

## CHAPTER V. PETER GOES TO CHURCH

There was no Sunday School the next afternoon, as superintendent and teachers wished to attend a communion service at Markdale. The Carlisle service was in the evening, and at sunset we were waiting at Uncle Alec's front door for Peter and the Story Girl.

None of the grown-ups were going to church. Aunt Olivia had a sick headache and Uncle Roger stayed home with her. Aunt Janet and Uncle Alec had gone to the Markdale service and had not yet returned.

Felicity and Cecily were wearing their new summer muslins for the first time--and were acutely conscious of the fact. Felicity, her pink and white face shadowed by her drooping, forget-me-not-wreathed, leghorn hat, was as beautiful as usual; but Cecily, having tortured her hair with curl papers all night, had a rampant bush of curls all about her head which quite destroyed the sweet, nun-like expression of her little features. Cecily cherished a grudge against fate because she had not been given naturally curly hair as had the other two girls. But she attained the desire of her heart on Sundays at least, and was quite well satisfied. It was impossible to convince her that the satin smooth lustre of her week-day tresses was much more becoming to her.

Presently Peter and the Story Girl appeared, and we were all more or less relieved to see that Peter looked quite respectable, despite the indisputable patch on his trousers. His face was rosy, his thick black curls were smoothly combed, and his tie was neatly bowed; but it was his legs which we scrutinized most anxiously. At first glance they seemed well enough; but closer inspection revealed something not altogether customary.

"What is the matter with your stockings, Peter?" asked Dan bluntly.

"Oh, I hadn't a pair without holes in the legs," answered Peter easily, "because ma hadn't time to darn them this week. So I put on two pairs. The holes don't come in the same places, and you'd never notice them unless you looked right close."

"Have you got a cent for collection?" demanded Felicity.

"I've got a Yankee cent. I s'pose it will do, won't it?"

Felicity shook her head vehemently.

"Oh, no, no. It may be all right to pass a Yankee cent on a store keeper or an egg peddler, but it would never do for church."

"I'll have to go without any, then," said Peter. "I haven't another cent. I only get fifty cents a week and I give it all to ma last night."

But Peter must have a cent. Felicity would have given him one herself--and she was none too lavish of her coppers--rather than have him go without one. Dan, however, lent him one, on the distinct understanding that it was to be repaid the next week.

Uncle Roger wandered by at this moment and, beholding Peter, said,

"'Is Saul also among the prophets?' What can have induced you to turn church-goer, Peter, when all Olivia's gentle persuasions were of no avail? The old, old argument I suppose--'beauty draws us with a single hair.'"

Uncle Roger looked quizzically at Felicity. We did not know what his quotations meant, but we understood he thought Peter was going to church because of Felicity. Felicity tossed her head.

"It isn't my fault that he's going to church," she said snappishly. "It's the Story Girl's doings."

Uncle Roger sat down on the doorstep, and gave himself over to one of the silent, inward paroxysms of laughter we all found so

very aggravating. He shook his big, blond head, shut his eyes, and murmured,

"Not her fault! Oh, Felicity, Felicity, you'll be the death of your dear Uncle yet if you don't watch out."

Felicity started off indignantly, and we followed, picking up Sara Ray at the foot of the hill.

The Carlisle church was a very old-fashioned one, with a square, ivy-hung tower. It was shaded by tall elms, and the graveyard surrounded it completely, many of the graves being directly under its windows. We always took the corner path through it, passing the King plot where our kindred of four generations slept in a green solitude of wavering light and shadow.

There was Great-grandfather King's flat tombstone of rough Island sandstone, so overgrown with ivy that we could hardly read its lengthy inscription, recording his whole history in brief, and finishing with eight lines of original verse composed by his widow. I do not think that poetry was Great-grandmother King's strong point. When Felix read it, on our first Sunday in Carlisle, he remarked dubiously that it LOOKED like poetry but didn't SOUND like it.

There, too, slept the Emily whose faithful spirit was supposed to

haunt the orchard; but Edith who had kissed the poet lay not with her kindred. She had died in a far, foreign land, and the murmur of an alien sea sounded about her grave.

White marble tablets, ornamented with weeping willow trees, marked where Grandfather and Grandmother King were buried, and a single shaft of red Scotch granite stood between the graves of Aunt Felicity and Uncle Felix. The Story Girl lingered to lay a bunch of wild violets, misty blue and faintly sweet, on her mother's grave; and then she read aloud the verse on the stone.

"They were lovely and pleasant in their lives and in their death they were not divided."

The tones of her voice brought out the poignant and immortal beauty and pathos of that wonderful old lament. The girls wiped their eyes; and we boys felt as if we might have done so, too, had nobody been looking. What better epitaph could any one wish than to have it said that he was lovely and pleasant in his life? When I heard the Story Girl read it I made a secret compact with myself that I would try to deserve such an epitaph.

"I wish I had a family plot," said Peter, rather wistfully. "I haven't ANYTHING you fellows have. The Craigs are just buried anywhere they happen to die."

"I'd like to be buried here when I die," said Felix. "But I hope it won't be for a good while yet," he added in a livelier tone, as we moved onward to the church.

The interior of the church was as old-fashioned as its exterior. It was furnished with square box pews; the pulpit was a "wine-glass" one, and was reached by a steep, narrow flight of steps. Uncle Alec's pew was at the top of the church, quite near the pulpit.

Peter's appearance did not attract as much attention as we had fondly expected. Indeed, nobody seemed to notice him at all. The lamps were not yet lighted and the church was filled with a soft twilight and hush. Outside, the sky was purple and gold and silvery green, with a delicate tangle of rosy cloud above the elms.

"Isn't it awful nice and holy in here?" whispered Peter reverently. "I didn't know church was like this. It's nice."

Felicity frowned at him, and the Story Girl touched her with her slippered foot to remind him that he must not talk in church. Peter stiffened up and sat at attention during the service. Nobody could have behaved better. But when the sermon was over and the collection was being taken up, he made the sensation which his entrance had not produced.

Elder Frewen, a tall, pale man, with long, sandy side-whiskers, appeared at the door of our pew with the collection plate. We knew Elder Frewen quite well and like him; he was Aunt Janet's cousin and often visited her. The contrast between his week-day jollity and the unearthly solemnity of his countenance on Sundays always struck us as very funny. It seemed so to strike Peter; for as Peter dropped his cent into the plate he laughed aloud!

Everybody looked at our pew. I have always wondered why Felicity did not die of mortification on the spot. The Story Girl turned white, and Cecily turned red. As for that poor, unlucky Peter, the shame of his countenance was pitiful to behold. He never lifted his head for the remainder of the service; and he followed us down the aisle and across the graveyard like a beaten dog. None of us uttered a word until we reached the road, lying in the white moonshine of the May night. Then Felicity broke the tense silence by remarking to the Story Girl,

"I told you so!"

The Story Girl made no response. Peter sidled up to her.

"I'm awful sorry," he said contritely. "I never meant to laugh. It just happened before I could stop myself. It was this way--"

"Don't you ever speak to me again," said the Story Girl, in a tone of cold concentrated fury. "Go and be a Methodist, or a Mohammedan, or ANYTHING! I don't care what you are! You have HUMILIATED me!"

She marched off with Sara Ray, and Peter dropped back to us with a frightened face.

"What is it I've done to her?" he whispered. "What does that big word mean?"

"Oh, never mind," I said crossly--for I felt that Peter HAD disgraced us--"She's just mad--and no wonder. Whatever made you act so crazy, Peter?"

"Well, I didn't mean to. And I wanted to laugh twice before that and DIDN'T. It was the Story Girl's stories made me want to laugh, so I don't think it's fair for her to be mad at me. She hadn't ought to tell me stories about people if she don't want me to laugh when I see them. When I looked at Samuel Ward I thought of him getting up in meeting one night, and praying that he might be guided in his upsetting and downrising. I remembered the way she took him off, and I wanted to laugh. And then I looked at the pulpit and thought of the story she told about the old Scotch minister who was too fat to get in at the door of it, and had to h'ist himself by his two hands over it, and then whispered to the



other minister so that everybody heard him.

"This pulpit door was made for speerits'--and I wanted to laugh. And then Mr. Frewen come--and I thought of her story about his sidewhiskers--how when his first wife died of information of the lungs he went courting Celia Ward, and Celia told him she wouldn't marry him unless he shaved them whiskers off. And he wouldn't, just to be stubborn. And one day one of them caught fire, when he was burning brush, and burned off, and every one thought he'd HAVE to shave the other off then. But he didn't and just went round with one whisker till the burned one grew out. And then Celia gave in and took him, because she saw there wasn't no hope of HIM ever giving in. I just remembered that story, and I thought I could see him, taking up the cents so solemn, with one long whisker; and the laugh just laughed itself before I could help it."

We all exploded with laughter on the spot, much to the horror of Mrs. Abraham Ward, who was just driving past, and who came up the next day and told Aunt Janet we had "acted scandalous" on the road home from church. We felt ashamed ourselves, because we knew people should conduct themselves decently and in order on Sunday farings-forth. But, as with Peter, it "had laughed itself."

Even Felicity laughed. Felicity was not nearly so angry with

Peter as might have been expected. She even walked beside him and let him carry her Bible. They talked quite confidentially. Perhaps she forgave him the more easily, because he had justified her in her predictions, and thus afforded her a decided triumph over the Story Girl.

"I'm going to keep on going to church," Peter told her. "I like it. Sermons are more int'resting than I thought, and I like the singing. I wish I could make up my mind whether to be a Presbyterian or a Methodist. I s'pose I might ask the ministers about it."

"Oh, no, no, don't do that," said Felicity in alarm. "Ministers wouldn't want to be bothered with such questions."

"Why not? What are ministers for if they ain't to tell people how to get to heaven?"

"Oh, well, it's all right for grown-ups to ask them things, of course. But it isn't respectful for little boys--especially hired boys."

"I don't see why. But anyhow, I s'pose it wouldn't be much use, because if he was a Presbyterian minister he'd say I ought to be a Presbyterian, and if he was a Methodist he'd tell me to be one, too. Look here, Felicity, what IS the difference between them?"

"I--I don't know," said Felicity reluctantly. "I s'pose children can't understand such things. There must be a great deal of difference, of course, if we only knew what it was. Anyhow, I am a Presbyterian, and I'm glad of it."

We walked on in silence for a time, thinking our own young thoughts. Presently they were scattered by an abrupt and startling question from Peter.

"What does God look like?" he said.

It appeared that none of us had any idea.

"The Story Girl would prob'ly know," said Cecily.

"I wish I knew," said Peter gravely. "I wish I could see a picture of God. It would make Him seem lots more real."

"I've often wondered myself what he looks like," said Felicity in a burst of confidence. Even in Felicity, so it would seem, there were depths of thought unplumbed.

"I've seen pictures of Jesus," said Felix meditatively. "He looks just like a man, only better and kinder. But now that I come to think of it, I've never seen a picture of God."

"Well, if there isn't one in Toronto it isn't likely there's one anywhere," said Peter disappointedly. "I saw a picture of the devil once," he added. "It was in a book my Aunt Jane had. She got it for a prize in school. My Aunt Jane was clever."

"It couldn't have been a very good book if there was such a picture in it," said Felicity.

"It was a real good book. My Aunt Jane wouldn't have a book that wasn't good," retorted Peter sulkily.

He refused to discuss the subject further, somewhat to our disappointment. For we had never seen a picture of the person referred to, and we were rather curious regarding it.

"We'll ask Peter to describe it sometime when he's in a better humour," whispered Felix.

Sara Ray having turned in at her own gate, I ran ahead to join the Story Girl, and we walked up the hill together. She had recovered her calmness of mind, but she made no reference to Peter. When we reached our lane and passed under Grandfather King's big willow the fragrance of the orchard struck us in the face like a wave. We could see the long rows of trees, a white gladness in the moonshine. It seemed to us that there was in the

orchard something different from other orchards that we had known. We were too young to analyze the vague sensation. In later years we were to understand that it was because the orchard blossomed not only apple blossoms but all the love, faith, joy, pure happiness and pure sorrow of those who had made it and walked there.

"The orchard doesn't seem the same place by moonlight at all," said the Story Girl dreamily. "It's lovely, but it's different. When I was very small I used to believe the fairies danced in it on moonlight nights. I would like to believe it now but I can't."

"Why not?"

"Oh, it's so hard to believe things you know are not true. It was Uncle Edward who told me there were no such things as fairies. I was just seven. He is a minister, so of course I knew he spoke the truth. It was his duty to tell me, and I do not blame him, but I have never felt quite the same to Uncle Edward since."

Ah, do we ever "feel quite the same" towards people who destroy our illusions? Shall I ever be able to forgive the brutal creature who first told me there was no such person as Santa Claus? He was a boy, three years older than myself; and he may

now, for aught I know, be a most useful and respectable member of society, beloved by his kind. But I know what he must ever seem to me!

We waited at Uncle Alec's door for the others to come up. Peter was by way of skulking shamefacedly past into the shadows; but the Story Girl's brief, bitter anger had vanished.

"Wait for me, Peter," she called.

She went over to him and held out her hand.

"I forgive you," she said graciously.

Felix and I felt that it would really be worth while to offend her, just to be forgiven in such an adorable voice. Peter eagerly grasped her hand.

"I tell you what, Story Girl, I'm awfully sorry I laughed in church, but you needn't be afraid I ever will again. No, sir! And I'm going to church and Sunday School regular, and I'll say my prayers every night. I want to be like the rest of you. And look here! I've thought of the way my Aunt Jane used to give medicine to a cat. You mix the powder in lard, and spread it on his paws and his sides and he'll lick it off, 'cause a cat can't stand being messy. If Paddy isn't any better to-morrow, we'll do

that."

They went away together hand in hand, children-wise, up the lane of spruces crossed with bars of moonlight. And there was peace over all that fresh and flowery land, and peace in our little hearts.