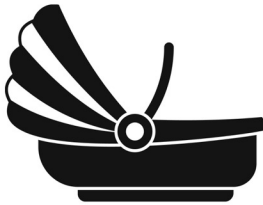


# Saving Grace



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Published by Scrivenings Press LLC  
15 Lucky Lane  
Morrilton, Arkansas 72110  
<https://ScriveningsPress.com>

Printed in the United States of America

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Paperback ISBN 978-1-64917-001-9

eBook ISBN 978-1-64917-064-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020946113

Cover by Linda Fulkerson, [bookmarketinggraphics.com](http://bookmarketinggraphics.com)

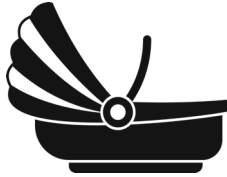
All characters are fictional, and any resemblance to real people, either fictional or historical, is purely coincidental.

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*The creativity has always been inside me, but several people in particular saw the potential in my stories and helped me polish my craft to truly let it shine. I'd like to dedicate this novel to Wilburta Arrowood and Sandi Rog, two fellow authors who took me under their wings and taught me to fly.*

*You have both been a huge blessing in my life and I thank God for you!*

## PROLOGUE



She couldn't breathe.  
Ringing filled her ears.

Michelle Wilson forced her eyelids open, one at a time. Dust floated in the air, leftover from the airbag deploying only moments earlier. Her car no longer moved, but somewhere a horn blared on and on.

Drawing a tentative breath, she squinted at her surroundings. Her head spun even though the vehicle was still. She fumbled for her purse. Where had it landed? She undid her seatbelt and pushed the deflated airbag out of the way. With fumbling fingers, she grabbed the bag from the floorboard and pulled her cellphone out.

"911, what's your emergency?"

"I've been in a wreck."

"Okay, ma'am. Are you injured? Can you tell me your location?"

Michelle looked around until she spotted the street sign. Her car must have spun around during the wreck. "Windom and Lancaster, Little Rock."

"Was anyone else hurt?"

"There was another car. I'm not really sure what happened."

“Can you see the other car?”

“Umm ...” Michelle glanced around but didn’t see it. As she pulled on the door handle, a sharp pain shot up her arm. Blood pounded in her ears. She slowly released a breath through clenched teeth, eased the door open, then stood on shaky legs.

“Ma’am, are you okay?” The 911 operator’s voice sounded in her ear, bringing her focus back to the task at hand.

“I’m hurt, but I need to find the other vehicle.” There it was. A pickup truck lay on its side about twenty feet away, one of the rear wheels still spinning. “It looks like it’s flipped over a couple of times. I can’t see any movement from inside.”

“The police are just a few blocks away. Stay still, and they’ll be there in just a couple of minutes, okay?”

Michelle nodded, then realized the girl couldn’t see her. “Okay.”

Lowering herself slowly to the ground, she put her head on her knees to stop the dizziness. Even with her eyes closed, the world spun out of control. The warm April evening had started so well, but now seemed as cold as the late-season snow they’d had back in March.

Flashing lights and a siren blast soon filled the area.

Before she could protest, someone lifted her from where she’d slumped against the side of her car and placed her on a stretcher.

“The other car—”

“We’re helping them, too, miss. Please be still so we can make sure you’re okay.”

Michelle turned her head to see the other vehicle. Were they all right? Across the intersection, emergency workers pulled a male driver from the pickup truck. His features were hard to make out through all the blood. Several other EMS workers rushed over to a woman lying in the street in front of the vehicle. Michelle frowned. How did the woman get there?

A commotion drew her attention back to the man. He’d

regained consciousness and thrashed against the restraints of his stretcher.

“My wife. Leah!” He screamed as they pushed him toward the other ambulance. “You’ve got to help my wife. Our baby!”

“Sir, are you saying there’s a baby still in the truck?”

“No.” The man shook his head. “She’s pregnant. In labor. We were about to have a baby!”

An icy wave rolled down Michelle’s spine. The woman still hadn’t moved. *Please, God, no.* If the woman was dead, the baby might also be dead. Could this previously perfect night possibly get worse?

They faced each other as EMS loaded them into the ambulances. The man’s eyes locked with Michelle’s, and it was as if a force connected them despite the distance.

“Please, save my baby.” Still pleading with the ambulance driver, his gaze held hers.

Had his plea been meant for Michelle? Could he see her through all the blood dripping from his forehead? Surely not. He didn’t even know Michelle. And yet—it was like a command had been given to her. She wouldn’t rest until she knew that baby was safe.

The ambulance doors closed, and they moved her left wrist. Pain cut through her like a knife, straight to her head. Everything went dark.



THE NEXT DAY, Michelle stood at the window of the hospital’s nursery. She looked through the glass at the little girl wrapped in a pink blanket. The name on the placard said *Grace*. The nurses told her it was the last word the baby’s father said after they told him he had a little girl. Before he died. Michelle pressed her hand against the pane and leaned her head against its coolness.

Grace’s eyes fluttered open and looked directly at Michelle. Michelle straightened, her breath caught somewhere deep in her

lungs. The gaze was almost an exact replica of the child's father when he'd pleaded for someone to save his baby.

Well, here they were now, the only two survivors of the disastrous wreck that had stolen the lives of both Grace's parents. Even though newborns supposedly couldn't see far away, Grace's gaze never wavered for a full five minutes. It was as if God were sending Michelle a sign. A reinforcement of the message she'd received the night before.

She and that child were now bonded for life. Soul sisters, forged through the pain of loss with matching battle scars across their hearts. A plan formed in her mind that would maintain that link for a long time to come. Michelle had only slept a few hours, but she was energized enough to know the right thing to do. This little girl needed her. It wasn't fair to the baby to have to start her life with no one to love her.

"Which one is yours?" a man interrupted.

"That one." Michelle didn't hesitate.

He nodded. "That one's mine." He pointed to a little bundle in blue with a full head of dark hair.

"He's beautiful." Michelle glanced over at his child for a second before turning back to Grace.

"Do you get to take her home today?" He tipped up on his toes as if to get a better angle.

"I hope so." Michelle swallowed her worry. "I hope so."