

Chapter 7 – Mick rebels, June 1923



Mack had a secret. Mick was painfully aware that he had, and resented it very much; nothing had ever come between them before. Mick was too proud to ask an explanation, and Mack too shy to offer one. But why, Mick asked himself, should he steal off from the others so often, and be lost to sight sometimes for an hour or more? If he were going after moths and other silly old things, why didn't he say so, and ask a fellow to go with him?

The breach between the twins widened, until it became big enough for all the family to see. At first they treated it as a joke; but when, after days and days, Mick continued to remember (sometimes) to put on a lordly air when Mack was near him, and when Mack began to look very miserable about it, Mother sought for a tactful way of bringing them together again.



Where did Mack go after school every afternoon; where did he spend a precious hour of his Saturday holiday; where did he go on Sunday after Mass? Of course, he had asked Mother's permission, and she knew it was for no wrong purpose her little Mack went on the mysterious journeys; she wondered why Mick did not share the secret with him? But she could not find an answer to the problem.

One wet holiday the children were in the playroom, each occupied in his own way - the way that pleased him most. But, gradually, as the rain increased and the room darkened a little, they all gathered round Angie's chair near the fire. Mother had made a cheery little fire; not that the day was very cold, but because it looked cosy and pleasant, and Angie liked watching the "stories" in the flames. To-day she was far too busy to look at them; her fingers were occupied knitting, and, although she was very clever with her needles, she was not clever enough to knit without watching the stitches. Mary, too, was knitting; and Baby Bet, imitating her big sisters, did wonderful things with two straightened - out hairpins and a small ball of, bright yellow wool.

Teddy had tried to learn to knit some time before, but even patient Mary had to give him up as a hopeless pupil. The number of stitches that boy would get on his needle! Start him with sixteen, and in a few minutes he'd have forty! So, now, the three boys watched the girls work, and they all talked about many things - aer-o-planes, paddy-melons, wild blacks, tad-poles, Dr. Chester and Mr. Carney, stars, multiplication, rabbits, Purgatory, the new priest, ice cream blocks, and St. Joseph. Many and varied were the subjects they discussed, and Teddy took the credit of knowing the most about everything; but it was really quiet Mary who gave the information, and clever Teddy took possession of it, used it, and made it his own.

Mick poked the fire savagely. Wet days did not agree with Mick. They did if he were allowed to spend them outside, splashing about in the rain and getting wet to the skin. But Mother had said, no out - of - doors until the rain cleared. So there they all were, "C.B." (Confined to Barracks), and Mick grumbled and worried the other children, and was not a good soldier at all. Even Mother's promise of a walk to Wongle Hill as soon as the rain cleared had not helped to sustain his spirits.

He poked again - more savagely than before.

"Cut it out, Mick," Ted said, crossly.

Conversation went on again, and this time the Little Missionaries' work was discussed.

Mick flung the poker down so heavily that it made Angie start.

"I haven't been able to do anything decent," he growled. "It's all right for Teddy - he has Mr. Carney to help him. And Angie has Dr. Chester and Miss Chester. It isn't a bit fair. No one helps me, I can only save pennies. That's no good. It's silly! I'm not going to try any more. So there!"

"Oh, Mickie!" Angie said, reproachfully, and stopped her work to give his head a sympathetic pat.

"I'll spend all my pennies - might as well! What good can my pennies do for a great big, big place like China? There are millions and millions of people in it. Pennies! I'm giving up!"

The other children, even Baby Bet, looked horrified. Was Mick an apostate? And was his conversion "extremely difficult"? What would Mother and Father say, and "Sister," and Maureen, and - and - everyone? There was a pained silence, and Shamie, who had been sleeping with one eye open, got up and whimpered. He did not like the children to be silent in that strange way. He sat up and howled dismally.

"Oh, Mickie," Angie said softly, "you don't mean it?"

"Do!" Mick hissed fiercely.

"You are tired and sick of staying indoors. You are not used to it - as I am." She smiled wistfully down into his sullen eyes. But even this slight allusion to her delicacy - made purposely to soften him - had no effect just then on Mick. He poked and poked the cheery little fire as if it were to blame.

Chapter 7 – Mick rebels, June 1923

"After you have a jolly run to Wongle Hill you'll be as brave as anything: you won't be a bit disheartened at the size of China and the size of a penny! Those millions and millions of Chinese you have to help to convert will not seem so very many, after all," she smiled, as she ruffled his hair, and Mick's temper was all but subdued.

"Little coward," Teddy said, superiorly. "Going to give up like that. Greedy kid! You just want to spend your pennies on lollies and stuff. Go on then. Do it, Greedy!"

"I don't!" flashed out Mick. Mick had a violent temper, but it raised its head only rarely, as Mother had taught him to control it. But now, at Teddy's taunt, Mick felt something burning, raging within him.

"I don't want to buy lollies. I'll show you. I'll burn them."

Before Mary could prevent him, he had snatched his mite box - his poor little unoffending mite box - and thrown it into the heart of the cheery little fire.

A horrified "Oh!" went up to Heaven from the souls of five little Dalys - perhaps from six. Perhaps Mick, for all his defiance, felt horrified at himself. No one seemed able to move.



"That's a sin!" cried Teddy sternly. "You're in a temper. Say a prayer. Mother told you always to bless yourself."

"Let me get it out! Quick! Give me the poker at once, Mick," Mary said. Mick promptly threw the poker to the other end of the room. Mack rushed round, bent down, plunged his little hand into the flames, and drew out the box, scorched, blackened, but not burnt,

Mick's temper was done. He stared at Mack's poor, burnt hand. "Oh, Mary - look - **he's burnt**. Quick! Tell Mother, Get oil or something. What does Mother get for burns? Quick, quick, Mary!"

"It's all right," mumbled Mack, in a "queer" voice. "Don't frighten Mother, Mary." He sat down, his face white and wet. But he caught Mary's dress as she attempted to rush past him. "Promise not to tell yet. Just say I burnt my hand - getting something that fell in the fire. Don't tell yet. Mick is as sorry as anything. The pennies wouldn't burn: it would not matter if they did. But the box, I wanted to save Mick's box. It seems to belong to the Mission; it seems a part of - a part of -" Then Mack fainted.

Mother and Kate soon revived him, attended to his hand and popped him into bed, for the pain of the burns made him feel weak and ill. Mother then came back, took Mack's vacant seat, and demanded an explanation. No one seemed inclined to give it. Mick was sobbing 'beside Mack's bed, and refused to leave it, until Mother explained that it was worrying Mack and making him worse. Poor Mick came in, and, kneeling at Mother's side, hid his shamed head in her lap, and told her how his temper had conquered him once more. Teddy manfully "owned up" to his share in the tragedy. He had known that to call Mick "coward" meant disaster for someone.

Mother scolded them both soundly; told Mick some sad stories of little boys who did not learn to control their tempers, and the tempers grew and grew, and, when they were men, led them into terrible offences against God and man.

Mick sobbed, and begged to be punished. He wanted to put his hand into the fire, too; he wanted Mother to beat him - hard - with something. He looked all around the room for a lash, but there was only the poker in sight. He begged Mother to beat him - hard - with that.

Mother smiled at this, and the other children, feeling the tension lifted, smiled too, and even laughed shakily.



Mother lifted Mick on to her lap, and he did not feel a bit too big to lie there. He felt as little as anything - "littler" than Baby Bet. Baby Bet stared in astonishment to see Mick on Mother's knee. Mother very gently went back to the cause of the tragedy - Mick had been jealous of Angie and Teddy because they had been able to gather more money than he for the Mission. "Why, Mick," Mother explained, "one of your pennies, given freely, is worth more than pounds of Mr. Carney's money. A penny you meant to spend and then put in the mite box is worth hundreds of a rich man's money. And you must not

think, Mick (none of you must think), that money will convert China. Money is needed, of course: no one can live without money; no work can go on without it. But money is not our first thought for the Mission. The grace of God will convert China. We cannot buy grace; we pray for it; we beg for it. God will reward those people who freely give money for the Mission, or for any good work; but I don't want my little people to think money comes first. Prayers first. Prayer is God's gold. So, Mick, do not be jealous of Angie's friends and Teddy's millionaire.

Your own little prayers will help the Missionaries more than Mr. Carney's money." The children listened quietly, and Baby Bet came closer; she did not quite like to see big Mack in

her place. She "edged up" until she was leaning on Mother's knee, and had one arm round her. "You have all been such good little workers," Mother went on, "I want you to continue, but to be free of jealousy and bad feeling. That is not the way to work for God, Our Lord said we should do good things, not talk about doing them. You have all been little doers of the word. Continue your good work. Don't give up, Mick. Suppose the Big Missionaries said; 'Oh, China is too 'big; there are too many people, I'll give up. I'll pack and go home. I won't try any more.' It is very big; it is a big task. Very, very slowly the work of converting China goes on - a little at a time, just like your little penny. Perhaps the Big Missionaries do feel disheartened at the thought of the task sometimes. But they don't give up. The spirit of the Missionary keeps him at his post. No land is too big, no country too populous.

The Missionaries are content to see their work grow slowly, slowly wearily - when they want to run quickly and do so much. And they are never jealous. If some seem to have greater success than others; if some Missions receive more help from the rich folk than others, the Missionaries know it is all for the one great thing - the conversion of heathen lands. So now, Mick, be a true Missionary - be patient (be content with a little at a time). Don't be jealous of your brother and sister Missionaries, and - chain up your temper as if it were a hungry lion. Oh, yes, the Missionaries have tempers, too; but they keep them well chained. And now the rain is over. Off you all run to Wongle Hill. There's a rainbow, Mick. God's promise of peace with us. Away now, and see what nice things Kate and I will have ready for your tea when you return."

Mick wanted to be locked up, to be deprived of the walk; or he wanted to be sent to bed at once and have no tea. Mother, finding him in such a mood for penance, very wisely forgave him everything, and sent him off with a kiss.

That evening Mick told his sad story again to Father. Father was very much shocked, and, when he saw poor, pale little Mack with the burnt hand, he was angry. Mick felt glad. He wanted a beating. He begged Father to give him one (die you ever before hear of a boy asking his father for a beating?), and Father was going to. But the three girls and, Mother and Kate cried; and Mack pleaded from his bed, and threatened to get up and share in the beating; and Teddy said it was his fault, too, and he'd have to get one; and Shamie howled horribly, so that Father, not feeling equal to beating his three boys, and not feeling able to withstand the tears of his women folk and the howls of Shamie, put the strap away, and forgave Mick, a Mother had done.

"I think," stammered Mick, "what started my temper first was Mack's secret. I hated him to have a secret from me."

Mack called out: "Righto, Mick. I'll take you with me tomorrow. But you'll laugh at me, and say I'm silly, and - But wait and see!"

So the next afternoon -

But that's another chapter.

