

STARS FOR SYLVIA

by

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CHAPTER EIGHT

AS OLD AS JOB

AS SYLVIA looked around the small room in the church where Miss Harper and the girls met for their Sunday school lesson, she knew she ought to be happy. There was Claudia, in a pretty new pastel striped dress, drinking in every word that Miss Harper said. And there was La Von, in a crisp white organdy, listening eagerly.

But where was Nancy? She had waited for Nancy as long as she dared, but Nancy hadn't come by for her. This would be the first Sunday Nancy had missed in— she couldn't remember how long! The other times when she had to miss, because of a cold or something, she had had her mother phone. This morning the phone hadn't rung, and neither had Nancy come by. It took the edge off Sylvia's new-found happiness to have Nancy absent. It wasn't much help to gain one girl, if another one were lost at the same time. "Sylvia!"

Sylvia flushed and apologized. "I'm sorry. I'm afraid I was thinking of something else."

Miss Harper's smile excused her and after that Sylvia paid rapt attention to the lesson.

But she couldn't forget Nancy and, after she had finished drying the dinner dishes, she decided, "Mom, I think I'll go over to Nancy's and see why she didn't come to Sunday school this morning."

"All right, dear," her mother agreed absent-mindedly, as she poured a little water on the potted geranium sitting on the window sill.

Sylvia went into the living room, glanced at her father who was sleeping on the couch, and at her brother Ted, who sat with his feet across the arm of the big chair, reading a book. They looked content! She wondered if she should take her Bible with her. No, she wouldn't need it at Nancy's. But, in case she should be able to interest Nancy in learning the verses, she would take her precious list with her. She hurried into her bedroom, picked up her New Testament with the list of verses and stuck it into her large patch pocket.

Outside, she noticed that it was a pleasant, dreamy afternoon. As she walked down the street, the peace of the afternoon crept over her. It felt good to be alive.

In a way, she matched the day. Her white dress had rosebuds rambling all over it, and her nut-brown hair was piled high in back and tied with a pink velvet ribbon.

She had always thought Nancy's home attractive. It had a low-roofed porch, and was set back in the middle of a wide lawn. As she walked up to the door and rang the bell she wondered exactly how welcome she would be. She could hear the chimes play; then Nancy opened the door, and when she saw Sylvia, she snapped, "It's you!"

"You weren't at Sunday school and I wondered . . ."

"Mom, it's Sylvia. We'll be out on the porch," Nancy called back over her shoulder. She closed the door behind her, and sat on the arm of one of the porch chairs.

"You needn't have put yourself out for me. It's only— I guess I'm not coming to church any more."

"But, why not?"

"I guess because I don't feel like it."

"That's no reason," Sylvia objected, sitting on the part of the canvas chair which extended out for the feet. "We always went together. And even if you're peeved at me, you should go to church."

"I should, should I?" Nancy's brown eyes threw off sparks of fire. "Well, I'm not going because of the hypocrites."

"Hypocrites?" Sylvia repeated, feeling blank. That was the last thing she had expected Nancy to say. She had heard of hypocrites but they did not seem real to her. She frowned. "Whom do you know that's a hypocrite?"

"If you want to know, you are."

"Me?" Sylvia gulped.

"Yes, you." Nancy stood up and looked down at Sylvia. "You pretend to be my special friend, and then the very minute someone else pays a little attention to you, like Claudia, you drop me and run after her. And that isn't all. You pretend to be such a Christian and all week long, you've been hanging around La Von and she goes with a bunch who certainly aren't Christians."

Sylvia turned hot, then cold. The idea of Nancy's misjudging her! She had only wanted to be friends with Claudia and La Von for the Lord's sake. She protested, "Nancy, you just don't understand!"

"I guess I understand all right!"

Sylvia jumped to her feet, tempted to walk away and let Nancy think anything she wanted; but no, that wasn't the way for a soul-winner to act! She explained. "But, Nancy, it's because I want to win the girls to the Lord that I spend my time with them. Claudia did accept Christ as Saviour and La Von has started Sunday school. If we want to win our friends to the Lord, there is much to do. Nancy, come back to church and help me."

"I did misunderstand," Nancy faltered. "But even so, I'm not going back because there really are hypocrites in the church."

"But there's an answer for them. Wait, I'll show you," Sylvia said, sitting on the foot of the canvas, while Nancy edged in beside her. Sylvia hadn't memorized the verses on the list about hypocrites because she hadn't thought they were important; but now she took her New Testament out of her pocket and glanced at the list.

Under the heading, "Verses to use with those who say there are hypocrites in the church," were listed four references, Job 27:8; Job 13:16; Job 8:13; and Job 20:5. Why, all of them were in the Old Testament, in Job, the oldest book in the Bible! The problem of hypocrites must be as old as Job. But she hadn't brought her Bible. She asked, "Nancy, get your Bible, will you?"

"All right." Nancy rose and went into the house.

Sylvia settled back into the chair and thought, "I wondered why Nancy didn't understand what I was doing. Can it be that Nancy isn't a Christian?"

Nancy came out again, handed her Bible to Sylvia, and sat down in the canvas chair beside the one Sylvia was sitting in.

"I think, Nancy, we can settle this problem of hypocrites as soon as we see what God's Word has to say about them."

She turned the pages to Job, found her verse, and read: "**For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?**" You see, Nancy, if a person is a hypocrite, it won't do him any good."

Nancy didn't answer, but stared at the cement floor.

Sylvia turned to the next reference and read, "**He also shall be my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before him.**" Sylvia closed the Bible and pleaded, "Surely, Nancy, even if a person is a hypocrite, you wouldn't let him come between you and the Lord."

Nancy looked up, and her chin quivered. "I'm sorry for the way I've acted, Sylvia. I guess I was jealous. I didn't understand why you were being nice to the girls, because I guess—well, maybe, I'm not a Christian."

Sylvia moved forward and nodded her head. "I was afraid of that. After all, going to church doesn't make anyone a Christian."

"Then I'm the hypocrite!" she groaned.

Sylvia thought for a moment before she answered. "No, I don't think you are. I think a hypocrite is someone who does wrong and goes to church to try to cover it up, but you didn't really pretend to be a Christian. And—" her heart began to beat a little faster as she urged, "you can be a Christian. You've gone to church and know how. All you have to do is obey, **'Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved'**" (Romans 10:13).

"I want to be," Nancy said earnestly. She slid to her knees beside her chair, and Sylvia knelt beside her. Sylvia waited, solemn and quiet, while Nancy prayed.

When Nancy finally looked up, with her eyes shining, Sylvia squeezed her. Nancy blinked back her tears, then said, "And now, I want you to tell me all about what you've been doing with Claudia and La Von."

"I will," Sylvia answered, happy that at last her chum was a Christian and they could be close friends again. She lay back in the canvas chair, and Nancy in the one beside her. Sylvia told her, "It all started with my asking Claudia to Sunday school and when she asked me some questions about the Bible I couldn't answer. I went to Miss Harper and she gave me a list of verses to memorize. After I had learned three of them I went over to Claudia's and she accepted the Lord as her Saviour."

"She did!"

"Yes. Then I started asking La Von to go to the youth rally. She went but she wasn't interested, not until after Fern and Marguerite were in that accident."

"Too bad that had to happen!"

"Yes, it was. And next week I'm going to the hospital to see Fern. But meanwhile, the accident made La Von think, and she started Sunday school this morning."

"Did she accept Christ, too?"

"No, not yet; but I do hope she will."

"I guess I couldn't ever talk to anyone about the Lord as you did to me."

"It isn't hard when you know the Scriptures. I didn't argue with you; I just showed you the Scriptures."

"Still, I know I couldn't do it."

“It isn’t easy,” Sylvia admitted; “I’ve learned that it isn’t enough to know the Scriptures. I always have to pray hard ahead of time.”

Nancy sat upright in her chair and exclaimed, “That’s it! I can help you by praying. You tell me whom you’re going to talk to, and I’ll pray for you.”

“That will help. There’s so much to pray about.” Sylvia moved closer to Nancy, and asked, “Will you pray that Claudia will be a witness to her dad, and that La Von will accept the Lord, and—”

“What about Fern and Marguerite?”

“Yes, I want to talk to them. And maybe Sarah. Oh, Nancy, so many of our friends need Jesus!”

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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