

1

The Man in the Mirror

As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect.

✎ Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*

The party was getting louder, but I wasn't adding much to the volume. The New Year was about to arrive, and I was facing that prospect with a lot more dread than glee. I hadn't wanted to be alone, so I was at a nightclub hoping for safety in numbers. But I felt alone anyway. The witching hour had almost arrived and everyone's eyes were on the television. The ball atop One Times Square was being readied for its big splash. The ghosts of coaches past were in my ear: *Keep your eye on the ball*, they'd always yelled. I watched the ball, but what I was really thinking about was my New Year's resolution.

I am going to quit taking steroids, I told myself. This is it, I vowed. I was serious about my good intentions, but then I

had been serious before. When I first started taking anabolic steroids I had told myself it would only be for six weeks. That had been three and a half years before. Since that time I had tried quitting a number of times only to go back to them.

Like Mark Twain said, "Quitting smoking is easy. I've done it hundreds of times." Quitting steroids was like that for me. I would stop using them but then start up again. I was afraid of the consequences of taking steroids but even more afraid of shrinking away without them. My fake muscles were my self esteem. What I didn't know was that my house of cards was about to fall apart.

Mirror watching is one of the great pastimes of body builders. It is the rare reflection that they can walk by without posing, and I was no exception. After using steroids for several years, along with working with weights, I had the body of a musclehead. I was five foot six inches tall, but weighed one hundred and ninety pounds, with overdeveloped chest, shoulders, and upper arms. At the time, my whole life was based on my physique. Because of that, whenever I tried discontinuing steroids it always made me depressed. On those occasions when I stopped using, my mirror watching would make me anxious and upset for I could see my muscles shrinking. For me, that was like losing a limb, and the next thing I knew I was using again to regain that bulk.

But not this time, I told myself. This was one New Year's resolution I was going to keep. I was going to get off the juice and quit forever. Before doing so, though, I had opted for a big send-off. Several hours earlier I had injected myself with a

mega-dose of testosterone. In my years of using steroids I had been taking a veritable cocktail, including Dianabol, Deca-Durabolin, Testosterone propionate, Equipoise, Winstrol, and Sustanon. But now that was all behind me, I told myself.

The party was getting louder with the anticipation of New Year's spreading a fever to the revelers. A casual acquaintance I knew approached me and said, "Hey, you're looking good, Jeff."

In my case I knew that seeing was not believing. I wanted to believe in what the mirror was showing me, but I couldn't. My body was big, but I knew I was a balloon with a leak. I didn't want to live a lie anymore. Somewhere deep down I knew my life of deception was killing me.

"So what are you lifting?" my friend asked.

I went into my gym talk patter, bragging about how I had bench pressed 225 pounds 27 times and done some reps with 350 pounds or more. It was easy to escape that way. When it came to escaping from reality, I was a Houdini. Although I was about to graduate from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst with a degree in economics, most of my college experience had been spent in the weightroom instead of the classroom. Truth to tell, I was terrified at the prospect of going out into the real world. My parents had spent good money for me to go to school and had no idea their son was a junkie whose drug of choice was anabolic steroids. I was so scared of leaving my artificial world that I had convinced my parents that I needed to take some more courses.