His Leading
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Joann Hatchett craned her neck, staring in awe and amazement at the tall skyscrapers around her. From her point of view on the sidewalk, where she felt like a tiny, insignificant creature in comparison to the towering buildings, she was positive she saw them swaying slightly.

"Come on, Jo," Jenny called. "There are far greater things to see than skyscrapers. I'll never be able to show you all I planned to unless you speed things up a bit."

Joann continued to stare upward at the tall, frightening looking buildings. How horrible to have to work on the top floors, she thought, shivering slightly. Then another thought took form...

"Hurry!" Jenny exclaimed, her voice registering open impatience.

"I was just thinking," Joann said. "Suppose the Lord shook the earth with an earthquake..."

"What about it?" came her friend's indifferent reply. "It happens all the time in some areas."

"Think of the many people who would die and the souls that would be lost!"
Jenny turned reproving eyes upon her friend. "You're too religious," she countered. "And I may as well tell you again as to wait for some other time, Joann, but religion and my crowd of friends aren't compatible. The sooner you throw your foolish ideas about God and heaven and hell aside, the better it will be for you. Now come," she ordered in a tone of voice such as Joann had never heard before.

Once inside Macy's Department Store, Joann forgot about the buildings outside. She was caught up in the spaciousness and the enormity of the store. Jenny, familiar with the store and its numerous departments and floors, moved steadily ahead, pushing her way through the throngs of shoppers and glancing every now and then over her shoulder to see if Joann was following.

Things went smoothly enough and Joann, by all but running to keep up with Jenny, managed to keep sight of her friend until after they had eaten in the store's rooftop restaurant. Then things changed:

The store became more crowded than ever. People shoved and pushed to get where they wanted to go and Joann, ever courteous and polite and refusing to shove, was not long in discovering that she was indeed lost in the crowd. She looked around her for Jenny's familiar face, but all she saw was a sea of hurried, serious-looking people -- people who no more knew her than she knew them. Worse still, they were too busy to care that she was new to the city and didn't know her way around. And why not? She was indeed insignificant in this metropolis of millions of people, a mere speck in the sea of milling, restless, shoving humanity.

For a brief moment panic boiled up within her, tightening her stomach and her throat into knots and sending daggers of fear to her heart. If only she were not so tiny and petite, she thought, watching as a man well over six feet tall made his way with long, easy strides past her and soon disappeared in the crowd. He could have located Jenny without any trouble, had he known her, she reasoned silently, deciding that the best thing for her to do was to remain calm and collected. At least that was the advise given to any who were lost in a mountain or in a blizzard -- stay calm; never panic.

Trying to follow the hurrying, frenzied looking crowd, Joan soon found herself in the men's department. She felt embarrassed when she discovered where they had led her to, but at least here she could see the counters and an occasional salesperson busy at work. It wasn't nearly so crowded as were the women's departments.

Making her way to an older looking salesman, she asked the way to the elevator. He looked at her as though it were some kind of foolish joke, then turned away in disgust to wait upon a man demanding his attention.

Blindly, Joann walked away, feeling like she was a prisoner in the store. She had been wrong in following the crowd, she now realized. They had led her, not to an elevator as she had expected and anticipated, but to a department in which she had no
interest whatever. That was the way with the crowd, she soliloquized as she walked. Generally, the crowd led one in the wrong direction -- down the wrong road.

Another thought came to mind just then, a thought that shook her to the depths. Jenny was not a "crowd" perhaps -- she was only one -- but which way was Jenny leading her?

Obsessed with the over-powering, all-possessive thought now, Joan forgot about her predicament. She remembered her first day in the new school. It had been disaster. So many hallways and doors. Which way should she go; east, west, north or south? Just when she was sure she had found her class, the door numbers along that hallway didn't coincide with what was to have been her room and she had to go another direction. Searching, searching. She was late for so many classes those first days that it proved to be a most embarrassing situation for her. Then Jenny entered the picture and saved her day -- or days.

"You're confused," Jenny had said, watching her on a particular morning as she wandered up one hallway and down another in search of her room. "It's frustrating," she had gone on. "I remember my first year here. You're new, I see," she added with a wide, warm smile.

"New and positively frightened," Joann recalled having said. "I've never been in a city this size before, and to say that it's frustrating and a bit upsetting is putting it mildly. Believe me! Brooksville had a total population of nine hundred and ten people, including the Keneers newly-arrived last set of twins, which came just before we moved away."

"You'll like it here after you're adjusted," Jenny declared. "Oh, by the way, I'm Jenny Metillo -- dark hair and all to match my give-away last name. And now I'll show you where your room is." And Jenny had taken her on a sort of tour of the school, pointing out certain land-marks, markers and differences in each turn of the hallway by which Joann could guide herself.

The tour had proved to be a lifesaver for her. She wasn't sure yet why Jenny had befriended her and come to her aid when she needed it so desperately. Perhaps it was because Walter Munson had paid some attention to her in science class -- Jenny seemed to consider Walter her property.

Was God trying to tell her something? Joann wondered now as she wandered around inside the expansive, over-crowded department store. Was He displeased, perhaps, with her over-much association with the girl? Jenny was anything but religious. Morally clean? Yes. And she never used slang or dirty by-words when she talked either. But neither was she interested in spiritual matters.

"Don't get too deeply entrenched in this church business, Jo," she had said once when Joann had witnessed to her about God's saving grace and sanctifying power in her
heart and life. "The younger set around here aren't into that sort of thing. It may be okay for a small town, but it's really very outdated for the big cities and the broad-minded young people of this day. Just wanted to clue you in, Jo. You're a sweet girl."

That was only one of Jenny's numerous "clueing-in" remarks and now -- this very day -- her latest, "The sooner you throw your foolish ideas about God and heaven and hell aside, the better it will be for you."

The store felt suddenly hot and stuffy, like it was closing in on her. Again, panic churned in her stomach and boiled up inside her being. This was God's way of showing her that she must not continue fellowshipping too frequently with Jenny. She, Joann, was in no way able to change the girl's attitude toward God and spiritual things. Always, Jenny's answer was the same: "I'm not interested, Jo. Dad and Mother have lived together without God and I'm sure I can do it, too."

No amount of heart-touching persuasion or talking could change Jenny. She remained adamant in her position.

Suddenly the illumination of what she must do overwhelmed Joann. She could not -- dare not -- yoke herself up with an unbeliever. It was a Scriptural injunction, one which applied to a good friendship as well as a boy-girl relationship. All her life, she had been inclined to believe it was meant only for the latter; now she saw clearly that it was every bit as applicable to her friendships as well.

She hurried ahead, not knowing which way she was going nor where, when she spied a ladies' restroom in front of her. Pushing the door open, she entered and found a lounge. Sighing with relief, she sank down in one of the cushioned chairs.

Oblivious of those who entered and left, Joann dropped her face in her hands and prayed, thankful to God for His faithfulness to her heart and soul. The Word had said that she was to be an "example of the believers" -- in every way -- and she meant to do just that. All her Christian life she had done everything with an eye single to God's glory, and by His grace, she meant to continue doing this.

She prayed silently but fervently and with an open heart. God knew how to send her the right kind of friends and how to lead her parents and herself to a spiritual church. He still knew where they lived and what their address was. Yes, He did.

"Pardon me, aren't you one of the new girls in school?" a soft voice asked close to Joann's ear.

Raising her head and opening her eyes, Joann saw a modestly dressed and smiling blonde-haired girl beaming down upon her. "Ye... yes, I am," she replied, standing to her feet.
"I'm Christy Morrison and I've been wanting to meet you. You're a Christian, I'm sure. It shines all through you."

Tears bounced out of Joann's eyes and chased each other down her cheeks. "Oh, thank you!" she exclaimed. "Yes, I am a Christian, and I gather that you are, too."

"Indeed I am, and so very happy to be able to say that I am. Like I said, I've been wanting to speak to you and make your friendship and have you come to church with me. But each time I went to your room, upon dismissal, you were gone. So I prayed about it and asked the Lord to lead me to you, and He has done just that. Isn't He wonderful!"

"So very wonderful! I'm Joann Hatchett, and I was just asking the Lord to please help me to find His kind of friends for me. The city is so vast and enormous and I have suddenly realized that I dare not choose the wrong kind of friends nor associate so constantly and continually with unbelievers. You are an answer to my prayer. But how did you happen to be here? I mean, well . . . this store is so very big and..."

"Oh, that!" Christy said, laughing softly and pleasantly. "I work here part time after school on some Thursday and Friday nights, plus Saturday. "They're open those two nights then?"

"Till nine o'clock. Yes."

Joann's eyes lighted with pleasure and relief. "Thank God!" she exclaimed with a sigh. "You are God's answer to my prayer all the way through. He sent you here. To me/I'm as lost in here as a person can ever be. Jenny Metillo wanted to show me the city, Macy's included. In the jostling and shoving of the throng, we got separated, the end result being that I am lost. Utterly and completely and entirely so. Which way do I go to get out of here? And how will I ever find my way home? I've never lived in a big city before and, frankly, I'm terribly confused."

"I'll see that you get home, Joann. My battered old jalopy is still in good running condition. Daddy bought it for me from a friend of his."

"You . . . you drive in this . . . this jungle of asphalt and humanity?"

Christy's laughter was bubbly and bright. "I guess when this is all you have known all your life, you don't think a thing about congestion," she answered. "It becomes a part of you; you kind of absorb it naturally. But come, I'm ready to leave. The car's in Macy's indoor parking area."

Sighing with relief and saying a heart-felt thank you heavenward, Joann followed Christy, confident of God's hand upon her life and assured of His continued leading. Yes, even in a metropolitan area.
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THE END