



The Fire Within

Valerie L. Greene

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She couldn't talk. She couldn't move. Someone seemed to be "switching [her] brain off and on at random." A few hours later, she was taken to a room that resembled an auto repair garage, with hose-like devices hanging everywhere. They put her on a chilly metal table, and a man in a mask approached her.

No, this is not a scene from a science fiction thriller. It's what happened to the author, a vibrant young woman, in the first hours and days of a massive stroke. Some of the medical care she initially received was not only as scary, but almost as harmful as torture by aliens would have been.

Greene was just over thirty and a successful businesswoman when a massive blood clot lodged in an artery in her brain stem. There had been warnings for almost a year—episodes of vertigo and nausea, baffling head and jaw pain, weakness in her limbs. Despite multiple MRIs and doctor visits, she was told only to take things easy. The book is not primarily about medical foul-ups, however. It is about how a young woman refused to settle for diminished dreams, and fought her way back to a nearly normal life.

Greene's whole left side was paralyzed and her oral speech was gone. She could still recognize and use words, though, and communicated in her shaky handwriting. Once her diagnosis was in, she spent hours and years relearning first to crawl, and then to walk. Speech recovery started with her being unable to even make sounds when she opened her mouth. The author does not go into detail on the exercises or her progress, but her impatience and determination come through strongly.

The real turnaround in her recovery came from live stem-cell treatments. Greene had to go to the Hospital of the Americas in the Dominican Republic to receive them, since this therapy, and several other advanced treatments, are not available in the United States. During her month of stem-cell injections, Greene's arm and leg strength improved almost instantly, and her mental fog dissolved.

The book, Greene's first, is short and reads quickly. Its main fault is a tendency toward vagueness. For example, readers learn only that the author was formerly a "businesswoman and entrepreneur," not the type of business she was in.

Now she travels as a motivational speaker, sharing her experience with others. Her road from speechlessness to this career is truly a miracle, she feels, and many would agree. Her story shows that stroke, one of the major causes of disability, does not limit its ravages to the elderly. The book will have a wide appeal to health-conscious readers.

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