



Sample from **JOINING MIRACLES**, the book referenced in the visionary thriller, **THE GRAIL CONSPIRACIES**.

Both are by Michael McGaulley

“What if you slept? And what if in your sleep, you dreamed? And what if in your dream you went to heaven and there plucked a strange and beautiful flower? And what if when you awoke, you had the flower in your hand? Ah! What then?”

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

“So the old word observer simply has to be crossed off the books, and we must put in the new word participator. In this way we’ve come to realize that the universe is a participatory universe.”

John Archibald Wheeler

“There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is. I believe in the latter.”

Albert Einstein

Key I

Reality Is Not as it Seems

Two Years Ago

MY FOOT SLIPPED ON THE WET ROCK; searing pain shot up from my ankle; the leg gave way; I toppled off the edge of the narrow trail into the emptiness below.

I can't say my whole life passed before my eyes then, just the two principles I'd been living by:

Whatever *can* go wrong, *will* go wrong—that's Murphy's Law.

And my own First Corollary to Murphy's Law: Once *one* thing goes wrong, *everything else* does, too.

I SUPPOSE I SOUND LIKE A GROUCH, A WHINER, A LOSER. The fact is, I *was* a loser back then, angry and frustrated, convinced that there was some sort of cosmic conspiracy to make my life even more difficult.

It seemed to be more than just coincidence that I lived constantly on the verge of getting the things I wanted, only to find them snatched away (as I had come to expect) at the last moment.

It seemed more than irony that the things I most dreaded and guarded *against* were precisely those that *did* come about, producing precisely what I most definitely *did not* want.

It seemed that every time something could go one way or the other, it invariably went the worst way—from the toast falling jelly-side down, to traffic lights ganging up on me when I was in a rush, to the really big, bad things in life.

"Bad luck," if you want to call it that, seemed to come along for me much more often than random chance would indicate. And I was tired of it.

THEY SAY THAT YOU HAVE TO HIT BOTTOM before you can start heading up. In my case, that was literally true: you can't hit bottom much harder than when you fall off a mountain, as I did. At that point, you can either give up, or start climbing.

My tumble off a mountain trail in a cold, driving, rainstorm, seemed to be more of the usual bad luck I had come to expect.

Ironically, however, it turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to me.

The fall showed me that I *had* been right: bad luck *did* come my way more often than mere chance. But not because I was the victim of a cosmic conspiracy to make my life difficult.

The fact is, I had been *choosing* to have those bad things happen to me. (Sounds strange, I suppose, but I'll explain later.)

In short, I learned that while there was no cosmic conspiracy out to get me, there is a set of "cosmic rules" governing the workings of our world. These rules can work *for* us or *against* us . . . and I was, without realizing it, choosing to have them work against me!

Most importantly, with the help of a strange old monk, I began to understand and apply these rules ("The Knowledge," as he called it) in navigating my life, so that now I'm on-course toward the outcomes I really want.

Now what *seem* to be "coincidences" almost invariably fall my way.

Which is how I ended up writing this little book.

THE FIRST THING TO GO WRONG—the event that I was convinced set off that cycle of “everything” seeming to go wrong—was losing my job a couple of weeks before the wedding.

Rather, before the *planned* wedding. Jackie felt we had no choice: “It would be imprudent without the security of two incomes.”

Jackie, even more than I, was ever on the lookout for the risks and dangers in life. Looking back, I wonder if that shared fear was our greatest bond.

I had already paid the deposit—half the total cost of the whole trip. Hiking in Europe was something I’d dreamed about for years. I thought it over for most of one sleepless night, then decided that I was already so far in that it made no sense to walk away from that deposit . . . especially since it wasn’t likely I’d ever get another chance to go, given my luck and my career prospects.

“I can’t believe it,” Jackie responded. “I can’t believe I came so close to marrying someone as irresponsible as you’re turning out to be.”

Since then, it had just been one of those months.

MY SECOND COROLLARY TO MURPHY’S LAW: There’s nothing so bad it can’t get worse, and probably will . . . sooner rather than later.

Things did get worse, of course . . . just as I expected. It came as no surprise when the plane had mechanical problems along the way. I had nothing else to do in that cold, dreary terminal than sit and wonder, What comes next? Will my luggage turn up missing? Will I miss the train? Will the hotel lose my reservation?

The answer was predictable: all of the above.

Though I was slightly wrong on the details. The hotel didn’t actually *lose* my reservation; instead they *gave* it away. “You were due hours ago,” the desk clerk said when I finally arrived tired, grungy, and wet from a drenching rain.

“There was trouble with the plane. Then I found out that my luggage didn’t arrive, and that caused me to miss the express train.”

“You should have telephoned.”

“I couldn’t find a phone that worked.” (Another Basic Rule of Life, as I saw things then: There’s never a phone when you need one.)

“Alas, the room has now gone to someone else, not ten minutes ago.”

“But my reservation—I’ve already paid for the room.”

The clerk shrugged. “I know nothing of that. Perhaps you paid the travel agent, not the hotel.”

“But—”

“There is another room I can let you have.”

“Fine. I’ll take it.”

“But it can be for one night only.”

“One night? But my reservation is for a week.”

“That room, alas, has gone to someone else for this week.” She smiled. “However, it is always possible that there will be a cancellation in the morning.”

BUT IN THE MORNING THERE WAS STILL NO ROOM FOR ME. “Perhaps later something will turn up,” the proprietor said. “Spend a few hours walking in the mountains, and luck may be with you.”

Luck *is* with me: I already knew that. But it’s *bad* luck, always bad luck.

“All my hiking gear was in my suitcase, and the airline lost it.”
“The hotel will be happy to store your bag for you when it arrives. The trails are gentle here. You won’t need equipment.”
“What if it rains?”
“Why expect the worst?”

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I SET OFF ON A PERFECT MORNING, just warm enough to be ideal for hiking, with not a cloud in the sky.

Enjoy it while you’ve got it, I told myself: a day like this is too good to last.

The trail began with an easy stroll across soft green pastures still damp with morning dew, then rose through a pine forest, heavy with the scent of balsam and wildflowers.

After an hour, I came to the first lookout. From up here, the village looked like a collection of toy houses. The mountains, snow-capped and majestic, soared above the valley.

Mountains have always been magical places for me. Up there in the clear air and brilliant sunshine, I began to break out of the dark mood that had been hanging over me for weeks—the sense of defeat, the mindset that I was a helpless victim of events conspiring against me. Up there, I was annoyed at myself for the time I’d wasted wallowing in self-pity.

Maybe, just maybe, things will work out, I told myself. Maybe my luck will turn. Maybe a room will turn up. Maybe the airline will get my bag to me. Maybe I’ll have clean clothes tonight.

Maybe even a decent job will turn up when I get home.

Things had been going badly for me, no doubt about it, but that’s life. Into each life some rain must fall, and so forth.

As the word “rain” came into my thoughts, I looked up and noticed the first clouds drifting over the tops of the mountains.

The early drops hit as I came to the signpost for the alternate route back to the village: the worst possible time, when I was at the farthest point from shelter. My usual luck.

The initial drizzle escalated into a downpour. Mist developed, blocking the view of the valley. I lost my sense of direction as I raced back down the trail, hoping I was still headed toward the village.

In my rush, I missed the marker for the main trail.

Which is why I was racing across slippery wet rocks, and how, some time later, I woke up to find myself lying on a rocky ledge, my clothes soaked through, rain beating on my back.

I tried to stand. Pain shot up my leg, and I dropped back onto the rock. My head throbbed, and I felt a lump on my forehead. I checked my watch, to see how long I had been out. It had stopped when I fell, and now it blinked 12:00, 12:00, 12:00.

Once one thing goes wrong, everything goes wrong.

NOW I’VE REALLY DONE IT, I thought. Lost on a mountain with a broken ankle, my only set of clothes soaked through, and almost certainly no room waiting for me even if I could make it back down to the village.

The wind began to pick up, and now I spotted the first snowflakes. I was becoming more and more chilled, and knew I was going to come out of this with the worst cold of my life. Maybe even pneumonia. Just what I needed.

Once one thing goes wrong—I was used to that scenario. But this time it wasn’t just events conspiring to make my life difficult: This time it was literally life-and-death. Soaked through by

a cold rain, hobbled with a broken ankle, I was in major trouble. The possibilities ran through my head: Hypothermia, exposure, frostbite, death. Not a pleasant menu.

Since I was no longer registered at a hotel in the village, no one would notice if I failed to return from the mountain. Even worse, I wasn't just lost on the trail, I was trapped on a ledge below the trail. It could be too late by the time anyone spotted me.

I sat there in the rain, cold and frightened. What had I done to deserve this? Why couldn't things ever go right for me?

That's when I spotted the little footpath that twisted down from the rock ledge. I broke off a branch of a tree to use as a makeshift cane, pulled myself to my feet, and hobbled down the trail.

The trail wound its way back into the forest, and before long I came upon a little chapel, nearly overgrown by trees. It looked abandoned, but at least it would provide shelter from the rain and cold.

Then I caught myself: Don't get your hopes up. The way things are going, the door will probably be locked.

I tried the handle. To my surprise, the door opened. I stepped inside.

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IT WAS SNUG AND DRY INSIDE THE CHAPEL, and the windows still held stained glass. At least I was out of the wind and rain.

I dropped into one of the old wooden pews. It felt good to sit. I was soaked to the skin; I'd soon be chilled now that I'd stopped moving.

But with a broken ankle, I couldn't keep moving.

I thought I'd hit bottom out on the trail. Now I found that had been just a resting point on the way down to the real pit of despair. Everything I'd worked for was slipping away. The job I had put so much into—gone. Jackie and the wedding and that future—gone. The money I'd saved for this trip—wasted.

Even if—best case—I did somehow manage to make it back to the village, I'd be spending the rest of my stay in a hospital, locked into a leg cast. Between medical bills and the extra cost of getting home with a cast on the leg, I'd be up to my neck in debt—and have nothing to show for it.

I was cold and tired and depressed, and for that moment, I really didn't want to go on. Once one thing goes wrong—well, that opens the way for everything else to dump on you. I was tired of it all. Tired even of living.

THEN I NOTICED CARVINGS ON ONE OF THE STONE WALLS.

I pulled myself to my feet and hobbled over to get a closer look. I couldn't read the words, but that was no surprise: this was a foreign country.

What did surprise me was that I didn't even recognize the alphabet used in the inscription. It wasn't ours, and it wasn't Hebrew or Russian or Arabic or even ancient Egyptian.

Then what language was it? Or was it in code?

I saw movement out of the corner of my eye. A figure materialized from the shadows. I was suddenly frightened, realizing how vulnerable I was with this bad leg. Running was out of the question, and so was fighting.

But it turned out to be only a small old man. His face was kindly, and his eyes twinkled with—was it joy or amusement? His bald head was round and shiny, and a fringe of snowy white hair circled around behind his ears, then looped down to a white beard. He wore a plain brown woolen robe. A monk's robe, I realized, and it was old and patched.

He smiled and held out his hand. "Peace, my friend. There is no reason for fear."

I relaxed. He seemed safe enough. I introduced myself, and took his hand. It was rough, strong for such a small old man.

“I am Brother Freddie, the Keeper of the Knowledge.”

“I didn’t mean to intrude. I was lost. I thought the chapel was abandoned. I didn’t—”

“Of course you were lost, and you did not intrude. Not at all. The Knowledge drew you.”

I didn’t know if he meant it as a question or a statement. “The knowledge? You mean the inscription? It seems very old.”

“They say it is even older than the chapel.”

“How old is that?”

He shook his head and smiled again. “No one knows. This was a holy place, a power spot, long before the chapel was built.”

“I can’t read the carvings.”

“It would take an unusual visitor to read them. They are written in a very old language.”

I waited, expecting him to translate. But he was silent. From the expression in his eyes, I knew he was assessing me.

“You have found your way to the Knowledge,” he said. Again, something in the way he said the word told me that, in his view, this was Knowledge with a capital K.

Why this bizarre conversation? I asked myself. Why are we standing here talking? I’m lost, I’m wet, I’m chilled through, I have a broken ankle, and maybe a concussion. I need to get back to the village, not discuss some old carvings on a wall.

“I’m not sure—” I started to say, then stopped.

“You have found your way here because you needed to be here.”

“That’s true enough. In this weather, I wouldn’t survive outside.”

He smiled and shook his head. “No, you found your way here not just for today, not just to escape the rain.”

I couldn’t help myself. I laughed despite the pain in my head and leg, laughed even though I was shivering from the wet and cold. I laughed because I was on the verge of panic.

“Sorry,” I said after I settled down. “I know I shouldn’t be laughing in a chapel, but it just seems so ludicrous. I definitely did not ‘find’ my way here. I’m here because I’m totally lost.”

“Yes, of course,” the Old Monk said. “Yes, that’s the way it usually is. People find their way to the Knowledge when they are most totally lost.”

I wanted to get warm and dry and safe, not get drawn into a conversation about some carvings on a rock. Kindly as he seemed, this old monk could turn out to be a fanatic. If I let him get started, would he ever stop?

“The Knowledge? Are you referring to those carvings on the wall?”

“Those inscriptions convey the core of the Knowledge.”

“But what is the Knowledge?”

He peered closely at me, and I felt he was somehow looking through me. Then he said, “The Knowledge enables one to—”

He cut himself off and shook his head. “No, I’ll not say more. Not now. Not until . . . not until you’re certain you want to know more.”

“No? Why not?”

“Because if you once absorb and learn to live by the Knowledge, then your life will change. Forever.”

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MY ANKLE WAS TOO PAINFUL TO STAND ON. I slumped back into a wooden pew. “Are you telling me that I’d be changed forever simply by understanding what these inscriptions say?”

“If you absorb the Knowledge, if you make it fully a part of how you view the world and how you live in it, if you live as the Knowledge teaches, then, yes, your life will change forever: You will live better and happier and more productively.”

Obviously, he was a fanatic, a zealot, and I should get away from him while I could, before he really got rolling.

But with this ankle, in this weather, getting away was impossible. It would be suicidal to start down the mountain in a storm like this. I was his captive audience.

Besides, curiosity drew me on. “Change my life? These carvings? How?”

“The Knowledge provides a way of taking active control of the events and circumstances you encounter in life.”

My face must have shown that I didn’t understand. He went on: “In other words, the Knowledge provides a methodology for joining the Reality Tracks that lead to beneficial outcomes.”

I felt my head spin. “Methodology? Reality Tracks? Beneficial Outcomes?” In a sentence, it seemed we’d jumped from the medieval to the world of high-tech. Was he a Harvard M.B.A. disguised as a 12th Century monk?

“Are you telling me that this Knowledge provides a sure way of getting what I want?”

“A sure way?” He shook his head. “Oh no, not sure, not sure at all. After all, quantum physics tells us there is no certainty, only probability, in this material world. Indeed, there is, so they tell us, only a probability that the atoms that comprise these stone walls stay in their anticipated orbits and hold the walls together.”

I glanced up, I suppose expecting to see the stones dissolve. It had been that kind of month.

He chuckled and gently touched me on the arm. “Not to be alarmed, my young friend. It’s only a way of looking at reality. The probabilities favor the stones remaining intact, just as the probabilities favor your strong expectations coming to be. The Knowledge provides a way of greatly increasing the probability of experiencing desired outcomes. Under the One, of course.”

I wasn’t much of a church-goer—my family never had been into that. But it was obvious what he meant by that part about ‘under the One.’

I let it pass for the moment. “What do you mean by ‘increasing the probability?’”

“Would you prefer the long or the short explanation?”

This is the end of the sample of *JOINING MIRACLES.*, by Michael McGaulley

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