Paige looked around for a seat as she got on the bus. She groaned when she saw there was only one seat available; the others were all taken. Like one in a daze, she remained standing.

Mr. Barnett closed the door of the school bus and waited for her to be seated. When she didn't; he said kindly, "Sit down, please Paige."
A lump of fear grabbed at her throat. She couldn't bear the thought of having to sit next to Gerald Mateer. She was afraid of him. He was belligerent and mean. Harmful, even. And he sat at the back of the bus, too. Always, the very next to the last seat on the bus.

"Sit down, Paige. Please. . . . " Mr. Barnett kept looking at her in his rear-view mirror.

Frightened and trembling, Paige made her way down the aisle to the empty seat, praying silently as she sat down, far out toward the aisle and on the very edge. Gerald slid toward her.

"Please, Gerald!" Paige exclaimed. At the same instant, something sharp pricked her. She winced, and jumped to her feet.

"Down!" Gerald's order came out in a hiss. Grabbing the end of her jacket he pulled her down with a rough jerk.

"You can't do this!" Paige cried. "I'm going to tell Mr. Barnett."

"No you won't! Try it; you'll wish you hadn't. You'll be sorry for the rest of your life if you do."

Paige stifled the sob that rose inside her chest. "O God," she cried, with her head on her books, "please, please help me. You promised that, 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe' (Prov. 18:10). Help me. Please!"

She felt tears sting her eyes. How she wished she didn't need to ride the bus to and from school! Oh, if only there were some other way for her to get back and forth.

She looked toward Mr. Barnett, wondering if he ever glanced in the rear-view mirror to see what was going on in the bus. But she was sure there was no way he could possibly see all the students inside the bus even if he did look. And she was positive that there was no way, none whatever, that he could know what Gerald was doing. Gerald was devious and subtle; he carried out his evil deeds in a sly, underhanded way, threatening any and all who dared to so much as think, even, of exposing him.
Paige recalled, now, how she had one day overheard two of the sophomore boys relating some of Gerald's daring wickednesses and how he was planning on forming a group called the Autonomous Ten.

"I hear he has three recruited so far," one of the boys had stated. "One is a junior and two are freshmen."

"I wonder if they know what they're in for," the other boy remarked. "I don't trust him farther than I can see him. Sometimes I wonder if he isn't possessed."

"Steer clear of him, that's a for sure thing," came the quick reply. "He doesn't care whom he bullies; he takes delight in doing it. Some of the girls are scared to death of him. And many of the fellows are too."

"Well, this is his final year," the other fellow replied. "That will make it nice for those of us coming on behind."

"I'm not too sure about that, Jim," came the other's reply. "If he's recruited two tough freshmen, you know he'll train them to follow in his way of thinking and doing. I can't understand why the school officials allow him to stay. Why don't they do something about it?"

"I don't know why; unless, of course, they may not know what's going on nor what he's doing. He intimidates everyone with threats. They're all afraid to tell. And I've heard that some are really serious and frightening threats."

"Do you think he'd carry through on what he says he'll do, or do you suppose it may just be a lot of blow; a mouthful of hot air?"

"Oh no! No! He's dangerous. He'd go through with the threat if he saw he could get away with it. He bragged to someone that he turned his life over to Satan some years ago and that Satan gives him power to do the things he does."

"That's scary!" came the exclamation from the other fellow. "For sure, I'm going to give Gerald Mateer a wide berth. I mean, w-i-d-e!"
"Maybe we should do what Monty did. . . ."

"You mean get started to church and go up front? Monty said that's what he did. He said he started going to church at the invitation of Stewart Felling. And when he get there and heard the singing and the praying and the preaching, well, he said, the Lord Jesus Christ came into his heart and he knew he was forgiven of all his sins. Every single one of them. Imagine that!

"He said he felt as free and as light as a bird in the air, and every bit as happy and joyful too. And then he told me something that I can't get away from.

"Like what?" came the spontaneous question. "Monty said that since the Lord Jesus Christ came into his heart he isn't afraid of Gerald at all. Not one bit! He said the Bible declared that. now that he was a truly born again Christian -- a child of God -- he had Someone inside him who was greater than he that was in the world. It's something like, "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (I John 4:4).

"Whew! That's really something, isn't it? But, hey, we're going to be late for class unless we get moving. Maybe we should go to the church with Stewart and Monty one of these days: they've asked us often enough. . . ."

The two were talking beneath the stairwell leading to the second floor when Paige heard them. She had been standing around the corner from them, waiting for Tina Malloy so they could walk to Home Ec together.

Suddenly and painfully, Paige was brought back to the present by a sharp, deep, prick. She let out a startled cry. And instantly, she knew what she must do.

She jumped out of the seat and started forward. Gerald grabbed her jacket and tried to pull her down, hissing, "Don't you dare! I'll. . . ."

Paige tore away from her tormentor, leaving her jacket in his hands. Sobbing, she moved forward until she reached Mr. Barnett. "Please, let me out," she begged. "Please! I won't sit there anymore, Mr. Barnett."
The bus driver pulled off the road and stopped the bus. "Now tell me what's wrong," he said, as he slid out of the driver's seat and stood facing Paige and the back of the bus.

Paige, recalling the "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world," scripture verse, felt suddenly very strong and courageous. "It's Gerald," she said. "He stuck me twice with something very sharp. This second time it went deep. See the blood on my skirt?" She pointed to a bright red spot along the side of her skirt.

Mr. Barnett's face blanched. "Sit down," he said to her in a kindly-soft tone of voice as he motioned to a seat near the front that was vacated by one of the students whom he had discharged in front of her house.

"Don't worry, Paige," he added quickly, "I'll report this to Mr. Jordan our school principal, and to as many as I can who are on the board. This isn't the first thing that's happened; but it's the first real, indisputable piece of evidence we have against him. You'll be visiting a doctor immediately, I'm sure, and I know Mr. Jordan will be wanting to talk to you."

Paige leaned back against the seat and closed her eyes.

"Good for you!" one of the fellows exclaimed. "It's about time!" Paige heard others declare. "Thank You, precious Jesus, for helping me," she whispered. "Thank You for giving me the courage to do what had to be done. Please protect all the other students. . . ."

Quickly, she opened her eyes as the conversation beneath the stair well that day replayed itself back to her again. She knew what she must do; yes, indeed. Mr. Jordan must know about the Autonomous Ten plan -- the self-governing "gang" Gerald planned to form and organize. And which was, already, partially formed. She had a moral obligation to tell what she had heard. And she would do it! By God's grace and His help, she would!

She felt a comforting surge of peace sweep over her soul.