Everything was so beautiful that I wanted to laugh and sing and cry simultaneously. The world was a wonderful place to live, and I was thankful to be a living inhabitant within its enormous sphere; just one out of multiplied millions, to be sure, still I was one, and I helped to comprise the whole. What's more, I was young and I was healthy and I was working for my King. He was the Sovereign Being Who ruled, reigned and lived within my heart.
and my life. Just knowing that I was in the center of His will made me want to shout and sing for pure joy.

Then, too, it was Christmas. Christmas has always made my heart especially glad and happy; my King, this Sovereign Being inside of me, had His birth then. And, while birthdays are always a delightfully pleasant time for my family and me, His birthday has had special significance for us I became new in Christ on a Christmas day ten years ago in my ninth year of existence. Somehow, this made the Christmas season especially wonderful for me: He was born; I was re-born. Converted. My heart and life was filled with song . . . Heavenly psalms of praise and glory.

Like I said, it was Christmas, and the fresh clean scent of pine and spruce boughs decorating the hearth and the windows was wafted my way as I dressed in my upstairs bedroom. The delicious, delightful, woody fragrance flooded my every breath with delight. And somewhere on the sidewalk outside our house, I heard the merry laughter of little children pulling sleds across crusted snow to the lusty singing of

"Dashing through the snow, in a one horse open sleigh, O'er the fields we go, laughing all the way . . . "

I wanted to laugh. I wanted to sing. I wanted to cry . . . for joy . . . as I pulled on white hose and laced freshly-polished, white, arch supports. Slipping into my white uniform and dabbing gardenia perfume on my wrists, I rushed downstairs to make sure that I didn't forget the box of cookies which I had baked and decorated to take with me to the hospital

Driving across town, the snow reflected the glitter of ornaments and lights. It was a kaleidoscope of color and fascination and of beauty. Shoppers hustled and bustled along the snow-cleaned streets and sidewalks, their arms laden heavily with gayly-wrapped packages, their faces wreathed in smiles and a hint of secrecy over the contents inside each bright, ribbon-bedecked box. I smiled with them. Or maybe it was at them and for them, remembering my own brightly-wrapped presents for those whom I loved at home.

I slid a gloved hand across the seat and placed it on two carefully-selected gifts, each lovingly and prayerfully chosen for two of my most "out of it" patients. Waiting for the red light to change, I closed my eyes and sent a
fervent prayer heavenward, asking my Father to use those two gifts for His
glory only and to let His light shine through them. O for a miracle tonight! I
cried in the silence of my heart.

The joyous, exuberant ringing of a bell drew my now-opened eyes to
the sidewalk where a Salvation Army lassie performed her duty nobly and
with apparent dignity and pride. Rolling the window down, I motioned her to
the car. In a few single, light steps her smiling face beamed into mine. "Take
this," I said. "And God bless you."

She took the proffered bill, thanked me profusely, wished me a blessed,
Christ centered Christmas, smiled again for me, then turned back to her
kettle, the merry bell pealing out its mission louder than ever.

Christmas! Ah, its beauty and real meaning never ceased to fill my
eyes to the brimming point and my heart to its fullest overflowing capacity. I
brushed tears aside as I moved ahead, by the green light's signal, along with
the flow of steadily-moving traffic, my heart so happy I felt like I could
scarcely contain myself. Giving! This was what Christmas was all about: God
sent . . . and gave; Jesus came . . . and gave. His life! Could I do less? With
one mighty, overwhelming no, my heart wanted to shout it to the world.

I took the outer-drive exit now and made better time as I drove. Traffic
was still heavy, but the three lanes afforded less congestion and a more rapid
pace. Houses and trees whizzed by as I hurried along. In almost every
window, or at the doors of the houses which I was passing, the glad, bright,
glittery tokens of this special season were shining. To me, it was as if they
were saying, "Christ is born! Christ is born!" Again, I was on a Judean hillside
with lowly shepherds. Herding sheep. What a menial task! But wasn't my
Lord Himself lowly! And hadn't He done an even more menial and lowly task
when He girded a towel around His midriff and washed the disciples' feet!

Tears ran down my cheeks. I was full of His glory and His peace. In my
mind and heart, I, like the humble shepherds, was hearing the angels song
and the glad, glorious pronouncement: ". . . Fear not: for, behold, I bring you
good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is
Christ the Lord."
"This is Christmas!" I exclaimed softly, happily, joyously-triumphant through my tears.

I needed the blessing which I had just received from God. The hospital in which I had been working for the past two months, and in which I would be working for several more before going to the mission field, was the most depressing I had ever seen. My years of training in General Hospital could not possibly have prepared me for what I faced and encountered at the Veterans' Hospital. Yet I had felt strongly that God wanted me there before going away to my called field. What's more, I heard from one of my colleagues that good nurses were needed there. So, in full assurance of heart that God was in this, I applied and was accepted.

I drove into the parking lot, gathered my gifts and the boxed cookies into my arms, locked the car and hurried toward the years-old building with my usual, daily prayer for patience, help, and guidance. Then I swung the heavy doors ajar and entered.

I exhaled the tingly lightness of the fresh, clean, cold snow air in a long, drawn-out sigh as I was engulfed by a hot, oppressive stench: a contamination of unwashed bodies, disinfectants, and medicine. I had breathed this heavy air ever since beginning work here, and it remained as utterly revolting and nauseous as it had been the day I first entered.

Mrs. Workman met me. Her large, towering frame could well have befitted that of any male I had seen or known. Her name . . . Workman . . . was totally becoming and fitting, the only error being in the "man" part. Workwoman would better have collaborated with her gender. That's the only thing, though. She was a cold and calculating woman, totally unfeeling and hardhearted.

"Well, Miss Brighton, it's about time you got here! " She barked the words at me like a General in the army, her eyes going over me in that "greater-than-thou" attitude.

"I have twenty minutes before I need to go on duty, Mrs. Workman. So I'll take these gifts to Al and Herb."

Reaching out, she snatched the boxes from my hands. "You'll do nothing of the kind! " Her voice was almost like sandpaper, grating and harsh.
"There's nothing to forbid my giving them gifts, Mrs. Workman. Please give the gifts back to me or I'll have to see the hospital's President."

"Just try that!"

"I will," I said kindly, turning and heading toward Mr. Pritchard's office.

Mrs. Workman's burly hand came down roughly upon my slender shoulder. "Here," she snarled, "take your gifts and do as you please with them." Her eyes were like gray steel glinting back into mine. She resented my kindness to the men.

I set the boxes on top of my carefully-decorated cookies, also in another larger box, then hurried away to "my men," many of them forgotten, unloved and anti-social. So this was the thanks, the pay and reward which they received for helping to keep our country free and make it a safe place for me to live in! I thought again, as I had done on countless other days and nights of duty.

"Good evening," I called cheerily as I entered the ward on my floor. "This is Christmas evening and so I am going to treat you. A cookie for each of you," I said with a smile, as I passed out the giant-sized goodies which I had made and had attached some small gift to. "God gave His only beloved, begotten Son to the world, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. You will find this precious verse in the little Bible beneath the ribbon, plus many other consoling verses. Read them. They will calm your fears, help you to sleep better and get you to Heaven if you will heed and believe what is told you. I'll be back shortly to attend to your needs and to help you. We may even have a carol sing sometime tonight. Be thinking about it and tell me which carols you'd like sung when I come on duty and have my work under way . . ."

I walked down the hallway to a two-bed room and hurried inside. Turning the light on, I smiled and handed one of the gifts to Al in bed 1; the other I gave to Herb, in bed 2. "With sincere Christian love to two brave men who are not forgotten by a caring and grateful citizen of our great U.S.A.," I said. "Thank you, Al and Herb, for what you did, how you gave, the sacrifices you made, and are still making, to preserve the freedoms of our Country. Your courage was dauntless, your fearlessness great and noteworthy, and
your sacrifices heroic. To two great and mighty leaders, I say, a blessed Christmas eve to you. I salute you!

Quickly, I stood at attention and gave the military salute which I had had my father teach me how to do. "I am proud of you," I stated soberly while tears raced each other down my cheeks.

"Every God-fearing, God-honoring American is proud of you, her noble heroes, who fought to keep the red, white, and blue waving and flying from our courthouses, our post offices, our Justice Department building, our national and state capitols, and to keep freedom of religion still our strong fortress and God our trust. Thank you, Al and Herb. I am proud of you. Enjoy your boxes. There are many gifts inside. Just like the Lord Jesus, when He comes into our heart in saving grace and forgiving power, we receive the main Gift. But He has many special surprise gifts that follow His coming into our heart and life."

Tears shimmered in the usually lusterless, listless-looking eyes. "Thanks, Miss Brighton," Al stammered. "I guess I'll have to change my thinking now, won't I? You'll never know how much this means!" he exclaimed with a tremor in his voice as he pulled the box close to his heart. "A Christmas gift! My first in years!" He was crying like a child now. So was Herb. And so was I.

Herb was too broken to speak. Like Al, he hugged the beautifully-wrapped box to his chest, holding it at arm's length every now and then to test the reality that it was his, before caressing it to his chest again. He managed a broken, stammered "Th . . . than . . . ks." But the look on his face and the light in his eyes spoke what his unspoken words meant to convey.

"I'll be back in a few minutes," I said. "But I'd like to pray for you and with you, if I may . . ."

Both heads nodded assent. I fairly shouted with thanksgiving.

Standing between the bed, my hand reaching out to touch Al's forehead, the other lying lightly on Herb's, I prayed. God came into that dismally-painted room. I sensed it immediately. Herb and Al sensed it. What did they have to lose by opening their cold, steely hearts to the Healer of
broken hearts, the Hope of forgotten men . . . forgotten, "buried" heroes? What? Nothing! Absolutely nothing! They had everything to gain!

When I finished praying and wiped the tears away, I knew again the true meaning of Christmas. I was an eye-witness to why He came and what He did. A light was turned on inside two former "hopelessly bitter" (Mrs. Workman's words) patients' hearts that was reflected on their face and in their eyes.

"Christmas!" Al said the word with such awe, such reverence, as to make one wonder if he had only just learned or heard about it. But in a way, he had.

"Christmas!" he exclaimed again. "Thank you God, for giving me Thy Son. He's in me!"

Herb could do nothing but laugh and cry and point heavenward while smiting his chest with his hands. Yes, the Light was turned on. It was brighter by far than any Christmas lights I had seen. And more beautiful, too.

And all through the simple act of giving a gift, I thought, leaving the room to begin my work. Yes, I mused, a gift, or any act of kindness, could make the difference between hope and despair, joy and sorrow the will to live or the desire to die. Especially, yes especially, with the forgotten, the forsaken, the castoff men and women and boys and girls who had no one to care; no one to shower kindesses upon them; no one to speak a word of encouragement and no one to pray for and with them.

I went about my duties with a greater than ever determination to do my utmost for His highest.

From the big ward came the sound of male voices tuning up for the carol sing. An air of expectancy and excitement pervaded. I sensed it. And in my heart, I could scarcely wait till 9 o'clock: a group from my home church was coming to sing carols and to distribute a personal, personally-wrapped gift to each man on my floor. Already, I could see the reaction, the changed countenances.

Tonight was Christmas Eve, "Silent Night, Holy Night." Not only for a select few, but for all the world. Yes, for the men in the Veteran's Hospitals
around the world. The living brave and the noble who had given everything, even to within an inch of their life, to keep the message of salvation . . . the message of the Cross . . . being preached and proclaimed from the pulpit and heralded from the pew, and the flag flying.

I forgot about the stench and the sickening, oppressive heat. I was on the hillside again, hearing the joyous, triumphant angels' song. I broke out singing, "Silent night, Holy night," and an entire floor took up the refrain.