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The Missionary Project

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Freeman High's cafeteria buzzed and hummed with noise and activity. Rachael Lindeman, her food tray held securely in both her hands to avoid spills by the shoving, pushing students, hurried to a table in the farthest corner of the cafeteria, wanting a bit of privacy to work on a theme she was writing in English class.

Sliding the papers off her tray and lifting the food on to the table, she sat down and bowed her head, her heart and lips offering their sincere thanks to God for the meal before her.



"I hope you weren't disappointed by what you heard," Rachel said.

"Mind if we join you?" a chorus of voices asked close to her ear as seven of the young people from the church seated themselves around her table.

"Hope we're not interrupting anything special," Joan Conley ventured in a half-apologetic way.

"Nothing more special than working on my theme," Rachael answered, smiling and taking a bite out of her tuna salad sandwich.

"Ugh! Tuna again!" Ramona Smith exclaimed, making a face at Rachael.

"De-licious!" Rachael rejoined pleasantly. "Try it sometime, Mona. Especially, grilled -- with Swiss cheese on rye bread. Topped with slices of my mother's candied dills it's super-delicious really!"

"Stop it. Stop it!" Roy King exclaimed, throwing his arms upward and outward in mock exasperation. "That tuna melt sounds simply too, too scrumptious for this mortal being to think about. And what I wouldn't give for a rounded platter of The Seagull's golden fried shrimp right now!"

"Aw, c'mon Roy!" Paul Sexton remarked. "How can any of us except our tuna lovin' Rachael, of course -- enjoy these sloppy Joe's and/or grilled cheese sandwiches, as the case may be, with all that talk about golden fried shrimp? Impossible, man. Impossible!" The group laughed heartily.

"Seriously, and all foolishness aside," Heather Cain said, "we'd better ask the blessing and get down to business. These sloppy Joe's are living up to their name; my bun's soaked through already."

"Care for a little ketchup?" Paul teased in irony. Again loud laughter ensued.

"Thanks. No, Paul," Heather replied, pushing the proffered ketchup bottle away. "But if we expect to have any time for discussion, we'll have to be quick about it. The lunch hour's fast passing away."

"Discussion?" Rachael questioned, "About what?"

"The missionary project, of course," Ernest Frye answered.

Rachael looked puzzled.

"Let's pray, so we can eat," Heather said again, requesting Ernest to offer thanks for the food.

Immediately the frivolity and light-hearted banter ceased; all heads bowed for prayer.

"Now, about that missionary project; what is there to discuss?" Joan asked, taking a sip of milk and looking around the group. "Personally, I rather like the idea."

"I think it's great!" Rachael exclaimed with overwhelming enthusiasm.

"Well, well, well!" Roy countered emphatically between bites of food. "And who, may I ask, is going to pay the bill? There's no way we can raise enough money to build that mission school."

" 'Oh ye of little faith!' " Rachael quoted.

"Maybe so," Roy conceded. "But I think it's absolutely ridiculous of Wayne expecting us -- our young people's group -- to build that school."

"Not 'build,' Roy; pay for the building," Ramona corrected. "And frankly, I agree with you; I think Wayne's asking too much from us."

"That makes three of us!" Paul asserted stoutly. "No, four!" Ernest declared, raising his hand. "I'm with you, too," Heather said in a little more than a whisper. "But I wish we wouldn't get so loud. That handsome new boy, James Goodspeed, is watching us."

"Maybe he has a crush on one of you," Roy teased.

"No way!" Ramona declared. "He's 'offish.' "

"Whatever that means," Roy countered with a grin on his face.

Ramona laughed lightly. "Simply stated," she said, pushing a potato chip around on her plate, "It means there's no communication line; he keeps his distance. Oh, he's polite -- to a fault almost -- and he's certainly not vain.., this to his credit; but try to get him to mingle, or to join the group and, well..."

Paul nodded in agreement. "You're so right, 'Mona," he said. "I asked him out to our house for a sort of get-acquainted supper less than six days ago, and he refused -- said he couldn't make it. And we had Mom's famous Bar-B-Q beef ribs that night, too!"

"I'm sure he spoke the truth," Rachael defended softly. "It's evil to surmise," she added as a quick afterthought. "And now, back to our project. First of all, I want to say I'm thrilled to be a part of a mission-minded church and people -- be it foreign or home, it's simply missions -- spreading the gospel of God's good news of salvation to a lost and dying world.

"Next, I think Wayne Kelley and his young bride are absolutely the greatest. He's the best young people's leader to be found anywhere. His enlarged vision stirs me and his holy enthusiasm challenges me. I'm behind him with all there is within me. We can do it; we can build that mission school!"

"Talk about bombs dropping on Hiroshima!" Ernest exclaimed.

"Our line of defense is gone," Heather conceded with a smile. "Shattered, tore down and destroyed by the 'Bombs of Rachael.' "

"I disagree," Roy insisted. "Much as I admire you for your straightforward stand, Rachael. If we were working full time, I could understand. But that's not the case. Each of us here is a senior . . . our final year at Freeman High . . . and each of us works only

part time. I simply cannot see the feasibility of this. If the entire church body was involved, yes, but not just our young people's group. Where will the money come from, Rachael?"

"Us, of course. I'll be happy to give; even though it will mean giving up some absolutely necessary things. Like Caleb in the Bible, I say, 'we are well able!' "

"How?" Roy persisted, gesticulating with his hands.

"By sacrificing," Rachael stated simply and without preamble. "By doing without some things... like rounded platters of The Seagull's golden fried shrimp . . ."

She deliberately let the sentence trail in mid-air. Roy groaned. "That's unfair," he said, getting to his feet. "It's grossly unfair. Ten dollars'll be my limit of giving; not a dime more!"

With that, he walked away. "Whew!" Paul exclaimed. "I never say Roy like that before! But it is a bit disturbing and disconcerting, I must admit." And, excusing himself, he followed Roy.

Joan was the last to leave Rachael. "I didn't say much," she admitted, "but I do feel it's a good project, a worthy project really; and I'll do all I can to help make that new mission school possible. Last week Mrs. Trawley gave me a raise for cleaning her house; so this means I'll be able to do more than I had thought possible even. Well, I must run; have some studying to do before classes begin. See you later, Rachael, the Lord willing."

Joan was scarcely gone when a voice spoke behind Rachael.

"Pardon me," James Goodspeed said. "Do you mind if I share your company?"

"Not at all," Rachael said, smiling and motioning the dark-haired, dark-eyed James to a chair across the table from her. "It's the cleanest looking chair here," she added with lilting laughter, wondering why some of her peers were so messy when they ate and why they didn't pick up their used paper napkins.

"I've been observing you," James began, smiling disarmingly. "Truth of the matter is, I've been doing a great deal of observation since coming to Freeman High... and since your kind and gracious invitation to attend services in your church. Thanks, Rachael, for your interest and concern; it's genuine and sincere, I know."

"I... hope you haven't been too disappointed in what you saw or heard," Rachael ventured cautiously, feeling embarrassed over the discussion around the table and, particularly, over Ron's loud, outspoken remarks.

James toyed with the ketchup bottle for a while when he raised his eyes to meet hers. "Some things I couldn't help but hear," he admitted candidly, adding, "I suppose no church is without its doubting Thomas, nor its 'we be not able' ten spies of Numbers 13:31.' "

Seeing the look of astonishment and delight in Rachael's eyes, James said, "In answer to your question . . . the one I'm reading in your face . . . yes, I know the Bible, and I'm a Christian, a truly saved and sanctified wholly Christian, and I am eagerly watching and waiting for the return of our Bridegroom Jesus Christ."

"Thank God!" Rachael replied in a half-whisper. "It may surprise you if I tell you that I'm very much interested in missions, too," James said. "From the day of my birth to this present hour, missions have been a vital and integral part of my life. You see, I am the son of missionary parents."

Rachael gave a happy little gasp of surprise. The simply stated declaration, related in a tone of awe, deep reverence and humility, brought tears to her eyes. "Th... that's wonderful!" she said softly. "My oldest brother and his wife and family are missionaries, and two years ago God called me, also."

Again James toyed with the ketchup bottle. "Know something?" he said after awhile. "The leading of God is wonderful. Wonderful! We, my aunt and uncle in whose home I am living while I finish my schooling and who have only recently been transferred here by his company, have been praying and searching for a spiritual church. While in prayer one day, the Lord impressed me strongly with Psalms 37:37, 'mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.'

"That's when I knew that through some young person -- or persons -- God would direct me to the right church. So I watched carefully for the 'perfect man' and the 'upright' one, and the Lord singled you out to me, Rachael. My observation of your day by day, moment by moment living and conduct, coupled with your modesty and simplicity of dress, persuaded me that one such as you would attend nothing other than a deeply spiritual and biblically sound church. So, the Lord willing, you'll see all three of us in prayer meeting tomorrow night."

"Oh, James, that's wonderful. You won't be sorry you came. We have some glorious services; God meets with us."

"That I can tell -- by you and your beautiful spirit. And would you know what I'd like, Rachael?" James asked, his dark eyes searching her face.

"I've never taken honors for being a mind reader," she teased, "so what would you like?"

"To pick you up for prayer meeting in my old blue Chevy, the Lord willing," James said quickly. "Will the lady do me the honor of accepting and riding with me in afore-mentioned chariot?"

Rachael blushed. Laughing softly, she said, "Thanks, much. I'm sure Father and Mother won't mind."

"Great! Thanks for the privilege," James said seriously, gathering her papers off the table and walking down the hallway with her. "We'll bring that mission school building to pass!" he declared emphatically. "By God's grace I'm going to help, too. I work after school for the same company where my uncle works; the pay is good. But here, this is your homeroom.., as my observation revealed to me," he said, laughing lightly and handing the theme papers to her before hurrying to his own homeroom.

Looking radiant, Rachael seated herself at her desk, confident that soon the money would all be in for the new building and that she would be seeing a great deal more of James Goodspeed.

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