Disconnect

Norman, 26, felt disconnected. He worked in an office where he did not often speak with colleagues, even then it was company-speak, unreal in itself. Much of his work was online, he communicated through emails and texts. Zoom calls where he saw faces felt too personal. He lived in a studio apartment in a nice high rise, the best he could afford. He cooked for himself, exercised on the stationary bike in his living room while listening to podcasts, slept on a heated mattress.

He had a cat. It ignored him.

He was in therapy for years, never helping, and now on Zoom. In playbacks, he saw his therapist yawn occasionally. His parents lived in another city, he saw them once a year. His brother also lived in another city, and his sister lived close by but rarely spoke with him, too much history. Norman felt lonely. The cat was little help. He needed to feel a connection to a distant world.

His therapist suggested implants—tiny devices implanted into his brain. Many people used them, Norman had heard of it, it was covered by his medical insurance, many doctors performed the operation–he booked time with the company doctor. The implant took all of five minutes and was painless. He returned to his office. When his supervisor walked in, Norman felt a blush of warmth. When a secretary came by, his attention on her was focussed. When a colleague asked for help solving a problem, pleasure. Norman felt more connected to everyone around him.

After an enjoyable week, where he had lunches with colleagues and even a dinner, Norman returned to the company doctor and asked about the chip in his head. The doctor confirmed what Norman suspected–the chip included a company programme designed especially for workers in Norman's position, who mostly connected through the web. It could not be removed as Norman's brain had already absorbed it.

At the end of a month, Norman received a plaque–This Month's Company Employee.

Norman enjoyed his new life—but it was a struggle. At work, all was good. After work, desolation. He ate frozen dinners, gained weight and his cat left him, leaping off the balcony. It fell to the balcony below, where a woman lived who always

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wanted a cat.

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