

## The Wager

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Tuesday 15 July 2149:

It is my birthday today. I am 149. Does it still make any sense to count the years passing? Does it make any sense to consider that I am still alive when drugs are my main food, this computer is my interface to the world, cybernetic visual and auditory implants bypass my natural organs, and I can barely move without breaking a bone? I guess it makes some sense, given the party that the nurses have organized. People don't organize parties for objects, do they?

# Recording 15/07/2149 - 0830 MT #

"Happy birthday grandma." It's the head nurse speaking, a woman with a patronizing voice who always over articulates for fear I don't understand. I have a cybernetic implant, I hear better than she does with an enlarged frequency range.

"How are you feeling today?"

The same stupid question everyday. I'm 149. I will get up from my wheelchair and sing: "I feel good!"

As every morning, my synthetic voice answers:

"The same as yesterday, just one day older."

All the staff and the other inhabitants of the elderly centre are gathered around me at the breakfast table. A bunch of old people, all over 120, who have been moved to Mars to spend their last days as guinea pigs for scientists working on aging.

They have wrapped gifts for me. Everybody is smiling at me with tenderness and admiration for my old age. There is no doubt that they all like me, but sometimes it's too difficult to cope with those people who give away their love too eagerly. I can't afford it anymore, it demands too much energy.

The head nurse puts the two packages on the little table attached to my wheelchair. I boot the exoskeleton that controls my feeble arms, and undertake to open the presents. The skeleton is fantastic as long as I concentrate my neural signals on it. It is impossible to think about anything else and everybody knows it: Only the humming of the exoskeleton's engines disturbs the religious silence. The first package is a box of sweets, fruit jellies. They are my favourites and also the only ones my mouth can still chew properly. I put one into my mouth. Nothing similar to what I was used to eat on Earth: enhanced taste, no assimilable nutrients, mostly water. Anyway my old taste buds would not have tasted the subtle taste of French fruits jellies.

The second package is the latest Internet interface, quicker, more adaptive and more responsive to my brain signals.

My synthetic voice thanks them all. Then, as during the last twenty years, the director of the research centre makes a little speech. I don't listen. It's always the same prattle about the latest research and the ability to extend life. He pretends that I am a pioneer in two ways: I have been where few have been--on Mars--and to the limits of life. And he hopes the journey will continue for a long time. It's obvious that he does not have to sit in a wheelchair the whole day, plugged to a computer as the only interface to the world.

# End of recording #

I am impatient to have my new Internet interface set up. I like going on the net because it's a place where I am not different from others. The speed of my brain is the only limiting factor. I may be 149 but I still am very quick: my long years of experience compensate for the raw speed of the youngsters. I am still one of the best information seekers in the solar system, probably because I can turn off my external stimuli. At least I can free my mind even though my body is stuck in this wheelchair.

My birthday has again raised the question of the oldest person in humanity. According to the net, I am the oldest person who ever lived. It makes people either admiring or aggressive. Some think that it's fantastic and send me congratulation letters. Others claim that I am an abomination and that I act against God's will.

# Email id. DFE33443FDAB-F1CE25 #

Dear Cilia,

Well, that's it. You're officially the oldest person in humanity. How ironic that you are living on Mars! It is now certain that civilization is going towards immortality and maybe toward independence from the sun. One day we will explore the galaxies, and thanks to our long life, we will be able to span huge distances in a lifetime.

Happy birthday from Earth!

Your great-great-great grandchild,

John

# End Email. #

That was the most original email I received. A load of rubbish! What do I care about the exploration of the universe? I can't move from my wheelchair. I shouldn't complain too much though, I am the most entertained elderly person in the solar system. In the centre, they have done everything so that we don't get bored and apathetic. They claim that

boredom is the indirect cause of death among the elderly. But all this care is part of the experiment. The tenderness that the scientists and the staff show here is the same as a biologist feels for his guinea pigs. Of course for humans the requirements are slightly more complicated. Massages keep our muscles supple; food is adapted to our decaying stomach; there are plenty of activities and cybernetic interfaces keep us as independent as possible.

I wouldn't be alive if I didn't receive all that care. Or at least, my life would be so unbearable that I would have committed suicide long ago. It's a curse to die young, but it's a worse curse to be trapped in a body that doesn't want to respond anymore. Somehow, it seems that my life has been going on for eternity and that God has forgotten me. When I was a little girl, nobody lived on Mars, we were not even sure that people would ever go there one day. Now people live both on Mars and on the Moon and the only issue about travelling is the change of gravity.

#

Thursday 17 July 2149

My new Internet interface has been installed today. I was excited to try it, but I didn't find any difference. It even seems a bit slower than before. When I mentioned it to the technician, he answered without even checking that everything was all right and I just needed to get used to it. I'm not sure what to think. Are they trying to hide something from me? Are they filtering my access to the Internet? Why would they do that?

Maybe I'm just getting paranoid. Today during lunch, I had the feeling that people were talking behind my back. They were looking at me with a mixture of jealousy and pity. I just need to forget about my pseudo-celebrity. I'm a shooting star. As soon as I die, everybody will turn towards the next oldest person. He is on Earth; he didn't want to travel to join us here. Maybe I should have done the same, die happily in a small house in the middle of the mountains, with no contact with the rest of the world. Ignoring and ignored.

#

Sunday 20 July 2149

Until today, I liked to go to mass. I realized that my opinion about mass has become more positive. Is it a sign that I'm getting closer to meeting my Creator? I found an old diary entry, a few months after I joined the centre.

# Diary entry Sunday 23-March-2121 #

Again today, I traded off a visit to church against a visit to the greenhouse. I don't believe in anything they are talking about there so I spend this free time out of the Centre visiting the station. I met some children in the greenhouse, and I told them old stories from Earth, fairy tales. They watched me with amazed eyes. None of them knew these stories. How can we lose our culture so fast?

# End Diary Entry #

Now I stay in the church and I pray. I record the pastor's preach and play it again during the week. Today he was talking about medicine and the fact that we were crossing the boundaries of what God had defined as Nature. Extra-uterine pregnancies, extended life span, organ replacement, cybernetic implants or genetic engineering of babies. All were against the Lord's rules. The speech was clearly targeted at me. As a confirmation that I wasn't again paranoid, the pastor came to talk to me at the end of the ceremony.

# Recording Sunday 20 July 2149 1203 MT #

"Good morning Cilia, did you like the sermon?"

"Good morning Pastor. Actually I didn't."

The pastor starts. Most people have problems to get used to the sharp tone. As I have to generate the sentences through the voice synthesizer of my computer, I go directly to the point.

"It was actually aimed at raising some questions in you."

"What sort of questions?"

"Well, to be as direct as you are: do you really belong in this World?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

I actually understand well. The pastor has always been on the extremist side. He doesn't like the research going on at the Centre.

"Well, I believe you are not alive by the will of God, but by the craft of humans. It is not very Christian indeed."

"I see... so I should unplug myself and die? Is that what you mean?"

The voice synthesizer cannot render the anger I have in me. This man implies that I should let myself die to be a good Christian.

"I wouldn't be that specific. But if I were you, I would ask myself why I am still alive. And I would probably conclude that it is not the will of God."

# End of recording. #

I did not even listen to the rest of the discussion. This man was trying to convince me that I should be dead. It is true that I have a Sword of Damocles hanging over my head. It is probably a question of days or weeks before I die but I will not give up these moments. I still think straight, and thanks to my cybernetics, I am almost independent.

#

Sunday 27 July 2149

I spent the whole week thinking about the discussion with the pastor. I decided not to go to church anymore. Who needs a pastor who asks you to commit suicide to follow our Lord's will? I traded the church for the greenhouse, like in the old days. It had been ages since I had been there. The orange glow of the Martian sun welcomed me. The sun on Mars is so

disappointing. I was used to the strong sun of the South of Europe that baked me after half an hour. The greenhouse is so dark. All the vegetation is dark purple to absorb the maximum of energy through their leaves. It is so depressing. The worst is the absence of any living being other than humans. The settlers didn't bring any birds and have eliminated all the insects that had embarked illicitly to Mars. "No vermin on Mars", they had claimed.

As always, there were kids on the playground, almost completely naked to get as much sun as possible. It was noon, and the sun was up in the sky. It was the place where I felt the closest to Earth. I miss Earth, as a planet, as an entity, wherever one stays. I miss the smell of the trees and of the wind. On Mars, there is no wind inside the station. I miss the birds singing, the wasps that try to steal small pieces of my picnic. I miss the smell of the flowers at bloom. I miss hay fever. That's a funny thought but I do. Hay fever was the sign of the good days coming, of the summer, the parties in the garden. One pill would stop the sneezing, but the simple fact that my body reacted to the pollen was the green light for all summer extravagances.

While I was looking at the orange sun in the orange sky, a man sat on the bench beside my chair. He was probably eighty or ninety, almost bald with a crown of fair-grey hair. He sat straight like a soldier.

# Recording Sunday 27 July 2149 1147 MT #

"Nice day, isn't it?"

"In the greenhouse, it's always a nice day. It's so boring compared to Earth."

The man seems disturbed. The metallic tone of my artificial voice again. He goes on after a pause:

"I wouldn't know. I've never left Mars. I was born in this dome."

"You don't look like a Martian, you're not thin enough."

"My parents have engineered me that way so that I wouldn't look like a thin giant. If I had lived on Earth, I would have looked very bulky."

"If I had stayed on Earth, I would have had all my bones broken by now. I am so old that my bones are more like fragile crystal structures."

"I know. I follow your life with great interest. Actually, considering your health state, I wonder why they let you come to the greenhouse."

Another journalist, I think, another person following me like if I were a freak of nature, something people are paying to see. They all want to be confronted with some strange reality to reassure themselves about their normality. I use the standard sentence already stored in my computer.

"I am sorry, I cannot give interviews, I have a contract with P. Inc., contact them if you need more information."

The man seems surprised.

"I don't need any information. And I am not a journalist. I am just interested in you. When I saw you sitting here alone, I thought it was a unique opportunity to talk to you."

"Why would you be interested in me?"

"Because of the bet!"

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"So you don't know?"

I remain silent.

"I am not sure that I can tell you, it'll bias the result."

Enthusiasm overtakes him. He seems twenty years younger. He rubs his hands in expectation. I tense. This man looks mad, and I have the frightening feeling that I am in the middle of something that overwhelms me. I try to formulate a sentence that is as detached as possible.

"Would you please explain to me what you're talking about?"

After a moment of reflection, the man looks at me, sighs as if he has just made a crucial decision and says:

"Well, I have said too much already, haven't I?"

I nod.

"There is a bet, a bet on you being alive by January 1st, 2150."

It takes time for me to grasp the whole meaning of this sentence. I look at him, dumbfounded.

As to make his sentence more theatrical, he stands up and leaves. The whole meaning of the sentence starts to unfold in my mind. He turns back and wishes me good luck.

# End of recording. #

It took two hours before I realized that my recorder was still running. I was paralysed with terror. I didn't move until a group of nurses from the Centre rushed into the greenhouse in panic. They questioned me, but I was shaking too much to be able to control my speech generator.

#

29 August 2149

I went through so many different phases last month. But I guess I was always depressed: I haven't opened this diary for so long. But what to write when the only question in my mind was: Are there people who wish me dead? People place bets on my life. This fact alone is scary enough. But if people bet on me being alive by New Year, others probably bet that I would be dead by that time. I searched the Internet but found no direct proof of the reality of such a bet. Either the man is crazy – on the video, he looked crazy – or my Internet connection is screened.

I wish I could be home, on Earth. I wish I could spend a few weeks there and die peacefully. I am tired. I don't want to join the sessions that they organize in the centre anymore. They oblige me. They say it's for my own good but they don't know what my own good is. I should die, peacefully, without regrets as I contemplate my busy life. I have achieved enough to retire from the world of the living. Nobody will really miss me. For my family I am already dead, just lingering on for the good of science.

#

Tuesday 2 September 2149

I have contemplated suicide, just to realize that I couldn't. They have trapped me in life by monitoring any sign of failure, like a machine. As the machine didn't work well lately, they put a bit more oil in the system, antidepressant drugs. They explained to me that it was common for people who live for such a long time to feel depressed like I did. They are satisfied: the machine works better now. It's true that I feel better. At least I have stopped considering suicide. But what now?

#

Wednesday 3 September 2149

A bodyguard was assigned to me, Horatio. He is supposed to follow my moves inside and outside the centre. The director told me that he felt I was unbalanced and that it would be better to have someone around in case I tried something ridiculous. Is dying something ridiculous at 149? I don't think so. But they don't want me to die, not yet.

It didn't sound right. They have probes to monitor me. They don't need someone who follows me all the time, sleeps when I sleep and eats when I eat. I thought of the bet. I went on the Internet. The search didn't give anything significant but I didn't give up. I went into old archives, those not coded in Q-bits but the old binary way, something I hadn't seen for fifty years at least. It was slow, and most of it was difficult to decode but the screening that the Centre had probably installed on my connection didn't seem to work on binary files. I finally found what I was looking for. It was an old page of the scientific journal "Nature" about scientific wagers that explained this 150 years old bet: "At least one human alive in the year 2000 will still be alive in 2150." The two people that had started the bet were long dead, but they had established a trust fund with the stakes. Using information uncorrelated to me, I managed to get around the filtering and I found that the trust fund was now worth a lot of money. Enough to support a large research project like the one I took part in against my will. The two people betting had named the beneficiaries of the winnings. The firms had disappeared and had been replaced by others. On the "Agree" side, I wasn't completely surprised to find P. Inc., and on the "Disagree" side, a cryogenic preservation company close to bankruptcy.

#

Thursday 4 September 2149

Today I invited Horatio for a cup of tea. He is a simple idealistic young man, in his thirties. Quite handsome indeed. His conversation is pleasant. He is not patronizing, which is unusual in this place.

# Recording 4 September 2149 1456 MT #

"Why did you accept the mission of guarding an old lady like me?"

"It was well-paid, and seemed to be of great importance."

“Do you know why you protect me?”

“I was told that you were suicidal and that I should take care that nothing happens to you. They made me understand that you would maybe hire someone from outside to murder you as you couldn't do it yourself.”

I smile. They were creative. Horatio doesn't seem to believe in it though.

“What do you think of their theory?”

“I'm not paid for judging what my boss employs me for. I just do the job.”

“Come on young man, you can find better than that.”

A smile passes over his serene face. He seems to never lose control over the situation.

“I don't really believe in their idea. You seem in good health for your age and not depressed to the extent you may commit suicide. But that's all I can say to you.”

“So I'll talk to you. I think they hired you because of the bet. You're here to protect me.”

Again an ironic smile.

“I don't know what you're talking about,” he said looking up and around the room for surveillance devices.

“I understand.”

# End recording. #

I didn't want to make him say more. We were almost certainly recorded and I didn't want him to lose his job.

#

Saturday 20 September 2149

They have cut my Internet connection. They argue that it is not good that I worry too much about "these things", without mentioning what exactly. I wonder what to do. Maybe I should contact a human rights organization. But as they screen everything I do now, any email coming from me would not reach outside. I am locked, both physically and mentally inside this building. My destiny is completely in their hands. Since I have moved to Mars, P. Inc. has turned me into an experiment. I am not able to decide what to do.

#

Monday 29 September 2149

It is becoming more and more difficult to get time alone to write my diary. Not that I have anything special to say. My life is now limited to the Centre, between the compulsory activities and my bedroom where I like to listen to my old music on my CD player. The acoustics of my room are surprisingly good and I like it better than to listen through my ear implant.

I have tried to make Horatio understand that I needed more privacy, less monitoring. He doesn't answer, doesn't do anything. I wish he were less dedicated to his work, and more to

me. But for him, I am only a mission.

In the rare moments of relative solitude, I have managed to hack the video system: the network security here underestimates the capacities of an old grandma like me! That's a mistake. Those young boys still believe that when I was their age (120 years ago!), I did not have electricity, let alone computers. Well, they are wrong. I can now alter the signal of any camera in the building. I have already managed to hide a couple of my visits outside, as a test.

I have also faked my biological probes. The nurse rushes in when my heartbeat is too high, which of course happens when I am writing my diary or preparing my little escapade. And it's the last thing I want them to discover!

Wednesday 30 September 2149

I've had exciting moments today. I feel like I am a teenager again, jumping the wall to party all night long.

# Recording Wednesday 30 September 2149 0934 MT #

All surveillance cameras show empty corridors. With the fuel cells on my wheelchair fully charged, I have calculated a trip of 3 minutes to the head nurse's office, where I hope I can find an unscreened Internet connection. I know that Horatio takes a coffee break with the surveillance guards, so they won't notice anything.

The door slides silently open, and here I go. I have deactivated the camera system so it always shows the same empty corridors on the guard's screen. I reach the door of the head nurse's office without any problem. The door is not even closed. I try to come in. Impossible, the doorframe blocks the passage of my wheelchair. I never thought of such a simple detail. Panic, I am in the middle of the corridor, and I can see on my screens that Horatio narrows in. He looks at his watch, and then luckily turns around and goes back to the entrance. All my biological alarms are blinking, my heart rate is too high, my blood pressure also, and my adrenaline levels have passed the range of the probe. Alternate plan. Which room could I enter with my wheelchair? The doctor's room. Quick check on the monitors, he is not in yet. Back and left to the doctor's room. The door opens easily and I am in. The Internet connection is available, a restricted range wireless. I just need to be close to it. First a rapid test of the filter, I bounce an email back to myself, it comes back immediately from an external server. It should be all right. Then I send the email to Amnesty International, still operational after so many years. I query the mail server. It tells me that they received it. Brilliant!

I disable the connection and check the cameras. Damn it! Horatio is running from my bedroom, with the doctor, and the head of security. Before I can do anything, they rush into the room.

"Hello grandma, what are you doing here?" the head of security asks.

Quickly, maybe too quickly, I activate the sentence I had ready in case I got discovered.

"I had problems with my local network connection, I wanted to check if it was ok."

"Why didn't you call us?"

"I felt like going out a bit."

"You know you have to tell me," said Horatio.

Ah that's it. The litany of asking permission.

"I'm fed up with being treated like a kid."

I wish this speech generator could add emotions to the sentences, I want to shout, and Horatio feels it.

"Let me take you to your room, said Horatio."

"Just a minute," the head of security interrupts. "It seems that nobody saw her going out of her room, maybe she has jammed the cameras."

"Come on, Spencer, do you really believe that she can do that? I was chatting with your boys, maybe they didn't pay attention."

Before the head of security can say anything, Horatio pushes my wheelchair out and to the corridor. With a move of his knee, he knocks and deactivates my long-range wireless Intranet connection. Then he calls the security room.

"Guys, do you see us in corridor B3?"

The answer comes from the mobile phone.

"Yes sure, why not?"

"Just a check." And to Spencer, "See, no problem!"

Spencer looks at me with a frown, and leaves.

Without a word, Horatio pushes me to my bedroom. Before leaving, he just adds:

"For your own sake, don't do it again."

# End of recording. #

#

Friday 2 October 2149

I wonder on which side Horatio is. Of course, by disconnecting me from the Intranet, he had prevented me from being caught. But did he do it on purpose? He certainly put a stop to my wandering: it took me two days to reconnect the system, and I think I injured myself while trying to reach the Intranet module on the back of my seat.

Since Wednesday, another guard has been helping Horatio in the surveillance of my door. The bet fever seems to have reached beyond the financial interests of two companies. I suspect that bookies have found an interest in betting on my life and it becomes dangerous for me. People are actually trying to kill me to win the bet. Tuesday at lunch Carolina, my table neighbour, tried to tip my armchair over. If I had fallen off, I wouldn't have survived the knock of my head on the floor. Now I am confined to my bedroom. I cannot breathe in here, it's stuffy. I spend my time watching the closed video system of the Centre. As I cannot get to the Internet, I try to learn bits and pieces by hacking in the Centre local news. I don't even know whether my email actually had any effect. I am alone with only a computer as a companion.

#

Saturday 3 October 2149

Yesterday evening, I overheard Horatio and the other guard talking about the bet. The odds on me dying were the lowest ever after P. Inc. released an optimistic health report. The paradox could be amusing if I weren't in the middle of it: On one hand I am treated like a precious relic preserved by expensive machines and hidden from the world in a vault, on the other hand they publish my health report as if I were the president of some important state, a human being whose health condition can change the world.

#

Sunday 4 October 2149

During the night, the "pro-death" group of the Centre tried to sneak in my bedroom to take care of me. Two of those old ladies had managed to distract the guard while the others entered my room. Fortunately I had linked an alarm to the camera monitoring my door that would wake me up in case of intrusion. I just had the time to call for help.

Horatio told me this morning that they will strengthen the safety measures. I don't know what else they can do: I am already confined in my bedroom with two men guarding the entrance.

#

25 December 2149

It's Christmas today. And this is the last entry of my diary. I almost made it until the end of the year, but in what condition! Let me go back to where the diary stopped, that Sunday.

After the event of the previous day, they decided that it would be best to put me to sleep for the rest of the year in a safe chamber. I tried to protest but the drug acted too quickly.

I don't remember anything in particular; time did not exist. I can't remember what was real and what was a dream. I was floating in a liquid, with intravenous feeding and drugs to keep me asleep.

But I wasn't sleeping all the time. When I woke up, I could not see anything, but I felt this enormous tube in my throat. Each time, it took me a while to remember, to realize I was in this darkness, canned, oppressed by the blinding proximity of the walls. They didn't remove my cybernetic implants but the interface to control them was on my chair. So I could not improve my hearing by manipulating the post-processing. I could not call either.

Many times I have thought about removing the tube from my throat, unplug the needles that went through my veins. But I always gave up. I did not know, maybe I would die, drown in the liquid before they could come and save me. The needles provided me food, and medicines. Maybe my heart would collapse if I didn't get these medicines. I didn't dare taking the final step. I was trapped, between life and death, kept alive in some container, another step towards the status of rare specimen that shouldn't be stressed too much because of its value. I felt like those animals preserved for decades in formaldehyde, except that I was alive and aware of it.

I woke up many times before I really grasped why P. Inc. kept me here. Of course, they would get the money of the bet, but it was not significant enough to motivate all the trouble. There was a marketing value in me being alive. All the anti-ageing drugs that they

would market could be labelled: "Keeps Cilia Smith alive for more than 150 years!" And people, stupid sheep, would buy them.

These were pieces of thoughts that I gathered through time, when I slipped out of the haze that covered me. Sometimes I had the feeling I did not sleep for hours, but it could have been minutes, or days. Who knows? I tried to count my heartbeats, or the seconds: "One Mississippi. Two Mississippi.", but even then I had lapses. And I'd start it again. I never lasted more than two Mississippi-minutes. During all this time, I never thought I could try to escape. Moving an arm or a leg in this thick liquid was almost impossible, as if a net covered me and hindered my movements. And what would I have done? Bang the wall? It would break my bones!

I could let go and die. But I wasn't ready for it. I had the feeling I could live another couple of months, or years and see my great-great-great-great grandchildren when they would be old enough to travel.

At one point, I thought I had finally gone mad. I could see blinking red lights and hear piercing siren sounds. I was confused. I couldn't make any sense of so many stimuli at the same time, my brain was not used to it anymore. Then I saw a face, blurred like an overexposed picture.

"Let's go, Cilia," the face said, far away.

Was I dreaming? Did the angel of death finally decide to take me to my Creator?

He took the respirator out of my mouth. My throat contracted in pain. I was shaking. I was really outside the tank and it was cold. I wanted to go back there, I wanted to sleep, to remain in my tank. In my half-delirium, I liked this place and I didn't want to go away.

I was covered with a sheet and a blanket.

"Don't worry Cilia, everything will be alright. We have your chair outside, we just need to transport you there. Don't move yet!"

So I was alive and it was Horatio talking to me.

I was still under the effect of the sedative. I felt that the stretcher I was lying on was going fast through the corridors. I heard sirens everywhere and a strange smell reached my nose. What was happening here? I heard Horatio's voice, but what he said did not make sense to me:

"Contagious patient, give way."

Suddenly the sheet went off, and I felt Horatio and a woman lifting me up, dressing me up and connecting me again to the computer on my chair. I had the control of my interfaces again and I could see and hear properly.

A rapid scan of the area showed me that we were in an ambulance and it was driving fast along the corridors of the colony.

"We need to pass a last control," Horatio said.

I wanted to know what date it was. When Horatio told me it was Christmas, I almost cried. Those bastards had taken three months of my life.

"What are you doing here by the way?" I asked with a broken slow voice, my voice, not the interface.

"I take care of you. Relax Cilia, everything will be fine."

"How can I relax when I've been put to sleep for three months, by the company you are

working for?"

"I resigned not so long ago," he said with a smile to the woman who was taking care of my interfaces.

A loudspeaker said: "Last check in, get ready."

Before they hid me again, I saw them putting some sort of biological suit on.

After something like ten minutes, they drew the sheets again.

"That's it Cilia, now we take off. Just lie there and soon we will be in the shuttle," Horatio said.

"Can you please tell me what this is all about?"

"No time now, but you'll be safe soon."

It is always the same, people decide for me whether I would be safe or not and what I should do. My destiny is not mine anymore, I am a weapon in a greater battle, but I don't even know who is fighting.

In the shuttle, they fully dressed me and sat me in my chair. I barely felt the shuttle take off. I could not escape. I could not live my own life anymore.

When we were in orbit around Mars, they explained to me the whole story. Horatio was a member of Amnesty International. Until recently, he did not think that the way I was treated was wrong. He only decided to act when they put me in the sleeping tank. He carefully organized my extraction, simulated a fire in the Centre, and drove me to this shuttle. It was a simple story, but the organization of the extraction had been very complex: the money at stake rose day by day, people had spent fortunes on both sides. As New Years Eve approaches, my death will bring more and more money to the few who have a bet on it.

"What now?" I asked.

"You will be frozen," said Horatio.

I didn't have to say anything. They could read the fear in my eyes.

"Yes, " said the woman as she put a reassuring hand on my shoulder. "We managed to make the judges agree that if your life was suspended by freezing, there was no proof on whether you were alive or dead. So the bet would be suspended."

"But nobody has been defrosted successfully yet!"

"That's why it works," said the woman.

"And soon it will happen!" Horatio's eyes were bright with ideals, the good guys against the rest of the world.

"While you are frozen, we will make the court cancel the bet and all the bets about you. We have good hopes that it will succeed. Then the trust fund money can be used to make more research on defrosting people, including you. And here you come back, free and alive."

I was in the hands of young idealists that fought for justice to be made everywhere in the solar system. Another hundred years of life and they would be as cynical and disillusioned as I am. Yet, for the moment, it was difficult not to be gained by such enthusiasm. I really wanted all those betting on me, either for life or death, to lose their money. It made me feel like in antiquity, when the crowd decided whether a gladiator had fought bravely enough to survive. But whatever the outcome, I would still remain a puppet. It didn't

matter whose puppet I was, I was not in control of my destiny. I had to admit it, I had to let go, 149 years old, lucid, alive but not free, never free again. If they managed to defrost me, in which state would I be? Did the two of them understand this? Had they thought about my feelings? My situation was tragic, in the old Greek tragedy sense. From the moment I was born, my destiny had been traced, and I could not do anything against it.

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These are the last lines I write in this diary. I am not a free person anymore. I am a tool, a tool that will hopefully achieve great things. A few hours ago I was scared to death about the prospect of being frozen, but a tool doesn't have any doubts. A tool is not afraid of being broken because it doesn't have a destiny of its own. It can't be free so it doesn't aspire to anything. It just is. Maybe this is the future of humanity. We don't die anymore, but we stop being humans. We turn into objects that younger generations, or maybe the machines, move around to serve their own purposes. Right now, they don't need me anymore, so they put me in standby mode, frozen, until they need to take me out of their toolbox to fulfil my function.

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