



# Heaven Begins Now

a Serialization of

## All The Way To Heaven

by Elizabeth Sherrill

It's *too* good, that's the trouble with the heaven to which Jesus the Way is taking us. It can't be true, the gift is too enormous, certainly it can't be meant for *me*.



## The Gift

In the inquirers' classes before my confirmation, I went through a sequence of emotions. Disbelief, dawning comprehension, joy. Jesus was *my* Truth, *my* Way, *my* Life?

Six months after my trip to the cathedral in June 1962, when I recited the Creed and was confirmed, I watched the same progression mirrored in the face of a small boy who likewise received an unimaginable gift. Tomu was the seven-year-old son of the yard man whose services came with the house we rented in Uganda that fall. All day Tomu trailed behind his father as he cut the grass with great swipes of his machete.

Tomu followed his father, that is, until the little boy heard a car coming. At the approach of an automobile -- an infrequent occurrence on our isolated hilltop -- Tomu would run to see it appear. He simply doted on cars; he could hear one coming moments before the cloud of red dust on the road below alerted me to an impending visit.

Often it was the green VW bug driven by the editor of the Kampala newspaper for which John and I were writing. As long as that car sat in our driveway, Tomu would hover near it, occasionally reaching out to touch it reverently with a single finger.

### Christmas

As Christmas approached, I went shopping in Kampala. And there I saw it, in

the window of a toy store: a miniature VW eight inches long. And wonder of wonders, it was green!

When we gave Tomu his package on Christmas Eve, he made no attempt to open it. He turned the box in its red-and-gold wrapping over and over in evident fascination, then politely handed it back. Nine-year-old Donn was Tomu's idol. Donn took the box, untied the ribbon, undid one end of the paper, and gave it to the little boy again. Tomu gazed admiringly at this new configuration and again handed it back. Taking off the rest of the gift wrap, Donn lifted up the box lid.

Seeing the toy car, Tomu's face reflected the kind of awe you see in paintings of saints confronted with the celestial vision. When he still didn't reach for the car, Donn lifted it out and handed it to him. The child held it on his two outstretched hands, trembling a little at being in contact with anything so glorious.

Then, solemnly, he handed it back once more.

I began to wonder whether this little boy had ever had a store-bought toy "Kapa! Kapa!" Donn kept telling him, Swahili for "gift." Tomu, however, spoke only the local Luganda language. Placing the toy car again in his hands, pointing to him, then to the car, then back to him, Donn at last communicated that he was to keep this object. That it was his. That he could take it away with him.

And then! Then I saw on Tomu's face a joy like the sunrise. Incredulous joy, celebratory joy, an open-mouthed smile that kept coming and wouldn't stop.

I recognized that joy. It was the joy I'd felt when slowly, stumblingly, uncomprehendingly, I grasped that inside the gorgeous packaging of St. Mark's -- the Gothic architecture, the splendid organ, the stately English of the Prayer Book -- was the Gift itself. Gods love, infinite, eternal. And that this love was mine.

No tiny part of it had I earned. I doubt if Tomu's family, in that almost cashless society, *could* have gone toy shopping. Tomu's gift, like mine, had to be purchased by someone able to pay the price. My gift too had been paid for and held out to me. God's problem, as Donn's with Tomu, is to persuade the recipient that what is too good to be true is true, nonetheless.