

-The Second Fifth Day-

*By Chase L. Smith*

Today was the day that Linda Windworth, a 37 year old laboratory technician, was going to die. She didn't know it, of course. Linda's thoughts ran with everything else going on in her life, all of her worries, hopes and fears, streamlined into a flowing river of consciousness. Linda's phone rang in her pocket causing her to jump, briefly interrupting her contemplation. She swerved briefly into oncoming traffic, and then pulled her black SUV back across the yellow line. Ignoring the irritated honking of the car behind her, she swiped the green symbol to answer. Putting both hands again on the wheel, she propped the phone in the crook of her neck.

"Hello? No I can't pick up Elise, I have to work late tonight. Dr. Cortez isn't happy with all the bad press we've been getting, and he wants us to pick up the pace." Linda flicked her blinker to pull into the turn lane, "No, I already told you this yesterday, and the day before for that matter. You're just going to have to pick her up. David I can't keep bailing you out anytime something comes up."

Linda forced down her temper as she pulled the SUV onto a side road that cut into a densely forested hill. The trees packed closely around her car, and the overcast sky up above made them reflect more strongly on the shiny metal of the car. The forest seemed to be pulling the vehicle into a slow embrace as it climbed up the side of the hill. Linda sighed passive aggressively.

"David, you're just going to have to get her, alright? She was going to stay at your place tonight anyway. Look, I'm almost to the gate, I have to go." A heavy silence followed that statement, as the typical, "Love you, bye" died on her lips. She knew that that wasn't true anymore, and, if she was honest with herself, it hadn't been true for a while. Linda bit her bottom

lip, and managed to sputter out, “Goodbye” before rapidly pressing the red button. Forcing down the storm of emotions that threatened to overwhelm her, Linda rolled down her window, and shoved her plastic ID card underneath the scanner. After an affirmatory chirp from the scanner, the two large metal gates in front of her car swung open with a soft groan. They revealed a large, white boxy building, with wide glass window panes and marble steps. A blue and red sign was in the expansive lawn out front, with “Day5 Labs” written in bold lettering.

As she pulled her car around the building, towards the employee parking located underground on the east side of the facility, she noticed a curious sight on the marble steps. A large white van with “Channel 12 News” written on the side was parked out front. She briefly caught a glimpse of a reporter and camera crew before she drove inside the garage. *Another press segment?* She thought, *Haven't they already done two this week?* " The media had been worried about the ethics of Day5 labs ever since its opening, and now that they were close to completing their project, skeptical news teams and “Anti-GMO” activists had been showing up at their doorstep on a regular basis.

The lab's website had become the portal for a host of nasty emails, and even some threats, which were later determined by the police to not be credible. The bad press was one of the reasons that the ethics board was pushing them so hard. Investors didn't like having their names associated with words like “Unethical”, “Environmentally destructive”, and most importantly “GMOs”.

Linda eased the SUV into a space and slid the stick into “P”. She put her head in her hands, and gave a long exhausted sigh. She missed how things used to be. How they used to be with David. She missed how things used to be with her work, when no one cared what they were doing, when no one wanted to see Day5 defunded...or worse.

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FBI Agent Molly Jen Harris *hated* this part of dating. She didn't know if everyone hated this part of dating this much, but she really didn't see how any relationship could be worth all of *this*. She gingerly picked up her glass of wine, her fingers feeling the cold, crystal stem. Swirling the overpriced white blend that was inside, she took a tentative sip, exaggerating the motion.

If her date didn't show up soon, the waiter would have to ask her if she wanted a *second* refill. At that point she should basically go home. *Why does this always happen to me?* She thought reluctantly, drumming her fingers on the table cloth. She fought down rising tides of embarrassment as the waiter looked over in her direction again, trying to hide the fact that he was waiting to clear her table for two, that was currently seating just one. He didn't do a very good job of it, and let his eyes linger on the empty seat across from her a little bit too long.

Molly refrained from biting her nails, a nervous tick she hadn't been able to banish despite nearly 30 years of trying. *"You know I was pregnant with you when I was 30..."* Her mother's shaky voice crept into her mind, despite her attempts to banish it.

Over the last few years, her parents' gentle suggestions about dating and "finding a man" had become a little less gentle. Molly still cared for her parents deeply, but she hated how, well how *old* they made her feel sometimes. Just because you were in your thirties didn't mean that you couldn't find love. That was ridiculous. Not everyone needed to have four children by the time they were eighteen. Not everyone could be charming on a first date. Not everyone had to be good at *everything*.

Molly set her jaw and took another sip of wine, a more confident sip this time. *So what?* She thought, *Another date, another no show? Better than an hour of awkward dinner conversation.* She should be glad that her date was a no show. Who needed "Tom Baxster" or

whatever his name had been. Another bitter drink of wine slid down Molly's throat, burning in the soft but intense way that white wine burned. Molly pulled her phone out of her "fancy" purse, the one that she only used on the occasional boring (or sometimes disastrous) date. Scrolling past a bunch of irrelevant notifications, she found what she had been looking for. Opening the dating app, she slid over to the chat window, and reread over her messages.

"Here:)"

"In the back corner"

"By the window"

All of them are still showing unread. She sighed and began to type out "Are you still coming?" but quickly deleted the text, fighting rising tides of embarrassment inside of her. Molly hated how *incompetent* this aspect of life made her feel. She had been rigorously trained in firearms, espionage, and problem solving, knew how to spot miniscule details in a crime scene, could run faster than most women five years younger than her, and had spent fifty plus hours a week perfecting herself for her career as an FBI agent.

How could she be so *good* at so many things, but still be so bad at *this* thing? Molly had made it a point to avoid most anything that didn't come naturally to her, which turned out to be most everything but her job. All her life she had despised the feeling of being incompetent, of not being good at something straight away, *of not being able to save the people she cared about...*

Molly banished this thought, shaking her head and taking a quick nibble out of her right thumb nail. She sighed and, reluctantly, drained the last few sips of her white wine. The waiter casually but not so casually strolled over to her table.

"Would you like to take a look at the dinner menu ma'am?" The waiter said politely, his small hands folded in front of him. He was young, early twenties, probably still in college. Molly

reached for her credit card, and slid the blue piece of plastic across the white table cloth. The waiter glanced again at the empty seat across from her, and took the card without a word. The table vibrated slightly as her phone buzzed. Work emails. Non confidential ones, of course, but that meant that her evening was going to be all the more boring. Her eyes stopped on a particular email. A small groan of annoyance escaped her as she opened the notification that read:

“Reminder: Personal Evaluation”

The FBI’s policy on agent’s maintaining good mental health seemed very noble on paper, but Molly mostly considered the mandatory meetings to be both personally invasive and unnecessary. Her partner, Agent Barnes always seemed to enjoy the things, but who wouldn’t like someone telling them that they were “One of our most capable agents.” Josh Barnes enjoyed a lot of things that other people didn’t however, including racketball, doing his taxes, and bird watching of all things. Molly would have to remember to RSVP for her evaluation later tonight.

*Next Tuesday's going to be a blast...* She thought sarcastically, as the waiter dropped her credit card on the table, along with the receipt and a black pen. After signing away her consent to pay fifteen dollars and sixty seven cents on overpriced wine, she got up from the table and pulled her brand new dress further down her legs. *I knew it was too short...* She thought with annoyance. Pulling on her large over coat for the chilly April weather, she walked as confidently as she could out of the restaurant. Molly hoped that something interesting would happen at work this week, at least that might take her mind off of the ridiculous activity that was dating.

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Linda had been scared before. She remembered skydiving with David on their honeymoon in Jamaica. Back when she still loved David, anyway. He had wanted her to go with him, even though she had been apprehensive about the idea. The plane ride up had been bumpy

at best, and she could still remember the way the sky opened out into nothing just beyond the plane's wing tips. Just before the jump, she thought that she would pass out, or cry. She hated it whenever she let David see her cry, so she jumped.

But now she was on the ground. Safe, yet so afraid at the same time. In so much danger. How she wished to be sky diving right now. Glass shattered above her head with a resounding crack as another bullet took another life. She huddled down behind the lab bench, her hands trembling. Then all of the lights in the facility went out. No power, no alarm. No alarm, no help. Somehow the intruder had disabled even the back up generators in the basement. Her fingers dug frantically inside of her lab coat pocket, and they felt the smooth case of her phone. The soft blue screen illuminated her face in the dim room, and her trembling fingers again dialed a nine and two ones. Still nothing.

She was on her own. The footsteps in the next room grew louder, and shouts were heard from the other side of the door.

She looked up at the large blue poster next to her. It showed a wide shot of a marshy lake with a greyed out silhouette of a water fowl in the center. The words "Missing. Have you seen me?" Were above the lake scene in large, bold letters. Next to it was a large poster of a fossil seemingly coming to life in the form of a bird, its feathers lifting away from the rock. "The Second Fifth Day?" The light of another gunshot briefly illuminated the posters, and the resounding crack followed, causing Linda to start. More shouts came from the next room, echoing in through the destroyed pane separating the laboratory and the observing room.

Linda looked back at the posters hung on the wall next to her, and then she looked down a hallway leading off to her left. Clenching her fists, she ran as fast as she could as another gunshot exploded behind her. She burst into a stuffy room filled with softly glowing monitors

and computer banks. Gently floating DNA helices were on all of the screen savers, bobbing up and down in a soft up and down motion. Linda ducked underneath a nearby work station, pulling the chair in in front of her in order to further conceal her. She tried to slow her breathing, but it felt like there was no oxygen in the room.

Another gunshot sounded in the hallway beyond with a resounding crack, the flash lighting up the dark computer room. Linda's fingers instinctively moved to touch her wedding ring in the pocket of her lab coat, but they felt nothing but soft cloth, as she had stopped taking it to work. Footsteps sounded outside, but they weren't fast. They were slow, meticulous, casual even. Linda gripped the empty pocket of her lab coat tighter, trying to imagine the small golden ring was still in there. Tears blurred her vision as pictures of her daughter, Elise, swam in her mind. She could see her little brown curls bobbing up and down as she danced to "Ring Around the Rosie" for the hundredth time. The door to the computer room opened with a click, and Linda braced herself for the coming gunshot.

After a few moments of silence, she cracked an eye open. They, whoever they were, were accessing a terminal. A password protected terminal. She couldn't see much of anything in the dark, but what she did see made her blood run cold. Glowing on the screen were the words "Project Fifth Day", spelled out in harsh black lettering. She held her breath, not daring to take her eyes off the screen. After what seemed like an eternity, the words: "Download complete", quickly followed by: "Delete all?" A flash-drive was ripped out of the computer, and Linda let out a small gasp as another gunshot was discharged directly into the computer's terminal. A small fire sparked to life behind the desks and the room soon was filled with smoke.

Just as the intruder got to the door, their footsteps paused. Linda's veins ran with ice water. A final gunshot resounded through the now empty laboratory.

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Molly's headache was terrible, perhaps the wine had been even more overpriced than she thought. Cold water and two pain killers slid down her throat. Work was probably going to suck today. Tugging on her black tennis shoes in her dimly lit living room, she flicked the TV on to look at the news. A commercial for a nutritional breakfast bar ended, and upbeat french horns filled the living room as the title sequence played. A loud booming voice followed, making Molly's hangover flare.

"This is your 9 News morning update." The loud male voice said, just before "Breaking News" scrolled across the television screen in large red lettering. An African American woman with a tight bun and a blue blazer appeared, and she immediately started speaking.

"Breaking News this morning, as a fire broke out in a controversial lab in upstate New York late last night. Witnesses say that they saw smoke rising from Day5 lab around 12:30am, and they immediately called 911. Firefighters were able to save most of the structure, but lab coordinators say that the lab's scientific section was completely destroyed. New York police say that they believe that the cause of the fire was electrical, but they suspect foul play, as the controversial experiments being conducted in the lab sparked public outcry all over the country."

Molly leaned forward more intently, and turned up the volume.

"The New York Chief of Police has stated that a full federal investigation will be conducted, and no stone will be left unturned. Will take you now to our special correspondent Alex, who's on the ground with reverend Garry Gibbs, an outspoken opponent of Day5 labs, Alex..."



The scene shifted to display a wiry, 50 something man with thinning white hair. He was wearing the black cloak of a reverend with thick dark gloves. Another man, Alex apparently, was holding a microphone out to him.

“Thank you Mariah,” the reporter said, “I’m here with Reverend Garry Gibbs of the first Evangelical Church of New York, Reverend, you say that you were protesting the lab's activities the day before the fire, do you remember seeing anything suspicious?”

The reverend leaned in closer to the microphone, probably a little too close, as Alex the reporter pulled it back a few inches. When he spoke, his southern accent was heavy and thick.

“Like you said Alex, me and a few brothers and sisters in Christ were peacefully demonstrating our opposition to the blasphemy that was going on inside that lab. We didn’t see anyone else but our own people here yesterday evening.”

“I see,” Alex said, taking the microphone back from the reverend briefly, “And why are you so opposed to the research that's taking place at Day5 labs reverend?”

“Well Alex, the Bible tells us that on the fifth day of creation, God created fowl, and said that fowl may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. The Lord also declares that ‘Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above’. No matter the genetic technology, humanity, graven in our sin, are bound to misuse it as this lab has.” [1] The reverend was passionate as he spoke, and his breath condensed in large, poofy, swirling clouds before him.

“What these scientists are doing here, in trying to bring animals back to life is blatant *blasphemy* against God and his holy name. What's more is that they slander his almighty name by naming their lab after the fifth day of creation! Now...”

The reverend seemed to be about to say more, but Alex apparently had gotten more than he bargained for. He a little too abruptly pulled the microphone away from Reverend Gibbs, and turned back to face the camera head on.

“I’m afraid that’s all of the time that we have right now. Back to you, Mariah.”

The scenes shifted, and once again showed Mariah in the newsroom. She straightened her papers on her desk before her.

“Thank you Alex. We’ll continue to keep you updated on any developments in the investigation into the Day5 lab fire as we have them. Stay tuned for more information.”

Upbeat french horns once again sounded, and ‘Channel 9 News’ scrolled across the screen. Another commercial began to play, this one for a new type of heart medicine. Molly’s phone rang, and she scrambled for it. Quickly muting the TV, she swiped the green symbol and held the device to her ear.

“Hello? Yes I just saw it on the news. Looks like some people are really fired up about it.” Molly turned off the TV and moved towards the door, grabbing her coat and shoving her wallet inside of it, “I’ll meet Josh at the station, I just have to grab a few things...I’ll do my best Sir. Goodbye.”

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“Just pull over there by those House Sparrows!”

“The damn fire trucks in my way Josh!”

“No over there! Those are Henslow’s Sparrows...wow, they must be the one of the first flocks to return...”

Molly let out an exasperated sigh and pulled the squad car between a gap in the emergency vehicles, and parked it on a patch of dead grass in front of the remnants of the lab.

The front metal gate had been flung wide to let in the stream of emergency vehicles. The building had been severely damaged, with large sections of it still black from the fire that raged last night. It looked like it was once a beautiful structure, with large marble steps at the front, and wide glass paneling in a lot of places. The fire had tarnished much of the eastern side of the lab, and even burned up some of the dead, brown, mid April grass outside. *Why did it take so long for the fire department to be notified?* Molly thought, and slid the car into park, then looked over at Josh.

“What did I tell you about using bird species as indicators of direction Josh?” Molly asked, shooting him a cold stare. Josh was a thin man with striking green eyes and blonde hair that bunched up into curls and spilled over his eyes, despite his best efforts. His black jacket displayed his golden FBI badge on his left breast, but his uniform always seemed too big for him.

“After three years you still haven’t learned any of the basic species Molly. It’s good for agents to always be aware of their surroundings, you know!” Josh cracked a sly smile at her, “Plus sparrows are my favorites.”

“Well I’ll be sure to take down the next criminal I meet with a few fast bird facts...” Molly said sarcastically, and smiled slightly, looking over the blackened remains of the lab. Josh undid his seat belt and looked over at her.

“Probably work better than your usual attempts at hand to hand combat.” Josh sneered, chuckling. At this Molly broke into a full smile. Josh could be...eccentric...and tiring. He had been her partner for three years now, and was probably one of her closest “friends”. She always put the quotation marks there because they never spent time with each other after work. Not that either of them had much time for anything after work, with their 14 hour days. Plus Josh watched

*birds* on his days off, and she couldn't think of anything more boring than staring at the same little brown creature for hours on end. She didn't know Josh *that* well, but she always appreciated how he never took their job too seriously, and always seemed to be ready with a witty comment.

“Wasn't it my hand to hand combat moves that pinned you during the last workshop?” Molly said with a smile, and got out of the car.

“I'm not sure I remember that...” Josh joked, and followed Molly through the maze of emergency vehicles, forensics specialist, and street officers. A cold wind blew through the pine trees surrounding the facility, the last remnants of winter trying to hold on. Molly pulled her black jacket tighter as she strolled up to the fire captain.

“Agent Harris, Agent Barnes.” He said, and gave her and Josh each a quick hand shake.

“What do we have here Captain?” Molly asked, surveying the remnants of the lab.

“Fire was reported by a local around 12:30 last night when she saw the glow and smoke rising from the hilltop. She called 911 immediately, but here's the funny thing, none of the fire alarms in the building have been triggered. The sprinkler systems didn't even go off, and no one from inside the building called for help. The lab's director said that the staff was working late, and multiple bodies have been recovered.”

“Any idea of what started the fire?” Josh asked.

“We believe that it was arson, some sort of electrical propellant, but we aren't sure yet.” The fire chief answered, and began walking towards the lab. The three of them began climbing the marble stairs out front, ducking under police tape as they did so. Broken glass covered the steps, and little yellow evidence markers were everywhere.

“Why do you believe it was arson?” Molly said as they stood atop of the steps, and looked out over the pine forest that surrounded the laboratory. The fire chief motioned and a forensic specialist came up to the fire chief, and handed him an evidence bag. Molly took it and held it up to the light. A single gray bullet was inside, and it glinted slightly in the sunlight.

“None of the scientists inside died from smoke inhalation or from burns. Every single body we’ve found has had at least one of these inside of it.”

Molly handed the bag back to the forensics specialist, “Get me a trace on that bullet.”

The specialist nodded and jogged off. Suddenly a commotion at the edge of the lab’s perimeter caught her attention. A large group of people with signs were being pushed back by a few police officers. The signs had things like “Say No to GMO!” and “De-extinction is playing God!” and lastly “Genesis 1:20” with a few pictures of birds on it.

“What exactly did this lab even do?” Molly asked, as more police officers rushed to force the crowd back. They all went reluctantly, but kept shouting and yelling. They seemed angry, afraid.

“Something with ‘De-extinction’ I think. Sounds like Jurassic Park[8] to me.” The fire chief said, and scratched his head, “You’ll probably want someone else to explain it to you. I just read the website, and it was a little bit beyond my pay grade...”

Molly pulled out her phone and quickly Googled “Day5 labs”. The first few articles were about the fire, but she found their website a little bit further down. It was well put together, with a wide shot of a marshy lake being the backdrop for the home page. “The Second Fifth Day?” large blue lettering asked across the top. Molly clicked on the tab labeled: “Research” and poured over the text.

“Fifth day?” Molly wondered aloud.

“Biblical creation reference?” Josh piped in, “Must be the day birds were created or something...” He pointed to all of the pictures of waterfowl, scattered across the website's blue page.

Molly nodded, and read the site's research description aloud: “Our lab focuses on utilising an advanced form of CRISPR-Cas9 [2],[3] genetic splicing technology, as well as a revolutionary new delivery system, named the Lazarus Vector, to genetically modify the DNA sequence of an animal in order to bring back extinct species from the dead. Our primary project is the Alatora Grebe. Day5 labs is working on utilizing genetic splicing techniques to reintroduce the Alaotra Grebe, a waterfowl native to Lake Alaotra in Madagascar that has recently gone extinct in 2010. This revolutionary genetic technology could be used to re-introduce species that have died off because of climate change, along with habitat restoration and other restorative measures.” Molly read the website's statement of purpose allowed for everyone.

Josh looked at her with a confused look on his face, “So they’re...making a bird?”

“An extinct one it seems like...” Molly said and went back to the main search page. She scrolled down a little bit further and one particular article caught her eye.

“NYU’s own Dr. Amiee Wise condemns Day5 labs.” the article read. Clicking on the link, her eyes flicked through the article. Her eyes narrowed on the words “unethical” and “absolutely disgraceful”

“What is it?” Josh asked, Trying to look over her shoulder at the article.

“It seems as though NYU’s Dr. Wise was a very outspoken opponent of Day5 labs...” Molly said, and quickly googled the university's address, “I think that we should pay her a visit. At the very least she may be able to explain some of this stuff to us...”

*15 dollars for parking?* Molly wasn't paying that. She had located Dr. Wise's office on the tenth floor of the biology building with a few quick google searches, and the professor had agreed to speak with them. Molly could find out almost everything about someone in less than fifteen minutes if she wanted too, but apparently finding parking took at least a half hour.

"It makes you wonder how they all get to class..." Josh said sarcastically, not taking his eyes off of his phone.

"You can at least help me look for parking space Josh." Molly said, wincing as another car honked at her. She pushed down her desire to make an obscene gesture at the other driver. The large, black government issued SUV she drove wasn't made for the tight, inner city streets that wound their way through the university campus, like roots permeating a hard, concrete soil. As if to add to the stress of the busy intersection she was in, her phone rang. Switching the device to play the call through the car's speakers, she answered.

"Hello?" She asked without looking at the caller ID.

"Is this Agent Harris?" A deep male voice said.

"Speaking." Molly replied.

"Agent Harris, I'm Dr. Cortez, I'm the ethics board director for Day5 labs, and I think that you all should be taking this case much more seriously. The technology in that lab could be dangerous in the wrong hands..."

"Dr. Cortez, first of all, we take all of our cases seriously, and second of all how did you get this number?" Molly retorted quickly.

"My apologies, agent, but I pulled some strings in your administration because I needed to talk to you directly..."

“Dr. Cortez, you have my condolences for your lab and the lives lost, and I assure you that we’re working as fast as we can to find out who’s responsible.” Molly looked over her shoulder and flicked her blinker, trying to force a merge into the left lane.

“Thank you, Agent Harris, but I just wanted to make sure you have all the facts when you’re going about solving this robbery.” Dr. Cortez said. Molly froze for a moment, thinking.

“I never said anything about a robbery...” She said, and looked over at Josh.

“I know, I’m telling you this wasn’t just a hate crime. I know that there are people who are apprehensive about the type of research our lab is doing. I’m one of those people too, I was worried from the start about how the research might be used for unethical purposes. I’ve been pushing the team for results that we could use *ethically*, in order to shake some of the bad press we’ve been receiving. But the lab’s security is pretty tight, and no one would go through the trouble of getting through all of that just for some old fashion vengeance.”

“So why do you think that the lab was burned?” Molly asked, trying to read into Cortez’s every word. It was difficult while trying to navigate the maze of traffic that swirled around the busy campus.

“I think that the fire was just to cover evidence. Our latest breakthrough involved a computer program that could modify an organism’s genetic code within an accuracy never seen before, and contained the complete protocol for creating Lazarus Vectors, a state of the art delivery system that can quickly and effectively modify the genetic code of a living animal. If someone were to have taken the computer program for coding and making those Lazarus Vectors before the lab was destroyed, the things they could do with that technology could be far more unethical than simply bringing back an extinct bird.”

Molly let out a sigh of relief as she finally found an open space.



“What type of unethical things, doctor?” She asked as she put the car in park.

“The human cloning, world ending plague type of unethical Agent Harris...I’ve checked and double checked our back up databases from our other labs, and every trace of the Lazarus computer program has been erased from our cloud storage.” Dr. Cortez was silent for a while, and Molly looked over at Josh. His face was serious, but he seemed to be staring past her, lost in thought. Finally he caught her eyes and mouthed, “Suspect?” Molly nodded in agreement, deciding to go with Josh’s gut on this one. After all, this Dr. Cortez appeared to know a lot of sensitive information about the inner workings of Day5 labs.

“Dr. Cortez, would it be alright if we interviewed you sometime tomorrow?” Molly asked, and quickly wrote down his name.

“Yes of course! I’m free tomorrow morning...would you like my phone number or home address?”

“Oh don’t worry about all of that, we’ll find you sure enough. And Dr. Cortez?” Molly said with a slight edge to her voice.

“Yes?”

“I wouldn’t leave town for a few days.”

“Ohh...I-I see.” Dr. Cortez said reluctantly, just now realizing how his plethora of insider knowledge might seem suspicious to the FBI agents, “Now I have an alibi, you see my secretary saw me leave around 6pm and I...”

“We’ll talk to you about it when we see you, doctor.” Molly stated, and hung up the phone. She looked over at Josh.

“Well I think that ‘Dr. Cortez’ sounded awfully suspicious, wouldn’t you say? Knowing so much about the crime scene? ‘The fire was just a cover up’?” Josh asked, undoing his seatbelt.

“Hmmm...I don’t know...” Molly said skeptically, “If this really was a robbery, the thief was smart enough to jam telecommunications, I doubt that he’d call the FBI the day after the robbery...right?”

Josh just shrugged, “At least we have a parking spot.”

“We do have a parking spot...” Molly replied, smiling. Hopefully this interview with Dr. Wise took a while, she didn’t want to have to drive into the maelstrom that was campus traffic ever again.

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The tenth floor of the biology building was composed of tight, interlocking hallways flanked by large glass windows looking out into the street below. Molly gave the door entitled Dr. Amiee Wise, PhD Biochemistry, a crisp one-two knock. The door opened to reveal a short, pale skinned woman with dark hair and thick rimmed glasses. Molly stepped forward, proffering her hand to the small woman.

“Dr. Wise, thank you, again, for meeting with us.” Molly said, and the woman took her hand in cold fingers for a shake.

“Agent Harris, Agent Barns, please come in...” Molly and Josh followed Dr. Wise into her office, the small room was lit with the soft grey light of mid April, and it looked as though someone had blown up a small library inside. Books and stacks of papers covered almost every square inch of the office, and Dr. Wise had to clear a chair for Josh to sit down on.

“What can I do for you detectives?” Dr. Wise asked, seating herself behind her desk, shuffling some papers in front of her nervously. Josh slid a manila file folder across the table towards Dr. Wise, and opened it slightly to reveal a few screen grabs. They were articles about Day5 labs, and some of her comments about their research.

“I’m sure that you’ve heard about the fire Day5 labs yesterday evening Dr. Wise.”

“Yes, yes I did,” Dr. Wise answered, looking down at her hands, “I know that me and Day5 have had differences of opinion in the past, but it's always a tragedy when scientists lose their lives doing what they believe in...”

“Dr. Wise,” Josh began, flicking his blond hair over his forehead as he spoke, “You’ve been a very outspoken opponent of the research conducted at Day5 labs in the past....why do you believe that what they’re doing is so unethical?”

“It’s not that I’m against reintroduction of species agents, but anytime we try and change an ecosystem artificially and suddenly, there are often a lot of unintended consequences. Simply de-extincting a single species doesn't mean that an ecosystem will automatically return to normal, nature is far more complex than that. Plus the large price tag placed on de-extinction [4] projects often takes money away from other conservation methods that *actually* work.” Molly quickly jotted down some notes as Dr. Wise spoke.

“Doctor, how does one ‘de-extinct’ a species, exactly?” Molly asked, twirling her pen in her fingers.

“Well there are a few different methods of doing it...the one Day5 labs has perfected primarily has to do with cutting and slicing specific parts of an organism's genetic code to make it into another organism. This usually only works if the genetic code you start with is very close to the one you’re trying to change it into, like Day5 utilizes cells from a similar species of waterfowl in its attempt to clone the Alotra Grebe. However, even with a very close species, you would have to make a plethora of changes to the starting organism's genetic code, thousands, millions maybe.” [3]

Molly's pen flew furiously across her notepad, trying to keep up, but Dr. Wise continued without slowing, "CRISPR-cas9 is essentially a genetic "cut and paste". CRISPR cuts where a guide RNA, essentially a genetic targeting system, tells it to. Then all you have to do is insert the donor DNA voila! You've edited some DNA. Do this enough times in the sperm and egg cells of a couple of birds and you've got de-extinction."

"So you essentially just copy and paste a correct piece of DNA where you want it to go?" Josh asked, looking skeptical.

"The entire process is not quite that simple. One needs to know exactly *where* to cut, *what* to paste, and have the ability to do it to a ton of cells at the same time. That's where Day5 labs' computer software comes in. I've heard them claim that they can not only accurately map out thousands of genetic changes at a time, but their acclaimed "Lazarus Vector" can make these edits to millions of cells in a tenth of the time of other methods. That's the true miracle to come out of Day5 labs if you ask me. The ability to modify the genetic codes of large groups of cells relatively quickly can have tons of applications in conservation and in medicine. That's the part of all this that I deem as the most dangerous."

"Why is that?" Molly asked, "I obviously don't remember as much tenth grade biology as Josh here, but what's so dangerous about changing small bits of DNA?"

"The dangerous part, agent, is that by changing small parts of the DNA of an organism, you can change small parts of that organism." Dr. Wise looked sternly over her glasses.

"I'm...not sure I follow..." Molly said, trying to jot down a few more notes in a cramped handwriting.

“Let's say that I modified a strain of infectious bacteria just a little bit, but the part that I modified was the part that made it susceptible to penicillin? Suddenly there's a worldwide plague that is no longer susceptible to most antibiotics. Millions would die.”

“Ok...” Molly said, jotting down ‘Pandemic??’, “What else might someone want this technology for?”

Dr. Wise tapped her long fingers on the desk before her, “Well, there's been some recent studies that have shown that the aerosolized delivery of naked mRNA is possible...[5]”

“What could that do? Vaporize the technology somehow?” Josh asked.

“Well, it could be used to edit someone's genetic code on the fly...for instance you could change someone's levels of base immunity to say, anthrax, with a simple nasal inhalant. Experiments are already being done to try and reverse blindness caused by genetic defects, but a weaponized version of the Lazarus Vector could cause permanent genetic damage to your eyes instead of reversing it. [9] You could also modify someone's genetic code without them knowing, which could also have deadly consequences...I'm sorry agents, there's just too little research and far too much potential in this area for me to give you any definite clues. All I know is that I wouldn't want that technology ending up in the wrong hands.”

“Dr. Wise, why are you so certain that someone stole this genetic technology? We haven't ruled out a terrorist attack or foul play by anti-genetic activists yet...” Josh said. Molly remembered the crowds of angry people outside of Day5 labs, their crudely painted signs waving about on the end of painting sticks.

“If you wanted to rob a bank and get away with it, wouldn't you try to make everyone think that it burned down with all the money inside?” Dr. Wise proposed. Molly's lips tightened to a line.

“I hadn’t considered that...Is there anything else you can tell us, doctor?” Molly asked, folding her pad of scribbled notes up and sliding it into her coat pocket.

“I don’t think so, I just want to urge you both that you may be working on the genetic equivalent of refined uranium.” Dr. Wise said as she stood, and Molly was once again the recipient of a firm hand shake from cold fingers. Once out in the hallway again, she checked her phone and turned to Josh.

“Well that's two people now that believe that some sort of genetic robbery took place.” Molly sifted through her messages, looking for anything important.

“I know...” Josh replied, “Either both Dr. Wise and Dr. Cortez are the best criminal team ever, or the attacker took something when they entered the lab.” Josh ran his fingers through his ruffled blonde hair.

“Regardless, we need to get more evidence that a robbery took place, and that someone could actually do something sinister with the technology.” Molly said as she punched the down button on the elevator.

“Someone could also have stolen the technology with the desire to sell it, make a quick buck? One of the employees perhaps?” Josh stepped through the opening elevator doors and hit the button for the ground floor.

“Perhaps...we’re going to need to know who had access to that lab, and if any of those people had a possible motive...it would be a lot easier for an employee to simply walk in and steal the technology than to break in some other way.”

“I agree, hopefully Dr. Cortez can help us out with that...do you really think that we could be dealing with some sort of superweapon here?” Josh asked after a pause. Molly sighed as

the elevator doors opened up to the ground floor. She could see where their car was parked, just down the row.

“I’m not sure Josh, let’s just focus on collecting evidence for now.” As she began to move towards the doors, Josh nodded his head towards a nearby men’s room and said, “Meet you by the car.”

Molly nodded, understanding, and emerged out into the crisp mid-April air, and pulled her coat tighter against the cold. It felt as though it may snow soon, the patchy overcast sky strewn with passing clouds. Spring’s reaching hands hadn’t quite taken the weather from winter’s cold grip just yet. Her pocket began to vibrate with sound and noise, and she slid her phone’s green ‘answer’ symbol over with already chilled fingers.

“Hello?...Yes I spoke to him, Cortez had a lot of the same things to say about the attack as Dr. Wise did, we’ll head there first thing tomorrow morning...Yes, Dr. Wise seems to think we were dealing with foul play as well...What did the ballistics trace turn up?...Well that’s quite an old revolver...” Molly said as a frown drew across on her face, her lips pressing to a line. *A Colt single action army revolver...* She thought, *Not my first choice for breaking and entering...it’s also probably old enough to be unregistered...*

“I’ll keep you posted.” She said quickly, and hung up the phone. Molly began to move towards the row of meters and cars that ran down the street, parallel to the sidewalk sparsely populated with passing students. As she got closer, she spotted a man in an orange vest near their vehicle. An orange piece of paper fluttered in his hands briefly before he stuck it underneath the wiper of the black SUV. Cursing under her breath, Molly picked up her pace and tried to wave to the meter maid.

As she approached, the young man looked up, seemingly exasperated at having to deal with yet another disgruntled motorist. Molly began to say something about being on government business, but she was thrown to the ground, all of the air leaving her lungs. Her ears rang with the sounding of a thousand church bells, and she could taste the metallic tang of blood in her mouth. Coughing and rising to her feet, her hearing began to return. Shouts and dust filled the air around her, and she looked over to what had caused the explosion.

The SUV's mangled corpse stood lying on its side, the parking sign in front of it mangled and twisted. A soft cloud of white dust fell over everything, making it look like it had begun snowing. She slid her hand inside of her coat pocket, and undid the safety on her 9mm pistol. She didn't take it from its concealed holster, but rather just kept her hand underneath her jacket so as to not cause further panic. Students streamed away from the blast like deer fleeing a gunshot, and the sound of sirens came faintly from the distance. A soft crunching sound came from behind her, and she spun, leveling her pistol.

"Josh!" She exclaimed, and lowered her weapon. He also had his pistol drawn, and was looking around, a wary expression on his face. Molly pushed some frazzled hair out of her face and stepped closer to him.

"Authorities are already on their way..." Josh said, checking nearby rooftops for shooters. He then turned to Molly, "Are you hurt?" She could see the genuine concern in his green eyes, and she noticed that his pistol grip was tighter than usual. Molly smiled softly.

"I'm fine, my jacket is a little worse for wear however." She nodded to the torn sleeve on the upper right arm of the coat. Josh's eyes lost a little bit of their harsh gleam, as he touched her arm where the jacket had ripped. She could feel his fingers searching for any wounds.



Her eyes fixed on a torn piece of orange fluorescent jacket, hanging from a warped piece of blackened metal. Josh stared at the small piece of singed cloth, blowing slightly in the breeze.

“Come on, let's get you out of the open.” Josh led her away, still holding her arm.

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A manila folder slapped to the table in front of Molly. It was followed by a cup of hot coffee in a styrofoam cup. Molly reached for the folder, pushing the cup of coffee aside as she did. She leafed through the pictures of twisted metal and charred concrete, pausing on a picture with many yellow markers, showing the location of bone fragments. She sighed and closed the folder.

“Whoever did it knew what they were doing. No fingerprints other than ours on the vehicle, simple time activated, mercury based ignition of the fuel tank.” Josh said, pacing back and forth in the small room, reading from another manila folder, “There’s no way to know how long that bomb was there, demolition says that it had an internal timer, and could arm itself remotely. A simple bump from anyone nearby and bang....the entire fuel tank goes up.”

The break room at the FBI was run down and dilapidated, and hadn’t been renovated since the 70s, but that matched Mollys current mood. Run down and in need of encouragement. After being cleared by the EMT team, Molly and Josh were ferried back to headquarters with a police escort. They were both asked to spend the night at the station, at least until the FBI had a better lead on who planted the bomb. After being given an overdone pizza and a change of clothes, they were both left to continue their work on the case, but neither of them had felt like getting much done.

The car bombing was already all over the news when they returned, and the “Genetic Hijinx” story, as it was now being called, was lighting up all major news outlets. With only one solid lead so far, Dr. Cortez, the administrative pressure was mounting.

Molly didn’t want to think about all that right now. The image of the torn safety vest, flapping lazily in the wind filled her mind once again, but she quickly banished the thought. She *hated* feeling this way, helpless to save someone. Feeling like the whole world was out of her control, feeling like she should have checked the car, or at least seen something, some clue that would have turned her onto the bomb.

“Do they have any suspect leads at all?” Molly asked as she blew aggressively on the overheated coffee. Josh shook his head.

“They didn’t see anyone approach the car before that meter-maid, so they believe that the bomb must have been planted on the vehicle before we arrived at the university.” Josh leaned against a far wall, running his fingers through his locks of blonde hair.

“It was planted on *our* car Josh.” Molly said, staring down into the swirling black liquid between her hands, “We should have seen it coming, there had to have been some clue, or some tip off...What about when we stopped at the gas station?”

“One of us was with the car the whole time, they couldn’t have planted the bomb then.” Josh said.

“Did anyone approach the car when I went inside?” Molly asked, looking up, “Anyone get behind you perhaps?”

“No, not a soul.” Josh let out a sigh and returned to pacing, “I was by the car the whole time, and I didn’t see anyone. It must have been planted before we even left HQ...”

“I should have checked the car before we left...” Molly muttered under her breath. Josh was silent for a moment and then slowly took the seat across from her.

“Molly, we need to focus on finding out who did this. Whoever they are, they don’t want us looking into what happened at Day5 labs...Anyone could have missed that bomb, we had no way of knowing.” Josh stared at her with concern, but she didn’t meet his green eyes. Molly fought down the urge to nibble at her fingernails, her nervous tick wouldn’t help her now.

“When can we meet with Dr. Cortez?” Molly asked, and tried to take a sip of the coffee. It was still too hot, and her tongue stung with its bitter, burnt taste.

“We’ve got a meeting with him tomorrow morning. He’s been told to not leave his home, and he seems compliant, but we’ve got a stake out on him just in case.” Josh explained, “In the meantime, we should probably get some shut eye. The agency wants us to sleep here tonight, just in case there’s another attack of some sort. They’ve already collected us a change of clothes.”

Molly didn’t say anything, and let one of her hands drift towards her mouth. Gnawing on her thumb nail, she remembered the beat up couches just outside of the break room. She had slept on them before, usually because she was pulling an all-nighter on a case. They weren’t as hard as the ground, but they still didn’t make the best beds. She slid the coffee away from her, and began to stand up.

“Hey...” Molly looked down to see Josh’s hand on her arm, “You good Molly? You’ve seen homicide before, but this one seems to have you pretty torn up...”

Molly let out a long sigh, and pulled her arm away from his, “I’m fine Josh, I think that I’m just tired.”

Josh gave her a flat look, and she knew that he didn't believe her, "Well, probably best you get some rest..." He nodded towards one of the couches just outside of the door, "If you need anything, I'll be right over there, destroying the hell outta my spine."

Molly smiled slightly at his attempt at humor, more for his sake than hers, "I'm going to go wash up, I'll talk to you in the morning."

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"Come on grandpa! Hurry up!" A young girl bounded up the rocky trail, the vast mountains of northern Colorado behind her. Bird song filled the pine trees, and the wind whistled softly through the green grass nearby. Molly's brown curls bobbed up and down as her small form hopped from rock to rock, avoiding the dirt on the trail below.

"I'm coming, I'm coming!" a deep voice called from behind her. Molly put her hands on her hips at the top of the hill, and looked down at her grandfather, slowly picking his way over the rocky trail, his wooden walking stick making soft thuds as he climbed. The wind ruffled his thin, grey hair, and sweat glistened on his brow. After what seemed like ages, her grandfather finally reached the top of the hill. Much to Molly's dismay, he immediately made his way over to a log and sat down.

"Sit and rest with me for a moment Molly..." Her grandfather said, and patted the log next to him. Reluctantly, Molly sat beside him, and stared off at the small brown trail that continued down the hill before them, and then disappeared into a dark green forest of pine trees. Molly could see the lake just beyond the forest, and could see her and her parents bright orange tents near the shoreline. Jagged peaks capped with snow rose behind the lake in the distance, looking as if they were trying to tear a hole in the bright blue sky above. Molly kicked her shoes absently, and looked over at her grandfather, who seemed to be staring off into space.

“You know when I was younger, I hiked all over these mountains. I even hiked to the top of some of them...” The elderly man said, still breathing a little bit heavily.

“Did you climb any of those ones?” Molly asked eagerly, pointing to the snow capped spikes in the distance.

“Actually I did...” Her grandfather said, and pointed, “Do you see that big one between the two smaller ones? I climbed *that* one.”

“Wow, that must have been really hard! Could you see the ocean from up there?” Molly asked. This drew a laugh from her grandfather, who replied, “No, no Molly-polly I couldn’t see the ocean from there, it’s too far away.”

Molly looked disappointed at this revelation, but her grandfather leaned in closer, his old grey eyes twinkling, “I did see a mountain lion one time!”

Scooting closer to her grandfather, her hands clasped in excitement, Molly exclaimed, “Ooo tell me about that! Did it try to eat you?”

“I was too fast for it!” Her grandfather said, smiling broadly, “Me and your great uncle Issac were training to hike a mountain called, “Pikes Peak” when we came across him...big old thing, walking not 200 yards from us across a ridge top. I don’t think that the lion even saw us, but that was the first and only time I got beat by Issac in a foot race!”

Molly giggled at this, and then asked, “What’s Pikes Peak?”

“Well, that’s the tallest mountain in the whole state Molly, in fact it’s taller than anything from here to the east coast!”

“Wow! Did you climb it?” Molly pressed eagerly, and clasped her small hands together in excitement.

“No, no I never did.” Her grandfather sighed.

“Well why not? You climbed a lot of other mountains!”

“Well I was training for it, but then I twisted my ankle pretty bad on some loose rocks, and by the time I was able to be on my feet again, me and grandma had your dad to take care of, so there wasn't much time for hiking...”

“So you climbed all of those mountains for nothing!” Molly exclaimed, and crossed her arms in a pout.

“Ohh I wouldn't say that...” Her grandfather began but Molly cut him off.

“You spent all that time hiking and training, but you didn't even climb the tallest one!”

“Well now Molly, even if I didn't climb the tallest mountain, it doesn't mean that I didn't have a good experience. Just because I didn't succeed doesn't make me a fool for trying.”

Molly bit a large chunk out of her right thumb nail, and thought this over, “So you don't feel like you wasted your time? You don't regret not climbing Peak's Pike at all?”

“It's Pikes Peak dear, and of course I regret not climbing it! Too many people nowadays only do something if they know that they can succeed at it...Summiting that mountain was a lifelong dream of mine, one which I worked very hard for. But just because I didn't climb the highest mountain doesn't mean that all the beautiful scenery I saw or the time I spent with your great uncle was a waste. In fact, looking back I think that I'd rather take another day hike with your great uncle than climb to that peak a thousand times...” Her grandfather got a far off look in his eyes.

Molly's mother had told her that her great uncle Issac had passed away some years ago. Everyone had seemed really sad about it, even though Molly had never met the man. Molly deduced from this that he must have been very nice.

They sat in silence for a while, before her grandfather said, “Well, we should probably get going, I’m sure your mom’s got supper ready. Now help me down these rocks so I don’t throw my back out...”

He reached down and clasped Molly’s hand, her small pudgy fingers enclosed by his old and bony ones. Molly smiled slightly. She felt both sad, and a little bit happy, but she couldn’t figure out exactly why. It was the strangest thing, like whenever it rains and the sun’s out. Grandpa seemed like he missed his brother a lot, but he walked down the trail with a small smile on his face. Shouldn’t talking about his brother make him sad? *Adults are so weird sometimes...* Molly thought, leading her grandfather further down the trail.

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Molly’s eyes snapped open as a ringing telephone pestered her ear drums. The crook in her neck was bad, but not as bad as the one in her lower back. She closed her eyes, and ran over the case details again in her mind. *Bad press, stolen technology, a strange gun, no fingerprints...why would the thief be so through about fingerprints but not care about the bullets they left behind?*

This train of thought was interrupted by Josh walking over to her, already dressed and cleaned up, “You ready to go?” he asked, and proffered her a manila folder. Inside was a file on Dr. Cortez, complete with a picture of the man. He was tall, hispanic, and may have been considered handsome a couple decades ago. Soft flecks of grey peppered his beard, and his brown eyes seemed to convey a charismatic personality. Molly read his profile aloud:

“Doctor Fernando Cortez, 54 years old, Phd in biomedical engineering, director of the board of ethics overseeing the Funding of the “Day 5” experimental genetic project. Seems like he should know more about this project than anyone...”

“I agree,” Josh said, “ Hopefully he can give us some leads on other possible suspects, or at least drop a bit of incriminating evidence for us.”

After a short car ride, during which Josh only pointed out two different species of birds, far less than usual, both agents found themselves standing in front of a large, white house with a silvery Lexus in the driveway. The grass was cut nearly golf course short, and looked well groomed, despite it still having the brown tinge of winter on it. The door opened to reveal the same man from the file folder, dressed in a thin grey suit with the top button undone.

“Ahh Agents, I was wondering when you would all arrive, please, please, come in.” Dr. Cortez said, roughly shaking both of their hands. Molly had to stop herself from making a face as her nostrils were assaulted by a strong, musky cologne. Apparently the man hadn’t learned a two spritz limit, or his sense of smell had deteriorated beyond repair.

Cortez led the agents inside of the house, and it wasn’t what Molly would call lavish, but it certainly wasn’t a studio apartment. The floors were all either black and white tile or a beautifuly beige carpet. Dr. Cortez led them to the living room, where a large, white couch sat facing the television and a finished wooden coffee table covered in small pastries. Their sugar crusted tops glistened in the morning sunlight.

“Please, please, sit.” Dr. Cortez said, and gestured to the couch. Molly and Josh took out their pads to write, but as they did, Dr. Cortez proffered both of them the tray of little pastries and mini donuts, “Refreshment?”

“No, thank you.” Molly said, and clicked the top of her pen, and did her best to hide her repulsion at the sting of another pungent whiff of cologne, “Dr. Cortez, when we spoke on the phone last, you were adamant that the fire that took place at Day5 labs was there to cover up a robbery, is that correct?”



Dr. Cortez folded his hands in front of him and leaned back in his chair, “Look, maybe this was some sort of hate crime, goodness knows we had our enemies. However, I don’t think that someone would go through all that trouble and not take credit for it, wouldn’t you all agree?”

“We can’t rule anything out yet, but we have mounting evidence that’s pointing us in that direction.” Josh said, scribbling down some notes, “What can you tell us about the employees of the Day5 labs? Were they all happy with their work? Were any of them fired recently?”

“No, no one has been let go for years now. Most of our employees are scientists who adamantly believe that genetic de-extinction could be a crucial tool to helping the reversal of climate change and the restoration of ecosystems.” Cortez explained.

“Did any of them have concerns about the ethical nature of Day5 labs?” Molly asked.

“Not necessarily,” Cortez replied, running his hands together in his lap, “Most had their own opinions about the future of the technology, but they all knew that the type of genetic editing we were doing in the lab was preliminary to an actual re-introduction of an extinct species. Day5 was more about showing how species could be brought back from the dead, not necessarily pumping out extinct grebes like a factory.”

Cortez continued, “Most of the arguments against de-extinction come from the unethically of reintroducing animals without rhyme or reason. A real reintroduction of any species would have to be coordinated with local governments and environmental groups to have any significant impact, and all of our scientists knew that.”

“Did Day5 ever actually produce the bird? De-extinct it, I mean...” Josh asked.

“Yes, indeed we did. With our state of the art computer program, we were able to map out thousands of simultaneous DNA changes at once. The real magic, however, was the Lazarus

Vector delivery system. The novel technology allowed us to get CRISPR and guide RNA into cells with an efficacy never before achieved! [10]

Think of it like being able to change a bunch of words in a book all at once, and if you change enough of them, and if you change the right words, the entire story changes all together. This is essentially what the Lazarus Vector ended up doing, we edited the genes in the sperm and egg cells of water fowl similar to our target species, and then mated the birds as normal. We ended up with four healthy, de-extinct Alaotra Grebes. A second fifth day indeed.” Dr. Cortez beamed at this.

“Where are the birds now?” Molly asked.

“They all perished in the fire unfortunately, along with most of our experimental data and lab equipment. I believe that I told you already all traces of our research or the computer program have been wiped from our cloud databases. The board hasn’t heard back from the insurance companies yet, but science aside, we lost a lot more than some expensive gizmos in that fire...”

“I’m sorry for your loss Dr. Cortez, but I assure you that we’ll find out whomever did this.” Molly reassured, “We know that Day5 labs had been the subject of both scientific and religious condemnation, were there any particular groups that posed significant threats to the lab or its employees?”

“Well...” Dr. Cortez thought for a moment, “we *technically* had a few threats, both from ecological activists and some religious groups, but these were more your run of the mill angry email, not a specific threat. The NYPD also deemed them all harmless.”

“Did any one of these emails in particular stand out?” Josh asked.

“Not that I can recall...most critiques that we receive fall into one of two categories: Either a rejection of the concept that de-extinction could actually be helpful in restoring biodiversity in an ecosystem, or that the lab’s de-extinction efforts “play God” so to speak. [6] Most of the ecological discenters tended to be adamantly against anything that came out of a lab, from GMO apples to extinct birds, but those that opposed our work for religious, spiritual, or just plain “we shouldn’t be messing with this” reasons tended to be the more outspoken.”

“Did either of these two groups of people seem violent to you Dr.?” Molly pressed, her pen flying across the white notepad before her.

“Hmm, well both groups seemed passionate about what they were saying, many conservationists were infuriated that we would spend millions on research for a potentially ecologically disastrous de-extinction of a single species, when that money could have gone to other conservation efforts. Most of the ‘playing God’ folks were more concerned that human beings were essentially creating and modifying life.[7] However, neither groups seemed to be moved towards violence because of their beliefs, and destroying a single lab wouldn’t halt de-extinction research, and it certainly wouldn’t stop the advance of the CRISPR-Cas9 gene editing technology we perfected, there are lots of people working with this pair of genetic scissors.”

Molly tapped her pen on the side of the notebook. A million thoughts ran through her head. *The employees at the lab have no motive...She thought, They wouldn’t work there if they didn’t at least somewhat believe in the project. A rogue eco-terrorist hiding among them perhaps? They probably would have claimed the attack by now...theft does seem the mostly likely option, especially if the technology could potentially be weaponized...but who stole it?*

“Is there anyone else you can think of, Doctor?” Molly prodded, “Maybe one of the board members? You yourself said that you said that you have your own reservations about the research at the lab, did anyone else share your opinion?”

Dr. Cortez leaned forward, “I did have my own reservations about the lab’s research, mostly because I didn’t want the technology being used for any unethical purposes, either through a misuse of de-extinction that could cause some sort of ecological disaster, or through some other nefarious means, biological weapons and such. A few other board members were concerned, but mostly with negative media attention we might acquire from essentially attempting ‘Jurassic Park’[8] with birds.”

“But you don’t believe that any of them were vehemently against the experiments being conducted at Day5 do you?” Molly looked over at Dr. Cortez, studying his relaxed posture and calm demeanor. *If he’s hiding something, he’s hiding it well...*

“No,” Dr. Cortez continued, “Most of the board is too worried about how the public image of Day5 will affect their DOW Jones investments the next day, not necessarily on the religious or ethical questions proposed by such a scientific endeavour. Plus with their cushy bank accounts, most of them have no reason to steal the technology just to sell it for profit.”

Molly’s lips drew to a line, and she resisted the urge to bite her nails. The case was growing colder by the second, but it seemed that whoever had stolen the technology had wanted it bad enough to kill for, which wasn’t a good sign.

“Dr. Cortez, before we go, we have to ask you where you were the night of the robbery, it’s not to be accusatory, we’re just trying to be thorough.” Josh said, and looked directly into the doctor’s eyes. The man straightened up a little bit and leaned forward, clearing his throat before speaking.

“Well, that evening I spent the night at home and turned in early. I had a few meetings early the next day, and I still had to prepare a lot of my work for them.” Dr. Cortez explained.

“Is there anyone who can corroborate your alibi?” Molly asked, not looking up from her pad as she wrote.

“I’m sorry agents, but I live alone...but my secretary can confirm that I left my office around 6pm last night.” Cortez added quickly, as if he had just remembered this tidbit.

“Dr. Cortez, do you have access to the lab's security protocols?” Josh leaned forward, his flashing green eyes looking intense. Dr. Cortez stammered, putting together the dots that Josh was connecting.

“Well, yes of course I do, after all I oversee a lot of the research that goes on at the lab and I...” Josh cut the man off suddenly, “Doctor, the night of the fire, all of the emergency security protocols were disabled, we believe internally. The thief obviously knew the layout and security systems of the lab, so it's improbable that it would be someone who hadn't worked in the facility before.”

“Agent Barnes, are you accusing me of something?” Dr. Cortez asked, seeming flustered.

“No, I’m just asking questions. After you so kindly eliminated most all other suspects for us, we have very little to go off of.” Josh said, his voice hard and cold. Molly had seen Josh get intense with suspects before, but not like his. He was normally lighthearted, even in the most dire of circumstances, so it was unnerving to see him this way. His words were so calculating, so precise, every syllable he spoke was sharp and distinct, like the tips of a million tiny syringes. Josh then produced a manila file folder and laid it on the table, and opened it to a page showing a Colt single action army revolver, the same gun that the ballistics team had traced the bullets found at the scene of the robbery to.

“I couldn’t help but notice, doctor, that you have a 1800’s era rifle hanging above your mantle. Is that a Winchester 1873?” Josh said casually, gesturing to the long wooden rifle above the fireplace mantle nearby.

“Y-yes, it is, agent. You have a good eye for firearms, but I don’t see where you’re going with this...”

“Oh don’t worry I’ll get there doctor,” Josh chided, seemingly enjoying making the man before him sweat, “I’ve read your biography on the Day5 web page, and it says that you’re a collector of antique firearms, specifically from the late 1800s. I also couldn’t help but notice a small side closet in the corner of your front room. Seems oddly placed to me, the piping for a house of this era doesn’t need a water heater in that location, and it wouldn’t make sense to place a coat closet so far from the door. It’s too small for laundry machines so I’m guessing that if I went over there right now and opened that door I would find a gun safe, am I correct?”

Molly’s mind raced, drawing the same conclusions that Josh apparently had come to before her. *Why didn’t he explain any of this to me before we came?* She wondered, *I guess he wanted to wait until he had more evidence...* At the same time though, a breakthrough in a case like this could mean good things for her career at the FBI. Molly had to stop herself from smiling at the prospect of being on the team that solved the “Genetic Hijinx” case. A wave of relaxation washed over Molly, and she once again felt in control of the world around her.

“Look, Agents, why would I murder and steal a genetic technology from my own laboratory?” Dr. Cortez asked, his voice calm, but Molly noticed small beads of sweat appearing on his brow, and how he anxiously dabbed at them with a napkin. Josh produced another manila folder and set it on the table.

“You would consider yourself an investor, would you not Dr. Cortez?” Josh said, but then continued before the man could respond, “Your domestic interests are all over the place, but your overseas investments were quite difficult to dig up. I did stumble across a particularly troubling piece of information about your ties to an oil company in Arabia, one which regrettably, filed for bankruptcy last month.”

“Agent Barnes, I assure you that I’m in no financial straits.” Dr. Cortez said, the dabbling at his brow increasing, and the pungent cologne he was wearing seemed to be aerosolized by his sweat.

“Sure, sure, not in the states at least, here you’re quite comfy actually,” Josh continued, his voice monotone and calculating, “But Dr. Cortez we both know that you sunk a little too much of your private stock into that oil company, perhaps by some under the table means? Regardless, by my best estimates, you’re out 13.7 million dollars, three times what your net worth stateside is...”

Josh flipped open the second file folder to reveal a list of bank statements and oil stocks, with some circled in red. Molly’s eyes flashed over them, but Dr. Cortez ignored them, obviously knowing what they said already. *Josh must have found all this out this morning, and only needed Cortez to rule out all other suspects for him to make his case...* She thought. Across the table from her, Cortez stammered and took a long sip of water.

“Agent Barnes, those numbers are preposterous! If I stole this technology to get rich, as you’re suggesting, why haven’t my accounts shown a marked increase in recent days?” Cortez argued.

“Doctor please,” Josh dismissed this with a wave of his hand, “We both know that money from black market bio-weapon sales doesn’t just get deposited in your local credit union. And as

we can see from these records here, you've recently purchased a stock in a small pharmacological research company on the west coast. I'll admit it's more classy than your typical strip-mall money laundering scheme, but still illegal none-the-less."

"Agent Barnes, this is ridiculous!" Cortez roared and stood, his anxiety spiraling into a maelstrom of rage. Molly's hand drifted towards her 9mm in her coat pocket.

"Agent Barnes, are you seriously suggesting that I broke into my own lab, murdered my own scientists, and stole my own genetic technology to sell to cover my debts?" Cortez roared.

"I'm only pointing out facts, doctor. You're a regular at the firing range downtown, so you obviously know your way around a gun, you have motive, means and know how. All I'm saying, doctor, is that it wouldn't be very hard to put together a search warrant for your home, and I'm guessing if we crack into that gun safe, we'll find a Colt single action revolver."

Josh had barely moved from his sitting position, but his eyes were still locked with Dr. Cortez, who was now visibly shaking. A small bead of sweat formed just above his right eye, and rolled lazily down his cheek. Josh didn't even blink, his crystalline green eyes seemingly picking the man apart.

The small piece of orange fabric blowing in the wind again permeated Molly's mind, and she felt a tinge of anger towards Dr. Cortez for being indirectly responsible for that death. Whomever he had sold the technology to had obviously not wanted Molly and Josh looking into it.

Still, to have a case this big solved this fast was momentous, and would mean big things for her and Josh. Looking over at her partner, Molly's relief and joy at solving the case were replaced momentarily by a sick feeling in her stomach. Josh wasn't smiling, his mouth was locked in a tight line, but she could just barely make out the softness to the corners of his mouth.



She looked to the shaking husk of a man before them, and then back to Josh. *He's enjoying this...* Molly thought with horror. Not the way that one enjoys a good movie or an ice-cream cone, but the way a cat enjoys watching a wounded bird struggle... Molly had worked closely with Josh for about three years now, but she had never seen this side of him.

“I-I’m innocent, I swear...” Dr. Cortez got out, his voice shaking, all of his previous resolve gone. Josh stood up, his sudden and precise movement causing Molly to pull back. He put his nose just inches from Dr. Cortez, his jaw set, green eyes blazing with the intensity of a raging emerald inferno. Josh’s posture was poised, all of his muscles flexed, and the poor ethics board director wilted before him. Leaning in even closer, Josh almost whispered in Cortez’s ear, his voice so low and cold that it sent a shiver down Molly’s spine, “Let’s go have a look in that gun safe shall we...”

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*2 weeks later*

“And now, without further ado, my partner and best friend, Agent Molly Harris!” Applause erupted from the small auditorium, and Molly tried to look dignified in the dress pants and uniform jacket she was wearing. Upon the stage, Josh smiled warmly at her, his own dress uniform a black carpet of sand, sprinkled with golden medals of recognition. Molly bowed her head and a medal was slowly lowered over her shoulders, followed by a firm handshake and word of congratulation from the director. The applause died down, and Molly crossed the stage to stand next to Josh, the heavy medal tugging at her uniforms collar. A warm smile drew across her face, and the relaxed feeling of control rushed through her.

“You know,” Josh began, “When they asked me to give a speech, I initially declined, but then they told me that they were going to let Agent Harris here do it, and I just couldn’t put you folks through that.”

This garnered a soft chuckle from the crowd of gathered news casters, police officers, and government officials, and Josh shot a wink at Molly. She smiled back at him, enjoying the attention a little bit.

“Seriously though, this was a team effort, this medal may be around my shoulders, but there are so many people who contributed to this groundbreaking arrest. I’d like to thank all of the forensics team that discovered the bullet that inevitably led to Dr. Cortez’s arrest. I’d also like to send a special thank you to the folks in records that pulled files for me on such short notice. I’d also like to say that the international cooperation of foreign governments with the CIA and FBI has been promising, and we’ll likely have the genetic technology tracked down within the month.”

This prompted a round of applause from the audience. The genetic technology still hadn’t been found, apparently Cortez had sold the genetic editing computer program, complete with the full protocol for creating Lazarus Vectors, to a shadowy terrorist cell known only as “Asmodeus” for somewhere near 100 million dollars, as shown by some very well hidden bank records that Josh had dug up. They were also believed to be responsible for the car bombing at the university, but with Cortez in jail, the FBI was sure that “Asmodeus” wouldn’t be as bold.

Cortez had denied his involvement in the robbery, all of the way up until they took him away. However, his case completely fell apart when traces of his pungent cologne were found at the scene of the crime. Josh suspected that he feared that if he confessed he might endanger himself by revealing too much about the shadowy organization he sold the technology to, and

Molly concurred. The international search was mostly in the CIA's hands now, but the arrest and detainment of the single most high profile robber in the last decade had made her and Josh into overnight celebrities.

"I would like to assure the public that the FBI is doing anything and everything in its power to keep the people of this country safe from biological attacks, both at home and abroad. You're all in good hands." Josh continued his speech, thanking various officials, and taking the occasional question from the flock of reporters that stood at the back of the small auditorium. He did well, his natural charisma often winning over the crowd more than his words. Molly perked up when she heard her name.

"Finally, before someone kicks me off the stage, I have one last person to thank, Agent Harris, why don't you come up here?" Josh said, and gestures for Molly to come forward. The crowd applauded, and Molly's legs moved almost without her consent.

"Now this woman right here is the best damned FBI agent you'll ever meet and I never would have been able to solve this case without her!" Josh said, smiling confidently down at her. Molly blushed lightly at the praise. Josh put an arm around Molly's shoulders, his other hand waving at the crowd. Molly returned the gesture, feeling Josh's muscled frame underneath his dress uniform. She waved at the crowd, a sense of calm, confident, joy washing over her.

After a few hours of cheap horderves, firm handshakes, and the same questions from 10 different reporters, Molly felt worn out. As the crowd began to disperse, Molly was able to make her way outside into the cool April night. Avoiding the bustling sidewalks, she found her way to the side of the building. She leaned against the cool brick of the building behind her and sighed deeply.

“Hey, I was wondering where you went off to...” Molly turned as Josh casually strolled up to her. Molly laughed and said, “Just trying to get away from all those irritating reporters in there!”

“Tell me about it,” Josh said, “They’re more chatty than a flock of Black Capped Chickadees...”

“Josh! I told you no bird jokes tonight!” Molly scolded.

“Oh come on! It wasn’t that bad!” Josh said, his flashing green eyes softly locking with Mollys.

“*All* of your bird jokes are bad Josh.”

“Maybe, but if I never told bad jokes how would you know when I told a good one?” Josh said, leaning against the wall. Molly shot him a scornful look, “You know, I’ve been your partner for three years Josh, and I’m still waiting on that first funny avian reference.”

“You just can’t appreciate good humor.” Josh shot back, but Molly laughed and shook her head. They both stood there for a good while, listening to the sounds of traffic and New York nightlife.

“Josh...” Molly began after a while, “There's been something I've been meaning to ask you...”

“Ok, sure...” Josh’s smile faded.

“When we were arresting Dr. Cortez, you seemed...different...harsher,” she stuttered, “angry even. I guess I just never saw you like that before.”. Josh was silent for a moment.

“When I was looking into his eyes, I didn’t see him. I didn't see a man that stole something dangerous, or someone that was just doing something out of greed. I didn’t see him at all. I saw all of the horrible things that could happen to people if that technology got into the

wrong hands. You heard what Dr. Wise said. I couldn't believe that someone would willingly let something like that loose into the world..."Josh paused, staring intently at nothing.

"That's why I wanted us on the team tracking down that technology. I don't want this to get out of our control...and I don't want to see anyone get hurt." He looked back at Molly when he said this, and Molly sheepishly looked down.

Molly thought this over. Josh had never seemed to take this job seriously before. Between his disheveled hair and poorly kept uniform, he always seemed more distracted than dedicated. Even after some of the harsher cases they witnessed, he was always cracking jokes. It never seemed like any of it bothered him until now. Molly had never realized just how passionate Josh was about his work. Sure, she knew that she cared, and that he was a good agent, but his charm and constant witty jokes made him seem less serious to her. She had never known that this side of him was even there, that there was so much of him that she actually didn't know.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to kill the mood there..." Josh chuckled, dismissively. Molly smiled softly, "I wouldn't say that, it was a welcome relief from your bird jokes."

Her humor felt forced to her, but Josh's smile returned nonetheless.

"You always mock my attempt to educate the public on avian ecology..." Josh said sarcastically, shaking his head. Molly rolled her eyes and mocked, "Josh Barnes, FBI Agent and bird educator."

"The best FBI agent and bird educator mind you." He corrected, slightly jabbing her arm.

Molly smiled at him wryly. Josh laughed and stared straight down at her, his expression changing slightly. Molly tilted her head, confused by his sudden intensity. Josh slowly took her hands in his, and Molly felt her face flush and blurted "Let's go get a drink!"

“I just don’t think that it's good for her to see him like this!”

“He asked for her specifically, we can’t just deny that!”

“She’s only nine, don’t you think that it will be too much for her?”

“It may be harder for her to not see him...”

Molly kicked her sneakered feet back and forth in the hospital waiting room while her mom and dad talked in the next room. They thought they whispered quietly enough, but she could always hear them. They had talked a lot without her recently. Mostly about her grandpa, money, and the “good of the family.” They never talked about the cancer that much, and they never mentioned it around her unless they absolutely had to. Molly didn’t really understand what the doctors said, but everyone seemed to think that grandpa was going to die soon.

*He’s not going to die, he’s not going to die.* She thought to herself over and over again, forcing down a wave of panic and sadness that washed over her. The door next to her opened, and her parents came out. Her mom had red, puffy eyes from crying. Molly got up and walked over to her parents, giving her dad a long embrace.

“Is grandpa going to be ok?” She looked up and asked.

“We don’t know yet dear...” Her mother answered quickly, and looked at her dad with concern.

“Can’t the doctors make him better?” Molly asked, trying to keep herself from crying, “They can make him better can’t they?”

Her parents were silent, and then her dad said, “He asked to see you honey, let's go visit him....”

Molly was led away down a long white hallway that smelled like the alcohol wipes the doctor always used whenever he gave her a shot. She turned into a well lit room with a small

hospital bed. All sorts of machinery lined the walls, and an array of buttons and sensors glowed and pulsed and blipped. Her grandfather lay in the middle of it all, a white hospital gown around his thin frame, like a sheet over a skeleton.

Molly shied away at first, fearful of what the cancer had done to her grandfather. Then his voice, weaker, but still with the same deep kindness it had always had, calmed her, “Molly-polly! Came to see your old grandpa did you?”

The smile on her grandfather's pale was so warm he almost seemed to glow. Molly grinned softly and made her way over to her grandfather's side. His thin hand reached out and took both of her small child-like ones.

“Are you ok grandpa?” Molly asked in a shaky voice. At this her grandfather laughed, not a soft chuckle but a happy, loud laugh.

“You’re the sweetest little girl I ever laid eyes on, did you know that? Don’t you worry about me none, Molly, our hiking days may be over but I’m still your same old grandpa, bad jokes and all.” Her grandfather said, squeezing her hands tightly. Molly however felt a stab of fear.

“Why won’t we go hiking anymore grandpa?” She asked, unsuccessfully keeping her voice from shaking.

“Oh Molly, don’t worry! Everyone’s hiking days come to a close sometime! These things just happen, you can’t control everything you know...But the important thing is that I had a wonderful time hiking with you when we did go...” Her grandfather's hands clasped hers reassuringly, but Molly’s vision was soon blurry with tears.

“I don’t want you to go grandpa...” Molly sobbed, and her mother reached forward and placed a hand on her shoulder, trying to pull her back. Shaking off her mother’s comforting grip and kind pleading of “Now Molly...”, she placed her hand on her grandfather’s cheek.

“Why do you have to go grandpa? Can’t someone save you? What can I do to save you?” She whispered softly.

Her grandfather dried a tear from her cheek and said, “I’m sorry Molly...” and Molly felt herself leave the ground, and sobbed into her mother’s shoulder as she was carried from the room.

*He’s not going to die, he’s going to be ok. He’s going to be ok, he’s going to be ok.*

---

FBI Agent Molly Jen Harris used to *hate* this part of dating. Waiting at a restaurant, wondering if her date would even arrive. Dreading awkward conversations and forced small talk. But this was the best date that she had ever been on. For starters, Josh had actually picked her up from her house, and he had even made an attempt to tame his mop of blonde hair. He had even complimented her on her new dress, which she had been unable to force down a blush at. They hadn’t told anyone at the department about their budding relationship, and didn’t show any extra affection towards each other at work while they poured over bank statements and data files, still trying to track down the Day5 technology.

Josh said they could discuss their relationship with their superiors if it “went somewhere.” Molly didn’t know about all this going places stuff, but this was, so far, the best first date she had ever been on. This was their first *real* date, a culmination of a week’s worth of drinks after work and careful flirtation. She was nervous that the whole experience would be too awkward, or that she had known Josh too long for something like this.



Her anxiety had melted away as soon as she got in the car, because instead of trying to get to know a total stranger over the course of a couple of hours, she found herself falling into a charmingly witty banter with Josh.

“No, I’m putting my foot down, only four!” Molly said, mimicking defiance.

“Now Molly, what if there's a flock of sparrows on the way? You know they’re my favorite!” Josh shot back as he pulled the car into a parking spot. Molly glanced out of the window, reading the name of the restaurant they were at, and she gasped in surprise.

“Josh!” She exclaimed, “Don’t you know how expensive this place is?”

He laughed, “Don’t you know how *in*expensive bird watching books are? Come on, I don’t want to miss our reservation...”

Josh helped her out of the car, and Molly resisted the urge to pull her dress further down her legs. *I knew this dress was too short...* She thought with annoyance. Her hand slipped comfortably into Josh’s, and her heart raced. It still felt weird to touch him like that, but the kind of good weirdness that made it exciting. Josh smiled confidently as he pulled her chair out for her.

Josh ordered an expensive bottle of wine for the table, and then told Molly to order whatever she wanted. The menu prices were outrageous, and she almost felt bad ordering something from such a pricey menu. Looking up she noticed Josh staring at her, his face kind and calm. Her blue eyes locked with his green, and he seemed to shake himself awake.

“Sorry...” He stammered out, “I was just thinking about...er the case.”

“I’m sure...” Molly said, smiling, but pulling her dress up slightly nonetheless, “Speaking of which, did you that lead you had on Asmodeus ever pan out? I’ve been meaning to

go over some security tapes of that car bombing again, and I was wondering if you turned up anything that could be useful.”

“Not really, we’ve traced the “Asmodeus”, probably some sort of shadow government or terrorist group to Eastern Europe, but the former soviet block is still largely under Russian influence, and getting good intel out of that part of the world hasn’t exactly been easy. I honestly wouldn’t waste your time reviewing old tapes, I ran over them a million times myself. Asmodesous must be dug in deep now, wherever they are...”

“Did you see that Day5 has begun rebuilding?” Molly asked.

“I did!” Josh took a sip of his wine, “Mostly new scientists, but those still employed by the lab seem undeterred by the bad press and theft, almost as if the odds are backing them more than their benefactors.”

“I’m glad that they could rebuild...What was your opinion on all of the genetic stuff Josh? Do you think that bringing back extinct species could actually change things?”

“I think that it certainly has its merits, but I think that there’s a lot more that needs to be done about the destruction of ecosystems than just bringing some dead birds back to life.”

Molly huffed, “Well I for one think that it's a noble cause. After all, we’re the ones that killed off those bird species. If we stole something from nature, the least we can do is to give it back. [6]”

“I guess that’s true...” Josh said, “We may end up causing more harm than good, though.”

“I’m surprised Josh!” Molly said, turning the thick laminated pages of her menu, “I thought you’d be all for more birds in the world.”

“Hey, I’m a bird watcher, not a bird necromancer.” Josh said with a smile, “Come on, let’s not talk shop while at dinner...”

“Here,” Josh said, raising his glass, “To the most beautiful and intelligent FBI agent I know.”

Their wine glasses clinked and Molly blushed, “You know that flattery won’t get you anywhere...”

He had started making comments like that whenever they were alone together, for which she chided him, but deep down she couldn’t wait until he said something witty about her eyes, or the way her hair looked that day at work. *My first real date with a really great guy...* Molly thought as Josh took her hand from across the table. Josh smiled warmly at her, and leaned forward. Molly leaned forward as well, a nervous wave of excitement bubbling up inside of her.

*I never want this night to end...* She thought as her lips touched his.

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Molly had only a bit of a hangover the next day, but thinking about the night out with Josh distracted her from her pounding headache. Currently she was stuck at her desk pouring over security footage from the area near the university campus where the car bomb had gone off a few weeks ago.

The demolition team still had no trace on who could have planted the bomb, the car was clean of fingerprints, minus Josh and Molly’s, no one had come forward to claim the attack, and no subsequent attacks had followed. Molly bit down lightly on her right index nail, and flipped through a few different camera angles, looking for anything suspicious. Josh had said not to waste her time with these old tapes, but she wanted to be thorough. Information on Asmodeus

had been sparse at best, and she still had no idea how they could have gotten so close to her but left no clues.

With a sigh, Molly paged back over to tapes from their trip to visit Dr. Wise at the university that day. She watched them stop at the gas station, Josh stood by the car while she ran inside. No one approached them, or was even in the parking lot at the same time as they were. She dropped her face into her hands, trying to think over every detail of the case, letting all of the facts wash over her. *Where are you Asmodeus? And where's that genetic technology?* She thought, and looked up at the screen again. Suddenly something caught her eye.

In the bottom left corner, the gas station's security camera displayed the time and date, mostly just a string of numbers. As the camera footage rolled, she watched the tiny white numbers tick up, and saw the anomaly again. Replaying the video, she paused the screen, wrote down the time stamp, then double tapped the space bar, and wrote down the time stamp a second later.

Except the time stamp from the video wasn't a second later, it was *37 seconds* later. Someone had cut the video. Either before the FBI obtained the footage or immediately after, someone had done something in those 37 seconds that they didn't want the FBI to see. She printed out both screen shots of Josh by the car, one before and one after the 37 second mark. Laying them over top of each other, the only thing to have changed between them was the time stamp. Josh was remarkably in the exact same position as he was before the clip. Almost as if he knew exactly when the tape was going to be cut...Molly's lips drew to a line.

"Hey!" A voice from behind her said, and Molly quickly shoved the screen grabs underneath some other papers. She wheeled around to find Josh standing behind her, munching on a donut.

“They have donuts in the break room if you want any.” He said, taking another bite out of the chocolate covered pastry.

“I’m good, thanks.” Molly said.

“You good?” Josh asked, noticing her tense air.

“Yeah, I’ve just been staring at these tapes for hours.” She said, and gestured to the screen.

“We’ve been over those a thousand times, Molly, whoever painted that bomb obviously knew how to avoid cameras. Why don’t you take a look at some of Dr. Cortez’s financial statements with me, see if there’s anything we missed.” Josh was smiling at her, and her heart softened towards him. *How could I ever suspect that he would have planted the bomb?*

“I guess I could run over those statements again.” Molly said, not taking her eyes from Josh’s.

“Alright, well I’ll send those bank statements your way!” Josh said, before he scarfed down the last of the donut in a massive bite and strolled off. Molly closed the video window and opened up the bank statements Josh sent her, and began to read over them. The screen shots still lay underneath the papers scattered across her desk, but she felt like they were burning a hole in the desk.

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As soon as Molly got home that day, she dumped her bag out on her kitchen table. Her phone buzzed. It was Josh.

“Hey, want to try that new sushi place tonight?” His text read.

“Sure!” She shot back, and then started leafing through the papers on her table, her heart racing. *There.* The screen grabs confirmed what she had suspected, now that she could study

them closer. Josh was standing in the exact same spot before and after the tape was cut. *Probably just coincidence.* She thought.

Opening her laptop, she scrolled over the evidence convicting Dr. Cortez. *Bank statements, gun range time, stock prices.* If the security camera footage had been faked, this stuff could have been too. She needed *something* concrete.

With a long sigh, she typed “Joshua Neil Barnes” into the FBI’s deep search window on her laptop. Everything came up as expected. Joshua Neil Barnes, 29 years old, with a masters in criminology from CalTech.

“This is stupid...” She said out loud, and was about to close her laptop when something caught her eye. According to the FBI’s site, Josh had recently purchased a plane ticket to Cancun, one that left...tonight? Why would he leave so suddenly without telling her? A wave of anxiety washed over her, and her heartbeat like a drum inside of her chest. Grabbing her phone, she forced herself to calm down.

*He’s going to be innocent, you’re just over-reacting, he’s got to be innocent.*

“Weird question” She texted, “Where were you the night of the robbery Josh?”

*Please don’t say alone at home....* She thought frantically.

“I was just chillin at my house. Why’d you ask?” He texted back. Molly’s mind raced. *No alibi, doctored footage, Cortez still hasn’t confessed...* Josh’s voice sounded hauntingly in her mind:

“Well I think that ‘Dr. Cortez’ sounded awfully suspicious, wouldn’t you say? Knowing so much about the crime scene? ‘The fire was just a cover up’...”

“I honestly wouldn’t waste your time reviewing old tapes...”

“I was by the car the whole time, and I didn’t see anyone. It must have been planted before we even left HQ...

“No fingerprints other than ours on the vehicle...

“Let’s go have a look in that gun safe shall we...

Molly bit down hard on her thumb nail, tasting blood. A tidal wave of fear welled up inside of her. *He’s got to be innocent, why can’t he be innocent?* She felt tears begin to stream down her face, and she wiped them away quickly.

*He’s going to be innocent, he’s going to be innocent. He’s going to be innocent.*

Her phone buzzed next to her but she didn’t look at the message.

“I’ll just confront him about it.” She said aloud in as firm of a voice as she could muster, “I’m sure it’s all a misunderstanding.”

“Sure what’s all a misunderstanding?”

Molly wheeled around with a squeak, “Josh!” She exclaimed, and stood up from the table. Her front door lay open behind him, the dark night and empty yard beyond, a lock pick still in the key hole. Molly’s eyes widened as they fell on Josh. He was dressed in a fancy suit, the nicest one she had ever seen him wear on one of their dates. In his left hand was a bundle of roses, and in his right was his standard issue 9mm pistol, now equipped with a silencer.

“Confront me about what, Molly?” Josh asked calmly, and raised the pistol. Molly backed into the corner of the kitchen, her hands raised.

“Josh...” She asked fearfully, “What’s going on...”

“I told you not to look at those tapes Molly.” Josh said coldly, not lowering the gun. His voice didn’t display a hint of emotion, as if he was chastising a child.

“Did you...” Molly began but Josh cut her off.

“Yes, I stole the technology Molly, took you long enough. Once I got my money, I’d thought that I’d have to skip town weeks ago.” His eyes were so cold, so harsh. They seemed to stare right through her, see all of her fears, see all of her true emotions, truly dissecting who she was as a person, bit by bit. Josh cocked his head to the side a little bit, noticing the tears Molly was trying to force down.

“Well I’ll be...” Josh had a small amount of surprise in his icy voice, “You actually thought that I cared about you, didn’t you?”

Then his entire demeanor changed, his posture softening, his muscles relaxing. It was like someone had flipped a massive switch somewhere deep inside of him, and turned him back into the person who Molly had grown so fond of. His voice was suddenly normal, jovial again when he spoke, but the words didn’t match his tone, “I never did anything to *make* you love me Molly, I just cracked a few bird jokes and, you, ever so desperate for love, you fell for it all. Out of everyone you were the easiest to manipulate.”

Then he actually laughed at her. She took this opportunity to dive for a block of kitchen knives at the far side of the room. A silenced round nearly took her hand off, and she froze.

“Now Molly, we both know that was never going to work.” Josh leveled the pistol at her again. His body was once again straight as a rod of steel, and his smile made her stomach turn.

“Someone will have heard that, even with the silencer.” Molly spat.

“Oh I don’t think so. There isn’t anyone alive on this whole street...at least not anymore. Amazing what a little bit of espionage training and some untested biological weaponry can do in the right hands. Josh dropped the roses to the ground to reveal some sort of grenade hidden underneath them. It looked to be made of glass, with a white swirling mist inside.



“They died pretty fast actually,” Josh said looking at the small canister in his hand, “This little baby CRISPR edited the life right out of them. I imagine it's like dying from stage four lung cancer in a few seconds, all of your lung cells popping like balloons as the Lazarus Vector unravels your DNA like a ball of yarn, all of those genetic scissors cutting indiscriminately. But I wouldn't know, the stuff is encoded to ignore my DNA, courtesy of Asmodeus...I can't *imagine* what a targetable biological weapon like this would fetch on the black market.”

Molly staring in horror, her eyes locked on the small glass canister in his palm

“You're bluffing.” She said, refusing to let him intimidate her..

“How would you know?” Josh asked, his voice and tone stung her as if she had been slapped, “I had you falling head over heels for me and you never suspected a thing. You were so ready to have someone there to make you feel strong and safe. To tell you that you were good at your job...the best damn agent there ever was, to validate you emotionally and physically, to make you feel like you had it all under control...”

“So what now?” Molly asked, trying to keep her voice from shaking, “You go to Cancun? Live your life on an island?”

“Pretty much.” Josh said, “Until the next time I want to steal something important.”

“Next time?”

“In case you haven't figured it out yet Molly, being an FBI agent isn't exactly my life's passion. This isn't the first heist I've pulled off, but it certainly was the biggest, and the most fun.” A sickeningly sweet smile pulled across Josh's lips. Molly slumped to the ground, tears now falling freely down her face. She was going to die. Killed by the one person she really cared about.

“Come now Molly,” Josh said, his head tilting sickeningly to the side “I showed you a good time, didn’t I? You can’t tell me that you didn’t have fun with me? I mean the part where you fell in love with me is unfortunate, but hey it was good while it lasted!”

Molly opened her mouth to shout at him, scream at him, but the quick double pop of two silenced gunshots cut her off. Her right knee exploded in pain, two 9mm bullets shattering the cartilage and ligaments inside. The world went blurry, and she gasped for air, hyperventilating. She tried to struggle to a sitting position, but her efforts were futile, and her pant leg was soon soaked with blood. Eyes closed against the pain, she slumped down against the kitchen floor, a thick red pool forming around her.

“Sorry about that,” Josh said, speaking as if he had just bumped into her at the supermarket, “But I couldn’t have you following me to the airport now could I?”

Molly watched from half open eyes as Josh crossed to the kitchen table, and took her phone and car keys. She winced as another silenced round shattered her laptop screen. Josh casually holstered the pistol underneath his jacket, and then strolled over to where she lay on the ground. He knelt down in front of her, his green eyes unblinking.

“You know what...I think that I’m going to let you live...” Josh said, smiling, “Think of it as a going away present, something from me to you, just for being the best FBI partner I ever had. Oh, and would you do me a favor? Go ahead and tell the department that I’ll be putting in my two weeks. Anyways, I’ve got a plane to catch...”

Molly tried to grab Josh, and just fell forward on her face, as he dodged back nimbly. He walked over to the front door, pausing briefly in the threshold, looking back at her.

“Goodbye, Agent Harris.” Josh said, and slammed the door behind him. As soon as he did Molly rolled herself onto her stomach, and dragged herself across the kitchen floor. Reaching

up, she grabbed a hand towel from the stove handle above her, and fashioned a quick tourniquet. A loud clattering filled the kitchen as she tossed a drawer from the counter, and used a wooden spoon inside to tighten the tourniquet on herself. Pain flashed all up and down her leg, angry and burning, but she bit down on another hand towel to keep from biting her tongue off.

Despite the searing heat of the pain in her leg, Molly felt so cold inside. Guilt pressed upon her like a weight. She imagined the terror she had just released on the world, a biological weapon that could be encoded with a targeting system more accurate than the world's best heat seeking missile. The world around her felt like water streaming through her fingertips, despite her efforts to catch it and make it flow where she wanted. It seemed no matter how hard she tried, she could never control anything, and could ever save anyone or anything she cared about. Not the parking ticket boy at the college, not the scientists at the lab, not all those people who had been killed by Josh and Asmodeous, not her grandfather, not even her relationship with Josh.

Finally, all of the pain, all of the frustration, the anger at Josh, at herself, crushed her. Molly felt every part of her body, her eyes and ears, her arms and hands, her blood soaked pant leg, still alive with pain. *I can't control anything, I can't stop anything bad from happening to anyone...* Molly thought to herself as she lay there, all of her will power slowly trickling away with the blood leaving her body. *I can't control everything....* And with that thought, she fully let go, letting go of all of her anxiety, all of her pain. Her blood stained fingers reached into her pocket and slid out her FBI badge.

Flipping it open, her own face stared back at her. She had a serious look on her face, her brown hair straight and her blue eyes were staring hard into the camera. The blue words just below her picture read, "Special Agent Harris" followed by her own signature. The golden badge

inset into the black leather felt cool underneath her fingertips. The eyes in the photograph willed her to do something, to *move*. Molly set her jaw, shoved the badge back into her pocket.

*I can't control everything*, She thought to herself, *But I'll be damned if I can't control something....* Then for the first time in her life, Molly didn't care if she failed. She didn't care that she was helpless, or incompetent, or injured, or not good at everything. She didn't care anymore what other people thought of her, she didn't care that she might not be able to save everyone, even those she loved. She was going to try anyway.

Molly hauled herself to a standing position, leaning on the kitchen counter and relying on her good leg for support. A wave of renewed pain washed across her, but she ignored it, hobbling across her kitchen and flung open her broom closet. Reaching inside she ripped the cap off a bottle of pain medicine, and chewed four tablets. The bitter taste almost made her gag but she forced down the pills. She also shoved a handful of bobby pins and a pair of tweezers into her pocket.

*I need a way to contact the FBI...*She thought. They could ground all flights out of the New York area, trapping Josh stateside, where he would be much easier to apprehend. Grabbing a broom from the closet, she made a makeshift crutch. Whenever she hobbled forward, the pain was excruciating, but it was still faster than walking. Her mind raced through possibilities.

With all communication devices in her home either stolen or destroyed by Josh, and the next door homes contaminated with a biological agent of terrifying potential, she needed to get somewhere else to reach help. Limping out of her front door, she emerged into an eerily quiet street. Dead birds and a couple of cats lay in the front lawns of most of the homes around her. Molly prayed that the wind wouldn't carry any of the deadly bioweapon's toxic mist her way.

Hobbling over to her car in the driveway, she tugged on the handle, but to no avail. The doors were firmly locked, and she was in no shape to break a window in her current state. Fortunately, she wouldn't need to. Dropping her makeshift crutch, she leaned against the door, and jammed one end of the tweezers and two bobby pins inside of the lock, keeping one pin inside of her mouth. A soft click sounded after about two minutes, and she slowly rotated the locking mechanism. The door clicked open and she hauled her broken body into the driver's seat, trying not to cry out as her leg exploded in white hot pain.

Reaching under the drivers console of the car, she ripped away the protective lining and her fingers found the wires underneath. Her years of training flashed through her mind, guiding her fingers as she hotwired the vehicle. The engine soon roared to life, just as she was losing hope. Situating her right leg out of the way, she put the car into reverse and used her left foot to slam on the gas, spinning the vehicle out of her driveway and into the street.

Her hands tightened on the steering wheel as she sped off down the road. Driving for a few blocks to make sure she was clear of whatever biological weapon Josh had just released, she roared into a corner gas station. A loud scrape sounded as she pulled into one of the fueling stations, the metal on the side of her car door taking paint off of the yellow concrete poles on either side of the gas pump. Rolling down her window, she strained to reach the attendant call button, holding it down.

Soon a tired looking woman strolled out of the station, and froze when she saw Molly's crashed car.

"Hey!" She yelled out, now jogging over to where Molly was, "You're going to pay for that!"

“Give me your phone, now!” Molly snapped at the woman, brandishing her FBI badge. The woman looked aghast for a second, her face frozen with confusion.

“Come on!” Molly urged, “I don’t have all day!” This broke the woman from her trance, and she passed Molly her unlocked cell phone through the window of her car. Molly’s fingertips quickly dialed the number for the FBI’s headquarters, her fingers putting blood stains on the phone screen. After a few rings, the line picked up. She didn’t give whoever was on the other side a chance to say anything.

“This is Agent Molly Harris, ID number 112947D, there is a biological weapon that is leaving the New York area from one of the surrounding airports. All flights need to be grounded immediately to discourage its containment...It is aerosolized easily and its carrier is immune to its effects, full anti-chemical warfare measures should be put in place...

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*4 weeks later*

Soft bird song floated through the trees, interrupted only by the tumultuous honking of a group of geese, flying in perfect V formation, passed overhead. Molly sat upon a park bench, watching the group of waterfowl streak across the grey sky overhead. She shifted uncomfortably on the hard bench, adjusting her crutches on the seat beside her. The doctors had said that she may never be able to walk again, but that was just because they didn’t count walking with crutches as walking, which Molly thought was silly.

Pulling herself to her feet, and swung herself into the soft braces at the top of the crutches. As she hobbled off, she thought moreover the new position she had been offered in D.C., working right underneath the secretary of defense. It was, of course, a desk job, something that seemed a little bit forced upon her considering her recent inhabilitacion. The pay was more

than double what she currently got, however, so she didn't mind too much. *I guess I'll have to let D.C. know that I'll take it...* The FBI couldn't exactly discharge her due to her injury, especially after Josh's inevitable arrest and questioning had yielded the location of a number of high value bio-terror targets that had worked under the still mysterious Asmodeus. Molly knew now that Josh wasn't even Josh's real name, but she didn't care much.

Her call had been just in time, and Josh was seized aboard a private small engine plane, just about to take off. 10 additional canisters of the deadly biological superweapon were confiscated from his luggage, and the FBI was still looking into exactly how Josh had gotten them on board, but the resulting corruption scandal they had uncovered at LaGuardia airport had the TSA all over the news.

Molly's crutches crunched over broken sticks as she hobbled off of the sidewalk and onto the grass. The wind gently tugged at her coat and jacket, bringing with it the last hints of winter. Leaning her crutches against the tombstone in front of her, Molly gingerly plopped herself down onto the grass. As she did, she pulled out a business card from her jacket pocket.

"Day5 Labs" was written across the top of it in a stylized red and blue font. Despite the praise she had received from her parents, her coworkers, and her supervisors, Dr. Cortez had been the most congratulatory, as her work identifying Josh as the true thief behind the break in at Day5 had cleared Cortez's name. Cortez had still filed for bankruptcy, as Josh actually didn't have to fabricate the legitimacy of his financial qualms. However, in his own words, Cortez had told reporters that he would rather be, "A poor man and a free one, than a rich man in a cage." Molly had heard that he was applying to be an assistant lecturer underneath NYU's Dr. Wise of all people, where he could begin to rebuild his life. Still, the good doctor had given Molly his card, telling her to "Call him if she needed anything, anything at all."

Day5 labs had apparently started a new research center somewhere in northern Alaska, a location which they hoped would offer greater security and also a further distance from the public eye. DARPA had also taken upon most of the funding, continuing the lab's original goal of de-extinction, as well as trying to discover countermeasures that could be effective against any biological weaponry that would make use of Lazarus Vectors, or something similar.

Molly slipped the business card back into her jacket pocket and looked at the gravestone before her.

“Mike James Harris” The stone read. Moss grew on its top, and its once smooth surface had been worn rough by years of weathering and erosion. Despite the many years that her grandfather had laid here, Molly had never visited this spot. Even as a child, she shoved her grief and frustration deep down inside of her, and refused to attend the funeral, despite her parents' encouragement. She had imagined for years what it would be like to come here, but the thought had always stirred up a maelstrom of fear and anxiety. Molly's fingertips brushed the cold stone, feeling its hash texture. For the first time in many years, her fingernails were long, no longer marred by her constant nibbling, and they scrapped across the stony surface.

A sudden flap of wings caused Molly to jump back in a start. A small, squat little sparrow perched atop her grandfather's gravestone directly in front of her. Molly was about to shoo the small creature away, when she paused, looking over the tiny creature. It chirped and cocked its head curiously at her.

Molly smiled at the small creature, “You have no idea how hard you are to make...”



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*Cover Art by Austin Smith, Instagram: @art\_by\_austin\_smith*

*This is a work of fiction. All similarities between characters and real life persons are purely coincidental.*

## Authors Note

While much of the science contained within this novel is either true or based on current research, I think that it would be beneficial to the reader to further distinguish where I cite real science fact, and where I elaborate for the purposes of science fiction.

To start out with, CRISPR-cas9 genome editing technology in its current form is effective, and being tested right now to cure blindness in living humans. Although the study is inconclusive at the time of writing, genetic therapy has promising avenues for many diseases beyond the scope of modern medicine, including sickle cell disease and hereditary genetic disorders.

However, its delivery method, how it gets to the guide RNA(the genetic scissors) and donor DNA(the new DNA you want to insert) into the cells to edit them, is not that effective. Thus, I had to fabricate a better delivery system that could do millions of cells at once, which I called the Lazarus Vector, since it helps life come back from the dead in the story (and that name keeps the biblical theme going). The fictional vector can get DNA into many more cells, and make many more changes much faster than is currently possible. Although current technology is advancing in this direction, CRISPR-cas9 currently is incapable of making millions of changes in minutes. This brings us to our next scientific topic, de-extinction.

There are a few on going genetic de-extinction scientific endeavours, most notably the Revive and Restore project, which Day5 labs is very loosely based on. This project is using CRISPR to try and de-extinct a few different animals, everything from the woolly mammoth to the humble passenger pigeon, a bird once native to North America, extinct since the early 20th century. However, they're methodology is different from the one I've fabricated for Day5 labs.

In the story, Day5 uses their Lazarus Vector and computer program to make millions of changes to the sperm and egg cells of living animals, and then mate them to produce a bird. Modern CRISPR techniques are a slow process of making a single change, usually to a single cell, and then checking to see if it worked. Because of this, Revive and Restore must use In vitro-fertilization, and change the DNA inside of an already formed gamete(sperm+egg) cell of a similar species, and then have that species carry the modified baby bird to term. This takes a lot longer, as even though modern science can CRISPR edit genetic codes fairly accurately (up to 95% some researchers claim), they can't make thousands of changes or do it to millions of cells at once as I've described in the novella. De-extinction is technically possible with modern science, but it will be a slow process.

Despite the many technological hurdles of de-extinction, ethical issues surrounding the topic may often prove to be an even greater challenge for scientists. The arguments characters make against de-extinction in the story are based on real concerns both scientists and civilians have about bringing back extinct species. Most with religious or spiritual concerns tend to be concerned that genetic de-extinction of life is beyond the moral bounds of human scientific endeavour. A number of conservationists are also concerned that de-extinction will actually cause more harm than good, and that the reintroduction of extinct species could possibly damage already struggling ecosystems. I've included a paper by S. Cohen that goes far deeper into these ethical conundrums than I've been able to in this novella.

I've tried to make most other parts of the story accurate as well, I'll name a few interesting or relevant examples here: The birds Josh references are all native to that region, both agents personalities are loosely based upon a core-competency list provided by the FBI for incoming applicants, and a 9mm pistol is the standard sidearm of FBI agents to name a few. In

addition, people suffering from severe psychopathy tend to be very charismatic and charming, as they end up being able to imitate normal human social behavior either consciously or subconsciously.

Many people have helped me make this novella possible, so I have some final thanks to say. First, I would like to thank everyone who has edited or read over the novella, and for all the helpful insights and ideas they have given me. I would also like to thank my graphic designer and brother Austin Smith for designing the cover art for this story. I encourage the reader to check out his other art work on his Instagram page listed in the citations. Finally, I would like to thank my advisor, University of Wyoming professor Dr. Heather Rothfuss for editing, advising, and consulting on this novella. Without her brilliant insights, scientific counsel, and tireless efforts, none of this story would have been possible.

-Chase L. Smith