

Exclusive Edition

A TREASURY OF MIRACLES

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EXCERPT FROM
Karen Kingsbury's
A TREASURY OF MIRACLES

**CHRISTMAS
ANGELS**

Austin Rozelle was four years old when his parents noticed his imagination truly taking wing. He loved sports, particularly basketball, and often pretended to be the greatest player of all, Michael Jordan. At bedtime when the Rozelles' children asked for favorite bed-time stories, Austin's request never changed.

"Tell me a Michael Jordan story, Daddy, please!"

And Burt Rozelle would make up a story involving Austin and Michael Jordan and some type of crucial basketball game. It got so that as Christmas approached that year, Austin wanted only one thing: a visit from Michael Jordan. Throughout the month of December, whenever the doorbell would ring at the Rozelle house, Austin would run toward the front door yelling, "It's probably Michael Jordan!"

So it was that three days before Christmas, when Austin dribbled his child-sized basketball into the family's Portland, Oregon, house and announced he was going to Michael's house, his mother thought nothing of it. Austin was always pretending to be visiting with Michael Jordan or taking a trip to his house.

That Sunday afternoon the air was particularly damp, and Austin tugged on his mother's skirt while she washed the dishes. "Bye, Mom. I'm going to see Michael Jordan."

Stella Rozelle smiled at the child. "Okay, Austin, have fun."

Obviously Austin had no idea where Michael Jordan lived, nor that he did not even live in Oregon. Even if he had known the exact location, Stella knew the boy would never really leave the house. Especially by himself.

Austin was merely playing a game of make-believe, as he had so many other times, and Stella felt at ease as she continued her conversation and watched the child disappear into the backyard.

Fifteen minutes later, Stella finished the dishes and sauntered outside to round up Austin and his six-year-old brother, Daniel. The older child was swinging on the family swing set, happily humming a tune from Sunday school earlier that day. The temperature was dropping, and Stella wanted the children to come inside before they caught cold. "It's getting too cold out here, buddy. Let's go inside and have some dinner." She glanced around the yard. "Where's Austin?"...

A DREAM COME TRUE

When Angie Bauer became pregnant with her fourth child, she and her husband allowed themselves to dream. They had been blessed with three healthy sons:

Sean, seven; Bo, five; and Wesley, who had just had his first birthday. The boys were happy children and all had the dark eyes and dark hair of their parents.

"You know what I wish," Ben Bauer said one evening as he and Angie rested on the living room sofa.

"What?"

Ben placed his hand on his wife's abdomen. "I wish we could have a blonde, blue-eyed little girl. Wouldn't that be something?" Angie uttered a short laugh. She had dark hair and her husband's hair was even darker. Their boys had Ben's deep brown eyes as well. There were no blond, blue-eyed people in either of their families.

"Good luck," she grinned.

"I know, I know." Ben pulled Angie closer. "Just dreaming, I guess."

The first three months of Angie's pregnancy passed by normally. She was busy at home with the boys and Ben continued his work as a special education teacher in Akron, Ohio. Ben's students were mentally handicapped and each held a special place in his heart. Oftentimes he would come home and play with his sons, silently thanking God for their strong and healthy minds. On more than one occasion he had discussed his students with Angie and pondered how they would deal with such a child themselves.

"It would be so hard to see one of my own children go through what my students go through," Ben would say. "But I know I

would love that child the same as any other."

Angie would agree and they would put the matter out of their minds.

When Angie was four months pregnant, her doctor ordered a routine ultrasound to make sure the baby was developing normally. After the test, Angie's doctor ushered her into his office and closed the door. He looked at the report on his desk and cleared his throat.

"It seems we have a problem," he said. "Something has shown up on the ultrasound and I'd like you to see a specialist."

"It sounds serious." Angie shifted uneasily in her chair and searched the doctor's face for information.

He nodded solemnly. "I won't lie to you, Angie. It is serious. There's something developing at the base of the baby's neck and it looks like cystic hygroma, a rare condition involving fluid buildup in the lymph system."

"What does that mean for the baby?"

He handed her the name and phone number of a specialist in Cleveland, forty miles north of Akron. "Get an appointment with him and see what he says about it. Then we'll go from there."

A week later, Angie and Ben drove to Cleveland, where technicians performed another, more sophisticated ultrasound on the unborn child. The diagnosis was the same.

"She has cystic hygroma, which is a rare—"

"She?" Ben interrupted.

The doctor glanced at his notes once more. "Uh, yes. It's a girl."

The couple remained silent but Ben squeezed Angie's hand tightly...

BACK TOGETHER AGAIN

Scott Miller was forever second-guessing himself as a single father. His wife had left him and their two children fifteen years ago, and now little Laura was a full-fledged teenager. For the most part, Scott figured he had a good relationship with Laura, but sometimes—nights like that one—he wasn't sure.

The evening had started out like any other, except it was Friday. For years, Fridays had been the nights Scott and Laura and her brother, Ben, settled down with a bag of microwave popcorn and watched a family movie. But three months earlier, when Laura turned sixteen, everything had begun to change. The occasional phone calls Laura once received became half a dozen every night. Her friends seemed to have something fun going on every night, but Scott laid down the law early on.

"Only once a week, Laura. No more. You need family time and study time. You're too young to be out every few days."

Most of the time Laura agreed.

But that night she'd gotten a call from two of her favorite girlfriends. They were all planning to attend the same slumber party the next night, so they wanted to know if Laura could go shopping with them. Just for a few hours.

"Please, Dad? Come on, everyone's going."

Scott leaned against the living-room wall and leveled his gaze at

his daughter. "You know the rule, Laura. Once a week."

"Yeah, but Dad, this isn't a night thing, it's shopping. Really. We'll be back before nine."

"Laura." He could feel the wall of his determination beginning to crumble. Times like this he wondered why he'd never remarried, why he'd never found someone to take away the loneliness he carried with him every day—someone who could be a mother for

Laura. For a fraction of an instant he wondered about Becky Olsen, his first love. Becky would never have walked out on him, ever. If only he hadn't let her go after high school, she would be here now, offering Laura advice.

He sighed and searched his daughter's eyes. "Who's driving?"

"Susie's mother. She can pick me up and drop me off."

"Me, too?" Ben walked into the room and grinned at her. He was fifteen and loved giving Laura grief when it came to her friends.

"No," Scott dropped into the nearest chair and cocked his head at Ben. "Let's watch the game instead. Me and you." He looked at Laura. She'd be fine; this was Mill Creek, Washington, after all. The crime rate was one of the lowest in the nation. "Go ahead and go shopping."

Laura ran to him and threw her arms around his neck. "Thanks, Daddy. I promise I won't be long."

Becky Olsen normally worked the southern Oregon and California doctors' offices and medical centers. That was her territory as a sales manager for the largest pharmaceutical company in the nation. But earlier that week, one of her colleagues had begged a favor of her. Could she cover his territory and take Washington for the weekend?

Becky didn't hesitate. She was single and independent, and work hid the fact that she was lonely far too often. A lifetime ago, she'd been married with twin boys. But one spring night six years earlier, she'd arrived home from a business trip only to find that for the first time in her career, her family wasn't there to meet her.

Not until two hours later did she get the news.

They'd been coming to the airport when they were broadsided by a freight train at a dimly lit crossing near their home. All of them—her husband and boys—were killed instantly in the accident.

It took two years for Becky to get back to work, and when she did it was with a determination to remain single. She'd loved once, and lost. That was enough for an entire lifetime. The problem was

her heart wasn't always in agreement. Some nights when she finished working her territory, she'd come home to her Portland, Oregon, apartment, pour herself a tall mug of coffee, sit at the kitchen table, and cry.

Not because she wanted another family. But because she wanted a friend. Her schedule kept her on the road for too often to develop any sort of consistent relationship, even with her neighbors. Once in a while, on those lonely nights, she found herself going back in time, back even farther than the family she'd loved. Back to her high-school days, when her closest friend had been her boyfriend, Scott Miller. They'd been kids, of course, but that hadn't stopped them from spending equal time laughing and playing and baring their hearts to each other.

Scott had gotten married years back, but still Becky wondered how he was doing. Not because she was interested in starting something up with him, but because he was an old friend. One of the best she'd had as a teenager.

Her thoughts cleared and she thought about the matter at hand. She needed to find her hotel, check in, and go over the notes for meetings she'd scheduled the next day at the nearby hospital. But first she needed to pick up a pair of nylons. It was almost eight o'clock when she pulled into a mall parking lot just north of Seattle. Becky was about to take a parking spot when something caught her attention...

