

CHAPTER XVI. TIT FOR TAT

With Faith, to decide was to act. She lost no time in carrying out the idea. As soon as she came home from school the next day she left the manse and made her way down the Glen. Walter Blythe joined her as she passed the post office.

"I'm going to Mrs. Elliott's on an errand for mother," he said.

"Where are you going, Faith?"

"I am going somewhere on church business," said Faith loftily. She did not volunteer any further information and Walter felt rather snubbed. They walked on in silence for a little while. It was a warm, windy evening with a sweet, resinous air. Beyond the sand dunes were gray seas, soft and beautiful. The Glen brook bore down a freight of gold and crimson leaves, like fairy shallops. In Mr. James Reese's buckwheat stubble-land, with its beautiful tones of red and brown, a crow parliament was being held, whereat solemn deliberations regarding the welfare of crowland were in progress. Faith cruelly broke up the august assembly by climbing up on the fence and hurling a broken rail at it. Instantly the air was filled with flapping black wings and indignant caws.

"Why did you do that?" said Walter reproachfully. "They were having such a good time."

"Oh, I hate crows," said Faith airily. "The are so black and sly I feel sure they're hypocrites. They steal little birds' eggs out of their nests, you know. I saw one do it on our lawn last spring. Walter, what makes you so pale to-day? Did you have the toothache again last night?"

Walter shivered.

"Yes--a raging one. I couldn't sleep a wink--so I just paced up and down the floor and imagined I was an early Christian martyr being tortured at the command of Nero. That helped ever so much for a while--and then I got so bad I couldn't imagine anything."

"Did you cry?" asked Faith anxiously.

"No--but I lay down on the floor and groaned," admitted Walter. "Then the girls came in and Nan put cayenne pepper in it--and that made it worse--Di made me hold a swallow of cold water in my mouth--and I couldn't stand it, so they called Susan. Susan said it served me right for sitting up in the cold garret yesterday writing poetry trash. But she started up the kitchen fire and got me a hot-water bottle and it stopped the toothache. As soon as I felt better I told Susan my poetry wasn't trash and she wasn't any judge. And she said no, thank goodness she was not and she did not know anything about poetry except that it was

mostly a lot of lies. Now you know, Faith, that isn't so. That is one reason why I like writing poetry--you can say so many things in it that are true in poetry but wouldn't be true in prose. I told Susan so, but she said to stop my jawing and go to sleep before the water got cold, or she'd leave me to see if rhyming would cure toothache, and she hoped it would be a lesson to me."

"Why don't you go to the dentist at Lowbridge and get the tooth out?"

Walter shivered again.

"They want me to--but I can't. It would hurt so."

"Are you afraid of a little pain?" asked Faith contemptuously.

Walter flushed.

"It would be a BIG pain. I hate being hurt. Father said he wouldn't insist on my going--he'd wait until I'd made up my own mind to go."

"It wouldn't hurt as long as the toothache," argued Faith, "You've had five spells of toothache. If you'd just go and have it out there'd be no more bad nights. I had a tooth out once.

I yelled for a moment, but it was all over then--only the bleeding."

"The bleeding is worst of all--it's so ugly," cried Walter. "It just made me sick when Jem cut his foot last summer. Susan said I looked more like fainting than Jem did. But I couldn't hear to see Jem hurt, either. Somebody is always getting hurt, Faith--and it's awful. I just can't BEAR to see things hurt. It makes me just want to run--and run--and run--till I can't hear or see them."

"There's no use making a fuss over anyone getting hurt," said Faith, tossing her curls. "Of course, if you've hurt yourself very bad, you have to yell--and blood IS messy--and I don't like seeing other people hurt, either. But I don't want to run--I want to go to work and help them. Your father HAS to hurt people lots of times to cure them. What would they do if HE ran away?"

"I didn't say I WOULD run. I said I WANTED to run. That's a different thing. I want to help people, too. But oh, I wish there weren't any ugly, dreadful things in the world. I wish everything was glad and beautiful."

"Well, don't let's think of what isn't," said Faith. "After all, there's lots of fun in being alive. You wouldn't have toothache if you were dead, but still, wouldn't you lots rather be alive

than dead? I would, a hundred times. Oh, here's Dan Reese. He's been down to the harbour for fish."

"I hate Dan Reese," said Walter.

"So do I. All us girls do. I'm just going to walk past and never take the least notice of him. You watch me!"

Faith accordingly stalked past Dan with her chin out and an expression of scorn that bit into his soul. He turned and shouted after her.

"Pig-girl! Pig-girl!! Pig-girl!!!" in a crescendo of insult.

Faith walked on, seemingly oblivious. But her lip trembled slightly with a sense of outrage. She knew she was no match for Dan Reese when it came to an exchange of epithets. She wished Jem Blythe had been with her instead of Walter. If Dan Reese had dared to call her a pig-girl in Jem's hearing, Jem would have wiped up the dust with him. But it never occurred to Faith to expect Walter to do it, or blame him for not doing it. Walter, she knew, never fought other boys. Neither did Charlie Clow of the north road. The strange part was that, while she despised Charlie for a coward, it never occurred to her to disdain Walter. It was simply that he seemed to her an inhabitant of a world of his own, where different traditions prevailed. Faith would as

soon have expected a starry-eyed young angel to pummel dirty, freckled Dan Reese for her as Walter Blythe. She would not have blamed the angel and she did not blame Walter Blythe. But she wished that sturdy Jem or Jerry had been there and Dan's insult continued to rankle in her soul.

Walter was pale no longer. He had flushed crimson and his beautiful eyes were clouded with shame and anger. He knew that he ought to have avenged Faith. Jem would have sailed right in and made Dan eat his words with bitter sauce. Ritchie Warren would have overwhelmed Dan with worse "names" than Dan had called Faith. But Walter could not--simply could not--"call names." He knew he would get the worst of it. He could never conceive or utter the vulgar, ribald insults of which Dan Reese had unlimited command. And as for the trial by fist, Walter couldn't fight. He hated the idea. It was rough and painful--and, worst of all, it was ugly. He never could understand Jem's exultation in an occasional conflict. But he wished he COULD fight Dan Reese. He was horribly ashamed because Faith Meredith had been insulted in his presence and he had not tried to punish her insulter. He felt sure she must despise him. She had not even spoken to him since Dan had called her pig-girl. He was glad when they came to the parting of the ways.

Faith, too, was relieved, though for a different reason. She wanted to be alone because she suddenly felt rather nervous about

her errand. Impulse had cooled, especially since Dan had bruised her self-respect. She must go through with it, but she no longer had enthusiasm to sustain her. She was going to see Norman Douglas and ask him to come back to church, and she began to be afraid of him. What had seemed so easy and simple up at the Glen seemed very different down here. She had heard a good deal about Norman Douglas, and she knew that even the biggest boys in school were afraid of him. Suppose he called her something nasty--she had heard he was given to that. Faith could not endure being called names--they subdued her far more quickly than a physical blow. But she would go on--Faith Meredith always went on. If she did not her father might have to leave the Glen.

At the end of the long lane Faith came to the house--a big, old-fashioned one with a row of soldierly Lombardies marching past it. On the back veranda Norman Douglas himself was sitting, reading a newspaper. His big dog was beside him. Behind, in the kitchen, where his housekeeper, Mrs. Wilson, was getting supper, there was a clatter of dishes--an angry clatter, for Norman Douglas had just had a quarrel with Mrs. Wilson, and both were in a very bad temper over it. Consequently, when Faith stepped on the veranda and Norman Douglas lowered his newspaper she found herself looking into the choleric eyes of an irritated man.

Norman Douglas was rather a fine-looking personage in his way. He had a sweep of long red beard over his broad chest and a mane

of red hair, ungrizzled by the years, on his massive head. His high, white forehead was unwrinkled and his blue eyes could flash still with all the fire of his tempestuous youth. He could be very amiable when he liked, and he could be very terrible. Poor Faith, so anxiously bent on retrieving the situation in regard to the church, had caught him in one of his terrible moods.

He did not know who she was and he gazed at her with disfavour. Norman Douglas liked girls of spirit and flame and laughter. At this moment Faith was very pale. She was of the type to which colour means everything. Lacking her crimson cheeks she seemed meek and even insignificant. She looked apologetic and afraid, and the bully in Norman Douglas's heart stirred.

"Who the dickens are you? And what do you want here?" he demanded in his great resounding voice, with a fierce scowl.

For once in her life Faith had nothing to say. She had never supposed Norman Douglas was like THIS. She was paralyzed with terror of him. He saw it and it made him worse.

"What's the matter with you?" he boomed. "You look as if you wanted to say something and was scared to say it. What's troubling you? Confound it, speak up, can't you?"

No. Faith could not speak up. No words would come. But her

lips began to tremble.

"For heaven's sake, don't cry," shouted Norman. "I can't stand snivelling. If you've anything to say, say it and have done. Great Kitty, is the girl possessed of a dumb spirit? Don't look at me like that--I'm human--I haven't got a tail! Who are you--who are you, I say?"

Norman's voice could have been heard at the harbour. Operations in the kitchen were suspended. Mrs. Wilson was listening open-eared and eyed. Norman put his huge brown hands on his knees and leaned forward, staring into Faith's pallid, shrinking face. He seemed to loom over her like some evil giant out of a fairy tale. She felt as if he would eat her up next thing, body and bones.

"I--am--Faith--Meredith," she said, in little more than a whisper.

"Meredith, hey? One of the parson's youngsters, hey? I've heard of you--I've heard of you! Riding on pigs and breaking the Sabbath! A nice lot! What do you want here, hey? What do you want of the old pagan, hey? I don't ask favours of parsons--and I don't give any. What do you want, I say?"

Faith wished herself a thousand miles away. She stammered out

her thought in its naked simplicity.

"I came--to ask you--to go to church--and pay--to the salary."

Norman glared at her. Then he burst forth again.

"You impudent hussy--you! Who put you up to it, jade? Who put you up to it?"

"Nobody," said poor Faith.

"That's a lie. Don't lie to me! Who sent you here? It wasn't your father--he hasn't the smeddum of a flea--but he wouldn't send you to do what he dassn't do himself. I suppose it was some of them confounded old maids at the Glen, was it--was it, hey?"

"No--I--I just came myself."

"Do you take me for a fool?" shouted Norman.

"No--I thought you were a gentleman," said Faith faintly, and certainly without any thought of being sarcastic.

Norman bounced up.

"Mind your own business. I don't want to hear another word from

you. If you wasn't such a kid I'd teach you to interfere in what doesn't concern you. When I want parsons or pill-dosers I'll send for them. Till I do I'll have no truck with them. Do you understand? Now, get out, cheese-face."

Faith got out. She stumbled blindly down the steps, out of the yard gate and into the lane. Half way up the lane her daze of fear passed away and a reaction of tingling anger possessed her. By the time she reached the end of the lane she was in such a furious temper as she had never experienced before. Norman Douglas' insults burned in her soul, kindling a scorching flame. Go home! Not she! She would go straight back and tell that old ogre just what she thought of him--she would show him--oh, wouldn't she! Cheese-face, indeed!

Unhesitatingly she turned and walked back. The veranda was deserted and the kitchen door shut. Faith opened the door without knocking, and went in. Norman Douglas had just sat down at the supper table, but he still held his newspaper. Faith walked inflexibly across the room, caught the paper from his hand, flung it on the floor and stamped on it. Then she faced him, with her flashing eyes and scarlet cheeks. She was such a handsome young fury that Norman Douglas hardly recognized her.

"What's brought you back?" he growled, but more in bewilderment than rage.

Unquailingly she glared back into the angry eyes against which so few people could hold their own.

"I have come back to tell you exactly what I think of you," said Faith in clear, ringing tones. "I am not afraid of you. You are a rude, unjust, tyrannical, disagreeable old man. Susan says you are sure to go to hell, and I was sorry for you, but I am not now. Your wife never had a new hat for ten years--no wonder she died. I am going to make faces at you whenever I see you after this. Every time I am behind you you will know what is happening. Father has a picture of the devil in a book in his study, and I mean to go home and write your name under it. You are an old vampire and I hope you'll have the Scotch fiddle!"

Faith did not know what a vampire meant any more than she knew what the Scotch fiddle was. She had heard Susan use the expressions and gathered from her tone that both were dire things. But Norman Douglas knew what the latter meant at least. He had listened in absolute silence to Faith's tirade. When she paused for breath, with a stamp of her foot, he suddenly burst into loud laughter. With a mighty slap of hand on knee he exclaimed,

"I vow you've got spunk, after all--I like spunk. Come, sit down--sit down!"

"I will not." Faith's eyes flashed more passionately. She thought she was being made fun of--treated contemptuously. She would have enjoyed another explosion of rage, but this cut deep. "I will not sit down in your house. I am going home. But I am glad I came back here and told you exactly what my opinion of you is."

"So am I--so am I," chuckled Norman. "I like you--you're fine--you're great. Such roses--such vim! Did I call her cheese-face? Why, she never smelt a cheese. Sit down. If you'd looked like that at the first, girl! So you'll write my name under the devil's picture, will you? But he's black, girl, he's black--and I'm red. It won't do--it won't do! And you hope I'll have the Scotch fiddle, do you? Lord love you, girl, I had IT when I was a boy. Don't wish it on me again. Sit down--sit in. We'll tak' a cup o' kindness."

"No, thank you," said Faith haughtily.

"Oh, yes, you will. Come, come now, I apologize, girl--I apologize. I made a fool of myself and I'm sorry. Man can't say fairer. Forget and forgive. Shake hands, girl--shake hands. She won't--no, she won't! But she must! Look-a-here, girl, if you'll shake hands and break bread with me I'll pay what I used to to the salary and I'll go to church the first Sunday in every

month and I'll make Kitty Alec hold her jaw. I'm the only one in the clan can do it. Is it a bargain, girl?"

It seemed a bargain. Faith found herself shaking hands with the ogre and then sitting at his board. Her temper was over--Faith's tempers never lasted very long--but its excitement still sparkled in her eyes and crimsoned her cheeks. Norman Douglas looked at her admiringly.

"Go, get some of your best preserves, Wilson," he ordered, "and stop sulking, woman, stop sulking. What if we did have a quarrel, woman? A good squall clears the air and briskens things up. But no drizzling and fogging afterwards--no drizzling and fogging, woman. I can't stand that. Temper in a woman but no tears for me. Here, girl, is some messed up meat and potatoes for you. Begin on that. Wilson has some fancy name for it, but I call lit macanaccady. Anything I can't analyze in the eating line I call macanaccady and anything wet that puzzles me I call shallamagouslem. Wilson's tea is shallamagouslem. I swear she makes it out of burdocks. Don't take any of the ungodly black liquid--here's some milk for you. What did you say your name was?"

"Faith."

"No name that--no name that! I can't stomach such a name. Got

any other?"

"No, sir."

"Don't like the name, don't like it. There's no smeddum to it. Besides, it makes me think of my Aunt Jinny. She called her three girls Faith, Hope, and Charity. Faith didn't believe in anything--Hope was a born pessimist--and Charity was a miser. You ought to be called Red Rose--you look like one when you're mad. I'LL call you Red Rose. And you've roped me into promising to go to church? But only once a month, remember--only once a month. Come now, girl, will you let me off? I used to pay a hundred to the salary every year and go to church. If I promise to pay two hundred a year will you let me off going to church? Come now!"

"No, no, sir," said Faith, dimpling roguishly. "I want you to go to church, too."

"Well, a bargain is a bargain. I reckon I can stand it twelve times a year. What a sensation it'll make the first Sunday I go! And old Susan Baker says I'm going to hell, hey? Do you believe I'll go there--come, now, do you?"

"I hope not, sir," stammered Faith in some confusion.

"WHY do you hope not? Come, now, WHY do you hope not? Give us a reason, girl--give us a reason."

"It--it must be a very--uncomfortable place, sir."

"Uncomfortable? All depends on your taste in comfortable, girl. I'd soon get tired of angels. Fancy old Susan in a halo, now!"

Faith did fancy it, and it tickled her so much that she had to laugh. Norman eyed her approvingly.

"See the fun of it, hey? Oh, I like you--you're great. About this church business, now--can your father preach?"

"He is a splendid preacher," said loyal Faith.

"He is, hey? I'll see--I'll watch out for flaws. He'd better be careful what he says before ME. I'll catch him--I'll trip him up--I'll keep tabs on his arguments. I'm bound to have some fun out of this church going business. Does he ever preach hell?"

"No--o--o--I don't think so."

"Too bad. I like sermons on that subject. You tell him that if he wants to keep me in good humour to preach a good rip-roaring sermon on hell once every six months--and the more brimstone the

better. I like 'em smoking. And think of all the pleasure he'd give the old maids, too. They'd all keep looking at old Norman Douglas and thinking, 'That's for you, you old reprobate. That's what's in store for YOU!' I'll give an extra ten dollars every time you get your father to preach on hell. Here's Wilson and the jam. Like that, hey? IT isn't macanaccady. Taste!"

Faith obediently swallowed the big spoonful Norman held out to her. Luckily it WAS good.

"Best plum jam in the world," said Norman, filling a large saucer and plumping it down before her. "Glad you like it. I'll give you a couple of jars to take home with you. There's nothing mean about me--never was. The devil can't catch me at THAT corner, anyhow. It wasn't my fault that Hester didn't have a new hat for ten years. It was her own--she pinched on hats to save money to give yellow fellows over in China. I never gave a cent to missions in my life--never will. Never you try to bamboozle me into that! A hundred a year to the salary and church once a month--but no spoiling good heathens to make poor Christians! Why, girl, they wouldn't be fit for heaven or hell--clean spoiled for either place--clean spoiled. Hey, Wilson, haven't you got a smile on yet? Beats all how you women can sulk! I never sulked in my life--it's just one big flash and crash with me and then--pouf--the squall's over and the sun is out and you could eat out of my hand."

Norman insisted on driving Faith home after supper and he filled the buggy up with apples, cabbages, potatoes and pumpkins and jars of jam.

"There's a nice little tom-pussy out in the barn. I'll give you that too, if you'd like it. Say the word," he said.

"No, thank you," said Faith decidedly. "I don't like cats, and besides, I have a rooster."

"Listen to her. You can't cuddle a rooster as you can a kitten. Who ever heard of petting a rooster? Better take little Tom. I want to find a good home for him."

"No. Aunt Martha has a cat and he would kill a strange kitten."

Norman yielded the point rather reluctantly. He gave Faith an exciting drive home, behind his wild two-year old, and when he had let her out at the kitchen door of the manse and dumped his cargo on the back veranda he drove away shouting,

"It's only once a month--only once a month, mind!"

Faith went up to bed, feeling a little dizzy and breathless, as if she had just escaped from the grasp of a genial whirlwind.

She was happy and thankful. No fear now that they would have to leave the Glen and the graveyard and Rainbow Valley. But she fell asleep troubled by a disagreeable subconsciousness that Dan Reese had called her pig-girl and that, having stumbled on such a congenial epithet, he would continue to call her so whenever opportunity offered.