Meagan Marie sipped the large strawberry milk shake slowly, almost deliberately, her mind in a grand tizzy-whirl. The shake was a celebration-treat thing to herself for having been declared the best writer and author in the Junior-Senior High category. Out of six different schools participating, her short story was voted best.
It was a wonderful feeling, being recognized as a writer and being called an author, she thought, as she stirred the creamy goodness in the tall glass with the long-handled spoon. It was a heady feeling, really, she told herself as she pushed the straw down into the thick shake and sipped it slowly, wanting to sit and savor her victory as long as possible before going home and hearing her mother's, "Meagan dust the furniture; Meagan clean the bathroom; Meagan start the supper while I finish ironing; Meagan...Meagan..." She was an author now, not a servant.

She was so absorbed in her thoughts of author-writer that she forgot where she was until she heard her name mentioned. Startled, she pushed her back against the tall booth in Andy's Icy Treats Shoppe and listened. There it was again: her name. And...and...

Meagan listened now, her world seeming to fall apart. It...it couldn't be! But yes, that was Cortney's voice.

"Honestly," she was saying, "if any one would have told me that a thing like this would have gone to Meagan's head, I wouldn't have believed it. But it has! She's so vain and...and stuck-up that I can hardly stand being around her since she was awarded the prize for best author and writer."

"I think it's sad, myself. She was always such a sweet thing. But she's changed, sure enough. Rather I should say it changed her. I wonder how her mother copes with the change."

Was...was Brent thinking that about her! Meagan felt the blood rush from her head.

"Some people can't stand promotion or popularity." This from Amy.

A chorus of laughter exploded in the second booth from Meagan's.

"No, I'm serious," Amy declared emphatically. "Some people just cannot stand promotion; it goes to their head. Instead of making them humble and meek, and giving God all the glory and praise for the accomplishment, it makes them vain and proud and haughty."

"That's if and when they're not dead to self Amy," Chuck stated emphatically. "I think we should pray for Meagan and not criticize her."
"I didn't mean to sound critical of her, Chuck," Cortney pleaded sincerely. "Honestly I didn't. Meagan and I've been friends for years. You know that. But she's become so vain, and she thinks she's so high and mighty anymore that the communication lines are gone. They're gone completely. I can't seem to get over the barriers nor through them. Every time I mention anything about what someone in the church is doing...Bill passing out all those tracts door to door in the south end of town; Doris taking it on herself to become 'eyes' to old Mrs. Baxter and her husband and 'ancient' Grandpa Deevers by reading Scripture to them each day after school, well, she turns me off with 'I'm sure Bill and Doris mean well by what they're doing, and this is all well and good, but ask them to write something...a poem even...and they're positively dull and...and ignorant.' This is what I meant when I said she's vain."

"I'm with Amy on that 'going to the head' mini-sermon she gave us just minutes ago," Brent declared sadly. "Amy didn't have points 1, 2, and 3, with subpoints A, B, and C, in her sermonette, to be sure, but she was right on target where Meagan's problem lies. If I was not aware before how utterly deceitful the carnal heart is, I'm seeing it with wide-open eyes now. And I tell you it frightens me. Meagan's deceived, she thinks she's all right. That is frightening."

"Like I said before," Chuck injected, "I think our entire group of young people should make Meagan a matter of prayer and not criticism."

"I agree," Cortney added. "She's having a bad influence on Marlin Hibbs though she's not aware of it. You know we've all been praying for Marlin, that he'll get saved. Well, he's always admired Meagan greatly. He's a writer too, as you know. So he went to Meagan about a story he had written, wanting advice, instruction, and whatever writers seek to find out and know from someone who's 'made' it. Marlin told me Meagan actually belittled him and his story, said he'd never be any good as a writer, that he may as well give it up and not give any more thought to it. It hurt Marlin. Especially since Mrs. Pattee told him he has great possibility as a writer and insisted that he enter and submit the story he'd written. And she was right about his talent for writing; his story came in third highest. Not bad, I think.

"I congratulated him and told him we were still expecting him out to our Young People's services, adding that we have really been praying for him.
Know what he replied? 'If everyone's as phony and as stuck up as Meagan Marie Miller is, forget about praying for me. Her brand isn't appealing anymore. It went sour on me.' Those are Marlin's words. Needless to say, I felt almost like a sword plunged into my heart. All these months of witnessing to and praying for Marlin, lost. And where do we go from here, where Marlin is concerned, I mean?"

"To our prayer closets," came Chuck's unhesitating, insistent and immediate reply. "To pray for both Marlin and Meagan Marie."

Meagan forgot about her strawberry shake. She wished the floor could have swallowed her up until she could escape home to her room without being seen by anybody. Especially the young people from her church. How could they think such horrid things about her? How? she wondered, pushing the straw around in the shake, her, appetite gone completely; the thrill, the glory, and the exhilaration of her accomplishment seemed to have turned suddenly sour and bitter.

She wanted to run away; to get out of Andy's Icy Treats Shoppe before anyone spied her and knew she had overheard the conversation. But there was no way she could leave without being seen by the young people from her church. She would have to walk past their booth on her way out. There was no other way!

Tears stung her eyes. Hot tears of shame, they were. Quietly, so as not to make the padded leather seat squeak, Meagan moved into the far end of the high-backed booth. She squeezed her petite frame into the corner and, with her napkin, she brushed the tears away from her eyes. No matter what happened...even if Cortney and Amy and Brent and Chuck did discover she was here, and know she had to have heard their conversation...they would not find her in tears! She had her pride, didn't she? They were all jealous of her. Yes, they were, she decided mentally. Envious, too. Well, she wouldn't give them the satisfaction of knowing she had heard! No, she wouldn't. She would show them that she wasn't vain and "high and mighty," like Cortney had said. Wait till she got to church, she would show them.

She sat until she heard them get up and leave. Then, breathing a sigh of relief and pushing her unfinished shake away, she slid out of the booth and walked, with her head held high, toward the door. If Andy recognized her as the object of conversation, he would at least have to admit that she was not
fazed by it; that she could take such things in stride, shrug them off and carry on with pride.

With pride? With pride! The words struck Meagan a shattering blow. If a sledge hammer had dropped from the sky and hit her it could not have had more force than the blow that struck her heart. Pride? Yes she had her pride, she reasoned sensibly. She was full of it. And "a proud look" was one of the seven things listed in Proverbs 6 that God hated. She not only had a proud look but she had a proud heart. Truth of the matter was, the proud look stemmed from the pride in her heart.

With the striking revelation, Meagan began sobbing. She all but ran down the street toward home when a voice called from behind her: "Meagan! Meagan, wait." It was Cortney's voice.

"Please wait for me," Cortney cried, hurrying to catch up with her friend.

She was breathless by the time she fell in step with Meagan. "You . . you heard what we said about you," Cortney said. "I didn't know you were in Andy's Shoppe until I saw you come out a few minutes ago. I was window shopping in front of Vicki's Dress Shop when I saw you leave. I'm sorry Meagan, I didn't mean to hurt you by what I said to Chuck and Brent and Amy. But it's true. I've wanted to talk to you about it to say something to help you. But each time I tried you brushed me off."

"Don't apologize, Cortney, I had it coming to me," Meagan said tearfully. "when I first heard you all talking, it made me angry. I thought you were jealous and envious. I tried making excuses for myself and my actions. But less than five minutes ago the Holy Spirit zeroed in on my problem: I'm full of carnal pride, Cortney! Full of it! Oh, I'm so ashamed of myself and how I've treated each of you. I've been hateful. And like you said, terribly vain too. Please forgive me. I wish I had never even heard of that writer's contest, nor submitted my story."

"That's not the way to feel, Meagan. God gave you a talent for writing and you must use this talent for Him or He'll take it away from you. Remember the parable of the talents! You must continue writing," Cortney said kindly. "Neither the contest nor the story made you carnal; it merely revealed, or brought out, the carnality that was hidden in your heart, the pride
that was lurking there all the time. Carnality's like that, waiting for the opportune moment to reveal itself."

"Well, I'm glad the Holy Spirit exposed mine," Meagan admitted humbly. "Now that I know it's there, I'm going to do something about it. Oh, I'm so humiliated over my actions and my words, Cortney! I must have deliverance! I've made life miserable for my family and for all of my friends, too. I'm going home to pray."

"I'm coming with you, Meagan. I love you. We all love you. God can use you mightily if you'll die out to self and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

"By God's grace I will! Meagan exclaimed. "But first I must be forgiven for this dreadful display of carnality. Oh, I must get home to pray!" she cried, running now, with Cortney by her side.