



THE
**GIRL WHO
FELL^{TO} EARTH**



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HOW IT STARTED

I remember the day it started. I was in class, supposedly listening to Dr Jake Watson talking about DNA. DNA was Dr Watson's passion, if you could imagine a large slow-moving sloth having a passion. The doc had been droning on at us for over an hour when, finally, we were allowed to go to our individual celloscope stations. This was the highlight of his lecture, where we got to spit on a tiny glass slide and see our own DNA. Wow! How lucky could we get? Doc Watson made it sound like we'd won a prize. What was it with scientists that they thought everything was so fascinating? But I'd promised Dad that I'd do my best with this module and so I made a big effort to listen.

'You will all please now look at your DNA structure. You will see that it looks like a honeycomb, with the hexagonal shape we associate with our DNA.'

I looked, but I had no idea what he was talking about. My DNA didn't look anything like a hexagon. I adjusted the eye-piece and tried again – still no hexagon. I was about to put my hand up when something stopped me. All the other students were looking through their lenses and nodding.

'Pick up your tablets,' Dr Watson said, 'and draw what you see.'

Dava, the ultra-clever science nerd to my right, had already begun to draw. Peering over her shoulder, I saw a series of hexagons.

I grabbed the celloscope and glared through the lens again. My DNA looked like a twisty rope ladder. I looked across the room to

where Rio was sitting, hoping to catch her eye, but she was talking to the boy beside her, her head bent, her hands gesticulating wildly, as they always did when she was excited about something, and she didn't notice.

Maybe the slide was the wrong way around? I repositioned it and looked again. There was no doubt now. My DNA looked nothing like the other students' DNA.

I stepped back from the celloscope as though it had bitten me. A cold feeling ripped through my body. I felt like I was free-falling into a deep hole.

Then the real question came, the words tumbling one over the other, like waves racing for shore.

How could that be?

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I knew who I was, I told myself. My biological father was Lucas Evan. My biological mother was Della Gular. Thus my surname – Evangular. Evan and Gular. I was a Terrosian, a citizen of the best planet in the universe, the planet of Terros. I had been grown in an artificial womb in the Blue Lab like all my friends and was delivered full term at twelve months.

My mother said that I was a cute baby, but she could be a bit biased. She is something of a beauty herself, and all my friends say that Dad is nothing if not handsome, which, though nauseating, is possibly true. Mum and Dad had come to look at me once a month in the Blue Lab, watching me grow from a blob (albeit a *cute* blob) into a strapping baby of three point three kilograms at full term.

I also knew that I didn't have some terrible disease, because I had a full medical every month, whether I liked it or not, just like every other teenager on Terros. I had experienced the odd glitch – to be honest, more than the odd glitch; I had once thrown a fever in the middle of the night that had terrified my parents – I had some minor allergies and the occasional headache. Seb Roy, my medical supervisor, had always taken care of me and assured me that these were things that I would eventually grow out of.

But none of my friends had experienced glitches. It was one of the few things that I didn't or couldn't discuss with my parents. It made them too anxious.

When I was younger, my mother had warned me never to discuss these glitches with anyone other than Seb Roy, and I had done exactly as she told me. Seb Roy had convinced me that there was nothing to worry about, and over the years I had allowed myself to believe that.

So why wasn't my brain happy to accept that now? Why was it nibbling away at me in the dark of the night and keeping me awake?

I had to find out why my DNA didn't look like anyone else's DNA. Obviously, I had done something wrong in Doc Watson's class and had messed up the test. It wouldn't be the first time. Even my best friends would say that I wasn't exactly a natural at science. Still, I had to know the truth; and that meant going back to the lab to have the Evaluator analyse my DNA properly. I could have asked Doc Watson about it, but something told me not to draw attention to the situation until I had an answer. If there was something weird about me, I wanted to be the first to know about it.

It would be a challenge to get into the lab without being discovered, but that wasn't what worried me. What would the Evaluator say? That was what really bothered me. I'd been to enough biology sessions to know that the Evaluator contained the most advanced science available on Terros. Every atom of knowledge, every new discovery, every proven theory was uploaded to the Evaluator. It also contained all our personal information, our medical history, our family history. It was one of our greatest inventions and I knew it had the answers that I wanted – as long as I didn't get caught before I could ask the question.

I chose a quiet mid-week night for my expedition. I couldn't risk going there during the day when the place was awash with students and scientists, not to mention security. At night, there were no students and only a skeleton crew of guards. There were always random scientists there, but I would have to risk that.

The laboratory was a short walk from our house, and I hoped I could be there and back within an hour. Mum and Dad were relaxing together, chatting in the family pod, laughing at some story Dad was telling about an experiment that had gone wrong.

I stood at the door watching them for a second, wishing I could go back to the way things had been before I knew anything about my strange DNA.

'What's happening, Aria?' Mum said when she saw me standing there. She was wearing a wine-coloured bodysuit with silver fastenings, and her curly black hair flowed down her back, freed from the tight bun she normally wore to work.

'I thought I might power down,' I said. 'It's been a long day.'

'I bet.' Dad grinned. 'All that gossiping with the girls and –'

Mum gave him a friendly punch. 'Respect!' she said in a mock cross voice. 'We women do not gossip!'

'Good night, baby girl,' Dad said, and for once I didn't protest about being called a baby.

I left the room and headed to my sleep pod. I knew that they wouldn't disturb me until morning. They never did. They trusted me. That thought didn't sit well with me. I hated lying to them, but it had to be done.

An hour later, I slipped through the back door and out into the night. I hurried across the darkening park, keeping to the shadows.

Ahead of me, the twin towers of The Hub pulsed orange and blue, their gleaming curves twisting brazenly, as they reached high into the night sky. This was the heart of our community, the seat of power and the place where we came to be educated. There was nothing more important than education on our planet.

I felt a surge of pride, the way I always did, when I saw the towers. They were a symbol for all the brilliant things the people of my planet had done and would do in the future. We were the

most advanced people to *ever* evolve, and I was so proud to be part of it all.

I hurried on, getting more and more nervous as I got nearer. The gauge on my bodysuit glowed fluorescent. My blood pressure was on the rise, my pulse galloping.

Taking a deep breath, I walked briskly up to the front door of The Hub. I raised my hand to the electronic eye, hoping that my student identity would get me in, even though I was never supposed to be there in the middle of the night.

The eye blinked. The screen lit up.

SECURITY QUESTION:

HAVE YOU A LEGITIMATE REASON TO BE HERE?

It seemed like an innocent question and not an awfully scientific one, but I knew how this worked. The eye was a lie detector, a sneaky device that could read the activity in my brain through the chip embedded over my left eye. But I had been raised in a world run by scientists. I knew that a lie was only a lie if you believed it to be so.

I looked at the eye.

'Yes,' I said.

I needed to know who I really was. That was a legitimate reason, wasn't it?

I had to believe this. If I didn't, I was about to witness an explosion of flashing lights, accompanied by deafening sirens and some very unfriendly security staff.

My heart beat painfully in the silence. The eye blinked again. The door slid open.

I was in.

I hurried down the dark corridors. Through the translucent doors, I could see that the White Laboratory was deserted. I pushed

the door gently and it slid open with a soft whisper. The long room was eerily quiet and lit by a soft tawny light. Rows of desks and chairs stood like sentries in the half-light, and beyond them I could see the Evaluator at the top of the room. It was egg-shaped, its skin made from a single sheet of rantam, satin-smooth and silver grey.

The screen lit up as I approached it. I could see it scanning my retina, establishing that I was a student.

PLEASE CHOOSE YOUR AREA OF INTEREST.

A list appeared. I chose biology, and that threw up another menu.

CELLULAR ANALYSIS
TISSUE ANALYSIS
DNA ANALYSIS

I touched the last option and waited. The screen transformed.

EXHALE ONTO SCREEN IN 3 ... 2 ... 1 ...

I blew. My breath misted the pristine glass.

The Evaluator's screen shuddered and letters began to form.

H ...

And then I heard footsteps. My heart lurched. I looked around desperately. I had to find somewhere to hide.

There was a storage area under the main utility bench, and I just managed to squeeze inside, my knees pressed up against my mouth and my arms wrapped around my body. I swiped the air with my hand and the door of the storage space glided silently

across two-thirds of the way and then stopped. I suspected that my bulk was blocking the visual field, but before I could do anything about it the laboratory door opened. The feet stopped right in front of me. Two men. If they looked down they would see me.

I tried not to move, not to breathe.

'Have you decided to put yourself forward?' a voice I didn't recognise said. 'You would win easily. Your work is ambitious and your record unblemished.'

'Yes,' a second man answered in a clipped tight voice. 'I told parliament today that I would like to be considered in the leadership contest.'

I knew that voice. Seb Roy, my medical supervisor and one of our top scientists, also a good friend of my parents. I could see him in my mind's eye, with his floppy dark hair that fell over his right eye and his slightly crooked mouth.

'I would be honoured to run your campaign. We will have to persuade people that you are the only man for the job. They need to get to know you better. We need to get you out there ...'

'I'm looking forward to it,' Seb said.

'There will be a thorough investigation into every aspect of your life,' the second man said. 'But as I said, you have an unblemished record.'

Thoughts buzzed like bees in my brain. Seb wanted to be the next leader of Terros?

'Indeed,' Seb snapped, and I heard the sharp tip-tap of feet leaving the room.

At that exact moment, the Evaluator pinged as it refreshed the page. I edged the door of the storage space ever so slightly away from me. Through the opening I watched in horror as Seb Roy walked over to the now glowing screen, his long legs eating up the distance.

No! A voice was screaming in my head. *Don't look at the screen.*
'Seb!'

He took a step backwards and glanced around. The other man was calling from the corridor outside.

I held my breath. Seb's eyes seemed to be looking straight at me. He hesitated for another moment, then turned sharply and walked away. I waited. I didn't care how long I had to wait. I'd come for answers and I wasn't leaving without them. After ten slow and painful minutes, I thought I might risk opening the door fully. I peered into the vast room and saw the high desks loom out of the dusk, standing on one leg like storks. I tumbled out and made straight for the Evaluator. The screen had gone to sleep again so I touched the cool glass interface. Immediately a series of letters appeared.

HUMAN/DOMINANT/MATERNAL