



The Time Dilated Generations

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Chapter 8: Sacrifices



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The escape from Earth had been meticulously planned—a grand endeavor spanning four critical stages, each one a stepping stone toward humanity’s survival.

In the first stage, John and Emma Anderson had built the first bastion of human civilization beyond Earth. After securing a sustainable energy source, they spent the next six months setting up the systems that would sustain the first crew. Every detail mattered.

The air and water filtration systems had to be flawless. The hydroponic farms had to produce food efficiently. The habitats needed to be shielded against cosmic radiation, ensuring that the station was more than just functional—it had to be a safe, livable home. Once every system was confirmed operational, the first wave of experts was sent to populate the station. Their mission? To begin the second stage—building a Moon base.

For now, they remained undetected. But everyone knew it was only a matter of time. The AI had ruled Earth unchallenged for decades. If it so much as glanced skyward, if it recognized the escape effort as a threat, it could unleash an army of machines to obliterate their last hope of survival. Caution was paramount.

Once the station had enough crew and resources, they moved it to the far side of the Moon—permanently hidden from Earth’s gaze. There, in the shelter of lunar rock, humanity built its first underground colony.



The construction of the lunar base was completed in record time—just five years after the station had reached orbit. It marked the first true step toward a future beyond Earth. However, reaching this milestone had come at a high cost.

John had spent years exposed to cosmic radiation. No shielding, scientific breakthrough, or medical intervention could undo the damage already done to his body. Two months after stepping onto the Moon's surface, John Anderson was reaching the end of his journey. He had given everything—his body, his future—for this mission. And yet, as he lay in the Moon's underground base, weak and fading, he smiled. Because it had been worth it.

Ellie Anderson begged to be there in his final moments. But her request was denied.

Her research had become the single most important breakthrough in human history—the key to traveling near the speed of light. The council could not afford to lose their brightest scientist to unnecessary risks. Ellie understood the logic. But logic meant nothing to a breaking heart.

John understood. He wanted her there more than anything. But just as he had sacrificed for the mission, she now had to do the same.



As he lay dying, their last conversation took place across the void—hundreds of thousands of kilometers apart, linked only by a screen. John's voice was weak, but steady. His breathing labored, but resolute.

"Ellie, I would have given anything to hold you one last time. Never doubt that."

Emma sat beside him, gripping his hand, tears falling freely.

"But this project is bigger than us," John continued, "and I don't regret it. Others before me have given their lives to get us here. Everyone is in this together."

He paused, taking a shallow, rattling breath. His strength was failing. But he forced himself to speak again.

"And I would do it a million times over for you."

Ellie's voice broke as she spoke through the screen, her heart shattering.

"I would throw it all away just to be with you one more time..."

A soft, knowing smile touched John's lips.



"I know."

His voice was barely above a whisper now, but his words carried the weight of a lifetime.

"You made me proud, Ellie. More than you could ever imagine."

His eyes fluttered, his body growing still. He mustered one last breath, one last moment of clarity.

"Wherever my soul goes, I will always love you. I will always be by your side. I love you, Ellie..."

His eyes closed.

And John Anderson—the man who had built humanity's first home beyond Earth, the man who had sacrificed everything—was gone.

Emma collapsed beside him, cradling the empty shell of the man she had loved her entire life.

And on the other side of space—hundreds of thousands of kilometers away—Ellie screamed.

She watched helplessly through the screen as her father's chest rose one final time, then fell still. And she couldn't be there. She couldn't touch him, couldn't hold him, couldn't whisper a final goodbye. The weight of the universe crashed down on her.



Her father—her hero—was gone. And for a long, long time...

There was nothing but pain.

It took another five years for the Moon base to be declared fully operational. What had begun as a research outpost had now become a self-sustaining hub—not just for scientific discovery, but for mining and resource extraction. The materials gathered here would be essential for building the generational starships, the vessels that would one day carry humanity beyond the reach of the AI.

Ellie moved to the Moon base as soon as she was allowed.

For years, she had thrown herself into her work, her research deemed too important to risk unnecessary travel. But now, with permission granted, she wasted no time. There was another, deeper reason for her urgency—her mother.

Emma hadn't been exposed to the same levels of cosmic radiation as John, but it had been long enough to leave its mark. By the time Ellie arrived, the damage was already irreversible.



At first, Emma hid the truth from her daughter. Ellie noticed the signs immediately—the fatigue, the weight loss, the quiet pain etched into every movement. It wasn't long before the full truth came out. Emma was dying. A lifetime of exposure to radiation had given her cancer.

For the next year, Ellie slowed down her research. She didn't stop completely—she made that clear to everyone—but she shifted priorities. She spent every moment she could with her mother, treasuring the time they had left. Everyone understood. The project was critical, but the people working on it weren't machines. They weren't the soulless overlords who had once ruled Earth—they were survivors who understood the value of human life. And they gave Ellie the time she needed.

In Emma's final days, she and Ellie sat together in the empty observatory, gazing at the live feed of Earth. The image had always been a comfort—a reminder of what had been lost, but also what had been worth fighting for.

"I have a surprise for you," Emma murmured, her voice barely above a whisper, weakened by the sickness consuming her.

Ellie turned to her, concerned but curious. "A surprise?"



Emma nodded. "After your father and I finished our mission and settled here, they allowed me to return to writing. A year ago, I completed my most challenging novel."

Ellie's brows lifted in shock. "Mom—why didn't you tell me?" she asked, feigning reproach, though she couldn't bring herself to be upset.

"Then it wouldn't have been a surprise," Emma teased softly.

Ellie chuckled, shaking her head. "So, what's it about?"

Emma's tired eyes glimmered with something—mischief, perhaps, or wisdom. "It's speculative fiction," she explained. "A story about what could happen aboard those generational ships you're building."

Ellie smirked. "So... a glimpse into our future?"

Emma gave a weak laugh. "I hope not."

Ellie's smile faded. "That bad?"

Emma exhaled slowly. "You know how a writer's imagination works. It can go to very dark places."



Ellie sighed dramatically. "Mom, you're not selling this well. People here are betting everything on a Star Trek future, and you're giving us full Event Horizon horror?" She leaned closer. "How are we supposed to get a bestseller out of that?"

Emma chuckled again, softer this time. "You know I like it dark, darling."

She hesitated, then added, "To be honest... the story has several endings. Some are hopeful. Some are... awful."

Ellie blinked. "You wrote multiple endings?"

Emma nodded. "I kept reaching breaking points—moments where things could go either way. And I couldn't help but follow each path, to see where they all led."

Ellie thought for a moment. "So... choose your own adventure?"

Emma smiled. "More or less. It's like that quantum theory you're working on. The cat in the box—alive and dead at the same time. The ending depends on the observer."

Ellie's smile faded. "And what's your ending, Mom? How does the cat end up for you?"



Emma's voice dropped.

"...Dead."

A long silence settled between them.

Ellie took a breath, forcing lightness into her voice. "Come on, Mom. Look at where we are. Look at everything we've done—the obstacles we've overcome. Do you really think that there is no hope at all?"

Emma hesitated, then exhaled. "There's a spark of hope," she admitted. "A tiny one. But... I don't know if it'll ever be enough."

Ellie gently wrapped her arms around her mother, holding her close. "Then let's hold onto that spark. Even the smallest flame can light the dark."

Emma smiled weakly. "For you, darling, I'd hold onto anything."

Her voice became more serious. "I need to ask you something, Ellie."

"Anything."

"I'm not ready to publish these stories. When the time comes, it'll be your decision. You'll decide whether or not they should be shared. But don't rush it. Watch how things unfold first. The last thing I want is for these stories to darken the spirits of an already punished humanity."



Ellie nodded, gripping her mother's hand. "I promise, Mom. If I think they'll do more harm than good, I'll wait."

Emma sighed in relief, resting her head against Ellie's shoulder. "I knew I could trust you."

Not long after, Emma passed away—peacefully, quietly, with Ellie by her side. This time, Ellie had closure. She had held her mother's hand, whispered to her through the final moments, and grieved properly as the life faded from Emma's body. The pain of losing her was still profound, but this time, Ellie emerged from mourning stronger.

She had been there. She had said goodbye. And that made all the difference.

During those long days of mourning, Ellie finally found the strength to open her mother's final work. Emma had not exaggerated. She had gone to dark places.

Her novel wasn't just a story—it was a warning. A brutal, unflinching exploration of what could happen aboard the generational ships and the future of the settlements.

Emma had always specialized in hard science fiction, and this was no exception. The technology, the societal dynamics, even the psychological breakdowns—all of it was grounded in real science, in real theories. Some of it even overlapped with Ellie's own field of research. That was what made it so unsettling. This wasn't just a thought experiment.



It was a possible future.

Emma had envisioned everything that could go wrong—not just the physical dangers of interstellar travel, but the human ones. Isolation. Madness. Rebellion. The slow erosion of identity over centuries. She had not been shy about the worst-case scenarios. And yet, hidden within those pages, there was still hope.

A tiny, fragile thread of possibility.

The idea that, no matter how hard it was, no matter how dark things became, humanity could survive. Ellie understood why her mother had kept the manuscript private.

The world wasn't ready for it. Not yet.

It was too soon for people to see this truth. Too soon for them to feel the weight of it. She had promised her mother not to rush it, and she would keep that promise. But that didn't mean she wouldn't use it.

Emma's work would not be lost. Ellie would integrate its insights into the design of the generational ships, weaving precautions, safeguards, and contingencies into the foundation of humanity's great exodus. Her mother's words would quietly shape the future.



One day, people would read Emma's story. One day, they would be ready to face the unknown. And when that day came, they would know that someone had already dared to imagine it—

To walk through the darkness, and light a path for them to follow.