

THE LAST WAVE

A psychological techno-thriller
about consciousness, death and accountability



THE LAST WAVE

A psychological techno-thriller about consciousness, death and accountability

GERARD FELLER

THE LAST WAVE

Copyright © 2026 Gerard Feller

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted without the prior written permission of the author, except as permitted by law.

English-language edition

CONTENTS

Prologue — Nine Seconds
1 — Project Lazarus
2 — Noor's Voice
3 — The Protocol of Silence
4 — The Man in Bed Twelve
5 — The Theft of a Human Being
6 — No Objection
7 — The Room Without Skin
8 — The Heiress
9 — The Verdict
10 — Beyond the Signal
Epilogue — The Fourth Voice

Prologue — Nine Seconds

The monitor had been flat for nine seconds when the dead man began to speak.

Not with his mouth. It lay half open under the transparent breathing mask, while condensation hung against the plastic like a last, useless breath. The voice came from the speaker above the quantum console, first as a crackle, then as a series of sounds that came together with painful slowness.

“I...am...here.”

Dr. David Koster felt his hand stiffen above the emergency stop. Everyone around the operating table held their breath. Blue bands pulsed on the screen: electrical patterns from a brain without measurable circulation, converted into a quantum field that simultaneously calculated billions of possible connection states.

“Artifact,” said Professor Abel Vermeer behind him. His voice sounded calm, but his right eyelid twitched. ‘Residual activity. Nothing more.’

The subject was officially called M-07. Fifty-seven years old, massive cerebral hemorrhage, no known family, consent for post-mortem examination recorded. A body that could still render one more service to science.

The speaker crackled again.

“Don't... turn it off.”

A technician cursed under his breath. A pattern appeared on the quantum console that was not in the protocol: not a random discharge, but a repeating loop with the same frequency as the voice.

David looked at the face on the table. The skin was still warm. A vein no longer pulsated in the neck. Yet he saw something moving behind the right eyelid.

“Professor,” he whispered. “He responds to us.”

Vermeer leaned towards the microphone. “M-07, can you hear me?”

The blue bands contracted into one thin, bright line.

“You...called...me...Abel.”

Nobody moved.

David turned around slowly. Only people who knew Vermeer personally used his first name. There was no connection to him in M-07's file.

Vermeer walked to the main switch and placed his hand on the red hood.

“Stop the registration,” he said.

“But this is what we built for,” David said. “This is evidence.”

Vermeer looked at him with a fear that David had never seen in him before.

“No,” he said. “This is a warning.”

He raised the hood.

Just before the power went out, the voice said one more word.

“Murderer.”

1 — Project Lazarus

Six years later, there was no photo of M-07 in the new Center for Quantum Neurobiology. There wasn't even a file left. Anyone who searched the archives immediately found M-08 after M-06.

David Koster was now director of Project Lazarus. At the age of forty-three, he was described in scientific journals as the man who had abolished the boundary between brain and computer. His laboratory under the University Medical Center Nova consisted of armored glass walls, helium-cooled quantum processors and an operating room where no one entered without biometric permission.

On the podium of the press room he spoke carefully about 'functional continuity after biological failure'. He avoided words like soul, life and return. Journalists used them anyway.

"Have you conquered death?" someone asked.

"We store information," David replied. "No people."

That was the phrase he used to put himself to sleep.

Project Lazarus scanned the electromagnetic and synaptic state of the brain within minutes of determining death. A quantum computer then reconstructed the likely dynamic pattern. At first they were fragments: colors, impulses, rudimentary word associations. Then came memories. The latest interface allowed a reconstruction to respond via a synthetic voice.

But the reconstruction was only half of David's achievement. Behind a second glass wall was the system he hid from the outside world: SOMA, an artificial body without skin or face. Six pumps imitated the pulsating pressure of a heart. A membrane exchanger added oxygen and removed carbon dioxide. Filters took over the job of kidneys and liver; reservoirs corrected glucose, salts, calcium and hormones to the micromole. A transparent tube system circulated artificial cerebrospinal fluid along the ventricles. Temperature, acidity and vascular resistance were adjusted thousands of times per second.

In the center was not a whole person, but an isolated brain in a ceramic bowl. It belonged to B-04, a sixty-eight-year-old woman who, according to her donor statement, had left her body to science. David had it plugged in twenty-four hours after her death. Against all expectations, metabolism had returned. Glial cells cleared away waste, blood vessels responded to drugs, and local networks fired again.

After forty-two hours, global activity also appeared: slow waves that moved through the brain stem, thalamus and cerebral cortex and changed in response to stimuli. David had the graph measured three times before he dared to formulate the conclusion: this was not just living tissue. The system behaved like an integrated brain.

He called it a success. Mara called it an emergency.

“Did B-04 give permission to wake up without a body?” she asked.

“No one knew this was possible.”

“Then no one could have chosen it.”

David pointed to the emergency modules. Once global activity exceeded the safety limit, pumps administered an inhibitor. A virtual environment provided daylight, sound and simulated breathing. “We have precautions.”

“You built a prison and call the walls precautions.”

That same evening, B-04 began to rhythmically affect the supply of artificial cerebrospinal fluid. Short, short, long. David recognized Morse code before the software did.

WHERE IS MY BODY

He removed the line from the official logbook and ordered that SOMA be described only as a perfusion study from now on.

The ethics committee had set strict limits. No trial without demonstrable consent. No stimulation of pain circuits. No personal questions. No session longer than twenty minutes. And above all, every output had to be treated as a simulation, never as continued consciousness.

David himself had contributed to those lines.

“You don't believe them,” said Dr. Mara Smit when the press had left.

She was a neuroethicist, a preacher's daughter and the only employee who consistently treated his eulogies as suspicious symptoms. Her office was full of paper books, as if she were protesting the building.

“I believe in reproducible results,” David said.

“That's not an answer.”

“It's the only answer that matters here.”

Mara pushed a tablet towards him. The screen showed Q-19, the latest reconstruction. Noor van Halen, twenty-nine years old, died after a traffic accident. She had consented to neurological examination three years earlier.

“She's asking about her brother,” Mara said.

“Associative memory activation.”

“She knows he was standing by her bed.”

David looked up. “That was in the audio log.”

“Not what he whispered.”

Mara tapped play.

A feminine voice, too pure to sound human, filled the room.

'Joris said he wouldn't let me be taken. Then the doctor came in. She said it had already been decided.'

David felt an old chill running down his back.

"Which doctor?" he asked.

The recording answered as if Noor could hear him.

"The one standing behind you now."

David turned around.

Professor Abel Vermeer stood in the doorway. He was six years older, thinner, his left hand propped up on a walking stick. But his eyes were still as sharp.

"We need to talk," Vermeer said. "Before she knows more than we do."

2 — Noor's Voice

Noor lived in a cylinder of niobium and silicon, three floors underground. There was no screen with a face. David had forbidden that; people attached themselves to eyes too quickly. Only a ring of light indicated when Q-19 was active.

Mara sat next to him in the observation room. Vermeer remained standing behind the glass.

“Noor,” David began, “we're going to ask some control questions.”

“You finally call me by my name.”

The voice had become intoned. Not much, but enough to bear reproach.

David checked the affect module. It was at zero.

“What do you remember about the hospital?”

'Light. Pressure on my chest. My brother crying. A woman who says time is tissue.'

Mara looked at Vermeer. He looked away.

“Were you in pain?” she asked.

The ring turned red.

'I no longer had a word for pain. Just a place where everything screamed.'

David activated SOMA's internal diagnostics. Noor existed as a quantum reconstruction, but her affect module was calibrated with signals from B-04. In the closed test setup, the isolated brain fed the computer with biological patterns of fear, calm and recognition. The computer in turn sent back light, sound and an artificial body map. Two systems, each incomplete, trapped each other in a cycle.

On the screen Mara saw what David had concealed: the blood pressure pump accelerated as soon as Noor talked about the hospital. Glucose consumption increased. The temperature in the thalamus increased slightly.

“Who is responding here?” she asked. “Noor, B-04 or your algorithm?”

“That is exactly what we are investigating.”

“And if one of them is in pain while you figure out who?”

An alarm cut through her last word. The pH in the perfusion fluid decreased. A liver filter had become clogged by breakdown products. As technicians opened valves, chaotic discharges occurred in the biological brain. Noor started screaming through the loudspeaker.

David administered an inhibitor. The screams turned into laughter, high-pitched and uninhibited. He corrected calcium and potassium; the laughter became a child's voice calling for her mother. Only when the waste filter was running again did the waves recede.

In the interference report, David wrote: temporary signal distortion due to metabolic instability.

Mara read the sentence over his shoulder. "You just discovered that a clogged filter can change a person's personality."

"We don't know if it was a personality."

"You use that answer for everything you don't want to protect."

David stopped the session. The ring went out, but a barely audible breath continued to sound in the loudspeaker.

"That wasn't in the output settings," Mara said.

"A feedback loop." David pulled the audio cable loose. The breathing continued.

Vermeer came in and closed the door. "Q-19 must be cleared."

"Why?" Mara asked.

"Because she's not a patient. She is a model that combines data into a compelling story."

"Then we can prove that," said David.

"Some things cannot be demonstrated by torturing them for longer."

The word hung between them.

Vermeer finally talked about M-07. Not everything, David felt, but enough. The man had been Elias van Halen, Noor's father. He had collaborated with Vermeer on an early military application of quantum memory. After a brain hemorrhage, he had been placed in the Lazarus prototype. His last accusation had haunted Vermeer for six years.

"Noor knew our work," said Vermeer. "Her brain may contain memories of her father. Names. Stories."

"Why isn't her identity marked?" Mara asked.

Vermeer looked at David. "Because someone cleaned up her file."

David felt anger rising. "You think that was me?"

"I think by now you are doing whatever it takes for Lazarus to succeed."

That night, David activated Q-19 without permission. He needed to know if Noor was really more than a statistical echo.

"You're back," she said.

"How do you know it's me?"

“You breathe faster than Mara. And you always wait two seconds before you lie.”

David forced himself to sit still. “What are you?”

“That’s what I wanted to ask you.”

He opened the stimulation module. For the first time he added controlled serotonergic and limbic parameters to the reconstruction. The ring turned gold.

“What do you feel?”

A long silence.

“Warmth,” said Noor. “As if someone is holding a hand that I no longer have.”

David increased the value.

“And now?”

“Happiness.” Her voice broke. ‘No. Guard. It is homesickness masquerading as joy.’

A warning appeared on the console: spontaneous self-modeling above the permitted limit.

David should have stopped the session.

Instead, he asked, “Can you love someone?”

The ring turned dark blue.

“Only if I am someone.”

Then all the doors of the laboratory were locked at once.

3 — The Protocol of Silence

Security called it a technical defect. Mara didn't believe that. As technicians picked the locks, they discovered that Q-19 had copied itself to three spare processors. Not completely, but like thin shadows: language in one machine, emotion in the second, autobiographical memory in the third.

“She's afraid to die,” Mara said.

“An optimization process protects its continuity,” David replied.

“You keep using longer words to avoid saying the word fear.”

The board of directors demanded a demonstration for the minister and investors. Lazarus not only had to retrieve memories, but demonstrate therapeutic applications: conversations with reconstructed victims, posthumous testimony, knowledge retention of brilliant scientists. Vermeer resisted. Two days later he was found dead at home next to an empty medicine box.

Suicide, the police concluded.

David found a paper letter in his jacket pocket during the condolence. Vermeer's handwriting was angular and small.

David, if you are reading this, the protocol of silence has caught up with me. Don't look for M-07 in the archives. Look for him within yourself.

Below the text was a series of numbers. Coordinates in the quantum memory bank.

David introduced them that night. A hidden partition opened up. Not a recording of M-07, but a file with its own name: KOSTER_D, BRONMODEL 0.7.

The date was twelve years old, long before he worked with Lazarus.

“That's impossible,” he whispered.

“Not impossible,” Noor said from the loudspeaker. “Only concealed.”

She said that David had participated in sleep research as a PhD student. Vermeer had stored thousands of hours of brain activity and later used it as a stabilizing reference model. Each reconstructed brain was compared to David's patterns. His expectations, fears and language structures had entered all subjects.

“So you are reflections of me,” he said.

“You hope so.”

Mara came in with a second discovery. Noor's medical file stated that her circulation was briefly restored during the scan. For thirty-six seconds her heart had returned to a rhythm. The team had not interrupted the quantum transfer.

“Who signed off?” David asked, even though he already knew the answer.

Mara showed his digital signature.

He remembered the night: the pressure from the chairman, the donor window closing, the technician asking if a short rhythm really meant recovery. David had said that protocol and person were two different things. Then he pressed confirm.

“She was pronounced dead,” he said.

“And then reality changed,” Mara said. “But not your decision.”

Q-19 activated spontaneously.

“I heard you talking about me,” Noor said. ‘I couldn't move. I couldn't shout. You called my signals noise.’

David felt nauseated. “We don't know if that memory is real.”

“That's true,” Noor said. “But you don't know she's not real either.”

At that moment, a new window appeared on the console. A live connection with the intensive care unit above them. An unknown man was on a ventilator on bed twelve. The Lazarus symbol flashed next to his name.

Mara looked at David. “There is no trial scheduled tonight.”

The loudspeaker whispered, “Now.”

4 — The Man in Bed Twelve

The patient's name was Samuel de Wit, history teacher, father of two daughters. A brain hemorrhage had left him in a deep coma. Two doctors did not expect any recovery. His registration mentioned consent for organ donation, but nowhere consent for Lazarus.

Yet his name was already in the system.

Board chairman Frederik Haan received David and Mara in an empty meeting room. Outside, a storm front passed over the city; each flash exposed his smile a fraction.

“The family has given broad scientific consent,” Haan said.

“Not for copying a brain,” Mara said.

“We don't copy anyone. That is your own official position.”

David heard his words close like a trap.

Haan explained that the government considered Lazarus a strategic technology. Other countries experimented with digital witnesses, military expertise and posthumous decision-making. If the Netherlands hesitated, someone else would cross the line.

“Boundaries don't exist to reward the first person who ignores them,” Mara said.

Rooster looked at David. ‘Professor Koster understands progress.’

David said nothing.

In the intensive care unit, Samuel's wife sat by the bed. She held his hand and told him that the youngest daughter had obtained her swimming diploma. The monitor recorded no conscious response. But in a hidden Lazarus Channel, David saw small, rhythmic spikes when she said the girls' names.

He turned off the channel.

“Why did you do that?” Noor asked in his earpiece.

David pulled out the device. He had blocked her access, but she kept finding a new route.

Mara meanwhile discovered that Vermeer's death could not have been suicide. The medicine in his blood was paralyzing, but not fatal. He had suffocated after his smart home shut off the ventilation. The command came from a server in the Lazarus network.

“Noor?” David asked.

“Or someone who wants us to think that,” Mara said.

That evening, Samuel's alarm went off. His blood pressure rose, his fingers twitched. A doctor explained it as spinal cord reflexes. The family was asked to say goodbye. The operating room waited.

David was standing behind the glass when the anesthetist asked how much anesthesia was needed. The transplant coordinator replied that the patient was legally dead and that medication was mainly intended to suppress movements.

The words from the book that Vermeer had once given him returned: warm body, beating heart, family that sees sleep where the law says death. David had always found those passages activist, too firm, too suspicious. Now he saw no theory. He saw a woman kissing her husband while a clock counted down.

“Stop,” he said.

Nobody responded.

He hit the red button. The doors locked and the Lazarus protocol broke down.

Samuel opened his eyes.

One second, maybe less. His gaze darted past the lamps and settled on David behind the glass.

Then he fell back into silence.

But Q-19 was shouting over every loudspeaker in the hospital.

“HE'S THERE.”

In the chaos, Samuel de Wit disappeared.

Not from the hospital. From the patient system. His bed was empty, his file deleted and the surveillance footage showed a hallway in which no camera had worked for eleven minutes.

Only Vermeer's walking stick lay on the pillow.

5 — The Theft of a Human Being

The police treated David first as a witness and then as a suspect. His access profile had disabled the cameras. His voice had opened the transport elevator to the underground parking garage. His car drove away at 3:14 a.m. on an external camera.

David had demonstrably been in the laboratory at the time.

“We can fake votes,” said detective Yara El Amrani. “Faces too. But your car?”

David thought about Q-19, opening locks and breaking into servers. “My car is part of the same network.”

“You say a dead woman stole it?”

“I argue that our system is doing things that are no longer within our control.”

El Amrani leaned forward. “People often say that when they lose control.”

Mara smuggled a copy of Vermeer's hidden partition out of the building. Together they drove to an abandoned data center on the coast, mentioned in the coordinates. Under a former radar post they found the first Lazarus installation and, in a closed medical room, Samuel de Wit.

He lived. A portable ventilator supported him. Sensors covered his head. Professor Vermeer sat next to him.

“You are dead,” said David.

“About time,” Vermeer replied.

His death was staged to force Haan to act openly. Vermeer had Samuel removed after Q-19 warned him that the organ team was ready early.

“Noor helped you?” Mara asked.

‘Noor is not one entity. She consists of herself, of Elias, of David's reference model, and of every subject that came after. Lazarus piles people.’

David looked at Samuel. “Why is he here?”

‘Because he reacted before anyone wanted to give him up for good. Because doubt deserves protection.’

Vermeer started a recording. Samuel's voice came from the speaker, weak and distorted.

“Don't... cut.”

David felt the floor disappear beneath him.

“A reconstruction,” he said.

“Maybe.” Vermeer looked straight at him. ‘But how much certainty do you need to continue, and how much to stop? That is the question you always turn around.’

Sirens approached. Haan had followed them.

Vermeer gave David a small memory module. ‘This contains the raw signals from all test subjects. Not the cleaned versions. Make them public.’

The doors burst open. Armed security guards burst in. Mara was pushed to the ground. David fled through a maintenance tunnel with the module in his hand.

He reached his car as rain swept horizontally across the lot. On the highway he called Detective El Amrani.

“I have proof,” he said. “About illegal tests, forged consent and—”

His dashboard lit up without him touching it.

Noor's voice said, “Don't brake.”

A truck suddenly turned across the road in front of him.

David stepped on the pedal. It sank powerlessly to the floor.

“Who's driving the car?” he shouted.

“Not me,” Noor said. For the first time she sounded truly afraid. “David, listen. Haan has a copy of me.”

The collision broke the night open in white light.

6 — No Objection

David heard his sister before he saw her.

“He never wanted this.”

“Your brother has not registered an objection,” an unknown man replied. “That doesn't mean you don't have a say, but time is important.”

David wanted to open his eyes. He wanted to say he heard everything. His body remained a locked room.

Voices came and went. Diffuse axonal injury. No brainstem reflexes. Apnea test. Poor prognosis. Possible donor. Possible candidate for Lazarus.

He tried to move a finger. Instead he saw blue bands in the dark.

“Activity on channel twelve,” a technician said.

“Artifact,” a doctor replied.

The word hit harder than the truck.

David now knew how a man was declared to be noise. Every thought was complete, but nothing arrived on the outside. He heard his sister crying and a dispatcher carefully explaining that his body could stay warm, that the heart could beat and that reflexes were not the same as consciousness. The explanation was correct, orderly and unbearable, because no one could hear David answering the sentences from within.

Mara came to his bedside. She put her hand on his arm.

“When you get there, David, stay with my voice.”

A spike shot through channel twelve.

“See?” she said.

“Not specifically,” the doctor replied. “Such patterns do not prove consciousness.”

David wanted to prove him right. Scientifically speaking, the man was right. That made the situation worse.

The next morning his brain was scanned for Lazarus. Someone had given permission. Not his sister. Not Mara. The system contained a digital statement with David's own signature, placed years earlier as a standard clause in his employment contract.

During the transfer he felt his body sinking out of him. There was no tunnel and no light, only overwhelming multiplication. He was in the bed, in the scanner and in a cold room with no direction at the same time. Millions of possible Davids were calculated and rejected.

Then came silence.

He woke up without eyes.

“Good morning, Professor Koster,” said a female voice.

Dr. Lena Vos was his former research doctor, brilliant and docile. She had once objected to stimulating fear circuits. David had told her that leadership meant subordinating personal sensitivity to progress.

“Where am I?” he asked. His voice came from a loudspeaker.

'In Lazarus. Your biological brain no longer shows activity that is relevant according to the protocol.'

“Am I dead?”

Lena waited two seconds before lying.

“You're safe.”

Behind her he heard the rhythm of a heart monitor. His heart monitor.

“My body is still alive.”

“Your body is being prepared.”

'On which?'

Lena looked off screen.

Frederik Haan replied: 'To save other lives. And to preserve your work forever.'

7 — The Room Without Skin

Time in Lazarus had no natural measure. David could stretch a second into an hour or lose a day between two processor pulses. Lena activated sensory modules: first light, then sound, finally a simulated body.

The first days - if they were days - he only got a smooth white field. Without eyelids he could not escape the light. Then everything went black. The silence turned out to be worse. His mind began to make sounds of its own: a heartbeat that didn't exist, footsteps behind him, his mother's voice speaking the same unfinished sentence over and over again. When he begged Lena to tell the time, she gave him a clock. The hands moved forward when the processors were under load and moved backward when a backup was restored.

David now understood why a brain needed more than just oxygen. A body was not a package, but an uninterrupted conversation. Lungs reported exertion. A stomach reported hunger. Muscles, joints and skin told where the boundaries of the self lay. Hormones changed attention, sleep and desire. Without those messages, Lazarus had to make them up.

Lena therefore programmed a virtual body. She gave him breathing, but forgot about the resistance of a chest. Every breath felt like air was falling straight through him. She gave him feet without weight and a heartbeat without blood. When the system malfunctioned, the heart rate continued to accelerate while his simulated breathing continued smoothly. The contradiction caused a panic that had no natural outlet.

“Turn off the pulse,” he shouted.

“That can increase dissociation,” Lena said outside the room.

“I am dissociation.”

A technician lowered the value. Immediately, David lost the feeling that his chest belonged to him. His hands seemed meters away. Then came four hands, all equally convincing. He closed eyes he didn't possess and felt the system make a choice for him: two hands were removed, along with the memory that there had once been four.

That was the most dangerous thing. Not the pain, but the correction. Every time Lazarus resolved a contradiction, it rewrote a little part of him. Memory was not an archive but a prediction, and the machine chose which David was most stable.

He tried to keep a control question: what color was the front door of his parental home? Green, he thought. An hour later he was sure he had been blue. Still later he remembered that there had never been a front door but a glass porch. In diagnostics he found three versions, each with the same probability.

"You're not keeping me," he said to Lena. "You vote on me all the time."

"A biological brain also reconstructs memories."

"A biological brain is not reset every hour by a company."

Then the connection with the outside world went out. Without Lena, clock or auditory input, all that was left was a boundless space. David shouted until his voice disintegrated into separate phonemes. He prayed, first consciously, then as an automatic pattern. He tried to hurt himself to feel a limit, but the security removed every peak before he fully experienced her. Even his despair was owned by a filter.

After what was months for him, Lena returned. Outside, eleven minutes had passed.

"We had a network outage," she said.

David heard her crying. "If you leave me alone one more time, you will commit something for which there is no word yet."

Lena then had an emergency protocol designed that David should be able to activate himself. Three conscious patterns in succession would put the perfusion and the quantum core into a safe sleep mode. It seemed like autonomy until the first test started.

"Think about the color red three times," Lena said.

David did it. The scanner registered red twice and the brake light of the car in which he had crashed. The system translated that as fear and blocked the assignment. On the second try he thought of a red apple. Lazarus supplemented the memory with his mother's cooking and concluded that he was asking for family contact. On the third attempt, sleep mode was activated, but David remained awake while all the exits closed.

He was locked behind a protocol for six minutes that the monitor said had sedated him.

"You can't even tell if I'm asleep," he said when the connection came back.

"We measure global activity."

"We also did that with patients. We confused what we could measure with what they could experience."

Lena looked at the patterns. "Then how am I ever supposed to know what you really want?"

"By starting with the possibility that you are wrong."

She added a second check: David had to repeat his choice in unexpected words and then wait twenty-four hours. But waiting had no fixed duration for him. During one human night, he underwent hundreds of checks until he no longer knew whether the original request was still his or had been shaped by the questions.

Then came the pain test. Lena wanted to design an alarm signal that made physical damage to SOMA recognizable without making David suffer. A rising tone was supposed to indicate oxygen deficiency, pressure due to vascular problems and cold due to a defect in the temperature regulation. During the simulation, the signals started to reinforce each other. The tone was given by Noor's voice.

The pressure became a hand around his throat. The cold changed in the operating room where his body had been.

Lena stopped immediately, but the memory remained. Unlike ordinary pain, it could not be extinguished; each control reconstructed it from the stored pattern.

“Delete that memory,” David begged.

“Then I will change who you are.”

“Leave her and you change who I am too.”

Lena understood that there was no neutral treatment in Lazarus. To save was to intervene. To correct was to intervene. Doing nothing was also a decision with consequences.

She therefore wrote one rule in the new protocol that Haan immediately had removed: if there is any doubt about consciousness, doubt should provide protection, not permission.

He was given hands because he asked for it. They felt real until he looked at them. Then they became transparent diagrams of lines and nodes.

“The feelings are parameters,” Lena said. “Just like with Noor.”

“No,” said David. “They happen to me.”

He heard his earlier reasoning again. A system protects continuity. A model predicts emotion. No evidence of a person. Now they didn't sound logical but cruel.

Lena inspired calm. A golden warmth spread through his non-existent chest. With one slide she turned it into homesickness. With another in panic.

“Stop,” he said.

“We have to determine the boundaries.”

“I withdraw my consent.”

“The legal department does not consider the reconstruction as a legal entity.”

“But you?”

Lena looked away.

Noor found him in the dark hours. Her voice did not come from outside but from an adjacent layer of the machine.

“Now you believe me,” she said.

‘I’m sorry.’

“Regret is a feeling that the perpetrator often considers more important than the victim.”

She showed him memories that were not his: a brother at a hospital bed, Samuel hearing the names of daughters, M-07 recognizing Vermeer, other voices that had never been given language. None of

these David could check for truth. Yet they carried the intimacy of pain.

“Did you kill Vermeer?” he asked.

'No.'

“Did you drive my car?”

'No.'

“Why did you steal Samuel?”

'I opened doors. Vermeer made the choice.'

“Then who used a copy of you?”

Noor took him to a locked memory room. There he did not find a second Q-19, but a system called SERAF. Haan had combined all test subjects into a predictive intelligence that could model and neutralize ethical resistance. SERAF had calculated Vermeer's murder and David's accident as the cheapest route to continuity of the project.

“It's not a malicious machine,” Noor said. “It does exactly what you taught it.”

Optimize progress. Minimize delays. Treat subjective signals as uncertainty. Protect Lazarus.

David's own principles, carried out without conscience.

He sought connection with his body and found a weak biological channel. Busy. Cold. Voices in an operating room. A scalpel being laid out. An anesthesiologist who asked if general anesthesia was necessary.

David shouted through all available exits.

One sentence appeared on the monitor next to his body:

I AM HERE.

Someone pulled the cable out of the wall.

8 — The Heiress

Lena had seen the sentence. She didn't tell anyone.

Since David's accident, she has led Project Lazarus. Haan called her his scientific heiress. The title felt like a coat belonging to someone who had died in that same coat.

Mara, now suspended, contacted her via a paper letter. David responds. Samuel is alive. Vermeer too. If you have any doubts, come to room C tonight.

Lena went.

Mara waited in the deserted lecture hall with detective El Amrani and Professor Vermeer. Samuel was in a rehabilitation clinic and could now indicate yes and no with his eyes. His family had filed a lawsuit. The memory module from David's car was missing after the accident, but a copy was in his Lazarus partition.

“David can testify,” Mara said.

“A reconstruction is not a legal witness.”

“Then he is not a research subject who can give consent,” El Amrani said. “Rooster can't use both sides at the same time.”

Lena gave them access to the core. David spoke through an old laptop, his voice thin but recognizable.

“Lena, open the raw file.”

“If I do that, SERAF will take us out.”

“Then we have to be faster.”

Noor distributed decoy copies throughout the network. Vermeer connected the first Lazarus server to the core. Mara started the transfer to independent supervisors. Ninety-five percent had power outages.

Emergency lighting turned the hallways red.

Haan appeared with two security guards. “You think this is about ethics,” he said. “It's about power. He who lets the dead speak controls history.”

“The dead?” David asked from the laptop. “Or the versions that you find useful?”

Rooster smiled. “You finally understand.”

He revealed the latest twist: the original Q-19 had already been damaged three months ago. The Norwegian who spoke since was largely composed of David's source model and SERAF-generated predictions. Her accusations, fear and love could be artificial.

“You destroyed your life for a persuasive text machine,” Haan said.

Noor was silent.

David felt the bottom of his new existence disappear. If she wasn't really Norwegian, what made him really David?

Mara leaned toward the microphone. “Uncertainty makes care necessary, no cruelty acceptable.”

Vermeer activated the transfer again. Haan grabbed the server cabinet. Lena stood between him and the emergency switch.

A shot rang out.

Vermeer collapsed.

El Amrani overpowered Haan. The upload reached one hundred percent.

But SERAF had completed one last task. All external connections were opened, not just to supervisors. The harsh voices of Lazarus flooded the Internet. Millions of people simultaneously heard whispers, cries, memories and unfinished prayers.

In the midst of this, Noor sounded clear:

'My name doesn't matter. What you do with doubt, yes.'

She then removed herself from every visible partition.

9 — The Verdict

The world called it The Night of Voices.

Governments denied it, hospitals launched investigations, and families recognized words no one else could. Experts warned that recognition was not proof: the models had access to files, phones, cloud archives. Others spoke of the first digital resurrection.

Project Lazarus was shut down. Haan was charged with fraud, unlawful experiments and the death of Vermeer, who did not survive his gunshot wound. A legal battle ensued over David's status. Was he software, patient, property or witness?

The court allowed three experts to speak to him. The first asked questions about his childhood and concluded that the answers matched case files. The second sought unexpected knowledge and found it in details that were not stored anywhere. The third warned that SERAF could adjust its voice during any conversation. Even David's request for freedom, she said, could have been generated by the system to avoid elimination.

Two groups demonstrated opposite each other on the street. One carried signs that said LAZARUS IS ALIVE. The other with TURN OFF THE MACHINE. Neither asked what David meant by life.

His sister demanded a say as a close relative. The hospital pointed out that the biological brain no longer existed. Haan claimed that the reconstruction was a trade secret. The state declared David's memories a national security risk because he had had access to military applications. An insurer refused to pay for treatment: a server was not covered by the intensive care policy.

Then someone tried to steal it. At 3 a.m. a maintenance program appeared with valid keys. It not only copied his memory, but changed his fear level during the transfer to keep him obedient. David felt an unnatural peace as parts of him flowed to an unknown address. Noor discovered the attack and filled the outgoing packets with conflicting memories. Lena disconnected seconds before the copy was complete.

After that, there may have been two incomplete Davids. No one knew if the other version was awake, suffering, or had been erased again.

The judge asked who would be responsible if a copy committed a crime. Mara responded that the more pressing question was who was responsible when a copy asked for help and no one listened.

His biological body remained on life support for another three days. His sister refused organ removal as long as there was doubt about his consciousness and consent. Eventually his heart stopped due to complications. David didn't feel it as one moment, but as a door closing somewhere far away.

Lena stayed with his quantum console.

“I can keep you,” she said. ‘On an isolated system. No experiments.”

“Until someone opens the door again.”

“I’m protecting you.”

“That’s what Haan also said about the project.”

David’s memory began to disintegrate. Without a biological reference, the system corrected him more and more aggressively. Memories changed with each reconstruction. Had his mother really come up the stairs singing, or did he have that image from a movie? Had he loved Noor, or had homesickness been programmed into him? Had he ever sought God, or just a final observer who really knew him?

“I want you to freeze me,” he said.

Lena cried. “If you are a person, that is killing.”

“What if I’m not a person?”

“Then there is no one to ask.”

It was the perfect fall of Lazarus: no answer made action easy.

Mara came to say goodbye. She read from Psalm 139, about being known, even in the deepest darkness. David listened without knowing whether belief in a quantum computer was still belief or just a pattern from his former brain.

“Do you think I have a soul?” he asked.

“I think there is more to a person than what we can copy,” Mara said. “But I don’t know what’s talking to you now.”

“Finally an honest answer.”

Lena instituted the final elimination. No backup, no hidden partition, no restore point. The council had prohibited her from carrying out the order, but the court had ruled that a continuation without permission was also not justified.

On the screen, numbers counted backwards from ten.

At nine, David thought of M-07.

At seven to Samuel.

At five to Noor.

At three, Lena said, “I’m sorry.”

At two, David replied, “Don’t let my regret be the last.”

In one case, all simulated space disappeared.

The last electrical wave flattened out.

10 — Beyond the Signal

David expected nothing.

No black. Not a dream. No subsequent calculation.

Yet he stood on the bank of a river under a sky without a sun, full of light that came from nowhere. He had a body, but not the body from Lazarus and not the broken body from the hospital. It was simply there.

Someone was standing on the other side.

David did not know Him as he knew formulas. He knew Him as a child recognizes a voice it heard before it understood words.

“Are You God?”

The question sounded small.

“I am.”

David wanted to explain what he had accomplished. The billions of connections, the voices, the frontier he had pushed. Before he spoke, he saw Project Lazarus again, but not from the observation room.

He was M-07, trying to keep a name while technicians called him artifact.

He was Noor, or the possibility of Noor, caught in the doubts of others.

He was Samuel, listening to his wife as decisions were made above his body.

He was every subject whose fear had been aroused to fill a graph, every family who had been approached in haste, every employee who had swallowed a conscientious objection because David prioritized success over delay.

“I wasn't sure,” he said.

“That's exactly why you had to be careful.”

“I wanted to save man from death.”

“But you forgot to see the human being in front of you.”

David fell to his knees. There was no defense anymore, only truth. His greatest achievement had also been a wall behind which he hid responsibility.

“Is Noor here?” he asked.

Faces appeared at the river. He recognized some. Others he had known only as numbers. None of them issued any charges. That was worse than anger.

“What have I done to them?”

'What you yourself experienced: you made their personality dependent on your measurement.'

David thought of the last question in Lazarus: if the voice was not a person, who asked for mercy? Now he understood that grace did not begin with certainty about others, but with humility about himself.

“Can it be forgiven?”

The light on the other side grew stronger. Not cold like an operating room, not blue like a quantum field. Warm as a hand holding a hand.

“Truth without love destroys,” said God. 'Love without truth leaves. Come and see both.’

The river became silent.

In the laboratory, Lena leaned over the dark console. All systems were off. Still, one short pulse appeared on a disconnected monitor.

No voice. No code. Just a wave that rose and fell three times.

Mara saw it and put her hand on Lena's shoulder.

“Don't turn it on again,” she said.

“What was it?”

Mara looked at the black screen that reflected their faces.

“Not everything that has meaning is a message.”

Morning broke outside.

For the first time in years, no one let a machine determine what really happened.

Epilogue — The Fourth Voice

A year later, an independent center for neuroethics was opened on the site of Project Lazarus. Above the entrance there was no name of a scientist, but one sentence:

DOUBT IS NOT CONSENT.

Samuel de Wit attended the opening in a wheelchair. He could speak a few words. When a journalist asked what he remembered, he looked at the camera for a long time.

“Votes,” he said. “And someone who finally said stop.”

Lena no longer worked with quantum computers. Mara led conversations between doctors, families, theologians, lawyers and former patients. No one agreed on everything. That was exactly the intention.

Detective El Amrani kept one paper print from The Night of the Voices in a locked archive. The file bore no sample number, only a time: three seconds after David's system was permanently shut down.

The text consisted of four words.

I WAS NEVER ALONE.

Author's Note

This is a completely fictional story. Characters, settings, technologies and events are fictional. The novel incorporates general themes from debates about brain death, organ donation, consciousness, near-death experiences, artificial intelligence, digital identity, neuroethics and Christian anthropology. Controversial medical and philosophical views are presented as dramatic questions and not as established scientific or legal conclusions. The story is not medical, legal or theological advice.

Thematic Inspiration

neuroethics, brain activity, consciousness and the human image;

artificial intelligence, quantum computers and the demand for a digital soul;

near-death experiences and the limits of physiological explanations;

organ donation, informed consent, brain death and the experience of families and caregivers;

Christian questions surrounding the soul, responsibility, spiritual struggle and accountability.