

Streetwalker

Flashing neon lights.

Plastic human flesh.

Voices of metallic origin.

I remember the time before.

I remember the flowers, the trees, the grass, the bird, all in full display.

I remember faces, souls, minds, all unique and diverse.

I remember the feeling of skin against skin, breath upon breath, heart given to heart.

It all seems like some sort of ancient fever dream, driven by the bad choices of others.

But this is reality.

I have to live it.

Every.

Day.

I snapped back.

The neon glow started to take shape – not just as the city around me, but as the people, their belongings, everything.

Deep breath. Focus. Head down.

I continued to walk, passing the artwork canvassing the loss of life to what used to be known as an “ecosystem.”

Those don’t exist anymore.

It was all humanity and their luxury.

We sacrificed it all for greed.

I shook my head. Not now. Get in, get out. Existential crisis later.

I continued to pass by artificial clothing and glowing legs, warily aware of the eyes around me. This thing had taken over the world, and it was infecting everyone, everything.

I got to the meeting point and sat. As is typical, I swiped on seemingly floating words until I reached the blandest and simplest thing they offered.

It came instantly. I blew, then sipped slowly. The urge to puke came almost instantly – I hid it, slowly emptying it back into my spoon. I washed the taste out of my mouth with my flask, which is pure, risking what little clean thing I had to make sure I didn't get contaminated.

It had all started in a lab long ago – back when it was first discovered, it was called the future. I forgot the name, and I don't care to remember. All I know is that it'll change you, in more ways than one.

It was praised, sold, upgraded, and eventually used as a cornerstone of society. People saw how it grew on their bodies and minds, but they didn't care, seemingly realizing this new way of thinking was “inevitable” and invited it in without hesitation.

Society had some resistance in the beginning, but the more others relied on it, more and more people fell into its brainwashing. It clings to you, and all you do, until all you can think is it, how to use it, how to cultivate it for your selfish needs.

It steals your thoughts and the thoughts of others, creating some sort of twisted hive mind where we are all the same, everyone can create the same things with the same “talent,” everyone can be like the next person, everyone can be perfect.

Humanity was so obsessed with this ideal of being the best in all ways, so much so that we lost ourselves, other people, and the living things around us to get there.

A soft tap. I looked up.

It was the Keeper. Their name was never known, and they didn't know mine. The mass covering half their face was the mark of the future, and it was a decision they had lived to regret.

I didn't need to know details. All I know is that they were the last sentient friend and guardian.

They gestured to the ally, standing. Waiting for a bit, I followed after.

No words were spoken. This only happens once a month, and they wish to not spoil the moment. I gave them my usual token, freshly cultivated myself, as thanks.

Stepping in, I was blinded, not by flashing color, but a soft white, caking the entirety of the entryway with the comfort of something as close to home as I'm going to get.

The door locked behind me.

I walked softly, taking in the slightly musty air, as the death of other living beings laid around the place - the soil of the Earth spilling from pots, once homes, and now coffins.

I opened the second door, exposing myself to a yellow light, not nearly as blinding or artificial. My chest started to tighten with the scene laid in front of me, free from contamination and static of society today.

Three beings lie beautiful and dormant.

Only one I had grown myself.

Green besides pale skin.

They had made me promise to never get contaminated – to always stay pure.

They knew of this future, yet they continued to live in the past.

They sacrificed themselves for a better life, out the goodwill in their hearts for others.

My breath shook with emotion.

“I’m back.”

Empty the clean flask.

Water dripping down the leaf.

I think I am home.

Ancient tech quiet.

Breath becoming evident.

I wish I was home.

Purged by the hive mind -

What else can we say lived on?

What is my home now?

Reflection:

The short story, *Streetwalker*, reflects on how I view the path of AI – as a sort of alien body promising greatness, but while it is the holy grail to start off, it slowly turns into snake oil, contaminating everything. Just as we let carbon dioxide contaminate the Earth, we must learn from our mistakes and prevent the same path for AI. As described in the story, green life is a rarity, and loved ones have been lost to our main character. Whether or not you and I agree completely is against the point – I am not saying that AI is ‘bad,’ per say, just as I don’t say cars are ‘bad.’ But it can become detrimental if we do not keep it and its effects in check.