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Chapter One

I SAT ON THE OLD, HARD, CHURCH PEW and watched Mrs. "Deacon" Pratt sing. She was the funniest-looking singer I had ever seen. I know I stared at her, but it seemed to me that her mouth was so big, why, it almost looked like the big black opening to a cave Daddy took us to one day last year while we were on our vacation.

"Wow," I whispered to my eleven-year-old twin brother, "what a mouth!"

I guess that struck a funny bone in Roy, because he snorted right out loud, and that got me to giggling. Here we were, in church, and giggling like everything.

"Joy," Mother called softly from the other

end of the bench, "sh!" And boy, I could tell she really meant it.

I tried to "sh," but it didn't work. And honest, I really tried, but what could I do? The more I thought of old "Cave Mouth" Pratt, the more I had to laugh. I didn't dare look up at Dad who was just starting his sermon. But I knew what would happen when we got home. There were two things that Dad just could not stand in church. One was chewing gum (he said it reminded him of a cud-chewing cow), and the other was snickering or giggling.

"It's disrespectful," he would say in his big preacher voice. Then he would give us a sort of spanking, tell us we weren't too old to get whipped good and proper, and send us to our rooms for the rest of the afternoon.

Well, sitting it out in my bedroom isn't exactly my favorite Sunday afternoon pastime, so I tried to be real sober and quiet through the rest of the service. It worked for awhile. But when Deacon Pratt suddenly woke up from his usual Sunday morning nap and shouted "Amen," Roy and I started again; only this time we couldn't stop. We laughed so hard

that the pew shook. And our laughing lasted all the way through to the benediction. We knew we would really get it from Dad, but even that didn't keep us from laughing.

One time I really tried hard to quit laughing by frowning, but that didn't work either. You see, Mrs. Pratt got pretty upset at us for laughing at her husband, so she looked at me and frowned like everything. I frowned back, trying to wrinkle up my nose and forehead the way she did. Roy saw me, and snorted right out loud again. And when he laughed, everybody could hear it. The worst part of it was that Dad saw and heard it too, so we were really in trouble. I was sure this time Dad would add that line, "It's the old Devil making you do those things." Dad only said that when he was real, real serious, and I had the feeling that he'd say it today.

After the benediction Dad went to the back of the church to pump everybody's hand like he always did. Roy and I sort of stayed away. We saw all the people though. It almost made me mad when old Deacon Pratt told Dad he

got such a blessing from the service. Roy heard it too.

“Blessing?” Roy said loud enough so that both Dad and the deacon heard it. “He didn’t get a blessing; he got a snooze.”

I saw Dad’s ears turn red and old Mr. Pratt hurry out of the building.

“Oh, oh,” I said soft enough so only Roy could hear. “There goes another session in the bedroom.”

Roy looked kind of serious for a minute, and then his eyes began to twinkle, and the corners of his mouth turned up into a grin.

“Yeah,” he said. “We might just as well have fun. We’ve done so much now, and there’s only one Sunday afternoon to spend in the bedroom. Let’s get our money’s worth.”

I smiled just a little bit. “Isn’t it funny?” I said. “If you had said that in church, I would have giggled until Mrs. Pratt’s hat would have wobbled, but now it doesn’t sound so funny.”

“Joy, Roy,” Mother called in her sweet minister’s-wife voice, “we’re ready to leave.”

“Joy, Roy,” I mimicked softly, “come get your Sunday spanking.”

Roy laughed out loud again, but now it didn't matter, because there wasn't a sermon going on.

Parsonage Hill, our house, was up on top of a big hill. It was a ten-minute ride from home to church, but in spite of the distance, we could see the church from our house. Roy and I named it "Parsonage Hill" when we first moved there.

It wasn't until we got into the car, and had started to drive toward Parsonage Hill that Dad spoke. "What in the whole wide world possessed you children today?" he asked. "I don't know when you have detracted so much from the sermon."

Neither of us said a word. In fact, I didn't dare look at Roy, and he didn't look at me either.

"You children should be listening to the message and getting something out of it now. You're old enough."

"I listened," I said seriously. "It was about Moses."

I guess I startled my dad. He was sure we hadn't heard a word.

"What about Moses?" he quizzed.

Roy came to my rescue. "God took care of him when he was a little kid so He could use him later."

"Roy," Mother corrected, "you don't call Moses a 'kid.' It's not nice."

"People call us 'preacher's kids,'" I defended. "It ain't nice for us either, is it?"

"How many times have I told you not to use *ain't*?" Mother asked. But she never did answer my question. That was something I could never understand about grownups. If they wanted to answer your question, they did; but if they didn't want to, they would just quick-like change the subject. Boy, just let us try that once!

Dad didn't say much more about our actions in church until after dinner. Oh, sure, he prayed our names in a long prayer before we started to eat, but that was all.

"All right, twins," he said as we were ready to leave the table. "You will do the dishes now without a word; then go up to your rooms."

I hated dishes, but I started to clear the table and pick up the dirty dishes right away.

"What! No paddling?" I said to Roy when

we got into the kitchen. But just as the words came out of my mouth, I heard Dad ask Mother for the ping-pong paddle.

“Blabber mouth,” Roy said, and then we went about our duties slowly and quietly. Neither of us said it, but I think we both figured it would be a good idea to take a long time doing the dishes, because there was half a chance Dad would either get called out, or we’d get company. But it didn’t work. Nobody called and nobody came. When the dishes were done, we did get a couple of hard swats on the back of our Sunday clothes and were sent to our rooms.

There wasn’t too much to do in my room — there never is. I’ve been sent there so many times that I’ve done all the interesting things. Dad says I’m supposed to think over the things I did when I’m sent to my room. Well, I can hardly do that, because I think some of those things are funny, and start giggling again. He doesn’t see that they’re very funny.

But I see Mrs. Pratt singing. It’s bad enough when she sings in the audience. She hangs on to the last note just a little longer than every-

body else, and I don't know how she manages to get a breath so fast, but she always starts half a second before anybody else starts. She must really have a windbag.

But you ought to hear her on a solo. Daddy says she flats and Mother says she sharps. Well, I don't know anything about that, but she sure sounds terrible. It's even worse when you look at her. She opens her mouth so wide that a dentist could easily get his whole fist in.

Dad and Mother get sore at me when I think and say those things, so it doesn't really pay for them to send me to my room to think, does it?

It had been terribly hot all during the day, and I had opened my window as far as it would go. Later, when I tried to close it, it was stuck. Boy, was it stuck! I pushed and pulled and jerked and pounded, but the window wouldn't close.

I looked around for a can of oil or something, but I couldn't find a thing. I ran across the hall to Mother's room, but there wasn't any oil there either. All I could find was a can of deodorant. It was the kind you could squish and it was

supposed to do everything. I grabbed the can, gave it a powerful squeeze and boy, did it spray all over the place! And it did the trick too. I pulled a little bit on the window and it came down right away. I was sort of hoping that this deodorant company would have a contest sometime and I'd write and tell them that I don't know how it works as a deodorant, but it sure is swell for taking care of stuck windows.

Mother has wanted me to learn to put up my own hair, so I decided this would be a good time to practice. I opened the door to my room and sneaked into the bathroom. There's a big mirror there in the medicine chest, so I decided to practice there.

I had seen Mother put some stuff on my hair before she put the bobby pins in, so I started snooping. There was toothpaste, shaving cream, after-shave lotion, and cold cream, but none of those would make my hair curl. If I tried any of those things, I knew Mother would be so upset that her hair would curl by itself.

That was when I found something else. All at once I forgot I was supposed to be in my room.

“Hey, Mom!” I called down after a minute or so. “How come we’ve got a communion glass in the medicine cabinet?”

“Communion glass?” I heard Dad say. “How did that get there?”

Mother came rushing upstairs, and boy, when she saw it, did she ever give me a terrible look!

“That,” she said sternly, “is an eyeglass. I use it to wash my eyes.”

All of a sudden I got a sort of a sick feeling. I knew next Sunday was Communion, and I knew what would happen. I sure would get the giggles again. It would probably happen just about the time the organ was playing real soft. “Hmm, an eyeglass. I wonder what would happen if Mother washed her eyes out with grape juice.” What a thought!

Oh, dear, Daddy would really get sore then, because he had explained to both Roy and me about Communion. He told us that it was something very sacred. He wouldn’t let us take Communion because Communion was only for Christians. Even though Dad had explained salvation to us lots and lots of times, we still

hadn't asked Jesus to be our Saviour. That made Dad feel bad too.

It wasn't that I didn't think I needed the Lord. I knew I was about the biggest sinner in the world, but I just didn't do it, that's all.

Daddy felt terrible about us not being Christians, but I don't think very many people in the church are saved. Everybody goes, but nobody really seems to take it seriously.

Sometimes I think Roy and I are to blame too; especially me. I do things at the wrongest times, but it just seems to come out that way. Like the first Sunday we were at this church. Roy and I sat to the side and watched the deacons serve Communion. There were so many people there that they ran out of the tiny glasses. One of the deacons ran downstairs and got regular water glasses and put a little grape juice in each. When I saw it I said, "Oh, oh, the first bunch got gypped." Mother heard it, and did we ever get it when we got home!

Daddy almost cried. He said it was sacrilegious. I wasn't sure what that was, but for the paddling I got, I knew it wasn't good. I was pretty careful not to try that again.