Len pedaled fiercely along the boulevard. He was glad he had a brand new 10-speed bicycle; at least that was one thing he wasn't ashamed of.

Brushing the shock of unruly red hair back off his forehead, he took his hands off the handle bars and pedaled fullspeed ahead, allowing the weight and proper balance of his body to keep the shiny new bicycle along the edge of the treelined, four-lane street.

A classy-lookng, yellow convertible whizzed by, loaded with giggling, laughing girls. One of the girls turned and whistled at Len, shouting, "Do I like red hair! Do I ever!"

Len felt the color mount in his cheeks. From the tips of his toes to the top of his head, he felt hot and feverish. Oh, it was awful--simply dreadful really--to blush the way he did. Why did he do it? Scads of other boys never knew what blushing was, even. He knew that in a girl, it meant she still had a sense of shame and modesty about her. But he was not a girl--very definitely not. He was a man, a senior in high school, to be exactly factual.

Dropping his hands to the handlebars, he pushed ahead, dreading going to school. This hadn't been his year, he decided, feeling sorry for himself. First of all, he had two strikes against him . . . he had a head of unruly red hair and (as if that wasn't enough) he had freckles, too. It seemed to Len that if God was going to "bless" (or shouldn't it be
"curse") a young man with red hair that He'd have kept the freckles for someone else--someone who didn't already have one bothersome thing such as red hair. But no, he had been "endowed" with both. Frankly, he hated his hair and the freckles, and He felt like God had greatly disfavored him.

His thoughts frightened him. Why, it was evil for him to allow such foul things to dwell in his mind. He knew this; and the realization that God already knew what was in man's heart, namely his, filled the young man with an even greater fear. How sad, too, if his parents knew of his evil thoughts and his thoughts of evil. It would literally crush and break their hearts, he suddenly realized.

A gentle spring breeze floated past him, ruffling his shirt, teasing his hair and cooling his hot body all at the same time. High in a maple tree a robin sang lustily, thankful to God for another spring in which to build its nest and raise its numerous families, its utter and entire dependency for food upon its Creator.

Len wished he could feel thankful like the robin, but so many things just hadn't "panned out" for him this past year. Take the move to Shrevesville; whoever would have thought he'd have to change schools the last half of his senior year--of all times! But he did. Yes, indeed. And he had to try to get adjusted and oriented fast enough so the teachers could get at least a feeble bit of insight and glimpse of his efforts before graduation time rolled around. In Blakely High, he was always on the honor roll. Here he had a bit of a struggle.

"Hey, aren't you one of the seniors!" a young man exclaimed, drawing alongside of Len, his bicycle old and much-worn looking.

"Uh-huh," Len replied, keeping his 10-speed moving steadily.

"I thought you were," the young man answered. "In fact, I've been admiring you."

Len gulped; then he swallowed. "Th... thanks. I guess I am pretty lucky to have a new bike. I worked hard for it . . . ."

"The bicycle's pretty; sure. But I admire you, not the blue vehicle you're pedaling."Len didn't know what to say.

"I always did say I wish I had red hair and freckles . . . ."

Oh, no! Len groaned.

"You see, the man who helped me the most in life has the most beautiful head of red hair I've ever seen. He is the kindest and most compassionate person my sister and I ever met."
By now Len was listening.

"I'm Kirk Mefford," the fine-looking, dark-haired boy said. "Betsy and I were orphaned years ago... Betsy's my sister. For years we were shuffled from one foster home to another. Then God sent Lemuel and Mary Mefford our way." Here Kirk broke down and cried. "I feel so... so unworthy." Len felt all choked up inside.

"The Meffords were looking for a brother and a sister to adopt," Kirk said. "And wonder of wonders, the lady who put us in these various foster homes suggested that the Meffords look into adopting us. They did and within a few months time, we were no longer orphans, but a real family again. That was twelve years ago, and today, Betsy and I owe everything we are to Dad and Morn Mefford. They've made us their very own. And, as though that wasn't enough, they led us to their dearest and best Friend, Jesus. Betsy and I are two of the happiest people on earth. We have a beautiful home, two of the dearest and finest parents in the world, and we are saved and sanctified wholly and ready for Heaven. Now you see why I say I wish I had red hair and freckles; I'd look like my dad. You... you could pass for his son. Oh, I love your hair. God favored you..."

They pedaled on in silence. Len felt too embarrassed to reveal his inmost thoughts and feelings to this young man.

"I guess I didn't get your name," Kirk ventured. "Oh, I'm sorry; I'm Leonard Hawkins. Dad's company transferred him here in late December. We live on Crestwood Drive. I'm sure glad to meet you, Kirk. You've given me something to think about."

"I'd sure like to be your friend, Leonard, even though I'm one grade beneath you."

Len's face brightened. "That would be great, Kirk. You see, I haven't made too many friends since moving here. I guess... well, I may as well confess, I've been kinda' bitter about having to move and change schools so close to graduation time."

"But your dad couldn't help that," Kirk stated philosophically and understandingly. "I'm sure, if he's anything like my dad, that he felt every bit as sick about the move as you did. Good dads are like this. Just think what the move meant to your folks, Leonard. No doubt, they lived wherever it is you came from for all of their lives. Or at least most of their lives. This can be painful, especially when one has all his friends and relatives living there."

"And we do," Len confessed.

"I feel sorry for all of you," Kirk commented. "Honestly, the first two or three years after our parent's accident, Betsy and I seemed to move every few months. No fault of ours, I can truthfully say. But I know how painful that can be. Devastating really. Fortunately, Betsy and I always stayed together. This in itself was a miracle. But, like
Dad and Morn have often said, it was God working for us all the time. Oh, it's wonderful to know the Lord. You do know Him, don't you, Leonard?"

The question, so pointed and straightforward, left Len speechless. Was he a Christian? Did he know the Lord? It was a shattering question, a real blow to his pride.

"I thought maybe you . . . you were." Kirk faltered. "In fact, I hoped you were. I've been praying so long for a Christian friend..."

Without waiting to hear more, Leonard blurted out, "I'm sorry to disappoint you, Kirk. But I realize, since listening to you talk and analyzing my heart and its feelings of bitterness, that I'm a miserable backslider. Until you rode up beside me, I was blaming God for putting something dreadful on me by giving me this head of red hair and a nose of speckled freckles to go with it. I see how very sinful I've been. It's neither the color of one's hair nor the possession or absence of freckles that makes a man what he is or is not, but rather it's the condition of the heart. And frankly, Kirk, my heart's in pretty bad shape right now. I need a change--a born again change. I know the right way. My folks are wonderful Christians; so are my sisters."

"Why not get things fixed up now, Leonard? Here's the park and over there's a shelter house. We'd have time to pray..."

Turning abruptly into the park entranceway, Len exclaimed eagerly, "I believe I will. Will you pray for me? I'm certainly not happy living without the Lord."

Kirk drew his bicycle up next to Len's. Together they walked to the shelter house and knelt in prayer, When they got to their feet a short time later, Len said, "Thanks for coming along; God sent you. By all means, I want us to be friends. You're the kind of friend I need and the kind I want."

Kirk smiled between his happy tears. "My folks will sure be glad when I tell them how God answered my prayers and gave me a Christian friend. A Christian friend with red hair just like my dad."

"And freckles, too," Len laughed as they pedaled side by side toward the school building.

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THE END