

Peter's Hands

"Look at my brand new doll! It's broken!" cried seven-year-old Sophie in dismay. She stood in the kitchen doorway, holding her plastic doll in one hand and its snapped-off head in the other. Tears shimmered in her sad brown eyes.

Mom stopped preparing the lunch sandwiches and came to look at Sophie's doll. "Oh, Sophie, I'm so sorry! This was brand new!" she exclaimed sympathetically. She turned to the three boys, who were setting the table. "Does anyone know how this happened?"

"I don't know," nine-year-old Andrew said quickly.

"Neither do I," twelve-year-old Michael added hastily.

Eleven-year-old Peter hesitated before admitting quietly, "I broke it."

Mom stared at him in disappointment. "You, Peter? Why?"

"I-I wasn't trying." Peter looked sorrowfully at his little sister. "I really didn't intend to break it. I would never try to do something like that."

"Then how did it happen?" Mom asked.

"I was just pulling it a little to see how strong it was—and—and it came off." Peter's face was truly penitent. "I'm so sorry. I'll buy a new one, Sophie."

"Well," Mom sighed, "if that's what you mean, Peter, then I will have you do just that. You must make restitution for your mistake. More importantly, I wish you wouldn't be so intemperate with your hands. It seems you're always pulling or yanking at something, trying to see how far you can stretch it before it breaks. Then you end up destroying something and you feel bad about it. Why can't you just touch things less?"

"I just like to explore," Peter said miserably.

Andrew and Michael snickered, but Mom shook her head at them. "I understand your desire for adventure, Peter... but perhaps you could find it in different forms than breaking things," she said as she walked back to her sandwiches. "Now finish setting the table, all three of you."

Later that afternoon, Dad needed some helpers glueing boards out in the workshop. Michael, Peter, and Andrew held the boards in place while Dad clamped them down with his strong clamps. Then Dad told the boys, “We’ll let this dry now. Thanks for your help.”

Michael and Andrew wandered off, but Peter remained in the shop. He liked watching Dad work. For several minutes he was content to just look at the drying boards, but soon he began wishing for more adventure. Forgetting Mom’s admonition from earlier, he reached out and wiggled one of the clamps a little. How much would it wobble before coming off?

Peter didn’t intend to pull the clamp off... but then, he never intended to undo anything. He pulled a little harder, and suddenly—*snap!*—the clamp snapped off the board and sailed across the room. The board wobbled and then tumbled to the floor. Glue was everywhere.

“Peter!” Dad came running. “What have you done?”

“I guess—the clamp came off.” Peter’s mouth was dry. “It was a mistake.”

“Oh, Peter,” Dad said reproachfully, “I’ll have to re-glue this board and clean up the mess now. What a setback in my project! Why did you touch it?”

“I didn’t try to break it,” Peter protested.

“But you touched it. Why did you touch it?” Dad repeated.

Peter stared at the floor. “I don’t know,” he mumbled.

“Your hands get you into so much trouble, son. You must learn to control them!” With a sigh, Dad picked up the board and began wiping the glue from the floor. “One of the fruits of the Spirit is temperance, Peter. Temperance—letting the Holy Spirit control your moves and actions. How can you ever strive against sin and win, when you can’t control something as insignificant as your hands?”

This time Peter did not reply. He did not know what to say. Dad was right, and he knew he must do better.

He stumbled out of the shop. Maybe inside he could find something better to do.

In the kitchen, Mom and Sophie were frosting a tall cake. Peter's eyes sparkled. It looked incredible! "Look at our cake, Peter," Sophie crowed as she carefully smoothed the frosting with her spatula. "It's perfect, isn't it? We're trying to get rid of every line so it's all smooth."

"It looks so good," Peter agreed. He walked over to the cake and gazed at it.

Rrrriiiingggg!

"The phone!" Mom washed her hands hurriedly, grabbed the phone, and scuttled from the room.

"I guess I will wait till Mom gets back." Sophie laid down her spatula. "I might ruin this perfect cake without her."

"Is the frosting stiff or soft?" Peter asked curiously.

"It's soft. Mom made it easy to spread," his younger sister explained.

"How fast does it dry on the cake?" And then suddenly, before Peter knew what he was doing, he had reached out his hand and touched that perfect cake.

He had only intended to feel the frosting. But he didn't know the cake was just barely balanced on its high glass platter. "Oh, no!" he screamed as the cake began to wobble. Sophie gasped and reached out to steady it, but it was too late.

Splat! Crash! Frosting, cake, and smithereens of glass lay scattered all over the kitchen floor.

"Peter!" wailed Sophie as she burst into tears.

Peter stared at the mess on the floor, his mouth wide open in shock. How had he caused such a disaster? That beautiful cake that his little sister was so proud of—that he had been so excited to eat—and Mom's glass dish, too—all broken, all over the floor! *What had he done?!*

Mom came running into the room. She gasped in astonishment. "Children! Our cake! What happened?" One glance at Sophie's tears and Peter's guilty face told her the whole story.

"Oh, Peter, Peter. What will we do with you and your intemperate hands?" Mom groaned, covering her face in her hands. "Just look at this mess!"

“I’m sorry,” Peter choked. But though the words came from the bottom of his heart, they could not undo his action. It was too late. The cake was ruined. Seeing it lie all over the floor brought tears to his own eyes. Such a simple little thoughtless act had resulted in this catastrophe! Why, oh, why hadn’t he listened to his parents before when they warned him about his intemperate, touching hands?

Tears continued slipping down Peter’s cheeks as he silently helped Mom and Sophie pick up the glass and clean the ruined mess of cake. When they were done, he started to walk away, still crying. He was ever so sorry, but how would anyone believe him?

Suddenly he felt strong arms around him, and Mom drew him close in a warm, loving hug. “Peter,” she said softly. “Do you think you’ve learned your lesson?”

“Oh, Mom, I *know* I’ve learned my lesson. I’m so terribly sorry! My hands just won’t stop getting me into messes, but it seems I just can’t help it,” Peter mourned. “I never try to get into the trouble I do.”

“You *can* help it.” Mom put her hands on her son’s shoulders and looked squarely into his eyes. “You *can* indeed help it. You have to choose to obey the Holy Spirit and tell yourself *beforehand* that you won’t control yourself. The Holy Spirit will control you.”

Peter swallowed hard. How could he ever remember?

“Ask Him to help you,” Mom said seriously. “Then if you must, keep your hands in your pockets and just don’t take them out. You *can* and *will* learn to be temperate, Peter, as a follower of Christ. It’s that important.”

That evening, Peter walked through the living room and saw a long row of Dominos standing up on their ends, stretched from one side to the other. Michael and Andrew were busily arranging the end pieces, laughing as they carefully set up the tiny blocks. When they saw Peter coming, they looked horrified. “Don’t touch it! Don’t bump it! Don’t make them fall!” Michael shrieked.

“I won’t!” Peter looked hurt. “You act like I’m a terrible ogre.”

“Well, you touch stuff too much,” Andrew argued. “Don’t touch our Dominos.”

While Peter stood there felling sorry for himself, he suddenly remembered his mother's words. *"You can and will learn to be temperate, Peter, as a follower of Christ."*

I CAN be temperate, he realized. I CAN show these boys that I'm not going to be touchy-touchy anymore!

He dropped to his knees and reached for the box of Dominos. "Tell you what, boys, I'm going to be different. I'm going to choose temperance from now on. You won't have to worry about me breaking your stuff." His eyes shone with excited determination. "By God's power, I *will* force myself to control my actions, and you won't have to hide your fragile things from me anymore!"

"That's quite a speech," said Michael slowly. "Do you mean it, Peter? You know, Sophie's doll and Dad's board and that cake you destroyed..."

"I know I've made those mistakes, but now I'm going to do better," Peter said humbly. "I'm going to pray and the Lord will help me. Maybe you two can pray for me, too. And for now, can I play with you?"

Slowly Michael and Andrew nodded their heads. "All right, Peter," said Michael quietly. "We believe you. And yes, we'll pray for you. The Holy Spirit will help you become temperate—I know He will, you're right!"

The End