He stood before the long window, hands buried deep inside his pants pockets, staring blindly out across the city. Lights blinked and winked from myriad houses, apartments and buildings but he seemed not to notice. Below him, moving in a seeming incessant stream, cars honked, and buses loaded and unloaded passengers with almost precision timing, this in spite of the work-hour traffic.
A nurse, moving on almost soundless feet, tapped him lightly on the shoulder. "You may see her now," she said, speaking ever so softly and kindly.

Like one awaking out of sleep or coming out of a trance, Harold followed the prim nurse along the corridor to the intensive care unit.

"Just five minutes, Harold," she told him, stepping aside and allowing him passage through the doorway.

All the courage he'd thought he had, and all the strength, too, crumbled and fell to pieces when he saw Esther lying still and immobile and pale as death on the bed. Above her and around her were tubes and hoses, reminding the young man of a giant octopus. His first impulse was to run, to scream. Then, pulling himself together and praying for strength, he touched her cheek lightly.

"Esther," he whispered her name softly. "I'm here, Esther. Can you hear me? I love you. Love you!"

Not a flicker of recognition; no sign of having heard.

He tried again. Tears were in his eyes, unfallen but gleaming like captive stars on jewels.

"Time is up," the nurse said, standing close beside him then leading the way out of the room.

Walking like a six-foot mechanized toy, Harold followed, feeling like he was living in some unreal world. His legs moved only because they had to, not because they wanted to. Since the news of the accident and of his bride's condition, his entire body seemed to rebel at motivation of any kind. His brain, too; it seemed completely dumb and numb with shock. Was this real? he wondered, taking his stance in front of the window again.

There was a waiting room in which he could sit, to be sure; but he felt he couldn't stand the chit-chat of those others sitting within its confines. No, not the mundane talk nor the blue smoke which seemed constantly to hang like a gray cloud above his head and cling suffocatingly to his clothes and in
his nose and lungs. So he stood in front of the window. The nurse knew where to find him if she needed or wanted him, he knew.

Harold did a restless bit of pacing back and forth, back and forth, his mind recounting the fragments of information he'd gleaned from nurses and hospital attendants. Esther had been driving west, they said. That meant she was enroute home, no doubt. The truck was traveling east at a terrific rate of speed, crossing the center line and hitting their small car head on. Esther was thrown out and lay unconscious, on the ground, until help arrived. The driver of the truck was unhurt, except for several minor skin abrasions. Drunk, they said he was.

Harold buried his face in his hands and groaned. How brittle a thing life was, and how brief! he thought. One had no promise, when he left home in the morning for work, that he would ever again see his loved ones alive by evening. Life was such a transitory and uncertain thing: "... swifter than a weaver's shuttle" Job 7:6 declared. And James (4:14) said it was "even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

Again Harold groaned. "Oh, God!" he cried aloud in anguish of soul. "Certainly You wouldn't take my lovely Esther from me! Please!" he begged, pleaded. "We've only been married a month. She's so young, so lovely and so beautiful in spirit. Please, God! I love her so! Spare her, please. Give her back to me. Thy will, not mine, be done."

It was the hardest thing he'd ever done, yielding and resigning his will to God's will for Esther. But with the heart cry of yieldedness, barring nothing nor any reservations, peace flooded his soul.

Finding a chair, he pulled it over to the window and sat down. Below him, candles came on in windows and Christmas trees shimmered and blinked their pretty colored lights from houses and buildings, and Harold remembered that soon it would be Christmas. He had forgotten about the rattling of paper behind the closed bedroom door in their tiny house; forgotten too, the pleased smile on his young wife's face as she had emerged through the suddenly-opened doorway with shining eyes and radiant face, waving the beautifully-wrapped, brightly-bowed box before him, admonishing him teasingly, 'no peeking-- nor shaking-till Christmas, my dear husband."
He had forgotten about her gift from him, until now. Now it all came back to him. Lying in its hiding place in the garage, (where else could he have put it that she wouldn't have found it?) it seemed to mock him now. Suddenly, the whole thing sickened him. Turning from the window, he began pacing again.

They had had such lovely plans for this Christmas, such beautiful plans. It would be their first Christmas in their very own home, tiny and small though it was, and it was to have marked the beginning of many Christmases to come, with Christ at the very core -- the center -- of each and every thing they did. But a drunk man . . .

Harold turned quickly and headed for the ICU, standing patiently outside the door, hoping one of the nurses would come through the closed doors, and he could learn how Esther was doing. He dare not dwell on the thought of the man who had changed their once-happy world into an instantaneous nightmare of fear and anxiety and dark forebodings. No, he must pray for the man. Was he not one for whom Christ died?

He waited and waited but no one came through the doors. With bowed head and sagging shoulders, he walked back to the window, wondering how he would ever again be able to enjoy Christmas.

From earliest childhood days, he had looked forward to Christmas with eager anticipation and joyous expectancy. Always, there had been the sweet scent of baking cookies and boiling, bubbling candies by his mother and four sisters; the popping and stringing of popcorn, and the garlands of hand-strung cranberries, too; the myriad hours of secrecy by his father, who worked far into the night behind locked doors in his carpenter's shop, and his mother's equally secret doings behind her closed bedroom door.

Oh, it had always been such a beautiful time of the year; such a delight some time of glad surprises and loving giving of hand-made gifts and creations.

There had been the Christmas Eve services at the church, attended faithfully by the entire family, and the singing of carols later, at home, around the big, stately Story and Clark piano in the living room. There was the roasting of chestnuts, collected from the woods adjacent to his father's farm,
the cracking of hickory nuts and the delight of sinking one's molars into a generous piece of homemade buttery carmels or wintergreen taffy.

He sighed, recalling and remembering. How free from care he was then! Care and responsibility, and pain. Manhood and love made radical changes in one's life, he soliloquized pensively, sadly. But he wouldn't trade it for all his boyhood days, he realized with sudden, fierce intensity. No, he wouldn't; not if he could. He loved Esther. She had made his life full and complete. And what if she died?

The thought sent a flurry of fear through his entire being. If she died, there would never be another Christmas with songs and carols and music for him, he was sure.

"Please God!" he exclaimed aloud again.

"Please . . .! Thy will!"

"Harold, . . ."

He jumped, startled.

Again, "Harold, I am Christmas!"

That was all; just, "I am Christmas!" It was sufficient. It was as though he had looked through the blackness and the darkness of a long tunnel, frantically searching for a way through the terror and the bleakness of it all, and had caught a tiny glimmer of light from the far end. Tears . . . stubborn, unshed tears . . . now poured down his cheeks, wetting his lips and washing his face. Then came light and joy and peace beyond human comprehension and understanding and instantly, he knew that whatever God chose to do . . . or not do . . . was for the best. His grace would be sufficient for whatever happened and Christmas would still be the same, sweet wonderful birthday remembrance of his Saviour-Sanctifier.

"Harold." It was the nurse. So preoccupied and transported was he with his new revelation that he hadn't heard her approaching. "You may see your wife again."
He seemed to be walking on air. All the way into the room, he was praising the Lord.

"Five minutes," the nurse reminded him again.

"Esther . . ."

Was there a fluttering of the eyes?

"Esther dear..."

"Oh, hi, sweetheart. Guess I overslept . . ."

"Esther! Esther! Nurse, Nurse! She just talked to me."

"You're quite emotional, Harold. Suppose you sit down a while. Your wife is critical."

"Was critical. Not anymore. God is healing her. Esther, can you wake up long enough to say something? Anything dear?"

"I'm ashamed of myself. Sleep, sleep, sleep; that's all I want to do. Why am I suddenly so tired, Harold?"

"Go back to sleep, my darling, and when you awake you'll feel strong again."

"I can't believe it!" the head nurse exclaimed, looking puzzled and dumb. "Pulse rate is normal, heart beat strong, and she's breathing like a healthy, exhausted individual." Waving a hand toward Harold, she said, "Go home and get some rest. She's going to make it. Possibly even be home for Christmas. This is a miracle if ever I saw one. We can chalk it up as nothing less. The doctors gave up all hope . . ."

"But God!" Harold exclaimed.

"What did you say?" the nurse asked.

"I said, 'But God!' With God all things are possible."
"It's been God!" the head nurse admitted emphatically and thoughtfully. "A miracle if ever I saw one!"

"It makes you believe, doesn't it?" another nurse said. "Believe in a Power higher and greater than medicine and specialized care. I'm glad I was here to see this. My mother often told us kids she saw God work miracles. Now I've seen it, too. Firsthand! Imagine!"

"It's the miracle of the Christ of Christmas," Harold told the staff, kissing his wife and hurrying home for a bit of much-needed rest and sleep.

With an overflowing heart, Harold turned the key in the door of their home. In his anxiety and concern over Esther, he had forgotten how cozy and warm -- how homey --his wife had decorated their home. But now, with appreciative eyes, he took it all in; every single detail of her skill at decorating with simple, inexpensive things.

His heart was warmed; tears fell from his eyes. He dropped on his knees by the davenport and offered a prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God. Then he went to bed and slept soundly, the miracle of God's healing power warming and comforting him through and through.