

The Apostate

by Jack Swenson

We are watching the ladies perform a miracle. We are pulling for them. We believe they can do it. They are going to fry an egg with no heat. They stand on a riser at the front of the room. They wave their hands. They speak in tongues.

One of the ladies is young and pretty. Her blonde hair is tied back in a bun. She cracks an egg into a frying pan and sets the pan on a card table. A crone dressed in black pours liquid from a bottle onto the egg. Whiskey. Gasp! The egg cooks before our eyes! The runny stuff turns white!

We look at each other. Bobby's mouth is open. Lulu looks like she is going to cry. "That's what happens to your stomach when you drink al-co-hol," the crone intones.

There is a restless shuffling in the room. The WCTU ladies pass out cards. We eagerly take the pledge. Never, never in all our lives will we take a drink of alcohol! The blonde lady smiles at us she collects the cards. We smile back. The Sunday School Superintendent wants to know how many of us signed the cards. "Raise your hands," she says. She is smiling, too. She is confident that the vote will be unanimous.

Oh oh. It isn't. Pete Moen stands there with his hands in his pockets. He looks at the floor. All eyes are on Pete. The Superintendent is a short lady as wide as she is tall. She scowls, then brightens. "Oh, well," she says. "Pete, you can sign it later if you change your mind."

Of course I tell my parents about Pete's disgraceful behavior. My mother is indignant. She frowns. "Tsk, tsk," she says. My father is undismayed. He grins his little grin. Pete's dad and my dad are friends. They hunt ducks together. My father reminds my mother that after all Elmer Moen owns a liquor store. "Even so..." my mother says.

