

STARS FOR SYLVIA

by

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CHAPTER TWELVE

A QUESTION OF HELL

AFTER CLASSES, when Sylvia was waiting for Nancy, Sarah came up to her and with her round face beaming, she said, “Thanks for standing up for me.”

“It was only right,” Sylvia belittled, but she was glad that Sarah had appreciated it and hoped that now she could talk to her about the Lord.

“It may be right, but most Christians are against the Jews,” Sarah answered, an unhappy expression crossing her face.

“No, Sarah, not the Christians,” Sylvia objected. “It happens all the time.”

“But you don’t understand. It is the Gentiles who are often against the Jews, but the Christians aren’t. A Christian who is trying to follow his Lord is not against any person because of his race. You must realize that there is a difference between a Christian and a Gentile.”

“You mean all Gentiles aren’t Christians, don’t you?”

“Yes.” Sylvia nodded, relieved that Sarah was beginning to see the difference.

“I suppose it is like the difference between a Reformed and an Orthodox Jew.”

“Why, yes—”

Sarah grinned and accused, “You don’t know there is a difference any more than I did about the Christians and the Gentiles.”

“That’s right,” Sylvia admitted. “What is the difference?”

Sarah frowned as she explained. “My mama is Orthodox. She tries to do everything like her mama and papa did in the old country. She buys only kosher meat and she goes to the synagogue every Friday night. But Papa is Reformed. He says the old ways are silly. He puts up with Mama’s obeying them, but he doesn’t try to follow them. And he goes to the Temple on Sunday morning. That is, he goes there, if he goes any place. But mostly, he tends to his business.”

Sylvia listened carefully and thought the distinction sounded like a devoted Christian woman whose husband was an unbeliever. She had an aunt whose husband was not saved. She wondered how it affected Sarah and asked, "Which are you?"

"I—I don't know. Sometimes I think there isn't much choice. Mama is cross lots of the time, and Papa isn't very happy either, so what good is it?"

"There is peace in—" Sylvia thought wildly—what was it she was supposed to call Jesus to a Jew? Oh, yes! —"the Messiah."

"Maybe," Sarah's shoulders slumped and she walked away.

Sylvia watched her with a heavy heart. Apparently neither the Orthodox faith nor the Reformed faith could satisfy Sarah, and Sylvia knew that Jesus could; but Sarah wasn't going to listen.

She felt someone tap her on the shoulder, and turned to face Nancy. Nancy said, "I saw you talking to Sarah so I waited. I didn't want to make the mistake we did with Fern."

"Thanks. But I don't know whether I'll ever get anywhere with Sarah. She listens just so much, and then I can feel her close up."

For a few minutes, as they walked off the school grounds, neither of the girls said anything. Sylvia was praying for Sarah. Then she asked, "Do you think we'll ever be able to get on the good side of Marguerite again?"

"Must we?" Nancy made a face. "Of course we must. We want to win her, too, don't we?"

"We ought to try. It seems to me that she needs it more than anyone."

"She was unkind to Sarah, but she's not lost any more than anyone else who doesn't know the Lord."

Nancy said sadly, "When you're lost, you're lost."

"Look," Sylvia said. "There's Marguerite. Let's catch up with her. It'll be harder to speak to her later if we let her hold a grudge about today."

"I suppose so," Nancy agreed and the girls quickened their step. They fell into step beside Marguerite, and Sylvia began, "I'm sorry I couldn't agree with you about Sarah. And I think after you see her in the play, you'll be satisfied."

"Let's not talk about it," Marguerite returned coldly.

"All right."

The three girls walked on in silence for a few minutes and the unfriendliness of it made Sylvia nervous. She tried to find something to say, and ventured, “La Von’s been coming to our Sunday school since the accident. She likes it there. How would you like to come with us?”

“No, thank you.”

Sylvia couldn’t let anyone refuse to come to Sunday school without inquiring, “Why not?”

“Because I go to another church, and I’m surprised that anyone as smart as you think you are, goes to a church where they preach about Hell.”

“Don’t you believe in Hell?” Nancy asked in surprise.

“No one does any more.”

“But if Heaven is true, Hell must be also,” Sylvia reasoned. “Don’t you believe in Heaven either?”

“If by Heaven you mean a place where everyone plays a harp, no. But if you mean a life beyond this one, yes—but I don’t believe that this thing called death is going to change one overnight into an angel.”

“Neither do I. Human beings never do become angels, but we are going some place, and we have to prepare for it while we’re here on earth.”

“Surely,” Nancy broke in, “you don’t believe that Claudia’s dad, who doesn’t believe in Jesus, is going to the same place that her mother went. Why, her mother was a dear, sweet Christian. I can still remember her.”

“No, we don’t all go to the same plane of existence,” Marguerite explained with an air of talking to very Small children. “But each one continues where he left off and evolves upward.”

“It seems to me that the older people get, the more set they get in their ways,” Sylvia pointed out. “It’s a case of **‘he that is unjust, let him be unjust still’**” (Revelation 22:11).

“After all, that is only your opinion, and as has been said today, this is a free country. I’m entitled to my opinion as much as you are to yours.”

Sylvia bit her lip. She realized what had happened. Marguerite had not recognized the Scripture, and it had sounded as if she were merely arguing her own opinion. And she knew that never worked. She admitted, “You’re right.”

“I’m right?” Marguerite said, with a startled expression on her face.

“I mean,” Sylvia hurried to explain, “that you were right to say your opinion was as good as mine.”

“But you weren’t giving an opinion,” Nancy argued. “You were quoting a verse from Revelation.”

Sylvia nodded, thinking how good and warm it felt to have a loyal friend like Nancy.

“Oh, was that in the Bible?” asked Marguerite. “I read it, sometimes. My Bible has the words of Jesus in red letters. I like that, because after all, they are all one can really believe.”

“What next?” Sylvia thought, but with a steady voice she quoted, “**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,**’ but if you prefer the words of Jesus, He said there was a Hell.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. He said, **‘These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal’** (Matthew 25:46); and another time He said, **‘How can ye escape the damnation of hell?’**” (Matthew 23:33)

Sylvia felt limp from her effort. It felt as if she were lifting a ton of brick to repeat Scripture to Marguerite who was so sure she was right.

But Marguerite didn’t answer, and as they walked on in silence, Sylvia grew hopeful that the Scripture had touched her. When they reached Marguerite’s corner, Sylvia asked, “Now, will you go to church with us Sunday?”

Marguerite’s blue eyes were slits when she answered, “No, thank you; I prefer my own church. I still don’t think God sends people to Hell.”

“He doesn’t send them, they send themselves—” she began, but Marguerite walked away leaving her still talking. Sylvia frowned in bewilderment. “I wonder what church she goes to, anyway.”

“I don’t know,” Nancy admitted.

~ end of chapter 12 ~

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