

Bitter-Sweet

“Do you value his life more than his eternal peace?”

As Mya gazed at her lifeless boy, tears welled in her eyes. After his fatal car crash, Liam no longer looked like himself as jagged glass escaped his bloody gashes.

“My baby boy,” Mya whispered, thinking over the procedure Dr. Myers, the neurologist, had described, “thank you for always being there for me.” She knew she had to do the same for him.

She motioned for Dr. Myers. “We’ll go through with the procedure.”

The doctor raised his eyebrows. “Do you understand the risks, Ms. Sanchez? Even after over a century of neuroscience research, the procedure may be unsuccessful. We can get very close, but to fully replicate him,” he said, peering at his patient, “might be impossible.”

Mya rubbed her chin, as her mind drifted...

Mya’s sniffles evaded her composure.

Liam held her hand and asked, “Mom, what’s wrong?”

Mya’s friends had just belittled her in front of her colleagues. Mya couldn’t forgive them but tried to hide her anguish. “Nothing, honey.”

Liam wrinkled his forehead, noticing Mya’s sadness. “Just try telling them how you feel.”

Soon, Mya’s distress eased with Liam’s support. Over many similar occasions, Liam had become Mya’s anchor, and without him, she wasn’t sure how she’d move on.

Mya grounded herself in the present, with her voice shaking. “We’ll go through with the simulation despite the risks.”

Dr. Myers nodded and fiddled with his electron microscope. “Let’s begin.”

With the click of a button, a hologram of an empty body appeared. He rotated it, focusing on the brain. He explained, “The data that fills this hologram will be used to simulate Liam’s mind.”

Mya stroked her hair in intrigue. “How exactly does the simulation work?”

The doctor peered at his digital manual. “To perform Whole Brain Emulation, we’ll undergo three phases: gathering data, interpreting the data, and emulating the patient. Using an environment simulation, Liam will be able to live normally, with templates of friends and family,” the doctor said, adding, “Now that you know more about the procedure, are you sure you want to go through with it?”

Mya confidently nodded her head.

As she exited the room, Mya’s hunched posture turned straight, hopeful that Liam would be with her again. The doctor and his crew of nanobots began creating precise incisions in Liam’s head, trying to extract his brain.

Although research on the brain had come so far, it remained largely unexplored and misunderstood. Her stomach ached; despite her deliberation, she wasn’t sure if she’d made the right decision. Should Liam’s rest be disrupted by giving him life? Would the simulation even be Liam? Her thoughts spiraled as her palms sweat.

Mya put her head in her hands, as confusion took over. She gave in to her exhaustion.



Mya was awakened by Dr. Myers's calm voice. "We're ready for you."

Upon seeing an empty operating table when entering the surgery room, Mya's face had turned red. Where was Liam?

The neurosurgeon noticed Mya's disarray. "Liam's body is safe." He gestured towards another room, with a bright yellow warning sign. "His body remains there, cryopreserved if more scans are needed."

Mya sighed, pondering her recent instability. But she hoped that with Liam back, her balance would return, as her consternation dissipated.

The doctor clicked his wristwatch to display the hologram. Only now, colors and symbols covered the entirety, indicating key biomarkers. Dr. Myers proudly gazed at his work. "This is Liam's digital twin. After we use this data to simulate his actions, you two will have a lifetime to spend together."

Mya smiled, but an uneasiness came over her. Was it too good to be true or just a miracle of science? Just a few days after his tragedy, could she already have Liam back?

The doctor's crew of robots displayed images of labeled brains to describe the third phase of the procedure. They explained how they'd employ dendritic computing and would account for other biological factors, such as Liam's hormonal and epigenetic state when creating the simulation.

"How convincing will this simulation be?" Mya interjected, tilting her head, "Will it truly be," she said, as memories rushed in, "Liam?"

The doctor intervened. "It's a matter of interpretation, Ms. Sanchez, but it'll be as close to him as we can get."

Mya peered out a window, trying to make sense of her overwhelming situation. Even the once impassioned birds lacked any sentiment: their melodious singing had turned shallow since mass biomimicking. Would Liam end up the same: just a biomimicry version of his true self, but never truly feeling and thinking the same way? Could his entire personality be boiled down to a series of 0's and 1's?

Tears trickled down Mya's cheeks as she didn't know how to feel. Like a dew-drop in a rose, her previous clarity had vanished. With Liam, happiness had engulfed her life, but now, anger and confusion distorted her vision.

"We'll do our best," a robot said.

Mya wore a smile, masking her genuine expression. The robots began examining Liam's data as they swiped through scans. But even a moment alone with her thoughts was a moment to fear. She remembered the day all too well...

Mya heard the buzz of a holographic notification and tapped her glasses to hear it.

An automated message began. "Ms. Sanchez, the NYPD is sorry to inform you that your child, Liam, has died in a self-driving car accident."

And that was the moment everything fell apart. Mya hoped that the message was a lie, but just like everything around her, Mya's hopes were fake. She contemplated as to who'd experienced more pain: Liam or herself. Unlike Liam, she had to carry the weight of a mountain without the support of the ground. Like a kid blowing on a dandelion, just a gust of wind could wipe everything away. But with Liam by her side, she'd build mountains, using Liam as support.



"He's ready," the doctor announced, proudly putting his arms on his hips.

Mya beamed in excitement. After all the scanning, interpreting, and computing, Liam was finally here.

"Hello, Liam," a female voice within the simulation said.

"Hi, Mom," Liam responded.

Mya thought she'd be ready for this, but she'd been so wrong.

The doctor continued. "As you know, Liam is unable to interact with you. Instead of being here with us, he'll be confined to the cells of this hologram."

Mya's body tensed. If Liam was confined, what was she? She was confined to the cells of reality, where she'd play observer to the life of her only child. She felt sick to her stomach as she only now realized that her anchor had been lost at sea. Rather than reeling it in, she had let it sink.

"We've made his environment as realistic as possible to ensure his mental wellness. He'll be fine; how you'll feel is up to you," the doctor concluded.

But Mya wasn't certain. Was it her fault that she couldn't accept a feat of science, proving that death was no longer permanent? Why couldn't that be enough?

"Thank you," she whispered as she battled tears.

She spent several hours watching Liam go about his day as he read, played, and... lived. The simulation had realistically reproduced all his habits. However, she'd realized that, all along, she hadn't gone through the procedure for Liam, but herself. Liam hadn't begged for life, but Mya had begged for his.

She couldn't shake the feeling that she'd done a disservice to Liam. He'd be met with extreme adversity in a new world. Without Mya to guide him, would he still thrive? Was his new life a blessing or a curse?



Liam had grown into his new world. He taught, donated, and raised awareness surrounding the issues he cared about. But, Mya was dissatisfied. In every way, Liam was the child of dreams, and yet, she couldn't feel pleased.

She wondered if her perception of Liam was due to an innate dissatisfaction. Would she ever be satisfied until Liam was by her side? But that day would never come. By remaining with Liam, she'd lost so much of her humanity and purpose. Being a mother gave her identity, but was that still the case?

Mya had unconsciously curled her hands into a fist. She no longer knew how to deal with her emotions. Despite Liam being there, he wasn't with Mya, which magnified her misery. As she longed to be with him, she'd lost all value in her life.

Sitting next to Liam's hologram, Mya slowly shook her head. With her lips quivering, she realized that with Liam still here, in this form, she'd never be able to move on... never be able to live her life. When there was the whole world to explore, she would be stuck on the one she'd never be able to penetrate. She could no longer wait for her anchor to wash ashore; she needed to say a bitter-sweet "goodbye."