Noelene Neff hurried out of school and down the sidewalk, her arms loaded with books and a song on her lips. The green folder that lay on top of the textbooks caused her heart to skip a beat. A song-writing contest! This was right down her line. She loved music composition and made straight A+'s year after year. She was sure she'd get that scholarship to pursue music at the Apollo Conservatory.
She was singing softly when she entered the kitchen door of her home.

"Deanna called," Mrs. Neff said. "Wants you to call her back. She sounded excited."

"No wonder, Mother! The school's having a song writing contest -- and you know how dearly I love composing music. Someone's going to get a scholarship. . . . " Noelene's voice trailed meaningfully. "I'm going to work hard for it," she added.

"Don't build your hopes too high, dear. There'll be stiff competition, I'm sure."

Noelene's song faded with her mother's statement. "You don't have confidence in me, Mother!" she exclaimed petulantly.

"Oh, but I do, honey. But I'd hate to see you disappointed if you failed to receive the scholarship."

Noelene raced up the stair steps and deposited the books on the desk in her bedroom. Then she dialed Deanna's number.

"It's just me, Deanna," she said when her girlfriend answered the phone. "Mom said you wanted me to call."

"How about coming over this evening for awhile?" Deanna asked. "I have something to tell you and we could work on that music composition together, too."

"It's to be an original composition, Deanna, something each of us writes by ourselves."

"I know, and it could still be original even if we worked together, Noelene. How about it?"

Noelene was silent for awhile as she rehearsed what she must do that evening, then she said, "I'm sorry, Deanna, but I promised Sally, Gary, Don and Joan I'd meet them at the drugstore for a soda when I'm finished with my work here."
"Oh, that's fine; I'll meet you there. Do you mind? A little break would be good for me, and we can study together some other time. OK?"

Noelene laughed softly into the phone. "Of course I don't mind, Deanna. In fact, Sally, Joan and the fellows will be glad to have you."

"I'll see you this evening then."

"About the usual time that we gather for these once-a-week sodas," Noelene reminded. "I must have all my household duties finished and done neatly before I may come."

"My mother's the same with me. You know that."

"It's good for us, Deanna. At least our mothers care enough about us to make sure we're prepared to meet life's demands as we grow older."

"I guess you're right. Well, I'd better get down to business and do my work or I'll forfeit that soda date. See you later. . . ."

Noelene put the receiver in place, then plunged industriously into her work, music notes and bars floating pleasantly through her mind and before her eyes. She was anxious to get busy on the composition she had started and gotten only partially done.

As she worked, her mind raced back to the night of her sister Gayle's graduation from the school of nursing and to the song she had written and composed especially for Gayle. It was her very special gift to her sister for her accomplishment, and when she played it for Gayle and sang the words, Gayle was ecstatic with joy. "That's just what we need, Noelene!" she exclaimed. "I'm taking this to Mrs. Delroy to see if we can't use it on graduation night."

"But I wrote it merely as something special for yon!" Noelene remembered having said. "It's not good enough for . . . for . . . a graduation exercise, Sis."

"We'll let Mrs. Delroy decide that," Gayle had replied.
Remembering the thrill of hearing her composition being sung by Gayle and five other nurses gave impetus to Noelene's desire to get alone somewhere and write the "best" composition. That scholarship would help tremendously toward a music career.

Noelene entered the drugstore with a light heart some time later. The conversation was music-centered and the atmosphere was electrified with enthusiasm and high hopes.

"Know who's going to get that scholarship?" Sally asked.

"Nobody actually knows," Joan and Deanna reminded seriously.

"That's true. But do you know who I think will get it?" Sally continued.

"Noelene has a pretty good lead, I'd say," Don commented.

"She does," Sally agreed. "But -- in my way of thinking -- I look for Sherrine Powers to get it. She's tops..."

"And she ought to be!" Noelene said, with a hint of acid in her voice. "Maybe if I had a brother who had his doctorate in music and who taught in one of our universities, well, maybe I'd be 'tops' too. Who do you think helped her write that last composition? And who..."

"Noelene! Please!"

Gary's voice cut into Noelene's insinuations.

"Well, who else but Geren, do you suppose, helps her?" she said sarcastically.

Gary shook his head in utter disbelief. "'A hroward man soweth strife,' " he quoted, "'and a whisperer separateth chief friends' " Prov. 16:28.

The rest of the evening passed in tension, and when Noelene started to leave, Joan asked softly, "Do you really think her brother may do the composition for her and... and...?"
"I didn't say he would; I merely said that perhaps Geren did help Sherrine on those other two musical compositions. He's a professional; so why wouldn't he want his sister to get the same kind of name and rating?"

"You've given me something to think about," Joan said.

Gary, Sally, Don and Deanna looked crushed and shocked.

"I think you need to go home and pray, Noelene," Gary said in a hoarse whisper, feeling on the verge of tears. "Forget about that scholarship. There are far more important things than that. 'A whisperer separateth chief friends,'" he reminded her again.

Noelene turned and looked askance at her schoolmate. Then she turned and walked quickly out the door.

At school, several days later, Joan met her at the door.

"I told Mr. Bailey what you said, Noelene. I felt he should know. After all, it's not fair for someone else to compose a song and write the music when this is supposed to be something original. I'm not concerned for myself; I'll never make it. I'm just not good at doing that sort of thing, but it's students like you that I'm concerned about"

"Whatever made you tell Mr. Bailey, Joan?" Noelene asked quickly, feeling her cheeks grow hot. "I just finished telling you why; I'd like to see you get that scholarship. Especially if Sherrine's cheating"

Joelene groaned inwardly. Cheating? Why, she hadn't said that! Whatever happened to Joan? And she was once Sherrine's best friend, too!

"I . . . I didn't say Sherrine's cheating, Joan," she said in a voice so small that she hardly recognized it was her own.

"Well, maybe not, but it meant the same thing. I'm sure Mr. Bailey will take this into consideration when he checks over the music compositions. I never dreamed Sherrine would do anything like that. It hurts terribly!"

Joan sighed and a tear dropped to the floor. "My best friend a cheater! A . . . a phony! And to think that I was gullible enough to swallow what she
told me about God and salvation! I don't know what to believe anymore, nor whom. I'm so disappointed."

"... A whisperer separateth chief friends. ..."

Gary's words marched boldly and meaningfully forward now from the back of Noelene's brain -- where she had shoved them the previous night -- and they stood facing her, their poignant swords aimed at her tongue. Oh, if only she could recall those words. If only. . . .

"Joan," she said quickly, taking the girl by her slender shoulders and looking into her disappointed face. "Joan, I'm sorry. Forgive me. Please! You must believe in Sherrine. She's real and genuine. It was cruel of me to surmise such a wicked thing."

"Surmise?"

"Yes. That's exactly what I did. And it's evil, sinful and wicked. Sherrine's a wonderful Christian. I know she wouldn't do anything that is wrong. . . ."

"You . . . you mean she wouldn't cheat?"

"Oh, no! Not Sherrine."

"Not even for a scholarship?"

"Not even for a scholarship, Joan. Oh, I'm so sorry. I've been envious of Sherrine -- that's what made me say those nasty, un-Christlike things. Please, please forgive me. Who else did you tell? I must go and straighten it up and tell them all that it was a false rumor; an evil surmise."

"You . . . mean . . . you'll tell Mr. Bailey?"

"Of all people, yes, especially Mr. Bailey. Then I must find Deanna, Gary, Sally and Don. I have some fixing up to do; some righting of wrong to take care of. Oh, Joan, I'm not even saved! I know I'm not. My wicked heart caused me to slander one of the most holy and upright girls I've ever known. I'll see you later; right now I have a big mess to try to straighten out, if this is possible."
Joan stared in astonishment after Noelene's rapidly disappearing figure. There must be something to all Sherrine had told her about God and being saved and sanctified wholly after all, she decided, hurrying away to find Sherrine and apologize to her for even listening to the tale.

She found Sherrine in her home room. Noelene's hands were gripping Sherrine's shoulders; she begged for forgiveness as tears ran like small rivers down her cheeks.

It was almost too sacred to behold, but Joan, perfectly awed with Noelene's humbleness and outright contrition and sorrow for her sin of slanderous gossip, stood as one rooted to the floor. This that Sherrine had -- and for which Noelene was willing to pay such a bitter price -- was real. It was the very thing for which her heart had been hungering. Tears stung her eyes.

A sudden sob made her presence known. "I'm sorry, Sherrine!" she cried. "Sorry that I listened to the tale and believed it. Forgive me. I need what you have and whatever it is Noelene wants."

"It's Jesus, Joan," Noelene said brokenly, rushing past the senior to find Mr. Bailey before school began for the day. "We both need His forgiveness in our heart. Sherrine will pray with you," she called over her shoulder.

Weeks later, with Sherrine receiving the scholarship in the assembly hall, Noelene made her way to her friend. "Congratulations, Sherrine!" she said. "From the very bottom of my heart, I'm so happy you got it; you deserved it."

"And I think you deserve a medal, Noelene, for your gracious manner in losing."

"Holiness of heart made the big difference in how I feel, Sherrine. My life's been absolutely revolutionized since I got converted and sanctified wholly. I've just begun to live; everything is changed."

"Through His precious Blood!" Sherrine exclaimed, giving Noelene's hand a gentle squeeze.