

## Excerpted from *The Scalpel and the Soul*, Chapter 6, “From Flesh to Spirit”

*Early in his internship, Dr. Hamilton had a stint in the Burn Services unit where the power of the human spirit etched itself forever on his soul.*

Thomas didn't remember me at all. His mother did. She bragged to me that he was an honor student now. And she wept, as we departed, telling me how grateful she was for what we had done for him. He waved goodbye to me with one of the lobster hands I had probably helped build for him.

But as he waved, he smiled at me. A big smile! A real smile! The smile of someone who is genuinely happy to be alive! Then I realized that I had been given a great gift on this very last day of my surgical training. I had been brought in a great, full circle. I had seen the hell of Crispy Critters. I had learned to see beyond the burns and the deformities to the real children who lived and thrived there. I had been permitted to experience the transformational moment when the spirit of Thomas' father had come from beyond the realm of the flesh to intervene, to protect, and, maybe, even guide us as we took care of his son. Now I had been permitted to grasp the miracle from beginning to end, its entire sweep across time and space. I had not grasped its full significance. Maybe I'd forgotten a lot. So the miracle came back to see me, like a planet inevitably making its orbit back to the moment of eclipse.

As I saw Thomas smile and wave, I reminded myself I had been permitted to watch the mortal threads of my life, interweave with the strands of the spiritual powers in Thomas's life. The trip had lasted precisely from the beginning to the end of my entire surgical training over eight years at the MGH. That too could not be mere coincidence!

I understood, for the first time, that the filaments of my own existence were inextricably interwoven with Thomas', his father's, mother's, and a host of other individuals. An idea began to take shape: I could see thousands of orbits, mortal and spiritual, all spun from the luminous fabric of creation. This eight year-long adventure was not just the story of a surgical residency. It was a message: We're never solitary mortal beings. Supernatural comfort is all around us—like Thomas' father's spirit—and never leaves us alone without divine strength and protection. But without the certainty of our link to the supernatural, the burden of individual existences can make us crazy.