

Prologue

Apparently, we are entering a "Brave New World," where truth, justice, and the American way have been cast aside for subterfuge, indoctrination, and manipulation. Most of the people who live in this amazing country still hold the traditional values which have always been the solid ground under its foundation. Local, national, and social media, as well as the doublespeak from most of our self-serving politicians, employ outright lies and innuendo to convince the majority of good people they are in the minority and their voice is irrelevant.

They have been erroneously led to believe and accept their supposed minority status, with the vast bulk of the population supposedly residing on the opposite end of the political spectrum. Such is the false propaganda being foisted on us. To quote Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's minister of propaganda:

*"Think of the press as a great keyboard on which the government can play."

*"Accuse the other side of that which you are guilty."

*"You can't change the masses. They will always be the same: dumb, gluttonous, and forgetful."

*"If you repeat a lie often enough, people will begin to believe it, and you'll even come to believe it yourself."

*"Propaganda works best when those who are being manipulated are confident, they are acting on their own free will."

*"A lie told once remains a lie, but a lie told a thousand times becomes the truth."

Sound familiar? It ought to. We are living it, and it will be our undoing. Never believe for one minute this is simply the way it goes in all societies. The greatest sin reasonable individuals can commit is the refusal to think and perceive reality for what it is.

This is my attempt to create a character, Iggy Marcus, the epitome of integrity, bearing the standard for all honest men and women everywhere, who abhor the destruction of America, man's greatest political creation. If we refuse to take up the standard with him and abandon our obligation to posterity, we will witness America's slide into oblivion as we get what we deserve for our apathy.

Gerald Ciccarone

Every now and then, the universe appoints prime movers. Given no choice, destiny grants them the helm as existence unfolds.

Melanie Coletta-Marcus

CHAPTER I SERENDIPITY

A one-million-volt blast of brilliant white light enveloped Ignatius Marcus, followed instantly by the deafening concussion of thunder as vertical walls of the atmosphere slammed into each other in the lightning path. The lightning explosion ignited his clothing, searing the top of his head, his back, and his legs as it hammered him to the ground. He lay prostrate, crumpled, and unconscious, smoking from the intense heat. His five-year-old son, Luke, witnessed the event from the window.

"Mary!" He screamed to the housekeeper, "Mary, Daddy's hurt and he's on fire!"

Ignatius Marcus's housekeeper rushed to the window. She was sickened at the ghastly sight of the man whose children she cared for. She called 911 and ran from the house with a blanket. Luke and his younger brother, Brett, followed in her wake.

We live, we dream, we hope, we travel the course.

A life defined by achievement becomes its own measure.

Shouldered burden, adversity, failure, success; are the source.

In the final hour, those, not possessions, are the real treasure.

Iggy Marcus

CHAPTER II THE HOSPITAL

Iggy's eyelids fluttered open for the first time in five days. Burning needles of sunlight stung his eyes. He was on his stomach in a bed with metal railings. What the hell am I doing here?

Vaguely he recalled a flash of brilliant light and a deafening explosion. Then the light had slipped away, and unconsciousness engulfed him.

A woman in blue scrubs lifted something off his back. He watched her press a button wondering why she was moving in slow motion. "Doctor, could you please come in here. The patient is awake. Please lie still, Mr. Marcus, you are very seriously injured. You should stay quiet and try not to move. The doctor will be with you in a few minutes." She busied herself with a few housekeeping chores awaiting the doctor. The ICU staff had been instructed to have one person closely monitor Iggy's vital signs in the event he awoke and tried to get out of bed.

Confusion impeded his speech. It was his first conscious moment in over five days, although he had no way of knowing it. He felt physical pain but there was something else. Something had changed dramatically but he couldn't identify it. He existed in a state of euphoria induced by pain medication.

A doctor entered the room and addressed him. "Mr. Marcus, glad to see you are back with us. I'm Dr. Peterson. How do you feel?"

Iggy groaned, groggy from the medication, as he tried to gather his thoughts. "I...I really am not sure," he stammered.

"I don't know what happened to me. There was a flash of light and an explosion; then I woke up here. Do you know what actually happened to me?"

"Yes, don't you remember?" the doctor asked. "You have been struck by lightning. You are an extremely lucky man. Somehow, you are alive. The lightning struck you on the top of the head from behind, then seared your back and legs on its way

to the ground. Your head, your back and the back of your legs are severely burnt. You have second and third-degree burns, depending on how far from the center of the lightning path the skin was. Your hair caught fire, and most of the skin on your cranium was either burned or blasted away. Frankly, we all are thoroughly amazed you are still with us. I've never heard of anyone who survived a direct lightning strike as severe as the one you have had. Your external burns are extremely severe. We have only been able to do a few tests. Your vital signs are reasonably better today than they have been. However, your injuries are still life-threatening, and you have been comatose for five days. The fact you are finally conscious, aware of your surroundings and able to communicate, is more than just a little encouraging. Your internal organs somehow survived the strike, but we are not sure if they have sustained any permanent damage. Our main priority was to keep you alive and breathing, which we have been successful at...so far. You are far from being out of danger. You have been in the intensive care unit since your arrival. Unfortunately, we could not run many tests due to your weakened condition. We still must do more tests. It will be much easier for us now with you awake and able to cooperate. Your family was here several times. Your sister said you are an engineer." Dr. Peterson continued as he lifted the sheet to examine the burns.

He was weak, barely able to move. He attempted raising his head to see the doctor's face. "How long did you say I've been in here?"

"Five days in the ICU. You will have to remain lying on your stomach for quite some time. We have applied a special silicone gel and silicone bandages to your burns. The back of your body and the top of your head have third degree burns and are in rough shape. The prognosis is improving but there is just no telling how long the healing will take. Direct lightning strikes are almost always fatal. For some indeterminate reason, yours was not. I would describe that as a miracle under any circumstances. Thankfully, lightning strikes are infrequent. The survival rate depends on the magnitude of the injuries; usually defined by whether it was a direct or peripheral strike. Each person's anatomy and reaction to extreme physical and mental trauma are different. There is an additional variable in the equation. Your body was subjected to approximately a million volts of electricity. We have no time-tested baseline for the treatment and convalescence for this type of thing because they are almost always fatal. Basically, the human body is comprised of water and chemicals. The top of your central nervous system, the brain, acts as commander-in-chief for your voluntary and involuntary physical and mental operation, by sending electrical impulses through neural pathways. Electricity energizes the entire operating system. Your survival from a million volts of electricity passing through you, may have dramatically affected that operating system. We don't know the long-term effects because the survival rate from a direct strike is almost zero. Obviously, there are short-term effects we know how to treat.

Dr. Peterson seemed to be an affable man with a relaxed congenial bedside manner. It helped Iggy feel better than he might have felt from the pain, as well as nearly getting the top of his head blown off.

His mind was beginning to clear. "Hazard a guess anyway, doctor. How long do you think I'll be in the hospital?" Then it burst in his thoughts... five days unconscious! "My God, what about my two boys, have they been told? Where are they? I hope they're okay!"

Dr. Peterson smiled. "Yes, they were here all the first day, but we sent them home with your sister once we were reasonably convinced you were going to live. They have been here several times. We told your sister we would call her as soon as there was any improvement, or you regained consciousness. I instructed a nurse to call your sister when I was told you were awake."

"Thank God I'm still alive. Their mother died and I'm all they have. They're so young, four, and five-years old. Will you let them in to see me?"

"Of course. Now that you're awake, we'll get you something small and bland to eat. We are giving you antibiotics and medication for pain. You will continue receiving those through your IV drip. After a lightning strike this severe, we are not exactly sure how your body is going to react to anything, even medication. You will have to remain in the ICU for some time. Tell me, Mr. Marcus, as compared to how you felt before the strike, other than the pain, how are you feeling now? Please describe any subtle differences. Lightning strike victims are rare. Any empirical data would be worth filing for future reference."

"Very strange, Doc. I am a bit groggy, but it seems to be getting better. I don't know how to describe it, but I feel very strange. Everything appears to be a little brighter than it used to, and my mind, well...it seems to be racing a mile a minute, albeit I'm slightly confused. I have a headache and feel physically very weak. Other than that, and a good deal of physical pain, I feel just ducky," Iggy said facetiously.

"Your sarcasm indicates the lightning didn't blast away your sense of humor. That's encouraging. We will schedule some tests for the morning. You now appear to be out of immediate danger, but we don't want to push you too hard. As I said, our priority is to see if any permanent damage has been done to your internal organs. It's five PM. We would like to start running tests after seven AM tomorrow and do an MRI for starters. It may be a lengthy process, depending on what we find, and will be somewhat strenuous considering what you've been through. You must stay in bed face down and immobile for now. We may get you up in a few days. The shock to your system has been so intense I doubt you will even be able to walk for a time. The strike traveled down your back and legs. We don't know the extent of damage that may have occurred to the spinal column, muscles, or nervous system in your legs. When we do finally get you up, it will be with support equipment and physical assistance from a therapist. I'm on call. If anything, serious arises, the staff will get in touch with me, immediately. I wanted to see you as soon as you became conscious. Right now, I must leave you and see another critical patient. You will be in good hands with the ICU nurses. See you in the morning Mr. Marcus. Try to have a reasonably good night."

The nurse repeated the doctor's instructions pointing to the call button near his left hand. "Please call the nurses' station if there is anything you need. We are right down the hall," she said, smiling.

His brief return to consciousness and the conversation with the doctor was exhausting, but he did not really feel like sleeping... just yet. He thought about what happened to him and how lucky he was to be alive. He scanned the room, turning his head from side to side, with difficulty. It was hard to see much while lying on his stomach. He gazed through the window. Everything seemed unusually bright and focused. He began to reflect on his life, a thing young people rarely do until they have a near death experience. Athletic and fit from years of figure skating and refraining from the use of alcohol or tobacco, probably had quite a bit to do with his survival. The oldest son of four children, he was very close to his two brothers and sister. All four had been semi-indentured servants to the family restaurant business. None of them liked it much while growing up, but he eventually realized after he left for college, why his father had worked them so hard in the restaurant. It kept them out of trouble and above all, taught them the work ethic.

His mother was primarily responsible for the formation of his character. He remembered how passionately his mother loved them all. He never quite understood what she meant when she said, "I'm going to make Renaissance children out of all four of you even if it kills me." It wasn't until much later, looking back, he understood the many years of piano, dance, singing lessons, Little League and other activities Rebecca unfailingly shuttled them to. She was his inspiration to do the same for his two boys. He and his two brothers were typical boys and mischief was no stranger. His father worked a sixteen-hour day, so, most of the discipline was left to mom. Rebecca had come from sound stock. Rock solid, she took no guff from any of the boys. Like all growing boys, they would push her to annoyance or anger with their natural disdain for authority. Always, when their misbehavior reached that level, she would put her foot down and isolate them. She was never a card-carrying advocate of the reward-punishment theory of child-rearing. She would sit down with them, individually, and talk to them like adults. No matter how long it took, she pushed the conversation until they became engrossed with what she was saying. She was gifted and knew how to patiently communicate with her children, elevating them to a higher plane of thinking, as opposed to knocking them down through punishment. Her child-rearing techniques accelerated their intellectual growth and inculcated a level of maturity in them far beyond their peers. She constantly explained things to them and knew exactly what she was doing when she taught them to think critically. They had no intellectual perception of her methods when they were young, but as they grew older, they began to understand. Repetition of things always makes acceptance of them the norm. It takes dedication and perseverance to parent in that fashion. Iggy was forever grateful to her and intended to pass it on to his sons.

He was uncomfortable and tried changing his position. He was a little worried about lying on his stomach for more than just a few days. Apparently, there wasn't much he could do about it, knowing he couldn't lie on his back until he healed somewhat. The pain medication was helping but it wasn't enough. He raised his head enough to look out the window, watching the evening breeze tinker with the leaves. It reminded him of chorus line dancers, flipping their skirts from side to side in a confusion of dark and light greens. He began to assess himself. Why is everything so clear and focused? It never seemed this way before. Maybe it's just the fact I have been unconscious for five days, seeing nothing...maybe. But this seems a little bit too dramatic. And then there is the other thing, my thought processes seemed to be different than before, racing. Not just a little different, but quite a bit different. I don't understand it, but somehow the lightning strike must be responsible.

The nurse entered his room. "Your family is here to see you. Your other brother is out on the West Coast and is going to fly in to see you tomorrow. He called the hospital a little while ago and spoke to one of the nurses in the ICU."

He heard the scuffle as his two boys ran toward his room. "Whoa," the nurse said as she grabbed them both by the arms when they tried to rush past her and jump on the bed. "You little guys are going to have to be plenty careful with your dad

for a while. He's had a serious injury, and you can't jump all over him just yet, even though I'm quite sure it's your *modus operandi*."

"What's a *modus operandi*?" Luke asked the nurse.

"It means the way you fool around with your dad when he's feeling good."

"Oh, I get it!" He was a bright child with his father's analytical mind and was filing away *modus operandi* for some later use. "I was so scared; I saw you burning. Did you get hit by the thunder too, Dad?"

Iggy laughed. Seeing the two boys, the lights of his life, was the best medicine he could possibly receive. Brett, a year younger than Luke and not quite as sophisticated, asked the most pertinent question, oddly enough.

"Are you going to come home to us Daddy, or are you going to have to stay here for good?"

"I'll be home soon. Don't you worry. I have to heal a little bit first. You boys are going to have to stay with Aunt Lindy for a few days."

Lindy reached and touched her brother's cheek. "Jack and I rushed to the hospital as soon as Mary told us you'd been badly hit by lightning. We were frightened to death and thought for sure you were a goner."

Jack's usual humorous candor surfaced, "You look really terrible, Iggy, burnt to a crisp, no hair, a real mess."

Ignatius was the oldest, Julius Jackson Marcus, Jack was the next in line, and Lucius, Lucky was third. Lindy was the youngest. Their parents had decided to stop making more Marcus children when mom finally gave birth to her little girl. Rebecca decided the day after she gave birth to Lindy, she wasn't going to raise her daughter any differently than her boys. Her Lindy was not going to become a demure, subordinate woman. Rebecca's determination to instill stability, strength of character and independence in all her children, as well as the constant competition with three older brothers, had provided Lindy with all the tools she needed to graduate *summa cum laude* from law school and become a first-rate trial lawyer. Iggy and Jack were two very close but dissimilar brothers. Iggy had gone to college to become an engineer. Jack didn't share Iggy's or Lucky's love for the technical fields. He had gone to school for something more esoteric. He had a PhD in psychology. They were a year and a half apart in age and spent most of their youth raising hell in the neighborhood when they weren't working in the restaurant or going to school and doing homework. They each had a dry, sarcastic sense of humor and constantly, but affectionately, badgered each other. Even though Iggy was, in fact, burnt to a crisp with no hair, and a real mess, Jack just couldn't resist the comment.

"Don't make me laugh, Jack, it hurts. If you, do it again, when I get out of this bed, I'll light your hair on fire so you can see what it's like."

They both laughed even though Iggy did it with a grimace.

Jack continued to prattle, "Even though your injuries are extremely serious and potentially life-threatening, the doctor says he thinks you're eventually gonna be okay. With a couple yards of new skin and a hair transplant or two, you'll almost be as good as new. I know where they can get the hair. I think you'd look great with a full head of very curly, kinky hair."

"Keep making me laugh, Jack, and I'll have them throw you out."

The nurse, who had been listening from the doorway, sensed how close this family was. She had come to tell them it was time to leave. The doctor wanted this first visit short. The patient needed plenty of rest before the rigorous testing the next morning.

Both boys' faces were only inches from his. They were his whole life, and he was their entire world. "I love both you boys, so much, and you two older characters, too. Thanks for coming to see me, everything will be okay... Maybe even better than okay."

"Jack, before you leave, would you do me a favor please? They don't give you enough food around here. I'm constantly starving. I have to get some more to eat. I wasn't this way before. I don't seem to be able to help it. Sneak some food in, okay?"

"Yeah, sure, Ig." Jack replied with raised eyebrows. "What the hell is with your appetite? You were never a big eater."

"Well, I am now, apparently."

"Bye Dad. We love you too. Aunt Lindy is gonna bring us back here tomorrow. Is it okay to kiss you goodbye, or will it hurt?"

"Sure boys, but don't make it too sloppy," said their dad happily, thinking of how close they had all come to another tragic loss. Had the worst happened, no one as devoted as himself would nurture and teach his sons as they grew. Jack and Lindy both had their own families. They would help, of course, but it wouldn't be the same.

They filed out, leaving Iggy to think about his strange new mental state. He was preoccupied with the thoughts of food. He saw steaks, lobster, pies, and all his favorite foods, float by his mind's eye, constantly. I wonder what this is all about

He lay there once more contemplating his past. He rarely ever gave thought to his own demise. It occasionally entered his mind when thinking about Clara. He was always quick to nip it in the bud before it got out of hand. How short life is, he thought, and a freak accident such as this could end it all in an instant. He had quite a different outlook, now, than he had five days ago. Iggy was a thirty-two-year-old professional engineer, exceptionally educated in many different fields. As a voracious reader, he thoroughly and consistently followed innovative technological developments. His strong mathematical background, steeped in his engineer's mentality, gave him an uncommon ability to ferret out the inherent scientific roots of new technologies. There was no device short of miniature micro-electronic devices he could not understand, troubleshoot, and repair.

That was not the total description of the man. His mother had given him, often against his will, a solid classical education. Thinking back to his childhood, he remembered his resistance to piano and dance lessons. Like all small boys, he wanted to be out in the neighborhood playing baseball. Mom allowed time for those things, but she was unwavering when she instilled a love for the classics in all her children. Again, he thought about his mother saying, "I am going to make Renaissance children of you even if it kills me."

"Mission accomplished, Mom," he said aloud, as if Rebecca was there in the room with him. After ten years of piano lessons and countless hours of practice, he became a proficient pianist and fervently loved the classics. He also managed to be a pretty fair baseball player.

He wasn't the pianist his brother Lucius was. Lucky, also an engineer, but in a different field than Iggy, was a brilliant pianist, just about concert quality in stature. He admired Lucius for his marvelous ability and dexterity, but there wasn't an envious bone in his body. Mom had seen to that. She taught her children, both verbally and through example, the non-value of a non-productive nowhere trip down envy lane. She instilled in them the concept of never allowing anyone's opinion to define your self-image. She taught them a person's self-image could only come from within himself, and the only mechanism that could bring a healthy, honest self-image into being was mastery through achievement. Mom, primarily responsible for Iggy's education, was nowhere near as educated as he was, but the basic philosophic concepts she had imparted to him were innate within her. She had given him the incomparable gifts of the ability to have productive life, and an appreciation for all the beauty that entailed. Tears came as he thought about her funeral. He remembered her lying in state, in her late fifties, and the overwhelming agony and sorrow of loss he had felt. This woman, who had given him so much, was gone much too early. A year later, almost to the day, his father passed away. He was twelve years Rebecca's senior and died, the family was told, of natural causes, but they knew better. They knew how devoted their parents were to each other and were witness to the love between them all their lives. They believed once their mother was gone, Dad just didn't want to be here anymore, but wanted to join Rebecca.

Clara's face surfaced again. He stayed away from the subject most of the time. Thinking about her became almost too hard for him to bear. She had perished in a stupid, pointless automobile accident. It was the luck of the draw-- road ice and an oak tree. He lay thinking how senseless life can be sometimes. She was my soulmate, the perfect woman and mother of my children. We were always on the same page, in the same book, from the moment we met. We were meant to spend our lives together if there is such a thing as destiny. Then, just when you think you have everything going for you, Murphy's Law kicks in and you live with the consequences for the rest of your life. I'm going to go somewhere else with this. If I keep this up, I'll be crying my eyes out for the rest of the night. After all, I have the boys and that's all that's left of Clara, except for the memories.

DAY TWO

Iggy woke up, starving. An orderly brought his breakfast, and he gulped it down. He knew radiology was his first stop, but he was still hungry. He flagged down a passing nurse. "Do you think I could have another breakfast, nurse? I'm famished. My first breakfast wasn't enough."

"I'll see what I can do, Mr. Marcus, but you're off to radiology, shortly."

Iggy's first stop in the morning was Radiology. Dr. Peterson had explained prior to an MRI scan, they had to x-ray him thoroughly to determine if there were any magnetic metal particles embedded in his body, especially the eyes. Embedded metal particles in his tissues could cause severe burns or blindness.

He remembered his conversation with Dr. Peterson, the description of the MRI machine, and the testing process verbatim. "Are you claustrophobic, Mr. Marcus?"

"No Dr., I don't think so."

"Glad to hear it. We have a large, closed bore 3T scanner at this hospital."

"What's the T stand for, doc?"

"Tesla," replied Dr. Peterson, "as in 1 Tesla, 2 Tesla, and so on. The 3T scanner is the largest scanner in use that I am aware of. You are an engineer, so I'll give you the technical description. The bore is 60 cm in diameter. In essence, it is a large superconducting magnet that generates a strong magnetic field around the subject to be scanned, which is especially useful for neurological imaging. It does a more precise, thorough job than anything else available today. The magnetic field excites the protons of hydrogen atoms in the water of your tissues. When the protons return to equilibrium, they emit radio signals which are measurable and recorded by a receiving coil. The contrast between different tissues or anomalies in tissues is determined by the rate in which excited atoms return to the equilibrium state. The radio signals can be made to encode position information by varying the main magnetic field with things called gradient coils. The coils are rapidly switched on and off to achieve the desired effect. The result is a banging or loud thumping noise. It is often the most alarming feature of the scanning process, to the patient. The mechanics of the process are quite a bit more complex than my simple explanation. Dr. Collins could give you a much more detailed technical explanation if you like."

"Thanks for the description, Dr., but I'm pretty familiar with the mathematics of magnetism. I have a good grasp on what you explained to me. Hmm...3T; that's about 100 times stronger than the magnetic field of the earth, depending on where you are in relation to Earth's poles."

"You have a better grasp on the technical aspects than most patients. Dr. Roberts and technicians are going to conduct the scan, so I'm going to leave you now in their hands and see other patients. You can relax, Mr. Marcus. We conduct these tests every day."

The orderly wheeled his gurney to a different section of the hospital where they entered a large white room full of instruments, gauges, computer screens and a tunnel. The sign over the door said MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGING.

Iggy eyed the tunnel. "I can't wait to go in there," he sarcastically addressed the two technicians who had been waiting for his arrival.

He was feeling much better. He knew he shouldn't have been. He was a burnt physical wreck. Theoretically, I should feel lousy considering all that has happened to me, but I don't. Hmm... Interesting.

"It's not as bad as it looks," said the technician. "My name is Ted, and my partner is Mabel. We can give you a mild sedative, if necessary. We are going to place you on the platform with padding under you because of your backside injuries. Some of what we do to scan you will be done with you lying face up, and some with you lying face down. We heard about the lightning strike. We don't get too many of those in here. You don't look too bad for a guy who just got nuked...surprising. We'll give you an explanation about the tests while we're prepping you."

"Thanks," said Iggy, "but it's not necessary. Dr. Peterson already ran this by me before he told me to relax."

"You're not claustrophobic, are you?" asked Ted.

"That may depend on how long this test is going to take," said Iggy with a grin. "The answer is, I don't think so, considering the fact I've never done this before."

"Good," said Mabel. "The test may take from 20 to 90 minutes. It depends on what Dr. Roberts determines he wants images of when he arrives. While you're in the tunnel, we will be giving you certain instructions. The success of the imaging, meaning clarity of the images, has a great deal to do with you lying as perfectly still as possible during certain phases of the scan. The scanner will make banging or thumping noises throughout the entire test. Please do not be alarmed. It is only gradient coils, switched on and off, altering the magnetic field to enhance specific imaging results."

Iggy was right on the money. He wasn't clinically claustrophobic, but the tunnel was positively creepy. He decided to grin and bear it without complaint, knowing a casket would be so much more confining and permanent.

A tall slender man with a thin gray mustache entered the room. He greeted the technicians by name and approached Iggy's gurney. He placed his hand on Iggy shoulder and said "Good morning, Mr. Marcus, I am Dr. Roberts. I will be conducting your scan today. I'm sure the technicians have briefed you on the procedure. I'll go through it again, anyway. I spoke to Dr. Peterson a short time ago. He said he explained the technical operation of the MRI scanner. He also described your case history. I understand the back of your body and head have been severely burnt by a lightning strike. We want you on your back as little as possible. However, some of the testing requires you to be in that position. I am going to minimize the duration of your first scan for exactly that reason. We will instruct you to hold your breath and stay as still as possible, when necessary. I'm sure the technicians explained the banging noise the scanner makes. Don't let it alarm you. Stay as relaxed as possible. If you feel you need a sedative because you are claustrophobic, we will give you one. We prefer not to, if it can be avoided."

"No, Dr. Roberts, I think I will manage okay."

"Let's place you into the tunnel and get started, then."

They rolled the platform under Iggy into the scanner. The first phase of the scan had Iggy positioned face up. Dr. Roberts nodded to the technicians, and they started the scanning process. The machine began to hum as it generated the intense magnetic field in the tunnel.

Iggy screamed. "Stop, please turn it off!" The pain deep inside his head was excruciating. He had never felt anything like it before.

The technician said, from somewhere in the room. "Don't worry, Mr. Marcus, it won't hurt."

"Turn it off! Turn it off! Turn it off!" Iggy screamed in agony.

"Shut it down, Mabel," said Dr. Roberts. "I don't know why he is shouting, but let's get him out of the tunnel. I've never seen anything like this before."

The technician closed the switch and the humming ceased. Semiconscious, shaking with convulsions, his face and chest covered with blood from a massive nosebleed, Iggy's head felt like it was going to explode. The pain and lethargy began to subside, and Iggy yelled from the tunnel. "Get me out of this thing, now!" The engineer in him knew this was not right. The intent and operation of this machine could not possibly hurt someone in the agonizing manner it had hurt him. Something was wrong, either with the machine or with himself. Either way, he wanted out, immediately.

One of the technicians rolled the platform out of the tunnel. His breath came in gasps as the pain finally subsided and he became fully conscious. Dr. Roberts stood over him, watching him closely as Mabel wiped the blood from his face and chest.

"How are you feeling now, Mr. Marcus?" Dr. Roberts asked him anxiously.

"I think I'm all right now, Dr., but the pain in my head was excruciating when you started the scan. Something is wrong with this picture."

"I'm not sure why that happened to you, Mr. Marcus. I have conducted hundreds of MRI procedures, and I have never seen it affect anyone in the manner it affected you."

Iggy asked, "Is Dr. Peterson around today? He's the doctor I saw when I first woke up. I liked him. No offense intended towards you, Doctor, but I would like to see Dr. Peterson."

Dr. Roberts smiled and looked at Iggy with raised eyebrows. "Dr. Peterson is in the hospital, but MRIs are not his specialty, anyway. It's my department. I'm sure he will see you at some point."

He turned to the technicians. "Let's put Mr. Marcus on the EEG and scan his brain waves. I would like to see the results, considering what occurred with the MRI scan." He turned to Iggy. "We are going to attach sensors to your scalp, and then hook them to the electroencephalograph with wires. During the test, we're going to ask you to change your rate of breathing and subject you to various optical stimuli. Normally, we glue the sensors directly to the skin. In your case we are going to embed them in a conductive gel because of the injuries to your cranium. Do you feel up to it? It really should be done as soon as possible."

"If you say so Dr. Go for it. I'm okay."

The technicians slowly unwound the bandage from Iggy's head. Dr. Roberts had his back toward them. Neither the technicians nor Dr. Roberts knew the extent of his head injuries. The doctor turned to watch the sensors being applied to Iggy's head. "This is interesting. I was told your head injuries were much more serious than they apparently are. I wonder how that information got fouled up. Let's continue." The technicians finished attaching the wires between the electroencephalograph and Iggy's head. They began recording his brain waves.

The machine made a soft humming sound as his brain waves were displayed on the screen. Dr. Roberts frowned. "Something must be wrong with the machine. I've never seen anything like this before. I believe we need to have the machine calibrated." He addressed the technicians, "You folks know what to do under the circumstances. I believe we must call GE and have the machine calibrated. Let's see if we can get another EEG machine in here and attach it to Mr. Marcus's sensor pads."

"There's another one in room B. It's almost new. The hospital only acquired it three months ago. I'll get it," offered the technician, Mabel.

Dr. Roberts was perplexed. "Mr. Marcus, we rarely have technical difficulties here, but as with all mechanical and electronic devices, equipment failure occurs now and then. Your chart indicates you are a victim of a lightning strike. We tested a victim of a lightning strike once before, but it was a peripheral strike. The patient was not hit directly but was standing under a nearby tree that was hit. It still almost killed him."

"I don't think the problem is with your machine," said Iggy. "Something very strange is going on with me and I think it just exhibited itself."

The other technician, Ted, opened the door as Mabel wheeled in the new EEG machine on a rolling cart. They had disconnected the wires from the sensors on Iggy's head; then attached the new EEG wires to the sensor pads.

Dr. Roberts instructed the technicians to begin.

"My goodness," exclaimed Dr. Roberts. "The patient's brain waves are almost identical on this machine as the previous machine. Remarkable! I've never seen anything like this before. If there is not a mechanical or electronic failure occurring, your brain waves are registering on a level, frankly, I have never seen or heard of."

"What exactly are you saying, Doctor?" Iggy wanted to know.

"Well, Mr. Marcus, without getting too technical, let me first explain how the EEG measures brain waves, by measuring the frequency and amplitude of electrical impulses that travel along your neural pathways. Those electrical impulses are generated by electro-chemical reactions in the cells of the brain tissue. It is the way your brain communicates with the rest of the body, giving it voluntary or involuntary commands. Historically speaking, neurological medicine has established norms which define the parameters of the waves or impulses. I'm referring to limits encompassing normal activity versus abnormal activity. The limits have been established through thousands of test results, coupled with research and analysis. The frequency indicates the rapidity of the waves, and the amplitude describes the spikes in those waves, much in the same manner as an oscilloscope. Am I making myself clear?"

Iggy was quick to respond, "I get it Doctor, I'm an engineer and I deal with similar stuff all the time. Please continue."

"Okay, then," said Dr. Roberts, "since you have more than just a basic grasp of the subject, I'll be a little more explicit. What the machine seems to be recording is the frequency of your brain waves is so compact, and the spikes are so high and low in both directions on the graph, I assumed the first machine had to be malfunctioning. Technically speaking, this printout is

theoretically impossible. Let me see if I can find another way to say this. It is so extreme that if the machine is operating properly, you are probably the most abnormal person, or I should say, you have the most abnormal brain waves I have ever seen. We use the EEG for diagnostic purposes. There are many different things we can check for. Examples would be epilepsy, brain tumors, dementia, and a host of other maladies. If something is not amiss here, you fall into a unique category. Your brain's electrical activity exists in a realm unheard of and as far as I know, never seen before. The machine is unable to measure the level of the spikes in the waves on either side of the graph."

"What does all this mean for me? I mean, medically," Iggy asked.

"I've probably breached protocol, slightly, by explaining this to you before I consulted Dr. Peterson and Dr. Collins. Technically speaking, however, you are lying here, apparently calm, and lucid, even though the results of the test are so startling. I looked at your chart containing information you provided concerning previous medical history of conditions or illnesses for both you, and your family. There are none if your chart is accurate. The answer to your question is, I have absolutely no idea what it means for you. I can neither diagnose something I don't understand, nor form a prognosis. We appear to be in uncharted territory."

"Whew," Iggy sighed. "Where do we go from here, Dr. Roberts?"

"Frankly, I'm not sure. My best guess is we are going to perform more tests and closely observe you, to see if you exhibit, or begin to exhibit any abnormal symptoms or conditions. Symptoms of what, I don't know."

"We need another EEG later and will apply various stimuli to see if it evokes a different response. I want to bring one of my colleagues, Dr. Collins, in on this. He is a brilliant neurologist and might be able to make heads or tails of all this. When we finish here, we'll move you to another section of the hospital for a CT scan, in lieu of the failed MRI. As far as I can see, Mr. Marcus, you don't seem to be in any distress, so we should allow the day's events to unfold as planned." He approached the gurney and stood over him. "I'm going to talk with Dr. Peterson, after we leave here, to see what your schedule is like and perhaps make arrangements for another EEG later today or tomorrow. I hope I didn't worry you too much." The doctor patted Iggy on the back of his hand before he left.

Iggy barely heard what the doctor had just said. He was far too preoccupied with his thoughts. His perception was heightened to an even greater level. His vision and hearing were more acute than ever. The lightning strike had done something to him. He had sensed it the day before, but the heightened perception of his environment was less then, as compared to what it was now, after the MRI scan. Something had happened to him in the tunnel. He didn't know what it was, but he was just a little apprehensive. His analytical mind led him down the avenue of sorting out, identifying, and assessing what was happening. There was no pain now, only the accelerated speed of his thought processes. Other than the slight anxiety, he felt he was emotionally stable and not having some sort of mental breakdown.

The technicians removed the sensors and gently wiped the gel from his head. He tried to get off the platform. The technicians had their backs to him and did not see his attempt to stand. Ted glanced over his shoulder at the patient.

"Oh no, please, Mr. Marcus! We will leave you on the gurney to move you. Please don't attempt to stand up!" They rushed across the room to help him lie back down but were too late. His legs were wobbly, and his balance was off, having been in bed with leg injuries for five and a half days. He began to slide to the floor due to his weakened condition and tried grasping the gurney he had been lying on. He sliced his arm on a screw protruding from a leg of the gurney as he fell. The two-inch-long scratch, slightly above his wrist, drew a thin line of blood. Ted helped him up while Mabel held the gurney. Iggy cupped his hand over the scratch as Ted helped him onto the gurney.

"I'll get a dressing for that scratch."

"Thanks, I appreciate it, but I'll be okay. It's really not bad." He was back on his stomach again on the gurney. This day isn't going so well. Mabel left to return the EEG machine as Ted rummaged through a cabinet looking for a bandage.

"I have to go down the hall to get a bandage. We don't keep that kind of stuff in here because no one ever gets wounded while getting an MRI scan. I'll be back in a jiffy. Please, Mr. Marcus... do not try to get up again!"

Ted left the room and Iggy glanced at the scratch. "What the hell?" he said aloud. The scratch was not bleeding and appeared almost healed. This is crazy. How could this be possible? I cut myself minutes ago and yet the wound appears to be almost healed! He knew this was extraordinary and had nothing to do with the hospital and his medical treatment. He realized

the profoundly dramatic changes had come from the lightning strike. It was the only thing different about his otherwise consistent life. Ted reappeared with a bandage as Mabel returned through the double doors. He reached for Iggy's arm to swab the cut with antiseptic and apply the bandage.

"Well, I'll be a used bedpan!" exclaimed Ted. "I saw blood, even though I didn't look at the wound that close. This cut appears seven or eight days old." Ted was no newbie to medicine. He knew this was more than just a little odd. "I don't get it," he looked at Mabel. "A couple minutes ago, this guy was bleeding from a cut he just got on his wrist. Well, look at it, Mabel. It looks like it's almost healed. Something really strange is going on here."

An orderly came to move Iggy up to the next floor. "Goodbye, Ted, Mabel, you're both very nice but I truly hope I never see you or your tunnel ever again." The orderly pushed his gurney down the hall to the elevator.

"You're the guy they say got struck by lightning, aren't you?"

"That would be me," Iggy jovially replied. He was feeling much better than even an hour ago.

"Everybody in the hospital's talking about you. They've even given you a nickname; lightning man. What was it like, getting whacked by a million volts?"

"You know, I can't remember a thing. One moment I was standing by the metal shed in my backyard where I keep my yard tools, and the next minute I woke up in the hospital with no idea what happened or how long I had been unconscious. Not the greatest five days I've spent in my life."

The elevator opened and the orderly pushed Iggy into the hall, took a sharp left and entered a small examination room three doors down. "Dr. Peterson asked me to bring you here before we proceed with more testing. He wants to examine you between tests."

Dr. Peterson, with his usual single knock, entered the room and observed the situation. "What in God's name are you doing lying on your back? It's absolutely critical you don't damage what's left of your skin any further!" Dr. Peterson walked quickly to the door and beckoned for a nurse. She arrived moments later. "Nurse, please find another gurney and help me turn Mr. Marcus over on his stomach." The nurse arrived with the gurney and placed it next to Iggy's. "Let's roll him onto his stomach on the adjacent gurney." After Iggy was moved, Dr. Peterson said he would return momentarily and left the room. Iggy's magnified hearing heard Dr. Peterson on the nurses' station phone. "My instructions were, he was to lay on his stomach and only be placed on his back on foam padding and a silicone sheet, very briefly, for the MRI scan. Why did you leave him on his back?" There was several minutes of silence while Dr. Peterson listened to the reply, then he returned to the room.

Iggy was on his stomach again. "How are you feeling now, Mr. Marcus?"

"Pretty good, Doc, but a little strange after the MRI."

"Considering what you've been through, I don't think normal is right around the corner, Mr. Marcus."

"Please, call me Iggy. Mr. Marcus was my father."

"Okay then, Iggy it is. So... describe what you mean by strange."

"Very weird, Doc, very weird. Something very strange has been going on with me that I'm at a loss to explain or understand. I'm an educated guy and none of this makes any sense at all. And please don't blame anyone in radiology. None of it is their fault. Some really crazy stuff went on down there, and well, they didn't do anything wrong. Dr. Roberts said he really wanted to talk to you about my situation."

"Yes, he had another patient to see but he left a message at the nurses' station on this floor, saying he wanted to talk to me about your case and it was important. Well, let's get these bandages off. I want to have a good look at you. You are at a very critical stage, and it's imperative your treatment progresses by the book until you are healed enough so infections or other bad things don't happen."

"What other bad things, Doc?"

"Well, you know, bedbugs, vampires and the like."

He enjoyed Dr. Peterson's sense of humor. "You know, Doc, I cut my wrist half an hour ago, and well, take a look... it seems to be almost healed."

The doctor did not pay too much attention to the small wound after a casual glance at Iggy's wrist. He had not quite grasped the implications about the timing of the actual cut and the accelerated healing process.

Dr. Peterson slowly peeled the bandages back on his legs and back but held off on the head.

"My God! Please forgive me, Iggy, but this is the craziest thing I've ever seen in my life. Fascinating! These burns look like they happened three months ago. What the heck is going on here? I can't figure this. I've been practicing medicine for over thirty years and never, ever have I seen anything like it. There is no way you should be in this condition today. No wonder you seem to be so chipper. You're one for the books, my friend. With your permission, I would love to experiment with you to find out what miracle brought you a full three months or so ahead of schedule, healing."

"Like Dr. Frankenstein's experiments, Dr. Peterson? Will I get a bolt through my neck?"

Dr. Peterson chuckled as the door swung open and Dr. Roberts walked in.

"I found you, David. I really want to discuss Mr. Marcus's case with you. His EEG readings are more than just bizarre, they're impossible. Another EEG should be run later today or tomorrow morning, early. Dr. Collins will be in shortly and I want him with me when we test him. His readings were so, what can I say...different, that I want to explore these anomalies with Dr. Collins. Has he been through the CT scan?"

"No, he hasn't. And believe me, you've hardly cornered the market on anomalies as far as Iggy is concerned."

"Iggy?"

"That's Mr. Marcus' first name. He asked me to call him Iggy because Mr. Marcus was reserved exclusively for his father."

"Dr. Roberts, please call me Iggy, as well. It's short for Ignatius. Mr. Marcus makes me feel old, and I'm not ready to feel old just yet."

"Okay...Iggy. If you don't mind, I'd like to attempt another MRI scan."

"Not a chance Doc. If you felt what I felt when I was in the tunnel, you'd run the other way, too."

"Look at this, Jim," Dr. Peterson peeled back the sheet covering Iggy. "This man was struck by lightning six days ago. He had third degree burns on the back of his legs, and the worst ones were on his back and head. There was going to be some long healing process for him. I didn't want to explain that, so as not to discourage him. All the skin in the affected area from the center of the path of the lightning was burnt away. He would need extensive skin grafts over the entire back of his body. That couldn't even commence until the musculature beneath healed. Well, there isn't enough skin on the front of him to remove to do the job. It was going to have to be partial repairs, while new skin grew where the old skin was removed, to acquire new skin to finish the reconstruction. I'm not a plastic surgeon but three years, maybe more, is my best guess. Even then, he would have considerable scar tissue. No matter what, this man's healing process was going to be a long painful ordeal. Apparently, there are forces at work here we don't understand. Very puzzling."

"My God!" exclaimed Dr. Roberts. "This is crazy. I've never seen anything like this, either Dave. It's even more impossible than the EEG we just ran."

"Let's take the bandages off his head, Jim. I was really worried about the damage. Much of the bone of his cranium was exposed where the skin had been incinerated by the lightning."

Dr. Peterson slowly unwound the bandage from around Iggy's head. As he began to expose the cranium from top to bottom, he stood there in stunned silence. New skin was already beginning to form over the bone.

"Wow! exclaimed Peterson. You didn't see it Jim, but it was very bad. As I said, I did not want to alarm the patient by telling him how difficult the healing process was going to be. There were too many variables and too much damage. Amazing!"

"How is this possible? I hope you will allow us to test you extensively, Iggy, to learn about this remarkable ability to heal yourself. Even with all my years in medicine, I think what I'm seeing here is not possible. Yet I am seeing it, so it is possible.

"I am convinced," he addressed Dr. Roberts, "after he told me the wound on his wrist healed itself in a few short minutes, his metabolism has been so dramatically altered by the lightning strike, it somehow enables some kind of accelerated healing process to occur. I know there is some scientific explanation for all this. Whether we can understand it is another thing altogether. There are many medical anomalies we have never been able to explain, and this is right at the top of the list." He looked at Iggy, "I'm sure you'll be willing to cooperate."

Iggy quipped, "I'm not too sure of anything right now, Doc, except the fact that I'm starving. Your breakfasts in this joint are too small."

The two doctors excused themselves and left the room, saying they would be back in a few minutes. He knew they wanted to have a private conversation they didn't want him privy to. Several minutes later, Dr. Peterson reentered the room. "We're taking you out of the ICU, in light of what's been happening to you, and this bizarre, accelerated healing process of yours."

The nurse opened the door. "Dr. Peterson, there is a call for you at the nurses' station."

Dr. Peterson returned a few minutes later. "You apparently seem to be out of danger, so we are going to postpone the CAT scan for today. I must leave you now; it's what the call was about. I will come to see you in your room when I'm finished. I instructed the nurse to have an orderly come down and bring you to a private room, near my office, because your circumstances have changed enough, and well, this healing business of yours should not become anyone's concern."

"I told you I did not want you lying on your back when I entered the room. I feel this is changed, somewhat, considering the present state of your injuries. I'm going to set up a ventilating sheet on an egg crate pad in your bed so you can lay on your back some of the time. I will probably be in to see you every few hours to observe and document this amazing healing process. Dr. Roberts very much wants to give you an EEG again. He wants to set a baseline to measure future changes in your brain waves. I can't imagine this healing is only temporary, but it makes sense for us not to assume anything, at this point, and jump the gun with conjecture and therapies. I'm sure you're going to be here for quite a while, no matter what."

"Thanks, Doc. I'd like to call my sister. When she comes with the boys, I would like her to stop by my house and pick up my iPod, earbuds, and phone. I presume there will be a phone in my room."

"Of course. I would like to caution you, though, about telling them too much about this healing process of yours, over the phone. It's something you should discuss with them in private, here in the hospital. They need to be circumspect about sharing this information with outsiders at this point. The last thing you need, at this stage, is a lot of media types cruising through here and badgering you in search of a sensational story."

"Yeah, sure, Doc. I don't like cruising people or sensational-story-seeking media characters either. What I really want from my sister is for her to stop at Subway and get me a foot long BMT."

An orderly knocked and entered. "Dr. Peterson instructed me to move you to room 12 on 7 West." They arrived at the elevator and the orderly pushed the call button. While they waited for the elevator the orderly asked, "Are you lightning man?"

"Yeah, I guess so, Only I left my blue tights with the red cape and the lightning bolt on my chest home, today."

They entered the elevator, and the orderly pushed the button for the seventh floor. "We're not supposed to call you that. I could get reprimanded if anyone found out, but the orderly who moved you before, my friend, George, told me you were really a good guy. My name is Bart, by the way. What was it like?"

"All I can tell you is there was a flash of light, a loud bang, then good night... and here I am...half starved."

"The elevator doors opened, and Bart pushed him into the hall, taking a right towards room twelve. George had pushed him to the left of the elevator before. Hmm, now why would I remember that? Come to think of it, I remember everything, even the smallest nuance, with crystal clarity since I woke up the other day. His mind had always been sharp and his memory excellent, but it had never been this good. Everything he had seen or experienced since he woke in the ICU; every moment, every subtle vocal inflection by others, every shifting of light patterns, all those things seem to be indelibly imprinted

in Iggy's mind like a photograph. Wow, this is really freaky. Everything seems brighter. My visual acuity keeps changing; damn, what's next? He wondered as they entered room 12.

He had been steadily feeling better since he woke up in the ICU. The shock to his body and his mind had been enormous. However, the residual trauma was rapidly dissipating. He looked down at his wrist and was startled. It's gone! No scar even! This is getting crazier by the hour.

After the meeting with the doctors on the fourth floor, they had re-bandaged his head. However, they only lightly bandaged his back and the back of his legs leaving off the silicone gel used in severe burn cases. "I have to take the bandage off one of my legs," he muttered to himself, "and see just what the situation is down there." He headed for the small bathroom in his private room. There was a knock and Dr. Peterson entered.

"Good afternoon, Iggy, I mentioned I wanted to check up on you periodically. I meant every few hours, simply because your case is so unique. If you would please lie face down on your bed, I'd like to pull some of the bandages off and look."

Iggy positioned himself on the bed. The doctor began removing the bandages from his back. They were only lightly fastened with surgical tape on undamaged skin. Dr. Peterson pulled back the bandage and exclaimed, "astonishing!"

"Your case is more than an anomaly, Iggy, you are a phenomenon. I discussed your case with Dr. Samuel Miltner, the head of the hospital, and Drs. Roberts and Collins. We decided not to publicize this marvelous healing ability you have. It is so bizarre, we are sure it would be greeted by skepticism, inviting a constant parade of observers. They would come from everywhere, the medical community, the press, and other supposedly important curiosity seekers. The resulting invasion could affect your convalescence. We have no medical proof, at this point, of how this is happening to you. If word got out, this hospital and your convalescence might become a three-ring circus. Your survival of a direct lightning strike, and healing at this rapid rate has already made you the talk of the hospital. Just imagine what it would be like if you were tagged with the name, Miracle Man."

"I've already been tagged with Lightning Man, Doc."

"Somehow, I'm not surprised. We have absolutely no idea if your healing will continue at this enormously accelerated rate, or perhaps you will suffer a regression. Your tissue is regenerating with enormous speed. Maybe that's why you want to eat everything in sight. The body can't manufacture tissue without nutrition."

"We can't see any upside to making your case public. Case in point, your back now has a look I've never seen before. It doesn't look like newly healed skin. It doesn't look like skin that has had third-degree burns but is in a terminal stage of healing. It's weird if you will please excuse the colloquialism. It looks inflamed with small welts or bumps, as if all the blood from the sub-dermal capillaries has gathered in the first few layers of skin. I've never seen it before. I don't know what the next stage is going to be if there even is a next stage. It's almost like an allergic reaction, but very different than any allergic reaction I have seen. I thought observing this every hour or two would be adequate. It is not. The transition from third-degree burns to wherever this is going seems to be accelerating. The entire medical profession would love to know how your body is doing this. It surely would revolutionize injury treatment! I described this dramatic accelerated healing process of yours to Dr. Miltner, the hospital chairman of the board of directors. He's away today but flying in tonight and wants to examine you first thing in the morning. I have heard he is going to invite a few doctors from John Hopkins, the Mayo Clinic and Duke University to examine you. They are specialists on the cutting edge of biomedical research."

"Please sit up now if you would. I need to remove the bandages from your head and have a look. I am calling Dr. Roberts. He is in the hospital and requested I notify him when I was going to look at the healing progress of your head."

Dr. Peterson opened the door and beckoned a nurse. "Nurse, please page Dr. Roberts for me. He's in the hospital and expecting to hear from me. Thank you."

Dr. Peterson peeled the bandages away from Iggy's head. He was no longer startled by anything he saw; it was becoming expected. The entire cranium now was covered with new, but very thin appearing skin that had the same inflamed appearance as the skin on his back. It was slightly more inflamed around the edges where it met the undamaged skin on his temples and sides of his head.

"Iggy, this is really amazing. I am still surprised by what I see and have no explanation for it. Somehow skin is forming over exposed bone without a skin graft, growing from the undamaged skin and spreading across your cranium. Theoretically it's

impossible, yet I am looking at exactly that. This entire incident has shot my reserved, aloof doctor's bedside manner right in the pants. But, then again, I was never overbearing anyway with formal nonsense."

There was a brief knock on the door and Dr. Roberts walked in. "Hello, David, how's the patient?"

"Better than ever could be, or should be expected, I would say. Look for yourself. You saw what it was like just a few hours ago." Dr. Roberts moved closer to the bed and examined Iggy's head.

"My God, what you make of this, Dave?"

"Don't know what to make of it, Jim. This man was near death four days ago with severe third-degree burns on his back and legs, and his cranium didn't even have any skin. For all intents and purposes, he should be close to death, if not dead already, but here he is, looking like he's just got a bad case of sunburn! What in medical terms, can you say about this?"

"Nothing I can think of Dave. It's way beyond my experience, but I do really want to get him on the EEG and measure his brain waves again. I don't believe his ability to heal himself physically is the extent of the changes happening to this man."

The nurse popped her head into the doorway. "Mr. Marcus's family just arrived Dr., shall I let them in?"

"By all means nurse, we're just about done here. Where are they? I'd like to speak to them for a minute."

"I'll see you later Dave," said Dr. Roberts. "I'd like to schedule another EEG on Mr. Marcus as soon as possible."

"Fine, Jim, talk to you later."

Doctor Peterson approached Iggy's family.

"Hello, I'm Dr. Peterson. I believe we briefly met several days ago when you first came to visit Mr. Marcus. The patient is doing remarkably well considering the extent of his injuries. In fact, he's doing so well, we are convinced something very unusual is happening to him."

Jack shook the doctor's hand. "We're very glad to hear that, Dr. Peterson. We are quite worried. Tell me, what is so unusual about my brother? Other than the fact he's always been the weird brother."

Lindy turned her head sharply and rolled her eyes, exasperated with her brother's ever-present comedy routine.

Dr. Peterson continued, "Something very strange happened to your brother from the lightning strike. As much as I hate to admit it, we have no idea what or why." He noticed the look of apprehension. "Please don't be alarmed, I should have said that a little differently. Allow me to explain. The very strange thing I'm referring to is your brother has incurred some sort of metabolic transformation. He seems to be able to heal himself at a remarkably rapid rate. We have never heard of or seen anything like this ever before."

"For all of you and Mr. Marcus, it is extremely good news. If his healing progresses at this rate, it appears we will be able to discharge him much sooner than we had anticipated. I know you did not see the physical damage from the lightning strike, but we photographed his condition thoroughly upon his arrival at the hospital. It's all very well documented. He's been here five days. His body has healed itself in a fashion we would not expect to happen for years. In fact, it's even more bizarre. The original trauma from the accident would have diminished considerably in a few months, but his skin repair would barely be beginning. Somehow, his skin has been able to regenerate itself and is growing at an unheard-of rate. Something also happened to his mental processes during and after the lightning strike. We are not sure what it is about either. So technically, he would not be in the condition his body is in now, for probably two years. It is extremely remarkable. We are hoping he will cooperate with us to get to the bottom of how this process occurred. You should go right in, he's anxious to see you all."

"That's my brother, Doctor, always taking a shortcut," Jack said with a grin. "I'm not sure I understand exactly what you're telling us. My field is psychology, but it sounds like great news."

A woman, presumably Dr. Miltner's secretary or assistant, arrived at 10:15 sharp. "You're Mr. Marcus?" she asked, gazing at Iggy's bald head. "My name is Virginia. I've come to escort you to Dr. Miltner's office."

"That's me."

"If you follow me, I will show you the way. We have to cross to the other side of the hospital and go to the 14th floor."

Iggy handed Jack the empty suitcase. "Call you later, brother, and let you know about the sales pitch. Say hi to everybody for me."

"Sure thing, Ig."

They started down the hall. Interesting, no wheelchair this time. I thought that was a given. They walked in silence through the hospital to an East elevator. Virginia was the professional executive type, remaining silent until they entered the elevator.

"We've all heard some of the stories about your injury and amazing recovery. It is the talk of the hospital. Most things around here concern illness and often tragedy. Your apparent story is a refreshing breath of fresh air. It's so upbeat, everyone wants to hear more about it."

A chime sounded as the elevator stopped at the 14th floor. They stepped into a wide carpeted room furnished in leather and walnut, with a full glass wall and a glass door opening to an exterior sundeck filled with plants and lounge furniture. Two carpeted halls extended right and left, obviously to executive offices. These are the perks at the top of the food chain. They walked down the hall extending from the left side of the large lounge and stopped in front of a large pair of wooden doors. Virginia knocked, opened one of the doors and walked in. "Mr. Marcus is here, doctors."

Iggy entered a spacious walnut paneled conference room and saw Drs. Miltner, Roberts, Collins, and three other men he had never met. The first room was the largest, with a large walnut conference table in the center and leather lounge chairs against the walls. The room beyond was evidently Dr. Miltner's office. It, too, was walnut sheathed with a large full glass wall overlooking the city. To the right of the conference room was an open door to another room, with the same look of opulence, filled with desks, computers, and rows of filing cabinets.

Dr. Miltner motioned him to enter. "Thank you for coming, Mr. Marcus. You already know Dr. Roberts and Dr. Collins. Dr. Peterson will be here, shortly. He is with a patient right now, but he'll be finished soon and will join us. Allow me to introduce you to Dr. Packwood, Mr. Klein, and Mr. Redford. They are all members of our board of directors. I wanted them to meet you, briefly. Your story has created quite a commotion around here and everyone is intensely curious. Of course, Mr. Klein and Mr. Redford will not be present when we discuss your test results with you and explain what our findings are."

Iggy walked further into the room to where the group of men was standing. Dr. Packwood reached out to shake Iggy's hand. Iggy extended his hand to grasp Dr. Packwood's hand in a traditional handshake. A sharp visible electric spark leaped between their fingertips as their palms almost touched. Startled, they both pulled their hands away immediately.

"Goodness," exclaimed Dr. Packwood. "It must be the carpet. That was quite a static electricity charge. It happens sometimes."

Not so for Iggy! He stood in silence, shocked. What he had just experienced was incredible. Evidently, when he barely touched Dr. Packwood's hand for one brief instant, a millisecond, he became completely aware of Dr. Packwood in a way he had never experienced before. He didn't understand it and wasn't sure what happened or what it meant, but a doorway had opened into Dr. Packwood's persona. Iggy had some sort of mental glimpse, a pictorial image. Yet, it couldn't even be described as that. Somehow, for one fleeting instant, he became completely aware of what comprised Dr. Packwood. He couldn't read Packwood's mind during that moment, but sensed Dr. Packwood's emotional state and much more. For one instant, the energy field surrounding both men had merged. Apparently, the effect was not the same for Dr. Packwood. He did not appear to be startled any longer, and it seemed there were no effects other than the mild static electric shock between them. Conversely, Iggy had become aware of everything comprising Dr. Packwood, except his actual thoughts. His emotions, his sense of morality, if they could even be described as such, even his attitude toward this meeting, were exposed to Iggy's perception.

Iggy was astonished. His mind raced as he attempted to analyze what had just happened. Geez! Every time I experience something new, I think what the hell is next and then sure enough, some new crazy thing comes along. He stood there for some minutes, oblivious to everything except the realization that whatever had happened to him seemed to be constantly expanding.

The other men were staring at him. "Mr. Marcus.... Mr. Marcus.... Mr. Marcus." Dr. Miltner had to say it three times before he snapped Iggy back to the present.

"Oh, yes... I... uh... uh...was thinking about my boys. Sorry, I'm a single parent," he fumbled, "and I worry about them too much." He put his hands in his pockets. One thing for sure, he wasn't going to shake any more hands.

There was a knock on the door and Dr. Peterson entered. Relief washed over Iggy when he saw Dr. Peterson. He was anxious from his recent profound experience, and felt he was perched on a tight rope, surrounded by one man he didn't particularly care for, and five other men he didn't really know too well. Dr. Peterson was sort of an emotional safety net.

"I hope I didn't take you away from anything too important, Dr. Peterson," said Iggy. "I appreciate your coming more than you know."

Iggy felt a little foolish standing there with his hands in his pockets, but he wasn't going to shake hands again, at least not until he experimented with this new ability a little more. He greeted Mr. Klein and Mr. Redford from a distance. If they think I am aloof for not shaking their hands, well, they'll just have to get over it.

The three members of the board of directors expressed how pleased they were to meet Iggy. They mentioned they had heard about his healing abilities and were very eager to find out more about the process. They chatted about the weather for a few minutes. Once they were past the social amenities, Dr. Packwood was the first to speak.

"We are extremely interested in your condition, Mr. Marcus. We understand you were almost killed by a direct lightning strike approximately two weeks ago, and your injuries were critical when you arrived here. I have seen photographs exhibiting their severity. This healing transformation you have gone through, in such a short time, is truly remarkable. In fact, it's hardly believable. Frankly, after seeing the photographs, if you were not standing here in front of us just eleven days later, apparently with no ill effects, I would not believe it."

Dr. Miltner broke in, "We, the Board of Directors, and the doctors present at this meeting, are hoping for, and highly anticipate, your cooperation. We would like to learn, if we can, to understand and, then perhaps duplicate what has happened to you, in other patients. Our hospital is a very fine research facility. We believe it would be to all our advantages, yours, and ours, if you would give us the opportunity."

"Well," said Iggy, "I completely understand what you're asking. I believe the advancement of medicine resulting from such research would benefit everyone. However, I am a self-employed structural engineer in private practice. I am also a single parent of two young sons. Since my wife's death a year and a half ago, my life has been a very full plate. I might be willing to cooperate with the hospital, to some degree, on an outpatient basis because I see the importance of the research. We can further discuss this. I will not, however, allow anything to become a full-time impediment in my or my children's lives."

Boy is this new mental condition of mine a real game changer. He could sense their emotional state when he concentrated and focused on each one of the men in the room. There were other things he couldn't quite put his finger on, yet. He had Dr. Packwood figured out. His brief electrical communion, or whatever it was, had been extremely revealing once he had the time to sort it out. Packwood's motives were considerably less noble than those he had sensed in Dr. Peterson. Dr. Peterson had a love for medicine, and his primary concern was the care of his patients. He knew Dr. Packwood, on the other hand, was more interested in studying him to advance his career.

Iggy had always known there was a fine line between selfishness and greed. Selfishness as he defined it, was the primary concern for one's own well-being, which was a virtue considering the fact an individual must first take care of himself before he could take care of another. Conversely, greed was the primary "me-first" concern of an individual; even if it meant their self-aggrandizement was often at the expense of others. The character of most people was a balance sheet comprised of opposite poles, selfishness on one side, greed on the other. It was rare to find an individual with character residing exclusively on one side. Most people vacillated between the two sides, to one degree or another. Their position on the balance sheet always defined their intellectual and moral stature.

He chatted with the other two men for a few minutes more. They verbally expressed similar viewpoints to those of Dr. Packwood. He had not shaken their hands or touched them in any way. Consequently, he did not have the intense familiarity with them as he had with Dr. Packwood. But even from a distance, Iggy could sense their mental and emotional composition. This sense of other people's persona was all new to Iggy. It wasn't like a photograph. It was a mental image with observable parameters, as explicit and tangible as a photograph, just not visible. He knew, like both Drs. Packwood and Miltner, their

primary focus was less on the advancement of medicine to alleviate suffering, than it was about the advancement of medicine, which would place their name and the name of this institution atop the fame and fortune pedestal.

“Well,” said Dr. Miltner, “we had better get started. We can sit right here at the conference table. Dr. Collins has brought the files and test results with him.” Iggy's treatment team, Dr. Packwood, and Dr. Miltner moved to seats at the conference table. Mr. Klein and Mr. Redford, again, told Iggy it was a pleasure meeting him as they walked toward the exit.

They took seats at the conference table. Dr. Miltner, of course, was at the head of the table. Drs. Packwood, Roberts, and Collins were on one side. He and Dr. Peterson were on the other.

Dr. Miltner spoke first. “I'm going to let Dr. Collins lead this off. He is our leading neurological expert at the hospital and is best qualified to explain the results of the testing.”

“What do you understand about the human brain, Mr. Marcus?” asked Dr. Collins.

Iggy thought for a moment before deciding his reply. He would leave Dr. Collins in control for now. “Not very much compared to the level of expertise I'm sure you possess. I'm quite well read about many subjects and have a smattering of knowledge about those types of things. Why don't we just presume I'm a pretty smart guy, but don't know much about anything concerning the physiology of the brain. What I would like to find out, here, is what you consider the implications are for me.”

“Okay,” said Dr. Collins, “that's a starting point. I'll describe the components of the human brain. It is comprised of two hemispheres, a right and a left. We understand the left hemisphere generally controls the right side of the body, and the right hemisphere generally controls the left side. I brought a diagram of the brain for you to look at. Both hemispheres are comprised of four lobes. Those four lobes, in total, are called the cerebrum.”

“The frontal lobe is associated with reason, problem-solving, emotions, movement, and speech. We understand you are an engineer. That is the portion of the brain you most frequently use for volitional activity. The parietal lobe is associated with movement, orientation, recognition, and the perception of stimuli. The occipital lobe is associated with visual processing. The temporal lobe is associated with perception, recognition of auditory stimuli, memory, and speech.”

“The cerebellum is similar to the cerebrum in that it has two hemispheres and a folded surface. It is associated with movement, posture, and balance. The limbic system, another portion of the brain, is found buried within the cerebellum. It is often referred to as the emotional brain”.

“For the purposes of this meeting, I do not feel we have to delve into any greater depth than that.”

“You have been tested with an electroencephalograph. It measures the electrical activity in the brain that is the result of electro-chemical signaling between neurons. Like all electrical energy, signaling can vary in frequency and amplitude. I'm sure I don't have to explain anything at all about that to you. Basically, the EEG measures the electrical activity of the brain in response to stimulation of specific nerve pathways.”

“Across the board, there is a general norm for analysis of the results of an EEG. We use the device to inspect the electrical wave patterns for irregularities that may be associated with various anomalies, such as stroke, dementia, epilepsy, memory changes, brain tumors, and a host of other things. When we read an EEG, something we do very frequently, we are able to compare wave patterns existing somewhere in the normal range, with wave patterns existing outside the normal range. Often things are revealed to us as they fit within a specific wave pattern caused by a specific abnormality.”

“It can be an excellent diagnostic tool, but it also lacks a certain specificity. It may not exactly describe what is causing the problem. It may just exhibit what the problem is. Prior to the advent of CT scan and MRI machines, especially the MRI, there were not many devices or methods that would refine testing to determine the root cause of physical abnormalities. X-rays of soft tissue may be inconclusive and exploratory surgery is often not an option. The new technology allows us to see all the aspects of a certain portion of anatomy by creating layered visual images. We are attempting to assess your brain wave activity, with a simple EEG scan, because of the pain you experienced during the MRI scan. He removed the printouts of the EEG tests from a briefcase and placed them on the table in front of Iggy.

“Frankly, Mr. Marcus, your EEG readings, if I were to see them without knowing the integrity of the test, I would say they were a fake...a fraud. I would say no human being could possibly have brain waves such as yours. The frequency is so compact, and the spikes or amplitude is so high, the machine will not measure the limits. Simply put, your brain waves exceed

the capability of the machine to measure and record. The machine was designed to measure the electrical waves of the normal or average human brain, not the intense electrical activity your brain apparently produces. Our first reaction was the assumption the machine was defective. After testing you on two different machines, both having the same results, it is obvious there is no mechanical problem. You, Mr. Marcus, are unique. Had someone other than myself administered the test, I would assume there must be either an equipment or an operational error. That is how bizarre the results are.”

“However, you are sitting here in front of us and appear to be completely normal, Mr. Marcus, and that is a contradiction. The electrical activity of your brain exists outside normal medical parameters, as we know them. We cannot explain why. We've never seen anything comparable, so we have no idea what is producing the effect...yet. Consequently, we have no way of accurately measuring the extent of the electrical output of your brain with a conventional electroencephalograph. To conduct this research, a different method of testing your brain waves must be employed; perhaps an oscilloscope that would measure a broader waveform on the electromagnetic spectrum. That would require a collaborative medical and scientific effort to find or modify a machine to do the job. That puts you right in the middle of the mix, Mr. Marcus. You are the only test subject.”

“The implications for you are another thing, altogether. You remember how I described the four lobes of the brain and what activities they are responsible for controlling. Let me draw you a simple analogy, describing the disparity between the average normal electrical activity of the human brain and the electrical activity your brain exhibits. Imagine normal human brain waves are comparable to a motor scooter. Mr. Marcus, your brain waves are comparable to a Ferrari. I don't mean to be so simplistic, but I hope I'm getting my point across. Normal electrical activity of the brain, as measured by the electroencephalograph, is the baseline. However, your brain waves exceed the parameters this machine is designed to measure. We can discover the answers to most complex questions with research and analysis. I'm quite sure your use of the scientific method as an engineer is along those lines. However, it is impossible to predict what the long-term effects of your condition will be with the information we possess at this point.”

“I understand you had an MRI scan, and it was agonizing. We will not ask you to do that again. A CT scan, or CAT scanner, is a glorified x-ray machine. It is actually more than that. Its operation is based on x-ray technology, but I don't need to elaborate now. A CAT scan might be useful. The MRI tunnel subjected you to an intense magnetic field. Dr. Roberts and I believe it was the intense magnetic field that caused your pain. Dr. Peterson has described some of the symptoms or manifestations of your new brain activity. It is my understanding the lightning strike somehow began this process. When you were exposed to the magnetic field from the MRI, the condition was apparently amplified. Our assumption is the complex relationship magnetism has to electricity has created this phenomenon.”

Iggy was frustrated as he listened to the simplistic, patient-oriented explanation presented by the doctor. He sat through the entire elucidation in respectful silence. He decided it was time to interject his thoughts and expose himself.

“Excuse me doctors, would you mind letting me take it from here,” Iggy said with a forced shade of humility. “I've been theorizing on my own. Please allow me to elaborate.” He continued without waiting for their permission or affirmation. “Electromagnetic force that is measurable, is the physical interaction between electrically charged particles. Electromagnetic force exhibits itself in magnetic fields. Electric fields and magnetic fields are almost synonymous, but not quite. Electromagnetic force, sometimes called the Lorentz force, is comprised inseparably of both magnetism and electricity.”

He elaborated on a concise, technically detailed definition of the minimal differences between, and similarities of both, as well as the corroborating mathematics.

“I could further define exactly what electricity is, along with its complex relationship to magnetism, but that isn't necessary to our purpose here. Suffice it to say, analogously, it is the glue holding all matter together and allows matter/energy interactions. It is also the component force of all the other physical manifestations of energy we perceive, such as light and heat, as well as the operating system that allows the brain to process information. I believe what happened to me, partially from the lightning strike and partially from magnetic field of the MRI, is the four lobes of my brain have been stimulated, causing the electromagnetic output of my brain to be exponentially elevated. I've been thinking about this a great deal. My technical background and education are ideal for the exploration of this phenomenon, especially with myself being the test subject. My professional expertise has more to do with structural engineering than electrical engineering; however, the physics of electrochemical energy generation as related to brain function is the avenue of study I intend to rigorously pursue.”

He then spent the better part of 30 minutes explaining the complex mathematics of magnetoencephalography, needed to measure his neuro-electric chemistry, as it relates to the radically changed chemical composition of his brain resulting

from the lightning strike and the MRI tunnel. He explained how his potassium balance as well as other chemical components surrounding neurons, axons and ganglia must have changed dramatically, thus exponentially enhancing neural activity. It was somehow facilitating numerous micro voltages and electrochemical activity that apparently gave his brain information processing capabilities unheard of, by creating billions of new neural pathways.

"My brother, Jack, brought me a few recorded books to learn about cerebral mechanics, at my request, allowing me to elaborate on what I suspect has happened to my brain. Two neurons are normally connected via gap junctions which provide for electrical synapses. I believe the axons in the neurons in my brain, which join at the axon hillocks and are connected with each other by dendrites, or dendritic trees as they are usually referred to, have exponentially multiplied creating an abnormally large quantity of connections between neurons, numbering in the trillions. This has amplified the electrical potential of ion flow through the neural membranes, to a degree much greater than before the lightning strike and the MRI magnetic field was applied. This not only increases the chemical synapse action potential, but it also dramatically triggers a much larger quantitative release of neurotransmitters. That is due to the increase of many billions of extra dendrites, I now seem to possess."

"As you know, electrical synapses are much more rapid than chemical synapses, but usually diminish considerably from one neuron to the next. I believe the enhanced electric neurotransmission, in my electrical synapses, increase instead of diminishing in their longevity. Coupled with the enormous quantitative increase of my dendritic trees, which apparently continue to expand, the electrical activity of my brain has been exponentially increased. It's probably been multiplied hundreds or perhaps thousands of times. This is an apparently logical explanation for my brain allowing a much greater processing speed for information, from one neuron to the next. I believe each dendrite or filament is a memory storage component, like a computer file, operated electrically; the computer being mechanical, but mine being organic. I have trillions of extra dendrites, or pathways if you will, each of which, represents a memory storage repository."

"This is only my theory mind you, but I am quite confident I'm very close to accuracy. I could go on about this for hours, but I don't want to bore you all with my layman's theories. I intend to study this in much greater depth, until I understand everything known about the mechanics and mathematics of cerebral metabolism to date, and then hypothesize on the increased efficacy of neural messaging I seem to possess. You would think I would have a perpetual, massive headache, he joked."

Only Dr. Peterson chuckled at his effort at humor.

"As far as the healing goes, that is another story altogether. This condition has only existed within me, for the better part of two weeks, certainly not enough time for research and analysis, only conjecture. I do believe my brain, which has somehow been enhanced as I described, is directly responsible for the accelerated healing processes of my body. Consider this; the brain is our biological computer, so to speak. It is the master controller of all the functions of the human body, directing all voluntary and involuntary functions, consciously and subconsciously. One of those functions, a subsystem of the human anatomy, is the brain-directed healing process. I believe the rapid healing process, I have undergone, definitely saved my life, and is directly proportionate to the elevated output of my brain."

"Usually, when the body heals, the process is driven at the local level of the injury by impulses emanating from the surrounding nervous system. We know how cellular regeneration occurs, so I won't go into that. Normally, the brain is not actually involved in healing on a local level. However, my brain is generating trillions more electrical impulses through electrical synapses, than commonly occur in any process, including healing. My metabolism has been altered so the healing process becomes directly controlled by the cerebral cortex, as opposed to allowing it to take its local course. I can explain this much further, as to how and why I believe this, but we would be here for hours. I don't see any other possibilities. I am quite positive of this. I haven't been able to fully substantiate this theory mathematically, but I am working on it."

"It is my opinion, unverifiable at this point, duplication of the process that transformed me from what I was last week to what I now am, may not be repeatable. The odds of me surviving that lightning strike are, who knows, a million to one, perhaps. The transformation, the freak accident or coincidence of my improbable survival of one million volts of electricity passing through me, certainly can't be successfully deployed to others via instrumentality. There would be an enormous risk to the subject."

"My abilities seem to be consistently expanding, so I intend to leave no stone unturned when I explore every possibility, which I am convinced is the best way to understand what is happening to me. What I'm respectfully saying, doctors, is I intend to do this research on my own. By this statement, I am not saying I don't want to be associated with the hospital or its

research facilities. I am only saying I would prefer to do this on my own, and from time to time, cooperate and share my research with the research staff here." Doctors," he addressed them. "I am now a freak of nature, an aberration, and I intend to use this constructively."

The doctors sat in silence after Iggy finished. They were more than just slightly intimidated by Iggy's description of matter and energy, relating to his theories about his new elevated intellect. Except for Dr. Peterson, Iggy sensed insecurity. They had just listened to someone who apparently had a far better grasp on the physics of electricity, as it relates to cerebral function, than they did, and lectured them in simple terms so they would understand. They had been trying to do exactly that to him. That was not supposed to happen in their professional orbit, and they resented it.

Dr. Miltner was the first to reply. Iggy sensed the dismay in him. He also sensed Dr. Miltner's executive mentality considered everything in life to be a game of chess, especially everything related to his position as chairman of the board. He knew Dr. Miltner owned the chessboard and wanted to control all the chess pieces.

"We had all hoped and anticipated you would work with us to explore your new abilities. We urge you to capitalize on the superior medical research capabilities of both staff and equipment offered here and at our affiliated university. Your background and capabilities are impressive. I would like to offer, and I'm positive the Board of Directors will agree, this hospital's facilities as the center of your research on a peer level. You would not be considered a patient but would have considerable control of the research."

Iggy smiled to himself. He knew exactly what Dr. Miltner meant by considerable; only some control, with himself, the chairman of the board, as captain of the ship. He knew Dr. Miltner was considering the accolades and the associated wealth, and perhaps even a Nobel Prize could be snagged, with himself as captain of his team. Thanks to his mother, Iggy had left all those false self-image boosters far behind. Since he was a young man, it had never been even a small portion of his character. He didn't need a captain for anything. All he had ever desired was the unfettered laissez-faire attitude of others as he pursued his dreams and aspirations.

They were ingratiating, as they all profusely thanked him for participating in the meeting, and he knew exactly why. They did not want to offend or alienate him. He knew Drs. Roberts and Collins desperately wanted to study him, to learn more about his physiology of healing and expanded mentality. He was sure their motive was the advancement of medicine, but he also sensed in them a flicker of ego-driven self-advancement. And then...there was going to be the money... Lots of money in the form of grants and private capital. He could almost see the dollar signs in their eyes. This new heightened sense of perception is really going to come in useful. He knew he had accurately sensed these things. Iggy also sensed Dr. Peterson was on his side. He was sure Dr. Peterson's primary motive was the patient's well-being. Sure, he would love to discover a way to easily heal the ills of the world, but Dr. Peterson wouldn't take advantage of anyone, purely to advance his own position.

"I was going to have myself discharged this morning and go home to my sons. I guess I can give it a few more days, considering the fact I might have wound up in this hospital for months anyway. If you don't mind, I would like to go back to my room now and rest."

They all rose from their seats. Iggy's hands remained in his pockets. As they walked down the hall toward the elevator, he lagged a little behind until he could talk to Dr. Peterson. He and Dr. Peterson were somewhat behind the others. Iggy said to him almost in a whisper, "Would you walk me back to my room, Dave? I want to tell you something important."

"Sure, Iggy. But we must make it quick. I already have a tight schedule, today, considering this meeting."

After the other doctors had gone their separate ways, Iggy described his experience with Dr. Packwood when they shook hands. Dr. Peterson shook his head in wonder.

"Iggy, you are one horse of a different color. I wondered what was next the other day and thought perhaps the next thing would be that you would sprout wings and fly out the window. God only knows what tomorrow will bring. Your statements at the meeting were more than impressive. At the risk of sounding maudlin, even though it's been a very short time, I feel a fatherly affection for you, and I believe you are destined for greatness. I must leave you, now, but will stop in and see you in the morning."

He smiled warmly at Dr. Peterson. "I already know how you feel, and appreciate the fact you've become a friend, as well as my doctor. I thank you for it. See you later."

Iggy was lost in thought as the elevator descended and he walked across the hospital. I must find a way to experiment with my new cognitive powers, without letting anybody other than Dr. Peterson know. He didn't want to compromise Dr. Peterson, as a member of the hospital staff. Even though Dr. Peterson had his own private practice, he was affiliated with the hospital and had a duty to inform his superiors about anything pertinent to an inpatient. He wondered if perhaps he had been too casual, informing Dr. Peterson about his incident with Dr. Packwood. He decided he had given Dr. Peterson very little empirical proof of the incident, so no harm had been done.

He had a life with his sons. Now that Clara was gone, they needed him more than ever. He wasn't going to allow a barrage of research testing and the ensuing publicity come between himself and his two boys under any circumstances. His crystal-clear vision displayed the possible difficulties of the hospital staff's knowledge of his enhanced capabilities, as clearly as if he were reading a technical manual. He must avoid the consequences of that. The usual trauma and confusion resulting from severe injuries had subsided completely. He had healed to the point he felt completely normal, other than the fact his mind had been so dramatically expanded, and his new skin was mildly irritated here and there. He couldn't wait to apply his new abilities to his profession. He saw incredible possibilities opening to him. He saw his life spread before him. He realized Dr. Peterson was correct. He was immensely excited with the realization he would be able to achieve much more than was possible to him prior to the injuries.

Iggy had always been different, emotionally, and intellectually, then most people. His rigid principles, attitude, and sense of morality stepped outside those perpetrated on society by mass media and social mores. What other people took for granted, he thoroughly explored before accepting it as dogma. He didn't think he was better than anyone. He was always sure of himself, technically, as well as esoterically. As for the technical aspects of his life, his confidence was due to his education and analytical mind. If he wasn't sure, he explored and experimented until he was confident that he had discovered all the features of the subject. His confidence about things more esoteric came from analyzing every existential question. He read just about everything every philosopher had ever written and had an enormous mental library to tap for information. His newly expanded mind gave him an enormous capacity for intellectual multitasking, and he constantly surprised himself as he experienced new capabilities. He wasn't sure about his contact with Dr. Packwood and what the implications were. That still needed to be explored. He was actually becoming grateful for the lightning strike and couldn't see a downside as he became comfortable with the changes. Maybe one would manifest itself later. Hopefully not. There probably wouldn't be anything he could do about it, anyway. His thought process became lightning fast. He didn't think in words, anymore. Images of things or problems flashed into his mind, and it seemed almost instantly, the solutions or answers were there staring back.

He often viewed the human condition and aberrant activities of people and wondered why they chose to do the things they did or stood their ground on futile positions contradicting common sense. Like most people, he assumed everyone was rational and thought the same as himself but were simply making the wrong choice. His expanded vision accurately perceived reality now. Most aberrant behaviors were transparent if one had the vision to see them. All actions, good or bad, proper, or improper, were presupposed by a choice to take that action.

There was usually one of three motives behind any choice to act improperly. One motive was either lack of information and/or the mental acuity to apply that information to the course of action and ensuing results. It was a simple mistake, recoverable from, but still a mistake.

Another motive, but much more insidious, was acting improperly when one had the pertinent information and mental acuity but still chose the improper action for self-aggrandizement at the expense of others, or a deleterious agenda-driven policy.

The last motive was not as perverse as the second, but still as base. It pertained to all the mindless people who consider nothing other than the immediate goal of self-gratification, without consideration of the source or consequences of their actions to themselves or others. They refused to think, allowing others to do it for them.

He knew all these things revolved around a lack of morality. It was becoming so clear to him. Most people thought morality was taught in church through religion, perhaps from their parents or some other code of nebulous ethics lacking intellectual definition. There were many religions, all with their own particular dogmatic precepts. Each culture believed their moral concepts were the one true vision and religion, and all or most of the others were in error. When the dogma of one tribal culture contradicted the dogma of the tribe on the other side of the hill, it was irrelevant to both cultures, and often precipitated wars killing thousands in a perverse premise of pseudo altruism. Iggy knew many of those varied contradictory moral concepts were non-valid. He had always felt it, but he had never bothered to define it.

The definition was clear now. It didn't come to him in words. It was just there. He assembled the words in his mind as he viewed it from every perspective. He realized immoral choices were not necessarily evil in nature, just simply bad choices, but still immoral. Morality was never a matter of opinion. He formulated the words for his definition, so he could eventually pass them on to his sons, as he created the mental picture of four tenets to morality. It was not the culturally imposed, multi-varied conventional morality taught to people by society. After all, a cannibalistic society considered it moral to consume their fellows, whether it was just their resources or their flesh itself. This new valid, true singular definition of morality was applicable to all men and women everywhere, no matter what their culture, philosophy, religion, motives, or their personal background. None of the four tenets would stand alone. If one was missing the entire concept was pointless.

The first tenet was personal knowledge and acceptance of the difference between right and wrong, good, and evil. Without that, there was no progression to the next.

He knew the second tenet, the vision to see and accept the truth, was the most important of the four. A choice to act presupposed all courses of action. Outside of a lucky toss of the dice, the vision to see all the consequences of that action was necessary. Small actions had small consequences. Large actions had large consequences and monumental actions had monumental consequences. It was axiomatic. Every choice precipitated an action. Even the simple choice of not brushing one's teeth and maintaining one's oral health, had the objectionable moral consequences of pain, perhaps poor nutrition, and dedication of extreme financial resources.

The third tenet was dedication to the good.

The fourth tenet he knew was almost as important as the second. It was the courage to stand by one's convictions, no matter what the price.

He was back in his room. He thought about his expanded mental powers. Everything he had been thinking occurred in less than a minute or two. He thought about Jack. His brother was a psychologist, and a good one. He needed to talk about all this with Jack. He decided to call Jack and ask him to get one of his laptop computers, with Wi-Fi, and bring it to him, since he was going to be staying a few more days. He had no access to research materials in the hospital, and he felt time was wasting. He could do research with his laptop, and desperately wanted to learn more about medicine pertinent to the brain and nervous system.

He approached the nurse's station looking for something to read and asked the nurse behind the desk if she had anything he could borrow. She reached under a desk and produced several magazines.

"Uh... That's not what I had in mind. I was looking for something more technical, preferably about medicine. My brother's going to bring me my laptop, but it probably won't be till tomorrow, and I'm beat for entertainment."

"We don't have too many things like that here, Mr. Marcus. We have some technical bulletins though. Wait," she said. "I have a book on obstetrical nursing back here I've been studying. I want to specialize in obstetrics; I've been studying before I took some tests. It's long and complicated. I bring it to work with me and read it on break and between my other duties. I'll lend it to you, for a little while, if you promise to take care of it. I need to take it home with me tonight to study though."

Iggy thought about it for a second. "Sure, why not, I don't know a darn thing about delivering babies and you never know when you're going to need information like that. Let me borrow it for a while and I'll bring it back later. Incidentally, do those two ring dings belong to anyone special?"

"No," she said laughing, "I swiped them from my kids, but I'm too fat, anyway. Would you like them?" She handed him the book and the ring dings. He thanked her and walked back to his room. He didn't want to read lying on his bed, so he sat on the chair under the window with his feet up on another chair, propped the book in his lap, opened it and started to read.

Another chunk of reality instantly slammed into him. He had opened the book and looked at the two open pages of the preface. Both pages had instantly imprinted themselves in his memory. "Holy crap!" He exclaimed aloud. "I didn't know this was coming. I haven't read anything other than a sign over a door for three days." He flipped the page. It happened again. He continued flipping through pages. He'd flip one page and within two seconds it was imprinted in his memory. "My God, what another game changer this thing is!" He sat there in wonder.

Ten minutes later he walked back to the nurse's station and handed the nurse her book.

"Too complicated for you? It is technical and some of the pictures are kind of icky. I don't blame you."

"It's not that," said Iggy. "I finished it. Do you have anything else to read?"

The nurse laughed, "Yeah sure. I didn't think you would like it."

"No really, I finished it."

"Mr. Marcus," the nurse said with a giggle, "are you sure the lightning strike didn't fry your brain a little?"

"Oh, it fried my brain all right." Iggy was about to have some fun. "Go on, open the book to page, oh... say... page 427."

The nurse opened the book to page 427. Iggy began reciting page 427 verbatim and continued through pages 428 and 429. The book slid from her fingers onto the floor. She hadn't moved a muscle. She looked up at Iggy, her eyes wide with surprise. Iggy sensed a tiny bit of fear or anxiety in her.

"I didn't mean to freak you out. The good news is, I am now ready to deliver a baby," he smiled. "Got any more books?" It helped dispel her surprise and fear.

She laughed, "No, I'm sorry. I don't have any more books. I think you need about twenty of them, though."

She gazed wonderingly at him as he walked back to his room. When he arrived at his room, he turned to look back at the nurses' station. The nurse was shaking the book in front of another nurse as she described what had happened.

Mid-afternoon brought frustration from inactivity. He had nothing left to read and television bored him. He despised empty, nonproductive moments and wanted to fill his afternoon with something worthwhile. I think I'll find Dr. Peterson's office and go and see him. I know it's in this wing of the hospital, somewhere. He walked to the nurses' station and asked where Dr. Peterson's office was. The nurse gave him instructions and asked him if he had an appointment with the doctor. "No, but he's a relative of mine," Iggy fibbed.

A few minutes later, he knocked on Dr. Peterson's hospital office door, hoping the doctor was in and he would not be disturbing him. He heard a muffled, "come in." He opened the door and saw Dr. Peterson sitting at a large desk, in a medium-sized office with a stack of books and paperwork in front of him.

"Hello, Iggy, what brings you here?"

"I hope I'm not disturbing you, Dr., I know you're a busy man."

"Not at all, not at all. This is where I hide when I get around to attacking the reams of paperwork, we medical personnel get shackled with these days. It's somewhat secluded from the main hustle and bustle of the hospital, and I like that. So, what can I do for you?"

Iggy looked around and saw the shelves lined with medical books he had been sure he would find. It reminded him of Lindy's office, lined with shelves of law books. "I'm going to stay here until the day after tomorrow, Dave, and then I'm checking out of this hotel," he said with a smile. "I was hoping I could ask you for a small favor."

"I would be happy to oblige you, if possible, Iggy; what would you like?"

"It's an unusual request, Doc. I'm bored to tears. I was quite sure you would have medical books at your disposal. I see I was correct. I would love the opportunity to read them."

"If anyone else had asked me that, Iggy, I would think it silly. But with you, I know better. I'll be happy to oblige. Exactly what book or type of book would you be interested in?"

"All of them, Dave."

"Surely you jest. There are over 150 medical books lining these walls. You can't possibly read all of them. Tell me what your interest is, and I'll refer one or two to you."

"No, Dave, two will not do. I intend to read them all."

Dr. Peterson looked at Iggy, and for the first time began to slightly doubt his mental condition. Not wanting to offend Iggy, he was tactful; "It took me years to read and understand all these books, Iggy. I have my doubts you could accomplish all of that in two days."

Iggy described the incident with the nurse's obstetric medical book. "I'm not joking, Doc; it's this new brain of mine. I read and memorized verbatim, a 750-page book on obstetrics in less than ten minutes."

Dr. Peterson leaned back in his chair and looked up at Iggy, shaking his head. "For a few minutes there, I was worried about you, and in fact, still might be. We don't know all the ramifications of the lightning strike. I was afraid it was affecting your mind in an adverse manner, and you might be coming just a little bit unhinged." He laughed deeply, "I should've known better. I'll tell you what I'm going to do, but I want this strictly between you and me. I don't want this around the hospital. I'm going to give you the key to my office. I don't want these books to leave the office, but you can use my chaise lounge over in the corner and read to your heart's content. If you must leave, lock the door. I believe what you're telling me is true but would greatly appreciate a demonstration just to satisfy my curiosity."

"Sure thing, Doc, pick a book, any book."

Dr. Peterson walked over to the bookshelf, selected Applied Cerebral Angiography, and handed it to Iggy. "Thank you, Dave, give me a couple minutes." He opened the book and began flipping through the pages from the beginning, spending a little more than one second on each of the two pages before him. A few minutes later, he closed the book and handed it back to Dr. Peterson. "Open the book wherever you want." suggested Iggy. Dr. Peterson opened the book to page thirty-two.

"I'm on page 32, what do you remember?"

Iggy began reciting the book, from the top of the left-hand page, verbatim, and continued for several minutes.

"Enough, Iggy, I'm more than convinced." Dr. Peterson sat down heavily in his chair and looked up at Iggy. "You actually did that! That's the most amazing thing I've ever seen in my life, second only to your ability to heal yourself, and a little bit frightening. Do you wonder, or are you concerned, where these newfound powers may take you? I wondered where this was going to stop. Apparently, it's not going to stop... just yet."

"It's a little scary for me too, Dave. My apprehension is probably from a different perspective than yours. The changes have been so rapid, I'm worried it may affect my mind in ways I haven't considered or may not be able to cope with. My attitude and mental stability don't seem to be suffering. However, this abnormal mental progression may lead to something unwelcome. I just don't know. So far, so good; I feel great. I thought about it and the most logical thing I could do is to memorize every single book on cerebral function I can get my hands on. The theory is, if anything aberrant becomes noticeable to me, I will have access to all the medical knowledge available to self-diagnose right in my own mental library."

"I'm speechless, Iggy. This is beyond amazing. I am curious. Do you have any idea how much of what you read and memorized; you can retain? I think that would be paramount."

"Well, Doc, the entire book of obstetric nursing I read a few hours ago was committed to memory, and I can still see every word. You see, it almost is if my mind photographs the page, a photographic memory sort of, but nothing escapes when I recall it. When I think about it, I see the page in front of me. But it's not just that. It seems when I am recalling the page, I am cognizant of all the words and the meanings of those words, simultaneously. It's all somewhat psychologically overwhelming, but it is not inducing, as far as I can tell, any schizophrenia, psychosis or paranoia."

"I'm glad of that," Dr. Peterson said with a smile. "I have a few more minutes of paperwork to do here, then I have to see some patients." Dr. Peterson teased him, "I'll leave you here to read, but when I return, I expect you to have finished your homework and read every book in here."

Iggy returned Dr. Peterson's smile. "Okay Dad," he joked.

He immersed himself in the books until Dr. Peterson's return, two and a half hours later. He looked up from the book, in his lap, to greet Dr. Peterson. "Hi, Doc, you obviously had a lot to learn to become a doctor. These medical books are very interesting."

Dr. Peterson walked to his desk and sat, "How far along are you, Iggy?"

"I have about forty more to go, give or take."

"You've read one hundred ten medical books?" asked Dr. Peterson incredulously.

"Yup."

"How much of it do you remember?"

"Everything, Doc, everything."

Dr. Peterson sat in silence for several minutes just staring at him. Iggy watched him and said nothing. He knew Dr. Peterson was considering the events of the past week. He could sense concern in the man and knew this Doctor, who had become his friend, was about to approach him on that level. His new mental prowess, this amazing ability of his, enabled him to see past the psychological walls most people erect to protect their privacy. Iggy realized the purpose of those walls was born of mistrust and insecurity. He had not sensed much insecurity in Dr. Peterson. He had sensed this man, in his mid-50s, was beyond that. He knew Dr. Peterson was an honorable man, comfortable in his own skin. He also felt beyond any doubt, this man had enormous affection for him. The feeling is mutual, Iggy thought. Other than his immediate family, he had not felt anything like it since his father passed away. He knew such familial affection enabled people to look past the weaknesses and foibles of others. It permitted unqualified love and affection between people, despite the flaws everyone possessed.

"What's the matter Doc, cat got your tongue?" Iggy smiled.

"No, Iggy, I've just been sitting here thinking. We've had many in-depth conversations, you, and I, covering a multitude of subjects. More so than I've ever had with another patient. In fact, more so than I've ever had with anyone, except my wife. I know it sounds a little strange; I've only known you consciously, for a little better than a week. The day you were brought into the emergency room, I looked at you as a man who wasn't going to live through the night. Well, here you are, against all the laws of probability, sitting here in my office. I've been debating how to have this conversation with you for a host of reasons, most of them foolish, and some just a little bit selfish. I didn't want to offend you. I'll say it honestly. You know I have a daughter and always wanted a son. My wife and I couldn't have any more children after we had our daughter. We learned to accept and live with it. And then, along came Iggy Marcus."

The doctor looked at the floor. He didn't want Iggy to see his face; it would reveal the depth of his feeling. Not being fully able to understand Iggy's mental powers, he had forgotten Iggy could sense his feelings despite that.

"It's okay, Doc, I feel just about the same way. But go on, I know you've got things on your mind you want to express. I can sense it. Logic tells me what some of them are, but others are beyond my perception."

"Dr. Peterson looked up directly into Iggy's eyes. "I'm very worried about you son, and for many reasons. None of those reasons have anything to do with your physical medical condition. They have everything to do with your mental condition. I'd like you to hear me out before you say anything in response. You are healed from your physical injuries, as far as I'm concerned. How and why, I don't think anyone of us here at the hospital will ever know. I think you are the only one who can ever discover that with your new cognitive abilities."

"I've been thinking about your situation a great deal, in fact, I've been obsessing with it. I want you to leave the hospital today, if possible, for several reasons. I have been involved in several conversations with other doctors at this hospital, both directly and inadvertently. They want you here at all costs. I'm sure with your cognitive abilities, you probably understand exactly why. It's not just the fact you are unique as an individual. I'm quite sure you are the most unique man on earth; maybe even the most unique man who has ever lived. That is enormous Iggy. I've been listening to them speak. They're not concerned with you; they are concerned with what they can get from you. They are not motivated by altruism even though they are doctors. They took the Hippocratic oath. But for some people, the Hippocratic oath really means hypocrisy. I don't know how low they will stoop to get what they want, but be assured, they will stoop."

"Among our many conversations, you have described your childhood, your mother, and many of the things she taught you. What a remarkable woman she must have been. She created an honest man in you. Through you, she taught me the meaning and source of a healthy self-image. I've been thinking about this a great deal and have come to the realization that what you possess, and possessed before you even arrived here, is rare indeed. I can't imagine one in a million people have your rational, secure, and stable psyche. Please do not think I'm patronizing you. I'm simply trying to express myself, honestly. Take it for what it's worth."

"I mentioned to you, a moment ago, some people in this facility will go to great lengths to get what they want. The people who would take advantage of you, Iggy, would do it for the simple reason they feel you can give them knowledge about the healing process, which would enhance their position in medicine. Beside the nurse with the obstetric book, I am the only one in the hospital who has even an inkling about your perception abilities and your miraculous memory capabilities. If they learn that, all bets are off; and there's more than one reason, also. They would not want to just learn about your healing capability. If they learned about all your profound mental abilities, they would be very frightened indeed. Imagine what it would be like for people, especially the rich and powerful, who use deception and manipulation as a method for the control of other people. Why, you would rip the veil of obscurity right out from in front of them, and they would be exposed for what they are. And Iggy, mind you, these men are doctors or educated men and women, societies' supposed elite, the intellectual leaders, the men everyone else looks up to as paragons of virtue. Can you imagine the personal threat the average person would feel? You would be considered a pariah, a threat to everything they think is normal. Let me put it this way. I understand your value system, your integrity, and your character to a great degree. I know you are no threat to others."

"Compared to the average person, you have become an intellectual superman. Most people are insecure to one degree or another. Think how difficult it would be to stand next to you. Consider the things your mother taught you about self-image; it should not be dependent upon others' opinions of you but generated from within yourself. You and your family are unique. Nobody thinks like you, at least almost no one. Everyone lets others' opinions of them define their self-image. You would force people to look at themselves in the mirror your very existence creates. Unless people are emotionally stable, self-aware, and comfortable in their own skin, that would be impossible. A person's strengths and weaknesses dictate their ability to resist life's storms. I'm not being critical about the weak; I'm just describing reality. We all have weaknesses to some degree. I'll say it again, how well we navigate through life depends on the levels of strengths and weaknesses, as well as our intellectual capacity."

"You are a new kind of man, Iggy, a first. I don't think there's been anyone like you. I'm sure of it or we would know so, and if they learn what you are, they will never tolerate you. I believe they will do everything within their power to destroy you. I can't let that happen. I see you as the son I never had."

Iggy was moved. He loved the honesty and integrity of this man; in fact, he loved the man. That was a rare find, today. The underlying forces in society that belied its collective character had become perverse. Mediocrities calling themselves politicians, supposedly representing the good of the people; Hollywood's fake description of life everyone emulated; the mass media purveyors of lies and hypocrisy, had become commonplace and the norm. It was small wonder contemporary youth resorted to drugs, violence, and ill-conceived sociopolitical philosophies to escape the confusion. I must get my sons beyond all of that.

He walked over to Dr. Peterson. The doctor stood and faced him. He embraced the man and Dr. Peterson reciprocated. Both men, startled, released each other immediately. The experience Iggy had with Dr. Packwood had just repeated itself. Dr. Peterson fell back into his chair, his jaw dropped and his eyes wide, he asked, "My Lord Iggy, is that what happened with Dr. Packwood?!"

Subdued, Iggy replied, "Yes Dave, but this time it was much more intense; I think because we had our arms around each other. Apparently, unlike Dr. Packwood, you felt it also. It's only the second time this has happened to me. I haven't experimented with this at all. I don't know what to say, other than you have my apology. I didn't think about Dr. Packwood and that incident. I've had no physical contact with anyone since the first time it happened to me. I told you what I sensed when I touched Dr. Packwood. Did you feel the same type of thing, a sense of my being?"

"Yes," Dr. Peterson whispered. "I'm trying to wrap my mind around it, now. I could sense everything about you; I'm not sure I can even describe the experience with words. It was almost spiritual. I saw beyond all those things available to my perception under normal circumstances. It is like I saw directly into your soul! I am overwhelmed. My God, Iggy... I had no idea." Dr. Peterson sat there shaking his head. "It's one thing for you to describe it to me; it is, by far, a much more intense experience than I ever would've expected. Can you explain what just happened to us, Iggy?"

"No, Dave, I cannot. So much has happened to me I haven't had time to sort it all out. I'm not even sure of the extent of my abilities, much less why they are occurring. I need time to learn."

Dr. Peterson looked into Iggy's eyes as a father would a son. "You must tell no one about this Iggy. In time, when you learn more about it and how to control it, you may acquire the judgment of how to use it. Until then, I would be very careful."

The two men stood, silently looking at each other. They had just experienced a mutual connection, a spiritual liaison, perhaps no other two human beings had ever experienced. It had cemented a bond of friendship between them that would last the rest of their lives. They were both honest men of integrity. Somehow, Iggy knew this type of mental liaison would only be palatable between people of similar character. He had viewed Dr. Peterson's being, that which comprised him, and it had been mutual.

"You have my promise, Iggy, I will tell no one about this incident except perhaps, my wife."

"Thanks, Dave, as strange as this may seem to you, other than my family and perhaps one other man, I have no truer friend: you've been great. Thank you, again. Like I said, I'm checking out of this hotel first thing in the morning."

"I'm more than glad to hear that, Iggy. I know you live in the vicinity, please keep in touch. I value this new friendship and I really want to watch your progress. If you can avoid the problems, I just mentioned to you, I'm positive you are going to achieve greatness. I respect and admire you, and honestly, I can't wait to see the results. Good luck!"

It was eight AM the next day. Jack was standing in the lobby waiting as Iggy was discharged to return home to his family.

Beauty does not always lie in the eye of the beholder. It is rarely a matter of opinion, but pure, authentic, and subtle with its own unique identity often hidden beneath effort, emerging only after sunrise.

Sarah Louise Billings

CHAPTER XXVIII

SUNRISE

Iggy was restless. He never slept much past 3AM. Rising quietly to not disturb Melanie, he swung the French doors to the stone terrace wide and stepped into the thick fragrance of wild mountain aster, as he admired the moonlit panorama of the mountains crowned with silver gilded cumulus clouds. It was a beautiful night. He thought about the previous week, the trip to Argentina and how close he had come to losing his son. I won't let that happen, again, he promised himself. He began to think about the future and the enormous task he had set for himself when he sensed Melanie's consciousness. She padded quietly to him from behind, and he felt the warmth of her body as she wrapped her arms around him, resting her chin on his shoulder. He turned slightly, nuzzling her forehead with his cheek.

"That was quite an Argentina vacation, my husband," she laughed. "Our first one in years. Maybe next time we can find something exciting to do when we are away, instead of just lounging around."

"He kissed her cheek softly. "My wife, you were... no... you are magnificent. You should have seen yourself in that room in Argentina. You are a pillar of strength and courage. I sensed you were shaken, but you held your own in a fashion that was incredible. I love you. No man, except perhaps my father, is or has ever been as fortunate as me."

"That is exactly how I feel, every waking moment of my life, my dearest. I once said to you, the night we met, you were my knight in shining armor. I expected that to wane over time. But no, it has grown into a burning flame within me. I did not know that love like this was possible.

Iggy turned, cocking his head slightly, admiring her beauty as the moonlight caressed her skin and made her blue eyes sparkle in the night. "Why don't we grab a cup of coffee at the Pavilion and drive-up Coletta Mountain to watch the sunrise."

"I love it. What a great idea. Thank you for naming an entire mountain after my family, my love. I'll leave a note for Gloria and Sarah."

"I decided on that name the day we brought your parents up there when they first arrived at Lightning to show them the ranch spread beneath them. Remember?"

"I remember everything like that. It was there we first discussed the wedding with my parents." She was smiling at the memories.

They entered the kitchen of the Pavilion and heard someone rustling at the far end. "I wonder who that could be at this hour? The breakfast crew doesn't usually get here till four thirty," said Melanie.

Her voice carried across the quiet kitchen. The occupant heard her voice as a cooler door swung open. Lindy's smiling face popped around the edge of the door. "Hi guys, what are you doing here this early?"

"I might ask you the same thing, little sister." It's kind of early. Are you alone or is Marty in the cooler rummaging with you?"

"No," she responded dejectedly. "Marty was held up in New York for two more days. I was lonely and couldn't sleep. So, I decided to get up early, get a cup of coffee and watch the sunrise."

Melanie smiled, "That's what we're doing here, also. Only we are driving up Coletta Mountain to watch it."

"Oh!... Can I come? I would love to watch the sunrise from there!"

"Absolutely, Lindy! We would love to have you come with us. Have you ever watched the sunrise from there?"

"No, never. Marty and I talked about doing it once, but we haven't gotten around to it, yet."

"You don't know what you're missing, sis. It's magnificent."

"Let's go then. I'll bring a thermos of coffee."

The Land Rover bumped along over the ruts, until they reached the parking spot high atop the mountain. "It's about half an hour till sunrise. Let's have coffee."

Lindy poured and they sat on the rocks sipping the hot liquid... waiting for Mr. Sun.

The silver moonlit gilded outline of the billowing blue-gray cumulous clouds scattered across the eastern horizon began to fade as the sky brightened, transforming their azure and indigo contours to a brilliant crimson explosion as they welcomed the sun.

"God, it's beautiful," said Lindy. "Who could not see this without believing we already live in paradise?"

"I'm glad you chose to bring me here this morning Iggy. The top of Coletta Mountain is the perfect place to tell you I'm pregnant. I wanted to wait for the right moment. I tested myself last night and Sylvia's ultrasound confirmed it."

Iggy held her hands smiling. "I thought you looked a little more radiant than usual Melanie. How exciting! Do you know the gender?"

"Both...twins!" Said Melanie as he embraced her.

Lindy wrapped her arms around her brother and sister-in-law, kissing them. Whoopee, Melanie, more Marcuse's to liven up the party! Congratulations! She said with her usual tear.

They stood, facing east, in a salute to the coming sun that radiated the dazzling promise of humanity's future. Melanie knew mankind's new sterling path to tomorrow was a spectacular gift to men and women everywhere from the man standing beside her. The first brilliant sunbeam pierced the morning sky, exactly from the summit pinnacle of Lightning Mountain, the highest peak on the eastern border of the ranch. It was like a beacon planted, at that very point, by a wandering explorer, to light the way for followers. The beacon intensified as golden rays fanned the clouds, transforming the crimson fringes to brilliant orange.

Iggy sensed a combination of joy and sadness in his sister. He glanced her way; tears streamed down her cheeks.

Iggy shook his head, knowing.... "Mom?"

She couldn't speak for a moment but shook her head through the tears. "I wish Mama could be here right now Iggy... She would be so proud," she finally said, sobbing.

He chuckled. "You're always crying Lindy. You have to learn to curb it a little," as he embraced her. "I told you before, you are going to get dehydrated."

She laughed. Her brother always knew the right thing to say.

The sky was becoming brilliant, and now, the large orange-yellow beacon seemed balanced atop the sharp pinnacle of Lightning Mountain. The three of them stood, Iggy in the middle, with their arms around each other's waists gazing east.

Lindy looked up at her brother. "You won, Iggy. You beat them all and saved the world. I had my doubts that anyone, even you, could do this, but now I know better."

"Don't count the chickens, Lindy. The eggs have been laid and are beginning to hatch, but this is only just beginning. We have a long way to go, and the fight will be intense. We'll win though. We have to because it is man's destiny."

Melanie leaned her head on his shoulder, her arm still around his waist and his around hers. "Are you ready for more kids, Melanie? The first group is about to leave and make their way through life. They will begin the change. The next group, you know, is going to be over a thousand. Are you ready?"

Melanie wasn't as often given to tears as Lindy, but one ventured down her cheek. "When I am with you, my husband, I am ready for anything."

The Author

It is probably safe to say, if you are reading this page, you have read the preceding book. It is apparent to many of us, society seems to have lost its way and is meandering purposeless through a world shackled by previously unheard-of technical wonders, collective promiscuity, and lack of intellectual vision that threaten to usurp our individuality.

What once held true for our predecessors seems to have diminished, if not vanished altogether in the face of contemporary influences and prolific social media. It is obvious we are rapidly abandoning the philosophical underpinnings and societal precepts, once the foundation of this incredible country.

I have been fortunate; raised and educated by a loving family and given all the tools provided by a classical education. In short, I was taught to critically think, which is a blessing most of the time. Often, however, it is gut wrenching to behold the foundations of my country atrophy and crumble. Critical thinking is the only venue that makes that vision possible. Both our public and private institutions have abandoned teaching our young to think in favor of indoctrination and the permanent extinction of intellectual individuality. I have attempted to resuscitate common sense and critical thought here. This is the beginning, but the saga continues as my hero, Ignatius Marcus, Junior, proceeds to enlighten, change, and save the world, from itself, for his posterity. The story continues... On The Shoulders of Giants...and....In The Footsteps of Giants.

