

Transformation

by

John O'Riley

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Chapter 1

Emily Winters paced back and forth in her small, barren living quarters which had served as her prison for twelve long years. Her plan for freedom was tenuous at best but finally, her opportunity would arrive and she had to seize it for there would never be another. As a level nine precognitive, she knew this was her only hope. She had been abducted as an adolescent with the ability to foresee the future with uncanny accuracy when discovered by an operative of the Psi-Tech research facility in Seattle. The extent of her powers had been ascertained through a battery of tests. The vast majority of psychics possessed only one strong talent but often one or two weaker abilities. Emily had been classified as a level five precognitive with no secondary abilities; however, she had intentionally failed their testing for telepathy. The researchers had been ecstatic to discover a naturally-occurring psychic with such a high rating. They had immediately forced her to undergo the psi-enhancement procedure which comprised of a combination of drugs and electrical stimulation to the brain. This technique only worked on a third of the population and no one knew ahead of time who it would help. After a painful recovery of several days, Emily was reclassified as a level nine precognitive which was the highest rating that researchers could currently measure.

At first, Emily refused to cooperate with her captors but after enduring days of torture, she'd capitulated with their instructions. For years, she made daily predictions that benefited the facility's ability to generate profit through economic forecasting as well as strengthen its political power base. Several key government officials and a small, wealthy, influential group of

individuals secretly reaped the rewards of work performed by both prisoners as well as employees of this organization. As the company's most valuable tool, Emily had been instructed to foresee and report a variety of major events. As a result of her work, she knew a great deal about this corrupt and greedy organization. She couldn't stand the thought of furthering their agenda and supporting their power base any longer. Not when an opportunity had finally arrived which would allow her to escape this place.

Emily's body filled with nervous anticipation as she continued pacing the main room of her living quarters. It was furnished with a small desk and laptop computer to allow her to record any unexpected visions she may receive, a plush gray armchair, and a small bookcase brimming with a collection of popular novels. The white walls were devoid of any decoration while the floor was covered by green, commercial-grade carpeting. The spartan bedroom offered only a twin-sized bed with a small nightstand that sported a cheap, digital alarm clock. The entrance to the private bathroom was situated on one end of the main room. Of course, there were no windows in the living quarters which would have allowed for possible escape.

Her head spun toward the front door as the lock clicked loudly and an instant later, Steve emerged inside the room. Steve was a research manager and a level five psychometrist. He was tall with soulless brown eyes and had thinning, blond hair. He wore a gray dress shirt and black tie and brown pants. He gripped a taser in his right hand and nodded toward the open doorway as he stepped away from it so she could move past him. Emily had been expecting this unwelcome visit. She took a deep, fortifying breath and traversed down the hallway. Steve escorted her to the elevator and they rode in tense silence until they'd risen several floors. Emily's anxiety mounted as they continued down another long corridor until finally reaching Sharon's office. Sharon smiled chillingly from behind her massive, polished oak desk. She was the director of this

facility and had taken a very personal interest in Emily as she had proven to be an invaluable asset to the company. Like Steve, she had started her work here with no psychic abilities whatsoever until she'd participated in the psi-enhancement procedure which had fashioned her into a level four intuitive. Psychometrists received impressions, information, and emotions that individuals unknowingly left behind on inanimate objects while intuitives could obtain information from some unknown source. The most common theory for intuitives was that they possessed a conglomerate of incomplete psychic abilities that gave them glimpses of information and insight from seemingly nowhere.

"Please, sit down," Sharon said.

Emily knew better than to mistake this statement as a request rather than an order. She reluctantly sank into the black leather chair facing the director's desk. Steve remained standing slightly behind Emily.

"You know why we're having this little chat, I presume," Sharon said evenly.

"Not exactly," Emily fibbed.

Sharon slowly rose from her desk which revealed her short height and dumpy frame. She wore a crisp, green blouse and pleated, green pants. She stepped out and positioned herself directly in front of Emily, peering down at her with a threatening expression on her face.

"You've been hiding something from me." Sharon's chilling gaze bore into Emily's.

"I've reported all my predictions and impressions to you."

"You can't lie to me," Sharon said. "You've withheld vital information from me. Something that threatens the security of this facility."

"That simply isn't true."

“I’ve been analyzing the predictions made by all the precognitives at Psi-Tech and I’ve seen a pattern of gaps of information that you report compared to what others have reported. For instance, it’s obvious that you’re protecting the identity of future telepaths. You know that they are a threat to us and that they must be eliminated so you conceal their identities from us,” Sharon said coolly. She paused for a moment to give Emily an opportunity to speak before continuing. “Fortunately, I believe we have virtually every individual who will become a telepath identified. I don’t know if you realize this but my security operatives have already begun neutralizing these threats.”

Telepaths were the greatest threat to Psi-Tech. As a group, the precognitives had foreseen the development of the ability for telepaths to create group psychic links that allowed for unimaginable increases in their secondary abilities. This revolutionary discovery would occur in approximately four years and cause a major power shift that Psi-Tech wouldn’t allow.

“You’re killing innocent people!” Emily’s gut twisted with a potent mixture of revulsion and horror. “You make me sick!”

“You don’t even know them. Why do you care what happens to them? I’ve provided a safe haven for you and everything that you need to live comfortably. Why do you try to undermine this company and all the good it does?”

“You kidnapped me and kept me a prisoner here for years! You expect me to be grateful?” Emily regarded the director with incredulous disbelief.

Sharon stilled and her eyes narrowed vengefully.

“You don’t understand what a pitiful life you would have suffered if I hadn’t intervened and enhanced your natural psychic ability. I know it’s difficult for you to believe but things are a lot better for you now. Unfortunately, time is running out and I need to know what you’ve been

hiding. The cataclysmic event is going to be a great transformation but only if Psi-Tech can control the chaos that results from it. If we can't maintain order, society will be plunged into anarchy. And it will be entirely your fault for failing to report what you've seen."

"I've told you everything I know," Emily said. Anxiety clawed at her gut and made her body icy with terror. She hoped that Sharon didn't figure out her secret. Sharon had sent a number of psychometrists to sense impressions from various objects and furniture in her living quarters but they had failed to uncover anything useful.

"Today is the big day," Sharon said. "The fragments of the comet passing through have already started to enter the Earth's atmosphere. It's only a matter of time before the electrical storms begin. Everything and everyone will be different. You can't stop that."

"I know I can't stop it," Emily said tonelessly.

"Then why aren't you cooperating?" Sharon demanded. "I'm at my wit's end with you! I've coddled you because you're an important asset to Psi-Tech but if you refuse to cooperate, I'll be forced to use extreme measures. I hate to see you suffer but I'm going to have to put a stop to all your meals until you comply. Furthermore, you'll be handcuffed to your office chair with a security operative standing guard at all times. At night, you'll be handcuffed to your bed. You know the drill."

Emily swallowed as adrenaline rushed through her. She'd endured this scenario many times. They'd carefully monitored her condition and hadn't allowed her to starve to death. When it came to a critical point, they'd fed her minimally then switched tactics.

"I can't believe you're doing this," Emily said shakily. "I've done the best job possible for you."

“It looks like you’re not going to cooperate with me,” Sharon said regretfully as she returned to her former position behind her desk. “I was hoping you would voluntarily help me. You have a good life and I hope that you will allow me to continue to support you in that. I need to know what you’re keeping from me. If you tell me now, we can avoid any unpleasantness. It’s your call.”

Emily swallowed nervously and waves of dread threatened to overwhelm her. She couldn’t endure any more torture. She’d already suffered long enough. Maybe she could tell Sharon something that wouldn’t hurt her chance to escape this dreadful place. Or maybe she could make up a complete fabrication; a false threat that would occupy Sharon’s mind long enough to leave Emily alone until she could make her move. Emily’s thoughts churned frantically for a solution to this dilemma.

“All right,” Emily said with a defeated slump of her shoulders and a weary sigh. “I’ll tell you.”

Sharon’s lips curved in a satisfied smile and she quickly brought out a tape recorder so she could save the entire discussion and have her assistant type it up later.

“You’ve made a wise decision,” she said. “You may begin whenever you’re ready.”

Sharon pressed the record button and waited expectantly. Emily took a deep breath as she mentally prepared her fictitious tale.

“There is a serious threat that will come about as a result of the new psychics who will be made in the aftermath of the electric storms. You remember reading about my reports on the multipaths?” Emily asked. The question was a delaying tactic to give herself valuable time to further enhance her story.

“Yes, I recall them. Multipaths are those psychics whose abilities inexplicably expand. They become level nines and they begin to exhibit more and more secondary abilities that are just as strong as their primary ability. All multipaths die within three weeks from the onset of their symptoms.”

Now it was time for a half-truth. Emily knew the secret to saving multipaths but only in theory. She'd seen how they were saved in the future but the technique wouldn't be discovered for more than thirty years.

“What I failed to mention is that a quarter of the multipaths that are created from the aftermath of the electric storms will somehow learn to control and stabilize their abilities which will allow them to live. With their precognitive abilities, they will quickly realize telepaths are in danger and move to get as many to safety as possible. They will go into hiding,” Emily said.

Sharon stiffened and her brown eyes blazed with fury.

“This is a terrible betrayal! I can't believe you hid this from me! None of the precognitives reported that any multipaths would survive so we never bothered to identify them for elimination! This is a serious threat!” She sputtered as she reached out and snapped the recorder off. “Go back to your quarters at once and begin working to identify the multipaths!”

“Okay,” Emily said meekly.

She headed for the door as Steve opened it for her.

“One more thing,” Sharon said in a chilling tone. “If you ever hide anything like this from me again, you will be severely punished!”

Emily didn't bother responding to this threat. She knew for a fact that she wouldn't reside in this facility for much longer. Sharon would order her execution soon or she'd escape. There were no alternate outcomes. Steve's brooding presence further exacerbated Emily's fears of

discovery. Steve Drake was the only research manager who ran these types of errands for Sharon. If it wasn't him who summoned Emily for a visit with Sharon, it would always be a security operative rather than a research manager. Emily knew the two of them were having an affair. Other psychics had discovered this information as well but all of them were prisoners rather than employees so they kept quiet about their discovery. Steve had grown aloof and distant with his wife over the years and had seen Sharon's interest in him as a great opportunity for power. And it had furthered his career just as he'd anticipated. Sharon had promoted him from a tech assistant to a research manager in spite of his lack of any supervisory experience or skill. His performance remained lackluster since he was just as incompetent in his current position as his former one but she was the boss so that didn't matter.

“You were wise to cooperate,” Steve said as they approached her room.

He opened the door for her and she stepped inside her living quarters. Steve quickly closed and locked the door behind her. Emily's eyes roved over her prison then rested on the laptop computer situated on the cheap desk shoved in the corner. She took several, deep calming breaths then purposefully shoved all thoughts of her plans for escape out of her mind. It was essential that she controlled her thoughts and emotions when touching any object in order to avoid leaving any psychic residue that would betray her hopes for freedom. Emily took plenty of time centering herself and plunging her mind into a deep meditative state. Once she was certain she had gained complete control of her thoughts, she sank into her desk and prepared to record psychic impressions of the future. She hated to give the names of those individuals who would become multipaths; however, she'd spoken the truth. They would all die within three weeks once the onset of symptoms had begun. Even her older brother, Jeremy Winters, who believed her to

be dead. But he was one name that Emily wouldn't give and she carefully avoided thinking about him whatsoever as she typed in a name of one person who came to her.

In a way, Emily was giving the future telepaths a fighting chance to fulfill their destiny by throwing Psi-Tech on a wild goose chase. The company already had so many targets that it would take years to hunt down all the telepaths but now, Emily gave them an even greater task by providing a huge list of psychics who would perish on their own anyway. If she hadn't remained in such a deep trance, her mind would burst with glee over this deception. After hours of work, Emily slowly became aware of pain nibbling away at the fringes of her consciousness. She mentally withdrew from her work and redoubled her efforts to remain in a meditative state which would partially protect her from the negative effects of the electrical storm which she intuitively knew had arrived. The lights in the room flickered then went out. Her computer became the only source of illumination as it was plugged into battery backup. The automatic program initiated, saving all programs and shutting down the hard drive.

Enough of the elements in the passing comet had been introduced into the Earth's atmosphere to initiate a world-wide disruption that would transform every living being on this planet. Even in her current meditative state, she would succumb to unconsciousness which would precede the transformation. Emily slipped from her chair and positioned herself so she was lying flat on her back on the floor. She closed her eyes and focused completely on going deeper into a controlled trance. For months, she'd practiced this exercise which was critical to her plan for escape. The deeper her trance, the easier the transition wrought by the electrical storms would be. She had learned this secret in a vision and kept it to herself. Hopefully, it would give her enough of a tactical advantage to stay alive once Psi-Tech initiated the post-transformation protocols which involved systematically killing all prisoners kept in the facility.

Chapter 2

Jeremy Winters emerged from his brown, two-story house to step barefoot onto his massive, concrete patio in the backyard. He grasped a large, beige mug of black tea in his right hand. His canvas featuring his latest work stood half-finished several feet in front of him. He often immersed himself in his work for countless hours and sometimes forgot to eat all day as his paintings neared completion. His current project featured an underwater scene depicting dolphins with a bleeding effect in a corner that showed outer space and a ringed planet spilling into the ocean from below. Jeremy's paintings often portrayed breathtaking beauty and realism with a touch of fantasy. His work was so popular that he'd earned enough money to live comfortably indefinitely without producing another piece; however, he was compelled to continue. It was a compulsion and he sometimes wondered why such a driving force existed within his mind.

His parents had both hypothesized that it stemmed from his dyslexia. They believed that like all dyslexics, Jeremy's mind was wired differently. He'd always struggled with reading and writing but his ability to picture his surroundings in vivid detail and to translate it to paper had always surpassed his peers. By the time he'd reached high school, he'd taken various art classes at the persistent urging of his parents, his sister, and his best friend, Skylar. He discovered he enjoyed painting and had a knack for it. Thanks to help and encouragement of his sister, Emily, and Skylar, he'd managed to rent a space at an art show as well as to set up a very attractive, eye-popping display that attracted many buyers. Luckily, he'd created a small fan base with several

influential buyers who spread the word about his artwork. That had been the launching point of his career.

Shortly after the smashing success of the art show, Emily had disappeared. The police had discovered her charred remains the next morning in an abandoned building that had mysteriously burned down. Emily's body had been unrecognizable but luckily her purse had been found at the crime scene and dental records verified her identity. Jeremy's father had died in a car accident a year before and his mother had decided to move from Seattle as there were too many bad memories plaguing her. She'd ended up relocating to Sacramento, California and Jeremy had been strongly tempted to go there as well. In the end, he chose to remain in the Seattle area rather than leave his best friend behind and somehow, he irrationally felt that to leave would be to abandon Emily. Jeremy wasn't sure if he would have ever succeed with his career in painting if it hadn't been for her.

Jeremy took a careful sip of his steaming, hot tea as he sank into one of his lawn chairs. His expansive backyard comprised about half an acre and contained a bunch of tall evergreen trees, a couple of maple trees, and several Chinese pear trees. A tall fence blockaded the view of his neighbors which helped to further seclude him. Jeremy didn't welcome uninvited visits except from his closest friends and family. He preferred the solitude which enabled him to immerse himself in his work. Jeremy's gaze gently drifted up to the overcast sky above. He could make out occasional flashes of light as debris from Reinard's comet burned in the atmosphere. It provided a spectacular night show with tonight being the peak performance. After that, it would slowly taper off over a week's time. Anyone who possessed even a minor interest in astronomy couldn't pass up the opportunity to gaze at the night skies this evening.

Thunder unexpectedly rumbled and jagged lightning bolts ripped violently from the gray clouds. Bolt after bolt struck in rapid succession as Jeremy watched with stunned amazement. He quickly realized it would probably be a good idea to slip indoors to safety. His head pounded with building pressure as he clumsily made his way to the house and shut the door behind him. His headache quickly intensified until spears of agony tore through his entire body. Jeremy tripped as he emerged in the living room and fell flat on his face. His body convulsed uncontrollably as unbelievable pain continued to savagely rip through him. Soon, he lost consciousness. When he awakened, it felt as though he'd been sleeping for days and the power had gone out. His mouth was dry and he had a killer migraine. Nausea assailed his senses as he rose to his feet and stumbled into the bathroom for ibuprofen, aspirin, and feverfew. After popping a handful of pills into his mouth followed by plenty of water, he reclined on his bed. Soon, sleep claimed him and he awakened feeling a lot better.

It was fairly early in the morning and the power had restored so he showered, dressed and turned on the news. When the date popped up on the screen, he could scarcely believe that three days had gone by. Alarm sprang inside him as he realized something major had occurred. The reporter currently spoke about a powerful electric storm that had occurred worldwide. The scientific community theorized that new elements from the comet had mixed with Earth's atmosphere and was a catalyst for the preceding powerful storm which had caused major damage. Even more disturbing was the fact that the entire population had lost consciousness at some point during this ordeal. On average, most had remained incapacitated for approximately six hours. In some rare cases, individuals had taken over two days to revive. Jeremy swallowed nervously because he was one of those few and he worried about possible negative impacts to his physical well-being. No doubt the hospitals were flooded with incoming patients who shared his

concerns. The phone rang and he temporarily brushed aside his concerns as he made his way to the kitchen to answer it.

“Hello?” Jeremy said.

“Thank God you’re all right!” his mother’s concerned voice spilled over the receiver in a rush. “I’ve been trying to call you for days! I couldn’t reach Skylar either. I called the hospital and the police to have someone check on you but it’s been crazy! No one would respond unless they knew it was an emergency. I booked an airplane ride to Seattle but the earliest I could get was this evening.”

“I’m sorry you were so worried. I hate to tell you this but I just woke up a few moments ago.”

“Are you all right, sweetie?” Her voice softened but was tinged with worry.

“I’ve got the worst migraine in history but other than that, I’m okay,” Jeremy said.

“I’m relieved to hear that,” Kate said. “You probably don’t know what’s happened over the last several days. It’s been a disaster! There were huge storms that caused devastating damage. Luckily, nothing here was hit too hard and my house is just fine. A lot of homes and businesses caught fire. I can’t tell you how crazy it’s been. Luckily, things are settling down now but it’s going to take a long time to rebuild some of these areas. Of course, we’ve got some really weird stuff happening too. If you watch the news, you’ll see the stories. There’s a lot of people with special abilities popping up.”

“Special abilities?” he said.

“Yes, it’s simply amazing! People are discovering that they’re psychic. One of my neighbors is having a great time playing with his new talent. He can lift small objects and make them float around. It’s remarkable! He’s not alone either. There are lots of people on the news

who can do the same thing! There's a bunch of people who claim they can see what's going on from far away. They call it remote-viewing. Others who say they can heal with a touch of their hand."

Jeremy wasn't sure what to make of all this. It would be difficult to believe if it hadn't been his mother he was conversing with. Of course, there were potential side effects to whatever phenomenon had caused everyone to lose consciousness. It was conceivable that one of these maladies could affect the mind. He would make a point of watching the news to verify the strange story that his mother had just told him.

"Do you have any of these special abilities?" Jeremy asked warily.

"I'm afraid not," Kate said wistfully. "But you never know. It may take awhile for some people."

"Maybe," Jeremy said.

"Oh! I just realized that you probably want to reach Skylar. You should check up on him and make sure he's all right," she said.

"Good idea. Thanks for calling, Mom," he said.

"I love you."

"Love you, too."

Jeremy disconnected the call and immediately punched in his friend's number. The phone rang until his answering machine picked up. He tried again several more times then decided to drive over to Skylar's house. He emerged from his house with trepidation as he was unsure if the storm had inflicted any damage to his property. He breathed a sigh of relief when he discovered all was well. He slipped behind the wheel of his green Toyota Rav4 and pulled out of the driveway. His gaze fixed on a fallen tree in his neighbor's yard several houses away. Several

scorch marks had struck both the tree and the house but hadn't resulted in a fire. Jeremy took the freeway to his friend's house even though they both lived in Bothell. It was a little faster and he didn't want to see any more damaged homes. It only took about ten minutes to reach Skylar's neighborhood which had received plenty of lightning damage. Concern for his friend and guilt for not immediately thinking to check on him stabbed in Jeremy's mind. He'd already lost his father and sister to tragedy, he didn't need to lose his closest friend as well.

He slowed his vehicle as fear began to build over what he would find. Suddenly, a vivid image of Skylar kneeling in his living room clutching his head in both hands as if in agony flashed in Jeremy's mind. Jeremy took a deep, calming breath. Abruptly, he saw himself knocking on his friend's front door. The scene swiftly vanished and Jeremy halted his vehicle. An instant later, he saw himself standing in front of Skylar's front door from a position to the side. He reached out and checked the doorknob to find it unlocked. Jeremy opened the door and stepped inside. The scene vanished again and Jeremy's skull ached. He waited for awhile to see if the visions would return but nothing happened. Jeremy finally moved his SUV forward and discovered his friend's brown house and moderately-sized yard were both undamaged. He parked his vehicle, rushed over to the front door, and knocked on it. No one answered the door. Jeremy worried that his friend was still unconscious from the electric storm.

He knocked again and rang the bell several times. Still, Skylar failed to respond. Jeremy reached out to try the knob and was only half-surprised that it turned easily in his hand. He swung the door open and stepped inside.

"Skylar? Are you okay?" Jeremy called out.

"I'm in here," Skylar said weakly.

Jeremy followed the sound of his friend's voice to find him kneeling in the living room clutching his head in both hands just like he'd seen moments ago in a vision. More guilt flooded through Jeremy as he silently chastised himself for not coming sooner.

"You came as soon as you could. Don't feel bad about it," Skylar said through gritted teeth.

"I don't."

"Yes, you do. You've been yelling at yourself since you pulled into the neighborhood," Skylar said accusingly.

His hands covered his ears as though he tried to block out painful noise. Skylar groaned softly and swore under his breath. His red hair was a sharp contrast to his unusually pallid skin.

"I'll get you some ibuprofen," Jeremy said.

"Don't bother," Skylar bit out. "I've already taken a handful."

"A handful?" Jeremy said in concern. "How many did you take exactly?"

"Not enough to kill me."

"What can I do to help?" Jeremy asked.

"For starters, you can stop thinking," Skylar said grievously.

"You're reading my mind!" Jeremy exclaimed.

"Yes, and everyone else in the city, too," Skylar said.

"How long have you been awake?"

"I don't know. I keep passing out," Skylar said.

(End of Book Excerpt for Transformation)