. Please report for duty promptly at 6am.* I hopped into my transport pod and it whisked me away to Bio-Tech Incorporated. I twiddled my thumbs nervously; today was my first day working in the Interior, the testing center for human enhancement prototypes.

For the past two years, I had worked in human resources helping people adjust to their new Enhancements. Almost everyone in the United States has an Enhancement these days; the lucky people have two! I had only ever seen patients recovering from an Enhancement surgery, but in my new job, I'll be a part of the creation process. I had always been in awe of the ease with which people adjusted to their Enhancements, whether it be a limb replacement or a complex cardio upgrade. I remember hearing rumors that decades ago, when scientists created the first Enhancements, people's bodies often rejected the invading bionics. But these archaic methods are long gone, replaced with what Bio-Tech calls the Cell. A small sample of stem cells is taken from one's bone marrow and used to create an Enhancement that the body immediately accepts. Everyone knows that the specifics of the process are classified under the Bionics Health Act of 2032, but I've always dreamed of learning how it all works. That's why I was so thrilled with my promotion; Enhancements are engineered and tested within the Interior.

I was jolted from my thoughts as the transport pod shuddered to a halt. I practically leapt onto the pavement, hardly containing my excitement. I took a deep breath and quickly downed a Calm, a cognitive-enhancing pill that lowers stress. As I entered the lobby, I diverged from my usual path and headed towards the Interior. I walked through the usual scanners and security measures and was greeted by a friendly hologram.

“Hello,” it said cheerfully, “state your name and Enhancement.”

“Elantra Voiture, Cochlear Receiver,” I responded brightly. I received my Enhancement when I was eighteen; it was a cochlear receiver that improves my hearing and allows me to understand different languages. While it was useful for my work in human resources, I had trouble imagining how it could be applied to my new job.

After a few moments, an imposing woman briskly entered the room. As she approached, I could see the tip of a Neuro-Prosthesis poking out from under her blonde hair. I stared jealously; she had the new M-Enhancement, directly connected to the hippocampus to improve one’s recollection skills. Only the most affluent could afford such a device. She reached out to shake my hand.

“My name is Corolla Quinn, and I’ll be your supervisor within the Interior,” she announced in a severe tone, as if she already suspected that I would be a disappointment. People with the newest Enhancements always acted haughtily to those who had earlier models. She started walking away, and I had to jog to catch up. “You will be working in Data Interpretation. After the Tests are done, the scientist’s findings will be sent to you for organization and analysis.” I stopped walking for a moment, my stomach twisting into knots.

“Will I be involved with the Tests themselves?” I asked hopefully.

Corolla snorted, “No, only with the collected data.” I sighed, it seemed like my hopes of finding insight about the Cell would remain only a dream. Corolla led me to a large room containing many seemingly dazed people milling around. “You will begin with a tour of the facilities,” Corolla said and left without another word. I was left alone in the crowd; I couldn’t see a single person without an Enhancement. It has become an unspoken rule that those without Enhancements are “undesirables” of sorts, a person you’d never want to be associated with. In only a few minutes a tour guide began to lead the group away, almost like a shepherd would lead a flock. I, of course, ended up being stuck in the back. The tour guide droned on and on, so I became disinterested and retreated into my own thoughts. My focus was brought back to the tour as we entered a tight hallway, with barely enough room for two people to walk side by side. Suddenly, an impatient newcomer walking behind me pushed me aside, struggling to reach the front. I

lost balance and crashed through a door so inconspicuous, it would have escaped my notice if I hadn't been shoved through it.

“The nerve of some people!” I said as I struggled to my feet, certain that I would have bruises later on. “I should make a complaint to...” I trailed off, in disbelief of what lay before me. I had stumbled into a huge lab where rows upon rows of tubes stretched out before me. I was barely aware of the holo-sign that declared this room a *Restricted Area*. I moved closer to one of the tubes, mesmerized by curiosity. The tube must have been seven feet tall; it towered over my head. It was filled with a foggy liquid, but as I moved closer, a shape in the tube became visible.

I paused, midway through a step, as I realized in horror what I saw. Suspended in the liquid was a child who couldn't have been more than twelve years old; he was perfectly still and porcelain-like. His entire lower body was an Enhancement, more extensive than any I had ever encountered. I couldn't look away as I took a step closer and noticed another holo-sign reading “*Cell Subject 2058: Benjamin Volve.*” I gasped as the disjointed information I had heard all my life fell into place and I finally had the answer I was looking for. The Bio-Tech scientists must have discovered a way to create clones from the stem cells, entire functioning body systems and muscles. The public had been told that we were still years away from developing this technology, but the undeniable truth floated before me.

“Maybe they created the body without a functioning brain?” I hypothesized, trying to justify what I saw. Testing on a living organism is extremely unethical, but a system without brain function would be slightly more acceptable. But why was this kept from the public? As I stared down another row of tubes, my question answered itself. Horrified, I stared at the innumerable clones, their bodies contorted in pain. I could tell, from their facial expressions alone, that they were very much alive. Rather than creating new methods to ensure the host accepted the Enhancement, scientists were still using the original system of trial and error, but on the “expendable” clones. My mind swirled from the information overload. I couldn't believe the magnitude of the situation's ethical implications. How could a sane person condone this research? Even if created artificially,

life is life! This research is the equivalent of experiments on humans, a taboo practice.

I gained a bit of clarity as I accepted the situation. I knew I had to tell the world about Bio-Tech's atrocities. I whirled around to escape, but found my path blocked by two massive security robots. In my confusion, I hadn't heard them approach. I opened my mouth to explain when I felt a dull stinging in my neck. And my world fell away...

I awoke with a jolt, feeling panic rise in my throat. I blinked several times, but my eyes were drowsy and fogged. My head felt heavy, but my body felt light as a feather. I forced my eyes open and uncomprehendingly looked at my surroundings. I saw the same room as before, but through a strange filter that blurred its features. The situation dawned on me and I gasped, choking on liquid. I banged on the glass and silently screamed. This drew the attention of a few researchers rushing through the lab, but I couldn't make out their faces through the glass. However, I still had my Cochlear Receiver, so I almost could make out what was being said.

"... function as a test subject?"

"..... never be allowed to share what she's seen..."

"... new prototype..."

I began to fight harder when I realized what they intended for me. I kicked and screamed, but the glass was too thick. I felt something flow into my arm through an IV I hadn't noticed before. I reached to pull it out, but all too quickly, my vision faded away.