Pungent smoke spiraled upward from the chimney in curlicues of wispy gray, filling the night air with its heady fragrance and sending slender, momentary smoke tails chasing after the few clouds in the midnight blue-black sky as Richard made his way to the barn. Snow crunched and squeaked beneath his boots and his breath came out in puffs of smoke-like vapors. The air was brittle-cold and biting, stinging both his nose and his
cheeks. He drew the collar of his heavy wool jacket more tightly about his neck and pulled the cap over the tips of his ear lobes to ward off frost bite, his mind and his heart torn between two desires: First and foremost, was his great and deep desire to get to the special Christmas Eve prayer service at the church and, second, and equally as deep and as great a desire, was that the tiny newborn lamb might live.

He hastened his pace, his mind racing back to the kitchen and to his sister's stinging words: "You'll die in that barn with the cattle and the sheep, Joel!" She had hurled the words at him in a tone of voice as biting-sharp and as brittle as the cold night air was. It stung him; cut him, too. Right to the heart. But he had learned long ago, since his glorious conversion and subsequent experience of entire sanctification, that one's hurts and wounds could be stepping stones of deep spirituality and growth if one kept them all in God's hands and bowed submissively and humbly to Him and to His will.

Tears stung his eyes and formed ice diamonds on his ruddy cheeks. Oh that Jodie would see her need of a cleansed and filled heart! But words were futile, he knew. Repeatedly, he had told his twin that Holiness of heart was not optional but was, rather, mandatory and absolutely necessary for one to make it into Heaven. Instead of accepting the facts, Jodie had scorned him and his testimony and made light of him.

A note of praise and thanksgiving fell from the young man's tips as he recalled the night when the Holy Ghost burned out the awful carnal nature within his heart and filled him with Love Divine. His parents, too, had walked in the tight and were sanctified wholly in the same revival service as he. But Jodie had resisted and "stood her ground," maintaining that the church they had formerly attended was the church and that, although she had to attend the little Holiness church by parental authority, she would not accept its teachings.

Richard sighed. It seemed almost unreal to him that his dark-haired twin would take such an attitude about an experience so wonderful and real as heart purity. Especially so since it was through Jodie's closest girlfriend that they had attended the neat little church in the valley: Donell had invited them all to the revival services and they had gone; Jodie included. And it was in that very meeting that God had knocked at their heart's door and they had responded and opened the door wide and bidden Him to enter. All but Jodie.
She contended that she was saved and she would stick loyally by her catechism.

He recalled how their parents and he had held on in prayer for her until she had humbled herself and gone to the altar to be saved some weeks later. Donell was overjoyed; she wept for pure joy and happiness to see her friend come to Christ. And Jodie had run well, and been changed, this was true. It was when the preacher began his exposition on heart cleansing, or holiness, that Jodie declared she had "all God had" (for her) "and there was no need of anything else," her words.

Richard tucked his head deeper into the folds of his upturned collar and prayed as he walked. God alone would have to convince his sister of the old man's existence within her heart, he knew. Then she would see! Yes, then, and only then, would she know the awfulness . . . the hideousness and the treachery . . . of that horrible nature within her which, according to the Apostle Paul, "is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7).

From a distant neighbor's farm came the clear barking of a dog. Sound traveled far on a still, cold night. A pin-point of light from the neighbor's kitchen window let Richard know that the supper was underway in the kitchen: The Richardsons milked seventy some cows and always ate a late supper. This was a part of the farming business; late meals. But to the farmer and his wife and family, it was a way of life. It was a routinely accepted thing; a pattern of daily living; the compensations and blessings of being self-employed while working and tilling God's good earth far outweighing anything so trivial as a late supper.

Richard thought of the lamb then and hurried along the snow-packed path to the barn. This, too, was a part of farming; caring for a sick animal and nursing it back to health. It was amazing how attached one got to an animal after caring for it and watching over it and nursing it back to health, he thought. Yes, amazing indeed. More than once, through the nursing-back-to-life process, he had had a very real glimpse into the way his Savior must have felt in His care and tender love and concern of the sheep of His flock and His fold. There were "sick" among His flock, too. Many with bleeding hearts and crushing sorrows and burdens too heavy for them to carry alone. And didn't Psalm 147:3 say, "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds"!
Tears of joy sprang to the young man's eyes. His Shepherd, his tender and loving Shepherd, was full of compassion and love for His sheep. Oh, what compassion! And He actually knew how they felt, because He was Divine.

Richard's heart leaped for joy. Having become so intimately acquainted with the Good Shepherd had helped to make him more gentle and tender and caring gins God's animal creatures. It just naturally worked this way. Proverbs 12:10 stated that "The righteous man regardeth the life of his beast; but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." There was a big difference between God's holy, Spirit-filled man or woman and the unholy person. Yes, a very big difference. He was sure the animals recognized the difference between the two. At least they never trembled nor shook from fear around the soft-spoken, gentle-mannered holy person. It was the harsh, unkind words of the unholy, and his brutality, that sent fear into their animal hearts, he realized.

He passed by the walnut trees, stark naked now except for the covering of snow on their limbs. They looked beautiful, he thought, in their nakedness, for the moon silhouetted their pattern in dark outline on the glittering snow. It was a picture of exquisite beauty etched on a canvas of shimmering white with an inky blue-black canopy as a back drop.

Stars twinkled and blinked merrily in the distant sky. Their silver-white lights sent out rays of hope and pin points of encouragement. Oh, he was glad to be alive! Glad, too, that he had come to know the real meaning of Christmas.

He opened the barn door and stepped inside, being careful to close and latch the door against the cold outside. Then he lit the lantern which he had brought with him. Its warm, mellow, orange-yellow glow seemed to bring a measure of added warmth into the barn and its gently-flickering lighted wick cast lingering shadows on the wall and in the straw. He liked the lantern's light: Neither bright-bright nor dark, it was somewhere in between, yet it was just enough to allow him to look after and care for the sick and the weak without disturbing the well and the strong which were resting.

He made his way to the back of the barn, where he had fashioned an improvised temporary pen for the ewe and her first-born lamb, wondering if
the tiny creature was still alive. Then, setting the lantern on the concrete floor, he went into the pen. The ewe baah-ed pitifully. Richard stooped down and stroked her head. Then he felt the lamb. It was so helpless and weak. He must get it to eat or it would die, he knew.

Crooning softly to both the mother and her baby, he took the lamb into his arms. From beneath his heavy jacket he removed a piece of an old but warm blanket and a water bottle filled with medium-hot water. Then, with the gentleness of a mother, he put the water bottle on the lamb and covered it with the warm, soft blanket. Still speaking softly to both animals, Richard gently forced a bottle of warm milk into the mouth of the tiny lamb. There was no responding sucking sound.

The ewe nudged him gently. Almost concernedly, he felt. She sensed that all was not well with the little one which she had brought forth. Richard again stroked her head gently and when she put her head on his leg beside her lamb, he let it remain there. Then he talked to the Lord about the lamb, asking God to please let it live.

He leaned his back against the wall of the barn and continued to pray. The ewe became more relaxed, he noted, as though she sensed that everything was going to be all right. With his free hand, Richard stroked the neck of the tiny little creature and it was then that he noticed it had begun sucking on the bottle and was swallowing its warm contents. Tears flushed warmly from his eyes. He lifted his heart in praise to God, and when the milk was gone from the bottle he transferred the little bundle of soft, cuddly wool to its mother's bosom where it began nursing hungrily.

He remained in the pen with the mother and her off-spring, keeping the warm water bottle and the blanket over the little lamb, listening as it fed hungrily. It was a miracle from God, he knew. A miracle on Christmas Eve. But he was not surprised, for his new-found Friend had been working one miracle after another for him since he had given Him his all. His everything. He closed his eyes and prayed silently, listening to the soft night sounds around him. It was peaceful. So very peaceful. He was sure that the barn, late at night in the cold of winter, was one of the most peaceful places in all the world. He could see why God chose a stable for the birthplace of His Son. Yes, he could see. And understand. Everything spoke of peace and serenity.
He relaxed, with his head and his back against the wall. Such peace! he thought reverently-silently. The cows were quiet, save for an occasional one chewing its cud or emitting a softly-gentle-like kind of sigh; the sheep, too, were still and at rest, their lambs lying close to their mothers' sides or on their mothers' backs. No sound whatever came from the hogs, in their barn some short distance from the main barn in which Richard was. Oh, he loved the night! Loved the cattle, the sheep, the hogs, the fowl. Loved it all.

He must have dozed, for when he next opened his eyes he saw a lantern light come through the barn door. Then he heard voices. Happy voices, they were. And they were singing. From the heart. Oh, it was beautiful!

He wondered momentarily if he had died and gone to Heaven, so beautiful was the singing and so full of victory. Then he heard Jodie's voice; not at all like the angry Jodie who had hurled the bitter, biting, slashing words at him as she ran out the door to her father's waiting car.


"Back here," he answered. "With the tiny lamb and its mother." Then, getting to his feet, he swung his legs over the make-shift pen and lifted his lantern from the concrete floor.

"I'm different, Richard." Jodie's voice sounded unbelievably joyful and happy. "The Lord sanctified me tonight!" she exclaimed. "I want to ask you to forgive me for being so angry and unkind to you. I've been downright hateful and mean to Mother and Dad and you, and I'm sorry. Ever since each of you got sanctified, I've been miserable. You can't imagine how miserable! It's been horrible."

'That's the greatest news of the day!' Richard remarked tearfully. "And of course you know you're forgiven. I've prayed so earnestly for this to take place in your heart, Jodie, and now, thanks be unto God, the work is done."

"When the preacher mentioned how God sacrificed His only Son to be my Savior and my sanctifier, and how Jesus became my sacrifice for my sin, that got to me," Jodie said. "It was then that I realized how deep and wonderful the love of God was. It tore my heart to pieces. And then, when I thought how you had stayed home to keep the little newborn lamb from
dying, Richard, God allowed me to see that it was love that made you do it; love for the helpless lamb. Through that, God whispered, 'If a brother of yours loves a tiny, sick lamb so much that he'd sacrifice the service to save the creature's life, how much greater and deeper is the love which I have for you that I gave willingly My Life for your salvation and your sanctification? For this is the will of God, even your sanctification.' I couldn't resist any longer. I ran to the altar and asked God to forgive me for my outbursts of carnal anger and for my pride. He freely and gloriously forgave and pardoned. Then I sought for His cleansing. . . ."

"And He did the work!" Donell exclaimed, stepping into the soft glow of lantern-light. "I wish you could have seen her and heard her when she prayed through, Richard. It was real. And so wonderful. We have all been so blest and so happy that we decided we'd go to various farm houses in the valley and sing at the farmhouse doors until midnight. We're too happy to go home and go to bed to sleep. You are the first one we've sung to. Jodie wanted you to be the first farmer in the valley to know what happened in her heart."

"I guess all I can say is, Praise the Lord. My cup is full and running over. I know that Dad and Mother are full of praise and joy," Richard replied.

"You ought to see Mother!" Jodie exclaimed. "She looks as radiantly happy as I feel. And now, after we sing another song or two for you, we must be going. Mom and Dad are getting a few refreshments for us before we go to other farm houses. . . ."

Long after Jodie and the group of young people from the church were gone, Richard remained with the ewe and her lamb. Christ came to bring light and life to mankind, he reasoned, it was only fitting, then, that he should have done the same for an innocent lamb.

Far into the night, Richard felt the lamb stir then get to its feet. By the warm, mellow light of the lantern, he saw it walk up to its mother's head on wobbly little legs; saw the ewe lick the babe tenderly and caressingly and heard her make a contented sort of satisfied sound somewhere deep inside her throat.

He watched the blending of mutual love as it flowed from mother to offspring and vice versa. And when he saw the lamb give a happy little jump then climb safely up on its mother's back and settle down for sleep, he
spread the blanket over the two and made his way out of the barn toward the house.

Snow squeaked and crunched beneath his boots as he walked and the air was still and brittle-crisp with a frosty silence so wonderful and beautiful that he wished he could hold the moment forever in his heart. The memory of the night would live with him forever, he knew. He had seen two miracles; his sister’s heart cleansing, and the healing of the little lamb. And both on Christmas Eve!

It was dark inside the kitchen as he shut the door on the night air and walked into the warmth of the house. His heart felt strangely warm and wonderful. He had had to miss the special Christmas Eve service at the church but he had had a service of his own in the barn and God had met with him there. In the form of a miracle, too!

Hanging his heavy jacket on a hanger, he got ready for bed. It was early Christmas morn and he was happy. Extremely happy.