

MIRACLES FROM HEAVEN by Christy Beam

Excerpt

Prologue

When my husband and I settled down to start a family, we prayed for the ordinary miracles: healthy children, a peaceful home, a late model pickup truck with good AC, and well-timed rain that fell plentifully on the flower beds but never on Friday night football. We expected nothing more breathtaking than a North Texas sunset, nothing more heavenly than growing old together. Our definition of paradise was a secluded plot of land outside Burleson, Texas, a small town just south of the busy Dallas–Fort Worth metroplex.

We're churchgoing people, Kevin and I, people of faith. We've experienced "showers of blessings," as the old gospel song says, "mercy drops falling around us," like when a baby is born after a family has given up hope or strangers cross paths and some tug of the heart tells them they are already friends. We always believed in miracles, in theory. With God all things are possible, we're told, and every once in a great, great while, I'd hear about something that defies odds and brushes fears aside.

Now I'm holding a miracle in my hands.

The nurse hands me a computer printout, two pages listing all the medications my daughter was on last time I brought her to Boston Children's Hospital—the time she told me she wanted to die and be with Jesus in Heaven where there is no pain.

"Three years ago?" the nurse says, one eyebrow up. "Can that be right?"

That is right. The fact that it's impossible doesn't matter anymore.

"So, Annabel," the nurse says, "looks like you're twelve now."

Anna nods enthusiastically, happy to be twelve, happy to be in Boston, happy to be alive. The nurse directs her to hop up on the scale.

"While I get her vitals, could you please go over these?" the nurse says to me, indicating the printout. "I need you to review for accuracy so I can update on the computer. Just mark the ones she's still taking."

My eyes drift down the list.

Prevacid (lansoprazole), a proton pump inhibitor; probiotic supplement; polyethylene glycol; Periactin (ciproheptadine), an antihistamine with additional anticholinergic, antiserotonergic, and local anesthetic agents . . .

It's like looking at the surgical scar on Anna's abdomen, just a pale white line now where she was stitched and reopened and stitched back together again.

Neurontin (gabapentin), an anticonvulsant and analgesic; rifaximin, a semisynthetic antibiotic based on rifamycin; Augmentin (amoxicillin and clavulanic acid); tramadol hydrochloride for moderate to severe pain . . .

For a moment, the lengthy list blurs in front of my eyes.

My God, what her little body went through.

Hyoscyamine, a tropane alkaloid and secondary metabolite; Celexa (citalopram hydrobromide), a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor . . .

I smile up at the nurse. “She’s not on any of these.”

“You mean, not any of these?” she says, indicating the first column with a pen.

“No, I mean these.” I hold up the two pages in my hands. “She’s not taking anything.”

“Wow. Okay.” She studies the list. “That’s really— wow—that’s . . .” A miracle.

She doesn’t say it, but that’s okay. People generally feel more comfortable calling the small things coincidence or serendipity or dumb luck. Doctors use words like spontaneous remission to explain away the big time inexplicable. A while ago, I made the conscious choice to use the M word. I didn’t always see God’s hand in the tangled threads of my life, but now I do. He was there in our beginning and every time our world fell apart. He’s with us now and into the unknowable future.

Standing in the light of all He’s given us, in the light of all that’s happened, I can’t not tell you our story.

Chapter One

The enormous cottonwood tree in the fenced cow pasture beyond our gravel drive was a natural wonder, one of those towering, craggy “only God can make a tree” trees. Take a moment to consider the baking heat and hungry borer beetles, the hard freezes that happen every few years, and the summer tornados that routinely whip across central Texas, ragged shirttails straggling out from Gulf Coast hurricanes. For a hundred years or more, that cottonwood provided a home for birds, spiders, and squirrels and watched over the sowing and reaping in the surrounding fields. It stood like a sentry as roads cut through the old oaks and houses were built on the rolling farmland.

A balding giant with sparse, heart shaped leaves, it raised a dome of dry twigs ninety feet in the air. Around the base of the tree, raw knuckles jutted up through the scrub. Thick, sinewy roots anchored it to the ground. The circumference of the trunk was more than any one person could reach around, but three years ago, Kevin and I could have circled it if we joined hands with our daughters—eleven year old Abigail, nine year old Annabel, and seven year old Adelynn—and that’s basically how we took on the challenging aspects of our family life. When something came along that was too big to get one’s arms around, Kevin and I and the girls only had to reach as far as each other.

About thirty feet up the cottonwood, two massive branches cast outward like open arms. One branch formed a wide bridge to the smaller trees in the shady grove, but the other branch had been broken and lay on the ground. Some mighty rush of wind in some long ago storm must have wrenched it away and hurled it to the earth. It smashed through the slender boughs below and landed hard, trenching the dirt. High on the broad torso of the tree, a jagged portal was exposed: an opening about four feet high and three feet wide. From the ground below, it looked like the cupped palm of a weathered hand.

The Bible speaks of God preparing a massive fish to swallow Jonah and deliver him on the other side of an angry sea. One might wonder if He began preparing that tree long before any of us were born. One might imagine God whispering into the heart of the cottonwood, Make a way. And it did.

Decades came and went, and the tree kept its secret.