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The Prometheus Thesis

By Steven Campbell

Isla Muir was dying. Not metaphorically, not existentially, but cell by cell, gene by gene. Dying in the most literal, finite sense of the word. The osteosarcoma had advanced beyond the spinal barrier, devouring bone like it knew her name. Chemotherapy had failed. Palliative care was a whisper wrapped in morphine. Twenty-three years old and scheduled for nothing but a quiet, lucid end.

But Isla had other plans.

Her doctoral thesis had been formally rejected by the university's ethics board before it ever reached a defence. Officially, she had claimed to be working on tissue engineering and regenerative medicine. Privately, in encrypted folders hidden from institutional servers, the real title remained: Subjective Continuity Through Embodied Rebirth: A Proof-of-Concept in Human Regenerative Substrate.

She called it the Prometheus Thesis.

The basement beneath the abandoned biomedical annex at Foresterhill was where she built it. A bioreactor stolen in pieces from three separate laboratories. A CRISPR-Cas9 gene editor modified for real-time response inside living cells. A printer that worked not in plastics but in hydrogel, seeded with pluripotent stem cells suspended in nutrient-rich media.

She began with herself. Buccal swabs. Bone marrow aspirates. Blood, hair, skin. Sequencing her genome took days. Correcting it took weeks. Mutations were identified and digitally excised. Structural weaknesses were reinforced. Cancer-linked regions were removed and replaced using comparative methylation patterns drawn from species with exceptional cellular repair: whales, deep-diving bats, salamanders.

Next came the scaffold. An anatomical replica of her body, printed layer by layer inside a nutrient vat. Not a clone, not exactly. A body grown from a corrected blueprint: her ideal, pre-morbid self. One that had never known pain. A biological blank slate.

The brain was the problem.

Isla's consciousness could not simply be copied like data from a drive. Her living brain, ravaged though it was, had to be mapped in active function. She used an optogenetic lattice: neurons genetically altered to respond to light, allowing their firing patterns to be tracked with extreme precision. Lasers pulsed through the transparent cranial array, forcing her neural circuits to reveal themselves in sequences of colour and timing.

This was the stage that nearly killed her. Days passed in seizure-like states as her cortex endured constant stimulation. Her thoughts fragmented under photonic stress while terabytes of synaptic activity were recorded, neuron by neuron, pathway by pathway.

From this emerged what she called the N-Ego Construct: a compressed schematic of identity, memory, and neural structure. Not thoughts themselves, but the architecture that produced them. The Construct was stored in a polymer-based nanomatrix, capable of interfacing with living tissue.

Finally, she initiated the transfer.

The room pulsed with electromagnetic current. The artificial body floated in its amniotic gel, twitching faintly under stimulation as neural tissue matured. The Construct was uploaded into a cortical implant embedded deep within the new brain's thalamic relay centre, the region that coordinates sensory input and conscious awareness.

Activation occurred through controlled synaptic ignition: patterned electrical signals designed to reproduce her original neural firing order. Her old body, riddled with tumours, convulsed under sedation. Her last breath came not with fear, but calculation. Isla closed her eyes. Released the trigger.

She awoke.

Not gasping. Not screaming. Her first breath was controlled, deliberate. Her first thought: I'm alive. But something felt unseated. Her limbs responded too smoothly. Her heartbeat felt distant, as if borrowed. There was no pain, no fatigue. Her memories arrived in fragments: her mother's voice before her own name. Her coursework. The ethics rejection. Her diagnosis. Her decision. Her death.

The room was silent.

Her old body lay still in the surgical chair. Hollow. Sunken. Eyes closed, lashes resting against colourless skin. She approached it. Her former self. Was this me? she wondered. Is this now mine?

The Construct had transferred. But not entirely. Something had been lost in translation. Emotional tones were blunted. Sensory meaning slipped from memory. Music no longer stirred her. Childhood recollections floated free of warmth or fear.

She understood then:

The body was perfect.
The mind was accurate.
But the soul was gone.

She buried the old body beneath the dunes at Aberdeen Beach. No ceremony. No stone. She walked the shoreline in silence, waves brushing against feet that had never walked before. Behind her, in the hidden lab, the bioreactor still hummed. The CRISPR device blinked in standby. The scaffold printer had another sequence queued.

Isla Muir had returned.

But something else might have come with her. And something had stayed behind.

Scientific Statement

This story is inspired by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and reimagines its central idea using contemporary science rather than nineteenth century electricity and anatomy. While the act of resurrecting the dead remains firmly within the realm of science fiction, many of the tools and concepts referenced in the narrative are drawn from real, ongoing research in modern biology and medicine.

Several real scientific technologies form the foundation of the story. Gene editing techniques, particularly CRISPR-Cas9, allow scientists to cut and modify DNA with high precision. This technique is already being used experimentally to correct genetic diseases and study how genes function. As demonstrated by Dolly the sheep in 1996, it is possible to create a genetic copy of an organism from adult cells. Although cloning humans is illegal and ethically prohibited, it makes for a great narrative idea. 3D bioprinting is another real technology, in which living cells are layered to form simple tissues such as skin, cartilage, and blood vessels.

Scientists hope this will eventually allow replacement organs to be grown for transplant patients. Optogenetics is a neuroscience technique that uses light to control the activity of genetically modified neurons, and is currently used in laboratories to study how brain circuits work. These technologies represent genuine scientific progress and provide the realistic framework for the story.

The narrative also references more speculative ideas. Consciousness scanning, the ability to record or copy a person's mind, does not exist in real science. Although brain imaging can measure electrical activity and identify regions involved in memory or emotion, there is currently no way to capture thoughts, identity, or personality in a transferable form. Similarly, the story's central conceit (Prometheus's Thesis), creating a fully healthy version of a person in a new body and transferring their consciousness into it, moves beyond current science into science fiction. While damaged organs can sometimes be replaced and genetic defects edited, there is no method to rebuild an entire human body or restore life once biological death has occurred.

The aim of this story is to imagine what might happen if real scientific tools were pushed to their theoretical end point. By grounding the narrative in existing technologies such as gene editing, cloning, and tissue engineering, the story attempts to feel plausible, even as it crosses into speculative territory. The gothic horror element lies not in the machines themselves but in their consequences: the ethical, psychological, and social implications of using science to redesign the human body and identity.

In this way, the story mirrors the function of Shelley's original novel for a modern audience. Where *Frankenstein* reflected contemporary fears about galvanism and anatomy, this version reflects present-day anxieties surrounding genetic engineering, artificial life, and the boundaries of medical intervention. The science provides a credible framework, while the act of transferring consciousness and recreating a person remains a fictional extension used to explore themes of mortality, responsibility, and what it truly means to be human.