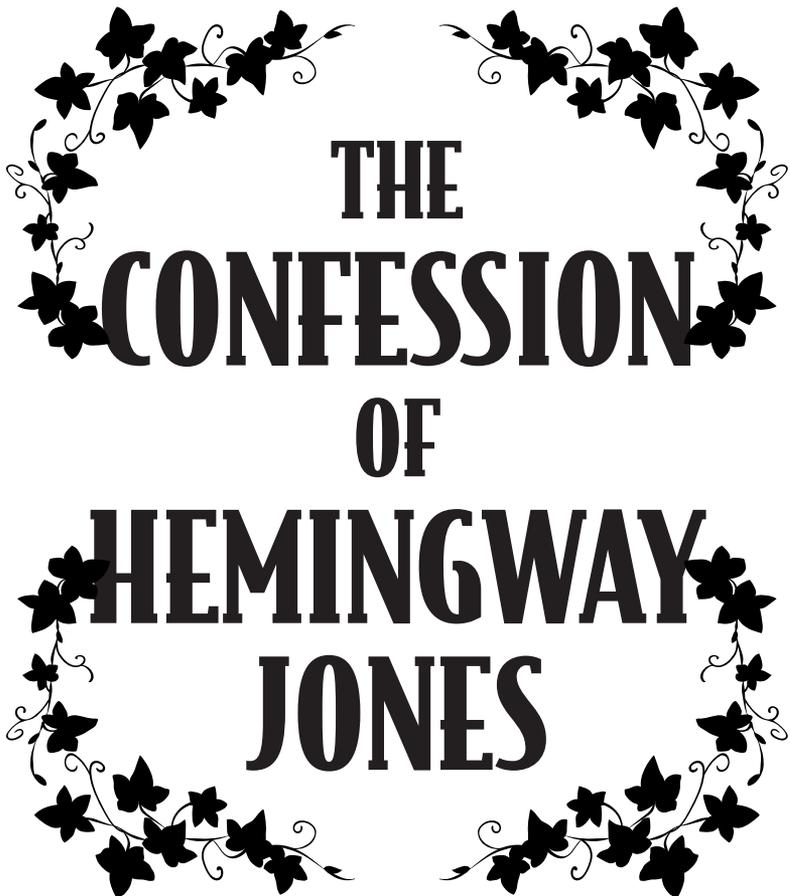
The background features a glowing blue skeletal hand holding a glowing green leafy branch. The hand is positioned vertically, with the fingers curled around the branch. The bones are rendered in a translucent, glowing blue color, while the leaves are a vibrant green with a glowing outline. The entire scene is set against a solid black background.

**THE
CONFESSION
OF
HEMINGWAY
JONES**

KATHLEEN HANNON

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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To my mom, Liz Saxon, who taught me my love of books.

Without you, this book would not have been possible.

Thanks, from "your weird and morbid child."





TO WHOEVER FINDS THIS

This isn't a diary. So if you're reading this in hopes that I've actually written down exactly how I did what I did, you're going to be extremely disappointed. I haven't written that down anywhere and I never will.

This is a confession, pure and simple. And I'll tell you right now, before you start reading, or listening, or whatever it is you're doing: I'm the bad guy. Don't forget that.

It's weird to be the villain in your own life story, but it is what it is.

Confessions are done for the sake of forgiveness. I don't deserve forgiveness. I know that. And I could claim I don't *want* forgiveness, but I guess I do. So if this is you, Melissa, know that it's your forgiveness I'm asking. I don't deserve it, but I loved you then and I love you now. I'm sorry for ruining your life.

Just for the record, I was trying to save you.

Hemingway Jones



PART I



CHAPTER ONE



It's been a few months, but sour memories of the day I killed my father still burp back up, and my gut clenches every time. Todd and I were absolutely blazed, sitting on the front steps of his family's double-wide when Dad pulled up, the tires on his Ford F250 skidding to a stop about three inches from my sneakers, while the JONES CONSTRUCTION AND RESTORATION lettering was practically shoved up my nose. Dad hiked himself out the driver's-side door with a slam and I knew I had about fifteen seconds to sober up.

We hadn't planned on doing this—skipping school and getting baked. Or at least I hadn't. But Todd had found this brick of hash in his parents' barn, and well, it was the first spring day where temps were due to hit 65 degrees. We cut out fourth period, rode our bikes back to his place, and got rocked. Seemed like a good idea at the time, and we'd had fun tormenting the chickens, but now I was going to pay for it.

I wasn't the only one who was nervous either. Todd tucked his drink behind his back while my dad crunched gravel. Todd had obviously

forgotten that all he had was a Yoo-hoo. He nodded and called out, “Hey there, Mr. Jones.”

Dad murmured “Todd,” in his general direction, but kept his eyes focused on me.

He was just standing there, directly in front of the late-afternoon sun. I squinted, but all I could see was this ominous black silhouette of rippling muscle.

I realize I’m making him sound scary, but he’s not. Everybody likes my dad, even Todd. Even me. He’s this pretty cool, off-the-grid kind of guy. He can build or fix just about anything, and I’m not just talking about when you’ve had a kitchen fire or a burst pipe—that’s just what he does for work. He’s also the guy who pulls over when you’ve got a flat and the one who starts applying the Heimlich on some choker in Kentucky Fried. (It’s happened.) He’s smart too. He doesn’t have a college degree or anything, but he can talk about black holes and Relativity. He can take any online Mensa or IQ test and come up genius, every time. He even beats my scores, and I’m not easy to beat.

The point is stand-up guy Bill Jones can be a little scary when he’s mad. And I was about to get reamed.

He turned his face profile before he spoke, so I could see just how much air he was furiously pumping through his shadowy nostrils. “Got a call from the school. And another one from Cass.”

My first impulse was to cringe, make excuses, and get up, knowing I was busted. But over the last year or so I’d learned that if I waited long enough in these fights, my pangs of guilt would pass and I’d turn into a cocky asshole, someone far more capable of fighting with Bill Jones. So I waited until I saw Dad as a thunderstorm, rudely blocking out my sun. And I shrugged. I mean, big deal. So I skipped school again. I knew the real problem was the call from Cass. I’d never skipped the Tuesday/Friday afternoon internship before, and that was what he was really pissed about. He’d filled out all the paperwork for that internship himself—he’d even written the essay when I refused—all so that I would have “the future” he never did.

“Hem, I’ll uh—” Todd looked around quickly, hoping some excuse for his desertion would magically appear. “I think maybe I gotta help with dinner. See ya, Mr. Jones.” He practically ran inside.

“Do you have any idea what you’re doing?” Dad exhorted. “You have this gift. My God, you want to end up like that?” He gestured at Todd’s disappearing form.

“Dad, that’s low. Leave him alone.”

He didn’t even pause. He just growled, “Hemingway Jones,” in that low, throaty way that he always does before lecturing. And he knows I hate my name. But he rarely calls me Hem—he says it sounds like a pronoun.

“You have absolutely no idea what you’re risking. NONE!” And with that crack of thunder came the rain. He blasted on, salting his sentences liberally with words like *responsibility* and *commitment*.

I rolled my eyes. The lecture was so generic I didn’t taste anything close to regret. I could recite a variation of this speech as easily as I could the periodic table. Anyway, due to some really good dope, the tweaks and nuances of this particular version are lost forever.

I finally interrupted him. “I didn’t even want the fucking internship!” I stared at him, waiting for a response. That fact was empirically true. But he just stuffed his hands in his pockets, so I charged on. “I don’t want college, either. School bores the crap outta me. You *know* that. Why would I *pay* for more torture, when I could be a project manager at your company and earn some money? Stanton got an honors degree from Chapel Hill. He’s still working at the gym full-time AND living at home, just to pay the loans. Why would I buy into all that crap?”

I tilted a little, trying to duck down and check my face in the side view mirror of the truck without him noticing. I was pretty sure I was smirking—a dead giveaway. No smirk, but the face that looked back at me was a little worrying. My black hair had gone all stringy from sweat and was stuck in clumps around my face. My eyes, normally green, were cayenne-pepper red. I looked like a stoner. If I didn’t shift the conversation soon, he’d notice. I needed a move.

So I conjured up the ghost of my mother. “Mom wouldn’t make me go there. Do you have any idea what I *do* in that place? Undressing dead bodies? So some quack doctor can do experiments on them? Do you think she’d want me to do that? Do you think she’d want that done to *her*?”

That worked. Dad looked as if I’d punched him. “Of course not,” he finally choked out.

I knew the image was unfair. Bottom-feeding, in fact. I instantly wished I hadn’t said it, but I didn’t take it back, because if the situation were reversed, he wouldn’t take it back. My dad sucks at apologizing.

Still. I could practically read his memories of Mom in his body language. His shoulders sagged with her diagnosis, quickly followed by a head nodding south to the ground, as she exacted promises out of him about how I was going to be raised. By the time his hands found his hips, I knew her body was being carted out of the cancer ward at Northeast into a mortician’s hearse. That was two years ago.

Now, who sucks at apologizing?

Fair would be admitting Bill Jones didn’t have the faintest idea what company I’d be interning for when he applied in my name. He’d just been all excited that this fabulous new biotech research center was going to take high-school students on as interns. He’d gone on and on about what an “amazing opportunity” that would be for me. That said, he’d grimaced when I got the acceptance letter. He’d guessed almost immediately what kind of company it was. But he still wanted me to do it because he thought it would lead to better scholarships for college. He rattled on that even if I didn’t want to go to college right now, I should still want the option. When I finally gave in, he told me what they *did*, or at least, what he thought they did. I absolutely flipped. I’d told him there was NO WAY I was going to work there.

The curtains shifted. Todd was watching us. I glared at him, and he pulled them tight again, but his fingertips were still visible at the seams. He really could be a dumbass.

My dad saw it too and checked himself, knowing he’d lost his temper and embarrassed me in front of my friend. He suddenly tossed me the keys.

“We’ll talk about this at home. You drive.” He climbed into the passenger’s side.

I did pause, keys in hand. That much is true. But I didn’t confess. I used to think it was because I was so shocked that I’d won the round. But the truth is, I was pleased with my merit-less victory. I didn’t feel like ruining it and getting another lecture.

Plus, I really wanted my license. Bad enough I was the only senior at school that didn’t have one. I wanted my freedom. I wanted to be able to get up and leave—just drive away—whenever he started in like this

Truth? I don’t really remember what I was thinking. I just climbed in, stuck the keys in the ignition, and pulled away.

Todd and his parents live way the hell out on Gold Hill Road, which is the kind of road your grandparents take you on for a Sunday drive in the country. While the southern half of Concord has been transformed into commuter sprawl for the city of Charlotte, this easternmost tip is the last gasp of Cabarrus County farmland. Rolling fields of corn and collard greens rise and dip in every direction, interspersed between wide pastures of native wildflowers and woods. The road rises and curves with those fields, and there’s only the occasional little clapboard house visible. Most of those are recessed way back too, stuck deep in the trees so the farmers can get a break from the scorching summer sun. Other cars are rare, but when they come, they come fast.

I remember the pickup that zoomed by, headed in the opposite direction. The road was so tight and his speed so great that I felt the backdraft blast me through the open driver’s-side window. I pulled my head back inside, knowing I was a mental train wreck. But too late now. If I confessed, my dad would cut up my learner’s. He’d told me if I ever got caught driving under the influence, I’d have to pay for my own car and insurance, and of course any attorney fees required to defend myself in court.

I concentrated on each turn, going over it slowly, careful to lift and twist with the road. He didn’t watch me. He was lost in thought, staring out the windshield. I bet he was still thinking about Mom. But we’ll never know.

The dope overtook me again in the silence. I got all caught up studying the budding spring green on the trees against the impossibly blue sky. Spring in Piedmont is something to see. Everything flowers in April—dogwoods, Bradford pears, weeping cherry trees, azaleas, *Loropetalum*, and bulbs of all kinds. We were only days away from a rainbow bath.

That's when I missed the curve.

I wasn't speeding, but I didn't have to be to wreck on this road. My reactions were slow, my instincts hairy. Dad yelled and tried to grab the wheel, but for some reason, I pushed his hand away, as I used the other to try and correct the spin. But I was going against the spin, rather than with it like he'd taught me to do.

Off the road, careening down an embankment, I felt his arm slam against my chest. He grabbed the handhold above me, pinning me in place because he didn't trust the seatbelt. When we hit rocks at the base of the creek, the resulting *smack!* lifted the bed. My airbag exploded as the truck vaulted over the creek like a gymnast doing a hand flip. I felt the roof above us buckle. The second flip—the one that righted us—was much slower, more like a backbend.

You know what the first thing I did was? I giggled. I say all this to keep reminding you—I'm no hero. I was absolutely fine, nervously wondering what kind of trouble I was in for now. I was even stifling a laugh when I turned toward Dad.

His eyes were open and glassy, his mouth gaping. A punched dent in the metal roof was seemingly melded to his brain. He wasn't breathing.

"Dad? OH FUCK." I touched him, hoping to get his eyes to blink. Nothing. "Oh God, oh God! DAD! DAD!" This time I pushed him a little. Nothing. "DAD! WE HAD AN ACCIDENT! BLINK YOUR EYES! TELL ME YOU'RE OKAY!"

But he just stared. I grabbed his wrist, and then his neck, looking anywhere for the faintest hint of a pulse.

9-1-1. No signal. 9-1-1, 9-1-1. Hold the phone out the window. Slap the phone on the dashboard. Nothing.

CPR. Compressions.

That meant moving him. I contemplated the head injury for a moment. If he was still alive, and he had to still be alive, there was seriously no alternative, he could bleed out from the head wound. I ripped off my shirt. I was shaking so badly I struggled, but eventually, I used the sleeves to knot it like a tourniquet around his head. I ran around the other side of the car, splashing in the creek, and grabbed his shoulders.

“STAY WITH ME, DAD.” I held on to his shoulders, letting his legs clatter down into the water, and pulled him up on the bank. He’d forced me to take every course the Red Cross had to offer before I was ever allowed behind the wheel. I proceeded to perform them all.

Thirty compressions, two breaths, pulse. “Ah, hah, hah, hah, staying alive, staying alive.” I don’t know whether I was singing the song in my head or out loud, but that’s what they teach you to do in CPR: sing the Bee Gees, so the compressions stay nice and even. Keep oxygenating the blood. After finishing the song the second time, I paused to check the signal—still nothing.

COLD.

The word boomed in my head like it came from a divine entity that was trying out 110-decibel speakers for added effect.

HE’S GOT TO BE COLD.

My sneakers were already soaked with freezing-cold creek water. Why hadn’t I put him in the creek immediately for the compressions? I slapped my head several times—stay in the moment. I tugged at his shoulders and then at his legs until his whole body was in that frigid creek. My hands were red, raw, and shaking by the time I’d arranged him, my bare chest shaking with the slightest breeze, but I paused to hit the timer on the phone—like I *knew* what had to happen. Except I didn’t. Honestly, I was still waiting for him to just wake up and start yelling.

I checked the phone again. Still no signal, out here in the boonies, down an embankment, in a creek full of frigid water.

Again, with the compressions and the song. Rinse and repeat. Nothing, and my arms were giving out.

I started screaming. Then I barfed in the grass.

I tried again—pumping his heart over and over again—while getting no frigging signal. I was going to have to climb the embankment to call, and that meant leaving him. I climbed, grabbing on to the knee-deep vines of dead kudzu to pull myself up. I kept turning back to check, fully expecting him to be awake and seriously pissed.

Calculations ran through my head as if I had nothing to do with them. It'd been approximately twenty-two minutes since the accident, so I tried to hurry up, but the ground was still loose from rain, so I kept slipping. Every time I did, the calculations shifted. It was going to take another five minutes—minimum—to get to the top of the hill. Total: twenty-seven minutes. Barring an EMT out on the prowl, it would take an ambulance at least another twenty to get here from downtown. That's forty-seven minutes. How much more time to unload and power up a defibrillator?

The answer mattered—I only had thirteen minutes left to play with. If Dad was clinically dead for more than sixty minutes when the EMTs arrived, they wouldn't even try to revive him. I knew this. They'd say he'd end up a vegetable at best, pat me on the back, and let me ride next to his body on the way to the morgue.

I could lie. Tell the medics he'd been down only a few minutes. But even if they bought it and tried to revive him, they had less than a 5-percent chance of success.

And at that point, with all that company, it wasn't like I could then move on to Plan B.

I'm not really sure when Plan B materialized. I mean, I'd instantly wanted the Gaymar machine to chill him down when I dragged him into that creek water. The Gaymar is what they put people in when they've fallen through the ice, or had a heart attack and they're completely unresponsive. Keep 'em cold until you're at the hospital and ready to go to work reviving them. But I don't know when that silent wish transformed into a plan to sneak my dad's body into the Paul D. Calhoun Biotech Research Center.

It was one or the other. Call 9-1-1. Or the Gaymar Meditherm.

The ground gave way and I fell again—that cinched it. This time I let the kudzu go and slid down the hill all the way to the bottom.

Bill Jones didn't believe in God. Or heaven. Even when my mom died, he didn't pretend he'd had some sort of a religious epiphany for my sake. He just told me she was gone and that was pretty much it, as far as he was concerned. That little nugget of truth should've told me what Bill Jones would want, what was right. But it just spurred me on: if there is no God, then there is no heaven. Only Earth. And no one deserved heaven more than my dad. So, if Earth was Bill Jones's only heaven, I had to bring him back. At least, I needed to try.

I checked my dad and the road again. Nothing from him, and no one around. No one could see us. No one had come running, and there weren't any farmhouses visible nearby with some old granny in the window dialing the police and an ambulance.

No one knew he was dead. Except me.

Did the truck work? If it didn't, this plan was over. I pocketed the cell phone, popped the airbag, and stuck the keys in the ignition. I silently vowed if the truck didn't start—or didn't run—I'd climb the hill again and call the cops no matter what.

I turned the key gently and the car responded. I stuck it in gear and lurched a few tentative feet before switching it off again: I was going to have to load up my dad. In the bed. The idea of putting him there made me nauseous, but there really wasn't any other option.

But it was more than that. He was so heavy. I'm tall, but I only weigh about 150 pounds. I tested moving him—I could drag him—barely. Lifting him by myself was a no go. I couldn't fail for this stupid reason. My hands were still shaking, and my eyes were bleeding tears, but I glanced around—Dad's dolly and incline were still trussed to the bed. He always secures them. Now I knew why. I grabbed them and set up.

I heard a car go by on the road. Then another. Every time one roared past I ducked, but they were going too fast, too high above me to notice. I guess we'd have been pretty hard to see, even if someone was looking. The

embankment was high, and we were veiled in thick gray vines of kudzu that draped from all the trees like hair extensions.

Once he was inside the bed, I kissed him on the forehead and covered him with a tarp.

My next thought was ice. The cold from the water wouldn't last long enough. I needed ice right away. Lots and lots of it. Which meant I needed money, which meant I already had to go back to the bed and rifle for Dad's wallet. Took me a couple of goes to work up the nerve to do it, but I finally got his card.

Too Much Ice is at the corner of 601 and 73. I could back the bed of the truck right up under the machine and just start paying for load after load. Nothing unusual in that—Todd and I did it all the time when we had keggers.

Then I'd drive to Kannapolis. To the research center. I'd go in under the pretense of apologizing to Cass. If she was there, I'd have to wait until she left. But I needed that Gaymar.

"Warm and dead is dead. Cold and dead means hope still exists." That's what Cass had told me on the first day of my ghoulish internship as she explained to me how to strip a body, get them into the Gaymar, and artificially induce hypothermia.

If I could keep Dad cold in a Gaymar, hope still existed for us both.

The motherlode would be getting him inside, because even if Cass wasn't around, there'd still be reams of scientists wandering the halls until well past midnight. I knew this because I'd hung out there one night with Stephens and Tan, chomping on pizza while I ignored my dad's calls because I was pissed at him. Guys in lab coats kept dropping by to chat. They were all geeks, losers, toads who had Domino's delivered every night of the week. They immersed themselves in their work because they didn't have wives and families to go home to. They were nothing.

"Why'd you want me to be like them, huh?" I shouted at Dad through the back windshield. I was crying like a baby. "That was the only reason you showed up, instead of calling. Because I missed the fucking internship. If you hadn't . . ." I didn't finish, because at that point the tears won out.

I wracked my memory for Cass's schedule, but I couldn't remember. If she wasn't there, I'd wait until dark, snag a dewar and wheel it out to the parking lot. At least the security guards never stopped me with a dewar. They just wrinkled their noses as I rolled past.

Dewars. Like the whiskey. That's what they're called. Huge, cylindrical freezers-on-wheels that cost more than your house. They fit a grown man perfectly, because that's what they're designed for: to haul and store dead bodies at Cass's mad lair, Lifebank.

Lots of medical researchers use dead bodies. I knew that even before I was offered the internship. And while I wasn't looking to get involved in that, I probably could've handled it if it was some normal research, just testing new surgical methods. Most doctors aren't trying to bring corpses back from the dead.

But Lifebank was. My dad had guessed the name Lifebank meant cryogenic storage. That's why we'd argued about whether or not I'd do the internship. But like everything else at the biotech research center, it turned out Lifebank wasn't just cryogenic storage. That would be too generic for this state-of-the-art facility. Dr. Elaine Cass was leading a research team in a quest to reanimate the dead, using a hybrid twist of cryogenics, stem-cell research and therapeutic hypothermia.

This was the loser lot I'd drawn in the internship lottery. Most of the kids I knew were working in agricultural engineering, making genetically altered super bananas. Meanwhile, I was transporting bodies in the dewar—rodents, dogs, people. I told you I protested. I seriously did not want to do this internship, especially when I had to sign all those "nondisclosure" agreements that no one else did. But Bill Jones wasn't a quitter, which meant I couldn't be one either, at least not until I was eighteen. Plus he bribed me: if I did my stint, I'd be off the hook for Governor's School this summer. I could stay home, work with him on the Richardses' house, and hang out with my friends at the pool. No more "academically gifted" camps at Duke, no more geeks. At that point though, if I could've turned back the clock, I'd have picked Governor's School. Trotted my ass off to Raleigh and been

the biggest geek on campus all summer. Then my dad would've been safe at home. He wouldn't have driven to Todd's house. I wouldn't have cost him his life and technically be an orphan right now. I'd just get chewed out for skipping school.

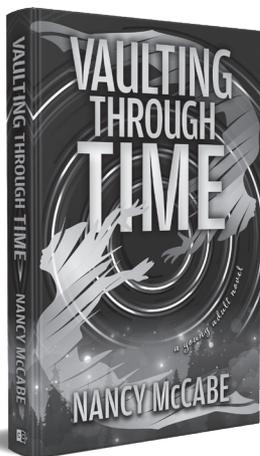
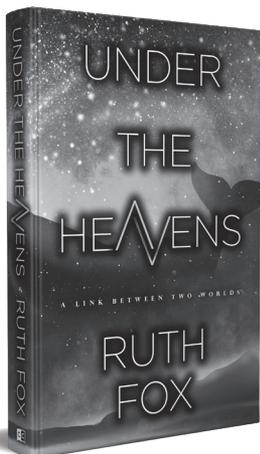
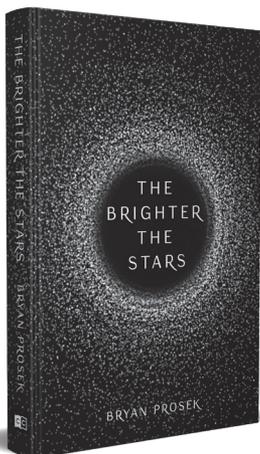
Frigging Gold Hill Road. The name is literal, you know. Way back when, some guy named John Reed found a seventeen-pound chunk of gold in his creek bed. He didn't know what it was—just used it as a doorstop. A visiting silversmith spotted it and ripped him off for it. Reed located more gold on his property and eventually opened a mine, and Cabarrus County, North Carolina became the site of the first Gold Rush in the United States. For real. Gold Hill Road was the dusty track that took people from the mines into Concord, where they could weigh in and bank their fortune. There are all kinds of legends about the bandits that ambushed miners along that road, people who were willing to kill for what John Reed had found. That's what a little gold will do.

I didn't know it at the time, but I was about to revive Gold Hill's legacy of priceless discovery, thieves, ambush, and death. Trouble with using that analogy is that I'm dumbass John Reed, using his chunk of gold to hold the kitchen door open.

I turned right at 73 and punched the gas.

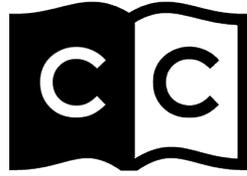


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IT'S TIME TO RAISE THE DEAD.

Moments after a devastating car accident kills his father, 17-year-old Hemingway Jones takes his body to Lifebank, the cryogenic preservation company where he interns. Hijacking the lab in a desperate attempt to reverse the natural order, Hemingway holds police and medics at bay as he works to revive his father. As dawn breaks, the heart monitor beeps, and his father slowly creeps back to life.

Days later, Hemingway arrives at the hospital to learn that his father's skin has turned ashen gray, he can't exist in temperatures above 55 degrees, and hydrogen sulfide has become his only source of food. Facing arrest for his reckless actions, Hemingway is offered a proposal by the billionaire owner of the lab: recreate the experiment he swore he'd never do again, or go to prison, leaving his father to die a second time.



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