

MAGE
CATALYST

Christopher George

Catalyst

'kat(ə)list/

- A substance that increases the rate of chemical reaction without itself undergoing any permanent chemical change.
- A person or thing that precipitates an event.

PROLOGUE

I'm not sure when I became the villain of my story. But I'm now quite certain that this is exactly what I've become. It is no more clear to me as I stand atop a destroyed car park looking over my home. The smoke from still smouldering buildings billow off into the distance, almost writing my name into the skyline, but I do not care. It is no more than a grim signature of the suffering that I've caused to those around me. My name is Devon Wills and I am a mage.

I'm well aware of the stigma now attached to that title. However, to understand exactly what this title means, I will tell you my story. Perhaps you have seen us on the news; maybe you've even seen us in person if you've been unlucky enough. You know what we're capable of. We're not tired old men who smoke strange tobacco and brew up potions in kitchen pots. We're not haggard

women who ride around on broomsticks and cackle into the night. We're able to send lightning arcing from our fingertips and burn holes through solid metal with just the mere flick of our wrists. In short, we're dangerous – but you already knew that.

You know the word “mage” – it means wizard, sorcerer, magician or a variety of other terms for mystic, but do you know what it actually means to be a mage?

I didn't think so.

Let me educate you. When I use the term “mage”, I mean someone capable of feats of power so great that they don't know what's real anymore. There are no limits, no restrictions – no laws. There is nothing to stop us should we go bad, and as you already know we *do* go bad.

When I use the term “mage”, I mean someone so whacked out on sorcery that they hardly know what they're doing anymore. They don't care about anyone or anything other than the magic. They will do anything in pursuit of their powers. When I say mage I mean someone who is barely human anymore.

Where shall I begin my tale? I was, of course, born to two parents in the usual way and I grew up and went to school like any other normal child. I was not the product of a brutal tragedy, nor was I betrayed by my parents and cast into the river. I did not draw forth a sword from a stone. In fact my life was decidedly normal. My upbringing was not the stuff of legends and so, perhaps, it should not surprise me now to discover that I am the villain and not the hero of my story.

Despite my mundane upbringing I always knew that I was different from other children. I've always known it,

though I never knew how or why. Somehow I was different, not in years, but in manner. It wasn't until several days after my eighteenth birthday that I found out exactly why - I was a mage, and my life would never be the same.

Understand that I don't say these things to defend my actions, nor to extol what virtues I do possess. I did what I did simply because I had no choice and I will not try to justify my actions to you. It is not for you to judge me – that is for my peers to do and I no longer have peers amongst the likes of you and your kind.

CHAPTER ONE

My story began on a cold autumn morning in Melbourne, Australia. It was raining as I recall, which wasn't surprising as rain and cold winds were not unusual in any season except summer. Our summers could be uncharitably and aggressively hot. It was almost as if Melbourne was trying to drown you for nine months of the year and then spend the next three months drying you out.

This day wasn't unusual from the one before. It didn't start any differently from the rest of my life. It wasn't until much later that I realised how just different this day actually was – for it was the last day that I could say without a doubt that I was a simple man, just like everyone else.

I was at school sitting through another boring English class, gazing longingly out the window. A gym class

made its way across the oval. I envied them. It's not that I particularly wanted to join them – physical education didn't appeal to me – but anything was better than this class room.

"Devon, will you please pay attention?" snapped a sharp voice from across the room.

"The horror, the horror," I murmured, as my gaze returned to the slides on *A Heart of Darkness* projected on to the whiteboard. This was the seventh class we had endured on this novel so far.

"Very funny," our teacher, Mr Saunders, said gruffly. "Now, can you tell me what Kurtz means when he says that?"

"No, sir," I mumbled, annoyed at not having something more antagonistic to say. That wasn't like me – my form was definitely off today.

Mr Saunders ran his classes like a form of ritual detention and some of my class, myself included, played a game to see how far we could push him before he'd send us into the hall as punishment. It was immature, but seeing the shades of purple and red rise in his cheeks made it all the more worthwhile. It was a game I usually excelled at; however, today my wit had served me poorly.

Mr Saunders was your typical middle-aged school English teacher – balding, overweight, and short-tempered. He wore horn-rimmed glasses perched on the end of his nose and if he was particularly agitated he would remove them and clean them viciously with an old handkerchief in front of the class. He also wore business suits to class each day and spent as much time lecturing students on their bad habits as he did

teaching. He wasn't my favourite teacher and I was far from his star student. He seemed to take delight in calling on me in class when he was sure that I didn't know the answer or if it was obvious that I wasn't paying attention. He took himself so seriously that we'd taken to calling him "sir" as a subtle insult, but I don't think he ever picked up on the jibe.

"What young Devon missed here is fundamentally important," Mr Saunders droned on. "*A Heart of Darkness* is a prime example of framed narrative."

Mr Saunders began to pace up and down the length of the whiteboard, a sure indication that he was gearing up for a long rant.

"A framed narrative is – of course – a story-telling device in which the tale is related by the narrator. Can anyone tell me another such example?"

Before anyone could answer, he turned back to me. "Can anyone tell me why this makes *A Heart of Darkness* such a psychological masterpiece? Mr Wills, perhaps?"

"No, sir."

I wasn't even trying anymore. Mr Saunders smirked and continued his rant. He'd won today's round and he knew it.

The darkness within, the thin veneer over the man, blah blah blah. Mr Saunders had drilled on and on about it when we first started reading the novel. Now, I understand the book, of course, but back then I knew nothing. I hadn't seen how people react when they are removed from the shackles of authority. At school my entire world was dominated by teachers and parents in

authority, people I had to look up to, or at least listen to. We are taught in our childhood to respect and obey our governments, our police, our politicians – those in positions of power. It's all a sham though. What happens when we learn the horrible truth that they are just as dark and misguided as everyone else – that they're just hiding behind an enforced and ingrained system of societal control?

“...Man, what a drag.”

“What? Huh?” I mumbled, looking up. I realised that the class bell had sounded and my friend Garry was staring at me expectantly.

Garry and I had been friends since the start of the year, when we had been seated together in English class. I got along well with Garry, although he could be annoying at times. He could provoke an argument with pretty much anyone about any subject. He was one of the smaller kids in the class and I guess he felt he needed to make up for that by being overly confrontational. I tried to avoid topics with him that I knew would lead to an argument. This worked most of the time, but it wasn't easy.

“Saunders, he just goes on and on,” Garry moaned.

Our next class was on the far side of the school so I had plenty of time to hear Garry complain about Saunders. Normally I'd be participating in the Saunders-bashing but today, for some weird reason, I just couldn't find the enthusiasm.

“Are you going to your dad's this weekend?” Garry asked. He knew I always spent my weekends with my father and he also knew that I hated it. I gritted my teeth and nodded. I wasn't sure if he was just curious or

if he was trying to annoy me. Either way I didn't want to be talking about this any further.

"What's the matter with you? You sure are out of it today," Garry snapped.

"Didn't sleep well," I said. "Just drop it."

The rest of the morning turned out to be no better than English class. I just couldn't focus. My mind kept drifting off. Two classes rolled by and I can't say what those classes were, let alone what was taught. It wasn't until lunch time that I was able to make any kind of effort to be sociable.

"Hey, Devon, are you okay?"

A soft voice beside me brought me back to the present. I was seated at a long bench in the lunch hall, but I had no idea how I had gotten there. I glanced up to see Sarah Bennett placing her tray down next to mine. She was my best friend's girlfriend and we hung out a lot.

"I know the food's bad but you haven't even touched it," she added.

"I'm okay." I nodded. "I was just thinking."

I'd always liked Sarah. In truth I'd had a little bit of a crush on her but I had no intention of making a move on my best friend's girl.

"Deep thinker?" she jibed. "Who'da thought..."

She trailed off quickly and looked away. I thought I heard a slight gasp from her, but when I looked up she was quietly unwrapping her sausage roll. She seemed fine, but something was definitely wrong here – Sarah was never like this.

"What?"

“No... nothing... It’s nothing,” she mumbled, no longer looking directly at me.

“You and Tony okay?” I asked. Maybe she was fighting with her boyfriend.

“Yeah, we’re fine,” she replied, her eyes looking deeply into mine, her look questioning, probing as if she was examining me. I didn’t like it.

“Okay, out with it!”

“You looked a little funny before...” Sarah began tentatively. “Your eyes looked, I don’t know, dilated.” She peered into my eyes again. “It’s nothing. They’re fine now. I must have imagined it.”

“You imagine me often?” I said in a hope to lighten the mood. I enjoyed teasing Sarah, although it wasn’t often that I had the opportunity because Tony was always around.

“Oh, always - you’re the last thing I think of before I go to sleep, and the first thing I wake up to.” She rolled her eyes.

“Well, you’re only human,” I countered.

“Ouch!” I recoiled as her elbow caught me in the ribs.

You could only push Sarah so far before she retaliated. The elbow never really hurt me, it was usually just an indication that I’d gone too far.

“Hey guys!” Tony’s voice boomed. I smiled as Tony sat down across from us, kissing Sarah on the cheek. I’d known Tony since the first year of high school when our teacher had paired us together in a hope that we would encourage each other to do our homework. It hadn’t worked.

“How’s tricks?” he chirped, as he began unwrapping his food. He was unusually peppy for this early in the morning.

“The rabbit died,” I replied promptly.

“Rabbit?” his eyebrow raised slightly, looking at me as if I was crazy.

“The one in the top hat...” I trailed off, realising that I had sounded a little macabre. My jokes had a bad habit of doing that. I really needed to think more about how my jokes sounded outside the confines of my own head.

“Oh... You’re quite the magician then,” Tony said. “Dead rabbits in hats and you’ve probably got a whole deck of cards lodged in your underwear right now.”

I didn’t really have a suitable response. Tony always seemed to get in the last word.

“Hey, I wanted to talk to you,” Tony began. “You’re going to be at your dad’s this weekend, right?”

I gritted my teeth. Again with the stupid questions.

I nodded as Tony continued, “This wicked new band are playing in the city this weekend. We can crash at your dad’s – if that’s cool?”

Tony had a knack for finding really good yet mostly unheard of bands. He hadn’t steered me wrong yet. Going out sounded good, but I just couldn’t feel enthusiastic about it. That wasn’t going to stop Tony though. If I didn’t say yes, he’d just keep hassling me about it until I did.

“Probably be okay,” I said grudgingly. Tony wasn’t going to just let this go.

“Ooh, I’m coming too!” Sarah smiled. “It’s awesome that you’re old enough now to come out with us.”

I'd had my eighteenth birthday party last Saturday. I was the last of my friends to turn eighteen and Tony had brought a bottle of whisky to celebrate. It's customary for the birthday boy to get a little toasted; however, I'd pulled up fine. Gloriously drunk then no hangover, no headaches, nothing. I was untouchable!

I smiled back, remembering. "Yep, I can drink with the best of them. What about you, Tony?" I grinned evilly. Tony had had a little too much to drink and from what I'd heard, he was still violently puking the next morning.

Tony just shuddered. "Aah well. All is good now."

Sarah frowned. She was obviously still unimpressed with Tony's performance.

"There was nothing good about your Sunday morning," Sarah huffed.

I was feeling quite proud of my drinking accomplishments, especially given that Tony hadn't pulled up quite so well. It's strange the way we can only appreciate our own strengths through the opposite weakness in others.

"This band you mentioned? What are they like?" I asked as I began to eat my lunch.

I wasn't really listening to his response as I was more focused on the pie in front of me. It was awful, but I'd expected that – it was school food. What this pie needed was tomato sauce and lots of it. A problem as I didn't feel like getting up and waiting back in the queue for a measly few sachets of sauce. There was an unused packet of sauce on the other side of Sarah's tray, just out of reach.

Tony was still talking excitedly – this must have been some band. I hadn't seen him talk so animatedly about anything for quite some time.

"Uhuh... Sarah, have you finished with that tomato sauce?"

"Yeah, sure." Sarah nodded as her hands went to her tray and stopped. The sachet was gone.

"Uh, I must have dropped it," she mumbled, looking down on the ground.

I followed her gaze to the floor for the missing condiment.

"Oh, you already grabbed it. Sure you can have it." Sarah smiled and turned back to Tony's spiel, which was fortunate because it meant that she didn't see the look of confusion on my face.

The sauce sachet was just inches away from my fingers. How did it get there? I didn't reach for it; reaching for it would have meant standing up, and I didn't do that.

Yet, there it was, mere inches from my fingers. Weird.

"Anyways, mate," Tony drawled, bringing me back to the present. "I'd better go. I'll see you later." Both Tony and Sarah got up. I poured the sauce onto the remains of my pie and took a cautious bite. It was still a very bad pie.

"Don't feel too cocky about the lack of hangover!" Sarah called as they left. "I've heard that they can sneak up on you!"

I hadn't even felt dehydrated the next morning. I was pretty sure I was in the clear. But Sarah must have had prophetic vision or I had somehow offended the gods of poetic justice. During the next period I developed a

headache – it was a real head-splitter. It came on suddenly and without any warning. My temples felt like they were on fire and a pounding reverberated throughout my skull with stunning force. Sarah had joked that hangovers could sneak up on you, but three days later? This was crazy.

Thud. Thud. Thud.

Pound. Pound. Pound.

Thud. Thud. Thud.

Light became unbearable, the sound of chalk on the blackboard became even more painful, and the dull monotone of Mr Cromby's voice made me sick to my stomach as shivers shook my entire frame. Why was he even using the blackboard? There was a perfectly good whiteboard next to it but our Maths teacher's response to progress and modernity was obviously to quietly ignore them.

I'd had Mr Cromby for Maths for several years and I'd always managed to retain a cordial relationship with him despite my grades and complete ineptitude at maths. I urgently raised my hand. I needed to get out of there – quickly.

"Mr Cromby, I think I need to go get some water or something," I mumbled as I swayed to my feet, taking the liberty of getting up before I had permission.

"Yes, Devon, that's fine," I heard him call as I made my way to the door. I contemplated going to the school nurse, but thought that some water would be a good first start. Maybe it was nothing more than just dehydration or something like that. Then the walkway I was following blurred and I had to lurch to catch the

handrail. I quickly readdressed my decision to visit the school nurse but again chose not to – the bathroom was closer and there was the distinct possibility that I might now throw up.

I found that by closing my eyes, the pain subsided a little and so I clumsily made my way from the walkway into the toilet block at the end of the quadrangle without opening my eyes – an impressive effort that only resulted in my walking into things twice. Once inside the washroom, I staggered across to the wash basin and threw some water over my face. I gripped the edge of the basin as I let the water trickle slowly down my face. I breathed out as I prepared to open my eyes again – this was going to be unpleasant.

When I did open my eyes again I was immediately sucked into a world of hurt. My vision swam and I saw reflected sparkles dancing across vision. The effect might have been incredibly beautiful if not for the pounding in my head. I gasped as I looked down at my hands. A small particle of blue light was sliding up my arm. More appeared as I watched. They didn't appear to be following any sort of pattern. I pulled my shirt sleeve up to follow them as they moved further up towards my shoulder. I quickly undid the top three buttons on my shirt and pulled it open to see the particles lazily forming a rough circular pattern on my chest. I took several steps back to see the effect properly in the mirror.

There was nothing. The figure standing in the mirror looked completely normal. No sparkling lights. Amazed, I brought my hand up before my face – the particles were definitely there. They were rotating around my

wrist and forearm, slowly making their way back up to my chest. When I returned my gaze to the mirror there was nothing. No, wait – that wasn't quite right either. I moved forward to gaze at my reflection. Something was definitely wrong.

My eyes, my God, my eyes!

The pupil of each eye was a tiny dot almost lost in the sea of blue that was my iris. In fact, I could see small tendrils of light sweep outwards from my iris expanding over the whites of my eyes. It wasn't affecting my vision at all, but the effect gave me an otherworldly look. I could see the irises of my eyes pulsing slightly, flexing as I gazed at my reflected face. A face that should be familiar appeared alien and threatening now. My changed eyes altered the entire balance of my face, giving me a malevolent look. I shuddered as my irises finished their transition, completely consuming the white. Then suddenly, as if someone had simply flicked off a switch, all the pain in my head stopped.

I quickly threw some more water across my face, closing my eyes and hoping when I opened them again that they would have returned to normal and that this was some kind of visual disturbance brought on by a migraine. No such luck, when I opened my eyes and gazed into the mirror – the strange eyes were staring back at me.

What the hell was happening? This kind of thing just doesn't happen in the real world. There was no rational explanation for it. This had to be some kind of hallucination or a weird reaction from cafeteria food, and that's when I remembered Sarah's comment about my eyes being dilated. So she had seen it too. It wasn't

just a hallucination. That didn't make sense though, surely Sarah's reaction would have been stronger if she had seen glowing blue pulses of light travelling over my skin. Was it possible that she couldn't see the pulses, but only the strangeness of my eyes? This theory was certainly supported by that fact that I couldn't see the pulses in my reflection in the mirror. Was it possible that the change to my eyes was allowing me to see the particles on my body?

This idea didn't bring me much comfort. I was still seeing things that shouldn't be there. In all likelihood I was simply going crazy. But at least the unbearable pain had gone. I had to be grateful for that at least.

I threw some more water over my face and made my way back out into the quadrangle. I got about half way there before another strange feeling came over me. It was as if I was wearing a wet suit or a thin layer of PVC over my skin. I could kind of feel the blue lights on my skin moving across my flesh. It was an uncomfortable feeling. I made it to the row of benches outside the toilet block before I had to stop as my legs had become rubbery and difficult to control. I took a few deep breaths and steadied myself.

As annoying as this was, I much preferred this to the headache, as at least I could open my eyes now.

"Mr Wills, is there a problem?" A curt voice broke me out of my reverie. Crap, Saunders! I looked up to see him bearing down upon me with a determined expression upon his face. He'd obviously come out of one of the classrooms.

"No, sir... No problem," I replied, trying to avoid eye contact.

“Sitting there staring at your hands is not the best way to gain an education, young man.” He smiled smugly as if he’d just made the funniest joke.

“No sir, I’m feeling a little woozy,” I mumbled, keeping my eyes downcast lest he noticed my eyes.

“Why aren’t you in class?”

“I had to go the bathroom.”

“And yet you’ve been sitting there for at least five minutes, are you planning on spending the rest of the class sitting on this bench?”

“No sir,” I replied, still desperately trying not to stare straight at him.

“I don’t believe you, I think you were planning on skipping class.” Out of the corners of my new eyes I saw him smiling at me, his hands turning to lock around behind his back, his pose a classic 1950s old English schoolmaster. “Maybe even the rest of the day too.”

I didn’t respond as I was desperately trying to decide what to do, anything further said on my part would probably result in detention. I could almost feel his eyes penetrating into the top of my head in an obvious attempt to assert dominance. He was just waiting for me to say something so he could increase my days in detention. I remained silent.

“Look at me when I’m talking to you,” he barked.

I cringed as I tilted my head to look at him, awaiting the inevitable explosion as he noticed my crazy eyes.

“Two days of detention, Mr Wills.”

I didn’t say anything. Had he noticed my eyes? He wasn’t acting funny though – what the hell was going on?

“Have you nothing further to say for yourself?” he said.

“No sir,” I said, eyes cast back down, my mind working in circles. He must have seen my eyes. How could he have missed something like that?

“Then off to class with you,” he ordered, and he turned and headed back to his classroom.

I watched him go until it was safe to run back into the toilet block. I had to find out what was going on. I was relieved to see that my eyes had returned to normal when I checked back in the bathroom mirror.

What the hell was going on? I could still see the lines on my body that were now faintly pulsating across my arms. I made my way back to class desperately trying to avoid looking directly at my glowing skin. By the time I got back Mathematics had all but finished. Mr Cromby frowned as I sat down but didn't comment. Science class was next and it was not my favourite subject, but on the upside it was one of the few classes that I shared with Tony.

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“You what?” Tony growled. “Detention for two days? Well, that sucks!”

“Yeah, Saunders sucks alright,” I replied, face down in my textbook. Biology was a subject that made me a little uncomfortable. Mrs Dowling, our Science teacher, was a dominating old bag who ran her class with a controlling iron fist. She looked like she was in her fifties, but she could have been much older. She was stick thin and incredibly small yet somehow carried an

expression of mild violence and menace that seemed out of place given the fragility of her small frame. I would not even contemplate horseplay in her class. Tony however was not as subdued as the rest of the class or as cautious as I was.

“Well don’t worry. We’ll see that you’re not lonely!” Tony avowed, his face alight with imagined mischief. I could literally see evil plans in his eyes as he contemplated what he was going to do.

“Speak for yourself,” Garry replied. “I’m in enough trouble with Dowling as it is.”

Abruptly Tony got to his feet. As he made his way to the back of the classroom unnoticed, Garry and I looked at each other with bemused yet tolerant expressions. Tony was usually unpredictable especially when he had something up his sleeve. The grin on his face foretold that this would certainly be interesting.

Tony parked himself at the far end of the room. Picking up a telephone directory, he flipped through the pages, idly raising his feet and placing them jauntily in the middle of the table. A look of intense concentration crossed his face.

“Hmm... discreet and exotic!” he said loudly enough to cause everyone to look towards the back of the room in alarm.

“Beautiful and professional, ooh... that sounds good, I want me some of that!” he continued, his finger running down the directory.

“Mr Ward, what do you think you’re doing?” Mrs Dowling demanded, a ruler held in her hand like a riding crop.

“Is this Biology class or what?” Tony said. “I’m looking up escorts. I figure I’ll flunk the written so going all out for the practical.”

“Detention! For a week!” Mrs Dowling practically shrieked, the ruler still vibrating as she whacked it across the table while the classroom dissolved in laughter.

“Silence!” Mrs Dowling scowled at the class, her ruler now like a sword – jabbing at any student who dared to defy her. Silence immediately fell upon the room.

“Oops, overshoot,” Tony smirked to me as he returned to his seat. “I only wanted two days.”

The class resumed its lesson. Eventually the students returned to their usual level of noise and the class began to feel normal again.

“Nice one,” I whispered to Tony.

“Now *you* owe *me* three *days!*”

Tony had cheered me up and distracted me but when the alarm bell went off and we all filed out I found myself staring again in wonder at my hands with the small particles of lightly slowly roaming across my knuckles and up my wrist.

I couldn’t for the life of me think of any illness that would lead to hallucinations like the one I had had in the toilet block. If my flesh wasn’t still glowing I would have probably shrugged it all off. However when your fingers are sparkling blue it tends to stick out in your mind.

Detention proved to be as stimulating as I had feared. Saunders hushed anyone who dared to open their

mouths so Tony and I sat in complete silence, staring at Saunders' forehead the whole time.

“Last time I do a favour for you,” Tony said out the corner of his mouth as we headed for the door.

“Same time tomorrow, boys,” Saunders smirked, holding the door open for us as we hurried to the school gates.

Tony lived around the corner from Mum's place, so we usually walked home and hung out for a bit before he went home. Tonight, however, I begged off, explaining that I felt a little off and would just crash. Tony took this with good grace and headed home without argument.

My room was the same as any other teenager's. In the far corner there was a pile of clothes in desperate need of cleaning. My prized possession, my roller-blades, hung up in the corner by the door with my hockey stick resting below them. I used to go rollerblading with my father when he and my mother were still together. We didn't go blading much anymore. He was always too busy working now.

My desk was overflowing with sheets of paper, books and magazines. My bed had a comforter lazily draped across its surface but mostly on the floor. Flipping my laptop on I hopped onto the bed and began to search the internet for a reason for my blue sparkly problems.

The internet wasn't much help. Hallucinations were apparently quite commonplace and were caused by a variety of reasons. The most common reason being drug use, but this obviously wasn't the cause. I had eaten mushrooms in a stir-fry about a week or so ago, but unless Mum's shopping trip was a little stranger than normal I seriously doubted that they were the cause of

all this. Despite Sarah's claim, I didn't believe for a second that this was alcohol-related from last weekend. There was a listing on a web page about a migraine or coma hallucination but that was also usually linked to unconsciousness and I couldn't remember passing out.

I started researching migraines. I supposed my splitting headache today could have been a migraine. If the other effects were also caused by a migraine then I should go back to normal soon. So I simply sat on the side of my bed, twiddling my fingers and watching the blue particles work their way from my fingertips up my arms. I noted that the effect appeared to be less severe than this afternoon. I took that as a good sign.

Maybe the whole thing would just go away?

No such luck, if I thought I had had trouble sleeping before, this night set a new bar. My body just couldn't seem to make up its mind. I was either burning up in my sleep, or freezing. By 2am I had kicked all the covers off my bed and was curled up in the centre of the bed cursing the mythical mushrooms that I couldn't remember eating, the magical marijuana that I hadn't smoked, and the crazy concussion I didn't have. It was a long time before sleep finally claimed me.

By 3am the quickening beat of my heart snapped me awake. I could feel the thudding against the insides of my chest. It sounded like a symphony with the gentle clicking of my pulse acting in staccato. The sound of my breath drawn from my body in short gasps almost acted as lyrical accompaniment. I turned and looked into the mirror and noted that my eyes had taken on the strangeness again.

I gripped the sheets, causing light particles to zig-zag across my fingers. These particles were far brighter than before, but now I noticed in the darkness an unusual fact. The light from the particles was not being reflected onto the walls.

I could see the source of the light on my skin, but not shadows that would be caused by them. With the intensity of the light emanating from my body my room should have looked like a disco. It instead looked like those action movies where they show you the night scope. I could see the particles flowing across my body like pulses, not following the conventional lines of my veins. They seemed to dance across my body in random swirling patterns, twirling around my arms and presumably onto my back in time with my breathing.

There were about twenty particles across my flesh as best I could figure but trying to count them accurately had proved an impossible task. After a few minutes of watching I discovered that there was a pattern, an erratic one, but a pattern nonetheless. If I actually was on drugs this probably would have been vastly entertaining; however, it seemed that sleep deprivation didn't seem to have quite the same buzz as alcohol.

I didn't sleep for the rest of that night. In fact, I didn't sleep very well for the rest of the week. My days and nights blurred into one long waking nightmare. When I did sleep it didn't seem to refresh me; my temperature steadily rose until I felt I was burning up. I couldn't eat, food tasted like ash and gave me no sustenance, but I was always hungry. After a while my friends began avoiding me after I'd snapped at them on several occasions for no good reason. It was the longest week

of my life, although I can't remember any details except that I was more irritable and exhausted than I'd ever been. It was as if my body was under some great pressure – I felt ready to snap in two at any moment. I struggled to react to anything, my whole body moved sluggishly and it seemed to take the greatest amount of effort to perform even the smallest task.

I should have gone to see a doctor or the school nurse, but I was hesitant to do so. For one, they might not believe me; and two, they might believe me and send me to hospital. I was going out with Tony at the end of the week and I wasn't going to miss that. It was the one thing that had kept me going, through all this. I could survive until then. If I was still feeling like this next week then I'd go see someone. It couldn't be that serious, could it? Besides, it came and went throughout the day. Sometimes I was fine, other times I wasn't. Maybe it was just growing pains? The more I thought I about it, the more I was able to rationalise it away.

It wasn't until much later that I realised how much danger I actually was in, not just to myself but also to those around me. There is no greater threat in this world than unchecked power in the hands of those who will not control it or those who are simply unable to do so.

