

IN HIS STEPS.

"What Would Jesus Do?"

By CHARLES M. SHELDON.

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[CONTINUED.]

CHAPTER III.

If any man counteth unto his and hateth not his own father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters—yea, and his own life also—he cannot be my disciple. . . . And whosoever forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

When Rachel Winslow and Virginia Page separated after the meeting at the First church on Sunday, they agreed to continue their conversation the next day. Virginia asked Rachel to come and lunch with her at noon, and Rachel accordingly rang the bell at the Page mansion about half past 11. Virginia herself met her, and the two were soon talking earnestly.

"The fact is," Rachel was saying after they had been talking a few minutes, "I cannot reconcile it with my judgment of what he would do. I cannot tell another person what to do, but I feel that I ought not to accept this offer."

"What will you do, then?" asked Virginia, with great interest.

"I don't know yet, but I have decided to refuse this offer."

Rachel picked up a letter that had been lying in her lap and ran over its contents again. It was a letter from the manager of a comic opera offering her a place with a large traveling company for the season. The salary was a very large figure, and the prospect held out by the manager was flattering. He had heard Rachel sing that Sunday morning when the stranger had interrupted the service. He had been much impressed. There was money in that voice, and it ought to be used in comic opera, so said the letter, and the manager wanted a reply as soon as possible.

"There's no virtue in saying 'No' to this offer when I have the other one," Rachel went on thoughtfully. "That's harder to decide, but I've made up my mind. To tell the truth, Virginia, I'm completely convinced in the first case that Jesus would never use any talent like a good voice just to make money. But, now, take this concert offer. Here is a reputable company to travel with an impersonator and a violinist and a male quartet, all people of good reputation. I'm asked to go as one of the company and sing leading soprano. The salary (I mentioned it, didn't I) is to be guaranteed—\$200 a month for the season. But I don't feel satisfied that Jesus would go. What do you think?"

"You mustn't ask me to decide for you," replied Virginia, with a sad smile. "I believe Mr. Maxwell was right when he said we must each one of us decide according to the judgment we felt for ourselves to be Christianlike. I am having a harder time than you are, dear, to decide what he would do."

"Are you?" Rachel asked. She rose and walked over to the window and looked out. Virginia came and stood by her. The street was crowded with life, and the two young women looked at it silently for a moment. Suddenly Virginia broke out as Rachel had never heard her before.

"Rachel, what does all this contrast in conditions mean to you as you ask this question of what Jesus would do? It maddens me to think that the society in which I have been brought up, the same to which we are both said to belong, is satisfied, year after year, to go on dressing and eating and having a good time, giving and receiving entertainments, spending its money on houses and luxuries and occasionally, to ease its conscience, donating, without any personal sacrifice, a little money to charity. I have been educated, as you have, in one of the most expensive schools of America, launched into society as an heiress, supposed to be in a very enviable position. I'm perfectly well, I can travel or stay at home, I can do as I please, I can gratify almost any want or desire, and yet when I honestly try to imagine Jesus living the life I have lived and an expected to live and doing for the rest of my life what thousands of other rich people do I am under condemnation for being one of the most wicked, selfish, useless creatures in the world. I have not looked out of this window for weeks without a feeling of horror toward myself as I see the humanity that pours by this house."

Virginia turned away and walked up and down the room. Rachel watched her and could not repress the rising tide of her own growing definition of discipleship. Of what Christian use was her own talent of song? Was the best she could do to sell her talent for so much a month, go on a concert company's tour, dress beautifully, enjoy the excitement of public applause and gain a reputation as a great singer? Was that what Jesus would do?

She was not morbid. She was in sound health, was conscious of great powers as a singer and knew that if she went out into public life she could make a great deal of money and become well known. It is doubtful if she overestimated her ability to accomplish all she thought herself capable of. And Virginia—what she had just said smote Rachel with great force because of the similar position in which the two friends found themselves.

Lunch was announced, and they went out and were joined by Virginia's grandmother, Mme. Page, a handsome, stately woman of 65, and Virginia's brother, Rollin, a young man who spent most of his time at one of the clubs and had no particular ambition for anything but a growing admiration

for Rachel Winslow, and whenever she dined or lunched at the Page mansion, if he knew of it, he always planned to be at home.

These three made up the Page family. Virginia's father had been a banker and grain speculator. Her mother had died ten years before, her father within the past year. The grandmother, a southern woman in birth and training, had all the traditions and feelings that accompany the possession of wealth and social standing that have never been disturbed. She was a shrewd, careful business woman of more than average ability. The family property and wealth were invested, in large measure, under her personal care. Virginia's portion was, without any restriction, her own. She had been trained by her father to understand the ways of the business world, and even the grandmother had been compelled to acknowledge the girl's capacity for taking care of her own money.

Perhaps two persons could not be found anywhere less capable of understanding a girl like Virginia than Mme. Page and Rollin. Rachel, who had known the family since she was a girl playmate of Virginia's, could not help thinking of what confronted Virginia in her own home when she once decided on the course which she honestly believed Jesus would take. Today at lunch, as she recalled Virginia's outbreak in the front room, she tried to picture the scene that would at some time occur between Mme. Page and her granddaughter.

"I understand that you are going on the stage, Miss Winslow. We shall all be delighted, I'm sure," said Rollin during one of the pauses in the conversation, which had not been animated.

Rachel colored and felt annoyed. "Who told you?" she asked, while Virginia, who had been very silent and reserved, suddenly roused herself and appeared ready to join in the talk.

"Oh, we hear a thing or two on the street! Besides, every one saw Crandall, the manager, at church two weeks ago. He doesn't go to church to hear the preaching. In fact, I know other people who don't either, not when there's something better to hear."

Rachel did not color this time, but she answered quietly:

"You're mistaken. I'm not going on the stage."

"It's a great pity. You'd make a hit. Everybody is talking about your singing."

This time Rachel flushed with genuine anger. Before she could say anything Virginia broke in.

"Whom do you mean by 'everybody'?"

"Whom? I mean all the people who hear Miss Winslow on Sunday. What other time do they hear her? It's a great pity, I say, that the general public outside of Raymond cannot hear her voice."

"Let us talk about something else," said Rachel a little sharply. Mme. Page glanced at her and spoke with a gentle courtesy.

"My dear, Rollin never could pay an indirect compliment. He is like his father in that. But we are all curious to know something of your plans. We claim the right from old acquaintance, you know. And Virginia had already told us of your concert company offer."

"I supposed, of course, that was public property," said Virginia, smiling across the table. "It was in the News yesterday."

"Yes, yes," replied Rachel hastily. "I understand that, Mme. Page. Well, Virginia and I have been talking about it. I have decided not to accept, and that is as far as I have gone yet."

Rachel was conscious of the fact that the conversation had up to this point been narrowing her hesitation concerning the company's offer down to a decision that would absolutely satisfy her own judgment of Jesus' probable action. It had been the last thing in the world, however, that she had desired to have her decision made in any way so public as this. Somehow what Rollin Page had said and his manner in saying it had hastened her judgment in the matter.

"Would you mind telling us, Rachel, your reasons for refusing the offer? It looks like a good opportunity for a young girl like you. Don't you think the general public ought to hear you? I feel like Rollin about that. A voice like yours belongs to a larger audience than Raymond and the First church."

Rachel Winslow was naturally a girl of great reserve. She shrank from making her plans or her thoughts public. But with all her repression there was possible in her an occasional sudden breaking out that was simply an impulsive, thoughtful, frank, truthful expression of her most inner personal feeling. She spoke now in reply to Mme. Page in one of those rare moments of unreserve that added to the attractiveness of her whole character.

"I have no other reason than a conviction that Jesus would do the same thing," she said, looking in Mme. Page's eyes with a clear, earnest gaze.

Mme. Page turned red, and Rollin stared. Before her grandmother could say anything Virginia spoke.

Her rising color showed how she was stirred. Virginia's pale, clear complexion was that of health, but it was generally in marked contrast to Rachel's tropical type of beauty.

"Grandmother, you know we promised to make that the standard of our conduct for a year. Mr. Maxwell's proposition was plain to all who heard it. We have not been able to arrive at our decisions very rapidly. The difficulty in knowing what Jesus would do has perplexed Rachel and me a good deal."

Mme. Page looked sharply at Virginia before she said anything.

Miss Winslow's affairs, but"—she paused and continued with a sharpness that was new to Rachel—"I hope you have no foolish notions in this matter, Virginia."

"I have a great many notions," replied Virginia quietly. "Whether they are foolish or not depends upon my right understanding of what he would do. As soon as I find out I shall do it."

"Excuse me, ladies," said Rollin, rising from the table. "The conversation is getting beyond my depth. I shall retire to the library for a cigar."

He went out of the dining room, and there was silence for a moment. Mme. Page waited until the servant had brought in something and then asked her to go out. She was angry, and her anger was formidable, although checked in some measure by the presence of Rachel.

"I am older by several years than you, young ladies," she said, and her traditional type of bearing seemed to Rachel to rise up like a great frozen wall between her and every conception of Jesus as a sacrifice. "What you have promised in a spirit of false emotion, I presume, is impossible of performance."

"Do you mean, grandmother, that we cannot possibly act as Jesus would, or do you mean that if we try to we shall offend the customs and prejudices of society?" asked Virginia.

"It is not required. It is not necessary. Besides, how can you act with any?"

Mme. Page paused, broke off her sentence and then turned to Rachel.

"What will your mother say to your decision? My dear, is it not foolish? What do you expect to do with your voice anyway?"

"I don't know what mother will say yet," Rachel answered, with a great shrinking from trying to give her mother's probable answer. If there was a woman in all Raymond with great ambitions for her daughter's success as a singer, Mrs. Winslow was that woman.

"Oh, you will see it in a different light after wise thought of it! My dear," continued Mme. Page, rising from the table, "you will live to regret it if you do not accept the concert company's offer or something like it."

Rachel said something that contained a hint of the struggle she was still having, and after a little she went away, feeling that her departure was to be followed by a painful conversation between Virginia and her grandmother. As she afterward learned, Virginia passed through a crisis of feeling during that scene with her grandmother that hastened her final decision as to the use of her money and her social position.

Rachel was glad to escape and to be by herself. A plan was slowly forming in her mind, and she wanted to be alone to think it out carefully. But before she had walked two blocks she was annoyed to find Rollin Page walking beside her.

"Sorry to disturb your thought, Miss Winslow, but I happened to be going your way and had an idea you might not object. In fact, I've been walking here for a whole block, and you haven't objected."

"I did not see you," replied Rachel.

"I wouldn't mind that if you only thought of me once in awhile," said Rollin suddenly. He took one last nervous puff of his cigar, tossed it into the street and walked along with a pale face.

Rachel was surprised, but not startled. She had known Rollin as a boy, and there had been a time when they had used each other's first name familiarly. Lately, however, something in Rachel's manner had put an end to that. She was used to his direct attempts at compliment and was sometimes amused by them. Today she honestly wished him anywhere else.

"Do you ever think of me, Miss Winslow?" asked Rollin after a pause.

"Oh, yes, quite often!" said Rachel, with a smile.

"Are you thinking of me now?"

"Yes, that is—yes, I am."

"What?"

"Do you want me to be absolutely truthful?"

"Of course."

"Then I was thinking that I wished you were not here."

Rollin bit his lip and looked gloomy. Rachel had not spoken anything as he wished.

"Now, look here, Rachel—oh, I know that's forbidden, but I've got to speak some time—you know how I feel. What makes you treat me so hard? You used to like me a little, you know."

"Did I? Of course we used to get on very well as boy and girl, but we are older now."

Rachel still spoke in the light, easy way she had used since her first annoyance at seeing him. She was still somewhat preoccupied with her plan, which had been disturbed by Rollin's appearance.

They walked along in silence a little way. The avenue was full of people. Among the persons passing was Jasper Chase. He saw Rachel and Rollin and bowed as he went by. Rollin was watching Rachel closely.

"I wish I were Jasper Chase. Maybe I'd stand some show then," he said moodily.

Rachel colored in spite of herself. She did not say anything and quickened her pace a little. Rollin seemed determined to say something, and Rachel seemed helpless to prevent him. After all, she thought, he might as well know the truth one time as another.

"You know well enough, Rachel, how I feel toward you. Isn't there any hope? I could make you happy. I've loved you a good many years."

"Why, how old do you think I am?" broke in Rachel, with a nervous laugh. She was shaken out of her usual poise of manner.

"You know what I mean," went on Rollin doggedly, "and you have no right to laugh at me just because I want you to marry me."

could attach no meaning to it beyond the familiarity of the family acquaintance. "It is impossible." She was still a little agitated by the fact of receiving a proposal of marriage on the avenue, but the noise on the street and sidewalk made the conversation as private as if they were in the house.

"Would you—that is—do you think—if you gave me time I would?"

"No!" said Rachel. She spoke firmly. Perhaps, she thought afterward, although she did not mean to, she spoke harshly.

They walked on for some time without a word. They were nearing Rachel's home, and she was anxious to end the scene.

As they turned off the avenue into one of the quiet streets Rollin spoke suddenly and with more manliness than he had yet shown. There was a distinct note of dignity in his voice that was new to Rachel.

"Miss Winslow, I ask you to be my wife. Is there any hope for me that you will ever consent?"

"None in the least," Rachel spoke decidedly.

"Will you tell me why?" He asked the question as if he had a right to a truthful answer.

"I do not feel toward you as a woman ought to feel toward the man she ought to marry."

"In other words, you do not love me?"

"I do not, and I cannot."

"Why?" That was another question, and Rachel was a little surprised that he should ask it.

"Because"—She hesitated for fear she might say too much in an attempt to speak the exact truth.

"Tell me just why. You can't hurt me more than you have done already."

"Well, I don't and can't love you because you have no purpose in life. What do you ever do to make the world better? You spend your time in club life, in amusements, in travel, in luxury. What is there in such a life to attract a woman?"

"Not much, I guess," said Rollin, with a little laugh. "Still, I don't know that I am any worse than the rest of the men around me. I'm not so bad as some. Glad to know your reason."

To be continued.

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"I'm not, but it is useless for you to speak—Rollin," said Rachel after a little hesitation and then using his name in such a frank, simple way that he

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