Jennifer scraped her feet along the porch floor, dragging them ever so slightly and just enough to slow the porch swing down to match the mood of her thinking. Randall! Why did she always hear music and bells and everything nice whenever she thought of him? she wondered dreamily, recalling his words to her just before leaving the grocery store where she had gone after eggs for her mother.
She brought the swing to an almost total halt now, thinking how very coincidental -- or whatever -- it was that Randall seemed to evolve out of seemingly nowhere whenever she had to run an errand for her mother. If she went to the drugstore, Randall's smiling face greeted her either as she entered or left the place; the same was true of the grocery store. And, lately, he had even begun coming to church just so he could see her as she entered and departed. He had even managed to talk to her once while she waited for her parents to come through the church doors to the car.

"I'll see you tonight at Sondra's birthday party, Dark Eyes," he had told her as he walked partway home with her from the grocery store, carrying the eggs for her.

She made no reply, not sure she'd be allowed to go to the party.

"You're coming, aren't you?" Randall asked quickly when she failed to say anything.

"Well . . . I . . . I don't know."

"Don't know? Why of course, you do! It won't be any fun unless you're there. Sondra wants you to come. She's expecting you."

"I... I don't know, Randall. I haven't asked my parents as yet."

Randall stopped dead still in his tracks. "Asked your parents!" he exclaimed, in what sounded like total and utter disbelief. "Aren't you being a bit too Puritan and... and out of step with the times, Dark Eyes? That's been out of style for a long, long time."

Rising to the occasion, Jennifer answered quickly, "That is never 'out of style,' Randall. Never! God's word admonishes us and commands us to honor our father and mother."

"You're a young woman, Dark Eyes!" Randall argued in his soft-spoken voice and way. "Just once isn't going to harm you. Besides, Sondra's planning on you being there. Don't disappoint her. Nor me," he added quickly, handing her the eggs and turning to go back the way he'd come.
Her mother's voice reached her from the kitchen now. "Telephone call for you, Jennifer."
She slid off the porch swing and hurried inside.

"It's Sondra," her mother said as she handed Jennifer the phone.

"Hi Sondra," Jennifer said, whispering a soft "Thank you" to her mother before listening to what Sondra had to say.

"I'm expecting you at my party tonight," Sondra said quickly. "I won't take no for an answer."

"Well . . . I . . . I'm not sure I'll be there," Jennifer answered. "I don't know what my father and mother will say."

There was a long silence on the phone. Sondra said, "Oh Jennifer, how exquisitely, super-positively, old-fashioned you are! But I guess that's one of the things that makes you so absolutely adorable. You're pure innocence, I do declare. And it's refreshingly beautiful, I must admit. But it is totally and absolutely out of step with our world today."

"But it isn't 'out of step' with God's Word, Sondra."

"Oh come now! That was all right for people of another era and age, but it's not all right for us; not for our group. Besides, you'll really disappoint Randall and me if you don't come. You'll have all kinds of fun, Jennifer. There'll be scads of people and more food than you can shake a finger at. Tell you what to do; sneak out of the house after your folks are in bed. Lots of kids do this, you know. I'll even send Randall by in his car. He can pick you up like, say, a block away from where you live. Your bedroom windows aren't far from the ground; you could easily climb out the window, replace the screen, and have a night of fun. I'll be expecting you," and Sondra hung up before Jennifer could answer.

She sat in the chair by the telephone for quite some time, thinking. The thought of Randall sent happy thrills through her. Then she became frightened: if Randall was a Christian she had never heard him say so. Christians, or believers in Christ, were admonished in the Bible to not be yoked together with unbelievers. Nothing could be plainer than that, she
realized as she prayed silently for the Lord to get her over the excited little feelings she experienced each time she thought about him.

Her mind darted quickly to Sondra's suggestion and a shiver of fear raced up and down her spine and through and through her being.

Jennifer heard her dad's voice and knew that he was home from work. Quickly, she hurried to him. "Daddy," she said, "Sondra's having a birthday party at her house tonight, may I go, please?"

Her father studied her face carefully. Then he said, "No, Jennifer. Your mother and I want only what's best for you and I don't feel this is one of those 'best' things."

"She said she'd be expecting me," Jennifer replied softly.

"The answer is still no, honey. Sondra's your cousin, to be sure, but she's not the best kind of influence upon the young people, I'm sorry to say. Her parties aren't like those your mother has for you."

Jennifer swallowed; she hadn't given so much as a thought to what kind of party Sondra may be having.

"Sondra's idea of a birthday party is having a house full of 'cool' boys -- her words -- and girls who are of the so-called 'in' crowd, with dancing, loud music and drinking."

Jennifer gasped. "Does Sondra do . . . I mean, does she dance and . . . and drink alcoholic beverages, Daddy?"

"It grieves me to have to admit it, honey, but yes, she does. I had hoped that things would change when my brother moved his family here a few months ago.

But. . . ."

Jennifer noticed how sad her father looked as his voice trailed into knowing silence.
She put her arms around his neck and said kindly, "We must keep praying for them, Daddy. I'm glad you're my father. You and Mother have given me such a rich and wonderful heritage. I feel sorry for Sondra."

"She's been deprived of a spiritual upbringing and of a Christian home, Jennifer. How different things could be for her today if she had had Christian training all of her life!"

"I'm thankful to God for you and Mother, Dad. Thanks for loving me so much, and for caring enough about me to say no when it's necessary. I love you, Daddy, and now I understand why you won't let me go. Thanks -- much."

Long after her father's soft caress on her cheek had been forgotten, Jennifer sat thinking of Sondra's way of living compared to hers. Her heart felt sad and grieved for her cousin who was less than a year older than she.

She recalled Sondra's words then, about "sneaking" out of her bedroom by way of the window. How dreadful that would have been! she thought. So utterly deceitful, had she taken her cousin's advice and done such a thing.

Light dawned upon Jennifer now: she realized how very subtle Satan was -- through people. Sondra had "sown" a seed thought, a thing which she, Jennifer, would never have thought of even. Had she been like Eve, and "listened" to the wicked suggestion, she would have been in serious trouble spiritually. And only God knew how much more. Too, it would have made a fracture in her parents' and her relationship which would never again have been the same.

Even if her parents would never have learned about her "escapade," via Sondra's suggestion, she, Jennifer, would have carried the feeling of guilt and remorse with her day and night. It would have weighed her down like a heavy burden until she could not have been happy and joyful. And the break, in a once-solidly beautiful and wonderful parent-daughter relationship, would never have been mended or healed to the same degree as their present relationship was.

Bowing her head, Jennifer prayed, asking the Lord to help her to never, ever, do anything to break the confidence and love and trust that her parents had in and for her.
She knew her prayer was heard; knew, too, that she must stop thinking of Randall. They walked two different roads; she meant to stay on the High road. At any cost!

Joybells of love and peace began ringing loudly in her soul.