THE SUNNY HEART
Mrs. Paul E. King

Silence was knee-deep in the six-patient hospital ward as the nurse wheeled Mrs. Ackerman back to her bed in the far corner. "Comfortable?" the nurse asked pleasantly.
"Very. Thank you kindly," Mrs. Ackerman answered, smiling. "You are too good to me, Miss Stebbins," she added, brushing a tear of gratitude away.

"Look who's talking!" the petite Miss Stebbins exclaimed softly. "It's easy to be good to someone like you, Mrs. Ackerman. Now you must rest awhile. I'll be taking you up for more x-rays. A bit of sleep may not be a bad idea," she suggested, patting the small wrinkled hand of the elderly woman.

"I'll try it; sleep, I mean," Mrs. Ackerman answered pleasantly, folding her hands and closing her faded blue eyes as she heaved a sigh of relief at getting back into bed. "The bed feels good!" she exclaimed tiredly.

Miss Stebbins tucked the bed covers gently about her patient. "I'll be back after awhile," she promised, hurrying past the other beds to the nurses' station.

"She bugs me!" Mrs. Terpenning exclaimed stoutly to Mrs. Henry in the bed next to hers when she was certain Mrs. Ackerman was asleep. "Can't be very much wrong with her . . . her knitting and smiling so smugly all day long."

"Wants attention, no doubt," the other woman rejoined, moaning as she tried to raise herself in bed.

"Well, she's certainly getting it!" Mrs. Terpenning said disgustedly. "And look at us, you and me! Why, no telling how long I'll be here waiting for Doctor Morrison to operate. I've been here a week tomorrow." She whined and her voice broke as she finished.

"I know what you mean," Mrs. Henry said, looking meaningfully at her counterpart. "I felt the same as you when Doctor Compton told me I needed surgery but that I must wait until my heart is stronger. I'm certain I could have stood it though, had he done surgery the very day I was admitted here."

Mrs. Terpenning was silent a long while, thinking the statement over. She clicked her dentures together in a nervous, annoying way she had. "I wonder if that's the reason Doctor Morrison hasn't done my surgery," she said slowly. "He keeps saying, 'As soon as I think you're ready for it, we'll operate.'"
"Why don't you ask him his reason for delay?" For once, Mrs. Terpenning's voice sounded pleasant.

"Me ask him? Never! He'd make some insipid excuse and give me some vague reply. He tries never to worry or alarm his patients. I like him, Mrs. Henry. A right smart doctor I have."

"Me," Mrs. Henry answered, "I'd rather know the reason."

A smiling nurse came suddenly into the room. Standing by Mrs. Terpenning's bed she said softly, "Time for medication. Here you are. Now swallow it. All of it," she ordered sweetly, handing the tiny cup to the woman and waiting until the contents were swallowed.

Silence fell over the ward when the nurse made her exit. All patients either dozed or slept. Not until the smiling Miss Stebbins wheeled Mrs. Ackerman out of the room for further x-rays did the two women resume their previous conversation.

"Well, there she goes again!" Mrs. Terpenning mocked.

"Probably not find a thing wrong with her," Mrs. Henry said disgustedly. "Any person who can sit and knit for hours as she does just can't be too ill."

"It's her continual smiling that irritates me, Mrs. Henry!" the now irate Mrs. Terpenning exclaimed vehemently, sitting suddenly up in bed and pointing an index finger at the other woman. "If she suffered half as much as we do she wouldn't be smiling, I tell you!" She clicked her false teeth together viciously.

Mrs. Henry ran nervous fingers through her thinning hair. "As I said before, some people like attention. Now me. . . ."

"What about me?" The women's conversation was cut short. Doctor Compton, a short, rather stocky built man with a pair of laughing eyes, stood looking down upon his patient. "Well, what about me?" he teased.

Mrs. Henry blushed scarlet. Never, under any circumstances, would she want to tell her doctor the tenor of her conversation with Mrs.
"We were just talking, Doctor," she answered lightly, giving him no definite answer.

Smiling down at the woman, the doctor gave the curtain a quick pull around the bed. "Just so you weren't talking about me!" he teased, doing a routine check of the incision. "You're coming along fine, Mrs. Henry," he commented. "Far better than my predictions to you even. You keep doing as well as you are and you'll be home with your husband in another three or four days."

"That's really good news, Doctor!" Mrs. Henry ejaculated. "My Tom declares he cannot . . . absolutely cannot! -- eat another can of pork and beans nor scrambled eggs. He knows how to open a can," she laughed, "and how to scramble an egg!"

"Tom'll be appreciating you more than ever when you get home, I dare say," the doctor asserted, making his exit.

It was late afternoon. Visiting hours were over. Each of the women in Ward 268 B had had her refreshing afternoon nap.

Mrs. Ackerman, with the aid of a nurse, was settled comfortably in one of the chairs near her bed. Reaching for the variegated green wool, her knitting needles were soon clicking stitches off merrily. A radiant smile played serenely and beautifully at the corners of her mouth. "This is the hundredth ounce of wool I've used between my operations," she said cheerfully. "My sister puts the squares together . . . with my not being able to see, you know. She declares we should have a centenary party." Here she paused and laughed aloud, her hands keeping up a continual and steady "adding and taking" all the while. "My sister says this variegated shade of green is most lovely. And I'm sure it must be. I'm making this afghan for a very poor widow woman whose children will have nothing to do with her."

By now Mrs. Ackerman had the attention of each woman in the ward. "Oh-h!" they exclaimed in surprised unison.

"It's too bad!" Mrs. Ackerman exclaimed. "This dear woman is such a godly person. Her three children married into money, prestige and power. They feel she's too old-fashioned for their way of living. But God has been supplying this little woman's every need in a marvelous way. The church
people have been wonderful to her. In our church we are all a part of each other's joys and blessings and its heartaches and sorrows. I couldn't get along without the Lord and my church!” she added emphatically.

Intense silence fell over beds 4 and 5 as Mrs. Ackerman finished. Operations! . . . in the plural! The woman had had operations! Worse still, she was blind!

Mrs. Henry was the first to recover her sense of bearing. "Mrs. Ackerman," she began, a trifle hesitantly, "how . . . what . . . I mean, how can you remain so cheerful and pleasant under your trying circumstances? Why, you knit beautifully and . . . and . . . I . . . I didn't realize you couldn't see! How can you do it? I mean, why don't you complain and . . . ."

The skein of variegated wool fell silent in the woman's lap. Carefully she put the needles beside the wool at her fingertips. "Oh that's easy to explain," she said, her face turned in the direction of her questioner. "Many years ago, as a small child, I got gloriously converted, or saved, whichever one prefers to call it. About a year I went forward again for a pure, clean heart. I then was wholly sanctified. From that day to this I have never questioned anything God may permit me to bear, endure, or go through. It is all for my good and for His glory. I draw freely from my gold mine of promises . . . the Bible. My sister has been so good to me. She reads the Bible to me and cares so tenderly for me since my dear husband's death. The Lord will reward her for it all someday," she added, smiling and resuming her knitting.

Mrs. Terpenning swallowed hard. "I . . . judged you so wrongly," she admitted openly, in the presence of her roommates. "And I beg your forgiveness. I had no idea that you were blind nor that you had ever had so many as even one operation."

"Only five major operations," Mrs. Ackerman said sweetly. "But then, I have so much to be thankful for. I have a very dear friend who has had ten major surgeries and who is, at this time, dying with a dreadful malignancy. But she is a Christian and is ready to meet God. Oh, can't you just imagine what that will be like when she sees Jesus Himself, and when He comes down to meet her as her spirit is departing this world for those blissful regions beyond! I must confess that I get homesick to see Jesus."
Again Mrs. Terpenning swallowed hard. This time it was for a different reason. "I . . . I'm just not ready to die," she confessed. "In fact, I never thought much about dying. Not ever. Our minister never mentions anything about death and Heaven or hell. But I would like to know that I can meet my Maker without fear; like you, Mrs. Ackerman."

"God provided salvation through Jesus Christ for all of Adam's race. And it is for all of you in here," Mrs. Ackerman said tearfully.

"What must I do to be saved?" Mrs. Terpenning asked brokenly.

From her chair in the far corner of the ward, Mrs. Ackerman pointed the way of salvation to the inquiring woman and from beds 4 and 5 sincere and heartfelt prayers went heavenward.

"Maybe now my face will shine!" Mrs. Henry exclaimed. "I just got saved. I felt the Lord come into my heart. Your face shines, Mrs. Ackerman."

"I feel wonderful, Mrs. Ackerman!" Mrs. Terpenning exclaimed at length. "Like a big load has been lifted off my back. Now I'll be able to smile. Just like you!" she said joyously.

For answer, Mrs. Ackerman buried her face in her hands and wept for joy. Yes, God could use even a blind woman in the hospital for His glory!