I checked my watch and saw that with fastly-moving feet and legs, plus good management of time when once I was inside the store, I'd have exactly half an hour for a bit of shopping. Not much time, I admitted silently, but enough to get Mom that peach-colored blouse I'd seen last week.
I slid into one of the sections of the mammoth revolving door and soon found myself inside. Talk about people; they were everywhere. For a brief moment, I felt like turning around and leaving, but then I decided against it. Since I was here, I may as well use the fastly-fleeting minutes to good advantage. So, maneuvering my body between people and packages and shopping bags, I hurried . . . or tried to . . . down the marble-floored aisle to where I had seen the blouse.

A lady with a folded umbrella poked me in the ribs and I jumped, knocking the packages out of another woman's arms and scattering the contents of her shopping bag over the floor.

"I'm sorry," I apologized sincerely, stooping to help gather the things from the floor.

Instead of scolding and berating me, the soft-spoken woman said kindly, "It was my fault; I should not have been carrying so many things. Not when I could have had them sent to my home. My eyes are failing me, too. I'm sorry for the inconvenience, young man. Thank you so kindly for helping me get things back together again."

I was shocked by such a display of gentleness and meekness. No ordinary thing, this. "Ma'am," I said, "you must be a Christian."

A smile played at the corners of her mouth. "How did you know?" she asked softly as tears brimmed in her eyes.

"That's easy; no tongue lashing nor scolding. Now stay right here while I go and get you two shopping bags, one to replace the one that tore and the other to put some of these packages in."

"You are most kind," came the soft reply as I darted through the crowded store after the largest shopping bags I could find.

By the time I reached the lady and helped to pack the things in her two bags, my time for shopping was up; the store was closing for the day.

Heading for the door, moving at the proverbial "snail's pace," along with the myriad holiday shoppers, my heart felt happy and light, the way it always does when self is lost and forgotten by doing for others.
I was almost at the door when I heard someone call my name. At least, I thought it was me who was being spoken to. Turning, I came face to face with Evelyn Sandberg. "Hi, Evelyn," I said. "Fancy seeing you here."

"And why not?" she asked mischievously. "I work here."

"You do? Since when?" I asked as we went outside.

"Since last month, when I applied for part-time work over the busy holidays. Whew, talk about busy, Kerston! Today's been almost like a mad house. And so many hard to please and hard to satisfy customers. Would you believe it? They seem to come in 'streaks,' one after the other of that kind. Today was one of those days. Am I ever glad to be going home where peace and joy reign!"

"I must have encountered one of those rare souls then, Evelyn. In fact, I did encounter a rare person. I jumped when I was poked in the ribs by a fastly-moving umbrella . . . held, of course, by a female hand. I jumped against this woman . . . the rare one . . . and scattered her packages almost like one scatters chicken feed outside. Talk about gentle and meek and kind! She was. But she was also a Christian. So you see, you had at least one pretty special person in the store today."

"Two," Evelyn said, smiling. "The rare woman and you."

"If you're doing that kind of addition," I countered, "then there should be three; you being the third. Now how about riding home in my fancy buggy? It will be a great deal nicer than riding a smoky bus and it won't cost you a cent, either."

"For your benefit, Kerston, a cent wouldn't get me on the bus, let alone get me home. Do you know what the fare is from here to where I get off? Seventy-five cents one way! Yes, I'll be grateful for the ride home."

I let out a low whistle. "That's something else!" I exclaimed. "Almost double what it was when I used to ride it. I'm glad I could get myself a car. It's no beauty job but it runs like a new one. I call it Old Faithful, because it gets me everywhere I want to go."
"That's more than can be said for the bus I ride: A few weeks ago it broke down and we had to wait two hours for a replacement. By the way, what brought you down town today?" "A blouse."

"A blouse?"

Evelyn looked at me like she thought I had misunderstood her question. I smiled, enjoying her puzzled look.

"A blouse." I repeated my two-word reply again. Then I went on to explain. "I saw the prettiest peach-colored blouse for mother when I was in here last week. I should have bought it then and saved time; but I didn't . . ."

"A typical male."

"Really!" I exclaimed in mock surprise. "By whose standards?"

"Typical by my father's and three brothers' standards and actions," Evelyn admitted, with another of her pretty mischievous smiles.

"Aside from the 'typical' types and comparisons, I was going to buy that blouse for mother and have it gift wrapped. But due to unfortunate circumstances, I didn't accomplish my noble purpose. As is all too obvious," I said throwing my empty hands outward to emphasize the validity of my statement.

Evelyn laughed. "That last gesture wasn't necessary," she teased. "I was fully convinced without the arm work. Why don't you let me buy it for you and have it gift wrapped? It will save you time. I realize how tight your schedule is. You must get dreadfully tired, holding two part-time jobs and finishing school this next term."

"I do, and I will. I mean, I do get weary sometimes, and I'll be thankful indeed if you'll get the blouse for my mother. It was on the mannequin and it . . ."

"I know which one you mean; I put it on display. That's where I work part-time."
"You're great, Evelyn. Thanks much. I'll give you the money and mom's size. This sure will take a load off me. And now, here's the parking lot where Old Faithful's waiting. I'll put you in the car, then I'll go and pay and be back in a jiffy."

Weaving our way through the crowded streets, Evelyn said, "Guess what I plan to do for young peoples' meeting this Sunday night, the Lord willing."

"I'm not a good guesser," I confessed, "tell me."

"What you did today fits in perfectly with what I want to challenge our group to do."

"What I did?" I asked quickly, poking my index finger against my chest and keeping my eyes on the road.

"Don't be so naive, Kerston. You didn't know it, but I saw what you did for that 'rare' woman. I saw everything that happened. I tried to get near enough to help; but some people are so very rude. They pushed and shoveled me mercilessly. I couldn't just drop the box of things I was carrying from Ginny's department to mine. So I stood watching; helplessly, I confess. Your gift of awareness is one thing I plan to challenge our youth group with."

"Hm," I said, totally unaware of that gift of awareness about which Evelyn was speaking. I was doubly-sure that I was going to benefit from her challenge and her scriptural presentation. Evelyn was one of the truly rare finds in young women and, for all the seventeen, almost eighteen, years I had known her, she was spiritually inclined and spiritual, having been converted and sanctified wholly like I was -- as a child.

"You know, Kerston," she was saying, "while I was on my knees praying last Monday morning, the Lord seemed to speak to my soul about this beautiful gift of awareness."

I gave her a quick sideways glance, knowing I dare not take my eyes off the road, where traffic inched its way along, bumper to bumper in all three lanes. "I'm sure it was something wonderful, Evelyn," I answered, noticing -- in that quick glance -- the utter and total serenity of her face. She looked angelic, I thought, as my heart did a crazy little happy flip-flop inside my
chest. For all the years I'd known her, she had seemed more like a sister to me than anything else. But now . . .

I gulped, then swallowed. And then, quite suddenly, I knew why I couldn't get interested in any of the girls in our church. Yes, now I knew why. The revelation came so gently but firmly that I felt almost as if a bright light had been turned on in my heart; in my head -- or both.

"Are you listening," she asked gently, totally oblivious to the snail-paced traffic and seeming only to savor and enjoy the warmth, and the friendliness between us.

"Yes. You were saying something about the gift of awareness . . ."

She laughed. It sounded like a happy little stream on a warm June day.

"Like I said," she began again, leaning her head back against Old Faithful's old but still-soft cushion, "I have had a new awakening . . . a keen awareness . . . to so many things since the Lord spoke to me. To name a few: awareness to the needs of others; like you displayed and manifested today, Kerston. This will be my main point"

"But I didn't even stop to think about being aware of this need, Evelyn," I protested kindly, not feeling worthy or deserving of such honor and acclaim. "The need arose and, without thinking, I just wanted to help."

"That's what I mean, and this is what I'll be stressing: If we are where we ought to be spiritually, there will be a spontaneity of awareness to the needs of others in all areas, not the least of which will be the spiritual area. Our church could be filled and overflowing if each of us in there had this gift of awareness and acted upon it."

Again, I threw her a quick glance; it was one of approval and deep admiration "May God help me!" I exclaimed soberly, trying to think how many souls I had tried -- earnestly and untiringly -- to win to Jesus during the year. "I feel condemned," I admitted quickly. "Only two souls for Jesus all year long."

"That's better than most of them, Kerston. Furthermore, I know you; and I know how hard you tried."
"I must do more this coming year, Evelyn. I must! Imagine standing before Him, empty-handed!" Tears filled my eyes at the thought of what He had done for me -- the awful price He paid! -- and the little I had done for Him.

"I made this same vow, Kerston. By God's grace, I'm going to keep it. Then, too, I want the gift of awareness in hearing the beautiful music and the words of the lovely old hymns and the Christmas carols. We sing, too often, simply out of form and habit, not listening to nor hearing the words of the songs.

"I want an awareness so I can feel the loneliness that aches in the hearts of many, remembering that sorrow and tears are some people's daily lot and fare.

"I want an awareness to the Holiness of God, taking more time each day to speak with Him -- fellowship and commune with Him -- so I can better recognize the depth of His great Holiness and utter righteousness.

Something welled up in my heart for Evelyn. She was no ordinary girl. Her thoughts were deep thoughts, spiritual thoughts. She was what I had been looking for but hadn't recognized until this very hour "You'll make a wonderful preacher's wife someday," I said meaningfully. "And, like Benjamin Franklin stated it, so I summarize all your wonderful points and thoughts with, 'Let no pleasure tempt thee, no profit allure thee, no ambition corrupt thee, to do anything which thou knowest to be evil; so shalt thou always live joyously; for a good conscience is a continual Christmas.' End of quote. Now I'll add, Keep the gift of awareness three hundred sixty-five days a year and you'll have a perpetual Christmas, for He said, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these . . . ye have done it unto Me.'"

"That's good preaching," Evelyn said sincerely. I smiled down at her, aware of the fact that I'd found the right girl. Immediately, my heart rose up in joyful praise and gratitude to God.