

RESTORATION

The Gaia Origin



Book One

Daniel C. McWhorter



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For Marcia,
without whose encouragement and support
I could have never seen this through.

“The whole difference between construction
and creation is exactly this:
that a thing constructed can only be loved
after it is constructed;
but a thing created is loved before it exists.”
—Charles Dickens

ONE



**DECEMBER 15, 2023 7:15 P.M. CENTRAL DAYLIGHT TIME
NEW BEGINNINGS CANCER TREATMENT CENTER
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI**

“So, how much time does he have?” Dylan Harris asked. He put his arm around his wife and pulled her close in anticipation of the doctor’s response.

Dr. Miles Conley hated that question. He had been a doctor for over thirty years and, despite significant advancements in technology during that time, there were no definitive answers in medicine. So, he did what he always did in these cases—he told the truth.

“Honestly, I just don’t know. It could be hours, or it could be days.”

Lily Harris burst into tears again. She pressed her face into her husband’s chest. Dylan put both arms around her and held her tight. He could feel her shoulder blades pressing against his forearms. Her father’s illness had been tough on her and, despite his best efforts, she hadn’t been eating or taking care of herself.

“I’m sorry, Lil...at least he’s not in any pain,” he said.

Dylan felt Lily tense; he should have stopped at *I’m sorry*.

She slid her hands against his chest and shoved until there was an arm’s distance between them.

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“What does that have to do with anything?” Her voice trembled as she spoke. “I should be happy because they’ve pumped him full of painkillers?”

“You know I didn’t mean it like that,” he said, his voice soft but firm.

Evan was like a father to Dylan, but they knew this day was coming. He only wanted to ease his wife’s pain—he just wished he could find the right words.

Lily put both hands over her face and cried even harder.

“Dr. Conley,” the nurse interjected, “the patient is awake.”

Everyone turned to look at Evan. Lily wiped the tears from her eyes and moved closer to her father.

“Dad, it’s Lily,” she said in the steadiest voice she could muster. “You’re alright...you’re in the hospital.”

Doctor Evan Feldman’s eyes fluttered open. The bright light above his head was blinding, but he could just make out the shapes of four people hovering over him.

Where am I? Who are these people? Why do they all look so concerned? Oh yeah, I’m dying

He vaguely recalled collapsing the last time he got out of bed to use the bathroom, and he remembered the ambulance ride from his home to the nearest emergency center. After that, nothing.

Dr. Conley moved to the bedside and leaned over his patient. “Don’t talk, Dr. Feldman. You’re on a respirator.”

The doctor took a small penlight from his pocket and swept its beam across his patient’s eyes. Evan’s pupils responded slowly, but that was normal given the medications being used to control his pain.

“Good. Blink once if you recognize this person.” He pointed at Lily. “Blink twice if you don’t.”

One blink.

“Excellent. Blink once if you know where you are.”

One blink.

“Do you know how long you’ve been here?”

Two blinks.

“Not to worry, you were brought in three days ago. You suffered a hemorrhage in your left lung. We stopped the bleeding, but the cancer

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has spread. You're stable for now but we're running out of options. Do you understand what I am telling you?"

Being diagnosed with lung cancer at age fifty-nine had been a cruel twist of genetic fate for Evan, who had never smoked a day in his life. He had tried every form of treatment, but they had discovered the cancer too late and there was no stopping its deadly rampage throughout his body.

He looked at Dr. Conley and blinked once.

"Well then, I will leave you with your family. I'll be back to check on you later." The doctor turned to Lily and put his hand on her shoulder. "Not too long please, he needs to rest."

"Not too long," Lily promised.

"I'll be at the nurse's station right outside, if you need anything," the nurse said as she followed the doctor out of the room.

Lily wiped her cheeks dry before sitting in the chair next to her father's bed.

He had an IV tube sticking out of the top of his wrist, and there was a spot of blood visible under the clear bandage that held it in place. His skin was so thin and pale that she could see the squiggly blue outlines of the veins running up his arm. She couldn't believe that the thin, frail man lying in this bed was her father.

Just two years ago, he had been in his prime. He was a world-renowned geneticist and CEO of Telogene Life Sciences, Inc., one of the biggest publicly traded biotech companies on the planet. His lean, six-foot, two-inch frame had radiated health and confidence—he looked at least ten years younger than he was. He was a man on a mission, and he had seemed unstoppable. But that was before cancer began destroying his body from the inside out.

She took his hand in hers and rubbed his fingers with her thumb. "How are you feeling, Dad? Can I get you anything?"

Two blinks.

"Aubrey is with Dylan's parents. She wanted to come, but I thought we should wait until after you woke up. Maybe we can bring her for a visit tomorrow, if you are feeling better. Would you like that?"

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Yes, he wanted to see her; she was his only grandchild. He couldn't talk to her and reassure her that everything would be okay, but he could hug her and look in her beautiful blue eyes one more time.

One blink.

Dylan stepped forward and rested his hand on the dying man's knee. "You gave us quite a scare there, Evan. But you're one hell of a fighter. If anyone can beat this thing, it's you."

Lily glared at Dylan.

"Will you please stop with the optimistic bullshit!" she hissed.

"What? I mean it. Your dad is tough."

The look on Lily's face told him to stop talking. He decided that she needed to be alone with her father.

"I'll grab a coffee. Do you want one?"

"Yes, please," she said, thankful he'd finally gotten the message.

She loved her husband dearly, but she found his perpetual optimism tiring. She was a pragmatist, like her mother. Dylan was just like her father; he was a dreamer who believed that tomorrow would always be better than today.

Dylan gave Evan's knee a squeeze. "Take care, Evan. I'll see you tomorrow when we bring Aubrey."

Lily sat quietly, stroking her father's hand. He struggled to keep his eyes open, but she caught glimpses of the fire that still burned beneath his heavy eyelids. He was a fighter, he always was. Giving up just wasn't in his vocabulary.

"Dad, do you think you will be with Mom?" She had to ask; this might be her only chance.

He blinked once; a tear slid down his cheek.

Lily's mother, Christina, had died three years earlier in a plane crash. She'd been flying to Hong Kong on a Telogene corporate jet to spend time with her husband at an international conference on genomics, where he was speaking. The plane crashed in the middle of the Pacific Ocean with no survivors. The cause of the crash was never determined; the plane had broken apart on impact, and its pieces were submerged beneath 9,000 feet of water. At least they had found Christina's body. Aubrey was born two months later.

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“Will you please tell her I love her and miss her and wish so much that she had met Aubrey?”

One blink. Another tear.

“I love you, Dad. You’re my hero and I promise that Aubrey will grow up knowing what an amazing man you are.” She sobbed. “What amazing parents you both were.”

Lily stood up and brushed the tears from his cheeks. She looked into his blue-grey eyes and smiled before kissing him softly on the forehead.

“I only hope that Dylan and I can be half the parents you were,” she whispered as she leaned forward to kiss him again on the forehead.

“Good night, Dad. I’ll see you in the morning.” Lily squeezed her father’s hand one last time before picking up her purse and heading for the door.

She tried to twist the handle, but it was as if every ounce of strength had left her body—it wouldn’t open. She took a deep breath and twisted again. The door opened, and she saw the nurse sitting at her station across the hall.

The nurse smiled at her. “Is everything okay?”

Lily tried to take a step forward, but her knees only trembled

What if she never saw her father again? What if she could never be the mother to Aubrey that her mom had been to her? What would her life be like without her ever patient and loving father to guide her?

She willed herself to step forward, but her legs would not support her. She stumbled into the hallway, slamming into a technician who had just exited the room next door. Lily fainted and crashed hard to the floor.

Dylan, who was filling a second cup of coffee at the vending machine, dropped both cups and sprinted toward her. The nurse checked her vital signs and tried to wake her while the technician raced down the hall to retrieve a stretcher.

“What’s wrong with her,” Dylan demanded. “Will she be okay?”

They loaded her on the stretcher, and the technician wheeled her down the hall toward the emergency department.

The nurse grabbed Dylan’s hand. “She fainted, but she’ll be fine. Has she eaten anything today?”

“Uh...no, I don’t think so. We...we’ve been under a lot of stress.”

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She gave his hand a reassuring squeeze. “She’ll be okay, I promise. Please come with me.”

He followed her to a nearby waiting area. It was empty except for a bench, four chairs, and a coffee table littered with tattered, outdated magazines.

“Please wait here,” she said. “I’ll come get you in a few minutes.”

He shuffled through the magazines. *Woman’s Day* and *Good Housekeeping* weren’t really his thing. He liked *National Geographic*, *Popular Science* and *Road & Track*, but it was the July 2022 issue of *Scientific American* that caught his interest. Evan’s picture was on the cover along with big, bold text that asked: *Can he feed the world?*

He’d seen it before; Lily had a copy on her iPad. She’d tried to get him to read it several times, but he never got around to it. He checked the table of contents and flipped to the story about Evan. Telogene had patented a breed of genetically engineered corn that required a fraction of the fertilizer and didn’t deplete the soil like regular corn. It was being touted as the biggest breakthrough since salt-tolerant rice.

It took him just a few minutes to read the three-page article, so he turned his attention to *Road & Track*. There was a Torch Red, 2023 Corvette Stingray on the cover. His was a 2020, the first year of the mid-engine Corvette, in Rapid Blue with a matching blue on black interior.

The nurse appeared in the doorway just as he reached the last page. It had only been twenty minutes, but it felt like an hour.

“You can see her now,” she said. “She’s fine. She was dehydrated, so we started an IV. And we’ve asked her to eat something before we discharge her. They just brought her some soup and crackers, and she should be able to go home as soon as she’s done eating.”

“Oh, thank God. Thank you, thank you, thank you!” Dylan clasped his hands and bowed his head in silent prayer. He then leapt forward to give the nurse a giant bear hug. “And thank you!”

The nurse was a taken by surprise but smiled politely. “You’re welcome. Now please follow me.”

The nurse led Dylan to a quiet, curtained-off area near the back of the emergency department. He pushed passed the curtains and rushed to his wife’s side.

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“Oh, baby,” he cried. “I’m so glad you’re okay; you scared me.”

“It’s nothing. I just need to take better care of myself,” Lily replied, her voice shaky and weak.

Dylan leaned over, kissing her gently on the lips.

“I’m sorry this is so hard on you. I’m trying, I am really trying.” Tears streamed down his cheeks.

“I know you are. It’s not your fault. I haven’t eaten since yesterday and I guess it caught up with me. I promise to do better; you and Aubrey are too important to me.”

“I love you.” Dylan gave her another kiss.

“I love you, too.” She kissed him back.

They arrived home two hours later. They were both exhausted, and wasted no time getting ready for bed. Dylan started snoring just minutes after his head hit the pillow, but Lily couldn’t turn her brain off. The events of the past three days had overwhelmed her. She knew that her father was critically ill, but she had let herself believe that he would get his last-minute miracle. If anyone deserved one, he did!

Dr Conley’s words reverberated through her mind. Her father was dying, and there was nothing anyone could do to change that.

First Mom, and now Dad. I can’t do this without him!

She turned away from Dylan and buried her face in her pillow. She wanted to cry, but there were no tears left. All she could manage were a few muffled sobs. When sleep finally came, it was the same nightmare-ridden sleep that had plagued her for the past year. But it was better than nothing.

Two



DECEMBER 16, 2023 3:07 A.M. CDT
THE HARRIS FAMILY HOME
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

The sound of Lily's cell phone brought her nightmare to an abrupt end. Perfect timing. That shadowy, nondescript thing that nearly caught her would have to wait. Her heart pounded in her chest like she'd just finished a marathon.

The phone rang again; she checked the number on the display. She didn't recognize it but answered anyway. "Hello?"

"Mrs. Harris?" an unfamiliar male voice asked.

"Yes, who is this?"

Dylan heard Lily talking, but he wasn't fully awake yet.

"This is Bruce Wagner, your father's attorney. I'm at the front gate and need to speak with you right away. Will you please buzz me in?"

"Why, what's wrong?"

The panic in her voice brought Dylan to full consciousness. He sat up and rubbed the sleep out of his eyes.

"Mrs. Harris, I am sorry to have to tell you that your father has passed away."

"No, no, no...please no...." She dropped the phone.

Dylan picked it up. "Who is this?"

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“I’m sorry to wake you Mr. Harris. This is Bruce Wagner, Evan Feldman’s attorney. I need to speak to you and your wife. I am outside the front gate.”

“The front gate? Okay, just give me a minute.”

Dylan set the phone on the bed and picked up the aluminum cylinder sitting on his nightstand. He released the lock on the side of the iScroll and unfurled the 12 x14 inch flexible display. Dylan tapped an icon on the screen and nine small boxes appeared—each showed a real-time video feed from one of the many cameras located around the property.

He tapped the box labelled *Front Gate*. The image zoomed in on a dark-colored SUV with a middle-aged man sitting behind the wheel. Dylan tapped another icon to open the gate.

Dylan picked up his phone. “Okay, park by the fountain. I’ll be right down.”

He hung up the phone before tapping yet another icon to disarm the security system.

“Honey, you stay here. I’ll see what he wants.”

Lily stared at Dylan in complete disbelief. “Are you kidding me? That man just told me that my father died, and you want me to stay here? Wake up, Dylan!”

She leapt from the bed and hurried to the closet where her robe hung. Dylan followed close behind, grabbing her elbow when they reached the top of the stairs.

“Lil, you know I’m here for you. I love you and I want to help however I can. Please let me help.”

“I know you do, and I appreciate your efforts. But you can’t fix this. The best way to help is to let me do what I need to do.”

She pulled her elbow away and continued down the stairs.

Dylan jumped in front of her just as they reached the front door. He twisted the lock and pulled the door open to reveal a man in a dark, pin-striped suit walking up the stairs from the driveway. He carried a black leather briefcase in his left hand.

The man stuck out his free hand. “Bruce Wagner.”

Bruce Wagner was a burly man, with broad shoulders and strong beefy hands. He was at least two inches taller than Dylan, which put him

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somewhere over six feet. He wasn't fat, but he carried the bulk of someone who might have once been an avid weightlifter but who hadn't seen the inside of a gym in several years.

Dylan shook his hand. "I'm Dylan and this is Lily."

"It's very nice to meet you. Evan has told me a lot about you both."

"What do you want, Mr. Wagner?" The harsh words stuck in Lily's throat like glass. She knew this wasn't his fault, he was just the messenger, but the tremendous anger welling up inside her had to go somewhere.

Bruce nodded his understanding. "I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news. He died in his sleep, a little after 1:00 a.m., cardiac arrest. The doctors tell me that it happened fast; he didn't suffer."

Lily didn't say a word. She just stared past him, like he wasn't even there. Dylan put his arm across her back and rested his head on her shoulder but said nothing.

Bruce gave them a minute to process the news. "I hate to be indelicate, but there is another matter that we must discuss."

"There's nothing to discuss. I am going to the hospital to see my father," Lily shouted at the top of her lungs. "Now get out!"

"Mrs. Harris—Lily—please, that won't be possible. Your father's body has already been moved to another location."

"Where are you taking him?" Lily demanded.

"Lily, I am here at your father's request. This can't wait," Bruce said, his tone firm but patient.

Dylan took his wife's hand in his. "Please honey, let's listen to what Mr. Wagner has to say. He drove out here for a reason, and it's obviously important since it's three in the morning."

She jerked her hand away. "No. I...want...to see...my...father!"

"I understand that you want to see him, and there will be time for that. But, for the moment, I need you here." Bruce held up his briefcase. "I only need fifteen minutes of your time...please."

"What is it that is so goddamned important?" She wiped the tears from her face and straightened her shoulders.

"Your father had very specific final requests, and one of them was that I bring this to you." He tapped his fingers against his case.

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Lily stared at the briefcase and thought about it for several seconds before finally stepping aside. The three of them walked the short distance to the kitchen. Lily motioned to an empty chair at the small kitchen table. The attorney removed his iScroll and a sealed folder from his briefcase.

“As the sole surviving heir,” Bruce said, “your father’s fifty-one percent stake in Telogene Life Sciences now belongs to you. In addition, your father has asked the board to promote you to CEO. Bill Frederickson will stay on as president for the time being.”

Bruce opened his iScroll while he talked and slid it in front of Lily.

“I need you to key in your access code and give me your palm print here to acknowledge these changes. There is more signing to do, but this will suffice for now.”

She slammed her hands on the table, her last ounce of self-control gone. “Seriously? You came here at three in the morning to get me to sign some bullshit corporate documents? Get the hell out of my house!”

Lily got up from the table and started to leave the kitchen but stopped at the doorway. She spun on her heels to face the lawyer.

“Wait. If I’m CEO, that means you work for me now. I demand that you tell me where they took my father.” She stared at him with a glare that would melt most people.

Bruce straightened in his chair. “First, I don’t work for Telogene. I’m your father’s *personal* attorney. Second, you’re not CEO until you sign these documents.”

Lily glared at him a little longer before sliding back into her seat.

“You have ten minutes, Mr. Wagner.”

Bruce repositioned the iScroll in front of Lily.

She scrolled through the document on the display. It was twenty-two pages long and overflowing with legalese. “What does it say?”

“It gives the company the ability to act on your behalf during the transfer of ownership. It also says that you won’t make any public announcements until you’ve received final approval from the board.”

Lily keyed in her Telogene network access code and placed her palm on the display to sign the document.

“What’s next?” she asked, her tone hurried.

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She would sign anything he put in front of her—the faster, the better. She wanted to see her father one last time, to tell him she loved him and that she was so grateful to have been born his daughter. One way or another, Bruce Wagner was going to take her to him.

The attorney took the iScroll from her and confirmed that she had signed the document. He tapped on the display several times before sliding it back across the table to her. “Your father left this for you.”

Evan Feldman’s face filled the screen. Her heart skipped a beat and her hand shook as she reached for the device.

Bruce stood up and took a step toward the doorway. “I will step out while you watch.”

Dylan joined Bruce at the door. “This way—you can use my office.”

Dylan returned a minute later and sat next to Lily. She was still staring at her father’s frozen image.

She started the video. The camera zoomed out to show Evan sitting behind his desk. He was in his office at Telogene’s headquarters. She knew it well; her office was just down the hall from his. He looked young and healthy. He must have filmed this before his cancer diagnosis, or perhaps shortly thereafter.

Evan stared directly into the camera. “Hi, Lilypad.” He’d called her that since she was born. “I know you’re hurting and confused, and I wish I could be there with you. Some of what I am about to say will be hard for you to hear, but you’re strong...stronger than you know. I know you can do this.”

He stood up, walked around to the front of his desk, and started pacing back and forth. She had seen him do that a hundred times before. It usually meant that he was angry or nervous. Obviously, the latter in this case.

“I’m ashamed to admit it,” he said, “but I’ve been keeping something from you. I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me for what I have done. I have kept it from you because I knew you would have opposed my decision.”

He stopped pacing. “Your mother wasn’t cremated. I had her put into cryogenic storage...and the fact that you are watching this means I’ve joined her.”

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After dropping that bombshell, Evan explained that there was a secret division of Telogene that reported to him and operated with little board oversight. He called it “Project Second Chance,” and its purpose was to identify and develop mechanisms to preserve human DNA indefinitely. Over the last three years, the team had significantly improved Telogene’s cryogenic storage technology—and it was now possible to freeze human tissue indefinitely with minimal deterioration.

Evan briefly reviewed the backgrounds of the key personnel before sharing details on the various locations involved. The main research lab was in Hong Kong but a network of limestone caves near Kansas City served as the primary cold-storage site. There was an air of pride in his voice as he described the storage facility’s geothermal power source. He expected that it would generate power for hundreds—if not thousands—of years.

He concluded with an explanation of his goal for Project Second Chance.

“By now you will have figured out that preserving DNA is only the beginning. I envision a day not too far off when we’ll take a sample of every person’s DNA at birth. We’ll preserve it, store it, and use it to sequence genetically targeted cures for all kinds of diseases. And no one will ever die waiting for an organ transplant again; we’ll use their DNA to clone whatever they need.”

He resumed pacing.

“And if we can clone organs, then there is no reason we can’t clone entire bodies. Of course, cloning a body is just creating another person. They may have the same genes, but they would have their own brains and would develop as unique individuals as they matured—like identical twins.”

Evan stopped mid-stride and leaned against his desk.

“Ethical issues aside, what I am really interested in is extending human life and perhaps even...”

Lily paused the video.

She knew where her dad was going, and she wasn’t sure if she wanted to hear it. Dylan, to his credit, didn’t say a word. He took her hand in his and gave it a tight squeeze.

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She tapped *Resume*.

“...the complete elimination of death. That wasn’t my main goal five years ago when I started this project, but it became my goal when your mother died. She left us too soon, and she had so much more to offer the world.”

He returned to his oversized, brown leather chair, taking a deep breath before he continued.

“We are also working on preserving the brain. Not only the tissues but the knowledge and memories locked inside it. If we can make it work, we will give new lives to all those people who live with perfectly healthy brains trapped inside diseased or broken bodies. And maybe even provide an option for those who are being slowly killed by their own bodies...like me.”

Evan clasped his hands together as if in prayer. “I want you to promise me you will continue this work. I believe in you...you’re a natural leader. People respect you and they *will* follow you. The Second Chance team will make the breakthroughs required to make this technology viable, I know it in my heart. They just need a leader who can keep them focused...and who can protect them from those that might not understand.”

Her father stood up from his chair again. “Lily, I want you to promise me you will bring us back. Give your mother and me a chance to see our grandchildren grow up. We both worked too hard for too long to be denied the opportunity to experience the full fruits of our labor. This is a big ask, and you will probably need time to think about it. Believe me, I understand. Just know that I love you and I believe in you. Bruce is a good friend and trusted confidant. He will help you if you let him. Goodbye, Lily, I miss you already.”

The screen faded to black. The words *For Lily, April 17, 2021* appeared on the display.

Lily took her hand from Dylan’s, wiped her eyes, and stood. She walked over to the kitchen door, took a deep breath, and called down the hallway.

“We’re ready for you, Mr. Wagner.”

Bruce returned to the kitchen and took his seat at the table.

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“So, what do you think?” he asked.

Lily’s face turned red as her anger overwhelmed her.

“I think very little of it, Mr. Wagner,” she answered. “I just learned that my father is a liar. That he and Mom are stored in some high-tech freezer a hundred feet underground. And that he actually believes that he can bring people back from the dead! What does he think, that he’s God?”

Dylan rubbed her shoulders, trying desperately to calm her down. It didn’t help.

“Even worse,” she continued, “he wants me to promise to carry out this mad scheme of his...which I guess means he that thinks I’m God, too. I should resign right now!”

Bruce responded in his usual calm demeanor. “I understand that this is quite a shock, Lily. Why don’t you get some sleep? I can come back in a few hours to help with the funeral arrangements.”

Lily couldn’t believe what she had heard. “Funeral arrangements? What the fuck do we need to have a funeral for? Isn’t he already in the icebox?”

She shoved the iScroll across the table. It would have ended up on the floor if Bruce hadn’t caught it.

“Lily,” he said, his voice soft and calm, “your father is the CEO of a multi-billion-dollar company. There are lots of people that expect a funeral and it would not be prudent to disappoint them.”

Bruce put the iScroll back on the table and leaned toward Lily.

“Look, I know this is hard. And I get that you would have preferred to learn of this in a very different way. But it’s what your father wanted, and I am doing my best to carry out his last wishes.”

He leaned back and picked up his iScroll.

“Let’s do this—you take a few hours to calm down and think about it. You can call me whenever you’re ready.”

Bruce tapped his iScroll several times.

“I just sent you my contact info. Call me anytime, twenty-four hours a day.”

Bruce put the device in his briefcase and reached for the folder he had left on the table.

“There is just one more thing,” he added. “This folder contains your new access card and a flash drive. The drive has the video you just watched and copies of your father’s private files. They’re encrypted but you can access them from any device with a palm reader.”

Lily stood up and extended her hand to the attorney. “Thank you, Mr. Wagner. You’ve been very helpful, and you will hear from me soon. Please show him out, Dylan.”

“Goodnight, Lily,” Bruce said. “Please remember the non-disclosure agreement, and don’t hesitate to call if there is anything I can do for you...anything at all.”

“I just need time to think,” she replied.

Dylan showed Bruce to the door and thanked him for his patience. He came back to find Lily pacing back and forth across the kitchen floor—a habit she had inherited from her father.

“What are you going to do?” he asked.

“I don’t know...”—she spun to face him—“I don’t know!”

Lily inhaled deeply before continuing. “On one hand, I am intrigued by this whole idea. But, on the other, it just doesn’t seem right. Does anyone have a right to live forever?”

“Well, it’s not forever, Lil...”

“Of course it is!” Her hands shot out from her sides like bullets from a gun. “Don’t you see? If you can clone someone’s body and then transplant their brain once, who says you can’t do it two or three or a hundred times? What would this world be like in a decade if the death rate dropped to zero? What about a hundred years from now?”

She resumed pacing.

“We are already approaching nine billion people, Dylan. Do you think this planet can sustain ten or twelve or twenty billion? I don’t, and I don’t want to be a part of creating the nightmare this world will become if people stop dying.”

“Yeah, I see what you mean,” Dylan acknowledged. “But what if it was just two people...or ten, or maybe a hundred? Would that seriously unbalance the world? I doubt it. I understand that there are ethical considerations. And it won’t be easy keeping this technology away from those who would misuse it, but that’s why your father chose you.”

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She stopped pacing again.

“Don’t *you* see?” he continued. “Evan wants you in charge of this project because he knew you would have ethical concerns...that you’d think about the big picture. Your father chose you because he knows you will do the right thing. He believes in you, Lily and so do I.”

Dylan took her hands in his. “I know that I am just a has-been game developer.”

He was being modest. He created his first blockbuster video game when he was twenty, sold his company for three hundred million dollars when he was twenty-nine, and retired when Aubrey was born at the ripe old age of thirty-seven so he could be a stay-at-home dad.

“But Evan gave you an amazing gift, and I’d hate to see you throw it away.”

“What gift?” she asked skeptically.

“The gift of life, the power to decide how long it lasts and when it’s over. This isn’t just about bringing your parents back. It’s about the power to decide when your own life ends...or mine, or Aubrey’s for that matter. Just imagine if, heaven forbid, someday Aubrey gets sick and this technology could save her. Would you do it then?”

“That’s not fair.”

“I know it’s not,” Dylan agreed, “and that’s precisely why your father kept this from you. It’s not fair, and no amount of rationalizing will ever make it fair. Dying isn’t fair. Getting sick or being born with a genetic defect isn’t fair. *Life* isn’t fair!”

“You’re right,” she said, “I’m exhausted and not thinking clearly. Thank you for being there for me.”

She threw her arms around his neck. “Please be patient with me. I love you and I promise we will get through this.”

Dylan leaned in and softly touched his lips to hers. “I love you, too. Hang in there and give yourself time to think it through. You will make the right decision.”

He held her close and kissed her again. “Do you want to try to get a few hours of sleep?”

“Yeah, that’s a good idea,” she said. “We both should try to sleep.”

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The couple walked hand-in-hand up the stairs to their bedroom. Lily climbed into bed first and Dylan snuggled up behind her with his arm drawn tight across her chest. Lily closed her eyes and tried to sleep but, as before, her brain would not quiet.

Too much had happened too fast. She couldn't help but replay every moment of the past several days over and over in her head. When she finally succumbed to the dark embrace of sleep, her memories gave way once again to her nightmares.

Lily moaned and whimpered as her brain conjured images of a planet ruled by a small group of wealthy elites. She imagined them as brutal people who lacked empathy and who used their vast wealth and unnaturally long lives to gain an unfair advantage over the less fortunate.

Her tears flowed freely down her cheeks and pooled on the pillow beneath her.

She imagined that she had unleashed the curse of eternal life on humanity. She dreamt of a stinking, decaying, over-populated Earth, with its billions of people all clamoring to live forever—and she screamed.

THREE



APRIL 3, 2075 10:00 A.M. GLOBAL STANDARD TIME
TELOGENE WORLD HEADQUARTERS
LEAD, SOUTH DAKOTA

“Dr. Harris?” A female voice echoed through a partially open office door.

Dr. Aubrey Harris, CEO of Telogene, shifted her glance toward the speaker. “Yes?”

A young woman in a dark blue pantsuit stepped through the door. It was Evelyn Wu, Aubrey’s executive assistant. “Dr. Hao says he is ready for you now.”

A smile crept across Aubrey’s face. “Okay, please tell him I will be right down.”

“Is there anything I should know?” Evelyn asked.

“No, I’m sure it’s just another one of Chen’s experiments. Will you please clear my schedule for the rest of the day?”

“Certainly,” the assistant replied as she closed the door behind her.

Aubrey waved her hand to dismiss the holographic projection that filled the air above her desk.

She was reviewing a new genetic enhancement protocol that, once perfected, would significantly increase human lung capacity. This would be a boon to the tens of thousands of space and undersea colonists who lived and worked in low oxygen environments. More importantly, it was

exactly the type of innovation the company needed to stay ahead of its competitors.

She would have to come back to that later.

Aubrey stood up and walked across the room to her private elevator. The elevator was an executive perk that allowed her to access any floor in the complex without having to enter public areas. Not only was it incredibly convenient, but it enabled her to get from point A to point B without having to stop and chat, or have people wonder where she was going and why she was going there.

She placed her hand on the scanner inside the elevator and stated her destination.

“Cryonics Lab.”

The scanner flashed green.

“Thank you, Dr. Harris,” a pleasant female voice replied.

The elevator began its rapid descent to the Cryonics Lab.

Telogene’s corporate headquarters was on top of an old gold mine that once served as a government-funded research facility. Aubrey’s destination was deep inside the mine, some 500 meters below ground.

A series of devastating earthquakes starting in 2037 had forced the company out of Kansas City. The old mine was a perfect choice for the company because the U.S. government had spent billions turning the site into a high-tech research lab used to conduct physics experiments. That funding had dried up after the global financial crisis of 2025, and Telogene had purchased the property for pennies on the dollar.

The elevator halted, and the door slid open with a soft hiss. Its lone occupant exited into a long, narrow hallway that glowed with a soft bluish light. Aubrey turned down the first hallway to her right and continued past several closed doors until she reached the one labeled *Lab 46-D*.

She put her hand on the scanner next to the door—it flashed green—and the door slid open. The large circular room featured a raised workstation in the middle surrounded by four patient bays. It took a moment for her eyes to adjust to the bright white light that flooded the room.

There were three other people present—one operating a series of holographic displays surrounding the central station and two others

Restoration

standing next to a large sarcophagus-looking glass tube in one of the patient bays. Although made of clear glass, a thick white gas obscured the capsule's contents. The swirling gas looked like a fluffy cloud stuffed into a bottle.

The man working in the center of the room looked up as she entered.

"You're just in time, Dr. Harris," he said.

Dr. Chen Li Hao was Chief Cryonicist, and the best cryo-engineer at Telogene—if not the world. Trained as a physician and geneticist, he specialized in the preservation and restoration of human DNA. He had worked at Telogene for nearly forty years, but you couldn't tell that by looking at him. His appearance suggested a physically fit, Asian male in his mid-thirties, but in reality, he was just two months shy of celebrating his 75th birthday.

Long life and a youthful appearance were among the perks of working at Telogene. Employees enjoyed convenient access to a multitude of discounted, and often free, gene therapies. This unique employment benefit allowed Telogene to attract and keep some of the best scientists and engineers in the world.

Dr. Hao gestured at the holodisplay before stepping down to join Aubrey next to the pod.

"Dr. Berkovic, Dr. Walker, it's nice to see you both again," Aubrey said to the two technicians monitoring the holographic displays projected above the capsule.

The two women smiled and returned her greeting. Both appeared to be in their mid-thirties but, like Chen, they were nearly twice that old.

Dr. Leah Berkovic was the company's Chief Neurochemist. It was her job to oversee the just-completed transcription of the patient's neural pathways. Dr. Tanessa Walker, Assistant Chief Cryonicist, would monitor the restoration process.

It had been many years since this group had performed a restoration, but this was a very special patient and Dr. Harris wanted only her best people working on it.

"We've completed the neurotransfer and are ready to begin restoration on your order," Dr. Hao offered.

"Excellent. How is he doing?" Dr. Harris inquired of Dr. Berkovic.

The neurochemist examined her holodisplay, gesturing several times to confirm the results. Each finger point, hand sweep, and wave caused a different set of data to appear on the virtual display.

“Neurotransfer is complete with 98.7 percent of all engrams successfully encoded. There was some minor degradation of the original data store...probably from a power disruption at the old facility,” she said, referring to the company’s original storage site in Kansas City.

Aubrey checked the display to verify the results for herself.

Neurological transfers were always a delicate process because every neural structure had to be encoded exactly as it had formed in the donor brain. Any deviation or error in the transfer process could cause symptoms ranging from minor memory loss to total synaptic failure. The system grouped regions of interconnected or related neurons into engrams, which were the higher order brain structures that allowed for persistent memory, motor function, emotions, and personality.

“I was hoping for better but I’ll take it. Have you isolated the affected areas?”

“Yes, it looks like most of the memory loss occurred in this region,” Dr. Berkovic said, pointing to a three-dimensional image of the patient’s brain.

“I believe these are mostly early childhood memories,” she continued. “But there may be some bleed-over into later memories built on the affected memory region. He might require some minor reconstruction but we won’t know for a couple of weeks, at least.”

“Okay, that shouldn’t be a problem,” Dr. Harris said before turning to her Chief Cryonicist. “You may proceed, Dr. Hao.”

Dr. Hao walked over to where Dr. Walker stood and gestured at her holodisplay. A duplicate display appeared in the air next to it. The Chief Cryonicist used hand gestures and voice commands to move the various elements on the display to different locations, and to add a few new ones.

Once he was satisfied with the view on his display, he nodded at Dr. Walker. “Please begin.”

Dr. Walker adjusted several virtual dials and slides on her display before issuing her verbal command. “Begin restoration. Authorization Walker 091792.”

Restoration

A digitized female voice echoed from the ceiling above them. “Senior executive approval required.”

Dr. Hao looked at Aubrey. “Would you like the honor?”

She smiled. “Why thank you, Dr. Hao, I believe I would. Authorization Harris alpha epsilon zero 10352.”

“Restoration approved. Initiating sequence now,” the digital voice acknowledged.

The holodisplays in front of Hao and Walker changed to show a three-dimensional image of the person inside the capsule.

Several readouts appeared alongside the image showing the patient’s core temperature, heart rate and respiration. Aubrey noted that the patient’s core temperature was minus 136 degrees Celsius and all other readings were zero. Perfectly normal for a person in moderate cryogenic suspension.

Full suspension involved temperatures below minus 196 C, but the patient had been warmed slightly for the neurotransfer procedure. Overlaid on the image were graphical indicators for cellular and neural activity. These indicators showed minimal cellular activity but no activity in the brain or nervous system...also normal.

“All readings normal and rapid warming is in progress,” Dr. Walker reported.

The temperature reading climbed toward zero at the rate of about one degree Celsius per second. Cellular activity slowly increased with the temperature, but all other indicators remained flat until the first signs of neurological activity appeared in the brain stem. All eyes were on the holodisplays as the subject’s core temperature passed ten degrees Celsius.

“Ion exchange returning to normal across all neural pathways.” Dr. Berkovic said. She turned her attention to a three-dimensional rendering of the patient’s brain. “Synaptic signaling is a little low but within range.”

“Increase cortical stimulation by point zero three percent,” Dr. Hao instructed. “I don’t want to risk any further memory loss.”

“Increasing cortical stimulation by point zero three,” Dr. Berkovic repeated as she manipulated a set of virtual controls.

“Synaptic activity has stabilized...all readings are normal,” she added.

Dr. Walker repeated the information that appeared on her display. “Respiration started and heart rate is ten beats per minute and climbing. Blood pressure is 90 over 50.”

The temperature reading stopped at 37 degrees Celsius—normal human body temperature. Dr. Walker watched closely as the patient’s heart rate and blood pressure stabilized. Respiration settled in at twelve breaths per minute. All body systems were normal, and the patient was breathing on his own.

“Restoration complete,” the digitized voice intoned.

A sucking sound replaced the humming noise as the thick cloud-like gas evacuated from the capsule. It took only seconds for the gas to clear, revealing a physically fit male lying inside. He appeared to be in his mid-thirties, was about two meters tall, and had the physique of an Olympic athlete. He was hairless, except for the close-cropped thicket of brown hair covering his scalp.

Dozens of tubes were inserted into various parts of his body, and he had electrodes attached to his head, chest, and along his spinal column. A robotic arm inside the capsule emerged to remove the tubes from the patient’s mouth, arms and legs. A second later, a loud hissing sound signaled the release of the vacuum seal holding the lid in place—a robotic arm descended from the ceiling to remove it.

“Wake him up, two CCs should do it,” Dr. Hao instructed.

Dr. Walker selected the specified dose on her display, causing yet another robotic arm to emerge from the side of the pod and inject the high-potency stimulant Adreneron into the patient’s neck.

A few seconds later the patient’s eyes fluttered but didn’t open. His heart rate jumped up to sixty-two beats per minute, and he was breathing noticeably faster.

Dr. Harris stepped closer to the pod.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

Dr. Hao looked at his display. “He’s fine. Give him a minute. If he doesn’t wake up, we will give him another CC of Adreneron.”

Just then a spike appeared on the display showing a big increase in brain activity.

“And here he comes now,” Dr. Berkovic said.

Restoration

The patient opened his eyes for a second but then quickly closed them again.

“Ambient light only,” Aubrey ordered.

The light diminished until it was the same soft blue glow as in the hallway.

“There, that’s better. Try to open your eyes again.”

The patient slowly opened his eyes and scanned the room before locking his gaze on the woman hovering over him.

“Don’t try to sit up just yet,” she said as she took the patient’s hand in hers. “Give yourself a few minutes to acclimate.”

The man in the capsule blinked his eyes repeatedly as he tried to focus.

“Lil...li...Lily?” he asked.

She smiled as she put the man’s hand to her lips. “No, Papa, it’s Aubrey.”

Aubrey had only learned to talk a year before Evan had died, and Papa had been the closest she could come to grandpa. A tear ran down her cheek and splashed on the back of his hand.

“Dr. Feldman,” Dr. Hao leaned forward so the man in the capsule could see him. “I am Dr. Hao. It is an honor and a pleasure to meet you.”

He pointed to the other two technicians. “This is Dr. Berkovic, and this is Dr. Walker. We will do your orientation.”

Dr. Evan Feldman nodded politely at the three technicians before turning his attention back to his granddaughter.

“Aubrey,” he said, his voice still raspy from the breathing tube, “you’re all grown up. It’s so good to see you.” He squeezed her hand. “Where is your mother? Where’s Lily?”

“I know you have a lot of questions, Papa, but I need you to focus on your orientation for the time being. Once Dr. Hao gives the okay, I will come visit you again...probably in time for dinner tonight *if* you follow all of his instructions and don’t give him any trouble. Can you do that for me?”

Although he was eager to discover where Lily was—to discover where *he* was—the strong pounding sensation in his head and the extreme dizziness he was experiencing convinced him he should heed her advice.

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“All right, Princess. I will be on my best behavior and do as the good doctor asks.”

A big smile crept across Aubrey’s face. His ability to remember the nickname he had given her was a very good sign that they had achieved a successful neurotransfer.

“Can you give your Papa a hug?” Evan asked. “I’ve really missed you.”

Aubrey leaned forward and gave her grandfather a big hug and a kiss on the cheek.

“I’ve missed you too, Papa.” She wiped another tear from her cheek as she stood. “You are in excellent hands. Trust Dr. Hao and his team, and you will be up and around in no time...I promise.”

She reached down and squeezed his hand one more time. “I have to leave now but I will come back and check on your progress in a couple of hours, okay?”

“Please do,” he said.

“And don’t worry about the headache. It shouldn’t last long, and they can give you something for the pain if it’s too distracting. That poor brain of yours just absorbed a lifetime of information in less than a day, so it’s feeling a little overworked at the moment. But it will pass.”

She gave him another kiss on the cheek before turning to leave.

“Please call me once you’ve completed phase one,” she whispered to Dr. Hao on her way out.

Aubrey looked back at her grandfather one last time. The technicians had him sitting up and were helping him put on a white gown.

God, I hope we’re doing the right thing.

The door hissed open, and she walked down the long hallway back to her private elevator.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel C. McWhorter (“Dan” to everyone who knows him) is an avid reader and life-long science fiction and fantasy fan who has long dreamed about writing for a living. As is the case for many of us, the realities of life took him in a different direction and his dream was put on hold while he worked to achieve successful careers in telecom, software engineering and talent development. In 2017, Dan decided to leave corporate America and start writing. His first book, *Restoration*, was the result.

Dan lives in the beautiful mountains of North Georgia with his wife and three dogs. When he's not writing, he likes to hike, boat, fish and experience the exceptional beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains. If the weather is bad, you may find him online playing the current MMO flavor of the month or banging away on his Xbox controller.

Please visit www.danmcwhorter.com for more information about Dan.