Lois Enders and her friend Tabitha Skeigh got off the bus laughing and talking the proverbial mile a minute before melting into the stream of students who moved smoothly and rapidly up the steps of Chestnut Ridge High and disappeared quickly through the doors into the beautiful big new building.
"I'm as excited as I can be with chemistry," Tabitha remarked to her friend. "Talk about beautiful and modern! Our chemistry room, with its adjacent 'experiment/work' room, is a chemist's dream. Honestly Lois, I've never seen anything more beautiful. And the joy of doing our experiments in that gorgeous room has me up on a cloud."

"Better be careful to get the proper mixtures, Tab, or you may be blowing yourself up on a cloud, literally." Lois teased. "I'm glad and happy for you, since you've always been a chemistry buff. It's just not down my line of things greatly desired."

"I hope you won't be sorry that you didn't take it, Lois." Tabitha replied. "We have great fun doing those experiments. And Mr. Shetler is super.

"Sometimes I wonder if it was for chemistry's sake or because of that handsome, new, young teacher that so many of the girls opted for this class." Lois said lightly, giving her friend a mischievous little smile.

Tabitha laughed softly, saying emphatically, "Honest, Lois, it wasn't because of Mr. Shetler that I wanted chemistry, although he is extremely handsome, and he's a dream to work with; but I wanted chemistry for chemistry's sake. This is a fact."

Lois squeezed Tabitha's hand. "I know, my dear friend. I know. I was teasing you:'

"I hear the new teacher's something pretty wonderful, too" Tabitha stated. "I am happy that, since we had to have these new teachers, we got some that are special. Mrs. Prantis, bless her, was like a permanent fixture here at Chestnut Ridge High. From all I've heard, she was quite a teacher. It makes me feel sad when someone so good and great must retire."

"I feel the same way as you do, Tabitha. But, then, maybe Mrs. Prantis was happy to retire. I don't know that she was; but there is that possibility. I'm sure if I had taught school all of my life that I'd welcome retirement when the time came. Just think of all the smart alecky and obnoxious students she must have had in those years; for it seems that almost every class has at least one of this kind in it."
"Maybe it's the only way some poor love-starved kids get any attention" Tabitha remarked sympathetically. "At least Dad and Mother said they felt that way about Brandon Mook. He was positively and absolutely overly obnoxious. You've never seen anyone quite like him. Yet when Ted got to know him and brought him home after school a few times, and Brandon opened his heart to him, then we all understood what made him do what he did and why. He was simply starving for love, Lois. From his father especially. Our dad, bless him! took Brandon 'under his wing' and taught him how to build beautiful cabinets and small pieces of furniture, and such like things.

"And you talk about praise! Dad dished it out in massive doses to Brandon -- and Ted, too -- as he completed whatever it was he was making. And all in Daddy's shop at Dad's expense! The fatherly hugs and verbally expressed love from Dad to Brandon paid off handsomely, Lois: The smart alecky, unusually obnoxious young man changed radically, into a beautiful and wonderful Christian. He and my brother Ted, along with their wives, are missionaries today. On different fields, of course."

"Oh Tabitha, that's so beautiful and... and so sacred that I could cry. Love bridges gaps and spans chasms, for a fact. Only, God needs someone there to do the loving and the giving; like He had your dad and brother."

"Yes. He that winneth souls must be wise. Also, he must be concerned enough to put action to his love and concern.' Tabitha replied. "I've often wondered what would have happened to Brandon had Ted not brought him home and Dad not cared about him. It makes me almost shudder at times. Souls are fragile things; we need to handle them prayerfully and lovingly.

"Brandon, I believe, would have become another drug user and an alcoholic had Daddy not gone out of his way and, in love and praise and compassion, with much prayer, helped him. He loved working with Dad and Ted. He was a natural with wood. And you talk about a perfectionist! And, now, everything he learned in Daddy's shop is being put to good use on the mission field, where he is not only pastoring and evangelizing in remote areas, but he is building, as well -- churches and parsonages, and whatever needs to be built."

Lois was amazed. Then she said suddenly, "Did you see that new girl in school, Tabitha?"
"I guess I never noticed her. Why are you asking?"

"Well, it's just that I've been thinking, since you told me about your brother Ted and that Brandon, whatever his last name is. For three days now, I've seen this new girl. She's always alone. And honestly Tabitha, I believe it's partly true what someone said about Chestnut Ridge High. . . ."

"What'd they say?"

"That we are a bunch of snobs and that we're 'exclusive'." I never gave it much thought nor bothered my brain with it, casting it aside as so much rubbish and garbage from someone who was merely disgruntled about something. But I'm beginning to feel guilty. Deep in my heart, guilty. After all, I profess to love the Lord with all of my heart, and I know I'm sanctified wholly. Yet here I am, a professor of the best thing on this side of Heaven and I've done nothing -- absolutely nothing! -- about welcoming that lonely looking and frightened appearing newcomer to our school. What if she'd die and I hadn't spoken to her about Jesus and His power to change her life! Oh, Tabitha, we are exclusive. Please, dear Lord, forgive my neglect!" Lois cried.

"I'm sure it's not been a deliberate neglect." Tabitha said. "We've been so busy getting adjusted and accustomed to this fabulously wonderful new school building, not to mention the newer, completely up to date computers, et cetera, until we've been almost dizzy with the excitement of it all."

"But when I realize that Jesus would not have allowed these new and lovely things to have crowded out the most important of all things -- a soul -- it makes me feel guilty. So today, with God's help, I mean to put feet to my testimony and put first things first: I'm going to meet that new girl and talk to her about Jesus."

The two friends parted, Lois going one direction to her homeroom and Tabitha to another, with the understanding that they would meet at noon in the school's new, shiny-bright and very attractive cafeteria.

Lois saw the slender, willowy-tall, blonde just before she got to her homeroom. Her heart leaped with joy. Remembering something her pastor had said one time in a special class for teens at their youth camp, she hurried toward the shy looking girl.
In a quick way, she recapitulated the pastor's four points given for welcoming a stranger to their group, their school, or wherever: Be a one-person welcoming committee, he had said. Point number one! Next, Be Available. Then, Be Understanding. And, Be A Friend.

"Good morning," she said with a smile, as she walked over to where the young woman was standing. "I'm Lois Enders. I'm really delighted to have you here at our school. I'm a junior, in case you're wondering," she added quickly. "You're new here. Are you becoming familiar with the school? Maybe I can help you. . . .

The girl smiled. It was a pleasant smile. "Thank you for introducing yourself. I'm Stephanie Foster; a sophomore, newly 'transplanted' from Oregon to here. Daddy's work she added meaningfully. "And as for the school; I love it. But it's so enormous. Beautiful, but so big. I've been feeling like a tiny pea in the sea." And she laughed. It was a soft, rippling, musical sort of laughter.

"I'm sure you do, Stephanie. Even those of us who have been familiar with Chestnut Ridge High for all these years are having difficulty getting used to this fabulously beautiful but sprawlingly-big new building. And don't feel badly if you go down the wrong hallway and find yourself looking in on a group of students other than those in your own homeroom. I've done it twice myself. And I was sure I was going in the right direction for my home room. It's sort of funny, and I'm thankful I can laugh about it."

Stephanie laughed again. "I felt so utterly foolish:' she confessed, "when I took the wrong turn -- three times -- and found myself completely lost. Thankfully, one of the faculty put me on the right 'path' back and, ultimately, I found myself in the right room."

"That's like the Lord," Lois remarked, smiling up into Stephanie's face. "I was once on the wrong road-the road of sin and death -- then Jesus came along and. . . ."

"You're a Christian!" Stephanie cried joyously, grabbing Lois and hugging her while tears trickled merrily down her fair cheeks. "Oh, thank God!" She was almost squealing for joy. "I was sure you were a Christian."
"A very joyful one" Lois answered softly, almost overcome with God's goodness in sending another light to Chestnut Ridge High.

"You'll never know just how much this means to me!" Stephanie exclaimed happily. "My parents and I have prayed and prayed, ever since we knew Daddy was being transferred here, for the Lord to make it easy for me to meet and find some true Christian friends. Oh, He is so wonderful: He answered prayer!

"When I saw you, three days ago I believe it was, I was sure then that you were a Christian. And your friend, also. She looked so sweet and modest and . . . and Christ-like, like you. There's something outstanding and beautiful about those who belong to Christ. They're different. The radiance and beauty of the Lord shines out through them. They stand out. Oh Lois, God answered prayer quickly for me and I am overwhelmed with praise to Him for this"

"This is simply wonderful!" Lois declared. "And where, may I ask, are you going to church?"

"Nowhere yet. But Daddy's been looking in the yellow pages of the telephone directory under churches. He called several pastors. We're praying earnestly about this too"

"Come to my church, please, Stephanie. We have a wonderful pastor and family. Our minister truly 'rightly divides' the Word of Truth. And God is there. We have some glorious services. Oh, I'd be so happy to have you come. We're second blessing holiness people. We believe in being born again and in being sanctified wholly"

"This is wonderful. Wonderful!" Stephanie cried. "We are, indeed, one in Christ and one in faith. Oh, Lois, thanks for coming to me today: Both of our earnest prayer requests to God have now been answered. Please give me the address of your church. But say, we'll both be late for class unless we leave this very minute. Maybe we could meet somewhere later on, the Lord willing. . . ."

"In the cafeteria, Stephanie, at noon," Lois said, turning and hurrying away.
"The cafeteria then, God willing," Stephanie called back, rushing down the hallway to her classroom, feeling as light as a feather in the breeze. God's answers were always the best. It paid to wait for His perfect timing. Always.

Smiling, she hurried to her seat and sat down just before class commenced.