



Hannah's Hope

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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KINGSBURY

Hannah's Hope

A *N* O V E L

KAREN
KINGSBURY



New York · Nashville

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P R O L O G U E



Hannah Roberts was late for lunch. Again. Her backpack was on a roller board, and she pulled it as she darted down the hallway of the music wing at TJ Prep, a private school for kids in Washington, D.C.'s politically elite. Hannah had gone here since sixth grade. As a freshman, she knew her way through the halls as well as she knew her own house. She tore into the commons area and bolted by the glass-walled administrative offices, past the storied brick fountain at the front entrance. A bronze plaque read, "*Bethesda, Maryland Welcomes You to Thomas Jefferson College Preparatory School for the Leaders of Tomorrow.*"

No doubt about that. A number of politicians, lawyers, and international ambassadors had made their way through TJ Prep. Hannah didn't care much about that. Right now all she wanted was lunch. If she hurried, she might still make it.

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She burst through the lunchroom doors, her backpack flying along behind her. Several hundred students milled about, eating cheeseburgers and fries or sipping on pop cans while they caught up on the latest gossip. Most of the guys were gathered around a baseball game playing on the eight-foot flat-screen television at the center of the room. There was a line at the automatic teller machine in the corner, same as always, and a few stragglers remained at each of the food court windows.

There was still time.

Hannah tugged on her blue-plaid skirt and adjusted her white blouse as she rushed toward the Salad Sensation line. If she didn't eat now, she wouldn't have another chance until late that evening. Cheerleading practice went until five, and after that yearbook had a committee meeting until seven. By the time her driver picked her up, she'd barely have a minute for dinner before her dance instructor came at eight.

On her way to the salad window, two of her cheerleading friends approached her. "Hannah, you're so bomb!" Millie tapped her shoulder with her fingertips. "Where did you get that blouse? Bloomingdale's?"

"Saks." Hannah kept walking, but she smiled at her friends over her shoulder. "Save me a spot at the table."

"Save you a spot?" Kathryn put her hands on her hips. "Lunch is over in nine minutes. You'll never get here on time."

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“I know.” Hannah was next up. “Save me a spot anyway.”

The girls looked put out. They hated when Hannah stayed late in choir and missed most of lunch. But they shrugged off their frustration and returned to their table.

It took Hannah three minutes to get her salad, and then, still rushing, she joined her friends. “Okay,” she was out of breath. “What’s up?”

“You won’t believe it.” Millie leaned low over the table, her voice little more than a whisper. “Brian—you know Brian, the senior in my algebra class—he came by my house the other day.” She squealed. “Hannah, he wants to go out!”

“Really?” Hannah took a huge bite of salad. It didn’t keep her from talking. “I thought you couldn’t date a senior.”

“I can’t.” Millie grinned. “My parents think he’s a junior.”

“Yikes.” Hannah took another bite. “When they find out you’ll be grounded until summer.”

“So?” Millie made a brushing gesture with her hands. “My dad’s gone till then, anyway. He’ll never know.” She raised her shoulders a few times and glanced at the others. “Besides, nothing ever happens when I’m grounded. My parents always forget about it.”

Kathryn finished her pop and pushed her can to the middle of the table. “My parents took my cell away,

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which stinks. Just because I'm getting a D in English." She exhaled hard, and her frown became the beginning of a grin. "But at least I don't get grounded."

"Yeah." Hannah took another two bites. She lived with her grandmother in The Colony, the enclave for D.C.'s wealthiest families. Whatever she wanted, she got. She could stay out late, date whomever, and she never lost her cell or her privileges. Not that she took advantage of the situation. She was too busy to get in trouble.

"You're blowing me off tonight." Kathryn plopped her elbows on the table and stared at Hannah. "You have yearbook." She made a face. "Frank Givens in Biology told me."

"Uh-oh." Hannah downed another bite of salad and grabbed her Palm Pilot from her Coach purse. A few key taps and she had her schedule up. "Yep. Yearbook five to seven." She would call for a ride after that. Her grandmother had a full-time driver, Buddy Bingo, a retired Navy guy. Buddy was available whenever Hannah needed him. She took another bite of salad and then scrolled down. "You're right." She looked up at Kathryn. "We were supposed to study."

"That's what I'm saying." Kathryn gave an exaggerated sigh. "We planned it a week ago."

"I remember." Hannah raked her hand through her thick, dark hair. "Give me a minute." A few more taps on her Palm. "Okay, how about six-thirty tomorrow after cheer practice? Dance classes are at eight this week." She

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found Kathryn's eyes again. "That gives us ninety minutes."

Before Kathryn could answer, two guys—a blond and a freckle-faced brunet—walked up. Both were juniors on the debate team, sons of senators. The blond took a step closer. He wore his usual cocky smile, the one that convinced so many of her friends to fall at his feet. "How's TJ's finest freshmen?"

"Well," Hannah lowered her chin and raised her brow at the boy. She wasn't interested, so why not have a little fun? "We're *fantastic*." She raised her voice above the conversations and clanking lunch trays in the cafeteria. In a school marked by money and madness, Hannah Roberts was one of the wealthiest, most prestigious girls on campus. There was no shortage of interested guys. "The question isn't how are the finest freshmen, but why the jerky juniors care?"

"Nice." The blond was unfazed. His grin crept a little higher into his cheeks. "Nothing gets to you, does it, Hannah Roberts?"

"Not much." She gave a practiced little wave to the guys. "See you around."

The bell rang before they could answer. The blond cocked his head. "Give me a call when you want a real man, Hannah."

"Okay." She took a long sip of water. "If I run across any, you'll be the first to know."

They walked away, Freckle Face laughing at Blondie.

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Hannah chuckled, took the last two bites of her salad, stood, and tossed the plate into the nearest trashcan. Millie and Kathryn took up their places on either side of her.

“I can’t believe you did that!” Millie’s eyes were wide. “That was Jaden Lanning!”

“So?” Hannah picked up her pace. “I can’t stand him.” She rolled her eyes. “He thinks he’s every girl’s gift. Besides, I don’t have time for guys.”

“You don’t have time for us, either.” Kathryn hugged her books to her chest. She was doing her best to keep up as they maneuvered their way through the halls to their next class—a speech course, the only one they all shared. Kathryn blew at a wisp of her bangs. “Ever think about slowing down?”

“Never.” Hannah’s answer was even quicker than her pace. “I like staying busy.”

“All right.” They reached the classroom door and Kathryn lowered her voice to a whisper. “I just wish I knew what you were running from.”

Hannah didn’t answer. Already the conversation was too close for comfort. She gave her friend a smile that said she was finished talking. Then she made her way to her desk.

Her speech today was on the challenges of international politics—a topic normally reserved for juniors and seniors. But Hannah handled it like a master, no trouble. She could’ve given the talk without a bit of research. International politics was her parents’ life.

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After school she led the cheerleaders in a new dance routine, one the cheer coach had asked her to create. “You’re a better dancer than me, Hannah. Would you mind?”

“Not at all,” Hannah had told her. Every challenge was a reason to keep going.

By five o’clock the squad had the dance down. Hannah grabbed her duffel bag and her roller backpack and sprinted across campus to the yearbook room. It was seven-thirty before she called Buddy for a ride. She must’ve looked exhausted because when he pulled up he gave her a worried frown.

“Runnin’ on empty again, Miss Hannah?” He caught her look in the rearview mirror.

“A little.” She smiled back.

Some days she spent more time talking to Buddy Bingo than anyone in her family. That wasn’t saying much. Most of the year, the mansion she lived in was empty, home to just her and her grandmother.

Her father was the U.S. ambassador to Sweden, a former senator well known in the highest political circles. Her mother kept his social calendar, but for the past year she’d worked some at the embassy, serving as liaison between Swedish bankers and various politicians on several key projects.

There was talk that sometime in the next five years,

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her parents might return home so her mother could run for senate in Virginia. “Then I’ll take over the social calendar,” her father had quipped more than once during their last visit that summer.

The ride home was quiet. Hannah wondered if Buddy was praying. Buddy was a man who talked to God, and most nights he’d tell her he was praying for her—something she didn’t quite understand. God—if there was a God—seemed far away and uninvolved. Hannah wasn’t sure if He had time to know who the real Hannah Roberts was, the reason she ran from one event to another without ever taking a day off.

“Things okay at school?” Buddy took a slow left turn onto the hilly road that led to The Colony.

“Great.” Hannah yawned. “Aced my speech on the challenges of international politics, tore up in cheerleading, and designed the layouts for a third of the yearbook.”

“You mean you didn’t solve world hunger between classes?” Buddy’s voice was upbeat, teasing her.

“Not today.” She pressed her head back into the leather seat. “Maybe tomorrow.”

“You’ll probably try.” Buddy chuckled. “Busy, busy girl. You sound like a twenty-five-year-old grad student. Not a high school freshman.”

“My teachers say that.” She breathed out. This was her resting time, and she made the most of it. She could’ve fallen asleep in the backseat of the new Lincoln.

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"I guess it comes from hanging out with adults. That and staying busy."

"But you're a kid first, Miss Hannah. Don't forget that."

"I'm all right, Buddy. Staying busy keeps me sane." Her feet were sore, and she wiggled her toes as she stretched them out in front of her. That was the nice thing about Town Cars. Lots of leg room. "I have to be moving."

"That's because you're a butterfly, Miss Hannah. Nothing could ground you."

Hannah smiled. She liked that. A butterfly. Dear, sweet Buddy Bingo. He was a single man, the age of a grandfather. Blue eyes with a shock of white hair on his head and his face. Her friends thought he looked like Santa Claus, and when Hannah was little she used to wonder herself. He'd been a faithful driver for the Roberts family since Hannah was in third grade.

They pulled into the spacious entrance to The Colony and stopped at the guard station. Buddy waved to the man in the booth, and the man raised the gate. Buddy was beyond passwords at this point; all the guards knew him. When they pulled up at her house, he stopped the car and turned around, the way he always did. "How can I pray for you, Miss Hannah?"

Buddy asked her this every time he drove her. Usually she shrugged and told him it didn't matter; he could pray however he liked. But this time she thought a little longer.

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“I know: pray for a miracle.” She could feel her expression warm at the idea. “A Christmas miracle.”

“Okay.” Buddy gave a thoughtful nod of his head. “But Christmas miracles are the biggest, most amazing ones of all.” He squinted. “Any certain kind of Christmas miracle?”

“I’m not sure yet.” She grabbed her bags and waited for Buddy to open her door. One of her friends had talked about Christmas miracles during the yearbook meeting. The idea sounded good. Christmas miracles. Whatever that meant. And since Buddy was willing to pray, she might as well ask.

He got out, walked to her door, and opened it. “Well, Miss Hannah, you let me know if you decide. Meanwhile, I’ll pray just like you asked. For a Christmas miracle.”

It was a nice thought, one that settled her racing spirit and gave her peace even as her dance instructor forced ten minutes of pirouettes at the end of practice that evening.

She didn’t see her grandmother until ten o’clock as she trudged up to her suite. “Hannah.” The elderly woman stood, proud and stiff, outside the double doors of her own bedchamber. “How was your day?”

“Very well, Grandmother.” It was always *Grandmother*. She stopped three steps short of the landing. “Thank you for asking.”

“Have you brought up the B in Spanish?”

It was Hannah’s only low mark. She bit the inside of her cheek. “Yes, Grandmother. It’s an A-minus now.”

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“Very well.” The woman smiled, and in it was a hint of warmth. “You’ll have it up to a solid A soon, I imagine.”

“Yes.” Hannah took another step. “Soon.”

“I assume you finished your work in class today?” Her grandmother raised her chin. “It’s very late for extra attention to your studies at this hour.”

“I’m finished, thank you.” Hannah looked at her grandmother and felt the corners of her lips push up into her cheeks. The woman was too formal, too taken with her parents’ world, their money. But still, she was all Hannah had, the only family she shared her daily life with.

The conversation stalled, and her grandmother bid her goodnight.

Not until Hannah was alone in her room did she let the truth she’d found out earlier today set in—a truth she couldn’t share with anyone yet, not even Buddy Bingo.

Her parents wouldn’t be coming home for Christmas this year.

They’d sent her an E-mail that morning before school. Usually they visited in summer and at Christmas—both times for a few weeks. But this year the schedule at the embassy was too busy.

“The social calendar is full, my dear,” her mother wrote. “I’m afraid we’ll be Christmas’ing in Sweden this year.”

And like that, Hannah’s Christmas had gone down the drain. Without her parents, there would be no Christmas parties or trips into the city to see the Living Christ-

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mas Tree and the annual pageant performances in the theater district. No one to exchange presents with or share a cup of cocoa with on Christmas Eve.

Her parents were even busier than she was, so she wouldn't miss out on any deep conversation or sentimentality or warm, cozy traditions—the things that made up Millie's and Kathryn's Christmas holidays. But without her parents home, the time would be quiet and lonely, just her and her grandmother—a woman who didn't believe in wasting resources every twenty-fifth of December simply because the calendar read, "Christmas."

She pulled off her dance clothes, tossed them into the hamper, and laid her blazer and skirt on the back of the sofa. The housekeepers preferred she didn't hang up her own clothing. Their method was better, easier to work with.

When the lights were off she lay there, considering her friend Kathryn's comment from earlier in the day again. *"I just wish I knew what you were running from."*

The idea bounced around her brain like a pinball. She was running from a dozen things, wasn't she? From her empty mansion and her grandmother's unsmiling face, from quiet dinners and a forgotten childhood. And now she was running from Christmas. At least when her parents came home for the holidays she could convince herself they cared. They might not talk to her much or show a genuine interest in her life the way other parents did, but at least they came.

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Now, though, there was no denying the obvious. Her parents had chosen their friends and social obligations over spending Christmas with their daughter. She felt a stinging in the corners of her eyes.

Of course she was running.

Every time she thought about the E-mail a sad sort of ache started in her belly. An ache that hurt all the way to her heart. If she didn't keep busy, running from one obligation to another, the hurt would eat her alive. It shouted at her now, reminding her that no one really cared, no one knew the private places in her heart.

They especially didn't know about the memories.

Now, in the dark, they came to her again. Memories that crept through the window and kept her company on cold November nights like this one. She remembered herself as a little girl, three or four years old, sitting in a small living room—a space no bigger than her walk-in closet. She was looking at her mother—a much younger version of her mother—and in the memory she was sitting near the feet of a handsome, strapping man, and the man was playing a guitar.

The song ended and the man pulled her into his arms. He nuzzled his face against hers and the two of them rubbed noses and she felt like the luckiest little girl in the world. In the memory, her daddy loved her. Both her parents did. There were other memories, all from about the same time, and in each one her parents were happy and laughing. Talking to her and holding her and

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reading to her and getting down on the floor to play with her.

She opened her eyes and stared at the ceiling ten feet overhead. In the darkness she could barely make out the molding along the perimeter of the room. Here was the problem: if that was the memory, where had it come from? And why had her parents changed?

Even when they did come home, they were busy entertaining dignitaries stateside, busy throwing parties for political friends they hadn't seen since their last visit. Almost none of their time was set aside for her. The family chauffeur cared more about her life.

She thought of Buddy Bingo and the notion of a Christmas miracle and a chill ran down her arms. She knew what she wanted now, what he could pray for. She would tell him the details tomorrow; that way, if he was putting in an order with God in the near future he could be more specific.

What she wanted more than anything in the world would take divine help to pull off. Nothing simple like a new handbag or a trip to France. What she wanted was bigger than that: she wanted her parents to come home for Christmas. When she'd received the E-mail that morning, Hannah had written back. "How completely understandable that my parents would choose parties in Sweden over Christmas with me. Love you, too."

Her mother's response was quick and to the point.

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“It’s impossible this year, Hannah. We’ll see you during summer vacation.”

And that was that. In fact, at this point—with her mother’s social calendar booked through the holidays and her father entertaining princes at the embassy—it would take more than wishful thinking to get her parents home.

It would take a miracle.

A Christmas miracle.

CHAPTER ONE



*M*otherhood never slowed Carol Roberts. Not when she'd first had Hannah fifteen years ago, and not now.

Back when Hannah was born, her father took care of her. He was smitten by the dark-haired, blue-eyed baby from the moment she came home. Hannah was a good girl. When she was old enough for kindergarten she was easily top of the class, and she held that distinction up until her current year as freshman at Thomas Jefferson College Preparatory. Carol was proud of her. But Hannah was still a child, and ambitious career plans didn't mix with children. Even the nicest children.

That's why Carol didn't mind living half a world away from Hannah. The two kept in touch through E-mail and phone calls, and twice a year—summer and Christmas—Carol and her husband found their way back to the States for a visit. Hannah wouldn't have had

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any normal sort of life living overseas, and it wasn't as if they had any choice.

Carol's husband was ambassador to Sweden.

The role of ambassador came with a host of responsibilities—some political, some practical, and some purely social in the name of goodwill. That November numerous dignitaries had passed through the office, and plans had been made for a round of holiday parties that would involve key international politicians—all of whom deserved the attention of Jack Nelson Roberts Jr.

Carol loved being in the middle of it all. Whether the day's work included a luncheon with visiting influentials or a party at a nearby ballroom, she thrived in her husband's arena, being a part of what he did—not only to help him look good, but because she had political aspirations of her own.

Maybe when Jack was finished with his work at the Swedish embassy, they could return to Maryland and she could try her hand at an office—something small to start with—and eventually work her way to being a representative, or a senator, even. She would be closer to Hannah that way. By then her daughter would be older—old enough that Carol could hire her as an intern and the two could get to know each other better.

For now, though, that type of day-in, day-out relationship would have to wait. Life at the embassy was simply too busy, too important, to take a chance on missing a key party or business dinner. Never had there been so

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many people to connect with, so valuable a host of politicians to get acquainted with. They were doing the United States a favor by giving the job their complete attention as winter approached. That was the reason they'd made their decision about the holidays.

This Christmas—for the first time—there would be no trip home. The holiday social demands on the embassy were too great to leave behind. Late the night before, Carol had alerted Hannah about the conflict. There would be a change of plans, she told her daughter. “Your father and I won't be coming home for Christmas after all,” she wrote. “Not this year.”

She'd hoped Hannah would understand. Christmas was just another day, after all. Another day in a round of parties and celebrating and merriment that went from September to January, and January to June, one year into the next for the Roberts family. Certainly Hannah could get through one Christmas without being dragged to a round of adult parties in Washington, D.C. In fact, Carol had expected Hannah might be relieved. The revised plan meant Hannah could spend the holidays relaxing with her grandmother or visiting her school friends.

But Hannah's response had been short, almost jaded.

“Fine, Mother,” she'd shot back in an E-mail that morning. “How completely understandable that my parents would choose parties in Sweden over Christmas with me. Love you, too.”

Love you, too? Carol had stared at those words, puzzled.

A U T H O R ' S N O T E



Hello friends!

Merry Christmas, and thanks for traveling with me through the pages of yet another Red Gloves novel. It's become part of my pre-Christmas tradition, writing these stories and bringing them to you, knowing that for many of you they are now a part of your traditions as well.

If this is your first Red Gloves novel, let me give you a little background. In the book *Gideon's Gift* I told the story of a sick little girl and an angry homeless man and the gift that changes both their lives forever. That gift was a pair of red gloves. In the back of that book, I listed service project ideas—Red Gloves Projects. The goal was that you would travel from the pages of the story to the streets of your community, where you and your family or friends or coworkers might do something to help the homeless.

Next came *Maggie's Miracle*, with Red Gloves Projects

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for needy children, and *Sarah's Song*, with Red Gloves Projects for the elderly. Always the red gloves play a cameo role in the story, bringing to mind again the gift Gideon gave to old, angry Earl in the first Red Gloves novel.

Hannah's Hope, of course, is a story centered around an earnest teenager who wants desperately to be reunited with her military father. The fact is around our country today there are thousands of children who feel the same way Hannah did. Not because they've been separated from their parents by thoughtlessness, the way Hannah was. Rather, they're separated because of military service.

Because of this, and to bring honor to the men and women who serve this country through the U.S. Armed Services, this year's Red Gloves Projects will center around the military. Our family started a Red Gloves Project for the military a few years ago. When we're in an airport, whenever we see a uniformed soldier, we slip him or her a twenty-dollar bill. Then we tell him or her, "Thank you for defending our freedom. Have lunch on us."

My kids and I did that one time at O'Hare International Airport. One of the uniformed soldiers was a tentative-looking young man standing in a food line with an older man who appeared to be his father. We gave him the money and the thank you and returned to our table.

A few minutes later, the young man's father approached us. He had tears in his eyes. "My son is going back for a second tour in Iraq." He held out his chest,


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clearly proud of his boy. “We would’ve been tempted to feel pretty low today.” He paused. “You will never know how much your gift meant to us.”

My kids and I were left with a joy that is indescribable. The simple joy of giving the gift of hope and appreciation to someone who deserves it.

With that in mind, I bring you this year’s Red Gloves Projects:

RED GLOVES PROJECTS

 By networking through your church or school or workplace, identify two to four soldiers currently serving overseas. Make a plan to bring them as much joy and appreciation as possible this Christmas. Round up as many people as you can, and have them write thank-you letters to the soldiers. You might contact your local school or organize this through your place of employment. Letters from both children and adults would be best. Next, purchase something special to go with the letters. Soldiers tell me that chewing gum and jelly beans are especially nice in the dusty desert areas. Finally, pack the letters and gifts in a box and top it off with a pair of Red Gloves and a copy of *Hannah's Hope* or another Christmas story whose message you enjoy. You might consider multiple copies so the soldier can pass them out to his or her friends. Reading material is hard to come by.

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- ✿ Contact your local Armed Services recruiting office and ask if there are any soldiers who will not have the finances to come home for Christmas. Organize a group of people willing to help in this matter. Stage a fundraiser, or have these people donate money to the cause. Then arrange with the local office to purchase airfare for that soldier. Make sure you know the date and time he or she will be returning. Plan for your group to be at the airport with signs that read, “Welcome Home,” and “Thank you!”

- ✿ Some soldiers will not have time off during Christmas. This will be an emotional burden on their families, but it can also be a financial strain. Talk to the local Armed Services office again, and ask if there are soldiers whose families could benefit from donated gifts. If so, get a group together and purchase those gifts. Deliver them with letters to the families, thanking them for sacrificing time with their loved ones so that we can remain a free country.

- ✿ Using the method in the first idea, locate a soldier who has family in your area. Next contact the soldier and express an interest in letting his or her entire unit know how grateful you are for their service. In our area, third-grade teacher Kathy Santschi arranged a campaign called “Jelly Bellies for Jonathan.” Jonathan Vansandt is a friend of ours, and he had expressed a

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general wish in his unit for Jelly Bellies. All told, Kathy Santschi's third graders collected well over a hundred pounds of Jelly Bellies. Jonathan was the recipient, but he shared Jelly Bellies with dozens of soldiers serving in Iraq alongside him. The candy came with letters from the children, and Jonathan says it lifted the spirits of the entire unit for weeks. You could do this sort of thing with chewing gum or inspirational novels or whatever you think might change the course of a few weeks for an entire unit of soldiers.

❁ Of course, the one thing we can all do for our men and women serving overseas is pray. Make a prayer calendar with your family or group, and choose to deliberately pray for those serving in all branches of the Armed Forces. Pray for our president and the decisions he must make in the fight for freedom. And pray that God's mighty hand of protection be over everyone fighting for freedom across the world.

❁ You may not have twenty dollars for every soldier you see in an airport or at a supermarket this Christmas. But make a point of going up and shaking his or her hand. Look that soldier in the eyes and be clear about how thankful you are. You never know. Your words of thanks might make all the difference.

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I pray you have a wonderful, joyous Christmas season, finding time with friends and family, and making special note of the moments together. The years fly quickly, and what we celebrate today will tomorrow be but a memory. Please contact me and tell me about your Red Gloves Projects. They are happening around the world now. If we all do our part to experience the joy of giving, together we truly can put Christ back into our Christmas celebration.

Until next time, in His light and love,

Karen Kingsbury

P.S. I'd love to hear from you, as always.
www.KarenKingsbury.com