

**The Light in the Barn**  
**Christmas Eve 2007/La Paz, Mexico**

Emily was not in a good mood. All her cousins and her older brother and sister had gone to a Christmas Eve ice-skating party at the lake. But she hadn't been allowed to go. She was too young. Too little. She sat at the kitchen table, kicking a table leg with a swinging foot, a frown a mile long on her face.

Her grandmother continued to beat the cake batter, watching her. "Going to feel sorry for yourself all night?"

"I hate being the youngest!" Emily muttered. "I never get to do anything, go anywhere!"

"I thought you were going to help me make the cake?" her grandmother reminded her.

"I hate cake!"

"Oh? Since when?" her grandmother asked, hiding a smile. She poured the chocolate batter into a cake pan, scraping the bowl with a spatula. "Want to lick the bowl?"

"I guess," Emily said half-heartedly.

Emily's grandmother began beating up a white cake batter in a different bowl. "Why don't I tell you a story? Get your mind off your troubles."

"What kind of story?"

Her grandmother paused. "Hmmm, let's see. How 'bout one from when I was a little girl?"

"When you lived on the farm?"

"Yes. It was Christmas Eve and I was five-years-old, just like you," her grandmother began. "It was dark outside, maybe 9 o'clock at night, and I had to go out to the barn."

"All by yourself?" Emily interrupted. "Weren't you scared?"

"Not really. There was a moon that night so I could see where I was going, and the barn wasn't too far from the house."

"Why did you have to go the barn?"

"To feed the lambs," continued her grandmother. "You see, there were twin lambs that had been rejected by their mother. She didn't have enough milk to feed them, so she'd simply abandoned them. It was my job to feed them each a bottle several times a day." She paused, dividing the batter and pouring it into two separate cake pans. To one she added green food coloring, to the other red, mixing the colors into each pan of batter until the color changed. "So I walked to the

barn, pushed open the door, and yanked the light chain. But nothing happened. It was only then that I remembered the bulb had burned out and that my father hadn't changed it yet."

"So what'd you do?"

"I waited a moment and let my eyes adjust to the dark, and then I made my way to the lambs' pen. And they wobbled over to me to find the bottle." She slid all three cake pans in the oven and then began to mix powdered sugar and milk for the frosting.

"Did they drink it really fast?"

"Oh, they gobbled it up. And when they were all done, I sat in the straw next to them and they huddled beside me while I rubbed their stiff, curly coats. And I knew they must miss their mother, so I whispered sweet words to them, and willed them strength. And then I sang them a lullabye."

"What did you sing?" Emily asked.

"Well, I had just learned *Jesus Loves Me* in Sunday School, so I practiced singing it to them."

"I know that song!" Emily declared.

"Sing it with me," her grandmother encouraged. "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so, Little ones to him belong, I am weak but He is strong. Yes, Jesus, loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so."

"Did they fall asleep?"

"Well, I don't know if they went to sleep, but they did cuddle down in the straw and were quiet. So I got up, and went back outside. And half way back to the house, my dad met me. And he had the strangest expression on his face."

"Why?"

"He said, 'Lorraine, did someone fix the light in the barn?' And I told him, 'No, it was still burned out. Why?' 'Did you have a lantern in there?' 'No, why dad?' 'Well, a few minutes ago I looked out the window, and there was a light coming from the barn. It was bright, like sunshine, streaming from every crack. So I walked outside to see what was going on, and then it went off, just before you opened the door and came outside.'"

Emily's face held a thoughtful expression. "What do you think that light was, grandma?"

"What do you think it was?" her grandmother countered.

Emily pondered. "I think," she began slowly, "that it was God's light."

Her grandmother set aside the completed frosting, and sat down beside her granddaughter. “And why do think that?” she asked.

“Well, it was Christmas Eve, you know. And you were in a barn, which is kind of like a stable. And the baby lambs were lonely and afraid without their mother. But then you fed them, and hugged them, and sang to them about Jesus. You loved them just like Jesus came to love us.”

“And what does that have to do with the mysterious light?” prompted her grandmother.

“Love is like a light,” Emily answered. “your love for the lambs made light in the dark.”

“Just like Jesus’ love came to chase away the dark for us,” her grandmother added. The buzzer on the timer rang, and she rose to take the 3 cake pans out of the oven. She set them on the racks to cool. “Do you know what kind of cake we’re making?”

Emily rolled her eyes. “Grandma, we make this cake every year for Christmas! Of course, I know what it is!”

“Okay, smarty pants, tell me!” her grandmother smiled.

“The Jesus Cake!”

“And what’s a Jesus Cake?” her grandmother teased her.

“Grandma! You know!”

“Tell me the story, Emily. I want to see if you remember,” her grandmother urged.

“Okay, first there is the chocolate layer. And that’s the darkness in our lives, sin. And then there’s the red layer. That’s the blood of Jesus that washes away our sin and gives us peace with God.”

“Good, and what’s the green layer?”

“The green layer is for growing. The more we learn about Jesus, the more we grow as a child of God. And then on top of all the layers is the white icing. And that’s because Jesus makes us clean and pure by his . . . by his . . .”

“Grace,” her grandmother helped out. “And what goes around the sides of the cake? Your favorite part as I recall.”

“Little red candy hearts! And the hearts are for all the people around the world that believe in Jesus like me. We’re tied together by God’s love.”

“And on the top of the cake?”

“Is a yellow star to remind us that Jesus is the King of Kings. And then we put a big candle in the middle for the baby Jesus, who came as the light of the world.”

“And just before we eat the cake,” her grandmother finished, “we all take a small candle, and light it from the Jesus candle, to remind ourselves that we are called to spread God’s love and light to the world.”

“Like the shepherds did the night Jesus was born,” Emily remarked.

“Exactly.”

“Grandma?”

“Yes.”

“I have a stuffed lamb upstairs in my toybox. Could I go get it, and then we could turn off all the lights and sing Jesus Loves Me? Like you did with the baby lambs when you were a little girl?”

“I think that’s a splendid idea, Emily. Run and get your lamb.”

Moments later, the lights switched off in the kitchen. And two voices joined together in a love song to Jesus. And a neighbor, passing by on the snowy sidewalk outside, stopped and marveled at a beautiful light streaming from behind the curtains of the kitchen window. It was bright, like sunshine, streaming from every crack. Then it blinked off, and was gone.