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HUGO AND NEBULA AWARD WINNER

# OCTAVIA E. BUTLER

## DAWN

BOOK ONE OF THE XENOGENESIS SERIES

"MOVING,  
FRIGHTENING,  
FUN, AND EERILY  
BEAUTIFUL."  
— Washington Post  
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**Hugo and Nebula Award Winner**

**Octavia E. Butler**

**DAWN**

# **Book one of the Xenogenesis series**

## **I**

### **WOMB**

#### **1**

**Alive!**

**Still alive.**

**Alive. . . again.**

**Awakening was hard, as always. The ultimate disappointment.**

**It was a struggle to take in enough air to drive off nightmare sensations of asphyxiation. Lilith Iyapo lay gasping, shaking with the force of her effort. Her heart beat too fast, too loud. She curled around it, fetal, helpless. Circulation began to return to her arms and legs in flumes of minute, exquisite pains.**

**When her body calmed and became reconciled to reanimation, she looked around. The room seemed dimly lit, though she had never Awakened to dimness before. She corrected her thinking. The room did not only seem dim, it was dim. At an earlier Awakening, she had decided that reality was whatever happened, whatever she perceived.**

**It had occurred to her-how many times?-that she might be insane or drugged, physically ill or injured. None of that mattered. It could not matter while she was confined this way, kept helpless, alone, and ignorant.**

**She sat up, swayed dizzily, then turned to look at the rest of the room.**

The walls were light-colored-white or gray, perhaps. The bed was what it had always been: a solid platform that gave slightly to the touch and that seemed to grow from the floor. There was, across the room, a doorway that probably led to a bathroom. She was usually given a bathroom. Twice she had not been, and in her windowless, doorless cubicle, she had been forced simply to choose a corner.

She went to the doorway, peered through the uniform dimness, and satisfied herself that she did, indeed, have a bathroom. This one had not only a toilet and a sink, but a shower. Luxury.

What else did she have?

Very little. There was another platform perhaps a foot higher than the bed. It could have been used as a table, though there was no chair.

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**And there were things on it. She saw the food first. It was the usual lumpy cereal or stew, of no recognizable flavor, contained in an edible bowl that would disintegrate if she emptied it and did not eat it.**

**And there was something beside the bowl. Unable to see it clearly, she touched it.**

**Cloth! A folded mound of clothing. She snatched it up, dropped it in her eagerness, picked it up again and began putting it on. A light-colored, thigh-length jacket and a pair of long, loose pants both made of some cool, exquisitely soft material that made her think of silk, though for no reason she could have stated, she did not think this was silk. The jacket adhered to itself and stayed closed when she closed it, but opened readily enough when she pulled the two front panels apart. The way they came apart reminded her of Velcro, though there was none to be seen. The pants closed in the same way. She had not been allowed clothing from her first Awakening until now. She had pleaded for it, but her captors had ignored her. Dressed now, she felt more secure than she had at any other time in her captivity, it was a false security she knew, but she had learned to savor any pleasure, any supplement to her self-esteem that she could glean.**

**Opening and closing her jacket, her hand touched the long scar across her abdomen. She had acquired it somehow between her second and third Awakenings, had examined it fearfully, wondering what had been done to her. What had she lost or gained, and why? And what else might be done?**

**She did not own herself any longer. Even her flesh could be cut and stitched without her consent or knowledge.**

**It enraged her during later Awakenings that there had been moments when she actually felt grateful to her mutilators for letting her sleep through whatever they had done to her-and for doing it well enough to spare her pain or disability later.**

**She rubbed the scar, tracing its outline. Finally she sat on the bed and ate her bland meal, finishing the bowl as well, more for a change of texture than to satisfy any residual hunger. Then she began the oldest and most futile of her activities: a search for some crack, some sound of hollowness, some indication of a way out of her prison.**

**She had done this at every Awakening. At her first Awakening, she had called out during her search. Receiving no answer, she had shouted,**

then cried, then cursed until her voice was gone. She had pounded the walls until her hands bled and became grotesquely swollen.

There had not been a whisper of response. Her captors spoke when they were ready and not before. They did not show themselves at all.

She remained sealed in her cubicle and their voices came to her from above like the light. There were no visible speakers of any kind, just as there was no single spot from which light originated. The entire ceiling seemed to be a speaker and a light-and perhaps a ventilator since the air remained fresh. She imagined herself to be in a large

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**box, like a rat in a cage. Perhaps people stood above her looking down through one-way glass or through some video arrangement.**

**Why?**

**There was no answer. She had asked her captors when they began, finally, to talk to her. They had refused to tell her. They had asked her questions. Simple ones at first.**

**How old was she?**

**Twenty-six, she thought silently. Was she still only twenty-six? How Long had they held her captive? They would not say.**

**Had she been married?**

**Yes, but he was gone, long gone, beyond their reach, beyond their prison.**

**Had she had children?**

**Oh god. One child, long gone with his father. One son. Gone. If there were an afterworld, what a crowded place it must be now.**

**Had she had siblings? That was the word they used. Siblings.**

**Two brothers and a sister, probably dead along with the rest of her family. A mother, long dead, a father, probably dead, various aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, and nephews... probably dead.**

**What work had she done?**

**None. Her son and her husband had been her work for a few brief years. After the auto accident that killed them, she had gone back to college, there to decide what else she might do with her life.**

**Did she remember the war?**

**Insane question. Could anyone who had lived through the war forget it? A handful of people tried to commit humanicide. They had nearly succeeded. She had, through sheer luck, managed to survive-only to be captured by heaven knew who and imprisoned. She had offered to answer their questions if they let her out of her cubical.**

**They refused.**

**She offered to trade her answers for theirs: Who were they?**