

Miracle Found
by Yisroel “Izzy” Goodman
Book One: The Vision
Prologue

“Code blue in ICU 317,” Sally announced, trying to remain calm. “Paging Dr. Walker. Code blue in ICU 317.”

It seemed like an hour but was probably only seconds before an emergency team was running down the hall with a crash cart. Sally stood at her desk in indecision. She had been told that a nurse must be stationed at the desk at all times, to monitor the patients. But this was an emergency. Should she attend to it and leave the desk unmanned? In a moment, her quandary intensified as another alarm sounded.

“Oh my God!” she exclaimed. She quickly grabbed the phone. “Code blue, ICU 325. Paging Dr. Hervey. Code blue in ICU 325.”

Only moments ago she and another nurse had been discussing the serious staffing shortage at the hospital, particularly in the late night and early morning hours. Now in a tragic application of Murphy’s Law, at three A.M., two children in the Intensive Care Unit were coding at the same time. New to the job, Sally stood rooted in place. Should she attend to the critical patient or man the desk? This question had not come up during her brief orientation. Quickly, she made a decision. As she ran down the hall to room 325, she wondered if she would still have a job tomorrow. She wondered if she even cared.

At first, she had considered herself lucky to land this job. She had wanted to be a nurse since she was a little girl putting bandages on her dolls. To her, there could be nothing more rewarding than helping others and alleviating their pain. But the reality of working at a hospital was nothing like she imagined. Because she had displayed the desirable traits of punctuality,

accuracy, and a willingness to go the extra mile, she had been assigned to the Pediatric ICU despite being a relative greenhorn. This was both a blessing and a curse. It was a blessing because there were fewer patients assigned to each nurse, but the flip side was that these were seriously ill patients who needed constant monitoring and could require life-saving intervention at any moment. Still, ICU nurses who worked in other hospitals had assured Sally that she would be spending some time just sitting at the desk chatting or catching up on her reading.

What she hadn't been warned about was the serious nursing shortage at this hospital. It wasn't really a shortage. There were plenty of nurses available for hire. It was more of a money shortage. The hospital saved money by hiring the bare minimum of nurses they needed. The problem was that on any given night, a few were ill or on vacation, leaving them short handed. This was further exacerbated by the hospital policy that a nurse must be at the desk at all times. When only one nurse remained and a patient went into distress, she faced a dilemma.

Sally had already been reprimanded once for leaving the desk to respond to a patient. At that time, the need hadn't been urgent. But Sally couldn't help thinking: what if it had been? Was it wise for the hospital to save a salary of perhaps forty thousand dollars and risk a lawsuit in the millions when a patient died due to inadequate staffing?

This is what she had been discussing with another nurse earlier in the evening.

"Karen, do you know how many weeks I've been carrying this book around in my bag? I think I've managed three pages. I might as well leave it at home."

"I know what you mean, Sally," Karen responded. "Managed Health Care has really screwed things up. I went into nursing in order to give patients the best of care. Two nurses, one of them still green, for eighteen ICU patients is not my idea of good care."

In her early thirties, Karen was an experienced nurse who had started her career back

when hospitals seemed to believe in providing quality care for their patients. The change in her environment had occurred slowly. Now she looked around and wondered how it had happened.

“Hey, I know what you mean,” Sally replied. A petite blonde of twenty two, she was still struggling to hold on to her idealism. “I spend most of my time here feeling completely inadequate. Every time I screw up, I expect to get fired. But I never do. Which makes me wonder what is the standard of care at this place and how long will it be before I accidentally kill someone.”

“The problem is that we have fewer nurses and more patients. They have drugs and machines and procedures that keep people living longer. But these old, sick people need a lot of care and they’re hiring less nurses instead of more.”

“I hope you don’t consider this a harsh statement,” Sally said, “but sometimes I wonder if it’s even a good thing to keep these people alive for so long. We have a floor full of old, sick, half-comatose people, in terrible pain when they’re awake, and we’re using extreme measures to keep them alive. There are so many younger people who aren’t being helped because there just aren’t enough resources to go around. What ever happened to the concept of triage? Of using limited resources where they would do the most good?”

“Don’t let anyone else hear you say that,” Karen warned her, “There have been enough stories about so-called Angels of Mercy who ‘helped’ patients die more quickly. If something happens and someone’s family decides to sue, you don’t want them repeating your comments.”

“I didn’t mean that I believe in euthanasia,” Sally protested. “I just don’t believe in using all these extreme measures to prolong someone’s suffering when they really have nothing to live for. It breaks my heart to speak to all these dying old folks who only want the pain to stop.”

“Would you prefer more units filled with dying children?”

“Well, no, that’s not what I meant.”

“Because those are the cases that break my heart.”

“I know what you mean. I don’t understand how God can give a five-year-old bone cancer and then take it away and make the family think it was all over and then bring it back again. And he’s such a sweet kid. He must be in terrible pain and he hardly ever complains.” She wiped a tear out of the corner of her eye.

“You’re going to have to be tougher if you want to be a nurse,” Karen said. “If you let every case get to you, you’re going to need intensive therapy yourself.”

“Doesn’t it get to you? I don’t know how you can block it.”

“You have to just keep telling yourself that there is a lot of pain in this world, and that you are not responsible for it. All you can do is deal with the victims and make it as easy as possible for them. Concentrate on the positive, the ones who go home.”

“You know, it’s easier dealing with the old folks. At least they’ve lived their lives. But when a case like Latrell comes along, it’s like a knife in my heart. And it’s always the good ones, the loved ones. His mother’s divorced and he’s her baby. She’s barely left his bedside in weeks. It just isn’t fair.”

“And Daniel’s case is fair, just because his parents aren’t divorced? They’re also here a lot. They love him just as much as Latrell’s mom loves her son. And Daniel’s only eight.”

“They still have each other and they have another son. Not that it isn’t awful for them, but they won’t be alone if he doesn’t make it.”

“It might be harder for them,” Karen pointed out. “Daniel hasn’t been sick a long time, so they could have time to get used to it. He was hit by a driver yakking on a cell phone instead of watching the road. If he doesn’t make it, they won’t even have a chance to say goodbye.”

Just then an alarm sounded and both nurses started. At the same time, frenzied shouting came from down the hall.

“Oh, no,” Sally moaned, “Latrell’s coding.”

Karen jumped up and ran down the hall. Sally grabbed the telephone and called the code. Minutes later, Daniel coded.

* * *

Daniel was having a strange dream. At least he decided that it must be a dream. The last thing he remembered was riding his skateboard to school. He was always very careful, as his parents had cautioned him to be. He wore his helmet, rode only on the sidewalk and at a safe speed. He had reached the intersection leading to the school, the only street he would have to cross. The mother who served as crossing guard for the day held up her stop sign to block traffic and signaled him to cross. He glided carefully off the sidewalk and into the street. Across the street he saw his friend waving to him. He waved back and then watched in puzzlement as her smile turned into one of horror. He thought he heard her scream. Then something struck him and he felt himself being lifted into the air. In slow motion, he watched his helmet fly off his head and smack into a car windshield. He saw spider webs form across the glass. Then he saw the grill of a parked car coming toward him. Even though everything was happening slowly, he couldn’t do anything to avoid it. His head slammed into the car and then there was nothing.

Now he was awake, lying in a bed in a strange room. It appeared to be a hospital room. There were other beds and other people in them. There were strange machines that whistled and beeped. Though the room was brightly lit, he could see through the window that it was night.

Had he really been in a car accident? He didn't feel any pain. He pushed down against the mattress in an effort to rise. Instead of just rising into a sitting position, his entire body lifted off the bed. It was like floating in a pool, only easier. He continued to rise, all the way to the ceiling.

There seemed to be a lot of activity going on below him. A team of doctors and nurses were surrounding someone on a bed and using different instruments. Instructions were being shouted. He had watched enough hospital dramas to know that whoever it was must be really sick. He caught glimpses of the figure on the bed and realized it must be a child.

"Just a kid," he thought, "I hope he makes it."

He became conscious of a child crying. It was coming from another room. He wanted to find the source of the sound. He found himself drifting sideways in its direction. Somehow he passed through the wall and entered the next room. The cry grew louder. He passed through another wall and entered a room where another group of people were frantically laboring over someone in a bed. This time he caught a clear look and saw a tiny boy about five years old.

"Geez, another kid," he muttered. "I hope he makes it."

Then he heard the crying again. He looked across the room and saw another boy hovering in the air. He started as he realized it was the same child who lay in the bed below.

"Are you a ghost?" he asked.

"I don't think so," the boy answered. "Are you?"

"No. I'm Daniel. Who are you?"

"Latrell. But why am I here? Why can't I go to my momma?"

Daniel looked down at the people grouped around the bed. There was one young woman standing in a corner not wearing hospital scrubs, watching the medical personnel with great concern. He decided she must be Latrell's mother.

“Why don’t you try going down?” he asked the younger boy.

“I can’t,” Latrelle said.

“Just try. Pretend you’re swimming,” Daniel suggested.

“It’s not working.”

“But you’re not really trying.”

Daniel understood that they had somehow left their bodies, and if they did not get back down, they would never wake up. He pushed his hands upward as if he were swimming and trying to go deep underwater. He began to sink. Latrell stayed up near the ceiling. Daniel grabbed him by an ankle and tugged. It was like pulling on a large balloon. Latrell began to sink and Daniel began to rise. Then Latrell reversed direction and they both moved upward.

“Come on, Latrell, you’ve got to try harder! Your mamma’s crying for you.”

“But it hurts so much down there!” Latrell cried. “Here it doesn’t hurt at all.”

“I know it must hurt,” Daniel said, “but it won’t hurt forever. It will get better.”

“They always say it will get better but then it comes back. I don’t want to hurt anymore.”

By now they had floated through several floors and were outside hovering over the building. Suddenly the night was shattered by a brilliant light that shone down on them. Like a sunbeam on a summer’s day, the light was warm. Daniel looked up and squinted against the brightness. He could make out the forms of people moving within the light.

“Grandma!” Latrell shouted and began moving upward more rapidly.

Daniel could make out the features of an older woman moving toward them. She seemed to be crying. She shook her head and motioned them away.

“Go back down, Latrell!” she shouted. “It ain’t your time! Your mamma needs you!”

Daniel understood that the woman was warning them to stay away. If they entered the

light, they would never be able to leave. Still the light was warm and comforting. But below, Daniel's parents were waiting.

"You have to go down, Latrell!" Daniel shouted. "Your mother's waiting for you!"

"But I want to see Grandma!" the boy cried.

"You'll see her when the it's the right time," Daniel said. "Right now it's time to go back."

"But I don't want to go back. I don't want to be sick and hurt all the time. I don't want to stay in the hospital all day with no friends."

"Then I'll be your friend," Daniel said. "As long as you're in the hospital, I'll be sure to visit you. Just go back down."

"But I can't. I keep trying but I'm only going up."

Daniel grabbed him and, moving above him, pushed him down. He pushed hard, sending Latrell down while he himself was propelled upward. He smiled as he saw Latrell become a small speck in the distance.

* * *

"We've got a heartbeat!" a nurse called out. "He's coming back!"

The young mother sobbed in relief.

The boy opened his eyes. "Where's Daniel?"

"Daniel?" his mother repeated in puzzlement, "Who's Daniel?"

"He was just here," the boy insisted. "We were going up and Grandma said to go back down but I couldn't and Daniel pushed me down."

"But Latrell, there is no Daniel."

"Isn't Daniel the name of the other patient who coded?" one nurse asked another, as they left the room.

"Oh my God, you're right!" the other nurse exclaimed. "The kid in the accident! What's his situation?"

"It doesn't look good."

Through the door they could see the crash team, working furiously to revive the boy.

* * *

A voice asked gently, "Daniel, do you wish to live?"

Thinking of his family and his friends, Daniel answered, "Of course."

"There is a balance which must be maintained. A plan. Many lives are intertwined. Perhaps you should see how your life affects others."

Daniel found himself walking along a parkway at night. A car whizzed by about every thirty seconds with a soft whoosh, doing approximately forty miles per hour on the curving road. The otherwise quiet night was suddenly broken by the noise of a powerful engine laboring, as twin beams of light stabbed through the darkness. A gleaming Corvette, detailed with red and yellow flames, flew down the left lane at high speed. The handsome teenage driver stared at the blue digital numbers of the clock in dismay. He was so late! If only he hadn't stopped to have yet one more argument with his father and lost track of time! His anger and his tardiness caused him to step on the accelerator harder than he planned. Then his eye caught the speedometer. He was doing almost seventy in a forty-five mile zone! He had better slow down before he got a ticket, or worse, before he reached the sharp curve that hadn't been graded properly. Over the years, he had seen a number of cars wrapped around the trees at what his friends called Dead Man's

Curve, though no one believed anyone had actually died there.

It was coming up soon, he reminded himself, as he released his foot from the accelerator. No, correction, it was here! He saw at once that at the speed at which he was traveling, he would never make it. He slammed down on the brakes, locking the tires so the car continued straight ahead while the road turned left. The front of his car slammed into the guardrail, lifting the rear into the air. The little vehicle somersaulted over the guardrail, like a toy thrown by a petulant child. It crashed into the trees, the body crumpling like a crushed aluminum can. With no air bag, there was nothing to protect the driver. Years after being named, Dead Man's Curve had claimed its first victim.

Thirty seconds later, another vehicle came upon the scene. The driver stared in shock and pulled out a cell phone. It was several minutes before a police car arrived. Two officers emerged and ran to the damaged car. They saw immediately that there wasn't much they could do.

"I'm afraid to even move him," the male officer said. His badge identified him as C. Kingsbridge. "He's in terrible shape and he's bleeding all over. If the ambulance gets here in time, he just might have a chance but it's doubtful. Anyway, with the response time we've been getting, he's got no chance at all."

"I already called it in, Charley" his partner said. "It's going to be at least twenty minutes."

"Did you tell them who it is in the car?"

"I did. Not that it will make any difference."

"What the heck was his father thinking of, buying him a car like that? And what was *he* thinking of? He must have been doing sixty! Why don't these kids learn? And the state should have fixed this stupid curve years ago!"

“This is going to kill his father,” the other officer told her partner sadly. “It’s just so tragic. First he loses his wife and now his only son. Second richest guy in town, maybe in the state, and what good is all that money now?”

The ambulance arrived almost half an hour later. The medical team examined the driver and shook their heads. They had loaded the body on a stretcher, when a black Lincoln Continental squealed to a halt and a distinguished middle-aged man with a powerful physique jumped out. He took a look at the ruins of the Corvette and let out a shriek. Then he fell to his knees.

“What have I done?” he sobbed. “What have I done?”

Daniel watched this scene with a heavy heart, as the voice said, “If you live, he dies.”

Daniel was suddenly standing at a magnificent estate. A silver Lexus pulled up in front of the gates and they slowly opened. After the vehicle had passed between them, the gates closed electronically. The car continued down the driveway to an elegant house. The driver stepped out and opened the door for the passenger in the back seat. A slim, silver-haired gentleman in an expensive suit emerged. As he approached the house, he frowned. The pounding beat of a rock tune blared from inside. He opened the door and they entered, Daniel unseen behind him.

“It’s about time you came home!” a pretty, blonde teenage girl exclaimed. “She’s driving us all crazy with the noise! Her door’s locked and she won’t answer!”

The man stomped up the stairs in anger, Daniel in his wake. He pounded on a door and received no reply. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a ring of keys. Selecting one, he inserted it into the doorknob and unlocked the door. Daniel followed him into a girl’s bedroom. The man strode over to a stereo system and shut it off with a decisive jab of a button. He savored the silence for a few seconds, before turning to the dark-haired teenage girl who lay on the bed with her back to him.

“Why are you doing this?” he asked in anger and exasperation. “What do you want from us?” She made no reply. “No, it won’t work this time. I’m not leaving until I get an answer.”

He reached out and grabbed her shoulder in an attempt to force her to turn and face him. She offered no resistance and flopped over. The man stared in shock at her pale features, emphasized with black lipstick, the darkened, sightless eyes, and the empty bottle of pills she still held. Then he lost his composure and wailed.

“If you live, she dies,” the voice said.

Daniel found himself in a rundown apartment. A dark haired woman of indeterminate age lay on the filthy floor in tattered clothing. She held a nearly empty wine bottle in her hand.

“If you live, she dies.”

He was walking down a dark city street. Around him, strange people made furtive deals, exchanging rolled bills for tiny vials. A girl with long, dark hair came staggering down the street, wearing the shortest of skirts and the flimsiest of tank tops. Her lipstick and mascara were badly smeared and her sunken eyes reflected an inner hunger. Stick-thin, her arms and legs were covered with scabs, some of which had become infected.

“If you live, she dies.”

The images came faster. A young black girl sitting in a wheel chair in a tenement building. Another girl about seven years old also in a wheel chair, being beaten by a large, powerful man. A boy who resembled an older version of himself in a hospital bed. A pretty blonde girl attempting to use a guitar to fight off a knife-wielding thug. Five black children lying on the roof of a house in a torrential downpour, while flood waters climbed toward them. They held on to a TV antenna for dear life, as gusty winds pummeled them. The oldest, a girl of about twelve, gripped the pole with one hand. In the other arm she cradled a baby.

“If you live, they die.”

“I want to live,” Daniel said, “but I want them to live, too.”

“Balance must be maintained,” the voice said. “The plan must be followed. You must make a choice, your life or theirs.”

“If they live, will they be happy?” Daniel asked.

Daniel saw the handsome teenager from the car accident embracing a dark-haired beauty, who he recognized as the emaciated girl from the streets, only now she glowed with health. He saw the girl turn to smile at a gorgeous dark-haired woman who he realized was the filthy drunk he had seen passed out on the floor. He saw the distinguished, silver-haired man from the Lexus standing with two smiling teenage girls; the young black girl in the wheel chair sitting at a table in a normal home with a mother, father, and brother; the seven year old, no longer bruised, sitting at a similar table; the teenage boy who resembled him at a club, surrounded by friends, including the girl with the guitar; the children caught in the flood were riding horses on some sort of ranch. “What about my family and my friends?”

He saw a woman who he recognized as the older version of his playmate, emerging timidly from the entrance of a slum building. She was dressed in shabby clothing and though it appeared to be morning, she looked exhausted. She passed a group of teenagers in gang colors, who called out comments Daniel could not understand. The woman obviously did because she flushed and tears of humiliation stung her eyes. He watched her walk into a diner, strap on an apron, then turn to serve the patrons.

He saw his brother wearing restraints and kneeling on the floor of some kind of cell. His eyes were wild, and he swayed to and fro, muttering nonsense words. Through the protective glass of the door, Daniel saw his parents, older and sadder, watching their son with tears in their

eyes.

“This is the result if you live.”

“What about me?” Daniel asked.

He saw an older, heavier version of himself sitting in a cluttered office. The clock read ten and from the darkness outside he knew that it was night. He watched himself scan papers, make notations, and enter numbers into a spreadsheet. This would be his future if he lived.

“And if I die?”

He saw the older version of his playmate, neatly dressed, walking happily with his brother, while his parents and hers watched them with joyful expressions.

“If giving up my life can bring happiness to all these people, then I’m willing to do it.”

“You have made a selfless decision.”

“But when will everyone start living happy lives?”

“Everything takes time. Balance will begin to be restored in seven years.”

“Then I’m ready.”

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As the nurses watched, the crash team slowly removed the equipment from the patient they had labored to save. Their dejection made it clear that there was nothing further they could do.