SQUEEZED
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Stephanie was barely inside the school building when she heard the bus wheeze to a halt out front. Dee's bus! she thought, recognizing the wheezing sound immediately. Of all the busses that stopped in front of Cranberry High, bus number 432 was the noisiest and strangest sounding. Its trademark was the funny wheezing sound. Everybody nearby knew when bus
number 432 was out front, unloading or loading its noisy and boisterous crew.

"It has asthma," Jon Peters declared humorously at the beginning of the school year.

"It has more than asthma the matter with it, if you ask me," mechanical-minded Gerald Roat countered, with that serious look he wore when he felt there was anything serious enough to look serious about. "I think bus number 432 has seen its best days: The school needs to get a new bus."

"Have you forgotten that all of these buses are checked for safety?" Alvin asked Gerald in his philosophical way. "Old 432's as safe as any of the rest," he added "It's just 'exposing' its 'personality,' that's all."

Loud laughter followed Alvin's comment, and a couple of the students declared they liked riding the wheezy old thing; said it was a sort of status symbol to be part of 432.

"At least everybody here knows when 432 has arrived," Merlin Jaggers declared. "That's more than the rest of you can say."

Again, there was loud laughter.

Glancing quickly across her shoulder to the fastly unloading bus, Stephanie hurried down the hallway toward her homeroom. The last thing on earth she wanted was an encounter with the dark-haired, fair-skinned beauty, Dee Skates.

Dee was popular at school. In fact, Stephanie was sure that Dee was popular wherever she was. She was Miss Personality plus, knowing what to say and when to say it. She knew how -- and when -- to flutter her eyes, to purse her lips, and to look Miss Innocence herself. But Dee had a tongue that could cut and slash like the sharpest razor. She was the ringleader of the in crowd at Cranberry High, and anyone who was not in sympathy with the afore-mentioned crowd was very definitely and absolutely nondescript and a non-entity. In Dee's eyes and her way of thinking, that is. And the sad thing was that she had acquired quite a following who felt the same way.
Stephanie sighed. Then she sent a quick prayer heavenward and slid into her desk seat. She hated cliques. And Cranberry High very definitely had at least one clique; Dee was seeing to this.

Stephanie thought of the number of poorer class of girls whose parents weren't able to afford all the name brand clothes Dee was forever bragging about having and wearing, and she felt sick inside. Dee had "squeezed" several poor innocent girls into her mold of worldliness by exerting extreme peer pressure on them; but they looked so unhappy, Stephanie noticed.

"Well, look at Miss Outdated today, would you!" Dee exclaimed loudly as she passed Stephanie's seat and gave a tug at her dress. "It's obvious she's not up with what's in."

Stephanie ignored the snide remark and, smiling sweetly, she laid her written English assignment on top of her desk just as Mrs. Smithson came through the doorway.

The day passed without incident and not until the buzzer sounded for dismissal did Dee say anything more to Stephanie. Then, going down the hallway, she lashed out without mercy or pity.

"Why don't you get with it, Steph? You look like something from an old book out of the past. Let your hair down, as they say, and have fun."

"Do I look sad, Dee?"

"Well, no. Just antiquish. Like a little puritan. Dye your hair; raise your skirts -- say, these newer, shorter fashions would do wonders for you. Come on, Steph, get out of that stuffy old mold you're in. Got with it. Have fun. I won't give you a minute's rest until you change. I'll make you over and. . . ."

Laying her hand on Dee's shoulder, Stephanie said, "Let me talk a while, Please, Dee. First of all, I'll never change over to your way of living. Never! You and I are marching to two different drummers: Your drummer is beating out the time of the world; mine is beating out the measures of Heaven.

"As you know, Dee, I am a born again and sanctified wholly Christian. As such, I haven't even the least desire to be a part of your 'in' crowd. Jesus
took out all desire for the world. I am fully and completely satisfied with Christ. He said, 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

"Cut the sermon, Steph. You know how I hate anything that even so much as smacks of religion. You grate on me: your careful conduct, your manner of dress and your pious attitude . . . disgusting! Have you ever had fun in all of your life? I mean real fun? But of course you haven't. You're too stuffy over religion and. . . ."

"Hold it, Dee. Hold it," Stephanie said softly, as she put her hand on the attractive but now highly agitated girl's shoulder. "Speaking of fun, I doubt you know what real fun is. The fun times we church kids have has no price tag attached."

"Just what do you mean by that?" Dee asked quickly.

"Just what I said. Our fun times are wholesome and clean: we're not left with hangovers or shame and guilt nor. . . ."

"Guilt? Who worries about such a thing these days? That's what I mean -- you're so puritanical. So sickeningly puritanical; you and the other church kids. You're inhibited; always afraid of doing or saying something wrong. Ugh!"

Stephanie sighed. "Oh, Dee," she cried, "I wish I could make you see and understand that the reason we live such careful lives is because of Who lives within us, Jesus resides in our hearts, Dee. We don't want to live like the world nor look like the world or act like the world. Instead of your continuous round of fun, we have constant and perpetual joy and peace and soul rest. We are happy. So very happy. Serving the Lord Jesus Christ is wonderful. We have no desire -- none whatever -- to be a part of anyone's 'in" crowd. And no matter how much 'squeezing' or pressure you may put me through, it won't move me, Dee. Not at all. God's Word says we aren't to allow the world to squeeze us into its mold. Our sights are set on heavenly things."

"I'm not through with you yet, Stephanie. I'll change you the way I changed Deanna and Darcy, see if I don't."
"Greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world, Dee. My anchor holds, in Christ. And as for Darcy and Deanna, they'll be coming back to God's fold. Our church is praying for them. They're so unhappy. We're praying for you, too, Dee. Very earnestly. You'll make quite a worker for the Lord when you get converted and are sanctified holy."

"Stop it! Stop it!" Dee cried, turning and running away. "Don't pray for me," she called over her shoulder. "That frightens me."

"'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God,'" Stephanie quoted softly, sensing the Lord dealing with Dee, ringleader of the "in" crowd in Cranberry High.