William Oscar Willard was the brainy guy in the Senior class of Southgate High. Frankly, I guess you could say he was the brainy guy of the entire high school. Unless, of course, you considered Jeannie Hartman and Louise Pannick, who were not guys but whose I Q's were on an almost equal par with William's.
William had brains, like I said. In fact, I wondered sometimes if he didn't have a built-in word processor-computer -- the entire works -- somewhere up there beneath his set of thick auburn hair. He was smart. Brilliant even. Sometimes one got the feeling that his brilliance frustrated the teachers and made them quite uncomfortable.

Not only was William brilliant but he was also endowed with good looks and a physique of such perfect build until most of the girls forgot there were other male students in Southgate High. They'd stand around in little groups (like a gaggle of geese) talking about him, whispering his name, and almost swooning when he spoke to them. He was popular all right. With the girls especially.

"Wow!"

I looked up from my books in time to see Mr. Brain himself come over to the section of the library in which I was studying and gathering reference material for an upcoming theme in our English class.

"Wow!"

Glancing in the direction of the second-time repeated exclamation, I saw three of the girls from our senior class sitting around a table some distance from where I was.

"Quiet please," the librarian said kindly but with a definite note of authority in her voice.

The girls giggled. William strode over to their table, pulled up a chair and sat down. I got back to my books and the notes I was taking, wanting to make a good grade on the theme. I was not one of those look-at-a-thing-and-have-it fellows; I worked hard for the grades I made. But the nice feature about it was that I actually enjoyed studying. Books and I were friends. Good friends. I enjoyed my subjects in the classes and I did my best at applying myself toward what I was being taught. Each new thing I learned was like another gate having been opened, beckoning me through its wide open entranceway on to the next.

I forgot all about William and the giggling girls as I researched the pages of the open books and read and wrote. I was totally absorbed in what I
was doing, not to mention being excited and thrilled over reading and learning the facts that pertained to and surrounded the theme upon which I was writing, when William's voice sliced down the middle of a pertinent thought which I had almost, but not quite, finished writing down on paper.

"Do you always study so intensely, Frank?" he asked, sitting on the edge of the table and curling one knee upward then locking it in position with his hands folded around it.

I gave him a quick, sideways glance, finished writing the sentences then smiled and countered with, "Intense? Did I appear to be studying intensely? I know I must work to make good grades, if this is what you mean by intensely. But I enjoy it. I suppose you're finished with your theme?" It came out as a question instead of a statement.

William tossed his head in a carelessly carefree manner and, laughing, he said, "I have it all finished inside my head; writing it down won't take long. But say, Frank, what's with you? All this religious stuff. I don't buy it."

I studied William for a long while, trying to figure out what he was getting at and where he was coming from. I had approached him numerous times, trying to witness to him about the Lord Jesus Christ, only to be rebuffed with, "Save your breath, Pal, I'm not interested. Not in the least. Strong men don't need a religious crutch to get them through life."

I continued to study him, recalling the Biblical injunction about being swift to hear and slow to speak, all the while sending up silent mini prayers to God for Divine wisdom and help.

"Well . . .?" he asked, breaking the silence and smiling smugly in his usual cocksure way and manner.

"What do you want to know?" I countered softly with a question of my own.

"Well-I . . ." he replied, giving his head a toss and looking down on me. "Explain your God to me. Prove that He's as real as you claim He is."

Again I studied this brainy fellow, sensing the utter folly and futility of answering him.
"Scared, are you?" His lips curled in pure mockery and scorn.

"Not at all, William. Not at all. But since God is a Spirit, and the Bible says that all who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth, there is no way you could comprehend what I'd be telling you; for the Bible states that the natural man -- that is, the man who is not born again -- cannot discern the things of God and of the Spirit, because he is not born of God."

"If you can explain God according to my rationale and my thinking, maybe I'll change my views of Him."

"God cannot be rationalized, my friend. Never. He has always been and He always will be. He has had no beginning and He will have no ending."

William's face became livid with anger. Smashing a fist into the palm of his other hand, he cried out, "You're crazy, Frank. That's impossible. Utterly impossible. All things have had a beginning. All things."

"All except God. He has been eternally existent. He wants to become your Savior, William. He gave His only begotten Son to die on a cruel cross so that you and I might be forgiven of our sins and may have eternal life by confessing and forsaking our sins and . . . ."

"Don't say another word, Frank!" William demanded, towering over me. "Anything that cannot be properly explained, or which I cannot rationalize, I'll never believe or accept. I demand proof positive."

"The only way to obtain this 'proof positive,' "I explained softly, as I stood to look him full in the face, "is by being born again and experiencing the wonderful joy and peace of His indwelling Presence in your heart. And unless you allow Him to come into your heart as your Lord and Savior, He will one day become your Judge. Jesus Himself said, 'Except ye be born again, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.' "

"You're even more crazy than I thought you were, Frank; and like I said, I can't believe it."

Suddenly remembering the tract in my pocket, I fished it out and held it out to William. "Here, take this," I said, "and read it, please."
William's sardonic smile was like a slap in my face but I continued holding it before him.

He turned to leave; then, wheeling about-face, he mocked with, "Save it for some other fool -- like yourself."

I watched him until he was lost behind a maze of library shelves; then I finished the work before me, turned in my books, and started for home, feeling sad and heavy-hearted and burdened for him.

I needed the brittle-crisp night air; it gave impetus to my heavy, lagging footsteps and seemed to lift my spirit somewhat. How could someone as brilliant as William not sense or see or feel his need of God? I wondered. Try as I may, I couldn't comprehend nor understand it. I shuddered with fear over his unwillingness to open his mind to something so simple as the gospel of Jesus Christ, a way so plain that, as Isaiah wrote, even the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein.

Then, almost like a light breaking in upon me, I realized that the greatest fool of all was the man who gambled with his soul, refusing to come to the Light and not willing to accept or believe anything that could not be rationalized.

Lifting tear-filled eyes heavenward, I praised the Lord for my wonderful Christian parents who had trained me from infancy in the things of God, bringing me up with a profound belief in God and in His Holy Word, all of which led me early in life to my blessed Lord and Savior.

Conviction was deep and heavy and mighty the night God revealed my heart to me as He saw it -- black and dark and sinful and exceedingly wicked. I stood at the crossroads that night; which way would I take? Perspiration broke out like small beads on my forehead and face. I felt guilty. Condemned. I knew I deserved eternal punishment since my sins had helped to nail Jesus to that awful cross of torment and pain and torture, not to mention the shame and ignominy for which the cross itself stood.

Like I stated, conviction, so mighty and powerful, seized my soul that memorable night until I pushed past my older and younger brothers and ran down the aisle to the altar, where I repented of all my sins and made a clean
break with it and from it. Oh, the peace and joy and glory that filled my soul! What carefulness -- what clearing of guilt! -- the godly sorrow wrought in me and exerted upon me!

No amount of rationalizing could ever have done what the simple, Biblical formula of confession and repentance and forsaking of sin did for my soul that night. I was, indeed, born again. Shortly afterwards, I felt the need of a cleansed and holy heart and, seeking fervently and diligently, I was sanctified wholly, alone in my bedroom one morning.

My thoughts raced suddenly to William again and I knew that, had he been reared in as devout a Christian home as I, he would never have become a skeptic.

A new hurt crept silently inside my heart; it was a hurt and a pain for the brainiest, most brilliant young man in Southgate High whose brilliance had shut the door on the simplest but most important and most priceless of all life's lessons -- "... Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

I walked on with a heavy and a burdened heart, determined to pray more earnestly and consistently for my classmate. God knew how to get through to a skeptic. Indeed He did.