I looked across the cafeteria and spotted Kate in a far corner munching lightly on her sandwich, her eyes downcast. There were tears in her eyes, if I knew Kate and could read that downcast, woe-is-me-look on her dainty little face. Now what? I wondered, as chivalry and big-brother all came to the fore for that pixie-like tiny sister of mine.
Her name isn't really Kate, but I've called her that ever since she was a baby, Mom says. So it sticks with me. She was named Katrina Anna Marie, a rather long name for one so tiny small and petite as Kate. But that's her name; so she'll carry it with her all her life and to her grave. No fault or choosing of Kate's, mind you. Seems like Mom's one sister had a part in the naming of that tiny five-pound four-ounce tow-headed infant, so I heard. Katrina was childless. All of her married life, childless. She persuaded Mom and Dad to name their next baby, were it a girl, after her. "I would be so pleased to have a namesake," she cajoled. Well, she got her "namesake" all right, but poor Kate!

I started down the food line with my tray, trying to decide if I wanted soup or a sandwich, or both, my eyes roving periodically to the far corner and the diminutive little figure seated at the small table, when I collided with the girl in front of me. Not me, physically; my tray, I mean.

"Hey! Watch where you're going and what you're doing!" she exclaimed emphatically but pleasantly enough as she sopped the water up from her tray with a bunch of paper napkins.

"I'm sorry," I apologized. "Sorry! And I really wasn't watching where I was going nor what I was doing. Here, let me get more napkins and dry your tray," I said as I got a handful of napkins and finished wiping her tray dry. "It's a good thing you didn't have your lunch on there," I added.

She smiled in agreement, thanked me for being helpful, then moved ahead along the line.

I settled for a barbecued beef sandwich and a salad and milk, then hurried over to Kate. "So what's bothering you?" I asked, pulling the chair out and sitting down on it.

"You startled me," Kate said. Then, with her enormous blue-green eyes probing my face, she said, "What makes you think something's bothering me, Ron?"

I bowed my head, thanked God for my food, then said, "There is. You can't fool me, Kate. I guess family members are quite adept at reading each other's expressions. And yours was anything but happy. So out with it; what is it?"
Kate nibbled on her sandwich. I saw the sparkle of tears shimmer in her enormous eyes. "Did you ever feel like you're nothing, Ron?" she asked suddenly, taking me by surprise with the question.

I sat, speechless, trying to read her mind and her train of thought. Then, like a bright light was turned on inside my brain, I said, "So that's it! Miss Popularity made you feel like you're nothing. Like you're a nobody."

Kate gasped. "How'd you know?" she asked in a broken, half-sobbed whisper.

I took a bite out of my sandwich. "She's a pro at that," I said. "You're not the first person she's done that to. And I doubt you'll be the last."

"But I often have the feeling that it's true, Ron," she said. "Just look at me, I'm shy and timid and not one bit out-going."

"So . . .?"

"She . . . she's beautiful and popular and smart and witty and . . ."

"And she lets everybody know it!" I exclaimed, breaking into Kate's sentence. "Look," I said, as I took a forkful of crunchy, crispy salad, "I'm glad you aren't like Kimberly. Really glad. And thankful, too.

I'd be ashamed of you if you were. She's loud and brassy, Kate. Foul-mouthed and vulgar, too. What'd she say to you today?"

Kate dipped a french fry in the little mound of ketchup on her plate. "She told me I was a square, a dumb-bell and a perfect bore to be around."

"And you believe that?"

"The square part doesn't bother me, for a true Christian and the world just never mix. They're not compatible. And my grades are pretty good. . . ."

"Pretty good! I guess the honor roll is a rather good, though silent, 'speaker' as to one's grades. Miss Popularity's not on the honor roll. And I dare say I imagine she wishes she were."
"I wish she were, Ron. I can say this truthfully and with love in my heart for her. I'm afraid that I am a perfect bore, though."

"What makes you think this? Just because Kim said it doesn't make it so, Kate."

"I'm really quite uninteresting to be around, I'm sure. I'm not a great conversationalist. . . ."

"But you're a wonderful listener," I countered quickly. "And if this world needs any one particular thing, it's a listener. Why, Kate, you're rare. I mean rare! You're kind, I mean. There are myriad 'conversationalists' as you phrased it. Talkers, would be a more fitting term, as I see it. But where are the listeners? Where? Tune in for a moment right here in this cafeteria; what do you hear? Talk, talk, talk. At every table and all across the room. Who is there that is listening? I mean really listening!"

"They seem to be having a good time, Ron."

"Seem to be is right, Kate. If you and I could see into each heart, we'd be shocked. Much of this chatter and laughter is a cover up for hurts and problems in the heart. Someday some of these same care-free seeming, talking, joking students will be coming to you to unload, see if I'm not right. They'll need a listener, a real listener. They know where you are and what you are. Secretly, they admire you. You listen not only with the ear but with your heart. You're rare. God made you, Kate. You!"

"Oh, I know that, Ron. But I wish I were just a bit more out-going than I am."

"So you're not satisfied with God's pattern-design for your life, huh?" I asked. "And Him the all-wise, all-knowing God and Creator!"

"Oh, I didn't mean that. Not at all."

"Really, Kate? What else could it mean but that?" She ran the french fry back and forth through the thin line of ketchup on her plate, her face a study of thought and of thinking.
"God's designs are faultless," I continued. "He delights greatly in each of His creations. No two of us, among all the billions and billions of humans whom He has made, are exactly alike. That's a miracle of such beauty and amazement as to boggle one's mind, Kate. Each of us is distinctly different and beautiful to God. And He who knows the stars and calls them all by their names, how do you suppose He feels towards us! We, not the stars, were made in His image and in His likeness. And we, not the stars, nor the sun or the moon and the cattle, were given a soul and the right to know both the evil and the good and to make our own choices."

Kate looked at me like I had just given her a too heavy theological discourse. Then in her soft voice, she said, "But you're out-going, Ron. Like Kimberly. And you're quite witty, too. . . ."

I felt a bit frustrated, I'll admit; like I wasn't getting my point across at all. Leaning toward her, I said, "Do you think you'd feel comfortable being witty, as you said I was? And Kim."

She looked dumb-founded.

"Kate," I said kindly, "believe me, nothing would be more unbecoming to you and to your gentle and gently-sweet nature. You are a lady through and through; your bearing, your talk, your walk, your conduct, your deportment and your mannerism. You are like a rare flower in this school 'garden' of unlady-like girls and un-gentlemanly men. Were you to try to squeeze yourself into the pattern of some of your contemporaries, you'd not fit. What's more . . . and this would be catastrophic . . . the students would lose confidence in you and in your testimony. And they'd have every right to do so, too. They know a phony when they see one. Right now, Kimberly's testing you. Sure, it's painful. And it hurts. Without a doubt, it hurts. Badly, too. But you keep shining, and don't ever change, and some day that girl may be looking you up for help. And for prayer, too."

"Not Kimberly, Ron; she's too proud and arrogant and haughty."

"Sometimes those hurt the most, Kate. Neither beauty nor popularity is a guarantee for happiness and real satisfaction. I'm sure that deep within herself Kim admires you. And even if she doesn't, I do. And I know a lot of others who do, also. But even if no one admired you, to God you will always be special and a thing of beauty. He created you like He wanted you to be,
giving you both a frame of body and a disposition beautifully becoming and comely to you and you alone. Don't try to change it, Kate. Never!"

She smiled faintly. "As though I would, Ron!" she exclaimed. "I've never once questioned what God did nor what God made; I know that He does all things well and that He is perfect in what He does. I needed your little discourse today. Thanks much. Sometimes, like today, Kimberly can be quite thorny."

"They always say it takes the crushing of the flower to bring out its perfume and its fragrance. Let Jesus shine through you in this, Kate. And never think of trying to be like someone else. You fit perfectly, and perfectly beautiful, in the mold and the pattern of God's special design for you. And since your wonderful experience of entire sanctification the pattern-design has been perfected in holiness, which makes it even more becoming and beautiful to you."

Kate lifted her tear-wet eyes to meet mine. "Thanks, Ron," she said. "Like I just said, I really needed your little theological discourse to help me today. Believe me when I say that by God's grace I shall never again wish that I were what I am not. Like you said, I am one of a kind, an individual beautiful to God. This is enough. What more could anyone desire! From today on, I shall endeavor only to live up to His approval and to bring glory to His pattern."

The buzzer sounded for classes to resume so Kate went her way and I went mine. But I felt like I was floating on a marshmallow cloud. My diminutive, petite sister with the long name of Katrina Anna Marie was more than a conqueror through Christ. She had just gotten something very important settled in her heart. And it was forever!

I slid into the seat, feeling like whistling and singing and laughing all at the same time. It was a great day. Yes, a really great day!