Caroline tip-toed up the porch steps and, almost noiselessly, she let herself into the house. Now, if she could get up to her room just as quietly, she'd have it made, she reasoned. At least, for an hour. Or until Mom would wonder where she was and would come looking for her.

She kicked her loafers off and shoved them under the bed, trying to erase any signs and all traces of the fact that she was in the room. She was fed up with being ordered around, with being told what she could do or could
not do. After all, she was no longer a mere babe in arms, needing a constant reminding as to what was dangerous nor who was a "good" companion or a "bad" one.

By her parent's standards, most of her favorite friends were in the latter category. To say that this "bugged" her was putting it mildly; her inner feelings bordered strongly on bitter resentment. This, she knew, was evil and sinful. But then, she did deserve a bit of freedom, she rationalized doggedly and determinedly as she squeezed herself between the bed and the wall and lay, flat on her back on the floor, reading.

She must have fallen asleep somewhere between the first and second chapters of the book, for when she regained consciousness to her surroundings, it was her mother's voice who brought her quickly out of the peaceful sleep she'd had.

"Caroline. Caroline, where are you? It's time to peel potatoes and make the salad for supper. Caroline, come this instant! You're late . . ."

With all the old bitter resentment and inner turmoil churning and turning inside her, Caroline pressed her back more tightly against the floor. She would not answer, she decided quickly, listening, as her mother's voice faded and died away with her slowly retreating footsteps. Then she began reading again.

She heaved a sigh of relief and stifled the triumphant giggle which almost escaped her lips, feeling suddenly bold and daring.

At first, the new feeling of daring frightened her; then she thought of Kayla and Darla and how very free they were and how daringly-bold they lived. It gave impetus to her own desires.

Rising suddenly and quickly, she retrieved the loafers from beneath the bed and tip-toed out of the room to the top of the stairs where she waited, listening. Not hearing any sound from the kitchen, she hurried down the steps and ran outside, slipping into her shoes when she was a safe distance from the house. The rest was easy. In a very little while, she was at Darla's house.

"Hey, what brings you here?" Darla asked from the porch where she sat swinging.
"I'm tired of being bossed around, Darl, of being treated like a juvenile. Yesterday, Mom left a note telling me to clean out the pantry and sort through mountains of clothes to see which ones were good enough to give to the Kibley family. I thought I'd never get done. Today, I did something different..."

"Like what?" Darla asked quickly, sitting forward on the seat.

"I hid from mother. Oh, she called me, to be sure. But I just ignored her call; you know, pretended I wasn't home."

Darla jumped off the swing. With hands on her hips and eyes flashing, she said, "You didn't, Caroline! How could you do such a thing? How? With a family as wonderful as yours, how could you do that? You're an ungrateful, selfish, impudent young woman; that's what you are. You shock me. Shock me! How fooled can one be!" she wailed. "I thought you were different, that you had something I needed... something I wanted. Oh, Caroline! Caroline, I'm so disappointed. So terribly disappointed." And Darla slumped back on the swing, looking forlorn and wretched and miserable, great tears drenching her cheeks.

Caroline felt suddenly weak and faint. All the daring bravado of a few minutes ago was gone. "Dar... Darla," she stuttered, "I... I'm sorry, I really am. I... I thought you were so very brave and so... so independent and happy that I... I wanted to be like you. Aren't you happy?" She asked the question because she felt she had to know the truth.

Removing her hands from her face, Darla exclaimed brokenly, "Happy? Are you kidding! I'm miserable. Miserable! And so dissatisfied. I hate myself and everything I've done. Happy? Who could be, in a family where tension and trouble are paramount? Our home's a veritable keg of explosive powder. At all times, too. Oh, Caroline, I thought you could help me. I hoped, hoped... ." Her voice trailed off into a penetrating meaningful silence.

Caroline slumped down on the porch swing beside Darla, feeling equally wretched and miserable. Life was so very complex at times and could be so devastatingly frustrating, she soliloquized pensively.

"Why'd you do it?" Darla asked suddenly, breaking into the knee-deep silence. 'Your folks don't deserve your shoddy treatment and unkindly
behaviour, Caroline. If I had parents and a family like you have, believe me, I'd be different. But with everything that goes on around here, I figure there's no need for me to even try to be different. You'd have to live here to believe it. If this is happiness, I want no part of it."

Caroline straightened up in the swing. "But there is something better, Darla," she admitted humbly. "Something real and... and far better."

"Then why didn't you stick with it?" came the immediate terse reply.

"Because I just didn't have what I should have had. I've been following the Lord 'afar off,' I'm sorry to say. But my folks... well, that's a different story. They're real. Genuine through and through."

"That is what hurts me so dreadfully, Caroline. They don't deserve to be treated like you're treating them. I may act bold and daring and rough and tough, but believe me, on the inside, I'm as soft as melted butter. I know what's right and what's wrong, and I hate the things I'm doing. It's not pleasant to go to bed night after night with a guilty conscience that nags you when you're awake and won't even allow you a peaceful, untroubled sleep when you finally do fall asleep. Oh, what I wouldn't give to be free from it all!"

Caroline stood quickly to her feet. Taking Darla by the hand, she said, "Come Darla, we'll go to my home. We're both in the same predicament. You wanted to be like you thought I was and I wanted to emulate you and Kayla. Neither of us is happy. I thought it would be so nice to have a bit of freedom..."

"Freedom, did you say? Why, you have all the freedom in the world. Just because your folks assigned you your share of work around the house should not have made you think you didn't have freedom. I wish my parents would care enough about me to include me in the work plan. If I do try to help, Mother yells at me and tells me to get out of her kitchen. And all sorts of things like that. So you see what I mean."

"Talk about being deceived;" Caroline exclaimed, "I've been! And now that each of us has admitted our guilt and our need, come with me. My mother and father know how to pray and get hold of God. I'm going to change, Darla, and this time, you'll really know the difference. How about you? Coming with me?"
Placing her hand in Caroline's, Darla got to her feet. "I've waited a long time for this," she said tearfully, "and now that you've finally asked, well, nothing's going to stop me. Nothing! I want your folks' kind of freedom. Do you hear, Caroline?"

"Yes, I hear you; you're coming in loud and clear and strong. And I predict that within a short period of time now both of us will only just have begun to know the true meaning of the word "freedom." I see that what I thought was freedom is not freedom at all. But I'm going to find freedom, Darla. This time, by God's help and His grace . . . after I've asked Mother's forgiveness and when I'm genuinely converted . . . I'm going on and getting wholly sanctified. But come, one must first be converted before he can have his personal Pentecost," Caroline said, leading the way toward home.