

MY LIFE, MY BODY, **MY CHOICE**

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I woke up.

The first thing I felt was terrible pain in my body. What had happened to me that I felt this way? I tried to move, but I couldn't move myself. It hurt too much. I had to lie still because I didn't want to feel more pain.

What happened???

I opened my eyes and saw I was in a hospital room. I had an IV in my arm and felt an oxygen tube in my nose. Breathing wasn't easy and I liked the extra oxygen.

It was clear I was in a bad shape -- I felt it too.

I saw that a young man was looking at me. He was handsome and made me think of my husband. He wore a white jacket and had a stethoscope around his neck. I thought he must be a doctor, or something like that.

The man had friendly eyes and I saw that he was worrying about me.

"What happened to me?" I asked. My voice sounded terrible. I tried to get up, but I had to lie down again. The pain... it hurt too much... I could not breathe.

"Lie down," said the man. "You have to spare your energy."

With a sigh I lay down again. My body hurt, my lungs hurt, my internal organs hurt.

Could he do something about this pain??? I tried to relax; maybe the pain would subside a little bit.

I looked again into the eyes of the young man. I had to ask the question repeating in my head:

"What happened to me? I have to know..."

"Don't you remember anything?" asked the man.

"No?..."

"You had a serious car accident. You are severely injured. I'm doctor Morgan.. but you have to rest now, okay? We'll talk later when you're up to it."

He was right. I was very tired, I wanted to sleep; then I wouldn't have to feel the pain.

The doctor checked the IV and I felt the pain decrease. I was grateful because I could try to sleep now.

Sleeping: that's what I wanted to do. No pain, and nothing to think about.

I closed my eyes and felt that I was was falling asleep...

I woke up again and heard voices in the room. They were whispering and I couldn't hear what they were saying.

The voices were familiar. They were the voices of my friends, family, and most importantly my husband Luke. I wanted to hold his hand. I wanted to go home, but I felt too weak--weaker than the last time I was awake.

It was clearly not good. Why else was a great part of my family here?

I wasn't gonna make it... I felt it in my soul. My body couldn't fight anymore. It didn't have the energy to heal itself.

A terrible feeling emerged in my thoughts... I was... no!

I wasn't ready. There was so much I wanted to see... to experience..

"Help me...

The voices fell silent and I saw my father, my husband, and my other family members looking at me. I saw they didn't know how to react to me. Some were looking away, others were crying. I saw the pain in my husband's eyes. I loved him so much...

Luke, my husband who knows me best, knew what I wanted. He picked up a chair and sat down by my bed.

I felt his body's warmth when he took my hand. It felt familiar and safe.

I looked in his eyes. I saw the sadness in his eyes and his love for me too. He was my everything and I couldn't leave him...



"Dear Lucia, what do you want me to do?" asked Luke, still holding the hand of his seriously wounded wife. He knew she was dying. It hurt him to see his wife suffering. All this happened because a drunken man.

He felt guilty because he wasn't injured. He had only a few scratches and his wife had caught the worst blows of the collision. The drunken driver had driven his car into Lucia's side of the car.

Lucia had become trapped between the dashboard and her seat. She had been instantly knocked unconscious and hadn't felt the internal injuries.

Luke had called desperately for help, yelling to the air -- because his phone was broken.

Another driver had called for the police. An ambulance and the fire department were soon also on their way. They had to cut Lucia out of the car. In the ambulance they realized her injuries were serious: they had to get her to the hospital to see the extent of the internal bleeding.

"I'm not gonna make it, right?" I asked Luke. I looked him in his eyes. He couldn't keep anything hidden for me. I wanted to know the truth, how bad it was. It would only have been confirmation for the way I felt.

Luke didn't say anything. He only shook his head: 'No'... He looked to the ground. He couldn't look at his wife's eyes. He didn't want to admit his wife was dying. They had made so many plans and now everything was slipping away like water and that because of that man, who thought he could drive with a lot of alcohol in his bloodstream. He felt miserable and powerless.

I held his hand more firmly, even though I had little energy left.

"Help me, Luke... I want CRYONICS... You have to help me with this... please... This is the last thing I want..."

I had expressed my last wish and tiredly closed my eyes.

"What is this nonsense?" cried Gerard, Lucia's father, before Luke could respond to the wishes of his wife. He looked at Luke, then looked at his dying daughter in the hospital bed. He could not imagine that his daughter believed in something as ridiculous as cryonics! Cryonics was something for dreamers, not his daughter!

"This is crazy!!" cried the outraged father. "Cryonics, pfff. That will never work!! Behave yourself for once like a normal person and don't live in a fantasy world! Grow up!!"

Oh no, not again...

I already felt so terrible and he wanted to discuss my wishes? I didn't. I knew it would go nowhere. This man was so stubborn in his opinion. How could I explain to him that cryonics could give me extra time if it did work? I knew the chance was little. Nobody had ever been revived from cryopreservation. There was no proof cryonics would work for sure. Theoretically cryonics could work, someday, just not in this time.

A little chance was better than no chance.

I wanted to do a lot of things in this world. There was much to see in this world. Not everything in this world was bad. I wasn't ready to leave. Now I wanted to take this small chance. I had nothing left to lose.

I turned my head... so tired.. I didn't want to discuss this. I just wanted one thing from my father: that he would accept my choice and help me with my last wish.

I wanted to rest...

"How can you react like that!!" Luke lashed out, seeing that his wife hadn't energy left to respond.

"Your daughter is dying and you don't want to respect her wishes??" He knew that Lucia and her father often disagreed and that had been expressed in many discussions between them.

"I don't believe this, you're doing this while your daughter is DYING!" Luke looked angrily at his father-in-law. "Accept for the first time in your life her choice. She is a grown-up woman and she knows what she wants!!"

"You don't believe this cryonics nonsense, right?? Think about this:" said Gerard thoughtfully. "Cryonics will never work because of the ice crystals! Freezing involves the forming of ice crystals, which destroy body tissues! So what Lucia expects from it cannot happen! She has to accept that she is living in the real world and not in a science fiction movie!"

I listened silently to my father. It did hurt that my father couldn't stand behind my choice. I opened my eyes and tried to sit up. My father had to go against me, as usual... I gathered the little energy that I had left in my body and said:

"If I do nothing, I die. If they put me in cryopreservation, I make at least a small chance to be rescued... and I can continue with my life again... vitrification, there are no ice crystals--please... read about it...on the internet..."

My father had to accept my choice whether he wanted to or not.

I already knew Luke would help me.

When we first heard of cryonics, through our friends, we thought it was for dreamers who had seen too many science fiction movies. When I read more about this topic, I found the idea not so far-fetched: to freeze someone to delay their permanent death, until there is medical help available. Would it work? Nobody knew. In the future we will know if it worked or not.

Cryonics is an experiment with a unknown outcome. I know someone who was signed up for cryonics. He realized only too well that the chance it would work was very small. I had spoken a lot with him and I understand the meaning of cryonics now.

Now I was about to die; I wanted to take this little chance. If I could have extra time in life, I would be very grateful to God for a second chance. Life is precious. God knows me and He knows that I wanted to do a lot of good things in this world. It will be up to God if cryonics works or not.

If not: I will have been done in this world and I will go to God.

It was fine with me. I didn't have to worry about this: I had to put this all in God's hands.

Tired, I looked at my father. I didn't know what to say; I was too tired. I wanted to sleep: to feel no more pain and fatigue in my damaged body...

Luke went to sit by his wife on her bed and supported her weak body, so she could speak. He saw the sweat on her forehead. This was not good, but he knew Lucia never avoided a discussion with her father. With pain in her voice she said:

"I really want this, daddy. Please, accept my choice and help me... help Luke to arrange this. Don't let him do this alone.. "

I started to cry. This made me feel dizzy. I wanted to lie down.

Luke helped me lie down. I couldn't do more to convince my father I wanted cryonics and that he had to help Luke.

My father now knew what I wanted. I didn't know if he'd help me, but I had to let it go. I had done enough...

Everything went black before my eyes and I felt myself slip away into a deep black hole that welcomed me with open arms. I let myself go...

I passed out again...

After some time I came back to consciousness and I saw strange people in the room. I had never seen these people before. They were too busy to see that I was awake again. I looked at them to see what they were doing in the corner of my room.

They were putting together an ice bath. I had read on the Internet that this was a way to cool and to stabilize their patients after 'legal death' for transport to the cryonics organization.

These people were from a cryonics organization! It had to be a standby team. Luke had arranged it all while I slept.

Luke was so sweet.. oh, I loved him so much. I saw his sad face before my eyes. I started to cry again. I didn't want to leave him alone.

A red-haired woman saw that I was awake and came to my bed. She saw me crying. With a moist cloth she carefully wiped my tears away. It felt refreshing on my face. It was nice. This woman seemed like a friendly person. I could see it in her eyes. She had

eyes like the doctor's, worried but sweet. I had to trust her and her colleagues. These people were supposed to care for me while I was in cryopreservation.

"Everything is gonna be all right, Lucia. We'll take good care of you if it is your time," said the woman with a soft voice.

"I'm scared..."

"That is not so strange. Everybody is scared of the unknown. Trust us. You'll get a good cryopreservation, okay? We will take good care of you. You'll be in good hands at our organization."

I nodded, reassured.

This woman had certainly cared for cryonics patients before. She was nice, very nice. I trusted her and I didn't know why.

I felt in my body that I didn't have much time left. There was one thing left for me to do, before I could rest for a long time in the freezer. It felt good to think that maybe I'd get extra time in life.

"Get Luke for me, please.... I need him.... I want him to be by my side."

"I'll get him for you. I understand why you want him on your side. You have a great husband. I've never seen a person who arranged so quickly a cryopreservation for a spouse."

I saw the red-haired woman leave my room. I was sad I couldn't get more time to know her. I had to accept that I didn't have any time left. It was not easy to know that Luke and I couldn't get old together. Not in this time... maybe in the future...

I closed my eyes and dozed off.

Gerard and Luke stood together at the coffee machine. Neither of them wanted to go home, because they knew Lucia didn't have much time left.

Lucia had perhaps a couple of hours to live, no more. The doctors could do nothing more for her than give her painkillers.

All the other family members had left for their homes. There was nothing they could do for Lucia. Gerard and Luke had a long conversation about cryonics. Gerard still thought it was a strange idea, but he did understand it better. If his daughter wanted to try it, who was he to oppose it?

"I am glad you understand Lucia's choice better. I know it's hard for you because you lost your wife a few years ago. What would you have done, if you had known about cryonics then?"

Gerard avoided Luke's eyes. He looked to the ground, because he didn't want to admit that probably he would have chosen cryonics for his wife.

"I think, I would have taken the small chance too... dead is dead... I know that she is with God now...but I still miss her every day..."

"All right... Now accept your daughter's choice. She wants cryonics. She does know that the chance it'll work is very small. If cryonics doesn't work, she still dies and goes to God. I believe this for sure."

The two men embraced and shared their grief.

The father who had already lost a wife and the son-in-law who was losing his wife at this moment.

"Let your daughter know that you agree with her decision. It'll be good for her. Believe me."

Gerard knew Luke was right. It was still difficult for him that his daughter wanted cryonics, but he'd understand in time, he hoped.

"Okay, I'll tell her..."

Lynda Halasy, the red haired woman of the cryonics standby team, found Lucia's father and husband at the coffee machine. She walked fast towards them.

"There you are. I was looking for you. It's time. Lucia needs you, Luke. There isn't much time. Come quickly!"

"Let's go, Dad. This is the only chance you can tell Lucia that you accept her decision. Soon it'll be too late."

Gerard nodded his approval.

Together they walked with Lynda back to Lucia's hospital room.

In the room they saw the doctor standing beside Lucia's bed.

She lay with her eyes closed. She looked very pale and breathed shallowly.

The two men sat down at each side of the bed and they each took a hand to let Lucia know that they were there.

With great effort, I opened my eyes.

I saw my husband and father beside me. I was glad my father was with me.

I didn't have a mother any more, but I was grateful that my father had decided to remain with me till the end. A small smile appeared on my face.

"I am glad that you are with me, Dad."

"I couldn't let you go alone. I understand your choice now, my dear daughter. If you want cryonics, we should arrange that for you."

"Thank you, you don't know how much this means to me, Dad..." I started to cry.

Finally, for the first time in his life, my father agreed with me. I was grateful for this moment. I had never thought that he would ever agree with me. This felt good. My tears were of joy. Everything was fine now.

Despite the pain in my body, I felt relaxed. Barely able, I turned my head to Luke. I saw the tears in his eyes. It hurt me because I loved him so much. It was difficult for me to leave him behind. He had to go on with his life, while I rested in the freezer.

I only wanted one pledge from him:

"Luke, darling. Don't let me go alone. I want you to sign up for cryonics too, in case it works. I want to share my future with you. Together forever, remember?... Promise me that, please..."

Luke looked at his wife. It hurt him to see her this way. He had to promise her that he would do it too. He had less confidence in cryonics than his wife, but he would gladly comply with the wishes of his wife and and hope that they would be back together again in a distant future.

"I promise, my dear. I'll let them place me in cryopreservation too when it's my turn and we'll wait together until the moment that we can pick up our lives again, unless we both awake in heaven. I don't want to live without you. I love you. Don't forget that..."

"I love you too..." I said. I was tired, very tired. I felt I was slipping away again. I didn't fight against it. Everything is all right....

The last thing I felt was a soft kiss on my forehead.

Satisfied, I closed my eyes and let myself go for the last time....

Gerard and Luke both looked at the woman in bed. Lucia was deanimated. It was over. She had rest now, no more pain.

The doctor was called to the room. He checked Lucia's vital signs. After a brief investigation he found no heartbeat and no breathing...

He softly shook his head: "No". The patient was gone. He declared her legally deceased.

This was the signal the cryonics standby team had been waiting for.

According to the law, cryonics could not be applied on living people. Also not on terminally wounded people like Lucia had been. Now that Lucia was legally dead, the standby team could act, under the leadership of Lynda.

The first thing they had to do was to artificially re-start Lucia's heartbeat and breathing to avoid ischemia in the brain.

After that they put her in the ice bath to cool her body temperature. The cooldown must be done fast to avoid further deterioration of the body cells, especially the brain. The

brain was the important part of the body to keep safe, because it held the personality and memories.

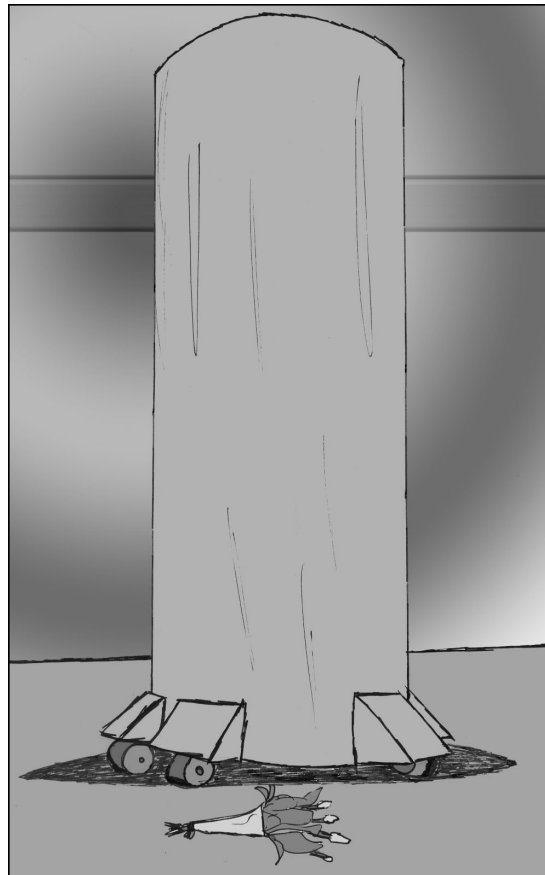
They gave her different medications, like heparin to avoid clotting of the blood. They gave her an anesthetic, so her brain would need less oxygen.

After the standby team was finished with the preparations for transport, Lynda told Gerard and Luke the next step. Lucia would be transferred to the second stage of preservation, cryoprotective surgery in which Lucia's blood would be replaced by cryoprotectants to minimize freezing damage. After the washout was finished it would be time for further cooling, all the way down to cryogenic temperatures. Then Lucia would be placed in a dewar for long term storage.

Lynda told these men the most important thing: the people of the cryonics organization saw their patients not as all the way dead people. In their eyes cryonics patients are in a state between life and death.

After the standby team had finished the stabilization procedures, they left the room with their new patient, who was in an ice bath, her heartbeat maintained by cardiopulmonary support machines.

The father and husband stayed behind in the hospital room, not knowing what to say or do. It felt strange to them, to know that Lucia soon would be resting in an ice cold freezer waiting for treatment which could save her life in the future...



The first thing I felt was that I had no more pain in my body!

What a relief!

I felt myself relaxed and healthy. It felt as if I had never been in an accident that had cost me my life.

I opened my eyes and I saw that I was in a white hospital room. It looked a lot more advanced than I was accustomed to. I tried sitting up. It didn't hurt! I took a deep breath. My lungs didn't hurt any more and I could breathe like I used to breathe! Wow, this was amazing!

I was really healthy again! I was alive!

I moved my arms and legs. Everything worked. I was healthier than before my cryopreservation!

I was grateful to God for the extra time I realized I now had before me. I hadn't believed that cryonics would actually work.

A sliding door opened and a young red haired woman stepped inside. She was wearing a white uniform. Her face was vaguely familiar to me. I didn't know where I had seen her face before.

"Ah, you are awake. How do you feel?"

"I'm fine. I am healthy now -- my injuries are gone! How did you do that?"

"You know you were placed in cryopreservation?"

"Yes, it was my last wish before I...." I couldn't finish my sentence. It was hard for me to think about that. But I didn't really die at that moment if cryonics had worked...

"You are in the future now. We have treated your body with nanobots, tiny robots that restore damaged body cells like yours. The nanobots will watch over your physical health from now on."

"Does this mean that cryonics really works? Am I really in the future?" I asked, surprised. Maybe I was dreaming all this and was this not real, but only a dream.

"Yes, cryonics has been proven to work." answered Lynda. "And yes, you are in the future now. Welcome! We are living in the year 2234. I am Lynda Halasy. I am from your time and I am going to help you and your husband to re-integrate into our society. Society is very different now than in 2008.."

"Husband? Do you mean, Luke is here too?"

"Yes, Lucia. He is. He had promised you that he would let himself be cryopreserved when it was his time, remember?"

"I remember this, yes.... Can I see him?"

"Of course you can. He is already impatiently waiting for you. I'll let him in." Lynda walked to the door. She waved her hand over a sensor and the door opened.

I got up from bed. I watched the door, and I saw a familiar face. It was a face I would never forget in all my life!

It was really Luke. We were together again! I couldn't have dreamed about this!

I ran to him.

Luke did the same.

Lynda looked on as the two happy people ran toward each other.

She saw the two people embrace each other for joy. This was why she worked in the cryonics business. She smiled.

These two people had had to wait in the freezer a long time in order to be back together again. They had been given a second chance in life. A second chance to live again. They had a new future for themselves.

I was, like Luke, very curious about the new society where we were going to live. Were there talking and fully sentient robots? Did we have real spaceships for space travel? Could we go to other planets now? How were the computers of today?

What I did know was that Luke and I would have a lot of time to explore all these things. Life is a great gift and I was very thankful for the fact that I had extra time and I had Luke with me.
Together we would handle this new world.
I embraced Luke and gave him a heartfelt kiss...



The end