Jenna gave herself a long, lingering look in the full-length mirror that was fastened to the bedroom door before slipping into the floral, pastel-pink jacket that accompanied the stylish dress she was wearing. Smiling to herself, she conceded that for a woman in her forties she didn't look bad at all. No, not at all: in fact, she told herself, she didn't look too very much older than when she was married, nearly twenty-three years ago. She had even
managed to keep her youthful figure, and this, in spite of being a mother four times over.

She indulged herself with a final, smiling look in the mirror—again—wishing the dress lengths had stayed a bit longer than they were. She had liked the longer length; it had given her a look of real womanliness and dignity. But styles were styles, and no way was she going to look "out of it" and "not with it," even though her oldest son had told her recently on one of his infrequent trips home, that she shouldn't try to look like a teenager, now that she was mature and had reached midlife. He had made a joke out of it, but Jenna knew he meant it.

"Poof!" she exclaimed aloud to herself now. "What does he know about women! I guess I'll do as I please; after all, I am his mother. My years have 'worn' well on me. Everybody I know tells me I certainly don't look my age. Poof, Milt, you need to give your mother a better look next time you come home. I'm not old. Not really."

She walked into the kitchen and out through the door, locking the door behind her. The day was beautiful, and bright: with sunshine and blooming flowers, flitting butterflies and singing birds. Jenna hummed softly as she slid carefully behind the steering wheel of the shiny-bright sports car. She was glad she had insisted that Robert buy it instead of the more practical one he'd wanted. The little sports car "became" her; it gave her a good feeling; like she was "in." It was no mere status-quo car: it had class. She loved class. The little car and she belonged together: it was a symbol of prestige; she dressed to match the symbol.

She backed out of the garage, carefully, and drove slowly down the boulevard, hoping the neighbors were watching. It was ever so exciting and exhilarating to be driving something with such class. And to be living in a home on the boulevard! Never mind the fact that the monthly rent on the house, and now the added payment on the new car, kept both Robert's and her "nose to the (proverbial) grindstone."

Jenna smiled to herself again. Who would ever have thought that both Robert and she had once belonged to an old-fashioned Holiness church! For sure, the neighbors along the boulevard would never know: she would never tell them. Never!
The move into the big city, away from friends and family, was the best move she and Robert and their family had ever made, she felt. She was finally free to do as she had always wanted to do; free to ''let her hair down,'' as the younger set phrased it. And the pleasant thing about it was that no one was around to tell her, with tears in their eyes and a look of sadness and disappointment on their face, that she shouldn't be doing what she was doing, et cetera, et cetera. And nicer still, the minister of their church never even preached about and against anything, like they'd heard in the former church. Preaching about ''things'' was obnoxious to their present minister, so he'd once said from the pulpit.

Jenna drove on, gloating over her ''freedom.'' From a magnificent English Tudor house ahead, on her side of the road, she saw a young woman burst out through the doorway and run across the lawn, pulling at her hair and wringing her hands in distress. Momentarily, she was tempted to stop to see if she could be of help. But no, she decided quickly, she'd keep on going; it was too dangerous to become implicated and involved in a family feud or fight, which is what she felt was happening in the English Tudor house.

She checked her watch, noting that she must hurry or she'd be late for work. She loved the job she had. It was so delightful to work in The Quaint Shoppe for Mrs. Ada Henlee, who was every bit as delightful as the exclusive little shop was. And Mrs. Henlee's clientele were, well, in a class all their own -- the upper class, that is.

Jenna heard the wail of sirens and wondered where the fire was, and as she neared the main part of the newly remodeled downtown business district she was disturbed by their increased volume. Never had she heard anything like it. What was the matter?

She parked in back of Mrs. Henlee's shop and hurried inside, thankful that, once inside, the wailings were muffled to a degree.

''I wonder where the fire is,'' Jenna remarked to her employer.

''It must be a big one,'' the plumply-smiling woman replied.
"I've never heard so many sirens. Not ever. And the entire downtown area seems frenzied since the sirens started wailing. I never have enjoyed hearing them," Mrs. Henlee admitted. "Not even as a child.

They always send chills racing up and down my spine. Turn the tape on; we'll have Beethoven instead. Ludwig von Beethoven; one of my favorite composers."

"Will do," Jenna said, and she slipped over to the expensive entertainment center, which was cleverly concealed behind a pair of solid cherry doors, and put the long-playing tape on.

"That's better," Mrs. Henlee commented as she cast an anxious look through her storefront window to the street, where the wail of ambulances and police cars added to the utter confusion outside.

"It's frightening," Jenna stated, walking quickly to the front of the store and standing beside Mrs. Henlee.

"It's most unusual, I must admit, Jenna. In all the years I've lived here, and had the store, I've never heard nor seen anything like this. Look at all the people out there! And it's not yet 9:30 in the morning! I can't figure it out. It's strange. Very strange."

The door opened just then and in burst Mindy. She was crying. She looked like she'd seen a ghost.

"Mindy!" Jenna cried, rushing over to her youngest child and wrapping her arms around her. "What's wrong? why aren't you in school? who brought you here?"

"Oh, Mom. Mom!" Mindy couldn't control her tears.

"What's wrong, honey? Please, please, tell me."

"I . . . I'm not sure; but I believe Jesus just came and . . . and took away His . . . His bride. Oh, Mom, Mom! We're left behind; just like the Bible says."
"Calm down, Mindy, and tell me what happened. Why are you crying?" Immediately Jenna remembered the woman from the English Tudor house. She had seen a child there a time or two when passing the house.

"I just told you! It's true. True! I was passing an extra pencil to Cherie Truitt -- she sits across the aisle from me in our geometry class -- and just like that, she disappeared. Everything she was wearing is on the seat. Oh Mom, Mom, we're left behind! We weren't ready! Why didn't we stay where we heard preaching that stirred us and moved us and kept us afraid of disobeying God's Word and doing anything that would make us miss the rapture?"

"Miss the rapture?" Mrs. Henlee shrieked. "Certainly you don't believe in that! But . . . but. . . ." She turned white.

"Oh, Mrs. Henlee, I do believe in it!" Mindy exclaimed, sobbing bitterly. "I believe in it now more than ever; 'cause the true saints of God are gone and we're left behind to go through the horrible and great tribulation period" (Revelation).

"Calm yourself, Mindy," Jenna remarked. "There may be another explanation for all this and. . . ."

Jenna hadn't finished speaking when the store door burst open and in came a group of people demanding to use Mrs. Henlee's phone.

"Please!" a distraught mother begged, "I must call the police. My little boy disappeared! And I was holding him by the hand."

"Out of my way!" demanded a burly looking man.

"I get the phone. My wife's gone. Just like that," he said, snapping his fingers. "We stopped for a cup of tea, across the street, and we were talking. I lowered my head to sip the boiling brew and when I raised my eyes, she was gone. Here," he demanded of the screaming, frightened mother who had rushed to the phone to call the police. "Give me that phone: I must call the police. . . ."

Mrs. Henlee made her way to the door and locked it, seeing the crowds of screaming, frightened people milling about on the sidewalks and in the
streets. Horns blared, sirens shrieked, men cursed: it was as if the crowd of people had gone mad and lost their reasoning.

Trying to sound calm, Mrs. Henlee said, "Now, each of you in here may call your loved ones then you must leave the store quietly by the back door."

In a frenzy of fear, the burly man grabbed the phone from the trembling hands of the sobbing mother and dialed the emergency police number. All he heard was the accusing hum of the busy signal. Over and over, again and again, he dialed, receiving nothing but an endless busy signal. In disgust, and like a wild man, he smashed the receiver against the wall and headed for the door.

"The back door," Mrs. Henlee ordered, standing guard in front of the locked door. "Jenna, show the man to the door, please."

Like one in a daze, and pale as death herself, Jenna led the way to the back door and let the man through. Slowly, and like people awaking from a nightmare, the others followed the man through the back door, out to the cursing, screaming, shrieking, motley crowd on the street, realizing that the telephone lines were jammed.

Trembling visibly, Mrs. Henlee leaned against the counter and said, "You may as well go home, Jenna. There'll be no sales today."

"Oh, Mother! Mother!" Mindy cried, dropping to her knees beside one of Mrs. Henlee's elegant overstuffed chairs. "I need God. I used to know Him. Somehow, since coming here, nothing much that we were once taught from the Bible seemed relevant, and I... I left my first love. I know the Bible says I must repent and do my first works over. . . . Oh, Mother, will you pray for me? Please? Can you pray? I... I mean. . . . Oh, I can't pray. I mean... it's not like it was when I sought the Lord before and He forgave me of my sins. Oh, what's wrong? What's wrong? If only I could see Grandpa and Grandma one more time! But they're gone; I know they are. The last time we talked to them they were crying -- they said they were so afraid we were going to miss the rapture. . . ."

Jenna slumped down in the deep cushion of the chair as the full impact of what had taken place washed over her like waves rushing in and crashing madly upon the shore.
Grabbing Mindy by her hands, she lifted her to her feet and rushed outside to the expensive sports car and started the motor, only to see that they wouldn't be going anywhere: the streets were jammed -- literally jammed -- with both milling people and bumper to bumper vehicles.

"Oh Mom! Mom! why can't I pray? I need Jesus. . ." Mindy doubled over in a paroxysm of fear and anguish.

Jenna buried her face in her hands and froze in terror as II Thessalonians 2:6-12 repeated itself over and over on her brain:

"And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.

"For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way."

". . . Until he be taken out of the way . . .:

"And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

"Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

"And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

"And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

"That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

She had missed it; her foolish pride had deceived her! And she had helped her children to miss it too!
Like a mad one, she let out a scream, jumped from the car and joined the shrieking wailers on the street.

"Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24:44).