

# STARS FOR SYLVIA

by

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## CHAPTER ONE

### A CHALLENGE TO SYLVIA

SYLVIA INGLE stood on the steps of the administration building of Brookside High School, waiting for her friend Nancy. It had rained that morning but it wasn't raining now, and her raincoat was a bother to carry. And her books were heavy. She wished slowpoke Nancy would hurry.

Instead, across the broad velvet green lawn strolled Claudia Brown, the sight of her made Sylvia ache inside. She felt so sorry for Claudia. Since her mother had died two years ago everything about Claudia seemed wrong. Her clothes never looked like the other girls'. Even now, she was wearing a plain, poorly fitted skirt instead of one of the popular plaids like Sylvia was wearing.

And Claudia didn't make good grades. Not that grades were everything, but every girl wanted to pass. She dated boys of whom Sylvia's mother didn't approve.

Sylvia remembered when she and Claudia had been in grammar school and used to play together. That seemed a long time ago. She seldom even talked to Claudia any more, and yet, if ever a girl needed a friend, Claudia did. If only there was some way she could help her to become one of the gang!

"Hi," Claudia called, tossing her tawny hair with a slightly defiant air. "Going my way?"

Sylvia's brown eyes opened wide at the unexpected invitation. Claudia always acted as though she didn't care whether anyone was friendly or not.

"But probably she does care. She's just pretending. Maybe this is my chance. And if I'm friendly, maybe I can—" Sylvia thought.

She glanced into the building, down the hallway. Nancy wasn't in sight yet. She would go on without her and explain tomorrow. Surely, Nancy would understand. Sylvia smiled, and skipped down the steps.

"I might as well. Something is keeping Nancy a long time."

The girls walked off the school grounds, across the street and down a tree-shaded avenue.

Now that Sylvia was with Claudia she didn't know what to say. Oh, she knew what she wanted to ask her, but she didn't know how to begin. Her throat felt tight and there was a sharp pain in the pit of her stomach. She swallowed, then sputtered, "What are you going to do over the weekend?"

"Well, Saturday morning I always have to clean house. And Dad has Saturday afternoon off, so we do our shopping then. After supper, I've a date with Ed."

"Ed?" Sylvia repeated, deciding that Claudia meant Ed Rankin. She knew of him but she didn't know him.

He had quit school and was now working in a gas station. She had heard that he chased around with a wild bunch. Claudia ought to know better than to go out with him!

"He and I are kind of going steady." Claudia's husky voice had a confident tone.

Sylvia only nodded. There was no use telling her she shouldn't go out with him. She would only think it was none of Sylvia's business. She shifted her books and raincoat to her other arm, and asked, "But what about Sunday? Why don't you come to church with Nancy and me? We have a real keen class. You used to go."

"When I was a child," Claudia said, disdainfully. "But I wouldn't care to go now."

"Why not?" Sylvia asked, taken back.

"Because I don't believe in the Bible."

Sylvia took a deep breath and stood still. She had heard there were people who didn't believe in the Bible, but never before had she heard anyone actually come out and say so. Surely, Claudia couldn't mean it. "But you must!"

"No, I don't."

"Why not?" Sylvia asked as she began walking again. Claudia's pale face flushed and excitedly she answered, "Because it's full of mistakes."

"It can't be. Name one."

"Well, maybe not mistakes, but things that are funny. For one thing, my dad says that no one knows where Cain got his wife. Do you know where he got her?"

Sylvia's mind turned a double somersault and back, but she couldn't find the answer. Where Cain got his wife had never bothered her. It was enough for her that the Bible said he had one. But she knew there was some explanation, if she only knew it—

“Adam and Eve had only two boys, Cain and Abel,” Claudia continued, her air of confidence growing.

“No, there was Seth too,” Sylvia suddenly remembered.

“Who was he?”

“He was the son God gave to take the place of Abel.”

“Well, maybe so.”

“Eve had other children, so Cain must have married one of his sisters,” Sylvia realized.

“But the Bible doesn’t say it.”

“I’m not sure,” Sylvia had to admit, and her dark eyebrows drew together in a deep frown. She felt terrible because she couldn’t answer Claudia’s questions. She had had high hopes of inviting Claudia to church where she would learn about Jesus and come to believe in Him. Sylvia had felt that when she did, everything in her life would be straightened out. She wouldn’t go out with the wrong fellows; she’d have Christian friends. Instead, the very first thing, Claudia had asked her a question she couldn’t answer.

“I could ask a lot more questions, but this is where I get off,” Claudia stopped in front of a large four-flat building. Her blue eyes smiled, and she said, “Anyway, let’s forget it. And thanks for walking home with me.”

Claudia did want to be friendly! If only Sylvia could answer her questions about the Bible! Anxiously, Sylvia suggested, “If I can find out about Cain and all that, how about my coming over tomorrow and telling you?”

“Can you make it Sunday afternoon? I’ll be busy to-morrow as I said, but Sunday is always a dull day.”

Sylvia thought that Sunday wasn’t dull around her house—there was always so much to do, with the different meetings at the church; but she said, “I’ll squeeze it in, somehow.”

“Okay, I’ll be looking for you.” Claudia trotted up the steps and into the house.

Sylvia walked slowly down the street. Claudia really had upset her! It was serious for a girl not to believe the Bible! Sylvia thought of the verse, “**All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness**” (II Timothy 3:16). She knew she believed the Bible all right.

But how could she prove to Claudia that it’s true? In a flash it came to her what to do. And she wouldn’t wait. She would do it right now!

She walked resolutely down the shady street and around the corner. Her full plaid skirt swung as she walked, her brown eyes were bright as amber and her dusky hair framed her face like a cloud.

She would go see Miss Harper and ask her all of Claudia's questions and more. She would ask her everything that Claudia could possibly ask. Miss Harper would know the answers.

Sylvia admired Miss Harper more than anyone else in the whole world. Adele Harper was tops. She was pretty. Of course, she wasn't too young. There was a wide streak of grey in her black hair, but the lines around her mouth and at the corners of her eyes were laugh wrinkles.

And Miss Harper was smart. She taught at Brookside High. Sylvia sighed—she wasn't her home room teacher, but she taught math. Sylvia considered math the hardest subject of all. Miss Harper was also Sylvia's Sunday school teacher. She always let the girls ask all the questions they wanted and she always answered them— every one!

Sylvia opened the white gate and walked down the path. Miss Harper's garden was different from any other in town. She didn't have a lawn, but rows and rows of roses. Miss Harper cultivated roses and knew them by name: Texas Centennial, Star of Holland, Hoover—that's how smart Miss Harper was!

Sylvia stepped onto the porch of the small white frame house and then she stopped. She had been to Miss Harper's before, but always when Miss Harper invited the Sunday school class. Never by herself. Suddenly, she didn't feel so brave. Maybe she had better forget the questions and go home!

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