

Prologue

Thursday, October 31st, 1974

7:23 PM

Hill Valley, California

Golden brown leaves fell from the trees. A strong wind blew. Cutout skeletons, ghosts, pumpkins, and black cats decorated the stores and houses along the streets, and plastic bags overflowed with candy.

Superman, Frankenstein's monster, a fairy princess, and Peter Pan marched down the street.

Halloween was Marty McFly's favorite holiday. He loved the candy and the costumes, but most of all he loved the scary stories that his eleven-year-old brother, Dave, told every year. Like his father, George, Dave had a knack for telling interesting stories. During thunderstorms, when the power went out, he entertained his family by telling tall tales or ghost stories. During class, he always wrote the longest essays. And on Halloween, he always entertained his eight-year-old sister, Linda, his six-year-old brother, Marty, and Marty's best friend, Bill, with spooky Halloween stories. The stories always enthralled the trick-or-treating group that Dave escorted around the neighborhood every year, but Marty was always the most interested. He loved to prove how brave he was by not only listening to them, but also enjoying them; the scarier, the better.

"...And they say that The Doctor tortures little children who he catches walking past his house," said Dave McFly, using his best scary story voice. "And that even in your own home, you aren't safe. On Halloween, he sneaks into your house, takes you from your bed in the middle of the night and you are never seen again. It happened one Halloween night ten years ago that this little boy, Johnny, was out trick or treating. He was a happy kid with a good life, but never thought about being scared of The Doctor. He was on his way home when he thought he was being followed. But he turned around and nobody was there. So he kept walking. When he got home, he went to his room to sort out his candy and go to sleep. But just as he was lying down, The Doctor came in through the window, gagged the boy, hogtied him, and took him away. Johnny was never seen again. Some say The Doctor threw him in the lake. Others say The Doctor tied him to the railroad tracks just in time for the 5:15. Others say that The Doctor broke his legs. But most say that to this day, he's being held hostage in The Doctor's lab, and being tortured with crazy experiments."

"That was a good one," said Marty, a huge grin crossing his face. "Do you have any more?"

"Nah," said Dave. "I'm fresh out."

"I heard something about The Doctor," said Bill. "I heard that The Doctor runs kids over with his car and uses their brains for science experiments. Everyone says it's true."

"I'm not sure if that's true. But I've heard it a thousand times," said Dave. "But I guess since you're in first grade you just heard it for the first time. Know what else I

heard? I heard that once he almost killed somebody. He only wound up breaking her legs, though.”

“Wow,” said Marty, appalled, yet fascinated, that somebody could be that evil.

Since Dave was five years older than Marty, he’d picked up more than a dozen stories about The Doctor from kids at school. He knew some of them, like the Halloween ones, were only stories, but rumors ran rampant around school—and the town—that The Doctor actually did pointless and inhumane science experiments on children and animals.

No kid in Hill Valley ever dared to go near The Doctor’s house. Even when children went to Burger King, which was situated in front of it, they always made sure to go in groups or with their parents. One could never be too careful...

Sometimes, Marty wondered just who The Doctor was, and how he got to be so crazy. He tried to imagine what would happen if a kid actually went to his house. There was only one way to find out...

“I dare you to go to The Doctor’s house,” said Marty to Bill.

“Oh, yeah? I dare you to spray paint his house,” Bill retorted.

Marty thought that one over. He *was* dressed as Superman. Maybe tonight was the night to do something brave! The last thing he ever wanted was to be labeled a wimp, and he always wanted to prove that he had more guts than any of his friends. So, yes, spray-painting The Doctor’s house was a good way to prove just how brave he could be.

“Okay,” said Marty. “Gimme some spray paint!”

Dave produced a can of spray paint from his trick or treat bag. “Here you go. Let’s do it.”

And the group headed toward The Doctor’s house.

“This is it,” announced Dave. “Welcome to The Doctor’s hellhole.”

Marty stood with Linda, Dave, and Bill in the front of the dilapidated garage that was behind the Burger King on John F. Kennedy Drive.

The garage had an eerie façade, especially at night. The chain link fence that surrounded it was almost like a shield of armor that kept people out or, more importantly, kept The Doctor *in*. The shadows cast by the chipped paint on the building evoked a spooky effect. Marty could only imagine what was inside the building. A mad scientist, of course. Maybe he had bombs in there, too! What if he was torturing children as the four of them stood there? The Doctor was also rumored to sacrifice goats to the devil on Halloween, as well as New Year’s. Maybe he also sacrificed kids!

“I don’t know if we should be here,” Marty whispered, suddenly feeling nervous. “What if The Doctor comes out and fries our brains?”

Bill, Linda, and Dave laughed.

“Don’t tell me you’re scared of The Doctor!” exclaimed Bill.

“I am not!” said Marty.

“Prove it,” said Bill. “Spray his house.”

“Yeah,” said Dave. “This is what Halloween is all about.”

“Besides,” added Linda, sharing the wisdom that she had picked up in the third grade. “Once you’ve accepted a dare, you can’t take it back. That’s how it works.”

“I dunno...” Marty said, his voice trailing off. He took a couple steps back.

“He’s scared of The Doctor!” announced Bill.

Linda and Dave laughed.

“You’re scared of The Doctor! You’re scared of The Doctor! You’re scared of The Doctor!” Bill, Linda, and Dave chanted at Marty.

“I am not!” said Marty, wanting to live up to the identity of his Halloween costume, and *not* wanting to be a total wimp. “Give me the stuff and I’ll do it!”

Dave handed Marty the can of spray paint. For a brief moment, Marty stared at the garage, one side bathed in nearby orange sodium vapor lamps, but otherwise dark from the night and from Halloween. He summoned his courage, and slowly slipped to the other side of the chain link fence, whose door was left unlocked. He tiptoed up to the entrance of the makeshift house and, with sudden quickness, sprayed a small red blotch on the door, and ran back to his group.

“Let me show you,” said Dave, rolling his eyes in exasperation and snatching the can from Marty. A fast walk to the inside of the fence, a quick flick of his wrist, and Dave managed to spray something in large letters.

The fence clinked softly as Dave brushed into it on his way back out.

“What does that say?” Marty whispered.

“The Mad Scientist lives here,” Dave said, back in his scary story voice.

Marty laughed. If The Doctor was doing horrible things in there to children and animals, maybe the sign would alert the police to his whereabouts. Then they would arrest him and rescue the kids and animals!

And if The Doctor wasn’t really doing these things, then... well... it was still fun to pick on the town nutcase.

“I have some rotten eggs, too,” said Dave. “I’ve been keeping them in the basement for the past two months.”

This was incredibly exciting. If anybody deserved to have rotten eggs smeared all over his building, it was The Doctor. Gleefully, Marty grabbed some of the makeshift stink bombs and, along with the other kids, hurled them at The Doctor’s old garage. It was so exciting to do something brave like this! He couldn’t wait until the other kids found out the next day what he did. He would be a hero! Marty laughed in the midst of his excitement.

“Shut up,” hissed Dave, grabbing his brother by the shoulder. “You want him to hear us? We still got more decorating to do!”

The carton of eggs empty, Linda, Marty, and Bill formed a circle around Dave, who brandished four rolls of toilet paper.

“Let’s paper his house,” whispered Dave, a mischievous grin on his face.

Marty giggled. “Yeah! Let’s give that mad scientist what he deserves!”

The children each took a roll of toilet paper. Giggling, they ran and tossed it, letting it unroll and spread around the asphalt in front of the building.

Marty took a step back and admired what the four of them had just done. The garage was saturated in stinky rotten eggs. Toilet paper littered the front yard. And, as Dave’s sign suggested, everyone would know that The Mad Scientist did, indeed, live there!

It was a work of art.

Chapter 1

Thursday, November 28th, 1974
4:28 PM

Thanksgiving had to be the most boring day of the year.

At least, any time Marty's extended family came to visit, it was. Being the youngest in his family of five, and having no relatives his age, it was another day for him to be left out. Whenever there was a family gathering, a plethora of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and much older cousins came to visit. They would sit around the dining room table for dinner, and Marty would listen to conversations between his older relatives—conversations that his older siblings knew how to get involved in, as they had a critical extra couple of years of life experience under their belts.

The discussions usually turned to politics and world events with the adults, and school with the children. Marty, only being in first grade, could not relate to his older relatives' conversations about long division, a project that was due in a week, or even a book that one of them was reading.

Because Marty could barely read.

He was *supposed* to be learning how to read at school, but was having a hard time with decoding the words. During his lessons, he would be asked to read aloud, and then he'd stumble over each word. Sometimes he even read things backwards, and the other students in his class would giggle and tease him.

It certainly didn't help that his grandparents would hound him about school, really only feigning an interest. When they visited the week before, they'd asked him if he was learning to read, if he enjoyed it, and ribbed him about when he was going to read *War and Peace*. It was a joke, Marty understood. But he could barely get through the Dick and Jane stories. It wasn't even humor—it was pain. His grandparents didn't understand that, and they thought they were being cute for their cute little grandson. Marty asked his mother to tell his grandparents—both sets—to leave him alone about it, but it seemed that her request to give the issue a rest fell on deaf ears.

"Marty, did you clean your room?" his mother asked. She opened the oven to check the turkey.

"Yeah," said Marty, his train of thought suddenly interrupted.

"And you didn't just stuff everything under the bed? You folded your clothes and put your toys back in the toy box and your books back on the shelves?"

"Yeah, I did," said the boy. He sighed. "Mom, is Grandma gonna smoke tonight?"

That was another thing that irked the boy—his paternal grandmother smoked constantly, and Marty could not bear to be in the same room with her and the smell when she did.

"That's up to her," said Lorraine McFly. "You know that she's trying to quit. It can't be easy for her, and I don't want you to give her any trouble about it. I want her to feel comfortable here."

"But the smoke smells bad," said Marty. Marty absolutely hated cigarette smoke. He never understood why adults always insisted upon doing it—and in front of people! He could scarcely breathe when his grandmother smoked. She usually ripped through at

least six cigarettes when she visited. Once, in a vain attempt to get her to stop, he stole the old woman's cigarettes, while she was getting something from her car, and flushed them down the toilet. Of course, that act of protest— and one that was possibly saving his grandmother's life— earned Marty a lecture from his mother about learning to be respectful.

"Well, Marty," said his mother, washing her hands in the kitchen sink. "That's something you'll have to learn to deal with. You need to learn how to be with people."

"Fine," said Marty, feeling this issue was less important than the one he was about to address. He had to pick his battles, and the one involving the ribbing his relatives gave him about his reading was much more important. "But I don't want anybody asking me about school."

"I've already talked to them about it," said his mother. "And I don't think they'll forget this time."

"I hope not."

"The company's going to be here in about a half hour. Could you please get your baseball and basketball stuff out of the driveway?"

"Okay," said Marty. He went outside in what was already turning to darkness. He tossed his basketball, baseball bat, glove, and ball onto the grass at the side of the driveway, and went back inside to amuse himself by watching a little television until the company arrived.

So far, so good.

In the half hour that Marty's grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins were at his house thus far, none of them asked him about school and how his reading was coming. Linda and Dave were happily talking to their grandparents about school and the teachers they had, about some who were nice, some who were mean, and some who weren't "all there."

Of course, Marty's grandparents didn't ignore the boy; they said hello to him and asked him how he was and about little league. He was perfectly content to have the conversation end there.

Dinner was ready a few minutes later, and everyone sat down to eat at the dining room table. Food was passed around, and Marty, sandwiched between his mother and father, dug into a turkey leg. He was hungry and hadn't eaten anything since that afternoon. He zoned out as conversations floated around him, the same ones he couldn't relate to just yet. Boredom from eating in silence overtook him, and it would have stayed that way if his eleven-year-old cousin, Steven, hadn't broken the proverbial ice with a joke he heard on the bus.

"I heard this funny joke last week," Steven said to his brother, Greg. "How do you get some without a girl?"

"Steven, stop it!" his father, Milton, scolded.

Steven ignored her and finished his joke. "Hands up!"

Steven was at that age where he was learning, primarily from his friends, how to speak with the eloquence of a truck driver. As were most of the boys his age, and some of the girls, he found sexual jokes to be the be all and end all of humor. Most kids his age at least had enough discretion to not to tell such off-color jokes in front of their parents, let

alone *grandparents* and little kids, but Steven didn't. Somehow, he didn't understand that such humor should be left in the schoolyard with other children his age.

All the kids, except Marty, broke into laughter, and the adults gasped in horror.

"Steven, I told you to knock it off! I don't want to hear that kind of humor at the table in front of everyone!"

The kids continued to laugh. Steven especially enjoyed the shock value the jokes had on people from earlier generations.

"I don't get it," said Marty. "What's so funny?"

"You'll learn when you're older," Steven said between giggles.

"It's adult humor, honey," Lorraine told her son. "Don't worry about it."

"But I wanna know what it means."

"You're too young, Marty," said Grandmother Baines.

"But that's not fair!" whined Marty.

"Marty, don't worry about it. It wasn't even funny," said George.

"It sure as hell was funny," said Greg.

"Watch your language," said Uncle Milton.

"I wanna know what was funny," Marty said again.

Marty's young age was, once again, finding a way to keep him out of the loop. As well meaning as his family was, its members, like the majority of the world, felt that telling a child he was too young for something was the best way to avoid their discomfort and hope that the issue would simply disappear.

"It wasn't funny," George restated. "And it's not something you should be worried about at your age anyway."

"I'm don't like being little," Marty pouted, folding his arms and slumping in the chair.

"I was the youngest in my family, too," said George. "It's better to be the youngest. You don't get as much homework and you have more time to play."

"Being the youngest stinks," insisted Marty. "You don't get to do nothing."

"Marty, just drop the subject, and let's eat," said his mother.

The family continued to eat in awkward silence until Grandfather McFly approached a subject that everyone—including Marty—could relate to.

"Did you hear about the latest thing that that The Doctor did?"

The Doctor—or Dr. Emmett Brown—was generally regarded as a recluse, a modern and dangerous Hunchback of Notre Dame. He was a scientist who was constantly performing weird experiments that sometimes resulted in loud noises or bizarre chemical reactions that caught the attention of his neighbors. These experiments seemed pointless, as nothing he invented was ever marketed. It was rumored that perhaps he was doing experiments on animals, or maybe even people. Hill Valley, being a relatively small town, always got wind of the stories quite quickly, and a large handful of its citizens bought them without question. The rumors about his psychological capacity, such as that he was psychotic or a paranoid schizophrenic, ran the most rampantly.

Everything, down to the way the man carried himself, struck most of the town as utterly bizarre. He walked with an odd gait, had eyes that seemed to stare a hole right through everyone he looked at, and was just plain *loud*. Dr. Emmett Brown was loud in more ways than one. In addition to having a loud, raspy, and frenetic voice that could wake the dead, he generally dressed loudly, donning bizarre Hawaiian shirts with cargo

pants that had more pockets than the average person would find necessary. Quite often, his clothes didn't even match. When he wasn't dressed *that way*, he was often seen coming outside for a moment or two, wearing a long lab coat that was covered with chemical stains and soot, his unruly white hair stuck out in many directions. At times, his skin barely seemed to exist, since when he was working in his lab, he often got some sort of black residue all over his hands and face. Plus, he didn't even live in a house—he lived in a *garage*! The tabloids always had a field day with him, and sometimes even respectable newspapers—*The Telegraph*, for example—published articles about some of the things he was rumored to do.

“Oh, yeah,” said Greg, taking a bite of his turkey. “It was in the paper last week.”

“What happened?” Marty asked.

“They think that he's doing experiments on his dogs,” said Greg. “His last dog was only four and he just died out of nowhere, and now The Doctor just got a new dog.”

“Wow,” said Marty. “What does he do to them?”

“We don't know what he does,” said his mother. “Maybe the dog was just sick, but I still wouldn't want to meet him in a dark alley.”

“Yeah, and he probably goes out of his way to meet women in dark alleys, if you get what I mean,” Steven quipped.

Once again, Marty's older siblings and cousins laughed at the bit of humor that Marty didn't understand.

“Steven, I told you to lay off the crude humor! If you don't stop it, then you will be grounded for a week!” said Uncle Milton.

“I don't get it,” said Marty, beginning to feel left out again.

“Good,” said Grandma McFly. “You don't want to. It's such a disgusting joke.”

“Yes I do!” said Marty. “I hate being little!”

“It was the same deal with us when we were your age,” said his mother. “This is not worth getting yourself worked up over.”

The older cousins stifled giggles.

Marty looked around at his family. Older kids laughing at him. Adults hiding him from the funny jokes.

“You're all mean!” Marty shouted.

“Marty, please calm down,” said George sternly.

“No! You're all so mean! All you stupid old people always ask about my reading! Grandma always has to smoke! And you won't tell me what the jokes mean!”

“Marty, please calm down,” said George. “Steven shouldn't have told those jokes.”

“You're all so mean!” Marty continued, completely ignoring his father. “I hate all of you!”

“Marty, I'm going to give you until the count of three to calm down. One—”

“You guys are always mean to me!”

“Two.”

“And you're stupid!”

“Three.”

“Stop counting!”

“That's it,” said George. “Marty, go to your room.”

“Fine!” Marty stormed off and went down the hall to his room. He could hear his parents apologizing for “his irrational behavior” and explaining that “he’s just young and hasn’t completely learned how to get along with his elders yet.”

Marty sat on the bed in his room, tears filling his eyes. “They’re all mean,” he pouted. He kicked the wall, his sneakers leaving faint black marks on the white paint. He could hear his mother yell at him to calm down or he wouldn’t be allowed to sleep at Bill’s house that weekend, as he had planned.

Marty decided that the only way to get his parents to understand would be to run away. Then they would be sorry. They’d call the police and Thanksgiving would be put on hold until they got their little boy back. Then they’d shower him with kisses and hugs and apologize for being so mean.

Running away was no problem. His room was on the ground floor and a window led to the outside. He unlocked it, pulled it open, and slipped out into the darkness.

Marty had some common sense—he remembered to bring a flashlight with him to light his path as he trudged down the street. It was after six in the evening, and although he knew that it wasn’t completely safe to be out after dark, he also knew that it was early enough that it wasn’t exactly dangerous either. Besides, he and his friends often walked to downtown Hill Valley during the day, always without incident. He brought some allowance money with him, too, in case he wanted a snack.

Downtown Hill Valley, and its court square were always interesting to him. He always found himself fascinated by the clock tower at the courthouse, whose hands were perpetually frozen at 10:04. He wondered how it got that way, and one of the rumors he heard was that, many years ago, The Doctor was performing some kind of weather experiment to make lightning strike the clock tower.

Trash—soda cans, bits of donuts, and crepe paper—littered the street from that morning’s Thanksgiving Day parade. Marty brushed some of the day’s debris off a nearby bench. He sat down and stared at the clock tower. He watched people, who gave him odd looks, pass by. Some of them stopped to ask where his parents were; others ignored the boy and only stopped to take a look at the famous clock tower.

Marty began to wonder when his parents were going to feel sorry and come looking for him. That wonder was temporarily put on hold when a small sheepdog puppy, that had seemingly come out of nowhere, jumped on the bench and started licking Marty’s face.

Marty smiled and petted the dog. “Hey, doggy. Where’d you come from?”

“Einstein!” a raspy voice yelled from behind Marty. “Come back here.”

Could it be? Marty turned around.

Marty screamed. A tall figure—with wild white hair—emerged from the shadows. Marty suddenly felt as if he were watching a horror movie.

If he wasn’t mistaken, it was none other than Dr. Emmett Brown!

One thing Marty was taught to do when threatened by a stranger was to scream—and scream loudly!

Fully expecting The Doctor to move closer to Marty, Marty was surprised to see the man nervously take a few steps back.

“Don’t be scared kid,” the man said, a hint of nervousness tainting his voice as Marty continued to scream. “I’m going, I’m going.” He turned to his dog. “C’mon, Einy. Let’s go before I get interrogated by the police again.”

Dr. Emmett Brown knew from a young age that he was different, and it was something that would be more than affirmed by both his peers and adults as he grew older. In the middle of first grade, he bluntly announced to his teacher that he was bored with addition and subtraction, and wanted to know when they would get to learn algebra. The teacher, who had had zero experience with exceptional children, gave an angry lecture about Emmett’s attitude problem, while other children laughed. The teacher sent him to the principal, who simply asked Emmett to prove his math skills by doing some basic algebra problems. When he successfully completed those, as well as other tests to prove his incredible intelligence, he was immediately reassigned to the sixth grade.

That was probably when the first rumors about him began to circulate. As he was a child, they were only confined to the school, but it wasn’t long before rumor had it that Emmett Brown was reassigned to sixth grade so he would be out of the elementary school next year and the teachers wouldn’t have to deal with him anymore. Once he was in middle school, his same classmates from sixth grade started the rumor and it quickly passed around both the seventh and eighth grades. The rumor showed no signs of abating, and it followed him all the way through high school.

During science classes, Emmett preferred to work alone than with a lab partner, but it was quite often that the teacher would not let him do so, and would assign him one for the day. Sometimes, when students had questions about the experiments, the teacher would tell the students to ask Emmett, who silently acknowledged that she referred the other students to him because she knew that he was more knowledgeable, and that she was too lazy to answer the questions herself. He also suspected that was why he was forced to be with a lab partner many times— so that students could get the work done faster. The other students begged Emmett to work with them—or *for* them—on each day’s assignment. He didn’t mind doing all the work, as he loved science and had an insatiable hunger for knowledge.

The other students found Emmett equally amusing and frightening. Generally, they avoided him, as they had no idea what to make of him, let alone what to expect. Emmett, with his odd gait, loud voice, unbound energy—and intuitive understanding for the most complex, and possibly the most dangerous, chemical reactions—often turned the other students away. Most of them were civil enough not to go out of their way to pick on him because of his eccentricity, but one student, namely Hank Webb, took genuine delight in making the boy’s life as miserable as possible.

Hank and Emmett first crossed paths during their freshman year of high school. For all four years of Emmett’s high school career, Hank made it his mission to make Emmett the subject of ridicule. He picked on him, calling him names, such as “Lunatic”, or “Freak.” He often suggested that Emmett join the circus, as he would fit in better there. Hank spread rumors constantly about Emmett, which the students often accepted without question. Emmett was a lunatic. Emmett spent the first eight years of his life in a mental

hospital. Emmett did experiments on animals. Emmett blew things up. Emmett did this. Emmett did that...

When Emmett made it clear that he was hardly swayed by Hank's remarks, Hank resorted to physical abuse. If he saw Emmett in the hallway, he often gave him a hard shove, tripped him, or smacked him in the back of the head. These kinds of physical gestures stung Emmett, but he also knew that as long as he left each situation virtually unscathed, and not give Hank the obviously wanted reaction, he should consider himself fortunate. After all, there were worse things that Hank could do, and all Hank was trying to do was provoke Emmett into a fight that would result in self-humiliation. Emmett was too dignified and confident to give Hank the satisfaction of that.

Of course, rumors spread quickly and easily, and, rather than abating with the alleged maturity of students graduating from high school, they only escalated and followed the scientist through college and well into adulthood. Because of Hank's quick and persuasive tongue and Emmett's questionable psychological capacity, the damage had been done and most people in Hill Valley knew, from the stories they'd heard, to avoid Emmett by a wide and comfortable margin—which was often conspicuously wide and anything *but* comfortable, for Emmett. The scientist found that many people, who happened to meet Emmett in any context, were instantly unforgiving of any and all of his quirks, even for things as harmless as his odd gait or his unruly shock of hair, which he'd started to grow out in his late thirties. Many people would not come near him, or simply interact with him in the most distant and non-personable way possible. He'd never even had a girlfriend. He'd been a few dates, with women that he'd met at different gatherings in the scientific community, but even they were put off by Emmett's eccentricities. None of them even considered a second date with him. None even allowed themselves to be kissed.

Between Emmett's lack of friends, his non-existent love life, and his reputation in general, the handwriting was on the wall that he was unlike most people. He was different, unusual and, possibly, not even normal.

Of course, Emmett realized, normalcy is entirely subjective.

For a brief moment—possibly a nanosecond—he'd considered trying to work on himself so he could fit in better—cutting his hair, changing his dress, working on his gait... but why change to suit already narrow standards? He would be pleasing others, not himself, suiting needs of other people, not his own. Emmett liked himself and was proud of who he was, no matter what anybody else said. One thing he'd realized over the years was that if one cannot advocate oneself, then who will? The reality of Emmett's reputation could hurt, but only if he'd really stop to think about it.

He had better things to do.

But Emmett was still human, and so he longed for human companionship and contact. He knew that, eventually, he was supposed to meet Marty McFly, the very same who traveled back to 1955 by accident and needed Emmett's help to get back home. He would let time run its natural course, and meet the boy when he was destined to. Until then, he had his inventions—and dogs—to keep him company. His love for his work was what prevented him from feeling sorry for himself, and was fiercely determined to invent something that worked. Of course, he knew that he would, come 1985, build a working time machine, but until then, he had to try for smaller projects. The very ideas of meeting

his best friend, Marty, and succeeding in time travel, were what kept him motivated everyday, and self-assured as to not take the rumors and pranks seriously.

Emmett himself was curious as to how his relationship with Marty started and what made the kid want to hang around him. He wasn't completely sure—other than that he and Marty were best friends—what their relationship was. Perhaps Emmett was to become like a second father to Marty, albeit one the boy could talk about issues with that kids often felt uncomfortable discussing with their parents, just by virtue of the fact that they were—well, parents! And perhaps their relationship was so special because Emmett would not only be able to be a good listener, but offer advice to the boy that friends his age couldn't do, with an adult perspective, but not one so parent-like.

And when were he and Marty destined to meet? Emmett didn't dare ask Marty that when Marty was in 1955 with him—that could prevent the natural course of events from taking place and really mess things up. Maybe something would happen that might prevent Marty from ever going back in time and meeting Emmett. Then there would be a time paradox, which, according to Emmett's theory, could cause the universe to destroy itself.

Still, Emmett was curious. How old were kids when they had an enough opened mind to give Emmett a chance and see past the rumors? Perhaps they'd met when Marty was fourteen or fifteen, as he would have been old enough at that point to realize how absurd and obviously untrue the rumors were. Then again, kids that age were easily swayed by peer pressure and cared more about being cool than the quality of their friends. Chances were, then, that by the time Marty was a teenager, he had known Emmett long enough that he wouldn't consider turning his back on him, no matter what anybody said. Plus, young kids had more malleable brains. Granted, that malleability could sway a young preteen kid in the direction of believing the rumors, but just as easily, a kid that age could be more open minded—if believing in Santa Claus and The Easter Bunny were any indication.

Whatever the case, Emmett strongly suspected that he was some sort of father figure—an uncle figure, at least—in Marty's life. This in itself fascinated Emmett. He often thought that he would like to be a father but, of course, who would he have kids with? He wouldn't adopt, either—surely the rumors would escalate even more, and the kid would carry Emmett's reputation on his shoulders much more easily than if he were *married* and with a kid.

And the town didn't simply avoid Emmett and talk about him—often the scientist was the victim of cruel pranks. He had to wonder how Marty would respond to that once they met and became friends.

Halloween and Thanksgiving were the times that Emmett received the most cruelty from the town. On Halloween, the jokes played on him were generally themed around his apparent madness, and on Thanksgiving and Christmas, he was given the harsh reminder that he had no friends or living family. Until he got his phone number changed and chose not to list it any longer, Emmett received prank phone calls from a great deal of people, mostly teenagers, but even some adults. The last straw came when, one Thanksgiving, a teenager called and demanded, “Why don't you just kill yourself? Nobody likes you!”

He used to report the more severe pranks, such as threatening letters, to the police, who told Emmett that they would “keep an eye open” for the perpetrators. Emmett

stopped reporting after he realized that the police weren't putting much of an effort into their watch, and it didn't help that he didn't know who the pranksters were.

This particular Thanksgiving, Emmett's considerate gift was a huge banner, strung all the way across the front of his house. It read, "I kill dogs and torture children!" Emmett, needing to divert his mind for a little bit from the harsh reminder that he wasn't like anybody else, decided to go for a walk in the town square. Usually, on Thanksgiving, most people were inside for dinner, so Emmett was able to have a more peaceful walk with his dog, Einstein, than normal. That night, which started out as boring and uneventful, proved to be the catalyst that would change the course of his life. It began when Einstein ran away from his owner, by breaking his collar, and towards the little boy who sat, appropriately, in front of the clock tower.

Horrified, Marty stared at The Doctor's wild brown eyes the way a deer stared in fear at approaching headlights, but continued to scream.

Emmett and his puppy walked away from the court square in a fast clip, but then Emmett stopped. He was afraid of getting questioned by the police, but what about the young boy alone on the bench? He couldn't just leave him there. Thinking better of his decision to leave the scene, Emmett returned, but made sure to keep a comfortable distance between himself and the boy.

"Hey, kid," said Emmett. "What are you doing out here all by yourself?"

"Get away from me!" Marty screamed, getting up and beginning to back away.

"I'm just here for my dog; relax," the man told Marty. "I'm not gonna hurt you."

"You're The Doctor, aren't you?" Marty asked, frightened. "I'm not going to let you kill this dog like you killed the last one!"

Marty scooped up the puppy and darted away from the court square.

"Killed my dog?" Emmett called, a tad frustrated as to how quickly the stories about him spread and how easily the average person accepted them as gospel.

"I'm going to take him home so you can't do experiments on him!" Marty continued running.

Rather than pursue and scare the boy, Emmett whistled. "Come here, Einstein!"

The dog wriggled from Marty's grasp and sped toward his owner, jumped, and ran circles around him.

Marty continued to run, but stopped when Emmett called to him.

"Hey, kid. Where are your parents?"

"None of your business!" Marty called back, running as quickly as he could.

"Kid, you shouldn't be out here so late without your parents," Emmett said, trying to physically approach the boy in the most non-threatening way possible.

"Get away from me!" Marty called, though something, he couldn't put his finger on what, made him stop running.

Emmett stopped walking and called to the boy, who favored him with at least a twenty or thirty foot distance. "I don't think you should be out here this late without your parents. Especially not on Thanksgiving. If you don't want to talk to me, that's all right, but I am a little concerned about you being out here alone, and I'd like to assist you if I can."

Marty took a few steps toward the man. Emmett, in turn, approached the boy, Marty and Emmett gazed at each other, Marty daring Emmett to move, Emmett waiting for Marty's permission to approach.

The thirty or so seconds that passed without Marty making a beeline in the other direction were enough for Emmett to allow himself to approach the boy. He kneeled in front of Marty, who in turn took a couple steps back, half expecting the man to grab him.

Emmett chuckled. "I'm not going to hurt you, kid."

Marty said nothing for a moment. "I heard you do experiments on dogs."

Emmett chuckled again. "Where did you get such a notion?"

"The newspaper said that you killed your dog," Marty said as-a-matter-of-factly.

"Don't believe everything you hear," Emmett dismissed, trying not to recall the previous week's bout with the police who came to his door to question him. "I have better things to do than to hurt my dogs. Do you think Einstein here is afraid of me?"

Marty noticed that the dog seemed genuinely happy to be with his owner. He wasn't afraid of him. He was standing beside him. He was even wagging his tail! "No," Marty finally said.

"Good then. Anyway, you should go home, kid. I'd take you there myself, but I don't think it's a good idea. But if you want I'll contact your parents for you. Can I do that?"

Marty hesitated a moment, then nodded.

"What's your name?"

"Marty McFly," said the boy.

The scientist nearly jumped at the familiarity of that name.

"What?"

"Nothing."

"Are you gonna help me or not?" Marty asked, a hint of challenge laced in his voice.

"Of course," said Emmett, trying to hide his joy and stifling the urge to scoop up the boy and hug him right then and there. A huge smile crossed the scientist's face. "Just give me your phone number and I'll call your parents."

And Marty did. But as Emmett looked around, he noticed there weren't any payphones around.

"Come on," said Emmett, risking every possible liability by inviting a little boy to walk with him. "Let's go find a phone."

Marty trotted behind Emmett, initially keeping a safe distance. But as he began to realize that this man had no intentions of hurting him, Marty eventually joined Emmett at his side. Marty began to wonder if The Doctor was really such a nutcase after all. He *looked* a little odd, with his wild eyes and long, white, disheveled hair, but other than that...

"If you don't mind, may I inquire as to what are you doing out here?" Emmett asked at length.

Marty shrugged. "I ran away. My family was being mean."

"Why would you run away from your family? I'll bet they're worried about you. I would be if somebody in my family ran away," said Emmett who, of course, had no family to speak of. His parents, aunts, and uncles had all died long ago.

“I always get picked on because I’m the youngest. I don’t like being little. So I had to run away.”

Emmett nodded. “What happened?”

Marty looked at Emmett in surprise. The man wasn’t chewing him out for disobeying his parents. He was offering to listen to his side of the story. So Marty did just that. He also talked about how he couldn’t read very well, and his grandparents always asked him about it. Even though they hadn’t done it that night, the events that caused him to run away carried the same weight.

Emmett laughed sardonically. “Yeah, that isn’t fair. But we all go through stuff like that as children.”

“You used to be a kid?” Marty asked in disbelief. “But you’re so old!”

“Everybody’s a child once,” Emmett said, choosing not to laugh as it could be perceived by Marty as condescending. He wasn’t even what one would call old to begin with—at age fifty-four, he fit into the category of middle aged. That is, if one were to categorize by *physical* age. Mentally, however, his energy, love of life and enthusiasm for his work made him feel no older than twenty-five.

“Oh,” said Marty, accepting this new information, dispelling his notion that old people were born old and always were old.

The two walked in a moment’s worth of awkward silence.

“How did your dog die?” Marty asked at length.

“Archimedes? He ran into the street and got hit by a car. I had to put him to sleep.”

“Huh?” Marty had never heard that expression before.

“It means I had to take him to the vet, who injected the dog with a substance that would make him die peacefully.”

“So you did kill your dog!” Marty exclaimed, slowing down his pace alongside Emmett.

“Nonsense. Putting an animal to sleep is a common practice.”

“But why?”

Marty, fully expecting to hear “You’ll understand when you’re older,” was surprised to hear Emmett explain it.

“Sometimes, when an animal is suffering, he can be in such terrible pain that it’s better for him to die. Archimedes knocked his spine out of alignment from the impact of the car, and the vet said there was nothing he could do to make him better. So I opted for having him put to sleep. It ends the animal’s suffering, and it’s done in a completely painless way.”

“That’s still bad,” said Marty, not understanding completely what Emmett was trying to tell him.

Emmett nodded. “It was a difficult thing for me to do, especially since he was only four years old, and my best friend. I really do miss him.”

“Wow,” said Marty, still trying to grasp at what Emmett was telling him.

“I was really afraid that Einstein was going to run into the path of a car when he ran away from me tonight.”

“Oh no!” said Marty. “Maybe get him a better collar so he don’t break free.”

Emmett smiled.

The two turned a few corners and ended up in front of a drugstore, where a lone phone booth stood. Marty stood outside the booth while Emmett called the boy's parents.

"Your parents are on their way," said Emmett, after he made the call. "We'll meet them at the court square. And by the way, they were really worried about you."

He looked at the young boy. He was unusually small for his age—no more than three and a half feet, most likely.

"You oughta be more careful, kid," said Emmett. "It's not safe to be out on your own."

"I can take care of myself," said Marty.

Emmett chose not to debate the subject.

Marty and Emmett were back in the court square a few minutes later. They sat on a bench, and Emmett reached into a deep pocket of his cargo pants and pulled out a deck of cards. They were worn and old and had photographs of old airplanes on the backs. Emmett was notorious for bringing things with him that he usually wouldn't need. Packrat and eccentric that he was, it was one of his oddball quirks, but to him it was only natural.

"Hey, would you like me to teach you a card game?" Emmett offered.

"You play cards?" Marty asked, interested. Adults didn't usually play games. Usually they bought games for kids, and kids played them with other kids. Or, they played them with their parents—who were really not interested in the game, but just doing it to keep the kid happy or quiet.

"Well, mostly solitaire," Emmett admitted sheepishly. "Sometimes I stop in the park to enjoy the fresh air. I let Einstein run around, and I get in a couple games." Emmett hastened to add that he'd figured out the statistics of solitaire—how often one could actually finish the game. Somehow, he doubted that sort of thing would interest a six-year-old boy.

"Here, I'll teach you one of my favorites," said Emmett. He enjoyed the challenge of this game—it required quick thinking and it gave his brain a good warm up. Of course, he rarely had anybody to play it with... "It's called Spit."

Marty fell into fits of giggles. "Spit! I know how to play that." He took a deep breath and hocked one at the ground—or at least he aimed for the ground. Instead, it landed on Emmett's left pant leg, which was hanging over the side of the bench.

Emmett grimaced. "Marty..." he said, briefly reminded of something he didn't want to think about... He gingerly wiped the spit off of his pants.

Marty looked at Emmett, fully expecting him to chew him out for doing something disgusting like that. Adults seemed to enjoy yelling at kids who were trying to be funny. Marty's grandparents, loving and well-meaning as they were, would lecture Marty on how inappropriate he was being when they overheard him telling bathroom jokes to Steven and Greg—even if they weren't meant for the grandparents to hear! Occasionally his parents lectured him about it as well. It wasn't fair. Sometimes adults expected kids to be perfect and never to do anything fun.

"You're thinking of a different game, I think," Emmett said with a faint chuckle as he dealt the cards between them on the bench.

Marty sat in disbelief. He wasn't getting yelled at. This *adult* was joking back with him!

Emmett explained the rules to Marty, and the game began. Emmett, of course, won every single round, being that he was older and therefore had more experience in training his reflexes. Marty found that the man could figure out which cards to put down with a lightning quick speed. It was interesting to see somebody react that fast. It was also amusing and fascinating to Marty to see the look in Emmett's eyes as he got involved in the game. He wasn't just playing with him, like an adult playing with a kid to keep him out of trouble or to make him happy just because he was little. Playing cards with Emmett was somehow... different.

Emmett was genuinely having fun.

He was playing cards because he wanted to. Not because he was trying to appease or distract the boy, and Marty could sense that.

Emmett laughed whenever he got ahead of Marty in the game, but also congratulated the boy when it seemed he was getting faster. Marty laughed a little, too. He quickly forgot about the evening's events and realized he was having a good time with this white-haired, wild-eyed alleged nutcase in his loud Hawaiian shirt and brown cargo pants.

As Marty and Emmett began a fourth round of Spit, they noticed Lorraine and George pull up to the curb. Marty was actually disappointed that he couldn't get in another game with his newfound companion. He watched, almost in disappointment, as his parents got out of the car and approached the two of them. Lorraine fiercely grabbed Marty in a hug.

"My baby!" she said, near tears. "You don't know how worried I was about you! Don't you ever do this to me again! I was about to call the police when Dr. Brown here called."

"Thank you, by the way," said George to Emmett.

Emmett shrugged casually and smiled.

"Come on, Marty," said Lorraine. "Get in the car."

"Aw, can't I play cards with Dr. Brown some more?" Marty whined.

"I'm sorry, Marty," said Lorraine. "But you're in enough trouble as it is, and we can't keep everyone at home waiting for you."

"Can I see Dr. Brown tomorrow then?"

Lorraine sighed. "Marty, it's time to go home."

Friday, November 29th, 1974

1:18 PM

Thankfully, Marty's punishment for running away was not being able to watch television for a week, rather than being deprived at staying at Bill's house for the weekend. Still, he wanted to see Dr. Brown again, and he approached his mother about it that afternoon while she was reading the newspaper in the kitchen.

"I'm really not comfortable with you seeing him," was her response to Marty's question.

"Why? He didn't hurt me or nothin'." But it was more than that. Dr. Brown didn't interrogate him, coddle him, or tell him he was too young for something. Emmett talked

to Marty as if he were smart enough to understand things. Plus, he was fun to be around. He liked to play. There was something neat about an adult who was like a kid.

“But we don’t know him, and while the rumors about him are probably not true, I’m still not comfortable with you hanging around strangers.”

Marty sighed.

“Besides,” his mother continued. “He’s an adult, and I’m sure he has more important things to do than to hang around with children he doesn’t know.”

Marty sat on the floor and, pouting, folded his hands in his lap. Lorraine folded the newspaper and put it next to the coffee table. She approached Marty and knelt before him. “You want to come with me to the supermarket? I’ve got some shopping to do and I really could use your help.”

Marty, always eager to help with the shopping, and quick to divert, happily agreed to come. As Marty and his mother got out of the car in the shopping center, Marty spotted a mane of white hair emerging from a distant car.

“Dr. Brown!” Marty exclaimed, running towards Emmett.

“Marty, don’t run!” Lorraine scolded.

Emmett turned around at the sound of his name. “Hi, Marty!” he called.

Panting, Marty stopped in front of Emmett, and asked, “What are you doing here?”

“I have to pick up some items at the hardware store,” said Emmett. “What are *you* doing here?”

“I’m going shopping with Mom.”

“Well, good,” said Emmett. He was really hoping that somehow Marty would end up spending the day with him, but he had to play through the course of events, doing what he normally would do, as if he didn’t know who Marty was destined to be. “Have fun.”

“Aw, can’t I come with you?”

“Marty, no,” said Lorraine, catching up with her son. “I’m sure Dr. Brown is very busy today.”

“Aw, please?” said Marty. “Dr. Brown, can’t I come?”

Emmett stopped himself short of saying, “I’d appreciate the company,” lest he sound presumptuous. “I think your mother needs your assistance today,” Emmett finally settled on.

“Please?” Marty looked up at Emmett, and then his mother.

Lorraine sighed. “No, Marty. You need to help me with the groceries.”

“Aw, Mom!” Marty pouted, folding his arms.

“Now, Marty,” smiled Emmett. “You need to stay with your mother.”

“But you’re cool,” said Marty.

“I’m sure your mother is cool, too,” said Emmett. “Now go with her, okay?”

Lorraine dragged Marty, who continued to look behind him, away from Emmett.

“Why can’t I see Dr. Brown?” Marty complained once they were inside the supermarket.

“Marty,” said Lorraine, stopping in the cereal aisle and looking at her son. “You don’t know him.”

“But he was nice!” Marty insisted, staring at his mother.

“Yes, he was,” said Lorraine. “Obviously what we heard about him isn’t true. But he still seems a little off the wall.”

“What does that mean?”

Lorraine knelt to Marty’s level. “It means that he’s unusual. And even if he means well, he might not be completely responsible.”

“How?” Marty stomped the ground.

Lorraine sighed, exasperated at having to explain and rationalize her maternal instincts. “He might not keep an eye on you while you’re with him.”

Marty folded his arms again.

“Marty, enough with this attitude,” Lorraine said, standing back up. “Come on. We need to buy some bread and milk and cereal. Go pick something out.”

Marty, arms still folded, followed his mother. He picked up a box of Frosted Flakes from the shelf and slammed it into the cart.

“Marty, I don’t need another one of your tantrums.”

Marty continued to grab one cereal after another and hurl it into the cart.

“Marty, just one box!” said Lorraine, gripping Marty’s shoulders. “We don’t need all this!”

Marty ignored her and angrily knocked down an entire row of cereal boxes with a quick flick of his wrist. Boxes scattered in the cart and on the floor. A few people turned around and gave mother and son puzzled glances.

“*Marty!*” Lorraine scolded, mortified at her son’s behavior.

Immediately, Lorraine bent down to pick up the boxes. Marty, seeing his opportunity to escape and find his new friend, bolted out of the supermarket and ran into the hardware store next door.

Inside, Marty could see Dr. Brown sifting through a box of light bulbs, and picking them up to examine them.

“Dr. Brown!” said Marty.

Emmett whipped around. “Marty, what are you doing here?” he demanded. “Aren’t you supposed to be with your mother?”

“She changed her mind,” Marty lied. “C’mon, let’s go play cards or somethin’.”

Emmett sighed. “Marty, I don’t think she did.” He took his hands out of the box and looked at the boy, who had a huge grin spreading across his face. Marty really wanted to hang around Emmett. Emmett really wanted to hang around Marty. But Emmett had to be the responsible adult, and—

“I heard your inventions never work,” said Marty bluntly, trying to change the subject but also trying to make small talk with the scientist.

“For once, a substantiated rumor,” Emmett allowed. “But that is beside the point. Come on. I’m taking you back to your mother right now.”

Marty put his hands on his hips and stared at Emmett, practically challenging to let him do that. “Fine,” he said at length.

Emmett took Marty by the hand and led him toward the door.

Through his peripheral vision, Emmett saw something that made him turn completely around. Less than ten feet away from him, inside the store, was a man who he hadn’t seen much in the past ten years, and, the less the better. The man favored him with an icy glance, daring him to stare back. He picked up a lead pipe, from a cardboard box

of assorted odds and ends, and held it casually at his side. Emmett, who chose to keep his head, especially in front of the boy, led Marty out the door at a quick pace.

“What’s wrong, Dr. Brown?” Marty whispered.

Emmett said nothing. He dared not turn around, but he could hear footsteps about twenty feet behind, he estimated. Emmett glanced around, quickly.

It wasn’t very crowded that day.

“Damn!” Emmett swore under his breath. “Marty, don’t drag your feet.”

“What’s going on?” Marty asked, beginning to feel nervous.

“Just stay close,” Emmett whispered back.

The footsteps loomed closer, when—

“There’s your mom,” said Emmett, heaving a sigh of relief.

The footsteps stopped, and Emmett turned around in time to see the man leave. Obviously, the man would not stalk him when a child’s mother was around.

“I think this belongs to you,” Emmett called to a very frenetic Lorraine, who looked like she was on the verge of tears.

“Marty, not again!” Lorraine ran to her son and knelt to his level. “Did you not learn your lesson from Thanksgiving? You know you need to stay close when we go shopping! I was worried sick about you!”

“But I wanted to see Dr. Brown.”

“And I told you to stay with me!” Lorraine said, the stress radiating from her eyes. “Was it not enough for me to take a week of television away from you? Do you need another week taken away?”

“I was fine,” said Marty. “Dr. Brown was watching me.”

“Marty,” Emmett interrupted, joining Lorraine at Marty’s level. “It is not my responsibility. Your mother asked you to stay with her, and you just took off. That’s not safe, you know.”

Marty, forgetting his own predicament, looked up at Emmett, and picked up on the hint of fear in his face. He was genuinely nervous about the man who was following them. He would be safer at the McFlys’ house from whoever the man was, rather than at his old garage.

“Mom, I want him to come home with us,” Marty said at length.

“I’m sorry, honey,” said Lorraine, standing upright again. “But I don’t have enough fish for six people tonight.”

Marty hung his head. “Mom, please let him come home with us.”

“Marty, don’t worry about me,” said Emmett. “I have food for myself.”

“But that bad man was following you,” insisted Marty.

“Marty, what’s the matter with you?” his mother asked, kneeling to her son’s level. “Leave Dr. Brown alone. I’m sure he has plenty to do today. And we need to discuss your punishment.”

“That bad man is gonna get him!” Marty insisted.

“Dr. Brown, what is he talking about?” Lorraine asked, completely baffled.

Emmett stood up and turned around to see the man waiting at a streetlight in the parking lot. “Just take Marty and go.”

Lorraine looked at Emmett, puzzled.

“Go,” said the scientist.

Marty looked behind Emmett, seeing the man waiting. “Dr. Brown, you gotta come with us!” Marty wailed. “That man is gonna get you!”

“What man?” Lorraine asked.

Emmett whipped his head around, gesturing behind him. “That man. He was following us.”

“What man?” Lorraine asked again, taking a more extensive look around. “I don’t see anybody.”

Emmett looked behind him again. The man was gone. He sighed. Why should any rational adult take him seriously? “Just take Marty and go.”

“No!” Marty insisted. “I saw him holding a pipe and he was gonna hit you with it!”

“Marty, are you serious?” Lorraine asked, crouching down to the boy’s level.

Emmett briefly regarded the boy. “Don’t worry,” he said, kneeling in front of Marty again. “I’ll be fine.”

Lorraine looked about. “Should I call the police?”

“No, that won’t be necessary,” said Emmett.

Lorraine gave this a moment of thought, and then nodded. “Okay, then. Be careful.”

She took Marty by the hand, practically dragging him away from Emmett, back to the car.

Marty continued to look behind him, watching Emmett looking about him cautiously.

Indeed, Emmett was nervous.

“I’m never going to forget this, if that’s what you’re thinking...”

Emmett shuddered.

Both he and Hank had a hard time forgetting...

Today I am going to fly! Emmett thought to himself.

Flight was something that always fascinated the twelve-year-old boy, and he swore he’d do it himself someday. He read as much as he could about the subject, checking books out of the library about the then brief history of flight. He was particularly intrigued by Leonardo DaVinci and his flying machines, which could never be realize, as the technology was not available in DaVinci’s time.

But Emmett was growing up in a different world than DaVinci, and he could make his own personal flying machine—he knew he could. And he would show everyone at school that he wasn’t some crazy little misfit kid who said he was going to be a scientist someday. He’d show them that he already was a real scientist who could do anything he put his mind to. He found some parts from old cars in the junkyard and sneaked them to school. He hid them in the closet in a basement that was no longer in use. Every evening, while his parents thought—or at least hoped—that he was outside playing with other children, Emmett sneaked to school and worked on his flying machine. Using some of DaVinci’s diagrams, as well as his own ideas and modifications, he spent a month building the contraption, a helicopter like machine that he could strap on his back.

When the machine was finally completed, Emmett tested it a few times on the school grounds, after midnight. Of course, he had to continue to sneak out to do it.

Emmett jumped out of trees, off of rocks, off of the school steps... and it worked! Every time! The flying machine worked! Emmett could feel the cool wind rippling through his thick blonde hair as he soared above the school in the moonlight. He was doing it! He was flying! He was really, really flying! He invented something that worked! Emmett Lathrop Brown was a scientist, a real, true scientist!

Emmett arrived at school early the next morning so that the other students could see his flying machine work. He hauled the thing to the top of the building and sat there, waiting, for the entire student body to arrive. His stomach flip-flopped with anticipation, knowing that today he was going to prove himself worthy of respect to the other students...

*The piece of metal!
The scream!
Blood!*

Emmett did not feel safe until he was at home.

Chapter 2

Friday, November 29th, 1974
4:57 PM

Back at home, Lorraine reminded Marty that he had to practice his reading. Thanksgiving break would be over on Monday, and she wanted Marty to get in some practice before then.

“But reading’s hard,” Marty protested, not even wanting to entertain the notion of concentrating on his reading, wondering if his new friend got home okay.

“I’ll help you with it,” his father offered.

George and Marty sat at the kitchen table, with Marty’s reader in between them. Patiently, George tried to explain to his son the different sounds each letter made, what the rules and exceptions to rules were... but Marty could not grasp it.

“Try this,” his father said, pointing to a page in the book. “The dog ran away.”

Marty looked at the words in the book. The letters seemed to float around his head and replace themselves in a strange order. “The... god... nar away.”

“No,” said George. “The dog ran away.”

Marty tried again. “The... god ran away.”

“No, Marty,” said George, trying to mask his frustration. “The dog. The dog ran away. Say it.”

“The dog ran away.” Marty paused for about a nanosecond before saying, “I wanna go see Dr. Brown.”

“Marty,” said George, turning the page in the book. “We don’t know him, and neither do you. You know the kind of stuff we’ve heard about him.”

“But it’s not true!” Marty said, folding his arms in another trademark pout.

“It probably isn’t,” said George. “But I don’t understand what your sudden fascination with him is.”

“He’s cool,” said Marty, folding his arms even tighter. “He likes to play. And he didn’t kill no dog.”

Lorraine, who had overheard the conversation, entered the room. “He seems nice,” Lorraine concurred. “And I’m sure he didn’t kill his dog. But, George, we can’t ignore *everything* that we heard.”

Naturally, Marty didn’t see Emmett that day. He did go to Bill’s house on Saturday, of course, to spend the night. The two friends spent the evening playing board games. When night fell, the two boys changed into their pajamas and built a fort in Bill’s room out of chairs and blankets. They lied inside their makeshift tent with all the lights off, save for their flashlights. Bill turned his flashlight on and stuck the lit end in his mouth, making his face look an eerie crimson red.

“Wow,” said Marty. “You look freaky.”

“I *am* freaky,” said Bill in his scariest voice. “And I’m going to tell ya some freaky ghost stories! And my first one is about The Doctor!”

Marty looked at Bill awkwardly. Just a few days ago he would have joined in with stories about The Doctor—and he always had—but now that he was sure that the rumors about the wild-eyed scientist weren’t true, he wondered if it was still okay to tell the stories. If anything, he felt guilty about telling them—and even just hearing them from others.

“Once upon a time, when The Doctor was a little boy, he almost killed a girl with a bomb.”

“Where did you hear that?” Marty asked. He’d heard that story a number of times, but was beginning to wonder where it came from.

Bill was taken aback. For a moment he said nothing, and looked at Marty in disbelief. “Who cares?” he finally asked. “It happened.”

“How do you know?” asked Marty.

“Because I know,” said Bill. “Everybody in Hill Valley says it’s true.”

“He didn’t do that,” said Marty. “Some dummy made it up.”

“Why are you standing up for him?” Bill asked, completely flabbergasted. “You always tell stories about him.”

“But I met him a coupl’ a days ago,” said Marty. “He was nice. He played cards with me.”

“*What?*” Bill nearly hit the roof of the makeshift tent.

“I met him in the court square,” Marty explained. “I ran away ‘cause my family was being mean. And he found me and called my parents. And he played with me while we were waiting for them to come.”

Bill stared at Marty, his jaw practically through the floor. “*Played* with you? You mean he fried your brain!”

“He doesn’t fry kids’ brains,” Marty said, beginning to feel irritated at Bill’s insistence that Emmett did horrible things to people.

“He’s a mad scientist!” said Bill. “He killed his dog! He runs kids over with his car!”

“He does not!” Marty snapped. “Those stories ain’t true.”

“Yeah, they are,” said Bill. “When he was a kid he went after this girl with a bomb and the bomb broke her legs.”

“He did not!” Marty was infuriated.

“You ain’t heard that story? Everyone knows it.”

“Yeah, I heard that story. But somebody made it up,” Marty reiterated. “He doesn’t hurt people.”

Bill backed away from Marty, keeping his eyes on him, as if he were afraid that Marty would attack him. “You’re freaking me out!”

“But he’s nice!” insisted Marty.

“Jeez!” said Bill, his blue eyes growing wider. “Don’t you know anything? My parents said that The Doctor cut his dog’s head off. They said that on New Year’s Eve he sacrifices goats to the devil. They said—”

Marty grew even more frustrated at how easily Bill believed the stories—and acted squeamish at Marty’s presence as a result. Bill was backed up toward the edge of their little fort, his eyes oddly fixed on Marty.

“Are you dumb?” Marty asked. “He don’t do stuff like that!”

Bill bolted out of the tent.

“Where’re you going?” Marty asked.

“Mom!” Marty heard Bill call. “Mom! Marty’s scaring me!”

Marty looked around awkwardly as he heard the sound of approaching footsteps.

“Marty, can you please come out for a second?” Bill’s mother asked.

Marty slowly got on his knees and crawled under the blue blanket that was separating him from the outside of the little fort.

“Boys, what’s going on?” Bill’s mother asked when Marty emerged.

“He was scaring me!” Bill said, almost maniacally.

Bill’s mother put her hands on her hips. “Is this true Marty?”

“Yeah,” Bill answered on Marty’s behalf. “He said that The Doctor is cool. He said that all the stories we heard were lies.”

“They are too!” said Marty.

“Boys, boys,” said Bill’s mother clasping a hand on each of the boys’ shoulders. “Why are you guys talking about Dr. Brown?”

“He said that The Doctor is *nice*,” said Bill, pointing his index finger at Marty.

“But he is!” Marty folded his arms.

“Whoa,” Bill’s mother said. “Enough, both of you.” She knelt at Marty’s level. “Your mother lets you hang around Dr. Brown?”

“He’s really cool,” Marty said, shuffling his feet and looking at the floor. “He played cards with me.”

“Marty, you be careful.” She clasped her hands on Marty’s shoulders. “Seriously.”

Marty said nothing as he slowly looked at Bill’s mother, and then at Bill.

Marty was actually glad to go home the next day. Bill’s mother instructed the boys to lay off the subject of Emmett Brown, which Bill gladly did. Marty didn’t talk about the scientist, but only for show, so he wouldn’t scare Bill anymore. As he drifted off to sleep, he couldn’t help but think about how often people talked about Emmett

Brown. It wasn't fair. He wondered if Emmett had any friends, and he intended to find out. So after leaving Bill's house the next day in a sour mood, he came up with a plan to meet up with the scientist.

"Mom, can we go to Burger King today?" Marty asked his mother that afternoon in the car.

Lorraine looked at her watch. "I guess so, if you're hungry," she said. Lorraine didn't question her son's choice of restaurant. After all, he often liked fast food—the greasier, the better. Not that Burger King was the greasiest hamburger place, but...

He really wanted to see Emmett. When he thought about it, he really wasn't sure why he needed to see him so badly. He was just different from other adults, and—as Marty realized now, after his argument with Bill—other kids.

Marty firmly decided he was going to get to know this man.

Lorraine parked the car at the Burger King, and she and Marty got out. Marty tried to think of ways to put his plan into motion. If Emmett Brown were inside Burger King, then the interaction would be quite easy. If not, then he would have to figure out another way to find the scientist. He couldn't run away, as that already got him into trouble. Maybe he could drag his mother to Emmett's house and knock on the door. But she might not let him do that. Unless...

"Hey, Mom?" Marty asked when they got inside. "Can we get Dr. Brown some food?"

"What?" asked Lorraine in astonishment. "Why?"

"Cause he's lonely," said Marty, not completely sure if that was true. Of course, it might as well be, given what the town thought of him. "I bet it would make him happy."

Lorraine sighed as she stood in the too-long line with her son. "Why are you so fascinated with Dr. Brown?"

"He's cool," said Marty, as if that in itself would explain everything.

"How's he cool, Marty?" asked Lorraine. "You don't even know him enough to be able to say that."

"He helped me when I ran away on Thanksgiving," said Marty. "He taught me a card game."

Lorraine listened to these words from her youngest child. Dr. Brown was obviously good with children; she could see that from both of the encounters she and Marty had with him. She could sense that, in the short time she had seen Emmett with her son, Emmett wanted to connect with Marty in some way. But why? He was at least fifty years old, and her son was only six. And the world was full of perverts...

But perhaps the man was just lonely. Emmett already had two opportunities in which he could have kidnapped or hurt Marty, but instead he brought him right back to his family. And he could very likely have no friends because of the rumors that constantly circulated about him. That would be enough to make anybody lonely. And the man who was following him at the shopping center was probably another person who had no reservation in making his life miserable by playing a prank.

No, it couldn't hurt to say hello for a moment. Lorraine had been to his garage before, in the fifties, while pursuing her latest love interest, who just so happened to go by the name of Marty (*not* Calvin!) Klein. The equipment in the garage certainly was enough to raise eyebrows, but overall it looked harmless. She occasionally wondered

what became of Emmett's nephew. Marty had told her that he was just visiting for a week and then was going to go back to his parents' house in San Francisco.

And if Emmett's nephew had no qualms about visiting the eccentric man, why should the rest of the town? It wasn't fair to believe everything that the newspapers and town gossip said.

No, it wouldn't hurt at all to say hello. It would be a nice gesture.

"Okay, Marty," Lorraine said at length. "We'll get him something to eat."

Lorraine bought the food and, with Marty, carried it around the back to Emmett's garage.

Marty took the food from Lorraine and, when he got to the chain-link fence, couldn't open it quickly enough. He ran inside and knocked on the door.

"Marty!" Emmett exclaimed happily when he opened the door. "What are you doing here?"

"I came to see you," said Marty. "We brought food." He handed the scientist the bags of food.

Emmett smiled and chuckled. It was Burger King, of all things—essentially artery-clogging lard in a bag—but a thoughtful gesture nonetheless. Somehow, he suspected that the boy planned this just so he could find a way to say hello.

"Why, thank you," Emmett smiled. "Want to come in?"

Marty bolted inside before Emmett could complete his sentence. Einstein, who had been sleeping on a small cot up until the door opened, ran over to Marty. Marty giggled and petted the dog as he jumped up, putting his paws on the boy's shoulders.

"C'mon boy!" called Marty, breaking into run. "Let's play!"

Einstein chased the boy around the garage.

"Marty, don't run," said Lorraine. She looked at Emmett apologetically. "I'm sorry if he's a little high-strung today."

Emmett smiled again, as he put the bags of food on a nearby table. "No, no. He's fine."

Marty stopped running and looked around the large garage in awe. In one quarter was a living area, with a large bed and wardrobe, but the rest of the garage looked like a bomb hit it. Paper was scattered everywhere. Tools were on the floor as well as tables. Beakers sat atop another table. A jukebox was in the middle of the room. There were so many interesting things to see!

"Wow!" exclaimed Marty. "I wish I could keep my room this messy! My mom makes me clean it every Saturday."

Emmett chuckled.

Marty reached for a gas gauge, which sat atop a small black table.

"No, no, Marty!" Emmett said, grabbing the boy's hand. "Don't touch that. That's a gas gauge. You could hurt yourself."

"Then why do you have it?" Marty wondered aloud. "Why have something if nobody can touch it?"

"The same reason your mother has a stove but doesn't let you touch it. There are some things that, if you don't know what you're doing with them, can be dangerous. I wasn't allowed to touch things like that at your age either."

Marty giggled, still finding it hard to believe that this man with a shock of white hair could have ever been six years old.

“You got a lot of cool stuff in here,” Marty mused. “What do you do with it?”

“Lots of things,” Emmett replied. “Science experiments. None of my stuff has ever worked, but it’ll happen someday.”

“How do you know?” Marty asked curiously, if not too bluntly.

Emmett knew, of course, that he would build a working time machine in eleven years. But he also knew that he should never give up on anything, no matter what.

“Because I don’t give up. I just keep trying.”

“Wow,” said Marty in awe. “Cool!”

“Well, I think it’s time to go home,” Lorraine said, looking at her watch. “You have to practice your reading.”

“Aw, I don’t wanna go home!” protested Marty. “If I gotta practice reading, I want Dr. Brown to help me.”

“Marty, I am sure he’s very busy today,” Lorraine said in exasperation. She looked at the scientist apologetically.

Emmett thought for a moment. Maybe now was the time for the situation—of he and Marty being able to spend time together—to present itself.

“If it’s okay with you, I would be more than happy to help him,” offered Emmett, praying to the vast and unresponsive heavens that Lorraine wouldn’t drag Marty away from him again.

Lorraine looked at Marty, and then looked at Emmett. His willingness to help Marty was indicative of either his selfless nature, his loneliness, or a little of both. It certainly was odd that he seemed to like being around the little boy as much as he did, but from what she could see, Emmett was basically harmless. Maybe he simply got along better with children because of how much energy he had, something that most kids lost by their teens. He had a dog that seemed happy enough. He wouldn’t allow Marty to touch something that he could hurt himself on, and he seemed to have an optimistic attitude towards life. Maybe this was the kind of example that Marty needed from an adult who wasn’t a parent or a teacher, in terms of learning how to read. Kids often responded better to adults other than their parents and teachers, for some reason.

“You sure it’s okay with you?” Lorraine asked the scientist. “I wouldn’t want him to be in the way.”

“Not at all,” Emmett said. “Really, I would be more than happy to help him. And I’ll bring him home afterwards.”

“Okay,” said Lorraine. “I have some of his books in the car. I’ll go get them.”

While Lorraine was getting the books, Marty stared in amazement at Emmett’s extensive clock collection. He noticed one particular clock, in which a man, who looked remarkably like Emmett, was hanging from the hands. In fact, the clock looked just like the one at the tower in the town square.

“Did you climb on the clock tower?” Marty asked.

Startled at the question, Emmett grunted an ambiguous answer.

“So it *is* true,” said Marty. “You made the clock stop.”

“I didn’t say I did,” said Emmett, not wanting to broach the subject any further. “Let’s get to your studies.” He cleared off a card table with a clean sweep of his hand. Papers, papers, and more papers scattered to the ground. Lorraine brought Marty’s reading books inside and left. Emmett sat across from Marty, and their studying began.

Two hours later, Marty's head hurt. "I can't do it," he whined. "I'm too dumb."

"You're not dumb, Marty," said Emmett. "And you can do it."

"Then why can't I read yet?"

"Because you need more time, that's all. And you *can* do it. I know it seems hard for you now, but a couple years down the line, you'll look back on this and laugh, because you'll be reading just as well as your peers."

Marty hung his head.

"You can do it, Marty. The way I see it, when you put your mind to it, you can accomplish anything."

Marty sighed.

"Do you want to take a break? I think you've worked hard today."

Marty nodded. "Can I see some of your stuff?"

"Of course," said the scientist. He walked over to his workbench and picked up a geodesic helmet.

"What's that?" Marty asked, trying not to giggle.

"I've been working on it for quite awhile. It's a mind-reading helmet, but it doesn't work. It's just as well, though. It's probably best that I don't know what people are thinking." He chuckled at a little dark humor.

Marty took the helmet from Emmett and slipped it onto his cranium. The contraption was built for Emmett's head, not his own—it was too big and slipped over his eyes.

Marty gasped with surprise.

Emmett picked the helmet off the boy's head and put it back on the table.

Marty sat down on a nearby couch, and regarded the middle-aged man with a long gaze, and then the garage-turned lab that surrounded him. He was too young to put his thoughts into words, but he could see that the scientist was a hard—and enthusiastic—worker. He had never met anybody like this before, and it was interesting.

A framed newspaper clipping on the wall caught Marty's eye. "What does that say?"

"Brown mansion destroyed."

"You had a mansion? What happened to it?" Marty was curious.

"I'd rather not talk about it." Emmett turned his back and gazed at the article, mesmerized, painfully recalling the evening back in the sixties in which his house—and family history—burnt down.

"Why?" Marty asked.

Emmett turned and gazed at the curious boy, who had absolutely no idea the weight of the question he was asking. So Emmett answered the question as best he could, in a way that was accessible—but not condescending—to Marty. "Because sometimes there are things that hurt to talk about. You don't like it when your grandparents ask you about your reading, because it's a painful subject for you. It's the same sort of thing for me."

"Oh," said Marty. He understood Emmett's reservation for talking about the incident, but he was still curious nonetheless. "The kids at school say that you blew your house up with a bomb."

Emmett managed a wan smile. "You believe that?"

Marty thought for a moment. Of course he didn't believe it. But why did all the kids at school say it?

"Naw," Marty said decisively. "Somebody's makin' it up, I bet."

Emmett sat down on the couch beside the boy.

"People make up dumb things about you at school. Know what else they say?"

Marty continued before Emmett had a chance to interject and say that it wasn't any of his affair. "They say that you broke somebody's legs."

Emmett flinched, but tried to keep his cool in front of his impressionable friend.

"But I bet they're making it up. They're just being dumb."

Emmett grunted, mostly in response to the pain and guilt he was feeling...

The rip of flesh!

"Don't it bother you when people say dumb stuff about you?"

The blood!

Emmett sighed, trying to remain composed in front of Marty. "I don't listen to it," he said. "It's really none of my business, anyway."

It was blood!

"But it's dumb to make up stuff about people," said Marty. "Especially stuff about blowing things up and breaking people's legs..."

"Hey, look!" one boy shouted from the ground. "Emmett's up there."

"What's he doing?" kids asked one another.

Emmett looked back down from the school roof, a victorious smile on his face.

This was it. At long last, he was going to do something that would impress people, rather than make him a subject of ridicule. "Look what I made! I'm gonna fly!"

Laughter erupted from the crowd that formed below.

"Just watch!" said Emmett, not swayed one bit by their skepticism.

The boy looked down. It had to be at least thirty feet to the ground. What if something went wrong? What if it didn't work? But almost the entire student body was watching him. There was no turning back now.

He summoned all his courage, leapt from the building, and pulled the cord. The helicopter sprung to life, the propellers spinning wildly—

The dumpster smacked Emmett in the face—hard! The sound of crunching metal and a scream penetrated the garbage he was submerged in.

Shaking, he looked above him. He could barely see the sunlight through the garbage that covered him. He slowly sifted his way through the trash, reached the top and, gingerly, lifted his head over the edge of the dumpster.

A fourteen-year old girl was facedown, unconscious. One of the propeller blades from the flying machine was on top of her legs. Blood oozed onto the asphalt. The blood was dark. It was blood! God, it was blood!

It was another unintentional blow. Emmett leaned into the backrest and thrust his head back.

"What's wrong?" Marty wondered aloud. "Are you okay?"

Emmett sighed and then, at length, said, "I'm fine, kid."

Marty regarded the scientist with another analytical glance, wondering how to address him. Something was bothering him, and Marty wanted to be supportive, to let the

scientist know that he was his friend. It felt weird calling him Dr. Brown, and he certainly couldn't call him Emmett. He was taught never to call adults by their first names, under any circumstances. His mind searched for a name that was easy but also appropriate.

"Doc?" Marty said at length.

Emmett, hearing the familiar nickname that he hadn't heard in nineteen years, looked up and smiled. Marty was reaching out to him.

"Are you crazy?"

"Do *you* think I am?" Emmett asked, mildly offended—but much more amused—by the presumptuousness of Marty's question.

"Nope. But everyone makes up stories about you."

"I've learned not to let it bother me so much," Emmett said, trying to disguise the bit of anguish he was feeling. "If anything, I feel sorry for these people, just eating up whatever is spoon-fed to them."

Marty continued to fire more questions.

"Do you have any friends?"

Emmett wasn't sure how to answer that one. He was going to be friends with Marty, eventually. But at the moment they were just acquaintances, two people who barely knew each other. At length, Emmett gave an ambiguous shrug and stifled a smile. Not knowing the answer to a question that had plagued him for a majority of his life could really hurt, and he didn't want to be too familiar with the boy and blatantly affirm his question with "Yes, you are my friend" without it being completely clear that he and Marty were on the same wavelength.

Marty seemed to understand, on some level, that Emmett had some issues that he was struggling to deal with. But at the same time, he had little concept of the kind of weight his questions and comments carried. He regarded Emmett, who remained silent and thoughtful, once again.

"I'll be your friend," Marty offered.

Emmett turned around and smiled. "Why, thank you Marty."

An ear-to-ear grin spread across Marty's face, and the two regarded each other, in silence, for a brief moment.

"Who was that bad man we saw?" Marty finally asked. "You know, the guy at the parking lot?"

Emmett regarded the boy. How could he possibly answer this question? "Just somebody I used to know," Emmett finally said.

"Is he mad at you?" Marty asked.

...And God, she was bleeding! Because of Emmett she was bleeding!

Shaking, Emmett climbed out of the dumpster.

"What happened?" Emmett asked, his voice and body trembling.

The ground was pressed firmly against his back.

"You're what happened, you little freak!" Hank shouted. "That's my sister, you idiot! She's hurt because of you and your stupid propeller on your stupid flying machine!"

"No!" cried Emmett in disbelief, struggling to get to his feet.

And, God, the blood was only a few feet away—

Hank would not allow Emmett to move until his threat was heard. "If she isn't okay, then God help me I'm going to get you, you freak!"

"I'll call the ambulance!" Emmett offered desperately. He was willing to do anything to rectify the situation, even a little. "I'm sorry, I wanna help—!"

Hank yanked Emmett to his feet by his collar. "No!" he shouted. "You've helped enough already!"

The crowd continued to form around Hank and Emmett. Stunned gazes dotted the crowd, all of their eyes fixed on the failed scientist.

A failed human being.

"I'll go get help," someone offered.

Emmett could hear the person run off as he stared at the crowd surrounding him. Nobody would take his or her eyes off of him. Judgment was being passed in a quick, but permanent, way. He accepted the blame for Holly's injury immediately. But he didn't want anybody to think that he would intentionally hurt somebody.

"I—I'm sorry," Emmett stammered. "I didn't mean to hurt her." He tried to approach the girl, but the other students blocked his path. They continued to level their angry and unforgiving gazes at the boy. "Please, let me help."

"You stay the hell away from my sister, you hear?" With a quick flick of his hand, Hank knocked Emmett on the ground.

Emmett winced in the pain that shot through his spine.

Emmett lay on the ground, feeling too guilty to allow himself to get up again right away. He felt low, lower than low. He looked up and could see that the students continued to stare at him. Anger and hatred were written all over their faces. A few other students shot Emmett sympathetic and concerned looks, but most of the others had already made it clear that they'd made up their minds that the boy was a dangerous lunatic and should be avoided completely...

Emmett looked at the young boy whose innocence wasn't yet tainted by the world's cruelty, even with the rumors that he'd heard and repeated without thinking about it. Marty was clearly reaching out to him, offering to be his friend. Would he still want to have anything to do with Emmett if he knew what happened so long ago? Would his young, fragile mind even be able to comprehend the horror of that incident? Things were just so damned complicated. Emmett hoped that Marty would never have to live through, or even witness, the kinds of egregious and traumatic things that Emmett had experienced. It was right then and there that he wished he had the power to protect and shield the child from the cruel world, and to make sure he had a completely happy and innocent childhood.

But Marty wanted honesty. He didn't want to be sheltered. It wasn't Emmett's responsibility to make those kinds of calls, anyway, and he could only hope that his parents would find a good balance for him as he got older and was exposed to more of the world.

Outside it began to rain. Emmett looked out the window, and then looked at his watch. It was twenty past eight. "I should take you home now. Your parents probably don't want you out here so late."

"Okay," was Marty's reluctant response.

A blinding flash of lightning struck from outside, and a deafening clap of thunder followed.

“Great Scott!”

“You’re scared of lightning?” Marty asked, trying not to laugh.

Emmett shrugged.

“I thought you weren’t scared of anything!”

“We’re all scared of something, Marty. I’m not really scared of it, but I don’t particularly like it either.”

“Why?” Marty wondered aloud.

“I got struck by lightning years ago.”

“Oh no!” said Marty. “How’d that happen?”

“Just... being in the wrong place at the wrong time,” Emmett dismissed.

“Anyway, I’m not driving in that, and I’m not going to let your parents either. I should call them and tell them that I’ll bring you home after the storm is over.”

And he did just that. The night progressed, and the storm continued to loom over Hill Valley. Marty’s eyelids began to droop, so Emmett kept himself busy by reading a newspaper. Einstein, who had been sleeping in a far corner of the garage, joined the pair, making himself comfortable on the floor in front of the couch.

“Hey Einy,” said Emmett, reaching down to pet his dog.

Another bolt of lightning and clap of thunder, and the lights were out. The room was dark save for the light from a small candle that sat on a nearby table.

Marty screamed, covered his ears and shut his eyes. “Doc!”

“I thought you weren’t scared,” said Emmett, not without a hint of amusement in his voice.

Marty quickly sat upright, trying to regain a more confident posture. “I’m not scared of nothin’.”

“Okay, Marty,” said Emmett, trying to hide his growing amusement.

Another blinding lightning bolt and deafening clap of thunder.

Without a word, Marty hurled himself at the scientist, wrapping his arms around his waist awkwardly, and screwing his eyes shut.

“Will you make up your mind already?” Emmett sighed and, after a feat of effort, loosened Marty’s grip. Emmett was not particularly comfortable with affection. The last time he remembered being hugged was back in 1955 when seventeen-year-old Marty was about to return to the future. It was a flattering, yet awkward, gesture. Although he was happy to see Marty again after all these years, he was not prepared for demands of physical attention, something that many young children seemed to want from adults. But he would have to get used to it until, at least, Marty reached adolescence when hugging other males was a big no-no. Being hugged was a very common—and human—interaction that most people took for granted and therefore expected others to take for granted as well.

Just like friendships.

Hell, just like any kind of *normal* human interactions...

Emmett didn’t know the name of the seventeen-year-old girl who took him to the nurse and then to the principal’s office. She wasn’t in any of his classes. For whatever

reason, she didn't blame the boy for the accident and chose to comfort him instead of reprimand him. She draped an arm around Emmett and led him down the corridor.

"It's going to be fine, Emmett," the girl said softly. "It wasn't your fault."

Emmett said nothing. He didn't even look at her. When the teachers came to the scene of the accident, they'd asked someone to take Emmett to the nurse, and then to the principal while they tended to Holly and called an ambulance. He suspected that this girl only volunteered for the job and was only expressing sympathy because Emmett was five years younger, a baby compared to her.

"You're going to be a great inventor someday," she said. "I know this was an accident. Do you think anybody your age, or even my age, could build something like that? That's pretty amazing."

Emmett still said nothing and still didn't make eye contact. He didn't even want to think about it like that. It was just another affirmation—for better and for worse, mostly worse, now—that he was different from everybody else.

When they got to the infirmary, the nurse was not yet there, and her secretary explained that she would be back shortly.

Emmett sat in a chair and stared straight ahead, still saying nothing. The older girl sat beside him.

"It's going to be okay, Emmett," she said.

When Emmett didn't respond, she put her arms around the child and held him in her lap, hugging him tightly. Emmett closed his eyes, but otherwise gave no reaction to the gesture. It was comforting and, deep down, he was glad that there was somebody who cared. But he didn't want to be mothered. He had to handle this situation himself. He was certain that if he were seventeen, like the girl, then she would show no sympathy towards him. She probably felt he was a cute, naïve little kid who made a mistake, not an equal who made a mistake.

The girl gently rocked Emmett in her arms and then kissed him on the forehead. Yes, he was definitely being mothered. It was comforting but also demeaning. He had no idea how to react.

When the nurse finally returned, she examined Emmett. He robotically showed her his arms and legs, not even caring if he was hurt or not. It turned out he had a few bruises, but was otherwise okay. When that was done, the older girl led Emmett to the principal's office. She wished him luck and assured him that everything would be okay, before going back to class.

In the principal's office, Emmett continued to hold his stone facade.

"Emmett, you could have been killed today. And you almost killed Holly! Do you have any concept of that at all?"

Emmett stared at his shoes as the principal continued to talk.

"I realize that you weren't trying to hurt anybody, but you broke a number of school rules in the process. You've caused a great deal of damage, and I hope you realize that."

"Is she gonna be okay?" Emmett whispered, still looking down.

"Okay?" The principal was shocked. "Okay? She's going to live if that's what you mean. Your little stunt broke both of her legs," said the principal. "She's going to be in a wheelchair for about a year, and she'll be lucky if she ever walks again. Do you appreciate the severity of the situation?"

Emmett looked up. The look on his principal's face told him that he was not joking. Emmett nearly killed somebody.

The blood!

Yes, Emmett nearly killed somebody. He caused irreparable damage.

"I'm sorry," Emmett stammered, wondering if there was anything he could do—anything at all—to fix the situation. "I didn't mean to hurt anybody."

"I know you didn't," said the principal, knitting his eyebrows. "That's why I'm not going to expel you. But if you bring any of your stupid inventions to school again, then God help me, you'll be outta here so fast your head will spin! Keep your Doctor Frankenstein junk at home! Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," Emmett whispered.

The child trudged home that evening, staring at the ground as he walked. His mother and father, who had already heard the story from the school principal, were at a loss of what to say to him. They simply yelled at him never to pull a ridiculous stunt like that again and sent him to his room for the rest of the evening.

Atop Emmett's bed was the January 1932 issue of Popular Mechanics, which he had just purchased the other day. On the cover were a picture of an airplane, whose wing had broken off, and a man parachuting. Emmett picked up the magazine and looked at it in disdain. He tossed it in a nearby garbage can, turned off the light, and then threw himself on his bed, burying his head into a pillow.

He'd fallen asleep for only a couple hours—if one would call it sleep. Every time he looked at his watch, it seemed time was getting slower and slower. One nightmare of the day's events after another would follow. The dreams seemed to get longer and longer but, in actuality, less and less time passed between them. And each time he woke up, his pillow was even damper.

Just as the sun was coming up, Emmett began to realize how this incident would affect him. He had spent so much time thinking about how Holly was affected to even consider himself. He realized that things would never be the same, especially not between him and Hank, especially since Hank never liked him to begin with and enjoyed spreading gossip, not just around the school, but around the town, to anybody and everybody who would listen...

Emmett looked to his right and noticed that the sleeping Marty was leaning comfortably against him. This time, Emmett did not flinch or pry him off.

It was pressing ten when the storm finally died down enough for Emmett to feel comfortable driving Marty home. He called the McFlys to let them know that they were on their way and, after a futile effort in waking up Marty, carried him to the car.

The jolting of the Cadillac was what finally woke Marty.

"Doc?" Marty mumbled, opening his eyes.

"I see you're finally awake," Emmett said with a crooked smile.

"Can we hang out again tomorrow?"

"Perhaps. And I'll help you with your reading anytime you need it," said Emmett.

Marty yawned a nearly incomprehensible "thanks."

At the McFlys' home, Emmett was greeted with some more thank yous from Marty's parents. While Emmett and George exchanged a few words, Marty clung to his

new friend, partially for support while trying to stay awake, and partially because he didn't want to go home just yet.

"Well, Marty," George said finally. "It's time for bed."

"You'd better let go before you grow too attached," Emmett quipped, prompting Marty, with a quick pat on the back, to release his grip. He still wasn't completely comfortable with Marty trying to hug him.

Marty sleepily lurched over to his father. He stopped and turned around to face Emmett.

"Hey, Doc?"

"Yeah?"

"We're pals, right?" Marty asked through a yawn.

Emmett smiled. Yes, Marty was reaching out to him. He was just as interested in hanging around Emmett as Emmett was around Marty. It was too early to label the two as close friends, but it certainly was heading in that direction. "Absolutely. Do you think I would be helping you if we weren't?"

Marty smiled, then yawned, and staggered back over to his father. George picked him up.

"Tired, Marty?" asked George.

Marty nodded, and waved good-bye to Emmett before passing out against his father's shoulder.

The next day, Marty spent another couple hours studying at Emmett's house. Emmett was patient with his young friend, and Marty was beginning to improve. Marty didn't want to go home just yet after the studying, and neither did Emmett want Marty to leave. The two were bonding very quickly, and Marty's parents were okay with letting Marty stay out with his new friend a little longer. They had work to do around the house, and felt it would be good for them, and Marty, for Marty to be out of the house and socializing a bit, even if with someone nine times his age.

It was an unusually warm December day, sneaking up into the sixties behind Old Man Winter's back, so Emmett decided to take Marty to the local park, where they could enjoy the fresh air. Emmett brought an old plastic Frisbee that he found in the bottom of a cardboard box that he had been meaning to go through for ages. Now was as good a time as any to put the old thing to use, especially now that he had somebody—other than Einstein, who didn't like to play catch, anyway—to throw the Frisbee to.

Both Emmett and Marty ignored the perplexed stares that they earned from both children and adults in the park, and simply enjoyed one another's company. After a long game of Frisbee, the two friends sat on a nearby bench. Marty, who was beginning to forge a fascination with Emmett's instinctive knowledge of how things worked, asked his new friend why a Frisbee flew the way it did.

Marty noticed the glow of intense interest that radiated from Emmett's eyes as he explained the physics of flight, and how the shape of the disc acted as a makeshift wing when air passed under it, allowing it to stay aloft for brief periods of time. Marty listened in fascination to this explanation of an everyday object—until he looked behind Emmett's shoulder and noticed a familiar figure looming behind a tree.

"Hey, Doc," Marty whispered. "It's that bad man."

Slowly, Emmett looked over his shoulder. Indeed, it was Hank Webb, holding a large rock in one hand, and favoring Emmett with a cold, icy, stare and crooked smile. Emmett looked at the young boy. Why did he have to be exposed to the world's cruelty, especially cruelty that egregious? This outlandish behavior was not even from a ten-year-old child trying to scare another ten-year-old child. It was a fifty-nine-year-old man genuinely threatening a man of nearly the same age—and a six-year-old boy.

"I'm never going to forget this, if that's what you're thinking..."

"Let's go," said Emmett.

He firmly grasped Marty's hand, and led him toward the car.

"I don't get it," said Marty, once he and Emmett were safely on the road. "Why does he keep following you?"

Emmett made an ambiguous grunt, not knowing how to otherwise answer that question, and not wanting to taint Marty's fragile young mind...

As Emmett reluctantly walked to school the day after his failed flight, he tried to think about what to do next, how to come to terms with—

SLAM!

Emmett's face was in the dirt, and his left arm was twisted in an impossible position behind his back.

"Listen to me, you little freak," Hank's hot breath blew into Emmett's ear. "Do you know what you did yesterday? You almost killed my sister. She's gonna have to wear casts on both legs for a year. And the doctors said that she'll probably never walk again." He pushed Emmett further into the dirt. "Are you listening to me?"

"Get off me," Emmett whispered shakily.

Hank drove his knee into Emmett's back. "Do you know what you've done?" Hank screamed.

Emmett winced in pain. "I'm sorry. It was an accident. I didn't mean to—"

"Are you stupid, Brown? Or are you just crazy? You think it's okay to ruin people's lives?"

"I didn't want to hurt anybody," the boy whispered. "If there's anything I can do to help—"

"There's nothing you can do!" Hank pushed Emmett's face further into the dirt, until he could scarcely breathe. "You already almost killed her! If you knew what was good for you and good for this town, you'd get the hell out of here!"

Emmett winced at the pain. His arm burned as it was twisted harder. Dirt irritated the inside of his nose. Suddenly, he was at his feet again, with his arm still in Hank's grip.

"You can go now," said Hank. "But don't think that this is going to be the last of it. I'm never going to forget this, if that's what you're thinking. And neither is this town."

Emmett kept his eyes fixed on Hank, masking the fear that sent tremors down his spine. He had already read the article in that morning's newspaper. He should have seen it coming a mile away. Someday, he had been bound to do something irreparable.

And it had been done.

He wondered if he'd run into the older girl again that day. He didn't. It didn't matter, anyway. She'd failed to mention that her father was recently fired from his job, and so her family was moving to San Francisco, in hopes that he could find more work.

She moved two weeks after the accident, and Emmett never saw her again. He wondered if he'd ever meet anybody else who would actually care about what happened to him and take his dreams of being a scientist seriously.

Driving towards Marty's house, Emmett began to feel conflicted at the kind of responsibility that he was carrying by being Marty's friend. Perhaps this wasn't how they had met in the original timeline. After all, he would never want to drag a young child into such drama. Originally, had he decided not to befriend Marty, and then had they met up again years later by chance, after Hank had given up on harassing Emmett? He looked at Marty, unable to help but think about the young life that he had in his hands whenever they were out in public.

Would Hank ever forgive and let Emmett forget and move on with his life?

Hank stayed true to his word, and went out of his way to make Emmett's life miserable as often as he could. As it was only the 1930s and times were quite different, the teachers merely dismissed Hank, who knew how to harass Emmett when the teachers weren't even within earshot, as somebody with an attitude problem, rather than a vengeful bully. Besides, many of them turned the other way when students harassed Emmett anyway, feeling that he brought it upon himself by injuring Holly Webb.

It was quite easy to feel the hatred that Hank felt, especially the time when Emmett was nailed to the ground in the boys' bathroom with Hank's massive hands wrapped around his neck and given the threat that if he ever again told the teachers about Big Bad Hank being mean to Little Defenseless Emmett, then he would not live to see the light of another day. Aside from one time, before the incident where Hank tried to strangle him, Emmett never told his parents, or anybody, about the abuse he suffered in school. He didn't feel he deserved it, but he also knew that he caused Holly's injury, even if by accident. It was his fault, therefore it was his fight, he reasoned.

Even though Holly could walk again, about two years after the incident, she did so with a limp, and often had to lean on a cane. And Emmett certainly wasn't without guilt. For a good few months after his failed flight, he rarely tried to experiment or create any new gadgets—it just reopened old wounds. He eventually got over it, of course—his love of science and the joy of creation were in his blood. But Emmett often passed many a sleepless night, knowing that he'd caused somebody's permanent damage and misery. The town, of course, never forgot either. Stories circulated more than ever, each worse than the next. Not everybody knew that Emmett was only twelve when the incident occurred, as some townsfolk didn't get wind of the story until years later. They only knew what they had heard, that Emmett Brown was a dangerous and insane troublemaker. As the years passed, very few people knew fiction from reality, as the story had evolved and changed as time passed, also giving birth to new and crueller rumors.

And although it had been many years since Holly's injury, and Hank and Emmett's interactions were fewer and farther between, any interaction they had always involved some form of violent harassment on Hank's part, be it verbal or physical. Generally, it involved a nasty comment or a spit in the face, but sometimes it even involved a violent and deliberate shove—along with a threat...

Emmett stopped at the hardware store on the way home that night to pick up some secure locks for his garage.

He made an important decision.

From now on, he and Marty would only spend time together indoors— to protect Marty from any and every possible physical—and emotional—injuries.

The weekend ended too early for Marty. He really enjoyed the time he'd spent with Emmett, getting tutored and getting to know the scientist better. If there was one thing he continued to learn, it was that he indeed was a lot of fun and interesting to hang around.

In school on Monday, Marty's outside help became apparent to his teacher, Mrs. Baum, when he was asked to read a passage from his reader. At his reading table, the other children exchanged smirks with each other when Marty was chosen for the task.

"The... god'—no, wait—'dog... ran... outside... with... his... own... own... own-er. He... was'—no, I mean—'he *saw*... a tac—cat, walking... with... the... girl... next... rood—door." Marty's head started to hurt. The page wasn't even half finished yet. He caught glances from other children, rolling their eyes and making faces. One even pretended to snore.

"Matt, that's enough," scolded Mrs. Baum. "Go ahead, Marty."

Marty looked at the next sentence. It started with a big word that he hadn't the vaguest idea of how to pronounce.

"Doc, I can't do it! It's impossible!"

"Marty, you can do it. I know you can. Just stay focused."

"But I'm too dumb."

"I already told you! You're not dumb. Marty, Thomas Edison once said that genius is one percent inspiration, and ninety-nine percent perspiration."

That in itself was something Emmett had to explain to Marty, who as of yet, did not understand the meaning of such expressions, or even know who Thomas Edison was.

"Come on Marty. Give it another shot."

Marty stared at the word in front of him. "'Ch-ch- *chasing* cats was... a...lot... of... fun." He continued to struggle with the reading, but kept trying until the page was finished.

"Marty, I'm proud of you," said Mrs. Baum. "This is much better than you were reading on Friday."

"Yeah, maybe somebody gave him a brain over the weekend," quipped Matt.

"Matt, you will be on the wall today at recess if you don't stop talking like that to other students," said Mrs. Baum. "Marty, it seems like you were really working hard this weekend. Has somebody been helping you?"

"Yeah," said Marty. "My friend, Doc."

"Who's Doc?" asked Mrs. Baum.

"Dr. Brown," said Marty, not the slightest bit reserved about his relationship with the scientist.

"Dr. *Emmett* Brown?" Mrs. Baum tried not to sound *too* shocked. "You mean *The Doctor*?"

"Yeah," said Marty. "But I don't call him that. That's mean."

“What?” said Matt. “You’re gonna get yourself killed! Don’t you know he’s a mad scientist and he does experiments on dogs and kills them?”

“He does not!” said Marty. “That’s all a bunch of lies!”

“Yeah, right!” said Bill. “You were at my house this weekend and saying that you guys hang out. Did he fry your brain or something?”

“He doesn’t do that stuff!” Marty said. “He helped me read and then we played Frisbee at the park.”

“Guess what I heard!” said Matt. “The Doctor thought some guy was following him at the shopping center and at the park.”

“He *was* following him,” Marty insisted. “Both times. I was there. He scared us.”

Bill laughed aloud. “You musta been hanging around him all weekend. Wow, he’s *really* fried your brain!”

Mrs. Baum, in a moment of being unprofessional, chose to listen to this piece of gossip, and see where it was going.

“He was being followed! I was there an’ I saw it!”

“I bet The Doctor did an experiment on Marty that made him think he was being followed,” said Matt.

“He did not!” screamed Marty.

“Matt, I have told you twice already,” said Mrs. Baum. “That’s enough. You may go sit in the corner, and you will be on the wall at recess today.”

Matt groaned and, in haste, grabbed his books and tromped to the corner of the room where he parked himself.

“You hang around with a mad scientist,” Bill said in disbelief.

“Okay, children, settle down,” said Mrs. Baum. “Let’s get back to reading. Jenny, why don’t you read next?”

By the time recess came that day, both first grade classes knew that Marty was friends with The Doctor, and that Marty also believed that a crazy old man really was stalking him that weekend. The other children, even his regular playmates, wouldn’t let him join in games of kickball, baseball, or basketball.

“Why can’t I play?” Marty asked.

“Because that mad scientist fried your brain!” said a child. “Now you’re probably programmed to fry ours!”

“Yeah,” said another. “And I bet you think there’s a scary old man on the playground right now, coming to get you!”

The other children laughed. After other similar attempts, with similar results, to join in games at recess, Marty resorted to playing on a swing by himself.

“Hey, Marty,” said Michael, a boy in the other first grade class.

Michael planted himself immediately in the path of the swing Marty rode.

“Hi, Michael,” Marty said uneasily.

“I heard you’re hanging around with The Doctor. Has he done any experiments on you yet?”

“Knock it off, Michael. And get outta my way while I’m trying to swing.”

This prompted the boy to move even closer. Marty had to pull in his legs to prevent himself from clocking Michael with them.

“Why are you hanging around with him, anyway? Don’t you know that he’s a real basket case? He thought my grandpa was following him! My grandpa said he went to go shopping and to the park and both times The Doctor was following my grandpa, not the other way around! My grandpa can’t go anywhere without that freak chasing him!”

“That guy was your grandpa?” Marty asked in disbelief.

“Yep,” said Michael. “And he ain’t no psycho like The Doctor!”

“Doc wasn’t following your grandpa! Your grandpa was following *him!*” said Marty. “And he scared both of us.”

Michael ignored Marty. “My grandpa says that The Doctor stole a nuclear bomb. My grandpa said he that’s why his house burnt down. My grandpa says that The Doctor is a crazy old coot who runs down kids with his car. My grandpa says that The Doctor broke my grandpa’s sister’s legs and almost killed her.”

“Then your grandpa’s a retard,” said Marty resolutely, trying to continue swinging without hitting Michael, though the prospects of knocking him in the chin were very tempting.

Michael moved even closer. “My grandpa went to high school with The Doctor. That weirdo was only twelve when he was in twelfth grade. My grandpa said that the teachers wanted him out of their hair so they moved him up five grades.”

“Your grandpa’s *such* a retard,” Marty repeated. “Your grandpa was probably forty-five when he was in twelfth grade.”

“He was seventeen, like *normal* people,” said Michael. “And he wasn’t a freak who went around blowing things up and breaking people’s legs.”

“Doc is not a freak!” Marty shouted, pumping higher on the swing. “And he doesn’t hurt people. So stop making dumb stuff up about him!”

“The Doctor’s a freak. Everybody knows that. My grandpa’s cool. The Doctor has no friends, and you won’t either if you if he keeps frying your brain.”

Hearing this, Marty practically flew off the swing in mid-air and just barely landed on the blacktop without skinning himself.

“Ooh, it looks like you’re learning to be a nutcase just like The Doctor!” said Michael. “I guess I’d better run.”

Marty lunged at Michael and pinned him to the ground.

“Get off of me, you idiot!” screamed Michael.

Marty held Michael to the ground and, without any forethought, punched him in the face. “Leave Doc alone!” Marty shouted, removing himself from Michael. “You don’t know anything!”

Michael’s nose began to trickle blood. Getting up, he screwed up his face and began to cry. “You busted my nose!” Michael cried.

“Serves you right!” screamed Marty.

“I’m telling!” Michael cried.

Michael ran to the closest recess monitor. A minute later, Marty was summoned to the principal’s office.

“Now, Marty, I’m not going to argue the fact that Dr. Brown has been really good to you these past few days,” said George, sitting on the couch in the living room with Lorraine and Marty. “But what happened today was not okay. The fact is that Doc has a bad reputation in this town, and even though the stuff everyone says is not true, people are going to judge you if they know that you’re spending time with him.”

Marty stared at his feet. “I can’t hang out with Doc anymore?”

“If you can’t learn to ignore what the other children say about him, and learn to control your temper when they try to get your goat, then no, you can’t hang around Doc anymore.”

“What Michael said to you was not nice at all,” said Lorraine, “but you need to learn to keep your hands to yourself. I don’t want you to stop hanging around with Doc, especially with all the great help that he’s been giving you with school. But if hanging around him is going to make you to lose your temper, then you’re going to have to stay away from him.”

“It’s not fair,” said Marty. “I don’t want people to say mean things about him!”

“And he doesn’t want to hear mean things either,” said Lorraine. “But, if he *is* your friend, he wouldn’t want you hurting other people.”

Marty folded his arms in another trademark pout.

“I know,” said Lorraine. “Why don’t you call Doc and see what he has to say about this?”

“Fine,” Marty said. He went to the phone in the kitchen and dialed Emmett’s house.

“Hi, Doc,” said Marty, when his friend answered.

“Marty, you sound troubled. Everything okay?” Emmett asked.

Marty relayed that day’s events to Emmett. “The kids in school are always saying mean things about you. This guy Michael was being really mean, so I had to beat him up. So my parents are saying I can’t hang out with you anymore.”

“Marty, you can’t go hurting other people just because they taunt you. It can get you into a lot of trouble. And your parents are right—if you can’t control your temper when it comes to me, then you can’t hang out with me. Period.”

Marty sighed.

“I don’t worry about what they say, and neither should you. Now, I want to continue helping you and spending time with you, but I won’t unless you promise me you’ll keep your temper and hands to yourself, especially around Michael.”

Marty sighed. “Okay, Doc. I’ll be good.”

“Good,” said Emmett. “Let me talk to your parents.”

Marty listened intently as George spoke to Emmett on the phone.

“Yes, Dr. Brown... believe me, I think that the time he’s spending with you is valuable but I don’t want him getting into fights and getting detentions... well, yes he got a detention which he’ll have to serve tomorrow... well, mark my words, he’s going to be punished for this...”

Marty’s ears perked up. Already he was banned from the television for two weeks! What else could his parents do to make it worse?

“... Okay, Dr. Brown... well, yes, his teacher did mention he was reading much better today... Okay... okay... sure, hold on.”

George handed the phone to Marty.

“Hi, Doc,” said Marty.

“Marty, remember what we talked about. I want to keep assisting you, but I can’t if you don’t learn to keep your temper in check when it comes to issues dealing with me.”

“Okay, Doc. I’ll be good,” Marty said again.

“Good, Marty.”

“Can you come over and hang out?”

“I think you need to spend time with your parents and discuss your punishment.”

“Aw, man, I almost forgot you’re an adult!”

“Marty, it’s not my business if they discipline you or not. It’s also not my place to stop them. So you need to go talk to them right now. I’ll see you later; I promise. Okay?”

“Okay,” said Marty reluctantly.

The two friends said “good-bye” and hung up.

Marty discovered that night that his new punishment repealed his television privileges for an extra week. Marty sulked. His parents told him that they didn’t want to hear it; it was his fault for letting his temper get the best of him to begin with. Marty went to bed that night upset, but also grateful and content that what appeared to be the beginning of a good friendship with Doc was starting to take off.

The stories about Marty and Emmett continued around school, of course, and Marty was usually pretty good about keeping his temper under control. The prospects of being kept from Doc Brown were analogous to a gun being pointed to his head. Marty tried to not let the taunts and rumors bother him, but they still stung somewhat. His old friends, including Bill, rarely would have anything to do with him in class or at recess unless forced by circumstance, such as other usual playmates being absent.

Michael Webb, in particular, took the taunts and alienation to an entirely new level. In addition to telling anybody who would listen about Marty’s friendship with The Doctor, he also spread rumors that Marty refused to play with any children his age, because The Doctor ordered him not to.

“So, you’re too good for us now that you’ve been fried by The Doctor?” kids would say accusingly to Marty during recess.

“Michael Webb says that The Doctor told you to not play with nobody else.”

“He said that you’re gonna study us so you can tell The Doctor whose brains to fry first.”

“He said that you’re gonna tell The Doctor which one of us you hate the most so he can run us over with his car.”

“He said—”

And the list went on and on.

Emmett’s old garage became an escape for Marty, a sanctuary of sorts. His parents often brought him over there after school to get help with reading, since it was obvious to them that Emmett’s tutoring was more effective than of any of the lessons he’d had in class or at home. But lately, the boy had been staying there longer because it was becoming more apparent that Emmett was becoming his closest—if not his only—friend. Emmett showed Marty his latest inventions—a Rube Goldberg machine that made breakfast and fed Einstein, a contraption that swept the floor, and an adapter that, when hooked up to all of his clocks, kept all of them in precise synchronization. Marty was

fascinated by the gadgets that Emmett had all over his garage, and Emmett was happy to show Marty how all of them worked and what they did.

Of course, the time they spent together wasn't all related to education. The two often played card games, such as Spit, and Emmett also introduced Marty to chess. Knowing how Marty appreciated honesty, Emmett didn't go easy on the boy just because he was younger. He took each game seriously, and taught Marty new moves and strategies each time.

Emmett also provided a receptive ear for when Marty needed to talk about the problems he was going through at school, with both his reading problems and his problems with kids who spread rumors about his friendship with the scientist.

"Marty," Emmett said one day after listening to Marty's stories about school, and considering the unfortunate consequences of their relationship. He proceeded to say something he knew he was going to regret, but that also seemed natural—and something he probably did in the original timeline. "You need to have friends your own age. If your friendship with me is interfering with that, then perhaps it would be best if we didn't spend anymore time together."

Marty was appalled. "No way, Doc," he said. "You're cool and they're dumb. I don't wanna hang out with dumb people."

Emmett smiled. "I just don't want to stand in your way of having other friends. And I really do hope you find friends your age."

"Me too," said Marty. "But only if they *aren't* mean to me for being friends with you."

Chapter 3

Christmas was coming.

Marty loved Christmas, mostly because of the presents that Santa brought him. But this year, Marty had something else to consider. He knew that Emmett didn't have anybody to spend time with on Christmas. When he'd asked Emmett what happened to his family, the scientist confessed that his parents, aunts, and uncles all died years ago. And when he asked him what Santa brought for him on Christmas last year, Emmett also confessed that Santa did not even come to his house!

"Why not?" Marty had asked. "You've always been good, right?"

"Santa only comes to houses where there are kids," Emmett had answered quickly.

So naturally, Marty talked to his parents about letting Emmett spend Christmas dinner with the McFlies. Marty's other relatives were coming, too, so Lorraine and George informed them about Marty's new friend coming over. Naturally, the relatives' initial reactions were those of horror and confusion, but then they eased up—somewhat—when they learned exactly what Marty's relationship with Emmett was, how it started,

and how Marty was vastly improving in his reading because of him—and that the rumors were rumors, and nothing more.

All Marty had left to do in preparation was get his friend a present. He knew that Emmett loved clocks, since he had so many all over his garage. So Marty and his mother went to a local odds and ends store, and found an inexpensive—but interesting—clock. The clock that Marty chose was an analog with a black face and red neon numbers on it. He took it home and wrapped it up in some Christmas paper.

On Christmas Day, Marty helped his mother and father clean the house to prepare for the company. Linda and Dave helped as well, and all three kids cleaned their rooms. As for Marty's siblings, who were only vaguely aware about the time Marty had been spending with Emmett Brown, they were utterly confused as to why Marty had grown so attached to him and why he'd invited him, of all people, to spend Christmas with the family.

Lorraine and George, of course, had to give Dave and Linda a talking-to about being polite and not to pay any mind to the rumors that they'd heard in school. Linda and Dave remained a little apprehensive, however, but also promised to be on their best behavior.

Marty's aunts, uncles, cousins, and all four of his grandparents showed up for dinner. Emmett arrived a half hour early because Lorraine and George wanted to speak to him briefly about how it might be awkward for their relatives at first as they only knew what they had heard. However, they also made it clear to Emmett that, after all the help he'd been giving Marty with school, they wanted to do their best to make him feel comfortable and at home for the evening.

Marty was dressed up for the evening in a light brown suit—at his mother's request, of course. Emmett was dressed up, too, which for him meant significantly less loud clothing. In this case, his outfit was a pale yellow Hawaiian shirt emblazoned with cacti, and a pair of brown cargo pants with less pockets than usual; he made sure to clean and iron both items. Before the rest of the company came, Marty enthusiastically led Emmett around, giving him the tour—as much as one could give—of the small house. He showed him all of his toys and action figures—including the new ones that Santa had left him that morning—that he had in his toy chest, and Emmett expressed genuine interest in whatever piece of plastic the boy thrust in his hands. It made Marty happy that the scientist wasn't feigning interest like other adults would. Emmett asked Marty about the toys—where they came from, what the characters' names were, and what kind of adventures they went on.

“This guy's Superman,” said Marty, handing Emmett the said figure. “He's got lotsa guts and he saves people from bad guys.”

Emmett turned the Superman figure around in his hands. Already the paint on the cape and boots was starting to chip. Obviously, this toy had been played with a lot. “Wow,” Emmett said with a grin, interested in what creative scenarios Marty might have come up with. “What's he done lately?”

“Well, last time Bill was here I pretended Superman went back in time. I always thought it would be cool to go back in time.”

Emmett smiled, and stifled a chuckle at Marty's subject matter. “Where did he go?”

Marty's face fell somewhat. "Well, he didn't go nowhere. I *wanted* him to go back in time. But Bill said that was dumb. Bill said that there ain't nobody who can go back in time. So we didn't play the game."

Emmett was at a loss for words. First of all, he knew that Bill's words were wrong, if older Marty's visit in 1955 was any indication, but he was more stunned at how it wasn't enough for adults to stifle children's creativity—other kids had to do it, too. That aside, Superman was a flying character, and last Emmett had checked, people couldn't fly! He recalled some of the ideas for inventions he sketched as a kid, and how often teachers and other students would tell him that they would never come to fruition. They were too outlandish and impractical, according to Everyone.

"What did you play?" Emmett finally asked.

"We just made Superman save a lady. She was getting attacked by a tiger, an' Superman had to save her."

"I see," Emmett said evenly, thinking about how he would have been writhing in boredom had he, as a child, been forced to play something so boring and limited. "Well, what did *you* want Superman to do?"

"I wanted him to go back in time. I like pretending stuff like that."

"I do too, Marty," said Emmett, suddenly feeling his connection to the boy deepen.

Marty looked at his friend in disbelief. "Really? Grown-ups don't like pretending."

"C'mon, Marty," said Emmett, favoring the little boy with an amused smile.

"Don't you know me better than that by now? I'm not like most grown-ups."

Marty looked at Emmett, who returned Marty's gaze with a chuckle.

Marty chuckled back. "Yeah, you ain't like most grown-ups. You ain't boring."

"You want to make Superman go back in time?" Emmett offered.

Marty grinned. "Yeah!"

And for the next fifteen minutes or so, Marty and Emmett concocted a time travel adventure for Superman, The Hulk, Batman, and Spiderman. Using Superman's cape, the four characters went back in time to when dinosaurs walked the Earth. Hulk, Spiderman, and Superman rode a pterodactyl around, and Batman beat up a Tyrannosaurus Rex. Marty and Emmett both laughed in joy over the adventure in the Whimsical World They Created, and were disappointed when they had to leave it to greet the company in the Real World.

As the two friends walked to the dining room, both Marty and Emmett realized more than ever that they did not have to be inhibited in one another's presence. Marty could be honest with Emmett about the things that mattered to him, and Emmett didn't have to worry about being judged as crazy, dangerous, or childish, or any other labels that the town liked to slap on him for his eccentricities.

Marty and Emmett joined the rest of the company in the dining room. Both noticed the awkward looks that Marty's cousins, Steven and Greg, favored the unlikely pair with. It stung Marty, but Emmett was used to it and chose not to take it seriously. The important thing was that he was in the company of someone, even if just one person, who genuinely appreciated him.

"Hello, there," George greeted the guests and, as casually as possible, said, "This is Marty's new friend, Emmett Brown. He's been helping Marty with his reading."

“Hi,” mumbled the cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents, who couldn’t help but stare in disbelief at who happened to be in the McFlys’ house, even though they had been given some forewarning.

Emmett forced a smile, and managed a brief hello and vague wave.

Marty looked between Emmett and his relatives.

“This is Doc,” said Marty, desperate for his friend to be accepted into the fold. “He’s really cool.”

Steven and Greg said nothing, and the adults each forced a smile and nodded.

During dinner, Lorraine asked her nephews about school in an attempt to break the awkward silence. Emmett looked around him, knowing damn well why conversation wasn’t flowing naturally. He was probably making things awkward for everybody, and he contemplated going home or, at least, to another room, so he wouldn’t interfere with his hosts’ Christmas. If he left, it would be rude. But if he stayed, he would continue to make things uncomfortable.

Marty picked up on Emmett’s discomfort; the scientist wasn’t usually so quiet. Marty wanted to leave just as much as his older friend did. As soon as the pair finished eating, Marty asked if they could be excused. He tugged on Emmett’s arm.

“C’mon, Doc. Let’s go outside.”

Gladly, Emmett rose from his seat and followed Marty away from the table, away from the judgment...

The two put on their jackets, and went outside to the front yard. As they passed through the threshold, they both could hear Steven sarcastically asking what that weirdo was doing here. Emmett remained composed, ignoring what he knew everyone was thinking anyway, but noticed Marty’s face fill in anger at the remark.

Outside, it was dark, cold, and a wind was howling. Still, for Emmett, it was far more comfortable outside than inside. For a moment, the scientist thought about how profound and symbolic a statement like that could be. And somehow he suspected Marty was also more comfortable out in the cold with him than inside with his extended family. Either that, or he was doing an excellent job, especially for a six-year-old, of sacrificing his own comfort for that of a friend.

“Hey, Doc,” said Marty, looking at Emmett with wide and concerned eyes. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” said Emmett with a weak smile. “Don’t worry.”

But Marty wasn’t fooled. He threw his arms around the scientist’s waist and hugged him tightly.

Once again, Emmett was flattered by, but also a little uncomfortable with, this gesture. He gave Marty a gentle pat on the head— a somewhat compromised return of affection— before prying him off.

And as if to hammer the point home that Emmett was more than welcome— always—Marty picked up the basketball at the edge of the driveway and tossed it to the scientist.

“Catch, Doc!” said Marty.

“I’m afraid I don’t know how to play this game,” Emmett confessed after catching the ball. He’d never had the time to learn to play basketball, or any other sport as a kid. He was always too busy with his work, and he didn’t have any friends who offered to teach him anyway.

Marty grinned. "C'mon an' I'll show you."

Emmett smiled and decided to let Marty be the teacher this time around. Marty had surprisingly more full body dexterity than Emmett did, despite the difference in age. Although Emmett had a quick hand at Spit, he wasn't so quick at the game that Marty was teaching him. Marty had more practice, and knew all the moves and all the tricks that the game involved. Still, Emmett was genuinely having a good time with this kid. Inside, everyone else was probably chattering away at the dining room table, talking about Things That Were Appropriate for Conversation in General, things that were Age Appropriate, and Things That Wouldn't Offend Anybody. More importantly, they were probably talking about Things That Wouldn't Cause Others to Pass Judgment. Emmett preferred to be a part of a world that involved childhood improvisation and spontaneity, not one that involved adult-written scripts and predictable plot twists.

Both Marty and Emmett were panting and sweating toward the end of the game, despite the cold winter air. Emmett finally was able to get the upper hand, and he stole the ball from Marty. Marty giggled.

"C'mon Doc," said Marty. "Gimme that."

"Come and get it," Emmett said teasingly, holding the ball out of Marty's reach. Emmett laughed as Marty made several attempts to leap up to the level that the ball was being held at.

"C'mon, Doc!" Marty said again. He laughed and, with a quick and strong shove, pushed Emmett back a couple inches. "No fair, you're bigger than me!"

A mischievous smile spread across Emmett's face as he decided what to do next. Without any type of warning to Marty, Emmett dropped the ball, picked the boy up, and held him horizontally above his head.

Marty laughed and tried to squirm free. "C'mon, Doc! Put me down! What do ya think I am, some airplane or something?"

As if to answer Marty's question, Emmett began to spin the boy around in circles above his head.

"All right, Doc!" said Marty. "Put me down!"

"You want down?" Emmett asked, a hint of amusement tainting his voice as he continued to spin Marty around.

"Yes!" Marty said. "Down!"

"Okay," said Emmett. "Coming in for a landing!"

And with a quick change in momentum, Emmett lowered Marty to the ground, leaving him face down in the grass. Marty snapped to his feet, and playfully hit the scientist in the chest.

Emmett playfully clapped Marty on the back. Marty laughed. Emmett laughed. They both collapsed on the cool, damp grass and doubled over in childlike laughter.

Yes, inside the family was most definitely talking about Things That Wouldn't Cause Others to Pass Judgment.

With Marty and Emmett both needing to catch their breath, they calmed down and sat in the grass. They looked at the night sky. There weren't any clouds, and all the stars could be seen quite easily. Marty asked Emmett about the stars, and Emmett pointed out the constellations to Marty and taught him their names.

"How come Orion looks nothing like a man?" Marty asked.

“You’ve just got to use your imagination,” he explained. He showed Marty how Orion could be recognized by the three stars that formed the belt.

“That’s the North Star,” said Emmett, pointing to the star that was just off the panhandle of the Big Dipper. “Sailors used to use it to navigate the ocean, back when we didn’t know much about how to get around the world.”

“Wow,” Marty said in awe.

“Yeah,” said Emmett. “It’s pretty fascinating. And during the day they also used the sun’s position in the sky to figure out where they were.”

“That’s neat,” said Marty, intrigued by the scientist’s knowledge. “Hey, Doc. How do you know so much about this stuff?”

Emmett smiled. “I was always interested in science. I used to check books out of the library, when I was a kid, so I could learn more.”

“Wow,” said Marty. “Were you the smartest kid in the class?”

“Perhaps,” Emmett confessed. “I *was* skipped five grades.”

“Wow,” Marty said again. “So Michael didn’t make all that up.”

“Make what up?” Emmett asked, confused.

“That you skipped five grades. He also said that you were skipped because the teachers didn’t like you.”

Emmett was a little conflicted about whether to feel stung or amused by Marty’s obliviousness to the rude remark. Ultimately, he chose to be amused.

“But I don’t believe that,” Marty added. “Michael’s a retard and I bet he made that up. Or his grandpa.”

Emmett blinked in confusion. “Why his grandpa?”

“He lives with his grandpa. He told me his grandpa was the guy who was following you.”

“Really?” asked Emmett in surprise.

Hank Webb was raising a grandson?

“Yeah. He said that his grandpa was just tryin’ to shop and stuff and that you thought he was following you but that you were really followin’ him. He also said that his grandpa says mean things about you all the time. He said that his grandpa said—”

“Never mind that, never mind that,” Emmett said quickly. “I told you not to worry about these things. You just stay out of trouble, okay?”

Marty nodded, worrying that he might have offended Emmett. So he said something to cancel out his rude remarks.

“You know everything. I wish I were as smart as you,” Marty said at length.

Emmett smiled and gave Marty a reassuring pat on the back. “I hardly know *everything*. And you *are* smart, Marty.”

“Not like you,” Marty mumbled.

“Maybe not in the same ways,” said Emmett. “But everyone is different. How many kids your age are smart enough to stop listening to rumors and realize that they’re not true? How many kids your age realize the difference between a good friend and a bad friend?”

“I dunno,” said Marty, not completely understanding what Emmett was saying, but at least getting the gist of it.

“Exactly!” Emmett said enthusiastically, clapping Marty on the shoulder. “I wish I knew adults with that kind of wisdom. It’s your loyalty, Marty. It’s in your heart. It’s a good thing, and it will take you far in life. Don’t you ever lose that.”

Marty looked at the scientist.

“Marty, listen,” said Emmett. “I don’t let what other people say get to me, so don’t let it get to you. Okay? I told you before, that they’re just repeating what they hear.” He grinned mischievously. “Michael’s a jerk, and you don’t have to listen to him.”

Marty smiled, surprised to hear an adult talk that way.

For a moment, Emmett thought about what he’d just said. What kind of confusing upbringing was Michael having if he were living with Hank? Emmett thought about the expression “You live what you learn.” He actually felt sorry for the boy. It wasn’t his fault, not at age six, but—

Marty nodded. “It’s still mean.”

There was an awkward silence between the two as they sat in the grass, both wondering what to say next.

“Presents!” Lorraine called from indoors. “Marty, Dr. Brown, come on inside!”

Emmett smiled at Marty. “Go on in. I’ll be right there. I’ve got something for you in my car.”

Marty scampered inside. As Emmett opened the door to his car, he noticed a figure emerging from the shadows.

“We meet again, Emmett.”

Emmett sighed and turned around. “Hank,” he said. “What do you want?”

Hank stared at Emmett. “It’s been over forty years, and my sister still ain’t walking normally.”

“Hank, shouldn’t you be at home with your grandson?”

“Eh, it don’t hurt to step out for a minute,” said Hank. “I just thought you’d like to know that I ain’t forgotten about what you did to my sister. And that I heard what you and Marty were saying about Michael.”

“Listen, Hank,” said Emmett assertively. “Follow me and pick on me all you want. Tell the town what it wants to hear. But I will not stand idly while you expose a six-year-old boy to your perverse animosity, be it towards me or anyone else. He’s too young to be seeing these things.”

“You think I’d hurt Marty?” Hank laughed. “I don’t go around hurting people. I’m not like you, Brown.”

It was a low blow, and Emmett was sure Hank knew it. Even after all these years, even knowing that Hank obviously had issues that stemmed deeper than his sister’s accident, Emmett felt an awful pang of guilt as he looked at Hank in the moonlight.

“Hank,” Emmett said at length. “I don’t know how many different ways I need to explain this to you. I was twelve years old when that happened. I was a little kid. I never meant to hurt anybody.”

Hank chuckled sardonically. “You may have been a stupid little kid when you did that. But people don’t forget when they’re screwed up forever. If you’re too stupid to understand that, then go kill yourself. The whole town would be better off without you and your bullshit.”

All of a sudden, Emmett recalled an awful evening from twelve years ago.

Thanksgiving, 1962...

Thursday, November 22nd, 1962
7:37 PM
Hill Valley, California

Seven miserable years down, and twenty-three more to go, Emmett thought to himself in a bout of angry cynicism, as he sat on an old beat up couch in his garage house. Twenty-three more years until he would successfully make time travel possible. Twenty-three more long, angry years of loneliness and self-loathing. Twenty-three more years of vandalism to his property. Twenty-three more years of phony police reports about his behavior. Twenty-three more years of unsubstantiated articles in the newspaper.

And anywhere between six and twenty-three years until he would meet Marty McFly.

It was too long. Too damned long. After meeting Marty in 1955, Emmett wondered how many working inventions he would make, before he would build the time machine in 1985. So far, none. To make matters worse, a chemical experiment gone haywire caused his house to burn down just a few months before. It caused more rumors, more accusations, more pranks...

His poor dog, Copernicus, had died in that fire. The Doctor must have killed the animal, concluded some of the locals. There could be no other explanation. Emmett briefly considered moving to San Francisco, or maybe even New York, so he could become anonymous and not get harassed.

But it wasn't as if everyone in Hill Valley believed the rumors. Emmett was sure some people didn't, and that there had to be somebody out there who didn't grudgingly refer to him as The Doctor. The problem was that those who did were louder than those who didn't, and sometimes it seemed as though the whole town was against him.

The phone rang.

Emmett reached over to a nearby coffee table and picked it up.

"Hello?" Emmett grunted.

"Why don't you just kill yourself? Nobody likes you!" a loud, male voice shouted in Emmett's ear.

Emmett was able to hear the laughter in the background as he slammed down the receiver.

The scientist was exhausted.

That was it.

He was exhausted.

He was exhausted from letting taunts roll off his back, from waiting for Marty, from building things that never worked.

He was so damned sick and tired of being the optimist, being his own cheerleader, and not caring about what other people thought. It wasn't getting him anywhere except into a delusional state of mind that everything was okay. So what if he didn't meet Marty? So what if his death caused a major paradox that destroyed the space-time continuum? It wouldn't be his problem if he were dead.

No, not that Emmett ever considered suicide, but at times he really wondered what difference it would make if he died, or never even existed. If he died today, who would be at his funeral?

What difference did he, one person, make to anybody? The only physical evidence that he had that anybody would care was a letter Marty wrote to him seven years before. Up until his mansion burnt down, Emmett seldom looked at the letter for reassurance, but ever since then...

Dear Dr. Brown,

On the night that I go back in time at 1:30 AM, you will be shot by terrorists. Please take whatever precautions are necessary to prevent this terrible disaster.

Your friend,
Marty

He must have looked at the letter for the twentieth time that week. He wondered, at that moment, if he would have considered suicide had it not been for Marty's obvious and unyielding concern for his life. Maybe one person did make a difference, after all, no matter how small.

Emmett winced at that memory of that awful Thanksgiving, winced at the sudden realization that it was Hank who had made that prank call—not a teenage punk—but mostly winced at the memory of what he'd been that year. One never should let his own emotional baggage stand in his way of living—especially if it affected other people. Hank, indeed was letting that happen. And Emmett could not—and would not—stand for it when it was being blatantly exposed to a young boy. When he thought about how Marty still believed in Santa Claus, it suddenly hit home to him, more than ever, just how young and innocent the boy was.

"I said it once, and I'll say it again," said Emmett. "I will not let you drag Marty into this."

Hank smiled. "It appears *you* already have."

Emmett kept his dark eyes fixed on Hank. "Hank, get out of my sight right now before I call the police; thank you."

Without another word, Emmett reached into his car, took Marty's present and headed back into the McFlys' house.

Hank chuckled and disappeared down the street, into the darkness.

Inside, the family and Emmett gathered in the living room around the Christmas tree. Marty opened all of his presents from his relatives, and decided to save Emmett's for last, somehow knowing it would be the most special.

Emmett's gift to Marty was a picture book, albeit one that was a little more difficult than what he'd been reading. Inside the front cover was a message.

"Go on, read it," Emmett said, smiling.

Marty took a deep breath, looked at his friend, and then at the book.

"T—to Marty. K—keep up the g—good work. I have f—faith in you! Y—your f—friend, "Doc."""

“Very good,” said Emmett.

“Wow, Doc,” said Marty, grinning. “Thanks! Now you open yours.”

Emmett opened the clock that Marty picked out for him. “Why, Marty. This is very nice. Thank you!”

“You like it?”

“I sure do. It’ll be a nice addition to my collection.”

Marty smiled. “Hey, Doc, will you read the book to me?”

“Don’t you want to try to read it?” Emmett asked.

“Aw, it’s Christmas,” said Marty. “I don’t wanna hurt my brain on Christmas.”

Emmett smiled. Marty had been working hard for the past few weeks, and he deserved a break. “Okay, Marty.”

While the rest of the family sat on the living room rug and made small talk, Emmett and Marty went over to the couch to read. The scientist held Marty in his lap—just as he would his own child—and read him the story, which was the classic *Tortoise and the Hare* fable. Marty liked the book—so much that he asked Emmett to read it to him again. So Emmett turned back to the first page and began once more.

“You know what, Doc?” Marty said at the end of the evening, as Emmett was getting into his car.

“What?”

“This is my best Christmas ever.”

Emmett smiled. “Mine too, kid.”

If George and Lorraine still harbored any reservations about Marty’s relationship with Dr. Emmett Brown, they let them go after seeing the two interact during Christmas— and Lorraine and George made sure to get a photo of the two of them reading together. They decided to let Marty go to Emmett’s garage on New Year’s Eve. They’d told Marty to invite him to the McFlys for the holiday, but Marty knew it would be a lot more fun if it were just he and Doc.

At first Marty’s parents were concerned that Emmett would be happier visiting the McFlys, where there were more people, and a more comfortable house, rather than simply allowing Marty to visit him in his old garage. They were mistaken, and Marty knew it. He could sense Emmett’s discomfort during Christmas when the normally enthusiastic scientist was unusually mellow. And Marty’s interpretation wasn’t unfounded; Emmett simply preferred to be around smaller groups of people, especially if they were people he knew well. After Marty and Emmett discussed it, the decision was made that Marty was going to hang out at Emmett’s place on New Year’s Eve, as well as spend the night there.

Marty, when asked by other classmates what he was doing for New Year’s Eve, told them that he was going to Doc Brown’s garage. He felt like he was licensed to tell them. After all, weeks had passed since the previous incident, and it seemed like his old friends were through with picking on him. However, when his alleged allies heard about Marty’s plans for New Year’s Eve, he was once again shunned and left out of the fold. Naturally, the two friends, who he told, managed to spread the story to the entire first grade, and even some of the second grade. Marty was indirectly challenged to fights,

particularly by Michael Webb, but he was able to keep his temper in check—for the most part.

Michael, who never let up in the slightest in terms of spreading rumors about Marty and The Doctor, approached Marty, who was sitting on the monkey bars, during recess one day.

“Hey, McFly,” said Michael in a singsong voice. “I heard that you’re going to The Doctor’s house for New Year’s. Gonna watch him sacrifice goats to the devil?”

“Shut up, Michael,” said Marty.

Michael climbed up next to Marty. “I still can’t believe you hang out with a mad scientist. That guy almost killed my great-aunt.”

Marty narrowed his eyes at Michael. “Stop telling lies about Doc! When are you gonna leave him alone?”

Michael laughed. “Man, he musta *really* fried your brain. Maybe he’ll sacrifice *you* instead of a goat this year.”

Marty climbed down from the monkey bars. “Shut up, you retard.”

“My grandpa says that The Doctor always—”

“And you can tell your stupid grandpa to shut up too!” snapped Marty, looking up at Michael from the ground. “You’re grandpa’s a big fat retard and Doc’s better than him.”

Michael laughed as Marty’s rage built up more. “You shouldn’t go there on New Year’s Eve. You’ll never make it out alive.”

“If you don’t stop picking on me and Doc,” said Marty, turning in his tracks. “Then *you’ll* never make it out alive, you dumb jerk.”

Tuesday, December 31, 1974

6:15 PM

On New Year’s Eve, Lorraine drove her son to Emmett’s garage house, where the scientist was waiting outside. Lorraine kissed Marty good-bye, wished him and Emmett a happy new year, and drove off.

Marty was ecstatic—surely this New Year’s would be a lot more interesting for him than the rest of his family, who was going to a party in the town square. “What are we doing tonight, Doc?” Marty asked, practically jumping circles around his friend, in a way that Einstein would—and was doing, in his puppyish response to Marty’s behavior.

“We’re doing homework,” said Emmett.

Marty’s face fell, and Emmett chuckled.

“I was just kidding,” he said, tousling the boy’s hair. “That depends. What would you like to do?”

Marty shrugged. “Do you know what we should do?”

Emmett gave Marty a mischievous smile. “As a matter of fact, yes.”

Marty followed Emmett around the back of the garage. In the dark shadows of Emmett’s makeshift house, there sat a large and long wooden platform, atop which were

several small rockets, more than he could count. Marty tried to estimate. Ten? Twenty? No, at least hundreds! Maybe thousands! Wired to them, through an adapter, was an alarm clock.

“What’s that for, Doc?”

“We’re going to ring in the New Year in style,” Emmett smiled. “Do you know how many minutes there are in five-and-a-half hours?”

“Five!” Out in the cold air, Emmett and Marty counted together, watching the first of the last five rockets launch, which left a brilliant red in the midnight sky.

“Four!” Another launched. It was blue.

“Three!” Yellow.

“Two!” Green.

“One!” Red again.

“Happy New Year!” Emmett and Marty shouted, as several rockets launched at the same time, illuminating the sky a brilliant green, yellow, and red.

Marty stood and watched as Emmett leapt in the air and repeatedly screamed “Happy New Year!” in a loud, boisterous voice. Marty fell into fits of giggles as his older friend danced around in a most unorthodox way and whooped, his white hair flying in all directions.

Emmett smiled at Marty, who asked him if he had “any other cool inventions.”

“I’ll show you some other things I’m working on, if you’d like,” said Emmett.

Ecstatic, Marty followed the scientist back inside his garage. Once inside, Marty noticed several blueprints on a table. The blueprints depicted an odd, Y-shaped object. “What’s that?” he asked.

Emmett, realizing he forgot to lock up the precious blueprints for the flux capacitor, which he would eventually complete in another eleven years for his first time machine, snatched the drawings out of Marty’s field of vision. “Nothing,” said Emmett.

Marty laughed. “Come on, Doc. I wanna see!”

“Not tonight, Marty,” Emmett said.

“Aw, c’mon, Doc!” Marty protested. “What is that thing, anyway?”

Emmett rolled up the blue prints and put them on a high shelf, out of Marty’s reach.

“Please?” Marty begged again.

But before Emmett could answer, a man, dressed entirely in black, and wearing a facemask, appeared in the doorway.

“You!” the man snapped. “You stay the hell away from the good people of this town!”

Chapter 4

Wednesday, January 1st, 1975
12:08 AM

“Doc!” Marty cried. Emmett immediately pushed the boy behind his back and tightly clasped his wrists.

Emmett and Marty recognized the man immediately, despite his covered face and body.

“How did you break through my locks?” Emmett demanded.

“You stay the hell away from my grandson, both of you!” Hank shouted. “I won’t allow my kid to be threatened, especially not by the likes of you!”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Emmett barked. He kept his hands locked firmly around Marty’s protesting wrists.

“Michael came home from school the other day, tellin’ me he was scared that that so called *boy* there was gonna kill him!”

“I didn’t do nothin’!” Marty shouted. He struggled and finally managed to come out from behind Emmett’s back.

“Marty,” Emmett quietly scolded, once again pushing the boy behind him.

“He was just warning you to stay away from this nutcase,” said Hank. “And what do you do? You decide you’re gonna kill him!”

Under Marty’s physical protest, Emmett kept the boy securely restrained. “Get out of here,” said the scientist. “You have no right breaking and entering.”

“You have no right threatening to kill my grandson,” said Hank.

“What on Earth are you talking about?” demanded Emmett. “If you don’t get out of here, I’m calling the police.”

“I’m not leaving,” said Hank. “Not until you admit that you told Marty to tell Michael that you two were going to kill him.”

“I’ve never said such a thing.” Emmett sighed and then a possibility occurred to him. At length, he asked, “Did *you* Marty?”

For a moment Marty could not imagine what the two men were referring to. He’d said a lot of things to Michael in fits of anger and defensiveness for his older friend, but he’d never said he wanted to kill him. It took Marty another moment to remember his passing comment to Michael during recess.

“Michael said that I wouldn’t make it out of Doc’s alive. So I said if he didn’t stop picking on me, *he* wouldn’t make it out alive.”

Emmett sighed, somewhat embarrassed for Marty. “Hank, Marty’s choice of confrontation with your grandson was highly unorthodox, and I apologize on his behalf. But I would never hurt anybody, especially not a child. And certainly, Marty did not mean what he said, and was probably acting in the kind of irrational self-defense that children his age tend to do.”

“With your reputation, how am I supposed to believe that?” growled Hank. Then he turned to Marty and leveled him a gaze that would scare the fiercest of lions. “Marty, you stay the hell away from my grandson or you will be sorry!”

“Don’t you dare threaten him!” Emmett barked, absolutely appalled at what he was witnessing.

Marty struggled to come out from behind Emmett’s back and, in turn, Emmett held even more tightly to the boy’s arm.

Hank planted himself in front of the scientist. He was too close for comfort. Emmett was sure he could smell alcohol on his breath. “If you knew what was good for

you, you would move out of this town and go somewhere people will put up with your bullshit. But I don't know where that is, so you might as well just drop dead."

Emmett avoided rolling his eyes at that overused comment.

"Did you tell him about how you almost killed my sister?" Hank asked, keeping his eyes fixed squarely on the scientist. "Or are you gonna wait until he's old enough to strap something big to his back so he can kill somebody too?"

"Hank," Emmett said, trying his best to stay calm. "You need to let go of this. It's in the past."

"What's in the past, Doc?" Marty asked. He forced himself free and came to Emmett's side. He had to know what this was about.

Emmett put a restraining hand tightly on the boy's shoulder.

"I guess you haven't told him," said Hank.

"Why would I tell him about something that horrific?" Emmett said sternly, making the sentence sound more like a statement than a question.

"Why don't you tell him, Brown? Tell him about how because of you my sister will never walk normally again."

Emmett noticed Marty leveling him a gaze of disbelief. His eyes were wide, clearly begging Emmett to tell him it wasn't true, that this was indeed another rumor. But he couldn't do that. The story was as real as the pool of dark blood that young Emmett saw the moment he climbed out of the dumpster, and as real as the large casts that Holly had had on her legs for a long time thereafter. The horrific images were permanently etched in every corner of his mind, and nothing, anywhere, ever, could possibly erase them. He was the cause of somebody's permanent injury. There was no denying that.

And here was six-year-old Marty McFly, staring at him with wide, pleading—and trusting—eyes. How was he going to handle this? He couldn't lie to Marty, especially not now. What came first and foremost was his and Marty's safety, and lying would only make Hank even angrier.

"Hank," Emmett said sternly. "I was a kid when that happened. It was an accident. It was a failed experiment. I never ever meant to hurt anyone. I said I was sorry—and I am. I offered to help several times, but you wouldn't let me. I understand why this torments you, but stalking and breaking and entering and threatening is uncalled for. Now *please leave*."

"No!" Hank exploded, now unhinged. "You *bastard!* I'm going to show you what it's like to have to fear for a child's life!"

With a quick snap of his arm, Hank yanked Marty by the collar, violently forcing him off the ground.

Marty screamed.

"Don't you hurt him!" cried Emmett, lunging at Hank.

"Stay back," Hank said, pulling a gun out of his coat pocket and aiming it at the scientist.

Marty screamed again.

"Put him down, Goddammit!" Emmett shouted, ready, willing, and able to take the bullet for Marty.

"You come any closer," threatened Hank. "I'll not only blow your brains out, but I'll shoot the kid too."

Emmett looked at Hank, who was holding Marty's life in the palm of his hand, letting it dangle by a string—a cheap piece of string. Emmett wondered how somebody could obsessively consider the life of one person but care little about the life of another.

“Hank, just let him go. I'll do anything you say,” Emmett pleaded in desperation.

Marty began to cry fearfully. He kept his eyes fixed on Emmett, as if willing the scientist to rescue him from Hank's grip.

And if Marty were willing such a thing to happen, he didn't will it hard enough. Hank whipped around and ran. Kicking down the side door, he raced outside with one arm carrying Marty, and the opposite hand covering Marty's mouth.

Emmett stumbled outside, just in time to see Hank's car speeding away, with a loud screech that practically tore up the asphalt. Sweat formed on Emmett's forehead, despite the frigid weather. He quickly went back inside.

Emmett nearly slid to the ground when he grabbed the phone on his desk. His fingers shook and nearly missed the digits he needed to press.

“911; what's your emergency?” the ridiculously calm female voice answered at the other end of the line.

Emmett's knuckles turned white as he gripped the steering wheel. Thank God the police had listened to his report about Marty being kidnapped. He was unable to contact Marty's parents, since they were at the party in the town square. Emmett had an inkling of where Hank was taking Marty. He half hoped he was right, but half hoped he was wrong...

At age twelve, Emmett was reluctant to join in whatever activities he could that would make him part of any kind of social group. On the last day of his senior year of high school, there was a school party—complete with barbeque and swimming—at the lake, to kick off the beginning of summer.

He did not want to go.

A group of one hundred people in a small area was simply too overwhelming. Besides, he was in the middle of building a machine that might even allow him to travel through time. It was a project he'd dreamed about for over a year, and the possibility that he might be able to go back and stop Holly's accident was another motivating factor (of course, at age twelve, Emmett was not aware of time paradoxes and what stopping Holly's accident would cause). The physics of relativity—and the possibilities of time travel—were remarkable and endless. Emmett had read extensively about Einstein's theory. All he needed to do was figure out how to break the light barrier, a task easier said than done.

“Emmett, aren't you going to the school party?” his mother asked, coming into his room.

The boy looked up from the schematic that he was working on at his desk. “I'm busy, Mom.”

“Emmett, come on. It's the summer. You've been working on this all day. Why don't you take a break? Go outside and play. Go to the party.”

“Mom, everyone there is older than me. And they're still mad.”

“Emmett, people are generally more sympathetic and forgiving than you think.” She put her arm around her son. “I know you’re not really friends with any of those people, but you are mature for your age, and if you would just be a little more outgoing, you might become more than just acquaintances with your classmates. And some of them would at least realize you would never meant any harm to anybody, that the whole thing was an accident. If they got to know you better, I bet things would be quite different.”

Not if Hank is there, Emmett thought to himself.

Emmett didn’t dare tell his mother that Hank did more to him than just taunt him. It was his problem, for him to solve, and he didn’t want her going to the school authorities and inadvertently making things worse.

“Go to the party,” Emmett’s mother insisted. “ You need some fresh air.”

Ice covered the highway.

It had to be thirty degrees outside, and the water in the lake was most definitely colder.

It was too boring on the beach for Emmett. His classmates were discussing boyfriends and girlfriends. None of them seemed interested in any of the new machines he was inventing, especially not after the flying incident. The lake was a good few hundred feet away from everybody, the air was hot, and a relaxing swim was in order. He stepped into the lake, the cool water covering his feet and ankles. A small shell—a moving shell—crawled onto his foot. Emmett bent down to pick it up.

“Hey, little guy,” said Emmett. He sat in the water and examined the snail, turning it over in his hand. “Come on out. I won’t hurt you.” When the snail made it clear that it didn’t want to be bothered, Emmett gently placed it back under the water, then scooped up a handful of sand, and sifted through it.

Two igneous rocks.

One sedimentary.

No. Not today. Today he should be swimming, not studying. Emmett waded into deeper waters. Cool, relaxing and refreshing. He looked at the clouds, finding himself mesmerized by the patterns and shapes.

Emmett slammed on his brakes at the red light. It was too sudden, for he found the world spinning about him, becoming a blur, with abstract patterns of light and color—

Submerged!

Emmett flailed his arms about and forced his head above the water.

“Hank! Let me go!”

“You little freak! Why can’t you get a social life like normal people instead of trying to blow everyone up with your stupid inventions?” Hank brandished a crooked smile. He clasped his hands on Emmett’s shoulders and pushed down.

The boy forced his eyes open underwater and stared at the blur of writhing arms and the bubble of Hank's face—

Bubble!

Emmett pushed his arms against Hank's body, kicked his feet around—

Emmett opened his eyes and looked at his surroundings, the inside of his toppled car in a ditch off the side of the highway.

He was tangled and twisted in the seats. He wrestled his legs free and pulled himself out the window of the car. He shook and limped as he got up, but looking at his watch gave him reason to ignore his pain.

How long had he been unconscious? Ten seconds? Ten minutes?

Emmett did not have time to try to remember. He ran dizzily up the side of the ditch and back onto the highway. Fortunately, he was close to where he believed Hank was taking Marty. He only hoped that he could get there in time.

Marty's parents had well drilled into Marty's head what to do if he was ever kidnapped.

To scream, and to scream loudly, even if Marty thought the screaming would anger his kidnapper and provoke him into hurting Marty more. So when Hank tossed Marty into the backseat of his car, Marty screamed as loudly as he could.

"Doc! Doc! Help me!" he screamed, accompanying it with some loud, ear-piercing shrieking.

"Shut the hell up, kid!" Hank snapped. He pulled out a gun, turned around, and aimed it at Marty. "I swear to God, if you say another word, I'll kill you!"

Marty was silenced. Somehow it didn't seem logical to scream for help, despite what his parents said.

"I'll teach you to mess with my grandson. It's people like you and that son-of-a-bitch Emmett Brown who prevent good people from living in peace."

"Where are you taking me?" Marty impulsively asked through tears.

"Didn't I warn you?" Hank screamed. He turned around to face Marty, and pulled the trigger.

Air!

Emmett's lungs screamed. He continued thrashing about, kicking, hitting—but striking nothing but more water. He thrust his head upward. More water, and back down again.

Emmett ran as quickly as he could. At age fifty-four, his heart and lungs were in exceptional shape for a man his age, but still were not holding up the way they used to. Wheezing and heaving, the scientist continued to force himself to run. It was only another half mile to the lake. When he was in high school, he could run that distance in four minutes. Theoretically he shouldn't be able to do it now. But he had to, somehow...

The life of a six-year-old boy was in danger, and Emmett began to wonder if it was a sign that he shouldn't have met Marty when he did. Perhaps if he hadn't been so eager to be with the boy, then Marty wouldn't have visited for New Year's and none of this would have ever happened. Maybe they were actually destined to meet years later. The fate of the space-time continuum aside, Emmett's determination and concern for Marty kept him running.

Hank whipped open the barrel only to find that there were no bullets left. "Shit! Son of a bitch!" he shouted, and hurled the gun at Marty.

Marty tried to duck, but the handle of the gun still managed to strike him in the side of the head.

He screamed.

"God damn you, kid!" Hank shouted. "You shut up or I'll kill you! I may not have a gun, but I can still kill you!"

Marty sat back in his seat, trembling, wondering when Doc was going to come rescue him. Maybe he wouldn't. Maybe he was too scared. Maybe Doc didn't know where Marty was.

There had to be a way out of this.

Marty saw his chance when the light turned red.

He pounced on the latch of the door, only to find that he couldn't open it.

"Tough break, kid," said Hank. "Too bad this door has childproof locks. If you had any sense, you'd stop trying to fight a battle that you aren't going to win. I'm doing this town a favor, you know. I'm putting The Doctor in his place. He's caused too many threats to this town, and the last thing I want is for him to kill my grandson. He's already brainwashed you, so there's no hope for you. You're as much of a threat as he is."

Marty's eyes bulged out of their sockets. His shaking grew more violent, and fight or flight syndrome begged to be satiated.

"Here we are, kid," said Hank, pulling up to the side of the lake. "I once scared the living shit out of The Doctor when he was just a kid. I bet he never went swimming again, not after that day."

*Emmett's eyes bulged out of their sockets, his arms started to grow limp—
His hair was yanked, and oxygen flowed desperately into his lungs. He coughed and sputtered and flailed his arms.*

"Was that so bad, Emmett?" Hank asked.

"Let me go!" Emmett coughed. The oxygen didn't seem to be getting into his lungs quickly enough.

Hank released his grip on Emmett's blonde hair, causing the boy to slip under the water again. Emmett quickly stood up and brought his head above the water.

"Get out of here," Hank laughed, gleefully watching Emmett gasp for air. "You really think I'd try to kill you? I'm not like you. By the way, someday I'll really get even with you for what you did to Holly. You hear?"

Emmett did not answer. Shaking, he got up and slowly walked towards the shore. The closer he got to where it would hopefully be safer, the more his body trembled, with mixed sensations of hot, cold, and complete and utter humiliation.

“No!” Emmett shouted, ready to pass out from the strain on his cardiovascular system—just as he saw Hank hurl Marty into the lake.

He darted into Hank’s path and, ignoring the gun that Hank brandished, launched himself on top of the man. Hank toppled to the ground under Emmett’s weight. Emmett raised his right fist to punch Hank, but the man kicked his leg up and struck Emmett in the jaw, knocking him down. Emmett winced in pain, and quickly realized that the bone was broken. Nevertheless, he continued to struggle. Although Emmett was in better shape than Hank, Hank was also bigger.

“Doc! Help!” Marty screamed, struggling to tread water. A strong wind was blowing, and the water quickly carried Marty away from the land.

Hank flipped Emmett on his back, hovering menacingly above him, pinning him to the ground. For about a second, Emmett was twelve years old again. A child—

“Doc! Help me!”

With a quick flip of his entire body, Emmett sprung back up and threw his entire weight at Hank, knocking the man on his back again.

“I’m coming, Marty!” Emmett promised, removing himself from Hank. He ran toward the lake. But his chances of jumping in the water were snowballed when Hank wrapped his arms around Emmett’s waist and pulled him to the ground. “God damn you!” Emmett screamed in anger and frustration.

“Doc, help!” Marty desperately called.

Emmett was forced on his back once again. Hank wrapped his hands around Emmett’s neck.

“You sick bastard!” Hank barked.

Emmett flailed his arms about him as the scenery started to fade to black. Hank’s hold tightened around the scientist’s neck. Emmett’s body and brain were no longer receiving oxygen, and any limbs he wanted to move were rendered heavy and nearly useless. To lift the rock beside him would be a Herculean task—

His fingers slowly wrapped around it. Perhaps he still had enough oxygen to sustain—

“Doc! Help!”

He had to come through for his friend.

With a quick snap of his wrist, the rock in Emmett’s hand collided with Hank’s temple, loosening the grip Hank had had on his neck. The land slowly faded back into view, and Hank slumped off of Emmett and into the grass beside him. Emmett stood up, slowly and shakily, coughing and wheezing.

“Doc!” Marty screamed again.

But the oxygen was just beginning to flow again... Just barely keeping the scientist on his feet. He staggered to the water. His body begged to collapse right there and the ground and recuperate, but the sight of Marty struggling kept Emmett at his feet. He waded into the water, which was not frozen only because of the unusually high salinity content, the chill scraping inexorably against his ankles. It felt as if pins and needles were violently scratching and breaking the surface of his skin. The pain he would experience from completely immersing himself in the water would be unbearable.

Emmett looked out to where Marty was doing his best to tread water. It was a good two-hundred-foot swim, at the very least, and Emmett was still gasping for air.

The oxygen...

Emmett coughed and wheezed as his heart continued to race.

The boy...

Emmett removed his duster jacket and tossed it carelessly on the shore. He immersed himself in the water, and swam out toward where Marty was struggling. The water scratched and burned and scathed and ripped! But a scream from the boy prompted another unexpected feat of strength on Emmett's part. It was an adrenaline rush, but more than that, it was a sort of primitive instinct emerging—paternal. The wheezing and the gagging and the coughing tried to crunch his body and his mind. But he kept swimming as another new feeling began to emerge—love.

“Climb onto my back!” Emmett prompted when he reached Marty. “It’s going to be okay.”

Shivering and trembling erratically, Marty wrapped his arms around the scientist’s neck.

“It’s okay, Marty,” Emmett said, fighting the cold from the water and shivering violently himself. “We’re going back. Just hold on.”

Marty carelessly hung from the back of Emmett’s neck as Emmett plowed his way through the burning water.

Just as Emmett reached the land, he felt the dead weight on his back.

Chapter 5

Wednesday January 1st, 1975
2:09 A.M.

Staggering to shore, Emmett carried Marty in his arms, holding him tightly to his chest in a vain attempt to warm the boy and wake him up. He retrieved his jacket from the ground and wrapped Marty in it.

“Marty?” Emmett whispered as he sat on the ground, trying to ignore the burning cold that made his body tremble violently, and at the same time doing his best to keep Marty warm. Shaking, he took the boy’s pulse.

“Thank God,” Emmett whispered, still holding his friend tightly. His violent trembles continued, and any attempt he would have made to get up and stagger to a phone to call the police and an ambulance would have been fraught. Marty was alive, and Emmett was finally able to surrender to some of the demands of his own body.

Marty opened his eyes. “Doc?” he whispered. His trembling arms snaked around his friend’s neck.

Emmett winced from the pain in his chin. “It’s okay, Marty.” He looked up to the sounds of wailing sirens. Thank God 911 had taken his report seriously. And thank God he was right when he told them where he suspected Hank was taking Marty. “Help is coming.”

He looked at Marty, wrapped up in the once-dry duster jacket that was quickly becoming soaked with frigid water. Marty's eyelids began to droop again. The boy was worn out from the trauma placed on his young body. It occurred to Emmett, looking at Marty wrapped up tightly in the oversized jacket, that the boy suddenly looked and seemed a lot younger than six—and helpless. His life was in Emmett's hands in every sense of the word.

"Marty, stay awake," Emmett said, knowing that in such life-threatening situations, being able to remain awake often determined the outcome of life or death. He looked down at the boy, keeping his eyes fixed on him.

Marty opened his eyes and looked up at Emmett. "What's going on?" Marty mumbled, his teeth chattering.

"Marty, stay awake," Emmett said firmly. "I mean it."

Emmett looked around, waiting for the police officers and paramedics to get out of their vehicles.

Marty began to close his eyes again.

Emmett shook Marty. "Marty, keep your eyes open. This is very important! Work with me here."

"Huh?" Marty moaned, letting his head droop.

"Marty, it's very important that you stay awake." Emmett repeated.

"I'm so tired," Marty mumbled softly.

Emmett could still feel the violent tremors, both from his and Marty's soaked, shivering bodies. His ribs felt as though they were going to rip through his skin and jump out of his body.

"Marty, look at me," Emmett said firmly, albeit through chattering teeth.

Marty gingerly looked up again.

"I'm going to help you stay awake, okay? First, you need to keep looking at me. I'm going to talk to you and you're going to talk as much as you can. Do you understand?"

Marty's head drooped again.

Emmett gently shook the boy. "Marty, wake up!"

But it was no use. He couldn't wait any longer for the rescue teams to get over to them. So he got to his feet and slowly lurched toward the paramedics, who were already approaching. Emmett looked down at Marty again.

"Marty, wake up right now!" Emmett insisted.

But the child did not respond.

The trauma placed on Emmett's own body suddenly hit him with a full and, almost vengeful, force. Emmett stumbled to the ground and passed out, still holding tightly to Marty, who was still clinging tightly to Emmett's neck.

Wednesday, January 1st, 1975
1:35 PM

They'd been asleep for almost twelve hours.

At the hospital, Emmett had only woken up long enough to answer the questions that the police had for him, before they'd finally decided that Hank was the one to take in for extended questioning—after he'd regained the consciousness that had been lost during his concussion, of course. As soon as the preliminary questioning of both parties had ended, Emmett sat in a chair beside Marty's bed, with the intention of staying by his side the entire night if he had to. However, the doctors had shooed Emmett out of the room, insisting that Marty needed his rest, and that Emmett himself should follow suit. Disconcerted that he couldn't watch over Marty, Emmett had reluctantly listened to the doctors and went to his own room.

More tired than he'd wanted to admit, Emmett crawled into bed and was out cold almost instantly.

Marty's family—who had arrived home by the time the police came—were notified, and met Marty and Emmett at the hospital. By then, however, the two had been sleeping deeply, in adjacent rooms, each wearing a set of warm hospital clothes, after having gone through emergency treatments for acute hypothermia. The McFlys were informed that Marty probably wasn't going to wake up immediately—the trauma took a more significant toll on his smaller body—so George took Linda and Dave home, while Lorraine stayed intently by Marty's side.

Emmett himself finally stirred when Lorraine went down to the hospital cafeteria to get some lunch. He went next door to Marty's room, and looked thoughtfully at the boy, who was still in a peaceful and deep sleep.

Emmett sat in a nearby chair, and gave Marty a gentle pat on the shoulder.

"I'm so sorry, Marty," Emmett whispered, gazing solemnly at the delicate life that was nearly cut short the night before.

He continued to sit in silence, feeling the throbbing in his chin, but more so the throbbing of his heart. His stomach tied itself in knots as his mind processed the information from the night before, continually replaying the scene of Marty's struggle in the water. Emmett had had Marty's life delicately in his hands from the moment they first ran into Hank at the shopping center. And Hank even had a point when he told Emmett that he'd already dragged Marty into this. The responsibility was far too awesome, and it was not his place to take it.

"Doc?" Marty slowly opened his eyes.

"Marty," Emmett said softly, concern etched in his face. "How are you feeling?"

Marty bubbled something indecipherable. He sat up and wrapped his arms around Emmett's neck.

Emmett briefly hugged the boy back. "Go back to sleep," he said.

"I'm not tired," Marty whined, folding his arms.

Emmett nodded. He and Marty had the same thing on their mind, but neither of them wanted to admit it, at least not right away.

Finally, Marty did say something. "Doc, what happened to that man?"

"He was arrested. There will be a trial soon."

Emmett hoped Hank would go to jail, for more reasons than one. He suddenly realized that the very status of his and Marty's friendship rested largely on that possibility.

"Somebody should kill him," Marty said bitterly.

"No, Marty," Emmett said firmly. "No."

“But he tried to kill us.”

“It’s true,” Emmett conceded. “But what we need to learn from this is that we can’t obliterate somebody who we think is a threat. That’s precisely why Hank came after us. He thought we were after his grandson, and he wanted to settle the score.”

Emmett looked at his younger friend, who in turn looked back at him, tears beginning to well in his eyes. Emmett couldn’t even begin to imagine what was going through Marty’s head and what, if any, concept he had of what transpired the night before. The fogged eyes that looked at him were trusting. Emmett remembered what it was like at age six, to have that kind of trust. It was the trust that children had in adults that they were close to— that trust that these adults were able to make things all better, just because they were bigger and older. Through the eyes of a child, they were almost supernatural beings who had the answers to everything, knew how to solve problems effortlessly...

Needless to say, Emmett was none of those things, despite what Marty hoped and, most likely, thought— at least, up until now. He couldn’t make things better. He couldn’t undo what had happened the night before. What had happened had happened— and it would be as firmly etched in Marty’s mind, for years to come, as was the injury Emmett caused to Holly, albeit without the immense guilt. That, however, didn’t make things any less traumatic for Marty.

Emmett looked at the silent tears that fell from Marty’s eyes. The scientist could see that Marty really wanted him to make things better, but he also could see that Marty was becoming disillusioned to the idea that adults could do Anything. No, Emmett could not live up to that expectation, no matter how much he felt he had to, for Marty’s sanity. He could, however, be supportive and comforting.

The scientist sat on the side of Marty’s bed and gently took the boy in his arms—a rare moment in his life where he actually initiated a hug with someone.

“Just relax,” Emmett soothed, letting Marty cry on his shoulder. “Everything’s going to be fine.”

Marty screwed his eyes shut and clung tightly to his friend. He continued to sob quietly, his tears drenching the collar of Emmett’s hospital shirt. The room gradually fell silent. For what seemed like forever, Emmett allowed Marty to lose himself in the immediate and temporary comfort that Emmett was providing.

And Emmett wasn’t sure he wasn’t losing himself in the same way.

The scientist felt a muted sob escape from Marty, to which he automatically responded by tightening his hug. It was for Marty’s sake, but Emmett suddenly realized that he hadn’t considered himself— he needed the closeness and comfort as much as Marty did. Trauma was trauma, and human beings were human beings— no matter what age they were.

Of course, the difference was that Emmett had more experience handling traumatic situations— which just happened to be because he was older. There was no getting around that. Suddenly, he felt the strong urge to protect the boy—and it was hammered home to him more than ever that the only way to do it would be to postpone his friendship with him for the time being. Obviously, he had come into Marty’s life too early. He had rushed and pushed things, and now Marty was paying the price. There was no way this was how the two became friends in the original timeline.

Well, it *was* possible, Emmett supposed, but highly unlikely. Had this incident actually occurred in the original timeline, when Emmett hadn't previously known who Marty was, he definitely would have chosen to step out of Marty's life. But Emmett knew that he was supposed to befriend Marty someday, so he would be stepping out temporarily in order to simulate the natural course of events—which, to Emmett, weren't natural, but were necessary. He felt like an inexperienced actor rehearsing for a play that had script problems from day one.

Someday, Marty and Emmett would meet again, and they could safely be friends. But not now. The only thing that Emmett could do was part with the boy indefinitely. It was going to be an awful, painful thing to do. He genuinely loved him, as if he were a nephew—or even his own son. For years, Emmett often wondered what it would be like to be a father. He hoped it could happen to him someday. Now, he already was getting a taste of that with Marty.

But he wasn't Marty's father, and never would be. He wasn't even the kid's uncle. But he still had taken some of the same responsibilities that a parent would. And if he really did love him as a father to a son, he had to do what any good father would do—what was best for the child, even if it hurt. He had no choice. Postponing his friendship with Marty indefinitely was the only solution.

Lorraine returned to the room, carrying a teddy bear and a bouquet of flowers.

"Mom," Marty said.

"Oh, Marty," Lorraine put the items down on a small table, and took her son from Emmett's arms and into hers. "Thank God you're okay."

"Doc saved my life," said Marty.

"I know he did," said Lorraine. She turned to Emmett. "Thank you. Thank you so much."

Emmett nodded. "I'm so sorry this had to happen."

Lorraine let Marty go, and retrieved the bouquet of flowers and the teddy bear.

"Dr. Brown," said Lorraine. "These are for you." She handed him the flowers.

"Thank you," said Emmett, taking the flowers and setting them aside on the night table.

Lorraine gave Marty the teddy bear. "And I thought this might make you feel better."

Marty took the bear and put it off to the side. A stuffed animal was the last thing on his mind. "Thanks, Mom."

Lorraine then turned to Emmett and said, "Marty is so lucky to have a friend like you."

Emmett nodded, forcing a smile. "It's probably not safe for him to see me anymore, at least not for awhile. If being friends with me indirectly puts his life in danger, then I don't want it."

"Don't say that," said Lorraine. "This wasn't your fault."

"There is a bit of a story behind what happened," confessed Emmett. He looked at Marty. "But it's probably best if we talked about it in the hallway. Marty's already heard a little bit, but the bulk of it is quite disturbing. I'd rather not rehash it after what he's been through."

"Doc," Marty whined as he watched his mother and Emmett leave the room. "What do you mean I can't see you anymore?"

Emmett turned around. “Marty, don’t worry. Everything will be fine. You have plenty of friends.”

“No, I don’t,” Marty sobbed. “You’re my best friend in the whole world.”

Emmett nodded solemnly, beginning to get choked up himself. “The feeling is mutual. But I have to have your best interests in mind.”

Emmett and Lorraine walked to the hallway, leaving Marty to hold tightly to his new teddy bear and sob.

The next half-hour, in which Marty waited for his friend to return, seemed like an eternity. He strained his ears to listen what was being talked about, but the only thing that he could make out was the last thing that Emmett said: “If you don’t mind, I’d like ten minutes.”

Emmett entered the room alone, a somber and serious look on his face.

Marty leapt from the bed and snapped himself around Emmett’s leg. “You can’t go!”

Emmett gently pried Marty off of his leg and knelt to his level.

“Marty, this is for the best. Your mother and I talked about what happened, and we both agreed that we can’t risk your life on account of me.”

“Doc, you’re not fair!” Marty wailed. “I thought we were friends!”

“We are,” said Emmett. “And because I am your friend, I can’t allow you to spend time with me anymore, at least not until Hank is safely in jail. And that could take months, especially with my reputation. It’s too risky. And even if Hank still goes to jail, my reputation is still affecting yours. I can’t let you be exposed to that sort of thing.” Emmett stopped himself short of saying “You’re too young,” knowing how Marty hated to hear that. “Besides, you have other friends.”

“I do not! They all ditched me when they found out about you!”

“I know. And that’s another reason why it’s best for us not to spend time together. It’s getting you into trouble at school. Besides, your friends will come around. They’ll forget about all the time you spent with the town psychotic.” Emmett feigned a mild chuckle.

“They’re not my friends,” Marty sobbed. “They’re mean.”

“No, they’re not mean. They’re merely repeating what their parents have told them about me. They’re kids, and they can be forgiven. Besides, you used to think I was crazy, too.”

“But you’re not!” Marty said again.

And then a moment passed in which neither he nor Emmett said anything.

“It has to be this way,” Emmett said at length.

Marty looked at Emmett in disbelief. The one person who he *knew* he could put complete and total trust in was betraying him—betraying him just like his so-called friends at school. But he should have known. He was an adult. Adults always made dumb choices *for* kids.

“I hate you!” Marty snapped. “I hate you! I thought you liked me—”

Emmett stood up, taken aback by the boy’s sudden anger. “Marty, please calm down. I *do* like you, but—”

“—but you’re just like everyone else!”

“Marty, will you please listen to me?” Emmett asked softly.

“Get out of here!” Marty shouted. With all of the force his little body could muster, he shoved the scientist, causing him to nearly topple backwards.

Emmett said nothing, only staring at the child, who continued to shove him and scream.

“You’re just a dumb jerk!”

Emmett remained in a stunned silence, and Marty gave him another shove towards the door.

“You don’t know anything! I hate you!”

“Marty, please don’t—”

“Go! Get out of here! I hate you!”

Emmett looked at the young child, whose confusion and anger escaped from nearly every bit of his being. He was not offended by Marty’s outburst and declaration of hatred—he knew that the boy didn’t mean it, and was just confused and hurt—but rather was sharing the pain that Marty was feeling. It was not just because it hurt both of them to say farewell, but also because he knew that understanding most of the situation was completely beyond Marty’s young grasp.

How could Emmett possibly convince a traumatized and lonely six-year-old, who had put every ounce of faith and trust in him, that he was doing the right thing?

“*Get out of here!*” Marty exploded once more, giving Emmett a final shove, one that succeeded in sending him completely through the threshold.

The door slammed in Emmett’s face, and suddenly nothing but silence radiated from the room.

As Emmett retreated down the hallway, he realized that the silence coming from the room spoke more than volumes about how difficult this was going to be for both of them.

Thursday, January 2nd, 1975
10:02 AM

Lorraine and George allowed Marty to stay home from school for the next couple days, to give him time to get over his trauma. Marty and Emmett were both released from the hospital the day before. In the living room of the McFly home, Marty sat on a couch, curled up under a blanket, and watched *Scooby-Doo* on television. It was a show that he was not quite fond of, but it didn’t matter, not now. Marty stared at the television, mesmerized, but not by the pictures he saw in front of him. He gingerly sipped a cup of hot tea, and tried to ignore the tears that sporadically came into his eyes.

Lorraine entered the room and sat on the couch beside her son. “Marty, how are you this morning?”

Marty continued to sip his tea.

Lorraine snaked an arm around Marty’s shoulder. “It’s been a rough couple days, hasn’t it?”

“You’re mean, Mom,” Marty said at length, in a hoarse whisper.

“Marty, I’m sorry, but after talking to Dr. Brown, I agreed with him that it probably isn’t safe for you to be hanging around him. He does have a bad reputation. And it’s getting you into trouble at school and with friends, and it almost got you killed.”

“But he saved my life,” whispered Marty.

“I know he did. And I’ll never forget him for it. But he doesn’t feel comfortable having your life in his hands. And he shouldn’t have to.”

“Some friend he is,” Marty mumbled. “He’s ditching me like my dumb friends at school.”

“Marty, he isn’t ditching you. He wants you to be safe. He doesn’t want you to get hurt. He’s also worried about your reputation getting ruined from hanging around him.”

“Grown-ups are dumb.” Marty stated flatly.

“Marty, Dr. Brown was telling me how, if you would have died that night, he didn’t know what he would have done. He cares about you—a lot—and only wants what’s best.”

“He’s dumb,” Marty repeated, staring at his tea.

Lorraine ignored Marty’s remark and continued. “He said that deciding to stay away from you was probably the hardest thing he’s ever had to do. He said he never had a friend like you and that he’ll really miss you.”

Marty looked up in surprise. “Really?”

“Marty, Doc loves you,” Lorraine answered automatically.

Marty allowed the tears to fall. “He has no friends.”

“He’ll be fine,” Lorraine tried to assure her son. “He has his work to keep him busy.”

Marty nodded. “All my stupid friends ditched me because of Doc.”

“They didn’t ditch you, Marty. They just don’t understand, and are repeating what they hear, just like you used to do.”

Marty glanced at the coffee table, where the book Emmett had given him for Christmas was sitting.

“Who’s gonna help me read?” Marty wondered aloud.

“Your father and I will help you.”

And of course they would. But it wasn’t the same as Emmett helping him. He added a certain energy and life to the lessons that nobody else could come close to doing.

“I want Doc to help me,” Marty stated, knowing anyway that there was nothing he could do to change things.

“Marty, I told you. You need to understand that it is not a good idea for you to be hanging around with Dr. Brown.” Lorraine paused. “Why don’t you call Bill tonight and ask him if he wants to come over?”

“Why would he want to?”

“He’s your best friend.”

“Doc’s my best friend.”

“Marty, you need to forget about Doc right now.”

“No. Bill ain’t my best friend. He’s mean.”

“He’s not mean,” said his mother. “He just doesn’t understand you being friends with Doc. But after awhile, he’ll treat you like a friend again.”

Marty snorted. “That’s retarded.”

“Marty, please—”

“Go away,” said Marty.

Lorraine, choosing not to chide her son for backtalk, left him to cry into a pillow on the couch, and exited the room.

Three weeks passed, with a trial that found Hank Webb guilty and sentenced to thirty years in prison. Michael was placed in the care of an aunt. As Emmett heard the sentence declared, he wondered to himself what was going to happen to Michael. He could only hope that the aunt would give him a better and more nurturing upbringing than his unstable grandfather.

Both Emmett and Marty were at the trial, of course, but with neither having the opportunity to speak to one another, except for a brief hello, before or after. Even going to lunch was out of the question, and nothing Marty said could get Emmett to change his mind on the subject, even with Hank’s decided fate. It was all about Emmett’s reputation affecting Marty’s, and Marty learning to just forget and move on...

But Marty could never forget. How could anybody forget having their life saved by someone who could have been killed himself?

And Emmett surely couldn’t forget. He felt a series of conflicted emotions. He knew that, logically, he was doing the right thing to keep Marty safe. But he also knew that he was hurting him emotionally. Marty had put all his trust in Emmett, and what was Marty thinking? What any six-year-old would think: that he was being betrayed.

And of course there was the pain that Emmett himself was feeling. Aside from the guilt that stemmed from what he had done, he was setting himself up for loneliness for an indefinite amount of time. It could be as short as a week, but it could also be ten years before he and Marty would be able to be friends again.

To Marty’s surprise, none of the children at school mentioned the events. Nevertheless, Marty still felt a sense of alienation when he tried to join in games with the other kids. Nobody, not even Bill, would have anything to do with him.

Marty sluggishly entered and exited the next few weeks at school, trying to find things at recess to do himself, and trying to do well in his schoolwork. He remained more reserved than usual, especially in his reading group. Everyday after school, he staggered off the bus and went straight to his room to play with his toys. Lorraine tried to encourage Marty to go out and play, which he sometimes did with Dave and Linda, but he otherwise sulked and found activities to do in his room. One day, he found the picture book, which Emmett had given him for Christmas, sticking out from under his bed. Just looking at it killed him. He kicked it further underneath.

Marty’s mother had to fight to get him to go to bed nearly every night. Nightmares that rehashed what happened on New Year’s constantly attacked Marty in his sleep, and he often woke up screaming. His mother and father had to come in to comfort him, and it often took at least an hour before Marty would fall asleep again. One night, Marty lay awake in bed, and could hear his parents’ voices through the ventilation shaft.

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12:32 AM

“Lorraine, this has gone on long enough. We have to do something.”

“Maybe we should put him in therapy for awhile.”

Marty’s ears perked up. What was therapy?

“Sending him to some quack isn’t going to help. Jesus Christ, what do you think? You send him to a shrink, and what’s he going to say? ‘Marty, you’ve been traumatized because you were almost killed?’ I could have told you that. If anything, sending him to some guy he doesn’t know and forcing him to talk is going to traumatize him more.”

“Then what do we do? His teachers are worried about him.”

What did Marty do that was so bad that was making his parents talk about him all night? He startled to tremble.

“I hate to say it, Lorraine, but there’s only one thing that we can do that will make things better.”

“No, George, we can’t.”

“Lorraine, we have to. You know what it is. We can’t go on like this, especially teaching our son that it’s okay to hide from the world. We can’t teach him that it’s okay to be swayed by peer pressure just so that he has lots of friends. He needs to talk to somebody who’s been through the situation, who understands it as well as he does. That’s the only way he’ll ever be able to put this behind him.”

What were Marty’s parents going to do? Punish him? Still trembling, Marty stuck his head under the pillow.

It had been plaguing Emmett for three weeks already.

When?

Five years?

Ten years?

Tomorrow?

And, finally, *how*?

Perhaps they would meet up on the street again, just as they had on that Thanksgiving night and, somehow, it would be time. More importantly, it would be safe. More than anything, indication of when it was time required Marty’s parents changing their minds about what Emmett had convinced them of—that it was too dangerous for the boy to spend time with him. Only then would it be time, because only then would it be most natural, most logical...

But Emmett had done a good job of convincing the boy’s parents that it was dangerous—maybe even a little *too* good. The only way that Mr. and Mrs. McFly would change their minds about the decision they agreed upon would be if Marty continued to inexorably assert his loyalty to Emmett—to a point where they felt it would be best if the two continued to see each other. But it was not up to Emmett to push it—only to wait, and hope for the best.

Postponing his friendship with the boy left knots in Emmett's stomach for days on end. He spent the time diverting himself, with some schematics that he had been working on for a new invention, and taking care of Einstein. But every now and then, he'd look up from his mechanical drawing, or the box of biscuits he was opening for his dog, stare into space, and sigh...

Marty awoke the next morning and walked sluggishly into the kitchen, where his mother was cooking pancakes and bacon, and his father was sitting at the table and reading the newspaper.

"Good morning, Marty," said Lorraine.

"I heard you and Dad talking last night," Marty said flatly.

"You did?" Lorraine looked up from the stove.

"Yeah," said Marty. "What did I do that was so bad?"

"Nothing, Marty. What makes you think you did anything bad?"

"You said the teachers are worried about me." He looked around. "Where are Dave and Linda?"

"They went down the street to play at Steven's house. And you didn't do anything wrong. The teachers are just worried that you seem unhappy. And we think you really need somebody to talk to."

"You mean one of those doctors for crazy people? Mom, I ain't going to one of those!"

George chuckled. "Who said anything about that? Marty, it isn't fair to keep you away from Dr. Brown. He's been a very good friend to you, and he's become an important part of your life. It's only fair for it to stay that way."

Marty's somber expression immediately reversed. "You mean I can see Doc again?"

"Of course," said George. "He's coming over for breakfast. He should be here any minute."

"Really?" Marty was enthralled.

"Marty, you miss him, and I think he misses you too."

"Oh, thank you, Dad!" Marty threw his arms on his father's back, nearly squeezing his neck in his hands.

"You're welcome, Marty," George nearly choked. "Now go get dressed before he gets here."

Marty did not have a chance to go back to his room; he already heard the car pull up in the driveway.

"Doc!" Marty shouted, running out the front door in his pajamas and bare feet, and nearly tripping several times. "Doc!"

"Marty, put on some shoes! It's cold out there!" Lorraine scolded as she followed her son.

Emmett barely got his right leg out of the door of his Cadillac when Marty nearly knocked him on his back. "Doc!"

The scientist grabbed the door of his car to regain his balance, and then scooped Marty up. "Marty! It's so good to see you again!" Emmett hugged the boy.

"Same here, Doc! I'm sorry I was mean! You ain't mad, are ya?"

Emmett chuckled. “Of course not. I would have had the same reaction at your age. And you were right. It wasn’t fair—to either of us.”

Scrambling out of his older friend’s arms, Marty leapt onto the pavement. “You coming in for breakfast, or what?”

“Yeah,” said Emmett. “And you had better, too. You’ll freeze your feet off if you don’t get inside and put something on them.”

Marty impatiently yanked Emmett’s hand and dragged him towards the door. “Come on, then, Doc! Let’s go.”

Emmett smiled and allowed the boy to lead him inside.

“You don’t know how good it is to see Marty again,” Emmett said, once he and the McFlys sat down to eat.

“He’s just as glad to see you,” Lorraine said.

“But really,” Emmett added. “You don’t know what this means to me, to have friends like him.”

George nodded. “A lot of people misjudged you. And I have to admit, we did too.”

“It’s true,” Lorraine added. “But we know better, now, and maybe others will someday.”

Emmett forced a crooked smile. “Doubtful. But even if it affects only one person, that all that matters. One person really does make a difference. I’ve learned that over the years.”

Emmett smiled at the boy, and Marty smiled back.

Marty looked up at Emmett. “Hey, Doc, can you help me read today?”

Emmett nodded. “Tell you what. I’ll help you read, if you help me in the lab this afternoon. I’m working on something big and I could use an extra pair of hands.”

Marty grinned. “Can I, Mom?”

Lorraine smiled. “After you get dressed.”

“Yay!” Marty cheered. He wolfed down his last bite of pancakes and bolted to his bedroom.

Emmett smiled.

“Thank you,” said George. “For everything you’ve done for him.”

Emmett laughed inside, knowing that he would do more for him eleven years later—or nineteen years ago—

“And for risking your life to save him,” Lorraine added.

—And knowing that Marty would also do his share of saving his life.

“It’s a pleasure, you know, to have somebody who’s worth risking your life for. Somehow, it makes one feel more complete, as if he has more of a purpose, other than tinkering with gadgets in his garage all day.”

“We also felt that he really needs help getting over the events of that night,” said George. “And if he ever wants to talk about it, it should be with the person who experienced it with him.”

Emmett nodded in understanding, and turned to see Marty bolting back into the kitchen. Kids were remarkably resilient. Somehow he suspected that the subject of the events from a few weeks ago would not even come up.

“C’mon, Doc! Let’s go!” Marty impatiently yanked on his friend’s arm.

“Marty, let him finish his breakfast,” said Lorraine.

Instead of doing just that, Emmett stood up and scooped the giggling Marty onto his shoulders. “Thanks a lot for breakfast,” he said to Lorraine and George.

“Thank *you*,” said George.

“Giddy-up, horsy!” said Marty, tugging on his friend’s disheveled white hair.

“Youch!” cried Emmett, feeling his hair get uprooted.

“Sorry,” said Marty.

Emmett laughed, and, with a quick wave to George and Lorraine, galloped out the front door, with the giggling Marty riding his shoulders.