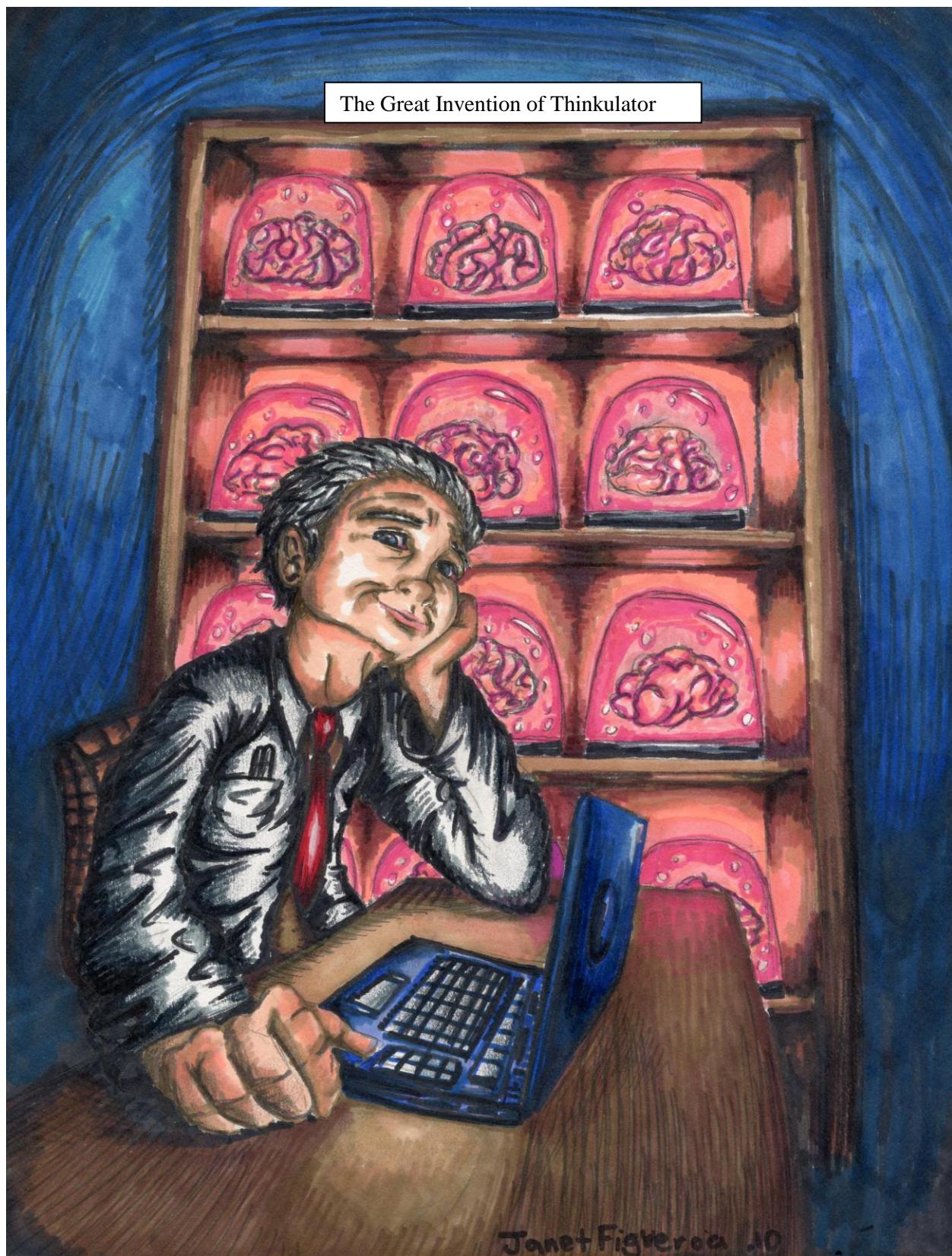


The Great Invention of Thinkulator



Janet Figueiredo '10

About 20,952 words

The Great Invention of Thinkulator

by

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Chapter 1

The Third Strike

David Fram waited in the small lounge next to the conference room where the faculty made their decisions. The ticking of the clock on the wall behind him appeared in sync with each beat of his heart. His stomach clenched, his head ached and the nervous tick at the outside corner of his left eye seemed more pronounced than usual.

How much longer could they be? This time his thesis was perfect; not a single flaw in either the writing or the content. So many late hours he spent pouring over each equation with only a pot of strong coffee to keep him awake until he was absolutely sure it was perfect. His foot tapped on the white linoleum floor and his chest felt tight. David glanced at the clock, four minutes until four O'clock.

Laughter sounded in the next room. David felt his heart miss a beat as the door to the conference room opened. Here it was, the moment he was waiting for. He stood as Professor Whitehall, the head of the department of Mathematics at Stanford University, broke off from the others and approached him. His expression was unreadable as he stopped before David. He had the thesis in his hand and held it out for David to take.

"Mr. Fram, after much consideration, I'm afraid we will have to pass. The work you did is excellent, the writing strong,

your research top-notch. Perhaps, after some deeper analysis and an alternate proof of your hypothesis, we will look at it again. You show a great deal of promise so don't give up." He smiled at David, but the emotion did not reach his eyes.

David took the portfolio, containing years of study and could only nod. The lump in his throat would not allow words to pass, causing his eyes to tear up. He watched the older man leave the lounge to join the other faculty members. With this third rejection he could not go through this again. A strange buzzing began in his ears as his feet took him out of the lounge and down the hall toward the exit. More laughter drifted from the office on his right and David heard his name mentioned. He slowed his footsteps so he could listen.

"Mr. Fram has an ego the size of Texas. He thinks he has the brilliance for a PhD in Mathematics. It may happen someday... but not in my lifetime!" It was a woman's voice. More laughter followed the comment.

"The witch..." David murmured as he hurried to the exit. Suddenly, he had to get out for some air. So, he was unfit for his PhD? They just did not recognize great work even when it was under their noses. David pitched the thesis in the garbage can just before he pushed open the doors. He took a deep breath and disappeared into the driving cold rain.

The semester had ended with no fanfare. No one called out greeting to him as he entered the dorm. David's roommate had gone home for the break. Not that Thomas spent any time with him. In fact, David did not recall anyone he really thought highly of. Taking the steps two at a time, by the time he reached his room, his headache was so bad he thought his head would split open. David lay down on the bed and closed his eyes. All his years in school, all his research and hard work, trashed in a single moment went round and round in his head. Finally, David drifted into an uneasy sleep.

The next day David woke early, but stayed in bed until noon. So many thoughts crossed his mind. He kept thinking how unfair life was; how some people seemed to have a powerful hold on his life like they were gods. He allowed the thoughts to whirl until he decided on the only course of action left him; 'Revenge.' He sat up, swinging his legs over the edge of the mattress, his head in his hands. "I can't let them do this to me. A person has to stand up for what he believes in. They destroyed my future. Now they must pay." With this determination, David decided to go after the one professor he felt was behind all his misery, Dr. Viola Chatham. She was the one, he felt, who always looked down at him, sneering at him with her obvious loathing. She was the witch who made the cruel remark that he would never get his PhD in her lifetime. She would be the one to pay.

David wasted no time. He looked up Dr. Chatham's schedule and noted that the last class she taught on Tuesdays and Thursdays ended at 8PM. He decided to stalk her that evening. He observed that she walked to the nearly deserted parking lot adjacent to the math department, and got into her navy blue Toyota Camry. She sat in the car for several minutes as she tidied the stack of papers on the front passenger seat. Then she started the car and slowly turned North on Serra Mall Street.

David came back to his room after she left, literally shaking from the rage of his anger. All reason drained from him as he made the plan to get even with her. He remembered that his roommate had a gun hidden in the top shelf of his dresser. What a delicious moment would that be! "That witch would cease to exist" he snarled clenching his jaw so tight his facial features twisted into a grotesque mask.

Next day, after a little search, David found the gun well hidden under a layer on clothes in a plastic bag. He checked for the bullets and put the gun in his pocket. On Thursday evening, dressed in dark clothes and a wearing a ski mask, he got into position behind the same bushes he had used to observe her routine. With his right hand tightly holding the gun, he watched as Dr. Chatham reached her car, got settled inside and began her routine. David's heart beat a rapid rhythm, his breath hot under the ski mask and his thigh muscles began to cramp.

As Dr. Chatham was about to start her car, David lunged from his hiding place and sprinted across the short distance to her car. He pointed the gun through the open window and, without saying a word, pressed the trigger. A loud bang ensued and Dr. Chatham fell on her side. Blood started to ooze and spread on her blouse as David ran to his truck, dropping the gun in the process.

The news of an attempt on Dr. Chatham's life spread quickly on the campus. She was found unconscious in her car bleeding with a single gunshot wound. The police immediately began their investigation. They found the gun in the bushes and after interviewing the faculty narrowed their search to David Fram and the hunt for him began.

David got on the freeway and just kept going, passing from one small town to another. Having no family, David traveled around for several weeks, passing from one small town to another. Each night he woke, trembling and covered with cold moisture. Whispered words he could not understand followed him from place to place, buzzing in his ears like angry bees. From the corner of his eye, he began to see shadows then, heard footsteps fall into step behind him as he walked from a store to his truck. Finally, after finding he could not hold a job for more than a few days, David climbed into his truck, filled the tank and drove until he could go no farther. This town was a

thriving metropolis and within a few days, he rented a room at a low budget motel, took a job tutoring students in math during the day and worked as a janitor for an office complex at night. Over time, the whispers and shadows left him alone. However, the knots in his stomach would begin to tighten, his heart would race for no apparent reason, his hands shook and his balance became unsteady. It was them, the professors, he would tell himself repeatedly. They took what was rightfully his. They ruined his life. Everything he worked for now ruined because of them. David could still hear their laughter and hear the snide comments bounce around in his brain.

Five months had passed since his departure from Stanford University. David stood before the mirror in the small room at the motel. His dyed hair had faded and tiny lines creased at the corner of his eyes. His hair had grown covering his neck and his jaw was set as though he clenched his teeth constantly and the tic at the corner of his left eye never went away. All he could think about was how he had been wronged, his future stolen from him.

"Those bastards at Stanford really screwed up my life. I could have been someone. There was nothing wrong with my God damned thesis, nothing!" he screamed.

Chapter 2

A Chance Encounter

David sat at the booth at Carter's Diner, with his order of hamburger with cheese and fries. He turned on the used laptop that he had purchased at a flea market just a few days earlier and started prowling the Internet over the diner's free Wi-Fi connection for any news on Dr. Chatham's shooting case. Then he continued his daily search on anything he could find about changing one's identity. He practiced accents and different mannerisms before the bathroom mirror as he readied for bed each night.

Eight months had passed since the shooting of Dr. Chatham. During that time, David had let his hair grow to shoulder length, dyed it blonde and sported a mustache as well. In his pocket he had forged driver's licenses and other picture identifications under different aliases.

On the move yet again, David finally stopped just before dark to get gas before continuing on his way northeast. He filled his tank and pulled the truck into a parking spot, planning to get a few groceries and a soda. Fortunately, David had been able to find work in most of the places where he stopped. His father had been a carpenter and David had grown up learning from him until a heart attack took him when he was still a teenager. David sat down on a bench just outside the

little market, opened his soda and took a large drink. His breath became white vapor in the chilly, mountain air. Closing his eyes, he allowed himself to relax for at least a few moments before he headed back to the freeway. He was so tired. Everywhere he went, people stared at him as if they knew he was the one the FBI was looking for. He knew they whispered behind his back. David just wanted to find a place to work and live where he was free from the eyes of people everywhere, to be able to sleep the entire night without being awakened from a nightmare.

The bench creaked as someone sat down next to him. David decided to ignore whoever it might be.

"You look like a fellow that could use some extra money."

The deep voice was hard to ignore.

David opened his eyes and took another drink of his soda.

"What kind of work do you have?" he asked.

"Well, I'm looking for a handyman to do some repairs on my cottage." David studied the man next to him. His hair was thinning and sprinkled with gray, deep lines creased the corners of his eyes and mouth, but his deep blue eyes were ageless and filled with warmth, a quality that immediately drew David.

"What do you do for a living, son?" The old man asked.

David's stomach clenched and the smile was harder to keep.

"I'm a carpenter by trade, been working construction jobs here and there on my way across country."

"That's perfect. I also was looking for a carpenter. I'm Louis Garfield, Professor Garfield to most. I don't believe in

coincidence. See, I'm not as young as I used to be and I need someone who knows his way around with a hammer and nails. I just happened to run out of milk and here you are needing work. What's your name, son?"

That annoying buzzing sound was back. However, David needed some place to lie low and regain his composure. This man offered that very thing. He stuck out his hand.

"Daniel Foster. What kind of work do you need done and how much are you paying?"

Garfield's grip was steady and strong as he shook David's hand.

"I live in the family home my grandfather built. Since then, it needs some serious repairs which is mostly carpentry work. I can't pay you what a standard construction worker makes, but I do have a guest house and plenty of good food that will make up the difference. What do you say, Daniel?"

"Good. My truck is right over there," Garfield said, pointing to a beat-up muddy pickup truck. "Why don't you follow me back to my place and you can settle in the guest house tonight and start work first thing in the morning." He stood and shoved his hands into the pockets of his jeans.

David stood and stretched. "I'll be right behind you." He picked up his bag of junk food and followed behind the older man until he reached his own truck. The drive to the professor's home seemed to take forever, most of it on narrow ungraded, heavily pitted dirt road. Trees rose above them seeming to stretch all the way to Heaven, and grew so closely together that he couldn't think of a better place to get lost in. Very little light from the full moon penetrated the small family cabin and smaller buildings close by. David parked his truck next to the professor's in front of the main house and slid from the seat to the ground.

"Grab your gear and I'll show you the guest house. It's too dark for me to show you what needs to be done."

David followed the professor toward the back of the house and waited just behind him as he opened the door to a three-room guest bungalow. David stepped inside. Garfield flipped the light switch near the door and the small lamp near the bed came on, casting a pale glow around the small room.

"I'll leave you to get a good night's sleep. Breakfast is at seven sharp. Goodnight, Daniel." Garfield turned and went back outside, his steps quick and sure as he hurried toward the main house.

David closed the door and sat down on the bed. It creaked beneath his weight, but it felt softer than any bed he had slept in for a long time. The other two rooms were just as small. One was a bathroom with shower and the other, a combined kitchenette and den. Cozy was the word that came to his mind. After a warm shower and his purchased food, David lay back on the bed, his eyes resting on the rough-hewn beams that crossed the ceiling. This was one job he would not be in any hurry to leave. It was the last thought he had before he succumbed to a deep, dreamless sleep.

Chapter 3

Daniel

David woke as the darkness gave way to the hazy dawn. He stretched and threw back the heavy comforter on the bed. His breath frosted in the air and he shivered. Either there wasn't any heat in the guest house or he just neglected to turn it on. Figuring the latter, he hurried to the bathroom and took a shower, making the water as hot as it could be without burning him. As the steam thawed his body, reality burrowed through his well-rested mind and his heart thumped heavily in his chest. However, if he played his cards right, he could stay here for awhile, out of the public eye and make a little money. Deciding he was safe for the moment, David took out his razor and shaved off his mustache then, took the scissors to his hair, cutting it to a respectable length.

After dressing, he carefully hid his fake identities and other relevant papers in the false bottom of his small duffle bag and put it in the bottom drawer of the hand carved oak dresser. In his other bag, he dug out a fresh box of hair dye and set it in the bathroom medicine cabinet. It wouldn't be long before he would need to apply it again.

As he looked around the small bungalow, David noted that although there was little in the way of furnishings or decoration, it was neat, clean in better condition than most of the motels in which he had lived over the past months. He located the thermostat just over the headboard as he made the bed and turned it on. He had just put away the last of his clothing articles in the other three drawers of the dresser when

a knock sounded on the door. He shrugged into his jacket and greeted Professor Garfield with a smile.

"Well, well. Without the mustache, you look much younger than I thought." Garfield rubbed his whiskered jaw as his blue eyes took in David's appearance. "Are you hungry?"

David forced himself to relax under the older man's scrutiny and kept his smile in place. "Yes sir, I surely am," he said shoving his hands into his jacket pockets.

"Good. Breakfast is ready and I'm looking forward to enjoying your company while we eat. Afterward, I'll show you round the property and point out what needs doing." He started toward the main house, not looking to see whether David followed.

Figuring he had just passed a major exam, David hurried to keep up with his new employer, his stomach gurgling in anticipation of a home cooked breakfast. The main house was more spacious on the inside than it looked. Unlike, the bungalow, it was filled with pictures, books and various sentimental ornaments collected over the man's lifetime. Colorful throws draped the living-room furniture and matching throw rugs were placed strategically on the polished hardwood floors. A narrow hallway led to the back of the house and appeared to have one, perhaps two rooms branching off it. The aroma of fried eggs and potatoes mixed with onions assailed his nostrils and David took off his jacket, draping it on the back of one of the four dining chairs. The kitchen was airy with a skylight above the preparation island. The table was set in front of bay windows that looked out to the side of the house. There was little to indicate a female presence.

"Do you live out here all by yourself?" David asked, sitting in the chair he had draped his jacket over.

"Mmm. Sure do. Wife died ten years ago and my son, Kurt, works for an engineering firm in DC doing some sort of top secret work for the government." He set a plate full of fried eggs, potato wedges and toast in front of David. David got up and helped set the rest of the food and dishes on the table. For some reason, he did not wish to feel like a guest. He was determined not to get too close to this man, afraid of being disappointed again. He poured himself a cup of coffee and sat back down, waiting until the professor joined him before helping himself to the food. They ate in silence for a while, enjoying the view outside the window as a herd of deer stepped out of the tree line.

"Ya know, Daniel, I don't care whether you're on the lam or just looking for a temporary place to stay, but I expect you to hold up your end of the bargain. That said, we should get along just fine."

David sipped his coffee, trying to get his stomach to settle. Everything was already fine. At least he thought it was. Why did the old man have to mention him as a possible fugitive? Did he know something about him? He swallowed past the lump in his throat and met the man's shrewd gaze. "No need to worry about me, sir. I'm a hard worker and will do everything you require me to do. I appreciate you giving me this opportunity."

Garfield set his empty cup back on the table and laughed. "No need to be so formal, son. Please just call me Louis, or Professor. As to the other, I trust you well enough. If you're finished eating, I think it would be a good time to show you around and point out those things that need fixing." He wiped

his mouth with the napkin and took his dishes to the sink. "Let me get my jacket and I'll meet you at the door."

David finished his coffee, watching the deer turn back to the forest of tall trees then, put his dishes in the sink along with the empty food bowls and stepped out on the front porch, he quietly put on his jacket. He took a deep breath and the cold morning air was so crisp it caused him to cough, the vapor fading as the professor stepped out the door and stopped for a moment at his side.

Garfield squeezed David's shoulder. "There is nothing better than a crisp clean breath of fresh air and a day of hard work to set things right with a man's soul. I believe you will understand that by the end of the day." He went down the stairs. "Come, Daniel and I'll show you what needs doing."

David took another deep breath, deciding he was going to like this assignment much better than the previous year's total and hurried to catch up to the spry professor. Two hours later, armed with hammer, hand saw and nails David began work on what turned out to be the first of dozens of repairs. The professor's property was larger than it appeared. Besides the main house and guesthouse, there was a fully stocked workshop, woodshed, single car garage and a separate cellar with stairs that went from ground level to an 8 by 10 dugout supported with heavy timbers and cross supports. The shelves bowed under many canned goods, homemade jams and other foodstuffs. Just beyond the cellar was a smokehouse that still held the odor of hickory even though years had passed since it last saw any use. There was enough work to keep him busy for a few weeks, at least. As he worked to repair a warped doorframe, David noticed the tightness in his chest was gone, so was the buzzing in his ear that always bothered him. It

had been so long since he experienced anything other than fear, hatred, and jealousy that the high of happiness was a foreign but welcome emotion. Before the sun reached the noon position, David was whistling a tune he remembered his father would whistle when David was just a boy, playing in the workshop.

It was late afternoon when he completed the repair to the cellar's doorframe and doors. David put the tools in the workshop and locked the padlock before heading to the guesthouse for a hot shower.

"Daniel," the professor called just before David stepped inside his door. David turned and greeted his new employer with a tired grin. "I just wanted to let you know that supper will be ready in an hour. I'll expect you're a little hungry seeing as you worked through the noon meal hour."

"To be honest, sir, I was enjoying working with my hands and the time just seemed to slip by so fast. I'll take a shower, get in some clean clothes and meet you at your house."

"Good. It will be nice to have someone to converse with during dinner." He turned and hurried back the way he had come.

David shook his head, still not believing his luck as he went inside to ease his stiffening muscles with a hot shower.

It was growing dark and the air had cooled by at least ten degrees by the time David sat down to dinner across from the professor. The baked chicken with whipped potatoes and gravy, fresh salad and hot rolls tasted better than anything David had eaten in more than a year and the day's work more than prepared his appetite. He was working his way through the second helping when Garfield chuckled and sat back in his chair.

"I checked out the work you did today on the cellar, Daniel. Damn fine work, too. I think we're going to get along just fine. Not to mention, it is nice to have someone on the property again. It gets lonely out here."

David looked up from shoveling another spoonful of potatoes in his mouth and nodded. The professor's blue eyes seemed a little kinder than they had appeared at breakfast. He swallowed. "Thanks, but I learned my way around wood from my father." He took a drink of iced tea. "This is the best food I've had in a long time. Thank you."

"I imagine diner food does tend to lose its flavor over time. I used to travel in my work. It gets old, I know." The older man got up and began clearing the empty dishes from the table. He washed them off then, put them in the dishwasher.

David finished off what was left and gave the dishes to the professor. "Is there any particular order to the list of repairs you want me to do, or is it up to me to pick and choose?" he asked.

Garfield filled a kettle with water and set it on a burner to boil. "Well, if you could see to the repairs on the porches first, both front and back so that the steps and rail are steadier, the rest of the property is up for whatever order you prefer. Won't you join me with a cup of tea? I promise not to keep you too long."

David's stomach fluttered nervously but he brushed the feeling aside. What harm could a cup of tea and a little conversation be before turning in for the night? "Sure, why not."

Two cups of tea later, David found it difficult to keep his eyes open. A fire crackled invitingly in the fireplace and the furniture was just as comfortable as it looked. As far as he knew, David figured he held up his end of the conversation, inserting the proper answers and comments every now and then. The professor was an avid conversationalist and an endless font of information. Finally, the conversation gave way to longer silences.

David startled when he felt the professor's hand shake his shoulder.

"Daniel, I'm sorry I kept on the way I have. You need to get to sleep. I'm impressed with your kindness toward an old man, but I can talk with you when you get used to a routine."

David stood. "I am tired, professor. Is breakfast at seven again tomorrow?"

"I can wait until eight tomorrow." Garfield took David's empty cup and walked him to the door.

"I'll see you at eight, then." David put his jacket on and found the cold air refreshing as he walked across the yard to the guesthouse. He was asleep before his head hit the pillow.

The next few days passed like the first and David became more relaxed as he worked on the replacement of the sagging, warped boards on the back porch. The professor went into town for supplies, bringing back more than enough groceries as well as a truck bed full of lumber in order for David to replace the lumber on the back porch. Every evening they had dinner and fell into easy conversation about general topics, staying away from anything personal, which led to the beginning of a relationship based on trust. Professor Garfield loved to talk about anything, especially about his heritage and his late wife. He was very knowledgeable about many different topics and shared openly. David was happy to let the professor talk. The buzzing in his head was gone and he found that he looked forward to getting up each morning, putting in a day of hard labor. It kept the terrible things he had done away from his thoughts. The days were getting shorter and the weather colder.

Both men sat in the den after dinner as had become a part of their routine. The fire was warm and each nursed an extra large cup of hot tea. David was always tired by this time of

day, however the professor appeared to enjoy his company. Thereby, he spent an hour, sometimes two humoring the older man.

"It will snow soon," the professor said, "I can feel it coming by the ache in my joints."

"Do you get a lot of snow out here?" David sipped the freshly brewed tea.

Garfield nodded and said, "Mmm. Yes, sometimes the drifts are so deep you have to dig pathways between buildings. Weathermen have predicted a heavy snow for this year." He grew quiet for several long minutes then, continued. "I expect it will delay my plans by several weeks."

It was the first time David had heard the professor mention anything in the current time. He assumed the old man was retired and never thought to ask him what he did all day long alone in his house. He was about to ask about his last comment when the professor looked over at him and grinned.

"You know, Daniel, I have come to enjoy your company each evening and very much admire the care you take with the work you do. You think I don't notice, but I do. Also, when you do talk, I can tell you have some education. Have you thought about a formal one? I mean, you are a bright young man and still young enough to get a decent degree. It would allow you to find some nice place to settle, get a job that pays a decent wage and, perhaps meet a nice girl and have yourself a family. I could recommend you. I do still have contacts in high places, after all."

David's stomach began to sour and the invisible band around his chest tightened a notch. He hadn't felt it in many days. Why did the old man have to bring up the past? Wasn't it apparent that he did not wish to talk of his past, by his silence? He stalled by gulping his tea, the hot liquid scorching the back of his throat. It bought him a moment to gather something together

with which to reply. His hands tightened around the hot cup as he lowered it to his lap. He cleared his throat.

"I'm a good talker, professor, that's all. My mother insisted that I speak and read well. I barely graduated from High School and never thought about going any further. I like the work I do well enough. Anything else I know, I learned from using computers and surfing the Internet. Even that is rather limited, I'm afraid. Perhaps, that's the reason I sound more educated than I am."

Garfield's eyes narrowed and he rubbed his chin, as he seemed to study David, making him feel like a science specimen under a microscope. Finally, he turned his attention back to the fire. "Mmm. Maybe, maybe not. I expect there is more than meets the eye with you, Daniel. Still, I think you would do well in college. At least think about it." He set his cup on the small end table next to his lounge chair and stood, stretching. "I think I shall turn in. The ground will be all white in the morning, so breakfast may be a bit later. You see yourself out, son." He didn't wait for David to leave, just took his cup to the kitchen and headed down the hallway.

David waited until the fire was little more than a glow before he started back to the guesthouse. As much as he liked being here, he couldn't take the chance of being recognized by anyone, especially, the professor. Surely, tonight's conversation was just the man's attempt to get to know him better. David really hoped that was the case. As he opened the door to his quarters, he could not help the grin that came to his face as the tiny white flecks began to fall.

Chapter 4

Professor Garfield

Persistent knocking woke David from a sound sleep. Who could that be at this hour and what time was it? He wondered. He pulled on his pants, hurried into a sweatshirt and opened the door. For some reason, it was much brighter than usual and he had to blink to keep his eyes from watering.

"Good morning, Daniel. I told you the ground would be covered with snow this morning and I was right. Can I come in?" The professor stood in front of him with a paper bag in his hands.

David moved aside so the man could enter then peered outside at what appeared to be at least a foot of snow on the ground. He closed the door and joined the professor in the small kitchenette. Garfield was unpacking containers of something on the counter. Whatever it was smelled good. "Did I miss breakfast?" he asked.

"Well, yes and no. Yes because it is past eight and no, because I brought it with me. Oh, and don't worry about working today. This stuff is hazardous to work in when you have to be outside all day." He laid out the remaining containers, four in all, and turned to face David.

"You didn't have to bring me breakfast. I still planned to work today. Just because it snowed, doesn't make it impossible." He approached the counter. "There looks like there is enough here for three people."

The professor opened a cabinet and pulled out two plates. "Actually, I hoped you wouldn't mind my company over breakfast. I've come to really enjoy mealtime again since you have been

here." He took the plates and flatware to the small square table.

David opened the containers and inhaled the delicious aromas then, replied; "I don't mind. You've been so kind and I do enjoy your conversation, too." He took the cartons to the table. Moments later, they were enjoying pancakes, sausage, eggs and orange juice. David was the first to finish and recalled a few bits and pieces of previous conversations that only hinted at what his employer did. Those tidbits and his curiosity had grown into a need to know more. The professor finished his own plate and met David's gaze.

"Well, spit it out, son. I know you have something on your mind," he said.

David sat back in his chair. "Well, I was just wondering. Did you actually teach at a college?"

Garfield grinned. "I wondered how long it would be before you would ask me that. I didn't always live out here. My sister inherited the place once my parents passed on. I lived in California for many years. I worked as a Neurosurgeon and a very successful one for most of my younger adult years and then, went on to complete my PhD in mathematics and computer science. I continued my career in neurosurgery at the Stanford University Medical Center where I worked a few days each week. I also taught math and computer courses at U.C. Berkeley. My wife complained she never saw me enough and I didn't see my son's young athletic games, so I retired early. My sister died in a car accident, leaving this family place to me, so I moved the family here and used some of my savings to build on to the original homestead. Fortunately, I am retired now"

Envy burned in David's chest. He was also surprised. "Wow! I'm impressed. I would think the fields of neurosurgery and

mathematics are poles apart." The buzzing was suddenly back and David had to concentrate to hear the answer to his next question.

Garfield grinned. "I have always been fascinated with computers and the human brain as they both deal with logic."

Finding the professor in a talkative mood gave David the courage to ask, "So, what do you do all day by yourself out here?"

Garfield was quiet for a long moment, as though his mind was somewhere else, or deciding whether to answer or not. Finally, he sat straight in his chair, his eyes bright as he looked at David. "Well, for the past forty years, I've been working on a project that will be my greatest contribution to the world. I can't tell you more than that. It is confidential. I don't even tell my son the details, but it is my life's work and, if successful will return a great reward. Whatever happens, I can say this for sure. Two weeks from today, this world would be a different place. My invention will have a lasting impact on almost everyone on Earth." He stood and put his coat back on.

"Thanks for the breakfast and for the day off" he said.

"Not a problem. Tomorrow, things will be back to normal. Enjoy the day, Daniel. I brought some extra food for your supper tonight. I'll see you tomorrow morning." Bundling his coat around him tightly, the professor went out into the bright

morning air, carefully picking the best places to step on his way back to his home.

The professor's last words echoed in his brain, steadily growing louder. This man was entirely too successful and fixing to reach the pinnacle of recognition and respect; the very accomplishments that kept slipping through David's fingers. No, no, no, he admired the old man. David appreciated the kindness and the budding friendship. The band tightened another notch around David's chest as he paced the small interior of the guesthouse. The static buzzing from what sounded like an entire hive of bees added to the echoing words. His left eye began to twitch. Why couldn't something as grand have happened to him? It should have. He was brilliant. Was it his fault that the professors at Stanfield couldn't recognize his obvious genius? Well, he showed them and he would show the world one day. An idea began to form in his mind. What was so remarkable that Garfield had to spend 40 years of his life on that would change the world?

David stopped pacing and sat down on the edge of his bed. What would the old man need with another remarkable achievement?

He had to find out what the professor was working on, whether it was indeed an incredible invention to which he eluded, or not. His heart began to race. David felt there was a need for urgency. Could the old man be nearing the end of the project? If that were the case, perhaps he didn't have that much time after all. David's left eye continued its annoying twitch.

He needed to figure out what the professor was up to. With just two weeks remaining, he had little time to waste.

David lay back on the bed, crossing his hands behind his head, his eyes resting on the timbers above him and began to formulate his plan.

"Mr. Frost, after much consideration, I'm afraid we will have to pass. The work you did is excellent, the writing strong, your research top-notch. Perhaps, after some deeper analysis and an alternate proof of your hypothesis, we will look at it again. You show a great deal of promise so don't give up. Don't give up, give up, give up..."

David woke up trembling, his heart pounding in his chest. It was pitch black in the room. Sitting up, he let out the breath he had not realized he held. It had only been a nightmare. How long had he been asleep? Reaching over, he turned on the small lamp on the table next to the bed. He glanced at his watch just as his stomach growled. It was 7 PM. He ran both hands through his hair and stood. The buzzing had slowed to a dull roar and the tightness around his chest was a little better.

Twenty minutes later, he sat alone at his small table, grateful for the leftovers as he filled his stomach. How had he managed to sleep the entire afternoon? The corner of his mouth turned up as he remembered his plan to find out what the professor was doing and if there was any credence to the project. He cleaned away the rest of the empty containers and made himself a cup of tea. With the work still to be completed on the back porch and the front porch needing as much or more

time, David figured his plan simply couldn't fail. Garfield appeared to trust him, at least liked him well enough.

Something nagged at David and his heart suddenly began to race, his breathing became shallow and the room began to spin, forcing him to sit down. There was the need for urgency. Then he remembered the professor mentioning a while back something about the snow setting his plans back a few weeks. That indicated the old man was near the end of the project. If that was the case, perhaps he didn't have that long after all. David's left eye twitched and he reached up to scratch the itch it caused. Well, his plan would just have to happen a little faster. Garfield did like to go to town now and then. In fact, it was almost time for him to go again. He needed lumber anyway.

David managed to take a deep breath as the invisible band loosened another notch. He set his empty cup in the sink and went to take a hot shower before bed. Already, he felt much better and his palm itched as he anticipated winning the accolades for himself.

Chapter 5

What Are We Celebrating?

Louis Garfield had led a charmed life, for most of it anyway, but having the I.Q. of a genius had its downside. For one, he found that sleep was a short-lived occasion. However, after so many years of three to four hours each night, he had grown used to it. His mind was always working and he could not quiet it. This was what had actually allowed him to finish his life's wondrous achievement. Since four that morning, Louis had worked in his private study on the final touches to his life's greatest achievement. Needing something to drink, he had made some tea and was on his way back to his study when the sharp crisp sound of a hammer driving nails caused him to pause in the shadows in the hall.

The sky was just turning gray and Daniel was working in the yard on a section of the back porch railing. The young man was certainly devoted to his work. Louis grinned briefly, recognizing in Daniel, a much younger part of himself. He sipped his tea and watched for a few moments more before continuing back into his study. His son, Kurt, would be getting ready for work about now and he had to speak to him about the unveiling ceremony of his project. He felt he was fallen behind in his work as he hadn't written anything new on his blog in over a week. For a moment, he imagined how crazy the world would get after his invention was revealed. People everywhere would want

to know every detail of his invention. That's when his video diary will come in handy when people will watch his carefully recorded day to day documentary. The snippets of videos that he had recorded earlier as an introduction to his invention were scheduled to be released on YouTube to help educate the general public and would most likely see millions of hits in just the first few hours. He checked on Twitter and updated his status. He knew his followers were constantly checking in to see how he was doing and to read the hints he had been dropping about his big invention.

Dr. Garfield sat down in his worn office chair and picked up the phone to call his son. It wasn't long before the deep voice of his son greeted him with enthusiasm.

"Hello, son, I just wanted to fill you in about a few things and then talk about the plans for the unveiling of my project." He clicked on the icon of his project to open and it asked for a security code. Dr. Garfield looked into his wallet and murmured, "Where's the damn security code. It was right here in my wallet." He looked again, "Aha, I found it."

He continued talking as his son listened. "Yeah, I think that I should be ready in the next fourteen days, give or take a few. Oh, son, did you happen to find anything on the young man I told you about?" He listened as his son talked and then replied, "Yeah, I know you're busy. No need to rush. I think he is a nice, hardworking man so how bad he could be. He is doing a good

job fixing the back porch." He listened to his son then hung up the phone by saying goodbye. He then forced his mind to concentrate on finishing the notes about his project.

David added a few more items to the list of supplies he would need to complete the front porch. For the past week, he had made sure he was up by sun rise and working on the back porch. The professor continued to feed him a hearty breakfast each morning while they made small talk about local news. It was the middle of the afternoon and he declared the back porch officially complete and not a moment too soon. He looked up from his small table in the kitchen, his eyes going to the window where shadows had lengthened across the floor. It was snowing again.

Every day he had worked on the back porch, he would peer into the window in the door at the back of the house, but couldn't see anything that would lead to where the old man worked on this so called wonderful, world changing project. David's stomach began to turn as he let his mind obsess about it. A knock on the door startled David and he looked up to see the very person he was thinking about on his doorstep.

He opened the door. "Professor, what a surprise come on in," he said forcing a grin.

"Thanks, Daniel, but I was just admiring your excellent workmanship on my new back porch. I thought we might enjoy dinner out there tonight."

"Not to put a damper on a great idea, but it is snowing, which means by dinnertime it will be quite cold on the back porch." David watched the wind toss the few gray strands of hair left on top of the man's head.

Something shadowed the professor's usually bright gaze, but passed in a second, hardly anything to worry about, surely. Then, they brightened once more.

"I keep a couple of the tall gas lamp outdoor heaters in the shed across from the smoke shack. If you would be so kind as to dig them out and place them on the porch, the air will be quite comfortable while we watch the snow fall and consume a celebratory dinner." He turned to go.

"Professor," David began. He waited until his employer turned to face him again. "What are we celebrating?"

A smile appeared on the old man's tired lips. "You'll have to wait until dinner for that one, son." Without waiting for anything more, his long strides took him back to the main house.

David closed the door, went to his bed and lay down on his left side. If it was one thing he abhorred above anything else, it was mind games. He was never any good at them and never would be. Why couldn't people just be straight about things? On the up side, he might just get to hear more about the mysterious project the old man was finishing up. He closed his eyes hoping to take a short nap before retrieving the gas lamps from the shed.

David tossed and turned, moving through one nightmare after another until he finally managed to throw the idea of a nice nap aside. He yelled from frustration, got off the bed and stormed into the bathroom where he splashed cold water on his face until his racing heart slowed to normal. David was getting more and more curious about the project the professor was working on. Whenever David tried to probe with subtle questions, Garfield managed to direct the conversation around them. David clearly sensed the professor purposefully avoided telling him about his work. The more the professor eluded the topic, the more David's interest peaked. He was dying to know what was it that the professor was working so diligently for such a long time that could be so special. Could that invention change his fortunes? What if he could get a hold of it? Could it turn around his life

as well? Realizing his life had reached a complete dead end, the idea of stealing the professor's invention kept crossing his mind. If only he could find out whether the invention was worth anything to him or not. In order to do that, he would have to get inside and search the house while the professor was out getting the supplies.

He stared at his reflection in the mirror. Lines had formed around the ends of his eyes and in his forehead. His hair had thinned, as had his once lean muscled body. Something had to give. This life of running from the law was not for him and the thought of a prison sentence was not something he could allow to happen. Garfield was the key that would end this nightmare, give him national respect and allow him to bask in the rewards of brilliance. If he could hold on for just a short while, it could all be his.

A smile appeared on his face as he combed his hair. He then whistled all the way to the storage shed to find the gas lamps.

Professor Garfield held the long match to each of the lamps, igniting the gas within, which immediately began to warm the smaller back porch.

"There, didn't I tell you it would be warm enough to eat dinner out here? I even oven barbecued a beef roast for the occasion. Sit down, Daniel, before dinner cools." The professor took off his jacket and sat in one of two matching chairs, pulling his tray to him.

David took off his jacket and folded it in his lap. As usual, Garfield had outdone himself with the meal. The roast practically fell apart when he put his fork to it, the flavor making him sigh with pleasure.

"You have done it again, professor. This is the best meal yet. I don't know how you do it. Even my mother couldn't cook like this."

Garfield chuckled then, replied, "My wife took gourmet cooking classes when Kurt started elementary school. She couldn't stand to have more than an hour of time where she didn't do anything, so she took all kinds of classes from gardening to do-it-yourself home fix up projects. Anyway, I loved her cooking and it is hard not to learn when the only time I could spend alone with her was in the kitchen. If I had known she would leave me so soon and with a young boy to raise, I think I would have tried to stay home more."

David watched the professor's features tighten and the far-away look that glazed his eyes. He almost felt the sadness for him. Almost. He stabbed at the meat on his plate. "I guess you must still miss her, huh," he said as he put more food in his mouth.

"Oh, yes, she was the love of my life, but it isn't good to dwell on the past, rather look to the future. Don't you think so?"

David nodded then, proceeded to finish every crumb and speck of juice on his plate. After the wonderful meal and warmed by the gas lamps, he sat back and rubbed his full belly. The crinkle of paper in his pocket reminded him of the list of items he needed so he could begin work on the front porch. He took it out, smoothed it on his thigh and handed it to the professor.

"I need these before I can really get started on the front porch. When were you thinking of going to town?" he asked.

Garfield's eyes ran down the list. He folded it and put it in his shirt pocket then, leaned back in his chair.

"Now that you ask, I planned to go into town tomorrow afternoon for the usual grocery run. I have a few other errands

to run while in town as well. It won't be a problem getting what you need." He fell silent for a while staring out at the woods, which were dark and quiet. David was about to get up when he spoke again. "You know, Daniel, I really love living out here under the towering trees, but I think it is time I move on. I'm not getting any younger and I still have places I want to see before I pass on."

David forced himself to settle again. Perhaps now the professor would mention the project he was working on. "Does this desire to travel have anything to do with what we are supposed to be celebrating?" he asked.

Garfield nodded and glanced over at him. "Indeed, it does. I have finished what has culminated as my life's work, forty years of research, study and trial and error. I have already contacted my son and sent to the local newspapers and television news stations a tentative announcement on the revelation that will change the way the world thinks. I would share it with you, Daniel, but Kurt insisted that I keep it to myself until the press conference." The professor turned so he could look more easily at David while he talked. His eyes were bright with emotion. "You will be here still and I expect your picture will be all over the news with my son and me."

David's heart sank straight through the new boards and into the dirt below. Heavens how he wanted to feel the way Garfield did right now. If he could have a moment of even half, he could die happy, but no, he wasn't good enough, always being told to try again. People like the professor didn't have to try again. One day soon, he would prove to the world that David Frost was brilliant, that he too was a true genius. Soon, but not now. Tonight, he would play the excited audience. He forced emotion into his frozen smile and replied, "I can hardly wait to find

out what it is you have been doing. When is the press conference scheduled for?"

The professor stood up, gathered his dishes then, David's and went to the door. David jumped up and opened it for him.

"Thanks," Garfield said putting one foot inside to hold the door open, "I have planned the moment by the end of next week. Kurt will be coming out tomorrow to help me prepare."

"Wow! That is fast." David let go of the door and stepped back. "I'll have to work quickly to finish the front porch."

"I would invite you in for tea, but I really do have to work on some notes and send more notices out before morning. I'll see you at breakfast, so make sure everything you need is on this list you gave me. Good night, Daniel. Oh, and please take care of the lamps." He turned and went into the house, shutting the door behind him.

David stared at the closed door for an indeterminate time before he was able to make his feet move. His stomach began to ache again, which set off every negative emotion he had experienced earlier when he had tried to nap. He turned off the lamps and took them across the yard to the storage shed, leaning them against the cool brick wall. By the time he reached the guesthouse, the snow was falling again.

Time was running out. Therefore, tomorrow he would find out about what the professor was so secretive. Tomorrow, he would take matters into his hands and start his life over with a clean slate.

Next day as the professor left the house for an errand; David went inside the house and looked for the professor's room. The room to the left must be the professor's study room. He tried to turn the door knob to see if it was locked. It was. He

couldn't see anything through the thick curtain on the window.

David noticed that the lock on the door was a Schlage brand security lock, clearly different from any other lock in the house. It appeared the professor had the lock added to his study for extra security. David thought of something and quickly left the house.

A few days later, the professor decided on a second trip to town. David asked him if he could accompany him for the ride so he could get a haircut. As they reached the town, the professor dropped David in front of the barber shop, then continued on to do his errand. As soon as the professor's truck turned the corner, David crossed the street to the hardware store, and went straight to the sign that said "Keys Made Here". He charmed the young girl at the counter into selling him a blank Schlage Security key. Then, he went back to the barber shop and had his haircut. A short time later, the professor picked David up and they drove back to the house.

Chapter 6

A Call from Kurt

As had become a normal morning routine, David met the professor in the kitchen for breakfast. Throughout this morning meal, Garfield appeared distracted, as his thoughts and attention were somewhere else. The phone rang half way through breakfast and Garfield hurried to take the call, excusing himself just after answering, taking the cordless phone down the hall.

David finished his plate and took the dishes to the sink. There he saw his big break! The professor was never careless, but off somewhere else, he had, momentarily, left his house keys on the counter by the sink while he took the call. David grabbed the keys, entered the half bath off the laundry room and used a bar of soap on the sink to carefully make an impression of the Schlage Security key. Then, he slipped the soap into his pocket. David had just returned the keys to counter when the professor entered the kitchen, replacing the phone in its holder. David picked up his plate and turned on the water, rinsing it off.

"Is everything alright, professor?" he asked.

Garfield looked at him, his eyes not completely focused and nodded. "That was Kurt. He was supposed to arrive this

afternoon, but his plane was delayed. He said he would be here before nightfall."

Garfield walked to the counter and retrieved his keys. His thumb rubbed over the security key before he put them in his pocket. "I'll see you later this afternoon, Daniel."

David watched the professor climb into his old pickup truck then he went back to his room and turned on his old laptop. A little research on the Internet showed David precisely how to fashion a key from the impression that was left in the soap. Using hand tools from the shed, he modified the blank key that he had obtained and was able to make a crude likeness from the indentations. Wasting no more time, David went back to the main house and after a little fine-tuning with a file, was able to unlock the door. The door swung open on silent hinges and David's breath left his lungs in a whoosh. This was it, his moment to find out if this so-called project was truly something so wondrous that it would change the world. If so, it may be his as well.

This room, unlike the rest of the house, was not neat and tidy. Books, magazines, and stacks of newspapers were everywhere. An old roll top desk stood in the left corner of the room. A small notebook computer was the only thing on that and the screen still glowed. Garfield must have left it on, being preoccupied, as he seemed.

David walked to the desk and sat in the chair before it. He tapped the space bar and the desktop came on, a picture of Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, was in the background. David looked at the desktop and saw many familiar icons. Then he glanced at the bottom of the screen and noticed the icon of an opened file. A mouse over at the icon revealed the name of the document, "Summary and Press Release."

He clicked the mouse on the icon and the document opened. He began to scan the article and then went back to read it, unable to believe his luck. The blood rushing through his veins sounded loud in his ears and the pounding of his heart as the discovery of a concept so far out there and so wondrous riveted him to his seat. He was half way through the document when he decided to steal the laptop. David rose from the chair, picked up the small computer, turned and froze. Professor Garfield stood in the doorway. David had not heard the truck return.

"This is how you repay a kindness, by stealing an old man's life's work? Is that right, Daniel, or should I say David?" Anger and disappointment put color in the old man's face. However, the glacial stare bothered David the most, that and the use of his real name.

David replaced the laptop on the desk. "How long have you known about me?" he asked.

"I just got a call from Kurt and that's why I am home early. He is the one who did the investigation on you. He has always been suspicious of everyone and it looks like he was correct in this, too. Police should be here any minute. I took you in as if you were my son. This is how you pay me back?"

The buzzing began in David's ears and grew so loud it seemed the hive was in his brain. His left eye began to twitch and an invisible band tightened around his chest to the point of pain and he couldn't get a full breath. *What am I going to do now? I can't go to prison. I must not go to prison!* David faced the professor, his stomach twisting into knots.

"Just let me go, professor. You've been more than kind to me but you don't understand. I deserve the recognition you've had all your life and that has been stolen from me." He shook his head to try to clear the buzzing and for a moment, the room spun, causing him to step to the side just to regain his balance.

"I can't let you go, David. What you've done is wrong."

David looked up and snapped. "NO!" he yelled as he ran across the room. He tried to run past the professor but the professor got in his way, "It's futile, David. The police are on their way. Give up before it is too late". Professor Garfield grabbed David's hand to try to stop him, but his grip was weak. David jerked his hand away and shouted, "Please! I don't want to

hurt you," but the professor got his collar this time. David wrestled with the professor. He pushed hard and the professor lost his hold, his foot slipping on some of the discarded paper on the floor. As the professor struggled to keep his balance, David wrestled the old man into a headlock, holding tight while the professor's fingers grabbed David's arm, his feet kicking. David tightened his grip. Garfield swung wildly. After what seemed like an eternity, the professor's struggles weakened, his fingers dropped from David's arm and his feet twitched and finally stopped completely. David lowered him to the floor. It took forever for the man to pass out. David stood and the buzzing in his ears caused him to yell out. He paced down the hallway and back, waiting for the professor to wake up so he could plead with him not to turn him in.

His eyes darted to the clock on the wall. The police will be here any minute. David squatted next to the professor and smacked his cheeks.

"Come on, professor, wake up." The skin on his cheeks was very cool to the touch. David looked more closely and noticed all the color had leached from the professor's face. He leaned down to listen for the man's heart and breathing but nothing greeted his ears. David shook the professor hard. *Oh, God! This can't be happening. He can't be dead.* David looked at the computer. It wasn't as if the old man was going to need it now.

After one more glance down the hall, David hurried into the study, picked up the laptop and then stopped for a second as if thinking what he should or should not do. Then, he flipped the professor over and took his wallet and exited the house from the back porch.

In the guesthouse, he quickly packed what little he owned and tossed it all in the cab of his truck. After several tries, the old engine made the familiar roar. David turned onto a narrow, pitted dirt road that was barely large enough for one vehicle that led up into the mountains. The dirt road ended in front of a line of huge trees. To the right, the road fell away in a deep chasm. David saw a freight train stopped on the tracks to the right. He quickly took his bag and pushed the truck over the edge. The sound of twisting, crunching metal and shattering glass replaced the buzzing in his ears. He picked up his duffel bag and the laptop and ran to the train. He noticed an unlocked door on one of the box cars and he quietly stepped inside and found a tiny place behind the large coffee bags and hid behind. Within a few minutes, the train started with a jerk and slowly disappeared behind the tree lines.

As the police arrived at Dr. Garfield's house, they found him unconscious on the floor barely breathing. He was airlifted to the nearest emergency room where doctors frantically tried to revive him but Dr. Garfield soon slipped into a coma.

Chapter 7

Dr Sloan's Wisdom

Seven years later... At Washington State University -
Spokane

"Matt, man where you going?"

Matt turned from his locker to greet his friend and shrugged into his backpack.

"I thought I would grab a quick bite to eat before the assembly. Want to join me?"

"Are you crazy? The auditorium is filling up quickly and I don't want to chance having to miss this one. Surely, your stomach can wait until afterwards." He waved the flyer containing the information on the lecture's guest speaker.

"Dude, you are wound too tight! I meant a candy bar from the vending machines. I'm not about to miss this either." Matt fell into step with his friend toward the small break room.

"Yeah, I could go for a sugar high for a bit. You got to work tonight?"

Matt fished in his pocket for some change. "Uh-huh, Riley already called and left three messages on my cell." He put the quarters in the machine and hit the button for the Snickers candy bar. "Which one do you want?"

"Skittles for me, thanks. You know, they make him sound like he's the second coming of Albert Einstein." He took the offered candy bar from Matt.

"Sam, you have to have an open mind for that stuff. He's an old man confined to a walker and due to his physical limitations he probably just learned to develop more of his brain function than flunkies like you and me." He peeled the wrapper on his candy and quickened his pace as they headed across campus to the auditorium.

"Whatever. But listen to this intro in this flyer put out by our university. It says, and I am not kidding here..."

"Dr. Alfred Sloan's intellect was discovered in an unusual manner when overnight he burst onto the intellectual scene about five years ago. Then Alfred Sloan, an ordinary man suffering the ravages of advanced stages of asthma, had a chance meeting with a professor from a small community college. During their conversation, Sloan impressed the professor so much that he asked Sloan to accompany him as his guest to a major mathematics conference scheduled in San Francisco that week. During the conference, a British professor put a mathematical puzzle before attendees that stumped even the best minds. A huge discussion was underway when Alfred Sloan raised his hand and solving the puzzle with incredible clarity and intellectual beauty. The entire audience was stunned. The moderators of the event invited

Sloan to the stage, grilling him with a series of questions. All of his answers were eloquent and demonstrated true insight.

Within a year the prestigious journal, 'Nature Physics' published Dr. Sloan's scientific paper entitled, "Unified Field Theory - An Analytical Approach" that was hailed as a masterpiece for laying the roadmap for the completion of the Unified Field Theory by incorporating the String Theory with Quantum Gravity theory. Overnight, Alfred Sloan was hailed as a true genius. Within two years, his reputation became legend and MIT bestowed upon him an honorary doctorate. His brilliance soon had him traveling the world, attending major conferences and stunning audiences at every stop. Today, Dr. Sloan is considered the top mathematical genius of our time."

Matt peeked into the auditorium and saw it was full. Even the spots on the floor in the aisles and against the back wall were taken by eager young men and women. The air crackled with anticipation and excitement. To have the great Dr. Sloan speak here at their small college made this a day for the history books for the entire town. Flyers papered the hallways, many of them tossed around by the winds, dropped by careless hands to the ground.

Dr. Sloan was known for his wisdom and seemingly endless base of knowledge. His amazing ability to explain phenomenal concepts in theoretical physics, putting them in everyday layman's terms

sprinkled with the right amount of humor kept him in constant demand as a guest speaker.

As they entered the auditorium, a student was handing out a flyer to everyone. Matt took the flyer and looked at it. He then whispered to his friend and said;

"Listen to this. A memo from the dean: Due to the nature of his progressive disease, Dr. Sloan a fiercely proud and independent man, is forced to communicate by relying on his computer to assist him when his voice gives up. Please be courteous when asking questions by giving him plenty of time to formulate his answer and then attentively listen to the response as it is too inconvenient for him to repeat."

They looked at each other and smiled. Soon they found a place to stand in the back of the auditorium as they leaned against the wall, placing their belongings on the floor.

A hush fell over the auditorium as the dean stepped up on stage and tapped the microphone.

"I don't believe I have ever seen this auditorium so full. Our guest speaker today is a true coup for our smaller university and a genius in every sense of the word. He speaks at universities around the globe. This man's schedule is a very full one so I will waste not one moment more. It gives me great pleasure to present to you the world famous Physicist, Doctor

Alfred Sloan." He stepped off the stage, adding his applause to that of the audience.

A door opened near the front of the auditorium, through which stepped an old man with a walker. His secretary was a few feet behind him carrying a briefcase. A sudden hush fell over the crowd so profound that his wheezing could be heard by all. An usher in a dark jacket quickly stepped forward and tried to help the man. Sloan appeared annoyed and swept his arm back from the usher and proudly continued to limp behind his walker up a makeshift ramp to the stage. Every ten steps he had to stop to rest. That terrible wheezing sound now appeared amplified. His back was bowed with his age and his white hair was thin and wispy. Those hands shook visibly each time he removed his inhaler from the pocket of his oversized, well-worn sweater. Finally, their esteemed guest speaker reached the center of the stage. A laptop computer was attached to his walker with two speakers just underneath. He looked out into the audience, his eyes squinting under the heated lighting.

"Good afternoon! I am so happy to be here today." His feeble voice was strained and the effort of his greeting sent him into rails of coughing. His frame shook from his efforts. His next greeting came from the speakers as he frustratingly started typing into his computer. An eerie sound of halting synthetic voice filled the auditorium. "Thank you for your warm welcome.

It is a great pleasure to be here today to speak to the brilliant minds of tomorrow. I can tell you that the journey to greatness begins with the mind." he glanced at the audience through his thick glasses and again tried to speak aloud but his voice fizzled out. He seemed visibly annoyed as he started typing again. "I can also tell you that by being here, in this wonderful learning atmosphere, that many of you will go on to make wondrous discoveries for the future of our world and that excites me!" He stopped until the applause died down. The two hours of his time with the awed group of college students was a mix of his trying to talk normally followed by a coughing fit, then his retreat to the computer. By the time, he was done for the afternoon, he received a standing ovation.

Doctor Sloan stayed on and started taking questions from students and faculty alike on subjects on everything from mathematics to astrology. The monotonous synthetic voice soon started sounding warm and soothing as the audience listened to the brilliant and profound answers that were delivered with a steady stream of crisp humor. Another hour passed before he put up his hand to silence the excited audience. "Ladies and gentleman, it has been a pleasure, but I'm not as young as I used to be and have to be on the road again tomorrow evening. Thank you for your warm hospitality." He turned to his Secretary, who had been sitting at the back of the stage, and

nodded. As his secretary got up, Dr. Sloan started the slow and laborious walk off the stage, the assembly was on its feet with thunderous applause.

Mr. Riley of Riley's Computer Service frowned when Matt came through the door. "You're late," he said.

Matt shrugged out of his backpack. "Sorry, but we had a wicked assembly that ran an hour overtime. You'll never guess who the guest speaker was."

Riley rolled his eyes. "I could really care less but surprise me anyway"

Matt grinned. "Doctor Alfred Sloan."

"You mean the Physicist? But while you were enjoying an intellectual evening, I had to do this inventory alone and take care of customers. There is a ton of work here, Matt." Riley replied checking off a few more items on a list before him on the counter. Then he added, "I need for you to start weeding through this pile of computer parts, determine what is still of value and what isn't and sort them accordingly. Discard the rest."

"Sure, boss, whatever." Matt left his boss to finish his inventory and entered the back room, which was a graveyard of used computer parts in complete disarray. He rolled up his

sleeves, put in his ear buds, cranked up the volume on his MP3 and began to sort through the first pile.

An hour later, Alan Riley called Matt from the back room.

"What is it, Boss?" Matt asked.

"I just had a call for an in-home service. Some guy needs to upgrade his hard drive. I need you to grab the new hard drive that we got yesterday and take my truck to the Ramada Inn. He's in room three O four. Charge him the usual" He dug into his pocket, withdrew his keys and tossed them to Matt.

Matt grabbed the bag with any tools he may need and took a new drive from one of the boxes already inventoried. "See you later," he called as he hurried out the door. Riley never looked up from his work.

In their small town, the Ramada Inn was the premiere hotel. The owner had recently renovated most of the interior and had the exterior repainted. Matt took the elevator to the third floor and knocked on the door marked 304 on a brass-plated plaque.

A tall young man opened the door.

"You must be the computer guy," he said. "Wait here. I'll let him know you arrived."

Matt entered the comfortable suite and sat down. Moments later he was led into the other room. His heart skipped a beat when he saw Dr. Sloan sitting in a chair looking up at him. Matt

couldn't believe that he could talk to Dr. Sloan in person, one on one.

"You are good at fixing computers? It needs a new hard drive". Dr. Sloan's halting voice echoed in the room.

"I certainly am. The boss said you needed an upgrade. I can't tell you how honored I am to have this opportunity to meet you in person. I was at the lecture today and heard you speak."

Matt rattled on as he began to set out the tools in a neat, orderly fashion, much the way a surgeon does before an operation.

Dr. Sloan chuckled in a fit of coughing. "Your boss said you were the best."

Matt nodded. "I certainly have a lot of experience. I know how important this upgrade is to you. Rest assured that I will do an excellent job. I don't expect it to take up too much of your time. My name is Matt, by the way."

The secretary took the computer off the walker and handed it to Matt who sat on the floor in front of him and began to work on the unit with an ease that spoke to the fact that the boy knew what he was doing.

Matt stayed focused as he removed the old drive, copied it to the new one, put the new drive into the computer and began to run diagnostics. "It's fixed now. Everything from the old drive

is now on the new drive. This larger unit will allow you to run programs at nearly twice the speed, too."

"That is great!" The secretary answered.

"There, Sir!" Matt said handing the computer back, "all done."

The secretary reattaching the computer to the walker and said, "Wait. Let's see if everything works."

Matt gave the bill to the secretary as Dr. Sloan played with the computer. Then he looked at Matt pleasingly and nodded at the secretary.

As Matt turned to thank the doctor, the phone rang. Dr. Sloan immediately pressed the speakerphone button and got into a technical conversation. He motioned Matt goodbye as the secretary handed him a check.

Matt looked at the check and left the room while Dr. Sloan was still on the phone. "Thanks," he said to the secretary.

"Would you tell him that it really was a pleasure to meet him in person for me?" He walked out the door as the secretary held it open for him.

"Sure, kid."

Riley took the check from Matt and closed up the store. Then he took Matt home.

"You know, boss, our customer was none other than that physicist I told you about today. He is much different in person.

Riley glanced at him. "I think all those guys with high IQ's are pretty strange."

Matt smiled and looked out the window.

Dr. Sloan caught an early flight to Frankfurt, Germany for a math symposium. As soon as he got into his seat, he fell asleep. All the travel and meetings were taking a toll on him but he seemed to enjoy every minute of being in the public's eye. Three days had passed before Dr. Sloan realized that the technician, who had upgraded his computer, had inadvertently walked away with the old hard drive. A cold shiver went down Dr. Sloan's spine. The old hard drive contained numerous confidential documents, not meant for anyone to see. However, he was still in Germany. He immediately ordered his secretary to call the computer store and ask them to put the old hard drive in a safe place.

Mr. Riley assured the secretary that the drive would be found and kept in a safe place until the return of the professor from his trip. But the secretary was adamant. He scolded Mr. Riley for an unprofessional job for not remembering to return the hard drive at the end of the upgrade.

"Go and look for the drive right now and tell me that you have located it and it is in your possession. That drive has all the hard work that Dr. Sloan has done over the years. We must get it back as soon as possible".

"I am so sorry about the oversight". Mr. Riley apologized. "We have been in business for over 10 years and I can say with confidence that we never had a customer that walked out of our store unsatisfied. I will immediately take care of this matter. Let me FedEx the drive to you. It could be few days before you'll get it due to possible delay with customs."

"I want you to first go and find the drive. I'll call you back in ten minutes". He said as he hung up.

Alan searched his store for the old drive, unsuccessfully. Frustrated, he called Matt on his cell phone, as it was his day off. The phone rang five times before Matt answered it.

"Matt, thank goodness you're at home. Look, I got a call earlier from Doctor Sloan's secretary.

He says that you walked away with the old drive after you completed the upgrade a few days ago. He was upset and he wants his old hard drive back. Where did you put it?"

He heard the heavy sigh on the other end.

"Mister Riley, I put it on top of the old pile of hard drives. It must be there. I remember well. It was a Western Digital Hard

Drive. It's probably laying there with the old drives on the bottom shelf" Matt sounded exasperated.

"I'm sorry, Matt. But I need you to stay on the phone while I look for it." Riley went to the back room and began sorting through the heap of old hard drives.

Matt remained on the phone until his boss found a drive that had the same model number and specifications as the drive he removed from Dr. Sloan's computer. Matt shouted, "That's the one."

As soon as Mr. Riley hung up the phone after talking with Matt, the phone rang again. It was Dr. Sloan's secretary. "What's with your phone? It was busy for the last five minutes. Did you find the drive?"

"Yes, Sir. I found it. I am wrapping it in an anti-static package as we speak." Assured Mr. Riley.

"Sorry Mr. Riley that I got edgy" The secretary added quietly. "That drive is extremely important to Dr. Sloan. Please listen carefully. Do not FedEx the drive to me. Keep it in a secure place. I just booked two tickets on a flight home. We're leaving in a few hours. I'll come and pick up the drive myself."

Mr. Riley cleaned the drive and carefully packaged it before placing it in a secure location.

Early, the next morning, Dr. Sloan, along with his secretary, sat in their car outside the store waiting for the store to

open. As soon as Mr. Riley arrived and turned the key into the front door lock to open, the secretary and Dr. Sloan followed. Mr. Riley apologized again and took the drive out from under the front counter and handed it to the secretary. Dr. Sloan's secretary carefully inspected the hard drive and asked, "Are you certain that is the drive you removed from the computer?"

"We are certain that this is your drive. It's the right model number and Matt, who took out your drive, verified its authenticity."

The secretary asked. "Can you plug this hard drive into another computer and boot it up? I want to make sure it is the right drive."

"I tried to boot up this one but it won't boot. It could be that I was using a newer hard drive controller. It is supposed to be backward compatible with the old controller but sometimes things don't work as seamlessly. I'll try to find an old compatible controller and re-check it this afternoon. You could stop by around five."

"And what if it still does not boot up?" Dr. Sloan asked sarcastically.

"Well, in that case sir, I may have to send the drive to an outside company to repair or attempt to recover the data. In either case, you are looking at least two weeks time.

"No. I don't want it to be sent to an outside company. It would take too long." The secretary murmured as he looked at Dr. Sloan for approval. "I'll just have to take your word for it for now. Okay go ahead and carefully wrap this drive. When I have time, I'll have it checked elsewhere."

"As you wish, sir." Mr. Riley said as he repacked the drive and handed it back to the secretary.

Without saying a word, he took the drive and they both walked out the door. It seemed that they were not happy with the outcome.

Chapter 8

The Thinkulator

Detective Andrew James turned his car down Elm Street. How could the security company have hired someone else? I was perfect for the job. The company claimed they informed him of the interview date by email. But where was that email? James glanced in the passenger side at his laptop and shouted, "Piece of junk!" The computer had been acting funny for the past two weeks. Little warning windows kept popping up, kicking him off the Internet. His files and emails were getting deleted. Perhaps some kind of virus had gotten into it and that was the reason his computer had become annoyingly slow. As he sat at the traffic signal, James noticed a computer repair shop just ahead on the right. It would be nice if he could just have his computer checked, but wonder how much it would cost? Well, let's find out, he thought. The light changed and he found a parking spot on the street across from Riley's Computer Service. Holding his laptop under his arm he crossed the street.

The bell hanging above the door chimed as he entered. A man appeared from the back room and asked, "May I help you?" James noticed his name tag. He was the owner, Riley. James looked

around the store, placing his computer on the counter. "Can you guys check for virus on my computer?"

"We're the experts at that," Riley replied. "Why do you suspect it has a virus?"

"Well, it has gotten a lot slower lately and sometimes it behaves strangely." James tapped the top of the machine and frowned.

"You could be right. I can give it a thorough check, if you want. However, the fee for the work is one hundred five dollars, which includes getting all the bugs out."

"I hate to put that kind of money in an old computer. Can't you give me a break on that?"

Riley smiled, "Let me take a look." He took a screwdriver and opened the case. "This computer is pretty old. If I were to diagnose it now, I would guess that the drive is nearly done. Let me tell you what. For another twenty I could install a good used drive that would have twice the speed and capacity. What would you like me to do?"

James scowled. "So now we are at one hundred and twenty five? Let's cut to the chase. How much would you charge me just to replace my old drive, with one of those you just mentioned? I'll have my nephew transfer all the files for me."

"Okay, I'll install a used drive as is for forty bucks. You'll see it boot up. However, there is no warranty."

Reformatting takes time. Your nephew will have to erase all the previous files and load your new ones."

"That's more like it," James answered satisfactorily.

Riley shouted for Matt to bring a specific used drive with model number from the backroom. Matt brought the drive and installed it right in front of him in a matter of a few minutes. He then carefully wrapped the old drive and handed it back to James.

James pulled out two \$20 bills out of his wallet, handed it to Riley, picked up both his laptop and his own hard drive and then hurried out the door. "Keep the change," he yelled back.

James drove a few blocks to a little diner on the side of the road. His stomach grumbled loudly, reminding him that he hadn't eaten his lunch yet. Parking near the entrance, he got out with his computer and entered the diner taking a booth near the back. A handful of people occupied the diner. A waitress stopped at his booth.

"What'll you have?" she asked.

"I'll have coffee, black. Is there a place for me to plug in my computer?" he asked.

"Yeah, you can plug it there". She motioned at a receptacle on the wall that was under the table.

"Thanks" replied James as he began to go under the table to plug in the charger.

Moments later the waitress returned with his coffee.

"Is the computer working now?" She asked.

"Yeah, thanks. I just had it repaired. I want to make sure it works while I'm still in the neighborhood. Would you bring me a turkey sandwich on rye with mustard?

"Sure thing. Do you want mayo on it?"

"No mayo," he replied without looking at the waitress. All his attention was on the working condition of the laptop as it finished booting up.

While waiting for his sandwich, James began aimlessly clicking on some of the files on the used hard drive's main directory. It appeared that it contained all the usual files that he was familiar with that ran on his computer many times before. Then he noticed Norton Antivirus icon on the desktop. He immediately started running the program. He looked for the waitress. She was waiting on another couple. He looked back at the computer; the antivirus program was taking too long to scan a folder labeled "Dleifrag". That file must be big, he muttered. Let's see what's inside the folder. He searched for the folder and clicked on it. The folder contained three other folders labeled YouTube Videos, Video Dairies and Notes. James feeling curious clicked on the folder. It opened into a series of other files, neatly labeled, 'YouTube Video1,' 'YouTube Video2,' and so on.

"What could be in those video files?" James wondered aloud. "Let's find out." He popped his knuckles and glided the mouse to the first one, clicking it open. The computer whirred as a video filled the screen. An elderly man appeared in the video and started talking but James could not hear what he was saying. Looking around on the keyboard and task bar on the computer, he located the sound icon and clicked the mute off. James could swear he knew this guy. "Have I seen him before somewhere?" Curious, he began watching the video. The man in the video introduced himself as Dr. Louis Garfield. "The name sounds familiar. Could this be the same Dr. Garfield who was assaulted and left for in a sensational case a few years back?" He muttered. James restarted the video, watching it from the beginning as Dr. Garfield announced:

"Dear Citizens of the World. Greetings to you all! I am Dr. Louis Garfield, a retired professor of Computer Science and Mathematics at the University of California at Berkeley and a Neurosurgeon at the Stanford University Medical Center. This video will introduce you to my incredible invention I affectionately call 'The Thinkulator.' This video is one in a series of seven videos in which I will give an introduction and later technical details of my invention for laymen to understand. This invention is destined to touch almost every life on Earth.

Over the centuries, the world has seen some incredibly competent geniuses that lived and enriched our lives through their remarkable inventions, wonderful original ideas and valuable contributions to our society.

Sadly, their lives are never long enough. It is frustrating that by the time a rare person of such high intellect completes his or her formal education and becomes an expert in his field, he begins to decline, dying within a few decades, taking with him all his knowledge, talents, reasoning skills, and unique insights.

"Suppose we could somehow keep these geniuses from withering away. Now, suppose we took our state-of-the-art tools like our super computers, the space telescope, the electron microscopes, and our vast database of accumulated knowledge in every field and made it available to the geniuses of the past to use as they wish. Wouldn't their newer discoveries and insights benefit humanity? Wouldn't it be awesome if we could forever benefit from the use of the collective brainpowers of incredibly gifted intellectuals such as Galileo, Euler, Newton, Einstein and others to solve such vexing problems as cancer and global warming and help discover new wonders?

What if all these past geniuses could co-exist in one timeframe to confer and network with each other? What if we could have their insight, intuition, life experiences, and sense

of humor, all at our disposal? Wouldn't it change the world for the better?

Imagine how much more culturally rich this world would be if the best authors of yesteryear kept writing, comedians kept performing and legendary filmmakers continued directing new films. What if the best songwriters continued to write beautiful new songs and musicians such as Beethoven kept writing their wondrous new symphonies forever. Imagine if Nobel Prize winning experts in every field could advise our new generations with their incredible powers of intellect and persuasion to help train the coming generations, forever!

Unfortunately, for some of the geniuses of the past, it is too late. They are lost forever. But, my dear fellows, I have invented a process that can immortalize all future geniuses forever. My invention will give access to the minds of any genius in the form of a portable personal device that can be made available to every man, woman and child in this world. They can use that device to obtain expert opinion and advice from these geniuses live! Imagine if your child needed help with homework. Wouldn't it be incredibly helpful if the great mathematician, Doctor Einstein could personally tutor him or her? Suppose a Nobel Prize winning medical researcher could be available twenty-four seven, giving expert advice to a new doctor as he needed help in treating a patient? Not just his

writings, in the form of a book, as is done today, but his actual live thoughts, his actual advice under present circumstances, his expert opinion starting at the top of our present-day knowledge database. Before I continue this explanation further, let me first explain some background information.

I joined Princeton University to work on my medical degree in neurosurgery a few years after the death of Doctor Einstein. I was a young man fascinated that Doctor Einstein lived and worked here on that campus. I could feel his presence as I walked along the same sidewalks where he had taken steps before. It was the best time of my life and I savored every moment there in his virtual shadow. A rumor was going around the campus that upon Doctor Einstein's death, his brain was removed from his skull, preserved for future generations to study and learn from. Since I was majoring in the anatomy and functionality of the brain, I was naturally curious. Through an amazing coincidence, I found out the rumor was indeed true. Within seven hours of his death, surgeons removed Doctor Einstein's brain and preserved it in formaldehyde. This act was without prior authorization from Doctor Einstein or his relatives and so it remained a secret. I discovered where the brain was stored and it saddened me greatly when I found out that it was kept in an ordinary mason jar in a

dark basement. No one used it to study its structure or to see how his brain differed from the brain of an ordinary person.

I decided to take custody of his brain with the sole purpose to study it, to unlock the secrets therein for the betterment of humanity. At the completion of my study, almost 20 years later, I returned Doctor Einstein's brain where I had found it.

With the time I spent studying and analyzing Doctor Einstein's brain, I was very fortunate to have also discovered a new method of analysis that sped up the process of mapping the human brain a billion times faster than the present system. This allowed me to map Doctor Einstein's entire brain, including every neuron and every one of its synaptic connections in just over 20 years. This was a herculean effort since each cubic millimeter of the just the cerebral cortex alone, contains over a billion connections between neurons.

Over the next twenty years, I programmed my computer with an algorithm that took into consideration every single neuron and every interconnection between every other neuron and made it into a 3-D model. From that, I successfully created a mathematical model that I translated into a computer program. The computer program represents an exact replica of Doctor Einstein's brain. When you run that program, you virtually make Doctor Einstein come back to life. His thought processes, his

emotions, his feelings, his insight, his intelligence, his sense of humor, and his vulnerabilities, everything comes alive. When you ask this computer program a question, the question goes through Einstein's brain and the answer comes from his brain as if he was sitting directly across from you, answering it in person. Not only that, this computer program allowed me to add modules, or subroutines, to the main program to bring it up-to-date with the latest developments and state of the art knowledge that exists today. It is as if Doctor Einstein had access to today's knowledge base. Just as now, we carry small hand-held devices containing entire encyclopedias or multiple languages, we can have portable electronic 'Thinkulators' the size of pocket calculators that contain copies of my program, giving every one direct access to Einstein's brain and make them as readily available as digital wristwatches and cell phones are today. As my techniques are duplicated and joined with geniuses from every field from now until eternity, how valuable will that contribution be to the society! Imagine multiple brains, in mathematics, psychology, medicine and arts, available to all of us. We could wirelessly network these brains so Einstein could consult with Carl Gauss, let's say. What kind of solutions will they provide for us? The use of this combined brainpower to solve problems will truly revolutionize the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen: From this day forward, every genius in every field will live forever, contributing to society their expert opinions for thousands of years after their deaths.

Indeed, even forever!

In the next six videos, I will explain the technical details regarding my invention."

Detective James sat there in stunned silence as the video ended. For the first time he understood the true significance of Dr. Garfield's invention and its implications to all of humanity. He was deeply saddened by Dr. Garfield's misfortune and his body shook from rage towards his attacker. He had a renewed determination to go after the culprit and help locate his invention for the betterment of the World. Immediately, he did a search on the Internet and found the main suspect was David Fram who had gone into hiding and had never been apprehended. Det. James went back to the folder with the weird name. He thought for a moment and then it dawned on him. Dleifrag was Garfield written backwards! This must be the personal folder of Dr. Garfield. He clicked on the other videos in the series and found them to be full of technical jargon and thus boring. Then he clicked on the folder labeled 'Video Diary.' He opened the folder and found a bunch of other video files. One of which was made on the day of Dr. Garfield's attack. He clicked on the icon and every muscle in his body

tensed as he realized this video file was different. In this video, Dr. Garfield was getting dressed to go somewhere, moving in and out of the tiny built-in camera's eye as if he did not realize it was still recording. Just before he left his room, he typed something into the computer and left, forgetting to turn the computer off. The computer screen showed the empty room. The timer indicated more film recorded, so he fast-forwarded it to the point where he noticed someone else enter the room, someone that was not Dr. Garfield.

James sat forward in his chair as the video revealed the intruder as he made a dash for the computer, reading everything on the screen. It was obvious he did not know the camera was on since his face was very clear. Several minutes passed and the intruder picked up the laptop, the camera catching angles of the ceiling then placed back on a level surface where it captured an angry looking Dr. Garfield standing in the background. The two men began to argue. The intruder went for Garfield, narrowly missing him, followed by some heated exchange. Finally, the intruder grabbed the older man into a choke hold and after struggling the professor's body went limp. There was more dead space and then the intruder reappeared, his clothing rumpled, his hair messed up as he went straight for the computer. The picture tilted again then went black.

Detective James felt completely overwhelmed. It took a few moments for the shock to wear off. This was a monumental break in the case. It meant the cold case had received life. It was obvious that the intruder was David Fram. Questions started whirling in his head. Who was the previous owner of the hard drive? How did these videos get into this old used drive? How did the drive ended up at Riley's computer store? And where was David Fram now?

James looked at his watch and realized that he had spent over two hours at the diner. His turkey sandwich still sat there untouched. He grabbed the sandwich, left the money on the table and rushed back to Riley's computer store.

Chapter 9

The Hard Drive

James walked back into the computer store and saw Mr. Riley sitting behind a computer.

"I was at your store earlier and you sold me a used drive." He said.

"Yes, I remember very well. Is there a problem with the drive?" Mr. Riley asked.

"No. No problem. I just have a few questions." James asked.

"How can I help you? Mr. Riley looked perplexed.

James introduced himself, "I'm Andrew James, a retired detective. I found some incriminating evidence regarding an assault that happened a few years back on the used hard drive that I purchased from you. Can you look up and tell me who the previous owner of the drive was?"

"I'm sorry, detective. We do not keep a log on any salvaged drives." Mr. Riley answered apologetically.

"Hmmm. Can you tell me approximately when this drive was removed from the computer." Insisted James.

"Let's see. I did my last inventory on July 1. After inventory, I moved the old drives on a different shelf. The

drive I sold you was not inventoried yet so it could not be more than 60 days old." Mr. Riley clarified.

"Excellent. Can you provide me a log of all the repair calls that were made during the last 60 days that required a hard drive exchange?" James asked.

"Sure can. If you wait, I can make a list of clients in 15 minutes." Mr. Riley replied.

"I'll wait. I need to make an important phone call. I'll be just outside the store. Come and get me immediately when the list is done."

"No problem, detective."

James stepped out of the store and called the detective who was handling Dr. Garfield's brutal attack case. He told the detective that he had some new information but first wanted to talk to Kurt, Dr. Garfield's son. The detective reluctantly gave him Kurt's phone number. He immediately called Kurt to tell him about what he had discovered. Kurt was delighted to hear about the big break in the case. He did not want the case to go cold again. He was impressed with James and he offered to hire him as a private investigator. Kurt also requested that James share his findings with the FBI.

"How is Dr. Garfield doing? I read that he was still in coma." asked James.

"His condition is stable. Last week was his 78th birthday. I felt that he knew."

"I am so sorry for your dad's condition. The whole nation is praying for his recovery."

"Thanks, detective."

"I just need to ask you some questions." James asked. "Did you know the extent of your father's invention?"

"Well. I knew that it was related to modeling a human brain. I also knew that he was working on a computer program that was going to mimic a human brain."

"So can we assume that David Fram, the alleged attacker, could have benefited from your father's invention while on the run?"

"I'd think that's possible. My dad had protected his invention with a rock-solid security password, that's virtually unbreakable. But he kept that password in his wallet. At the time of his murder his wallet went missing too." Kurt replied.

"Hmmm. Thanks for the info. I must go now. I'll call you as soon as I find something new."

"Thank you, detective. Great work!"

James re-entered the store and watched Mr. Riley making a list by checking the records from the computer.

"Almost ready.... Here are the clients that we serviced for an upgrade since the inventory"

"Great!" said James as he took the list from Mr. Riley. The list contained 11 names.

"Anything occurred out of ordinary that you remember about any of these clients? Anything!"

"Well. One customer tried to run away with his laptop without paying, but Matt got him."

"Anything else?" Think, even if it seems a minor detail?"

"Some of these were in-house service calls. Matt might know more as he made those upgrades." Mr. Riley answered.

"Hey, wait a minute. One customer requested house call and was upset about us not returning his old drive back. He actually came back from his overseas trip to pick up his old drive. He was certainly upset."

"That sounds interesting. Is that client on the list?"

"Yep! That's third from the top. Dr. Alfred Sloan.

"You mean the brilliant scientist?"

"Yes. That's the one."

"He couldn't be. You said that he came and picked up his old drive". Right?"

"Yes. That's right."

"So Matt is your employee who makes all of your house calls? Did he upgrade Dr. Sloan's computer also?"

"Yes, he did."

"I need to talk to Matt." Is he in?"

"No. He just left. But he'll be here tomorrow at 9"
I'll stop by tomorrow to see him. Please don't mention anything to him yet.

Detective James stopped by at a fast food place and ordered a coffee. He looked at his watch. It was 9:25 a.m. He got up and headed to his car.

As James entered the computer store, he found Mr. Riley alone at the front counter.

"Good Morning Detective"

"Good Morning. Is Matt in?"

"Yes. I'll go get him right now."

Within a minute Matt comes out with Mr. Riley.

"I am detective James. I need to have a chat with you. Did you eat breakfast yet?"

"I usually don't eat breakfast. I am always running late as is." Matt answered.

"Let's go and grab a bite."

The diner was buzzing with customers. However they were able to find a place in the back and ordered breakfast.

"Mr. Riley told me that you are the computer expert that makes house calls?"

"That's right. I'm the only one who usually makes house calls. Could I ask you something detective?"

"Go ahead"

"Why are you asking these questions? I mean did I do something wrong?"

"No. I am working on a case and some evidence was found on the old drive that I purchased at your store. So tell me kid, in the last two months Mr. Riley said that you made six house calls. Do you remember anything unusual about any call?"

Well. One customer was very upset that I picked up his used drive and brought it to the store. He came back all the way from Germany to personally pick up his old drive. That kind of stuck in my mind."

"You mean, Dr. Sloan?

"Yes. But how do you know his name?"

"I have a list of all customers. Didn't he pick up his old drive?"

"Well. My boss is sure that Dr. Sloan picked up his drive. But I am not so sure. I believe there is this possibility that what Dr. Sloan thought was his old drive was not really his."

"Why do you feel that way?" Detective James asked curiously.

"Because I remember that it was my day off when my boss called me. I was watching a football game with my friends. He kept me on the phone as he looked for Dr. Sloan's used drive. Frankly, I didn't remember where I put it. But I was not the one

who was going to tell him that. He would probably ask me to come over and search for the drive. As I could sense frustration in Mr. Riley's voice so the moment he gave me the model number of a drive that matched, I shouted, 'That's it' even when I was not sure."

Hmmm. Let me ask you this. The drive you sold me and the drive that came out of Dr. Sloan's computer were the same type?

"I don't know but you can call Mr. Riley. He would know."

"Let me call him right now." James right away called the computer store.

"Let me check in my computer. Yes. They were identical. They both were the same make and model number as the drive you bought." Mr. Riley said as he looked on his computer screen.

After hanging up the phone, James got back to asking Matt questions. "Yeah the drives were the same. So are you implying that there is a remote possibility that the drive I bought could have been the drive that was previously in Dr. Sloan's computer?"

"I hope I don't mislead you, but I would say that there is a slight chance."

"Well, that gives me some space to work on. Let me run a profile on Dr. Sloan. Okay, kid. You provided some good help. Thanks."

He then drove Matt back to the store.

Chapter 10

A Strong Possibility

James was in the waiting room at the local FBI office. He was there to meet Special Agents Rick and Jose. After several minutes, they called him in.

"Hey come on in. How was the traffic on the freeways?" Agent Rick asked.

"As usual. I had no problem. I have been employed as a Private Investigator by the family of Dr. Garfield, the prominent scientist that was brutally attacked a while back. The alleged attacker, David Fram, is on your wanted list for many years now. I have discovered, quiet by chance, what I believe to be the big break in the case in the form of two short video clips. These clips provide details about his invention and also show the last few minutes of attack on Dr. Garfield's life. These are right here on my laptop." James patted the black computer sleeve under his arm.

"Hey, let's watch." Detective Rick suggested. Everyone watched the video in horror as David attacks Dr. Garfield and leaves him for dead. "This is an incredible find!" Detective Rick ran a shaky hand through his thinning hair.

"Just mindboggling! I can hardly believe our luck" Detective Jose stood up.

"Now we all know about the invention as Dr. Garfield's son Kurt, described to the media," said Detective James as he clicked on the next icon. "But you got to see the next video to truly understand its significance."

Everybody got immersed watching the video. As it ended, all three looked at each other and shook their head.

"What a sad attack on a brilliant man" commented Detective Rick. "What a revolutionary invention!" added Detective Jose. "Listen. We need to check this clip for authenticity. I want you to fill out this form and turn the drive over to FBI for evidence and analysis." Jose handed a form in triplicate to James.

James hesitated before handing the laptop over. "I have one more request. Could you run a preliminary profile on Dr. Alfred Sloan for me." He asked.

"You mean Dr. Sloan, the scientist?" Agent Rick sounded surprised.

"That would be him." James answered. "The evidence I came across compels me to clarify some points with him in person. I plan on paying a visit to him as he arrives tomorrow morning for a conference here. Yesterday, I ran a search on the Internet on him and I can't seem to find anything that can show his past. I want to know what high school he graduated from, where he lived

for the past 20 years, what places he worked before his chance discovery. I am coming up against a dead end again and again. Maybe you guys can find more. After all your resources are unlimited and tools state-of-the art."

"David Fram has been named the primary suspect as was evident on the video we just watched. So, how does Doctor Sloan figure into this?" Detective Rick grimaced.

"It is mostly a hunch, right now. All I want to do is to eliminate Dr. Sloan from any link to Doctor Garfield's murder. It seems he may, unwittingly be, in possession of Dr. Garfield's stolen computer."

Officer Jose, "Let me run the profile. I'll be right back."

Ten minutes later...

"Here's the info that you requested. We really don't have much on this guy" Said Detective Jose.

"Well, there is something of value here, but not much," James said as he skimmed the report. "Dr. Sloan claimed that he had lived in the city of Bell and graduated from Maywood Academy High School in Maywood, California. This was on his form for the honorary doctorate degree from MIT, which is exactly the type of information I was looking for."

"Wait here. Let me check that out. I'll call the school to verify." Detective Jose volunteered.

Twenty minutes later...

Detective Jose returned with a frown on his face as he handed the report to James. "Nothing there either. The school says they have no record of anyone named Alfred Sloan."

"What's the chance that David Fram may be masquerading as Dr. Sloan?" Detective Rick asked incredulously.

"Precisely the hunch I have." Detective James looked at both of them. "Don't you find it rather odd that David Fram disappears with Dr. Garfield's computer and a few years later, with no traceable background, Dr. Sloan appears from nowhere and his computer just happens to have the victim's hard drive or at least a copy of victim's hard drive?"

"Pull their pictures side by side, I want to see." asked Detective Jose.

All three stared at the large screen with both pictures side by side.

"There is some resemblance, could be a coincidence. I mean, how could he have become a genius overnight? He was an average PhD candidate and according to the interviews conducted with the faculty at the time of the shooting, certainly nowhere near a genius," Rick remarked and then continued; "Maybe he was using Dr. Garfield's invention, 'The Thinkulator' that was on the laptop."

"That's a strong possibility. According to his son

Kurt the invention was protected by a sophisticated password that was almost unbreakable. But Dr. Garfield kept that password in his wallet..." James said.

"... And the wallet went missing at the time of the attack," Detective Jose interrupted excitedly.

"That's an interesting theory." Observed Detective Rick. "I would say that now we are getting somewhere. Let me take all this information to my supervisor. Please wait in the hallway."

Forty minutes later.

"We ran the pictures of both David Fram and Dr. Alfred Sloan with our face recognition experts and according to their preliminary report there is a ninety eight point four percent chance that both are the same person. It looks like David Fram had some plastic surgery done to evade detection. My supervisor has Okayed the pickup. We are ready to interrogate."

Chapter 11

Showman to the End

The shrill ring of his cell phone startled him awake. His eyes went to the alarm clock. 6:01AM. He sat on the side of the bed and answered the phone.

"Detective James, here," he said rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

"This is Special Agent Rick from the FBI. I wanted to give you a heads up. Sloan arrived last night. Come to the Hilton on 5th street. He is cornered inside his room on the 14th floor. The action is about to begin."

"Wouldn't miss it," James said and jumped out of bed.

James raced through the town to get to the hotel. He reached the top of the ramp that led to the parking garage now crowded with at least ten law enforcement vehicles. James put the car in park and hurried into the entry from the garage into the hotel.

James walked over to the nearest uniformed officer. He showed his I.D. then put it away while he asked his question. "I came in on the tail end of this storm. What's happening? Where's Fram?"

"FBI went to his room to question him this morning but he refused to open the door. Right now he and his secretary are holed up in room fourteen ten B at the other end of the hallway. Everyone is under orders to stand down until this floor and the two below have been completely evacuated. FBI has already secured the ground floor."

James felt a warm and fuzzy feeling all over as he smiled and said, "Well, that's just about the best news I've heard all day. I believe I shall enjoy the sunshine until the rest of this drama is played out."

A crowd of people were already gathered and corralled behind a line of police and official vehicles. James decided to watch the rest of the event unfold as he entered the crowd of bystanders.

David Fram knew this day would come, eventually, but he did not feel the panic he thought would accompany it. He went to the window and looked out. Quite a crowd had turned out for his final performance. He vowed not to disappoint them.

"What are we going to do, sir?" Allen asked. The young man had become Fram's assistant six years ago after David helped him through the sickness of drug withdrawals.

David turned to him. "WE are not going to do anything. I want you to walk out the door and give yourself up. I have

prepared for this eventuality and you will not be going to prison, I promise."

"What about you? I don't want to just leave you here."

David sighed. He was truly tired of the game, of running, of being someone he wasn't. "Don't worry about me. I knew this day would come. I planned for it. Besides, this place is completely surrounded. I won't be walking out of here. But, you have a chance and it's time for you to go." He turned his back to the window.

After a short while, David heard the door open and close softly. He crossed the room and locked it, then returned to the window. It wouldn't be long now. He watched as two officers placed Allen in the back of a squad car. David went to his suitcase and pulled out his 44 magnum, shooting out the thick window. Placing the empty gun on the bed, he picked up the computer and, cradling it against his body, stepped out onto the narrow ledge.

James could feel the tension in the people around him. Then, gunfire came from somewhere near the top of the hotel. Shouts erupted as the crowd drew closer, many of them pointing up. James looked up to see what the people were excited about. Fram stood on the narrow ledge outside the window, something held tight against him.

"Damn," he muttered. Fram would never give up.

As much as James did not want to see this end so gruesomely, he could not make himself look away. More shouts of dismay rose when Fram tossed whatever he had been holding away. As it fell, people could see that it was a laptop computer. It hit the concrete below with such a force that it shattered into little pieces. Fortunately, no one was hit.

Just as the Police chief pulled the bullhorn from his cruiser, the crowd went nuts. Screams rose into the air as Fram jumped from the ledge. It seemed to happen in slow motion as his body sped to the pavement below, landing with a horrible crunching noise as his head split upon contact.

James's stomach soured. Fram was the ultimate showman even to the bitter end. The crowd slowly wandered back to their lives. James went back into the hotel, taking the elevator to the fourteenth floor to retrieve his car.

"Detective James, wait up," It was the officer he had spoken to upon his entrance from the garage. James turned to see what he wanted. "Chief Morris wants you to come down to the station for a final briefing."

"Sure, why not?" James shrugged then, retrieved his car.

A month later...

While enjoying his retirement, James was at the poolside reading the newspaper when he noticed a news on the second page. The news read:

The FBI held a press conference today to issue an update on Dr. Luis Garfield's case. Dr. Garfield is still in coma and his condition is stable. There were still no new developments regarding Dr. Garfield's invention. According to the FBI spokesperson, Dr. Garfield's invention, "The Thinkulator", was found on the hard drive and turned over to the FBI by detective James. A backup of the hard drive has also been located online. The program is protected by a nearly unbreakable security code, which has baffled experts. The FBI has turned over copies of the program to top experts in the field, both here in the US and abroad. The FBI believes that David Fram may have had, in his possession, the security code that he stole from Dr. Garfield's wallet, and used the Thinkulator to establish himself as a world-class genius. However, since David Fram's dramatic suicide, the FBI has been unable to locate the security code in any of his possessions, despite a thorough search. In answer to a question by this newspaper reporter, the FBI spokesperson added with optimism that, eventually, the code would be cracked and Dr. Garfield's famed invention would be made available for the benefit of mankind just as he had envisioned.

The End