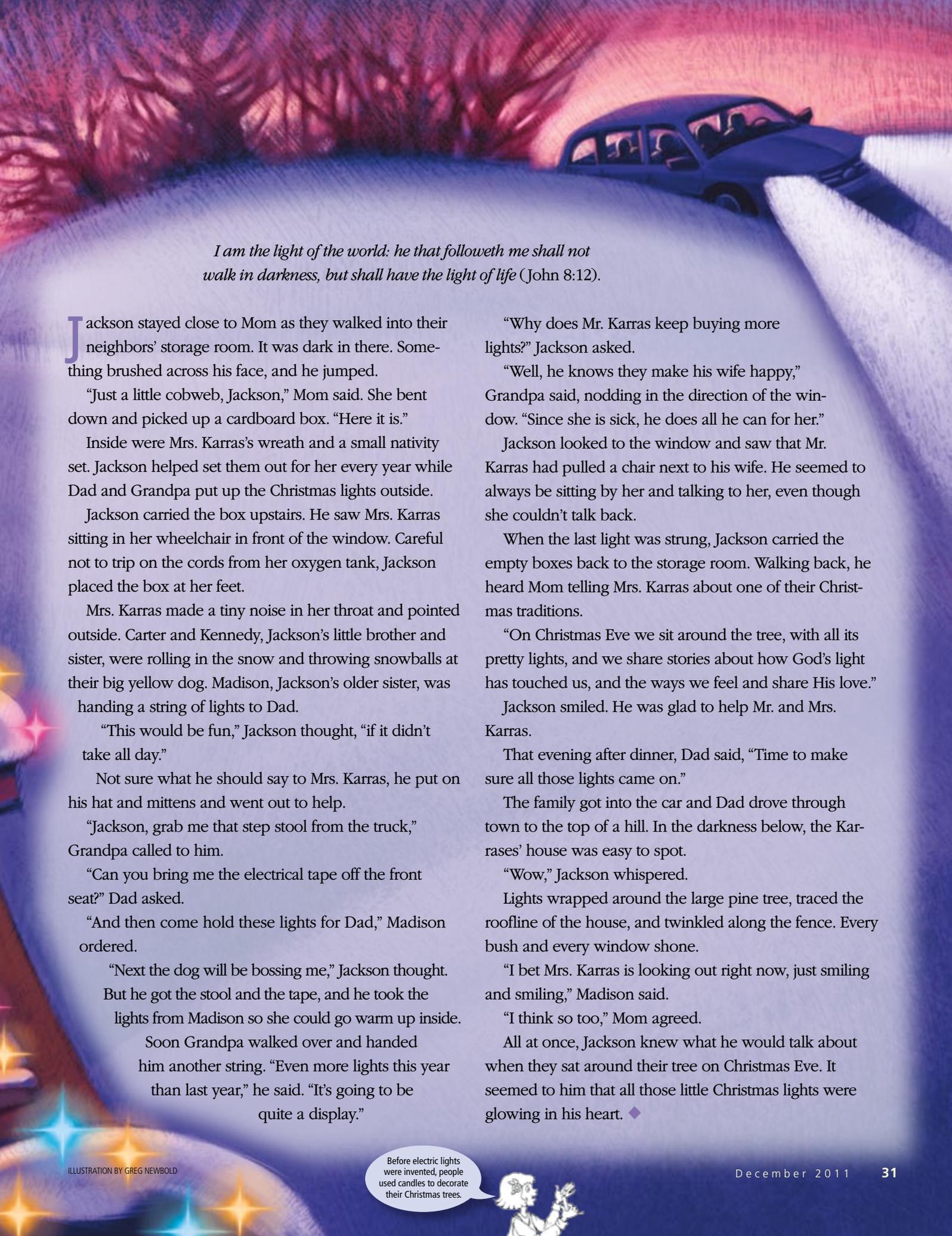


The Lights of Christmas

By Hilary M. Hendricks
(Based on a true story)





I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life (John 8:12).

Jackson stayed close to Mom as they walked into their neighbors' storage room. It was dark in there. Something brushed across his face, and he jumped.

"Just a little cobweb, Jackson," Mom said. She bent down and picked up a cardboard box. "Here it is."

Inside were Mrs. Karras's wreath and a small nativity set. Jackson helped set them out for her every year while Dad and Grandpa put up the Christmas lights outside.

Jackson carried the box upstairs. He saw Mrs. Karras sitting in her wheelchair in front of the window. Careful not to trip on the cords from her oxygen tank, Jackson placed the box at her feet.

Mrs. Karras made a tiny noise in her throat and pointed outside. Carter and Kennedy, Jackson's little brother and sister, were rolling in the snow and throwing snowballs at their big yellow dog. Madison, Jackson's older sister, was handing a string of lights to Dad.

"This would be fun," Jackson thought, "if it didn't take all day."

Not sure what he should say to Mrs. Karras, he put on his hat and mittens and went out to help.

"Jackson, grab me that step stool from the truck," Grandpa called to him.

"Can you bring me the electrical tape off the front seat?" Dad asked.

"And then come hold these lights for Dad," Madison ordered.

"Next the dog will be bossing me," Jackson thought. But he got the stool and the tape, and he took the lights from Madison so she could go warm up inside.

Soon Grandpa walked over and handed him another string. "Even more lights this year than last year," he said. "It's going to be quite a display."

"Why does Mr. Karras keep buying more lights?" Jackson asked.

"Well, he knows they make his wife happy," Grandpa said, nodding in the direction of the window. "Since she is sick, he does all he can for her."

Jackson looked to the window and saw that Mr. Karras had pulled a chair next to his wife. He seemed to always be sitting by her and talking to her, even though she couldn't talk back.

When the last light was strung, Jackson carried the empty boxes back to the storage room. Walking back, he heard Mom telling Mrs. Karras about one of their Christmas traditions.

"On Christmas Eve we sit around the tree, with all its pretty lights, and we share stories about how God's light has touched us, and the ways we feel and share His love."

Jackson smiled. He was glad to help Mr. and Mrs. Karras.

That evening after dinner, Dad said, "Time to make sure all those lights came on."

The family got into the car and Dad drove through town to the top of a hill. In the darkness below, the Karrases' house was easy to spot.

"Wow," Jackson whispered.

Lights wrapped around the large pine tree, traced the roofline of the house, and twinkled along the fence. Every bush and every window shone.

"I bet Mrs. Karras is looking out right now, just smiling and smiling," Madison said.

"I think so too," Mom agreed.

All at once, Jackson knew what he would talk about when they sat around their tree on Christmas Eve. It seemed to him that all those little Christmas lights were glowing in his heart. ♦

