

Carly Martin

Resurrection Complete

200625 - Glenn Air Force Base, Kansas, USA

My resurrection took two days, and I am given three to recover.

By resurrection I mean the gradual stepwise protocol I underwent to reawaken all of the organ system in my new body. By new body I mean my genetically-optimized-for-Mars body.

My breath whooshes in and out like low tide. Okay, breathing is still the same.

The transformation was relatively pleasant. I wasn't conscious for it, of course; I got to enjoy the most rapturous induced sleep. It was all dreamless blackness and leaden limbs. It was like the sleeps I enjoyed before entering the Mars program, before MIT, before the army, when I was still at home.

Are my muscles heavier? Or am I paralyzed? I'm not going to move anything. ...But what if I am paralyzed? If I don't move maybe Dr. Achenbach will be able to fix everything. But how long should I wait? What if I feel time differently now?

During the transition, I felt shamefully high. Technically, I was in a coma, but that sounds a bit harsh. It makes it seem like I've come out of my transformation brain damaged.

Why are they letting me wake up alone? There has to be some kind of mistake. This is cruel. Did something go horribly wrong?

During the transition, I couldn't feel anything, or see myself anew. I wasn't concerned, thanks to the anesthesia. I'm lucid now, but I don't dare move. If they did fuck me up, I'm not going to be implicated in their oversight. Right now I'll just imagine my first move in this pile of unfamiliar muscle and mineral and carbon compounds.

I lie still, and my thoughts do calisthenics. They warm up my neural connections, seeing if everything is still there. Name? Tenley Mae Wyatt. Date? June 25th, 2020. Mother's maiden name? Holladay. I like fake leather jackets, textbooks, post-it notes, Adobe Illustrator, and Greek food. I think I still do.

My first observation is that my heart feels different. It beats more deliberately. I feel its tempo increase and blood rushes to my fingertips in time like waves on a shore. Never in my life have I felt my blood travel this way.

I will not move until prompted to. What if I break my body? All of those SpaceX funds for naught. The investors would be furious.

Where is Dr. Achenbach?

Am I still recognizable?

Is Mom going to be okay when she sees me?

“Tenley, are you with us?” said Dr. Achenbach.

Oh praise Jesus, she’s here. I haven’t moved. I’m in her hands now. I’m her responsibility. This body is too foreign to speak out of, but I have to open my eyes so she knows I’m here. I’m terrified of that; I know for sure that my vision will be different.

I peek into the world through crescent moon slivers. Everything is washed in a bluer tinge. UV resistant eyeballs. I now see life through sapphire-colored glasses. I let out a breath. They actually changed me.

“Hey Tenley, you hung in there, you made it, the hardest part is over.”

That is not true, but I’m used to Dr. Achenbach speaking in clichés. She’s okay, though, she got me through this metamorphosis. I can’t imagine hanging your entire career on my biology and watching me nap through the most critical part.

“Now Tenley, this is all quite overwhelming, I know, but we have to check everything as soon as possible” said Dr. Achenbach. “Just relax, we’ll be quick. And then you can go home.”

* * *

200626 - Glenn Air Force Base, Kansas, USA

Resurrection complete.

But goddam, what a shit show.

My muscles are still heavy, my joints stiff, my skin taught...this probably isn’t much different from molting.

There are many aspects of the astronaut lifestyle that are not glamorous, but learning to walk, talk, eat, and use the toilet in a body that feels like your corpse is an all time low.

All complaints aside: at this point, I can move through the world pretty well. I can speak as usual. If I stay in a shady spot with most of my skin covered I'm a passing wild-type human.

Most importantly, all of my good looks are intact.

Most *most* importantly, I will still resemble Mom when I see her, which isn't too long from now.

I'm waiting in one of the hangars on base for my very own private jet back to Virginia, my home state. The private jet thing is pretty glamorous, although I'm sitting in a hospital-issued wheelchair, dressed in a navy blue sweat suit, clutching a Deer Park. I'm still pretty fragile.

Starting now, I have three days before I have to resume training for the mission. This is going to be my last extended period of time with Mom before I leave, and then it'll be five years at least before the next time. Five years of memories made in a couple of days.

The idea is that we get all of the emotional shit out of the way right after the genetic alteration so that we can focus on the mission. Everything about this program is so calculated. I want to explode, to rip off my sweat suit and board the jet plane completely naked, with my new radioactivity-resistant skin on display just to do something they couldn't predict.

Instead, I shakily raise my body out of the wheelchair, walk to the opening of the hangar so I can view the Kansas brush and breathe in dusty air; acquaint my half-Martian body with the Earth. I decide to tilt my head back and pour the Deer Park over my crew-cut hair. Baptized. Sure beats the sponge baths to which I've become accustomed.

“Officer Wyatt... we board in five.” Says some C.O.

I don't want to leave. I don't want to start this.

I get back into the chair and let them push me in.

Hello Mom, goodbye Mom. We have no time to waste, Mom.

* * *

200627 – Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, USA

Good lord, there she is.

I'm still on the plane, but we've landed now. We're inside of a new hangar. I can see her standing on the opposite side of the cavernous space through my window. She looks tiny and delicate but exactly as I left her. She has on a crisp outfit from the J. Crew outlet store... her hair color is from the same box I can picture from our bathroom... the familiarity of the distant postage-stamp-sized figure pierces my UV resistant eyes and makes my nitrogen-efficient lungs collapse around my anabolic heart.

What if she can't handle it? What if I break down? In front of all of these military people that I don't give a shit about.

I have an irrational fear that she'll be outright horrified by me. It's not that I look very different, but maybe my daughter pheromones were compromised in the alteration and when I stand before her she'll ask, "Have you seen Tenley? She's my daughter, she's arriving soon. I'm really proud of her." And when I say, "Mom, it's me," she'll think I'm lying and call for assistance.

"Tenny," she says, with a hiccup at the end. "Tenny, Tenny, Tenny." Her arms clamp tight around my body and I feel her whole form shudder. All of the manmade gears and machinery and God knows what else whirr and ricochet off of my ribcage as I surrender to her embrace.

"Mom, I'm home, I'm still me, I promise."

We remain like this for a sensational amount of time. In her arms, I am transported back to youth soccer tournament losses, middle school academic failures, fatherless childhood melancholy.... All of our past moments of comfort and hope in loss resurface in this position. This moment will be remembered with those other moments. We attempt to match my lost human-ness and our lost time with our years of cumulative mother-daughter solidarity. It isn't until I feel liquid on my lips and taste soap in my mouth that I realize I have been crying.

I pull away. There are blue splotches down the front of her J. Crew cardigan.

"They didn't tell me my tears would be blue, too... sorry ..."

"We'll figure it out, Tenny, everything will be perfect, these days are all ours."

* * *

200627 – Dulles, Virginia, USA

We're driving home now, catching our breath from catching up. I gaze out the window at a landscape familiar in another time.

Back in the jungles of Virginia. Fertile in late June, with assorted vegetation bubbling over concrete overpasses and trees obese with tumbles of thick emerald dinner-plate leaves. Every outside second is clocked by the scratching rhythm of one thousand invisible insects. During this season, the roughed-up infrastructure of suburban Virginia looks vastly more impotent than usual when surrounded by monstrous heaves of humidity-gobbling botanica.

I'm hot, but I have to keep my skin covered as much as possible as I adjust to its new radiation-resistant features. More blue sweat pools on my brow.

"So...how was it?" asks Mom, like she'd just picked me up for Thanksgiving break. "How do you feel?"

"Uh...Fine.... Everyone was really attentive. The adjustment was difficult, to be sure, but it moved a lot faster than I expected." I continued, "Yeah, the hardest part is how fast everything is moving."

"You got that right," said Mom, "It's a travesty how little time we have together. If you're up for it, I have a lot of ideas of things we can do, to, you know, make the most of it."

It's like I have a terminal illness.

"Only if you're up for it... I have no idea how you must feel after everything. It's all up to you, Tenny.... There are a few things that I think must be done, though."

I notice sweat is also running down the side of her face. Five years of memories from a couple of days. She believes we can do it, she planned for it, I can tell.

I love this woman so much.

200628 – Springfield, Virginia, USA

Goddammit, I overslept.

I bolt upright on the bed in my Mom's room (after getting home the night before we talked about boring things, just existing together, until I passed out). My lower back muscles, still feeling thicker and heavier than they should, cramp violently in surprise. I yelp in pain. And anguish. And regret.

I open my eyes, and the foreign blueness all around me induces vertigo before I realize this is what the world looks like to me now.

How the fuck did I do that? I have so little time... this new body hasn't done me a single goddam favor. I only have a day and a half now to make five years worth of memories with the only family I have.

With the room still spinning, I realize that Mom was sitting at the foot of my bed the whole time.

"Mom, why did you let me do that? It's the middle of the fucking day! I leave you tomorrow!"

"I assumed you needed it," she says, "I have no idea what you've been through... I'm sorry, Tenny... please, let's not fight." Her eyes are dewy.

Her pained look made the space behind my sternum contract, I keel over, and then my back muscles pipe up again. Out of frustration, I say compulsively, “I will be sleeping one year both ways, Mom!”

Her mouth drops open, she looks like I just bit her, like a stray animal brought inside out of the best of intentions.

“I know...” Her breath becomes ragged. “I always make the wrong call, Ten, you know that...” She leans her body over my covered-up outstretched legs and hugs them. I rub her back.

“I’m so, so, sorry, Mom...” I whisper. “I’m not doing this right. What was it you thought we should do today? We need to get started now, it’s all going to be perfect.”

* * *

“Lots of dolmades,” says Mom to the waiter, with the proudest smile on her face, “lots and lots of dolmades... a whole plateful.”

I smile back, humoring her. Her earnest joy for simple things always made me soft, but under the circumstances, it made me want to burst out in blue synthetic tears in the middle of my high-school favorite restaurant in Springfield. Dolmades are the best: little heavenly stuffed grape leaves. For her, this was ultimate luxury, asking for extra appetizers, showing her Mars-bound GMO daughter Springfield hospitality.

The food arrives, and my Mom does a little prayer while I sit and respectfully wait and watch. All things considered, my religious skepticism will thankfully take a backseat on this visit.

Dolmades, gyro meat, tzatziki, phyllo pastry... all down the hatch. I am intensely relieved that my sense of taste has remained intact. Giving up alcohol has been rough enough. I let myself fill up this new body to the brim. Perhaps lots of delicious food will calm it down for the rest of my time here. Human or not, olive oil has magical properties for all creatures.

She talks about her best friend, Denise, and Denise's grown children in an animated way. I went to daycare with them. They are all in IT or management positions, with children. Mom pulls out her iPhone and swipes through sandbox photos of their toddlers. "Such a blessing." To me, their blond towheads appear sky blue.

"What's going to be interesting," I begin, "Is how they'll be halfway done with grade school the next time I see them." I didn't mean for this to be a profound statement, but upon hearing this, Mom fumbles her iPhone back into her purse and begins apologizing.

"Oh, Mom, but it's okay... It's kind of cool how the entire world becomes my time capsule, I'm looking forward to seeing how powerful five years can be."

"Right...always the optimist, Tenny..." I see tears accumulating on the bottom rims of her eyes.

I'm not sure what compelled me to say this, "And I think it I'd like to adopt once I'm back home..."

"Oh Tenny... " Real tears now. I get the check. We walk outside. She holds me in the parking lot, my skin itching under the sun's rays.

"Are you still up for church this evening?" I ask, knowing that it's what she'd hope I'd have the strength for.

“Oh of course, I’m happy you suggested it, Ten.” She batted away the rivulets on her face. “We can still make this perfect.”

* * *

In the car ride home, I violently vomited all of the Greek food everywhere.

I started getting queasy as soon as we pulled out of the parking lot but I thought I could make it home. Then, Mom mentioned offhand that she thought I might benefit from a laying-of-the-hands ceremony for my mission tonight at church. In this ritual, everyone in the congregation stands around you in a circle, eyes closed, palms raised toward you, and when compelled, they say spiritual notions at you. Nausea came over me then.

To save time, and dignity, Mom is getting it professionally cleaned and we’re renting a car for the remainder of my visit.

“Ooof, well, now that I’m empty let’s just do the laying-of-the-hands thing all weekend.”

Mom laughed weakly, “I love you, Ten.”

* * *

The sun set, and the strain of knowing that this was our last night became increasingly unbearable. We try and diffuse it by tacking on “I love you” at the end of every sentence. It kind of works. Between the time constraint, all of my physical

indecencies, and the complete objective ho-humness of my last visit for five years, we buoy ourselves with something we can control: the number of “I love you’s” said.

In the unfamiliar rental Subaru, we made our way to night church in the twilight.

“I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

* * *

I tried to be an inconspicuous attendee, but the gauze mask I have to wear over my mouth in large public places due to my reduced immunity made that difficult. Everyone in the congregation could see this, and so, labeled with this white flag of surrender as the guest of honor, the laying-of-the-hands ceremony was inevitable. The sermon would occur first, though.

Seated next to my mother in the pew, the memories from all the hours spent like this with her overwhelmed the present. This new body isn’t mine; it’s not the one that spent all those mornings and evenings clothed in pious finery and motherly love, but the memories contained inside of it were enough to conjure the ghost of my tiny family through the years. If these memories could transcend bodies, they could transcend atmospheres and planets, too. After retracing familiar steps in an unfamiliar body, it was the memories met, not made, that reaffirmed the infallibility of her love.

“Mom,” I lean to her and whisper, “It’s going to be okay, I can take us anywhere.”

She looked confused, but on good faith said, “I love you, Tenny.”

I need to make sure she knew what I felt, so I decide to do so on her terms.

Time is up, let the laying-of-the-hands ritual begin. I stand in the center and the congregation surrounds me in a large circle, four rows deep. A forest of palms grow around me. I face Mom and bow my head while the pastor places his hand directly on my shoulder. “Oh Lord...” He began.

“... Amen,” he finishes. A moment of stillness. Then, still facing Mom, I pull down my white gauze, and begin my devotional to her: “Lord, I am liberated by you. You gave me life, made me in your image, but I have changed that,” My eyes connected with hers, she has to know that this is about her. I shut them again. “Forgive me that, Lord, I am an explorer, you made me to be that way... and you deserve the greatest from me for loving me as you have. Of course, I want to be near you, but that’s not possible, so you give me the strength to go. Your love has liberated me, and I am so grateful, and I love you for it ...Amen.”

When I open my eyes, her palms were on my shoulders, eyes locked on mine. To me, her eyes look blue, but it doesn’t matter, I know they are green. We stood there for a moment, and then I collapsed.

* * *

200629 – Springfield, Virginia, USA

Overslept again. Mom is at the foot of the bed again.

Outside, the SpaceX car awaits to take me back to the private jet, and then back to training.

“As soon as you’re ready,” says Mom.

“I have always been ready, and that was your doing.” I smile, even as breathing becomes difficult through my tightened throat.

Mom runs her hand through my crew cut. “I love you, Tenny, I liberate you.”

