

The next morning, Mrs. Jason answered the doorbell to allow Nina and Parvin in.

“You must be Parvin,” Mrs. Jason greeted her. “Race told us about you. Please tell your mother I would be happy to pick up anything from the store she needs. Race is upstairs on his computer. You can go on up.”

“How is David today?” Nina asked.

“David’s just fine. He knows you’re coming. He’s looking forward to hearing you sing.”

“That’s good.” It had been months since David’s last anxiety episode, but with a stranger visiting, it never hurt to check.

“Hi Race. Hi David,” Nina greeted them as they entered the room.

“Hi, Nina, Parvin. Give me a second to finish this e-mail.” Race pressed a few keys and hit enter. “Done. Ready to rehearse?”

“Are you going to sing, Nina?” David asked.

“Yes, I am.”

“Good.” The brief smile flickered. “I like to hear you sing. How about your friend?”

“Oh, right. David, this is Parvin. Parvin, this is David.”

“Nice to meet you, David,” Parvin said. She stood back somewhat nervously and did not proffer her hand. Nina had prepared her for meeting David but she was still unsure of what to do.

Nina in the meantime, was struggling to hide her amazement. In the past, David had always been wary of strangers and until introduced, generally acted as if they weren’t there. This was the first time she had ever seen him acknowledge the presence of someone he didn’t know.

“Do you sing?” David asked Parvin.

“No, I don’t.”

“That’s okay. Race and Nina can sing, and we can be the audience.”

Race and Nina exchanged significant glances. Including someone new into the group and actually trying to participate was a milestone for David.

“You have a large and lovely room,” Parvin said, looking around in amazement.

Race’s room was as big as her family’s living room. Despite its size, it was crowded. Several large floor-to-ceiling crammed bookcases took up one wall. A large workstation in one corner held an assortment of computer equipment. The other corner was taken up with a state-of-the-art stereo system, television, video cassette and DVD recorder. Along the back wall was an elaborate keyboard synthesizer, electric and acoustic guitars.

“You know what they say,” Race said, watching her take it all in, “your possessions expand to take up twice the available space.”

“I see that you play the keyboard and guitar,” Parvin remarked.

“So does Nina.”

“Really, Nina?”

“I used to take piano lessons.” Nina answered. “Until we moved to the apartment and couldn’t afford them anymore. We also had to sell the piano. But Race gave me his old electric keyboard, so I can still practice, and he taught me to play guitar.”

“No sense letting all that talent go to waste,” Race said.

“That looks like a very good computer,” Parvin said.

“It is,” Race told her. “I work part time for a computer store. I get used parts for free and new ones at cost. Do you know how to use a computer?”

“My father used to build them,” Parvin reminded him. “We were one of the few families in our village that actually owned one. That’s one of the things I miss. It’s hard to keep in touch with my friends without e-mail.”

“Maybe Race can get you a computer,” Nina said. “He got one for me.”

“Do stores give away computers?” Parvin asked with a wistful smile. “Or do they have a buy one get one free?”

“No,” Race answered. “But people do bring in broken computers that cost almost as much to repair as to buy a new one. Then they decide to buy the new one and just leave the old one behind. We keep it for parts. But in my spare time, I put together working computers out of the trade-ins. They may not be state-of-the-art but they work. As a matter of fact, I put one together last night that’s pretty nice. Okay, it only has Windows 98, not XP. But it has a modem, so you can use it for e-mail, and it has an older version of Office, so you can do word processing and spreadsheets.”

“And what does it cost?”

“Nothing. We can’t sell them. If we did, we’d have to provide support, and on these older machines, that can cost more than whatever we would sell it for. So we give them away, with the understanding that there is no warranty. Also with the hope that if you do decide to upgrade, you will come to us for the parts, and not run down to the superstore to save a few bucks.”

“You talk as if you were the owner of the store,” Nina remarked.

“Sometimes I feel like I am,” Race admitted. “I’ve been working for Mr. Hadley part time for a few years now and he’s a really nice guy. It’s hard for a small shop to compete with the superstore. But by going the extra mile for our customers, we’ve managed. When we’re finished here, let’s go down to the store and check out that machine I was talking about.”

The doorbell rang, and moments later Mrs. Jason shouted that Miriam was on her way

up.

“Hi Race, Nina, David, Parvin. Did I miss anything?” Miriam asked breathlessly, bursting into the room. “I went to Nina’s apartment and her mother sent me to Parvin and her mother sent me here, so I’ve been bouncing all over town looking for you guys. Don’t tell me you already finished rehearsing. I didn’t just pedal my feet off all over town to miss it. You’re just gonna have to do it again. It’s not official until I give my opinion...”

“Good morning, Miriam,” Race interjected, cutting her off. He knew that sometimes she could go on like this for hours. “We haven’t started yet. Take a seat with David and Parvin. You are now officially the audience. Ready, Nina?”

“I don’t know if I can.”

“Nina, cut it out. We already know you can. You already proved that. There are only friends in this room. Now I’m going to start and you know when to come in.”

The first attempt was okay but Nina was a bit hesitant. The second try was better.

“You’re singing a little too low and fast,” Race said. “Try it again, slower and louder.”

The third attempt was good. The fourth time through the song, Nina did not hold back. Her pure voice rang out. Race’s voice harmonized with hers perfectly. When they finished, the audience applauded enthusiastically.

“I think that’s enough of this song for now,” Race said. “We can rehearse again later today and again tomorrow. Miriam, it’s your turn.”

“I don’t know if I can. I mean singing in public. Talking maybe, but singing is something different. Maybe I shouldn’t try out for a singing part....”

“At least with a singing part you’ll know how to stop when it’s over,” Race interrupted with a smile, while Nina and Parvin shook with silent laughter.

“Oh, God, was I doing it again?”

“Is she always like this?” Parvin asked.

“Like what?” Race asked. “You mean talking a lot? I think Miriam was born that way. I think she was cracking jokes in the neonatal ward.”

“Come on, guys, I’m not that bad,” Miriam protested.

“Oh no?” Nina asked rhetorically. “You’re the only one Mr. Whitaker had to ask to stop speaking. Outside of Race, of course. Remember your first speech, where you had the class in hysterics?”

“I was trying to be serious. I don’t know why people were laughing.”

“You can’t help it. Everything you say just comes out funny.”

“It’s a gift,” Race said. “You were born with it. Remember pre-school?”

“Oh, no,” Miriam groaned, “don’t bring up the underwear story again.”

“Why not?” Nina asked. “It’s funny. And Parvin never heard it.”

“If you’re gonna tell it, I’m gonna cover my ears,” Miriam threatened.

“Well go ahead then. Parvin, this is so funny. In pre-school, Miriam was changing into her smock so we could finger-paint. She pulled off her dress right in middle of the room. The teacher said, ‘Miriam, don’t pull off your dress in public. Everyone can see your underwear.’ Miriam said, ‘No they can’t. I’m wearing my sister’s.’”

Parvin’s soft laughter was like a musical bell.

“Remember in first grade when the teacher was calling on people to read?” Race reminded her. “Most of the class hadn’t really learned how to read yet, but Miriam couldn’t figure that out. When her turn came, she asked the teacher how many times she was supposed to get it wrong before she was allowed to read it correctly?”

“What is this, Pick On Miriam Day?” Miriam asked.

“No,” Race answered, laughing. “But we’ve learned that when we talk about you, that’s the only time you stop talking.”

“Thanks a lot, guys.”

“Okay, now that we’ve had out little fun, are you ready to sing?”

With Race’s keyboard accompaniment, Miriam sang a few of the narrator’s songs. Her voice was sweet but soft.

“So what do you think?” she asked.

“You’re going to have to work on volume,” Race told her.

“I’ll practice loud,” Miriam promised.

Suddenly, in a voice that was a near perfect imitation of the movie narrator, David began singing the introductory song. The others sat spellbound as he performed it perfectly. When he finished, a smile flickered on his lips. He bowed, sat down, and his face relaxed into an expressionless stare.

“That was amazing,” Miriam said.

“David has a number of hidden talents,” Race explained.

“You should see him draw,” Nina said. “He’s absolutely fantastic.”

“I think he’s had enough excitement for one morning,” Race said. “Let’s head over to the computer store and take a look at that machine I told you about.”

“I’m going over to Peggy’s house,” Miriam said. “We’re working on the history assignment together. See you.”

A short while later, Race, Nina, and Parvin pulled their bikes up in front of the computer

store. Robert Hadley, the owner, was on the phone. He smiled when he saw Race walk in. A clean shaven man of average height, in his middle thirties, Bob Hadley sported the beginning of a pot belly and a head of thinning brown hair turning prematurely gray. While he talked, he peered myopically through gold rimmed glasses at an eviscerated computer that sat on the table. He hung up the phone and turned to them.

“I’m so glad to see you, Race. You can’t believe what I’m going through. My techs have hardly shown up this week because it’s the first week of the term. I guess that’s what you get when you hire part-time college kids. So I pushed as many support calls as I could to the weekend. Now two of my techs tell me they can’t come in today. I guess I could run out and take the calls myself but that means locking up the store.”

“Can I handle any of the calls?” Race asked.

“Some of them are a bit too far to bike over, and some of them require bringing another PC or a monitor and you can’t do that on a bike. The only local call I have is at the Assisted Living Center. Some old lady says her PC won’t even go on. Of course she doesn’t have much money. She said she can pay fifty dollars at most.”

“Sounds like a power supply,” Race said. “The part is only twenty five dollars.”

“Well, if that’s all it turns out to be and you don’t mind handling the call for twenty five dollar, I can send you there.”

“No problem. And if you want to handle some calls now, I can stay in the store for any customers that drop in.”

“That would be really great. I appreciate it.”

“By the way, this is Parvin. She just moved in on Nina’s block and I was thinking that the 98 computer I was working on last night would be perfect for her.”

“I’ll tell you what. I’ve got to make some service calls. I’ll be gone about an hour. You handle the store until then, and when I come back, I’ll deliver the system to your friend’s house.”

“You got a deal.”

“Race, you’re incredible!” Nina exclaimed once Mr. Hadley had left.

“What are you talking about? I’m doing a favor for Mr. Hadley. In return, he’s doing one for me. What’s the big deal?”

“Because you’re helping Mr. Hadley in return for a computer that you’re giving to Parvin. What do you get out of it?”

“A good feeling. Friendship. I know that if I ever needed a favor, Mr. Hadley or Parvin would be happy to do something for me.”

“Race,” Parvin said softly. “I don’t know that I could ever do anything for you that would

approach the value of a computer.”

“Friends don’t keep count,” Race assured her. “Today I do you a favor, tomorrow you do me one. We don’t keep track of whose favor was more valuable.”

“If we did, I would be paying Race back for the rest of my life,” Nina said.

“Where did you get that idea? I would be the one who owed you.”

“Did you forget the electronic keyboard, the computer, the contact lenses, just to name a few? Not to mention giving up summer camp.”

“You did it first,” Race reminded her, “when we were eight years old.”

“You were in the hospital and then you were laid up in bed at home,” Nina said. “How could I go to camp and leave you all alone with nothing to do?”

“But you gave up your summer to sit in my room, mostly watching me sleep. I gave up summer camp but at least I got to bike ride and hike in the park. Nothing I did for you matches what you did for me.”

“It was one summer when we were eight,” Nina argued.

“One summer that I can never give you back. You see, Parvin, this is what friendship is all about. Nina thinks I give her more than she gives me. I think she gives me more. Friendship is when we both think we got the better deal.”

The bell rang, signaling that a customer had entered the shop. The discussion came to a halt as Race went over to help him. A few minutes later, the shopper left with his purchases, and Race took Parvin to the computer he had assembled the night before from spare parts.

Mr. Hadley returned and Race told him about the sale. Then they carried the computer and its peripherals to the van outside, emblazoned with the store’s logo.

“I have another service call to make,” Mr. Hadley told them. “So I think I’ll just close the shop a little early today. I’ll deliver the computer to the Patels in an hour or so.”

“We’ll meet you there,” Race said.

They returned to Race’s house for lunch, then biked over to Parvin’s apartment. Parvin’s siblings were playing in front of the building, watched by both parents. Mr. Patel was a diminutive man with the same dark skin and large eyes as his children. The youngsters became very excited when Parvin told them that they were about to receive a computer.

“So you are the amazing Race,” Mr. Patel said. “The boy who finds free food and free computers.”

“I guess that’s me,” Race said, grinning.

“We owe you much thanks.”

“For what? It’s just neighbor helping neighbor. I understand you are familiar with the

concept yourself.”

“We have a saying, ‘Your soul can not keep that which you spend on yourself. But that which you give to others, remains with you forever.’”

“It’s really amazing that no matter how different people are, they’re really the same,” Race remarked. “That saying is almost exactly like something a Jewish friend of mine told me. And I heard something very similar from my pastor.”

“All humanity shares the same spirit,” Mr. Patel agreed. “Jew, Christian or Hindu, we are all children of the same God.”

“If only everyone realized that.”

Shortly afterward, Mr. Hadley showed up with Parvin’s computer.

“I have another service call to make,” he told Race. “I know you can handle the installation without me. And here’s a power supply for your call at the Assisted Living Center.”

“Thanks for your help.”

“Thanks for yours.”

Race assembled the system in the room Parvin shared with her two sisters. In short order, the Patel children were playing a computer game. They thanked him as Race left to complete the call at the assisted living center.

“I’ll come with you,” Nina offered.

“Why? I’m only going to fix a PC. You’ll be bored.”

“Somehow with you around I doubt it. I’ve never gone with you on a call. I’m curious to see how you work. Unless, you’d prefer I didn’t come.”

“No, you’re perfectly welcome.”

The Assisted Living Center was a few blocks away, a remarkably well-kept building in a rundown section of town. Inside the apartment they found a group of elderly people awaiting their arrival. The apartment belonged to Liz Potter, an old black woman.

“Bless you!” she said. “I wasn’t sure you were coming. Your boss said it was seventy five dollars for the visit and we’ve only managed to collect fifty dollars. Did he tell you? As much as we need the machine to work, I don’t want you to get in trouble.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Race assured her. “It’s probably just a power supply.”

“Denks so much for comink,” an elderly white man with more than a hint of a Jewish accent called out. “Dis mechine is our lifeline. Widout it, how do I talk wif mine son in Chicageh and mine dotter in Clefelend?”

“Please, Harvey, let the boy do his job.” To Race she said, “That’s Harvey Levine. He’s our computer expert. But he only knows Windows. He can’t fix a broken computer.”

In a few minutes, Race had replaced the power supply and the machine was once again operating.

“Bless you!” Mrs. Potter called out.

“You’re ah miracle verker!” Harvey Levine exclaimed.

“It was just the power supply,” Race explained.

“How much do we owe you?”

“Twenty five dollars for the power supply.”

“Here’s fifty dollars. It’s all we managed to raise.” She handed him ten wrinkled five-dollar bills.

“Well that means you have twenty five dollars to buy yourselves something nice,” Race said, handing her back five five-dollar bills.

“But your boss said it was seventy five dollars for the visit.”

“Don’t worry about it. He charges by the hour. This was a very quick visit.”

“I feel like I could cry.”

“Please don’t. I didn’t come here to make you cry.”

“I’m crying because I’m so happy. Oh, I could hug you.”

“I wouldn’t mind. I don’t have a grandmother.”

Mrs. Potter hugged him, and then she hugged Nina, and then Harvey Levine joined in, followed by a few of the other elderly people in the apartment.

“I’ll leave you my card so you can call me if you ever have a problem,” Race said.

“You got cards now?” Nina remarked. “Fancy, shmancy.”

Race handed her a card and her eyes widened when she saw how attractive it actually was. Printed in color on glossy cardboard, the left side showed a detailed image of a computer motherboard, while the right displayed Race’s name, address and phone number.

“These cards look expensive,” Nina commented, as they left the building.

“Not really,” Race told her. “Take a look at the back.” The back of the card had the name, address and phone number of the printing company. “I got them off the Internet. You choose from their designs, you type in your own text and you place the order. They advertise them as free because all you pay is shipping and handling of about five dollars for two hundred and fifty cards. But the catch is that they put their own ad on the back unless you pay an extra ten dollars. A professional business wouldn’t hand out cards with someone else’s ad on the back.”

“But you’d rather save the ten dollars.”

“Why not? I don’t think anyone won’t call me because of the printer’s ad on the back.”

“Won’t Mr. Hadley be upset at you?” Nina asked. “He normally charges seventy five

dollars for a service call, plus the cost of the parts. They offered him fifty dollars. Now you'll be a little short."

"I got a twenty five dollar tip on my previous call," Race said.

"But that was a tip for you."

"But Mr. Hadley doesn't have to know about it. Anyway, he said I could keep the twenty five dollars for this visit, so I didn't lose anything."

"So you just did it for nothing?"

"For nothing? Wasn't the experience worth it? We just got hugged by a whole bunch of grandparents. That's worth much more than twenty five dollars."

"Did anyone ever tell you you're really super guy?"

"Just a super guy? Is that the best you can do? Mr. Levine called me ah miracle verker."

"So you're a miracle worker because you changed a power supply?"

"No, I'm a miracle worker because I made all those people smile."

"How much did you make this weekend?"

"On my call last night, I got a twenty five dollar tip. And Mr. Hadley lets me keep twenty five dollars for the call, so I made fifty dollars. That's pretty good for an hour's work for someone my age."

"You're practically a millionaire. What are you going to do with your fortune?"

"Should I save up for Victoria's Secret?"

"Hey, you'd better promise to cut that out!"

"No problem. As long as we agree that promises don't mean anything."

"Why would you say that? Oh my God, I forgot about the lenses. I'm sorry, Race. I'll definitely remember tomorrow."

"I'm holding you to it. If you show up without them, I'm sending you home," Race threatened, though his smirk betrayed him, "just like any student who violates the dress code."

"Speaking of home, it's getting late. See you tomorrow."

"Good night."

Race always looked forward to church on Sunday, as did David. Church was the only place where David did not seem to mind the crowd. The Pastor's sermons were always thought-provoking. Even David appreciated them because he often discussed them with Race afterward. If Pastor Jonas did not relate an interesting story during his sermon, he was sure to save one for Race afterward. The Pastor met with his congregants by appointment on Sunday afternoons and Race had a reserved weekly slot. He spent at least fifteen minutes each week discussing the Catholic viewpoint, in addition to the time he spent with his friends of other faiths over the

Internet, getting their perspectives.

Today he was especially anticipating the service. Nina had promised to wear her lenses. She would never attend church in a baseball cap. This would be the first public unveiling of her new look.

The Jasons were already seated when the Ryans entered. Race was disappointed to see that Nina still wore her glasses. Instead of her baseball cap, a cute little hat concealed her hair. They seated themselves in their customary spot, in the same pew as the Jasons.

Race leaned over and whispered, “You promised to wear your lenses. And what’s with the hat?”

“Did you expect me to wear a baseball cap to church?” Nina whispered back.

“No, I expected you to not be wearing a hat and not be wearing your glasses.”

“Race, we’re in church. It didn’t seem appropriate. We’re supposed to be praying, not competing in a fashion show.”

“Really? Tell that to the cheerleaders over there.”

A few of Nancy’s and Sam’s friends were giggling in a rear pew, sporting the latest hair styles. The girls were wearing outfits that were just this side of modest, so long as they sat down very carefully. This was the clique who went to church only because their parents insisted. Sam and Nancy had boasted in school that they only attended on the holidays.

“They’re obviously not here for spiritual uplifting,” Nina said.

“How about you? Do you feel uplifted after church? Do you feel moved to become a better person? To say what you mean and mean what you say?”

“Yes, Race. I promise I’ll wear the lenses today.”

“Now that’s a promise made in church. You don’t want to break it.”

The service started and put an end to their conversation.

“My topic today is Living A Good Life,” the Pastor began, “which is not the same as living a happy life. The Constitution guarantees Americans the right to pursue happiness. People today equate happiness with self-gratification and material possessions. But a good life means achieving happiness through seeking goodness, in yourself and in others. It means living your life not as if the concepts of God and heaven and eternal reward are good ideas but as if they are the key factors that govern every action. Because it is what you do in this life that determines where you go in the next.

“How does one do that in this day and age? Can we really be expected to become Mother Theresa and dedicate our lives to helping others? I believe God understands that only very few extraordinary people have the ability to sacrifice themselves in this manner. God does not ask us

to do extraordinary things. Gods asks us to do ordinary things in extraordinary ways. So how does one live a good life?

“Show concern. We all know that times are hard. There are many among us who are finding it difficult to provide for their families. Let us find ways to help. Do you know of any job openings a neighbor might fill? Are you disposing of items a neighbor can use? Remember that we have a fund specifically earmarked to help our friends. While some of them are having difficulty holding on to their homes, perhaps we should cut back on our entertainment and our expensive vacations, so that we can set aside some of the good fortune with which we have been blessed and share it with others. Please contribute generously to this fund.

“I am reminded of a charitable, church-going woman who asked upon her death that she be laid out with a fork in her hand. Naturally, there was much consternation at her funeral. Then her pastor rose to speak and everything became clear.

“Have you ever been at a fancy dinner and as they collect the soiled plates and silverware, they ask you to keep your fork? You realize immediately that some very special dessert will soon be brought. This woman wanted to send a message to the loved ones she left behind. Unlike those who talk of an afterlife but don’t really mean it, she knew that she was about to receive something very special.

“Remember that you can’t take it with you. In the afterlife, the only possessions you will own are what you gave away. When you give generously, you are investing now for your eternal future. Live your temporary life in anticipation of your eternal afterlife. You too can live a good life, secure that something very special awaits you.”

The choir broke into a hymn and the worshipers rose to their feet.

“So what do you think?” Nina whispered.

“I think you’d make a better soloist,” Race whispered back.

“I meant about the sermon.”

“I particularly liked the story about the fork. When it’s my time, I’d like to do something to let my family know they shouldn’t be mourning an end but celebrating a new beginning.”

After church, Nina told Race she would see him in about two hours. This was their usual schedule. First both families returned home to change out of their church clothes and to eat lunch. Then Race went back to church for his appointment with Pastor Jonas. Then he had some e-mail to catch up on before Nina came over.

Almost exactly two hours later, Nina ascended the stairs to Race’s room. As promised, she was wearing the contact lenses. She was halfway up the stairs when she heard his voice and realized he was on the phone. To avoid interrupting, she waited in the hallway.

“No, Honey,” he was saying, “don’t you change a thing. You’re the prettiest one there and the most talented. Don’t you tell anyone else I said that. I’m looking forward to seeing you, too. Winter break? Why would you want to come here in the winter? No, you’d better wait until the warm season comes back around. Looking forward to it. Love you.”

When she heard Race hang up, she entered his room. He looked up guiltily.

“Hi, Nina. I was just on the phone.”

“I know.”

For the second time she could remember, there were a few moments of awkward silence.

“You’re probably wondering what that was about,” Race began.

“It’s really none of my business.”

“That’s someone I met over the Internet,” Race explained. “I helped her out with some computer problems and we became e-mail pals. It’s sort of funny. She’s also trying out for a production and she’s nervous. She keeps asking me if she should change anything. I thought it would be easier to give her some confidence over the phone.”

“You don’t owe me an explanation,” Nina insisted, then added. “You said you loved her.”

“I’ve never even met her. It’s kind of like a joke between us. She keeps saying some day she’ll come down here for a visit but we both know that’s not going to happen.”

“I heard you say she was the prettiest one there. So you’ve seen her?”

“She e-mailed me a photo.”

“And is she pretty?”

“She’s pretty. Not as pretty as you when you take off the glasses and let your hair down, but you do understand why I can’t tell her that. Now when are you going to lose the cap?”

“I want to take it one step at a time.”

“That means you’re wearing the lenses to school tomorrow?”

“I’m certainly going to try.”

They spent some time rehearsing their song until they felt they could not improve. They were reviewing some math work when Race’s phone rang.

“Hello?” a woman’s voice came through the receiver loud enough for Nina to hear. “I’m looking for the boy who came to the hospital a few days ago.” She had a slight accent.

“Yes, that’s me,” Race answered. “I’m looking for information about something which happened seven years ago. Two boys coded on the same night and were resuscitated.”

“What is your interest in this matter?”

“I was one of the boys. I’m hoping to find the other one.”

“Then it really did happen?”

“You know something about it?”

“Look, I can’t promise anything. But I’m a nurse in the Children’s ICU unit. I’m on a break now just before I work the night shift. If you want to meet me in the hospital, we can talk.”

“I’ll be there in about twenty minutes.”

“Meet me in the cafeteria. I’ll be waiting for you at a corner table. My name’s Jenny Cheung. I’ll be the nurse sitting by herself.”

“I heard that,” Nina said in excitement.

“Then you know I’ve got to go.”

“Are you kidding? I’m going with you!”

About twenty minutes later, they found a young Asian nurse waiting for them.

“I’m Race Jason. This is my friend, Nina.”

“I’m Jenny Cheung. Tell me, is this some practical joke?”

“No, it really happened.”

“Because the story is like a legend here. Everyone’s heard it, but no one believes it. They say two boys were brought in, one in a coma. Both boys died at the same time. Both boys came back. The first boy woke up and asked for the other one. But he had never met the other boy. Then a few weeks later, the second boy woke up from his coma and asked for the first one. But he had never met him either, he had been in a coma the entire time.”

“And when is this supposed to have happened?” Race asked.

“Like years ago. It’s a hospital legend, like the dead surgeon and the dead nurse.”

“I never heard of those.”

“Oh, they’re famous. A patient has a serious brain tumor. There’s only one surgeon gifted enough to do the operation but he’s away somewhere and can’t be reached. No other surgeon wants to touch it. One night, the patient is wheeled into an operating room and the tumor is removed. No one in the hospital knows how this happened. When the patient wakes up, he remembers nothing except the surgeon visiting his room earlier and assuring him he’ll be just fine. He describes the surgeon and it sounds just like the expert they were trying to get hold of. Then a telegram arrives saying that the surgeon they were looking for had been killed in a plane crash the very night of the operation. We have similar stories about dead nurses coming back and helping patients. So you see, the story of the two boys is just another one of those legends. The Head Nurse likes to tell us these stories and then say if we stick it out, we might see some miracles of our own.”

“Well, I know I was in the hospital seven years ago and I know I died and was brought

back. I remember floating toward a light and I remember meeting another kid. We both saw our grandparents and they sent us back. I'm looking for the other kid."

"Then I'm afraid I have some bad news."

"Is he dead?"

Jenny laughed. "You might say that. I'm sorry for laughing but you might see the humor in it. There was no other kid. Whether you remember it or not, someone told you the legend. You pictured it in your mind and became convinced that it really happened."

"But it seems so real!"

"Of course it does. You've been living with it for seven years."

"Is there any chance it's true?"

"It's highly doubtful. But you can ask some of the other nurses in the ICU, only do it really quietly, and don't mention that you think you're one of the boys."

"I guess as long as we're here."

"Then follow me. But be real quiet, I don't want to get in any trouble."

They waited by the elevator outside the ICU and spoke to the other nurses who passed. Most of the nurses they saw were too young to have been working there seven years ago. The ones who were the right age were mostly transfers who had not been working at this particular hospital at the time. Jenny popped out from time to time to check on them.

"I guess we'd better go," Race said.

"It's probably a good idea. If the Head Nurse catches you here, I could get in trouble."

"It's too late for that, Nurse Cheung," a voice called out. A woman in her thirties, with short-cropped blonde hair, glared at them through bifocal glasses. "What are you kids doing here? This is a hospital and you are on the Intensive Care Unit."

"I'm sorry we caused any trouble," Race said. "I was trying to get some information about something I thought happened when I was in this hospital seven years ago. But Nurse Cheung explained to me that it didn't really happen. I was confused by the legend."

"What is your name, young man?"

"Race Jason. Actually Daniel Jason, but my friends call me Race."

The Head Nurse's eyes grew large. "Oh, my God," she gasped, "you're Daniel. I was there that night. It really did happen."

"Then it's not just some old legend?" Jenny asked.

"After all this time, I was beginning to think it was," Sally said, "because no one would believe it was true. Daniel, you're the reason I'm still working here today."