

## Lost and found

It's 2054. New Zealand is tormented by acts of God. Earthquakes, pandemics, and hurricanes rage across the country without a break. Civilians have given up hope and feel lost. They live in poverty and without a future. All the money is spent on reconstruction even though it is torn down immediately. The population is living in deep depression. Suicide rates are colossal. One of the 3 citizens ends his/her own life. Amidst the chaos, the desperate government decides to intervene. They introduce the boldog tableta, popularly called the bulldog. It's a Hungarian substance that is supposed to eliminate negative emotions. The substance is injected into the nerve system. They tested it first on the most miserable. The results in 2 months were amazing. The participants were happy and grateful for the change. They felt energetic and created a good atmosphere. The government decided to continue the procedure.

Every human being got one injection, from baby to elderly. The injection will suppress negative emotions for a lifetime. The government obliged the citizens to take one as it was the solution against all the pain and suffering. People did not have control over natural disasters but they could control their reactions. There were no riots or opposition as people did not care anymore what happened to them. They just wanted some peace from all the pain and hopelessness.

It's 2059, 5 years after the government's intervention. Chris wakes up from the soft sunlight shining through his broken window. He slowly opens his eyes as he feels a breeze caress his arms. He thinks back to last night while he smiles. He went to the volcanic eruption with a group of friends. They roasted marshmallows above the lava. The air was thick and fumes rose from the ground. Chris snorted the scent of sulfur and burned grass. As time went on, more people joined their group as they walked out of their houses which were consumed by the hot liquid flooding towards the city. They partied till dawn.

Chris yawns, his body feels a bit stiff, probably because he only slept 3 hours. Despite his stiffness, Chris feels energetic and jumps out of bed. He paces towards the window and looks outside. The sun rises among the decayed houses of his neighborhood. Chris lives in the largest shack of Churchill. All of his windows are broken, his door has been stolen weeks ago and his garden is overgrown by weed. The stolen door is sometimes a bit inconvenient as there are a lot of people entering his house, but Chris likes social contact so he doesn't mind. His gaze shifts from the horizon down to his front garden and focuses on some blue flowers peeking through the dirt. His home is fine and Chris does not feel the need to maintain it. He walks towards the shower, which is a leaking broken pipe. He has not showered in weeks but today he would like to feel the water flow across his body. He takes a quick look into the shattered mirror on the floor. He watches his naked body as he slides his hand along his sunburned arm. He sees his many scars engraved into his skin. A smile appears while the memories levitate through his mind. All of these scars tell fun stories. The one on his shoulder is from that time he tried to stop his friend's car with his bodyweight. His shoulder was shattered but it was an amusing experiment. Totally worth being hospitalized for a week. The scar on his forearm is a small purple-colored hole with dashes of red. He gained that one from a family trip. His sister thought it would be funny to nail him down on the table so she could eat his cake. She was right, it was hilarious. He hovers above his wrist, that's the one from 4 years ago. His gaze shifts from his wrist towards his chest and moves up until he looks himself in the eye. He starts laughing but through the joy, he feels a weird sensation which he can't explain. He tries to focus on this sting but it disappears as fast as it appeared. He shrugs and steps under waterdrops of the leaking pipe.

Chris walks down still dripping from his morning shower. He looks through the doorposts outside and sees a girl playing. As he focuses on the scene that takes place before his eyes, he tries to examine the object the girl is playing with. It is a big, grey, and metallic object. The girl turns around and Chris

sees that it is a gun. He laughs at the creativity that children nowadays possess when choosing their toys. He only owned some marbles and strip books, which was fine and all but having a gun would have really given a kick to his playtime. The girl sees Chris staring and while she smiles she points the gun at Chris. As a joke, he puts his hands in the air and screams: 'I come in peace!' The girl screams something back but Chris can't hear what she says as a big bang buzzes through his ears. He feels a warm fluid drip along his forearm. The girl before him looks proud. His head turns upwards until he sees his bloody hand which is now an owner of a red gap. She shot me, she really just shot me! Chris thinks to himself astonished. In the back of his mind, a weird sensation rises. He almost wants to scream at the girl as he feels his blood rise. Instead, he just laughs it away. 'That was bull's eye!' He says while raising his thumb. The girl hops away and Chris starts walking towards the kitchen. He grabs a stinky, six-month-old dishcloth covered in stains. He dabs the tingling flesh wound and holds his hand up to the light. Sunrays peek through the new hole in the middle of his hand. That is going to be a beautiful new scar. He thinks to himself while stuffing the hole with toilet paper. Chris shrugs and starts to prepare some expired bread for his breakfast.

Halfway through Chris's sandwich, he feels his body protesting. He stares at the bread covered in green spots. He suddenly detects a rotten waft of air entering his nostrils. He brings his nose closer to the bread while taking a deep breath. His bodily rejection disappears and he calmly continues his breakfast while looking at the wall across from him. It is covered in brown and red stains. It contains thin scratches and deep holes. He found this abandoned house 4 years ago. He heard that his former residents were murdered. It was a family of 4. The father lost his interest in his family and just ended their life as he did not care for them. He killed himself afterward. Rumors tell that by-passers heard laughter composed with screams. They saw someone running. No one reacted, why would they, they were indifferent. Chris also wouldn't have done anything if he was in their situation. There it was again, that weird sting he also felt while he stared in the mirror this morning. He focuses on the wall, he sees the splashes and scratches. He imagines the situation from the son's perspective. The sting grows. Chris's body tightens. His scalp tingles. Startled he looks down while a rat runs through his legs. It disappears in the hole of the baseboard of the splattered wall. Chris shudders and immediately gets confused by his reaction. Why does he feel so weird today? Why does everything matter? Maybe I just have to take a walk, he thinks to himself.

Chris steps outside and immediately feels the sun warming his skin. He pauses for a moment and takes it all in. The blend of the cold spring breeze together with the warm sun's rays provides a pleasant temperature. He hears some bird chirps above him and as he pricks his ears he can even hear the water stream from his backyard. He enjoys the nature around him and sees some beautiful blue flowers peeking through the weed of his garden. He walks towards them to view them up close. The delicate leaves are full of life. The blue color changes into purple, pink, and red the closer Chris gets. He shuffles a bit closer to take a better look but immediately jumps, 'auw!' Chris looks down at the place he was standing and sees a spike pointing upwards. That hurts, why is there a spike in the middle of his garden path. He looks around in irritation. The mess in his yard suddenly annoys him. He follows his path with his eyes from the front door to his feet. Wait, he is not wearing any shoes, no wonder that the spike hurts so much. It suddenly dawns on Chris that he is also not wearing any clothes. He blushes as he feels prude and shy seeing his genitals hanging loose. Normally he wouldn't care, but today is different. He is ashamed of his nakedness. He rushes inside to put on some garment.

In his quest for clothing, Chris grabs an old box from the closet in the hallway. He unpacks its contents to find a dark blue jacket at the bottom. He quickly puts it on and feels the rugged fabric scrape his skin. It feels familiar, almost safe. He looks at the other contents of the box. A children's drawing of a family, an old football, some paperclips. It is quite nostalgic to peek through all this stuff. Warmth fills up Chris's soul. His body is tensed while he slowly moves his hand towards a yellowed paper. He grabs it to see it up close. The paper is thick and smooth despite its many

smudges. The size of the picture is small, as big as Chris's palm. The edges are rough, corners are curled. He flips it a few times. At the back he sees a name, the ink is runny and faded. He squeezes his eyes causing him to decompose the letters, C. Williams. He turns the paper and focuses on the photo. The picture portrays a family. The parents are seated on a blue couch. The son sits on the lap of the father. His face is filled with joy and excitement. His father looks proud into the camera, one hand lays on his son's shoulder, his other hand caresses his wife's leg. The mother looks loving towards her daughter, which is seated between her parents on the couch. The picture is wholesome.

Chris's lips tremble, his skin radiates. He is over-flooded by the sensation. He tries to fight it while he falls on the ground. A tear rolls off his cheek while his body cells start to vibrate. His stomach constricts as he holds back the emerging life and color. It feels like fog is clearing away while his body is taken over by this vivid wave of emotion. A mixture of love and grief provides a painful experience. His eyes search for the picture. They linger at the father. Suddenly he remembers. His pupils widen while he stares at the family. 'This, this is my family', he stutters. The memories appear, they were hidden in a dark kink of his brain. The past plays before his eyes in different scenes. Bodies lying against the wall; a bloody knife; a smiling father with red splashes strewn across his face. Chris screams in pain and beats the ground with clenched fists. 'Why?' he cries. He curls up on the ground into a fetus pose. There he lays... time passes by without Chris noticing. Trying to control himself, shocks of anger, grief, fear, and shame attend his mind. He touches his wrist and remembers the blade scraping his skin. He remembers the red river flowing from his veins. He did not feel anything back then, he was even surprised that he ran away. But now he feels, he feels everything he should have felt back then. He feels the grief of the loss of his family. He feels anger towards his father. He feels the fear of a dying young man. He feels the shame of him not intervening. He feels darkness pouring in. He feels so much, he's going crazy.

After hours of laying on the floor, Chris revives as a warm spring breeze strikes his face. His body is cold, his face is puffy. He opens his eyes, they are swollen from all the crying. He has not cried in years. He orders his body to move as he thinks about his next steps. In just a morning he started from feeling nothing to experiencing intense waves of truth. What has happened? He has always been described as a highly sensitive boy but the bulldog had eliminated it all. I should probably go to the city hall, he thinks to himself. I don't think this is normal. Something went wrong, maybe the bulldog just wears off in a few years. They never tested the substance for multiple years, so scientists couldn't have known that this could happen. Chris reassures himself with this thought and starts putting on some clothes as he moves towards the stairs. He carefully walks the steps. He hears them squeak, it sounds ominous in Chris's ears as his eyes fall on the stained wall. The squeaks change into screams from that night. He turns away in disgust and shivers while he quickly paces towards the door. Passing the blue flowers, Chris walks towards the end of his property and turns left.

He sees his neighbor in the corner of his eye. Chris's arm moves upwards to wave but hesitates midway. He sees him with a woman but not his wife with whom he has been married for 26 years. It is a young, blonde chick dressed in provocative clothes. Chris glances towards the hand of his neighbor, which is laying on the butt of the girl. Their heads move towards each other with pouting lips. Chris is confused, what is happening? Why is he kissing this young girl? She looks underaged, he could be her father. Where is his wife? Chris feels pity for her because he knows how painful it is when someone cheats on you. He experienced it years ago, he could still evoke the emotion that rushed through his body back then. He remembers his heart dropping while he heard the news from his friend. Chris's eyes become watery. He returns to the present while the haze disappears. His eyes widen as he tries to focus on the front side of the house. Is he seeing this clear? The wife is standing in the doorway, she smiles while she watches her husband kiss another woman. She almost looks content. Chris's jaw drops. Why isn't she mad? Why isn't she doing anything? He quickly walks by weirded out by the situation that just happened before his eyes. Guided by his emotion he walks further, determined to go to the city hall.

Chris turns right. He has to be careful where he walks as the whole road is covered in trash. He looks at the dilapidated houses of the street. His eyes catch the look of an older woman looking out of the window. She is smiling with a weird smile and glances down. Chris follows her eyes down. At first, he sees an old, blue car. The windows are shattered and most of the roof is rusted. Chris is a bit confused, why is she smiling so weird? At the moment he wants to avert his gaze, he suddenly sees where the woman is looking at. A hand is laying behind the car. He quickly walks towards the vehicle worried of what he will find on the other side. He looks behind the car and sees an older man lying in a weird position on the ground. One foot lays next to his hip, he smells like alcohol mixed with sourness. Chris carefully nudges him in the side. The man groans. Relieved that he is not dead, Chris squats down next to him. 'Are you okay?' Chris asks. The man groans again and moves his head a bit. Chris gets nauseous from the smell. He is not sure what to do, he can't let an older man lay down on the pavement like this. 'Shall I bring you home?' The man mumbles. Chris brings his ear closer to his mouth so that he can hear what the man is saying. While Chris is getting closer, the mumbling changes into a laugh. First soft but the volume increases. Startled, Chris recoils. The laugh keeps getting louder and now sounds hysterical. The resulting repulsion from the noise makes Chris's body wants to flee. He starts running away from the situation while the laugh reverberates in his ears. He slows down until he is a block away and silence has returned. Chris walks further, his pace quicker than when he started his journey.

Crossing the street, he approaches a park. It is covered in trash, the smell is unbearable. The park is even a bigger mess than his front yard. Chris chuckles, he did not think that to be possible. Amidst the chaos, he sees 2 young boys playing. They are approximately 10 years old. 'Look what I found!' screams the boy in the blue shirt enthusiastic, 'it is a dog.' He is holding up a stuffed carcass. Pieces of its flesh are hanging loose, bones are peeking through. White maggots fall of the rotten flesh. The other boy yells in excitement: 'We finally found some meat, that's amazing!' The boy holding the skeleton looks proud. 'Yes, I know! I am really excited to eat it!' He rips a piece and gives it to his friend. Chris stares in horror at the so-called brown steak covered in green spots. It slowly moves towards the mouth of the boy. Chris bends over gagging. He cannot hold back his stomach contents. His breakfast lays before him in a pile on the sidewalk. He briefly looks back at the boy who is now licking his lips while still holding the bone in his hand. Chris, quickly, starts walking away from the scene while tripping over his own feet. He is almost running, scared and perplexed about the world around him.

He is now approaching a crossroad. It's filled with battered cars. The cars pounded onto each other as one big traffic accident from multiple days in a row. Chris remembers what happened. The crossroad has been useless for years now. At the beginning of the bulldog era, drivers were bumping into each other on the road. This one crossroad was very dangerous as drivers came from everywhere without watching where they were going. They did not care about their safety and carelessly drove towards their destination. Chris cautiously crosses the road. On the other side, a man is leaning forward seated on the trottoir. The legs of the man are missing. Two uneven stubs are bound in dirty cloths. Chris feels empathy for the man. His eyes move towards the man's face. He gets scared of his gaze. The man's eyes are empty but his lips are curled into a smile. As he wants to say something, Chris's lips start moving but he immediately gets distracted. He looks up while he hears laughter in the distance. A group of women approaches the crossroad. Their high-pitched screams fill the air. Chris's eyes catch a gleam, his body takes over while his mind is stuffed with fear. He is commanded to hide behind a brick wall at the corner of the crossroad. His thoughts struggle to persuade him to help the man but he has already reached the wall. The laughter gets louder, Chris hides and peeks over the edge as he sees the group, now only 5 meter away from the man without legs. He tries to examine the shimmer he saw earlier and looks down at the hands of the women in a terrible fright. They are all carrying knives, some of them are spattered in blood.

'Look at what we have here!', screams a woman with dark brown hair hysterically. 'You're in our way crippling', screams the shortest woman while pushing the man's back. The man falls onto his stomach due to the unexpected push. 'What's the matter?' he asks half smiling, half surprised. Chris catches his eyes. For a moment he thinks he saw some fear but it quickly disappeared behind a curtain of emptiness. It is like the true self is taken captive by the bulldog. The emotions can sometimes reach the surface but quickly get pulled back by the substance's strings. But why am I no longer under the influence of the bulldog? Chris thinks to himself. He is quickly pulled out from his pondering due to some movement in the group. One woman had crouched down next to the man. She has a large scar running from her right eyebrow all the way up to her hairline. 'You know... that is none of your business!' She says in a sinister calmness. 'However, you are going to help us, so I will tell you. It will be our little secret.' She bends over and whispers loudly in the man's ear. 'We like excitement and adrenaline, without it everything seems too neutral.' The man looks surprised. 'I don't think I understand what you mean.' The woman sighs. 'Are you stupid or what!' She looks around to her fellow peers. 'Should I give him our special explanation?' The women chuckle and nod. The woman with the scar gets a sneaky look on her face. 'Well, our life is like a flat rope'. She draws a line with the tip of her knife on the arm of the man. Chris sees his skin impress. Behind the tip, a red scratch arises. 'Everything feels just normal, which can be a bit boring sometimes. We need bumps in our emotions.' She presses harder on the blade and traces a wavy pattern backward. Blood runs out of the resulting wound. Chris looks in the eyes of the man in pity while feeling scared. 'But here is our problem', the woman continues, 'There is not a lot left that excites us. But you know what does give us a kick.' She had barely spoken her last word when her knife pierces the man between his shoulder blades. 'Hurting others!' The woman looks down with crazy eyes and hands dripping red, sticky fluid. The man moans but retains his smile. The other women dive onto the man with raised knives, as bulldogs awakened from their slumber. Chris squints his eyes while squatting down. Tears roll down his cheeks. What has become of humanity since the injection was introduced? Chris hears the women's laughter while they are stabbing the man. He hears the blades cutting through muscles and touching bones.

Chris starts running as fast as he can. He is desperate for a solution as he cannot handle his brief awakening. He feels too much, definitely in a world where no one truly understands the depths of emotion. He thought he could still feel when he was under the influence of the bulldog, now he knows his fake positivity was just the surface of a deep ocean. An ocean that has so much to offer. For the past 5 years, he only felt boredom and purposelessness dressed in superficiality and so-called fun. A blend of positive and negative emotions makes a human understand the contrast. Eliminating negative emotions is not a solution. Sure, it could work in a short period to get someone out of depression. But in the long run, the loss of negative emotions leads to a loss of morality as no one can evaluate behavior anymore. People can no longer understand their mistakes or see the use of a higher purpose. Should I fight for morality? Chris rushes down the road when he suddenly something catches his eye. He stops to get a better look at it. He sees a small baby boy laying on the road. 'Why are you here all alone.' He whispers. Should I fight for a New Zealand with humanity, he thinks to himself, for a future in which people can reflect on their actions? Chris takes a few steps towards the baby but realizes a bit too late that he is dead. The little corpse's eyes are wide open, his skin is translucent. His mouth stuck in a smile. That smile has haunted Chris all day long. Chris turns around terrified and starts running again. He passes all kinds of sins forbidden by God. Nobody is aware of morality. Is caring valuable in a world where no one actually cares? It is valuable if a higher power is watching over the world. He would be in horror by what has become of his beings. Chris's condition isn't the best, he leans with his hands on his knees to catch some breath. But what if there is no higher power? His battling would be as aimless as how people currently live. When Chris has regained his breath he starts rushing towards the city hall.

Bulldog eliminates humanity, but it gives so much peace. Not caring is soothing for the mind. Not thinking about everything that is wrong with the world is easier than fighting. I can't fight on my own,

I can't handle all of these emotions. I can't stand this much pain. I can't carry this world filled with horrors while feeling everything. Why would morality be important in a world already lost? Is it still important to ask ethical questions when people are already content? Even if it is a fake content, they are at least at peace with themselves. Chris feels so alone and weak. I want that peace of the bulldog! He stops running while he stands in front of the open door of the city hall. Am I really going to give up? It is not fair that I even need to think about this. Why did the bulldog release me? I was safe in my prison. I could do whatever I want without questioning myself. And yes, sure it was a dull life but it was secure. I need that safety back! I will see what I can do after I am filled with that amazing tranquility. He walks in with determined steps, content with the imagined peace of the bulldog intruding his soul.

### **Some explanation**

This story is about a remedy that eliminates negative emotions. The story follows the life of Chris and especially touches upon the subject of morality. What happens to society in which negative emotions are eliminated is discussed. It was an experiment to understand what could happen when a person goes from feeling no negative emotions to suddenly feeling everything. I decided not to discuss the reason why Chris's bulldog wears off as I like to keep it a mystery throughout the story. I did suggest the reason when I wrote that Chris is a very sensitive young man. Being highly sensitive makes someone feel a lot more than the average human being. This could be the reason why his emotions break through the injection and the function of the bulldog disappears.

The message of this story is actually against what I think. It seems like people are bad at their core as the society I described went nuts. I don't believe this. I think humans have good intentions as I am actually quite inspired by the book: 'De meeste mensen deugen' written by Rutger Bregman. So this experiment did not have the result I agree with, but I am content with the story on itself.