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CHILDREN'S PAGE STORIES -- 1971

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Story 1
HOW THE CUCKOO CLOCK HELPED

Billy and Sally were stretched out on the floor coloring Bible story pictures.

"Oh-h, Billy, I like this story. It's about Daniel. He's one of my favorite Bible characters."

"He was a great man," Billy said, "but I'm afraid I wouldn't have been as brave as-he was if the king had told me to bow to the graven image."

"You . . . you mean . . . you would have bowed to the image, Billy? That you wouldn't have stood up for God?" Sally was shocked at her brother's statement and confession.

"Well . . ." the red-haired boy stammered,

"Well would you have done like Daniel," Sally?"

Without a moment's hesitation, Sally said, "I believe I would have, Billy. I love the dear Lord Jesus with all of my heart, and Father and Mother say God will give us the courage and strength to stand when the time comes for courage."

"Well, I just don't believe you'd have stood like Daniel," Billy retorted.

Sally stopped coloring. "I don't agree, Billy. I love Jesus very, very much and I know He would have given me grace and taken care of me, too."

"You're just trying to sound brave," Billy said. "If Daniel was so wise, why didn't he run away and hide somewhere? He wouldn't have been missed, surely!"

"That's cowardly," Sally said quickly, "and God doesn't like cowards. He can't use cowards. Daniel was a man of courage and principle and faith. He had a 'spiritual backbone', Father said. Oh, Billy, I wish you had a backbone like Daniel!"

Backbone like Daniel! That did it! Billy was suddenly highly agitated and irritated at his pretty sister. His face colored red. His back-bone was good enough to suit him! Yes, sirree!

"Well, just forget about my back-bone," he said angrily, "I'll never be like Daniel and I"

"But you could be, Billy," Sally pleaded tearfully, "If you'd open your heart to Jesus and ask Him to come in He'd forgive you of all your sins and you'd be a brand new creature, in Him. Why, you'd be saved, Billy, and you would be brave and courageous for Jesus; and just think of this, we'd both go to heaven"

"That's all right for girls . . and.., and for sissies; but I'm not a sissy. I'll have courage in my way."

"But don't you want to go to heaven, Billy? Unless you get converted, you'll go to hell and burn forever and ever and ever."

"I'm tired of hearing about heaven and hell and Daniel's backbone and his courage . . ." and Billy jumped up and started through the living room archway into the dining room.

"Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo . . ." the busy little bird popped joyfully out of the clock doorway and cuckooed and cuckooed and cuckooed . . . ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen and . . . fifteen times!

Billy stopped in his tracks. "Sally! Sally! Did . . . you hear that? It's fifteen o'clock!"

"It's later than you think, Billy. Much later than you think!" Sally said thoughtfully, wondering if it was a warning from God to her brother.

"I... I... know. I was just thinking that myself. Maybe . . . it's too late for me!"

"What do you mean by that, Billy?"

"I . . . I'm scared." Billy came back into the living room. He sat down on the sofa. His head dropped into his hands.

"But why should you be scared, Billy? Everything's peaceful and nice and orderly in our house."

"No, it's not!" Billy exclaimed. His voice was trembling and it sounded all full of tears..

"Why ... Billy"

"My heart's not one bit peaceful and nice and . . . and orderly. And that . . . cuckoo clock reminded me that it's awful late."

"The cuckoo clock isn't working properly, Billy. Father said he must take it to the clock shop to be worked on and cleaned"

"That's just it, Sally. That's just it!" and Billy was gesturing wildly with his hands. "It doesn't keep time any more because there's something wrong inside. That little bird just seemed to scream at me that something's dreadfully wrong inside of me, too."

"Yes? Yes, go on, Billy." Sally was on her feet now. Tears were rolling down her sweet, innocent face. "Like maybe what, Billy . . .?"

"Maybe . . . if I asked Jesus to forgive my sins and . . . and to save my soul., maybe He'd clean my heart good and . . . and make me"

"He would, Billy! I know He would! He did it for me. Don't you remember?"

Billy searched his sister's face anxiously. "Why, He did change you and your disposition, Sally. I do remember. But . . . what if it's too late for me? I . . . I've kept Him on the outside of my heart for a long, long time."

"It's not too late, Billy. Jesus will save you if you want Him to really and truly want Him to!"

"But I do." Billy was crying hard now. Penitently, he dropped to his knees. He confessed all his sins.

"Oh, Sally!" He exclaimed suddenly, his face shining bright with the joy of heaven on it, "I have peace and rest in my heart. I... I believe my backbone's strong now., like Daniel's." He laughed softly. Sally was laughing, too!

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February, 1971

Story 2

JULIE'S BATTLE

"Why, oh why did there ever have to be a devil!" Julie sobbed bitterly, sitting on the very first step that led up the long winding stairway. "Oh, Mother, I do wish Eve had never sinned! I feel miserable and wretched again."

"Why, Julie Anderson! Whatever is the matter with you? What makes you talk like that? What have you done?" Mother seated herself by her little girl and cradled her tenderly in her strong mother arms.

"I stuck my tongue out at Timmy and told him I hated him. That's what I did! And I really do hate him, Mother. And I hate me because I know it's wrong to hate Tim. You said Jesus makes you love everybody, but I hate Tim! He's always making fun of my braids and he teases me constantly about my freckled nose and big, round brown eyes. I wish I were a little humming bird. I'd fly so far away from Tim that he'd never see me again. Oh, why wasn't I a bird or... or a rabbit . . . or . . . something besides a girl! The birds and animals never have enemies. They never have any Timmy Smythers tormenting them!"

"Julie! Julie! You really would have troubles if you were a bird or rabbit."

"I hate being me. I hate my freckled nose and my big, round eyes and . . ."

"Wait a minute!" Mother interrupted. "Your father and I love your turned-up freckled nose and your big, round, dark-brown eyes and your long 'pig-tails' and . . . and just everything there is about you, honey. So does your teacher. Maybe Timmy Smythers admires my little girl. How about that for a thought! And maybe he's trying to get Julie Anderson's attention!"

"Attention! Well, he gets it all right. He makes me lose my religion every time he teases me," she pouted.

Mother smiled inwardly.

"If you'd get salvation, Julie, instead of religion, you'd have something on the inside that would keep you. That's the trouble, dear. Just because you go to church and Sunday School with Daddy and me doesn't make you a Christian. You need to ask Jesus to come into your heart and to forgive you of all your sins and wash your heart in His precious shed blood."

"If only I were a robin or a humming bird or something," the dark-eyed girl asserted, "then I'd never have to worry about sin and the devil and I'd have no Timmy Smythers to make me get cross and pouty-feeling."

"Let's sit on the front porch awhile, Julie. A mother and father robin are very busy feeding some babies in the maple tree on the lawn, and a mother dove is hatching some eggs in her nest in one of the blue spruce trees. Maybe we'll see how peaceful a bird's life is. But you must be real quiet and still."

Julie followed close to her mother's side and seated herself lazily in one of the porch chairs next to Mother's.

After a long time of watching, Mother and Julie saw a boy sneak stealthily toward the trees. He held a B B gun proudly in his hands. Stopping directly beneath the big maple tree, he took careful aim.

"Stop it! Stop it!" Mother exclaimed, running toward the tree.

"Oh, you bad, bad boy!" Julie exclaimed tearfully. "You wicked boy! Trying to kill our lovely song birds." And she placed her hands tightly on her hips and scolded loudly after the rapidly retreating figure. "Now why would he ever want to do anything so bad?" she asked, as she settled herself once more by her mother's side.

"The same thing that makes you hate Timmy makes that boy . . . whoever he is . . . want to kill those poor helpless birds, Julie."

"Oh, Mother, I'm no murderer. I don't have killing in my heart -- not even for birds."

"'Whoso hateth his brother is a murderer.' This is what the Bible says, Julie dear."

Julie sat still. Very, very still. She stared hard at the blue spruce tree. After a long while she exclaimed loudly, "Hurry, Mother! A big black bird chased the dove off her nest. Hurry! The black bird's going to her nest! Shoo! Shoo! You bad, bad bird. Shoo!" Julie shouted and ran with all her might toward the blue spruce tree, clapping her hands together noisily as she ran.

The frightened bird took wing and was soon out of sight.

Julie slumped weakly to the ground. "I . . . I . . . guess I wouldn't want to be a bird after all," she confessed tearfully. "They have lots of enemies. I see how mistaken I was. I'm glad I'm a little girl and I'm glad I can do something about my heart. Will you pray with me? Jesus can fix my heart up till I'll be good and kind and loving."

On the big lawn, beneath the blue spruce tree, Julie prayed until she knew her sins were all forgiven and washed away. She laughed for joy and the dove cooed softly with her while the robins sang lustily.

"Know what, Mother? I'm going over to Timmy's house and ask him to come and play with me. I believe he's lonely and he'd make a good friend. I don't hate Timmy anymore. It's all gone.., washed away. I want to ask Timmy to go to church with us, too." She laughed as she skipped lightly toward the Smythers' house.

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March, 1971

Story 3

THE BIG HEAD

Susie gave her long blonde curls a saucy toss over her shoulders. She walked proudly down the street with her head held high and her chest thrust forward. She was in a world of headiness. She didn't even see the beautiful flowers blooming and blossoming along the side of the road and nodding pleasantly to her as she passed. Nor did she notice Angus the Third, as he stuck his little black Scottie head beneath the yard fence of Mrs. Stippich and barked happily at her, and wiggled and wagged his tail fiercely, hoping desperately for his usual kind pat on the head and the

soft-spoken words of praise and adoration. Oh, no, Susie just didn't notice. She walked straight ahead, down the street, tossing her long blonde curls and holding her head up, high and mighty-like.

"Hello, Susie. How pretty your hair is today again. I wish my hair was naturally curly like yours." It was Stephanie, one of Susie's very, very best friends.

Susie kept right on walking. She didn't say one single thing! Not one single word! She didn't smile, either. Just walked on past Stephanie -- like she didn't hear!

Stephanie stared. She was wide-eyed with wonder. What had happened to Susie? What had happened? Had she gone suddenly deaf? Or... or dumb, maybe?

She stood on the sidewalk staring after her dear friend, wondering and worrying, too. Just then Janine skipped by, a jump rope in her hand.

"Oh, Janine," Stephanie was nearly in tears, "whatever has happened to Susie? Can't she hear anymore? Or... or has she gone dumb? I talked to her but she just walked past me like she didn't hear one single thing I'd said to her. Her eyes were open so I know she saw me."

Janine laughed softly. "Haven't you heard?" she asked, looking into Stephanie's big brown eyes. "Heard what?"

Janine laughed softly again and did a quick agile jump with her rope. "Susie was given the lead part in our class play."

"But . . . but . . ." Stephanie stuttered and stammered, not understanding, "that wouldn't make her deaf!"

"She's not deaf," Janine said, lighthearted and still laughing; "Susie has the 'big head.' "

"Big Head! What's that?" Stephanie asked, frowning. "Susie's one of our best friends. Maybe you and I can help her."

Again Janine laughed, ever so soft and pleasantly. "My mother told me when I had the 'big head,' that it makes every one sick but the one who has it. But Jesus took mine all out of my heart. Susie will learn her lesson." With that, Janine skipped lightly down the street, spreading sunshine in her own sweet way.

Still puzzled, Stephanie walked down the street to her home.

Susie walked up the front porch steps, tossing her curls proudly and feeling tremendously big and important-like.

She turned her nose up in the air as she passed Ginger.

"Honestly, Mother," Ginger began, "you'll have to do something about Susie. She's obnoxious and . . . and intolerable!"

Mrs. Abbott turned and faced Ginger. "Why, Ginger, what makes you talk that way. What's the matter with Susie?"

"What's the matter with Susie. ...! Oh, Mother, if you only knew!"

Susie stopped what she was doing and came in to her mother and sister.

"She's chock full of pride!" Ginger exclaimed. "And it's making everybody sick except Susie. She'll lose all her friends unless she changes. That's what's the matter with Susie!" Susie tossed her curls again and her head went high in the air. "I guess you're just jealous because you didn't get the lead part in your class play!" she retorted.

"Susie! Susie, stop! We don't talk like that in our home. What has happened to you?"

"I'm the leading one in our class play!" Susie tossed her head proudly, as she made the exclamation.

"And this has made you proud, Susie? For shame!" Mrs. Abbott was horrified.

"Proud of it! Oh, Mother, you can't imagine. It's sickening. Since she got that little bit of a lead part she doesn't even speak to her friends." Ginger's lament brought Susie to immediate action.

"Who cares about friends!" she said tartly.

Mrs. Abbott faced her little girl squarely. " 'Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall,' " she quoted. "It's coming, Susie; just as sure as I'm facing you. God's Word cannot lie. You're in for a let-down, little lady. A real let-down."

Susie's face became clouded. She believed in Mother and what she said.

Mrs. Abbott continued: "I can see that it's extremely dangerous to send little boats far out to sea."

"Wh... what..., do you mean by... that?" Susie asked.

"Do you remember the story about Scurfy, the little tug-boat, Susie?"

"The book I had when I was a very little girl, Mother?" Susie was especially careful to enunciate 'very little' in such a way that mother and Ginger understood it quite plainly.

"Yes, Susie; that's the book. And it would do you good to reread it right now." Susie looked sheepishly at her mother.

"You will remember the beginning of the book, I'm sure: It went something like this:

'Scurfy was a tiny little tugboat. Scurfy was meant to sail in the bathtub. But Scurfy thought he was made for bigger things ' "WELL, you will remember how Scurfy got out of the bathtub and sailed far, far out into the great wide ocean," Mother continued.

"I remember that story well," Ginger said, laughing. "It was one of my very favorite books."

"I liked it, too," Susie said. "Poor Scurfy."

"That's right, Susie. He was to be pitied. But you will remember that it was his pride that got him into all the trouble he was in."

"He was nearly killed," Susie said, shuddering at remembrance of the little boat. "Shipwrecked!" she exclaimed, "and nearly drowned!"

"And do you remember why he got into that trouble, Susie?"

Susie's head dropped. She just couldn't face mother. She knew why poor, dear, little Scurfy was almost killed and shipwrecked and drowned. Even now she could see the face of the dear little boat of the story. He was all scarey-looking and sad and crying and...

"Scurfy was a tiny little tugboat that was meant to sail in the bathtub!" Mother reminded solemnly. "But Scurfy got the 'big head,' Susie, and great was his downfall. Have you forgotten your last Scripture verse, dear...?"

"About . . . the Lord . . . hating ... a proud look?" Susie didn't look up as she answered.

"That's the one," Mother said softly. "What are you going to do with it and about it?"

Susie's chin was quivering. She looked at her mother and saw the sad look in her eyes. Suddenly Susie burst into tears.

"Oh, Mother! Dear, dear, Mother, I love you so." Her arms wound tight around her mother's neck. "Will you and Ginger pray for me? I . . . I feel just awful inside. Not sweet and kind and nice at all anymore."

"Of course we'll pray for you, dear. You need your heart changed and only Jesus can do it."

"I want it changed and.., and made all new; just like yours and daddy's and Ginger's heart. Since God hates a proud look, I know He hates the way I acted and felt. I want to go to Heaven, Mother."

The tea-kettle whistled merrily and joyously as Susie prayed clear through to glorious victory. Oh, how good she felt; and so-o light and peaceful on the inside.

"I lost my 'big head'," she said, laughing and crying together, "and Jesus gave me a light heart. I feel like Janine looks all the time . . . happy, and sunny and cheerful."

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April, 1971

Story 4
MOLES

"Let's go for a walk, Grandpa, please!" Ten-year-old Duane could be quite insistent at times . . . especially where Grandfather was involved.

"Not till we go by the church, Sonny," Grandfather said firmly. "Rev. Brownlee said we've been having a number of petty intruders in the church. He suggested we all pop in whenever we can to pray and also to discourage any unsavory type of character who may be lurking around the building."

"Why don't we just lock the church?" Duane asked reasonably, slipping a small eager hand into Grandpa's big steady one.

"Because it's to be a house of prayer. So long as I can remember, the church has been unlocked. If anyone wants to pray, they can slip inside and leave every burden with the Lord. Looks like we're going to be forced to lock it, though, unless things change. A worried look furrowed the kindly brow of the aging grandfather.

"Can't God take care of His church?"

"God will never do what we can do and are expected to do under the circumstances," was the frank reply. "Come, let us be going."

"May I take Toby? He loves to go for walks."

"Bring him along, Duane; but you'll have to stay outside with him while I go inside the church."

Duane was happy. Walking side by side with Grandfather made him feel truly, truly big and strong and gallant. Toby, the cocker spaniel, seemed happier still.

Together the trio sauntered leisurely through the woods to the river and through the churchyard.

Toby, nose hard on the ground, took a zig-zag course over the grass.

"He's chasing something!" Duane shouted with glee. "Maybe it's a rabbit. He'll chase it right into the cemetery then catch it!" The boy was greatly excited.

"He's not trailing a rabbit," grandfather said wisely, "he's after moles . . . those intrepid engineers who do so much good as they excavate the ground so efficiently and form a very admirable draining system."

"Moles! Ugh!" Duane suddenly lost his enthusiasm. "They're hateful little creatures!"

"Not really. The little mole has a very healthy appetite, Duane. They love wireworms, leather jackets and grubs."

"But they can't see. However do they find the worms?"

"Like us, God gave more than one sense to the mole. He can smell. Since he works strictly underground, he doesn't need eyes. His work is done in the dark."

Duane shuddered. How like the mole his own heart was! 'He works underground,' grandfather had said. Suddenly, like a bright flash of light, Duane saw how wicked his heart was. He had pretended to love Jerry Karlson, but when Jerry wasn't around he had said dreadful and hateful things about him. He had even lied about him! Duane saw now that he was terribly jealous of Jerry -- Jerry with his ready smile, helpful hands and unselfish ways.

"Let's go, Grandpa!" Duane's voice was demanding, insistent.

Grandfather's voice was just as firm as his grandson's had been demanding. He would help God all he could in taming this sweet but demanding grandson of his by not catering to his whims and wishes. He must be taught obedience!

"Not yet, Sonny. I'm enjoying Toby and his energy. See how he digs! How excited he is! There's a good lesson here for you, Duane."

Duane turned his face quickly away from his grandfather lest he see the tell-tale marks of his heart written on his face.

Grandpa settled his large frame on an exposed tree-root and allowed Toby his freedom.

Duane stood some distance away. "Let's go!" he demanded again.

.... "Not yet." Grandpa was just as firm as was the domineering ten-year-old. "We'll not go until I say so."

The color drained from Duane's face. Rebelliously, he clenched his fists. 'He works strictly underground ' Again grandfather's words rang like a heavy sledge hammer striking a bell through his head.

Grandpa sat and sat. Duane thought and thought. He was like the mole..., in his heart. He was jealous of Jerry and right now he almost hated grandfather . . . in his heart; deep inside in the dark of his heart!

Still grandpa sat. A bemused smile played across his face as Toby expended his last measure of energy on the mole.

"Grandpa, I.... I've been thinking"

"Yes, Sonny?"

"I . . . my heart's just like that mole Toby's been after. It stirs up dirt from inside and works strictly in the dark"

Grandpa picked a twig up from the tree and chewed thoughtfully on it. His eyes were fixed on the ground.

"I . . . I've been a hypocrite, grandpa"

"Really?"

"I pretend to love Jerry to his face but when he's not around I say all kinds of nasty and mean things about him"

"And you've only been hurting yourself, Duane," grandpa answered truthfully. "We always hurt ourselves more than anyone else, when we do such things."

"I wonder if you'd pray with me, Grandpa? I hate myself and I hate my sins."

"Do you want to get saved? Really and truly saved, Duane?"

"I really do!"

"Then we shall pray."

Grandpa knelt by the big tree root. Duane knelt by his side. Amid Toby's excited barking, the boy prayed and confessed his sins until the Lord Jesus came into his heart and forgave him of all his sins. He was so happy!

"I'm going to get sanctified, too. Then I'll never, never be like the mole, in my heart."

Toby ran up to his little master and barked joyously. His eyes were shining -- like Duane's.

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May, 1971

Story 5

BENNY'S EXPERIENCE

"Get up, Benny. Get up. The sun's high over your head. See?" and Mrs. Hobbs pulled the drapes wide open so the warm sunshine could spill gloriously through the windows and lay all over Benny's bed and carpet on the floor.

"Aw, Mom, must I get up already? Why can't I stay in bed a little longer?"

"No work gets done by lying in bed, son. Get up. The sweet corn needs hoeing and the garage must be cleaned again."

"Aw, Mom!" Benny moaned good-naturedly, rolling out of bed. "I wish I'd never, never, never need to work."

"Say no more!" Mrs. Hobbs said sternly. "The Bible says if a man won't work he shall not eat, either. Are you willing and ready to go without food, Benny?"

"Well-I" Benny began, then halted. He knew only too well how much he liked to eat -- especially pumpkin pie and chocolate cake and pancakes!

"Hurry," his mother urged, "breakfast's ready," and she hurried downstairs.

Benny perked up. His nose had long since picked up the wonderful and delicious aroma of fried bacon and onions!

"Um! Yum!" he exclaimed aloud. "Morn made fried potatoes and onions this morning."

Sniffing the air, he detected another delicacy

"And fresh, hot cinnamon rolls, too," he added happily.

With whetted appetite, he hurried to the bathroom and washed his hands and face and combed his hair. Throwing one leg astride the balustrade he slid gleefully down the winding stairs.

"Do I pass inspection?" he asked, laughing in his carefree manner.

"You pass," mother said, examining Benny's ears.

"Whew! I'm sure glad," he said, taking his seat at the table.

'As soon as we're through with breakfast and family worship, I want you to begin working on your mother's garden," Mr. Hobbs said, passing Benny the potatoes for the third time.

Benny took a generous bite out of his fourth cinnamon roll and looked at his plate. If only he wouldn't have to work! He hated it!

After family worship he headed for the tool shed next to the barn. There he found the hoe waiting for him -- "just inside the door," father had said.

He stood for awhile and looked toward the garden. How far away it seemed to be.

Reluctantly he made his way through the meadow and the small cow pasture to the garden.

Mother had said the sweet corn was to be hoed, but father added that the potatoes and onions needed weeding and hoeing, too. "What a day!" he thought moodily.

Upon reaching the end of his sixth row of sweet corn, Benny stood up and surveyed his work with pride. He hated work, he admitted silently, but when he had to work he always did a good job even if his back felt all crinkly and sore and old.

The long, golden finger rays of the sun seemed to throw a warm coverlet around his shoulders and back. How good it felt! But how sleepy it made him feel!

He saw the big baldwin apple tree not too far away. How inviting was its cool umbrella like shade. Carrying the hoe over his shoulder, he hurried to the tree. He sprawled out his full length on a thick, dark green grass clump and was soon fast asleep, his hand resting lightly upon the handle of the hoe. And then a funny thing happened; Benny dreamed that all the vegetables in the garden were screaming at him.

"I'm being choked to death!" a big round, purple-skinned onion shouted "Help! I can't breathe anymore! Help me, please!"

"There'll be no more fried potatoes and onions for him," a sad-looking potato sobbed, struggling ever so hard to be heard and trying desperately to be seen above the tangle of weeds that grew all around her. "I . . . I'm . . . almost . . . choked to death, too!" she lamented, trying vainly to fan herself.

"Lazy boy!" another onion hurled "He'd rather sleep and let us die than to work. Oh, he loves to eat all right"

"But I heard his mother tell him something about not eating if he didn't work," a potato declared. "Benny has the proper training; it's getting him to put what he knows he ought to do first."

"Why doesn't he put it to practice?" a yellow-skinned onion cried. "All of us over here in this row are slowly dying., slowly dying . . slowly dying! Every day of my natural onion life, breathing becomes more difficult. I'm suffocating!" and he fell to the ground, limp and shriveled up and wilted.

Just then a busy little bee flitted across the onion and potato patch.

"Oh, Busy Bee, can't you stop and help us? Please?" a potato cried piteously from the garden. "We can't breathe!"

"We're being choked to death," an onion added, in a voice so faint that Busy Bee had to stop his buzzing to hear.

"I'm a very busy bee," the honey bee said, pausing on a potato blossom, "but I'll help if I can. I'm a working bee. Where do I begin?"

"Oh-h-h, give us air! Give us air!" the onions and potatoes cried out together.

Busy Bee rubbed his busy little wings together thoughtfully. "Maybe if I flap my wings fast he said, working his strong little wings as fast as ever they would go.

"Air! Air!" the vegetables cried. "We can't feel the air. We're being choked.., choked..."

Quick as ever he could fly, Busy Bee was off the potato blossom. Zoom-m-m, he went.., right over on Benny's nose! Ever as gently as he dared, he pushed his little stinger into the soft flesh.

"You lazy, lazy boy!" he buzzed. "Don't you know you're killing your mother's garden by not working! You love to eat. Ah, indeed! But didn't you know that in order to live you must give? The clouds just don't float over the sky to look pretty . . . they give rain to water the fields and the cattle and, yes, you!

"The flowers bloom . . . not for mere show: they give scent and nectar! Your cows give their good milk for you to drink and I work all day long so I can make honey to give you. Sweet, delicious and wonderful honey to spread on that bread your mother works so hard to make for you.., to give to you!

"Even Mr. Sun gives. His gift to the world is light and heat. That's the reason for his existence. But you . . .! You give nothing, Benny Hobbs. You're worthless. You're a sponge. God will never be able to use you and you'll never amount to anything unless you begin to work, and obey and to give.

"Stop it! Stop it!" Benny screamed, awakening himself. "I'll show you I'm not worthless. I.. I'll... Why, I guess I was dreaming," he said, standing to his feet with sudden determination.

He picked up his hoe and went to work.., with a will! No weeds were going to smother his mother's potatoes and onions. No, sir! Not so long as Benny Hobbs had a good right arm, they wouldn't!

Suddenly he saw the meaning of his mother's Bible verse: A lazy man (or boy or girl) was just like the drone in the beehive. Drones didn't live long, he knew . . . the worker bees stung them to death, then tossed them out of the hive.

Suddenly Benny dropped to his knees. Maybe God looked on him as a drone in His vineyard! And he had behaved pretty much like one, he admitted to himself. Well, he wasn't going to remain a drone!

There on the cool, damp earth, Benny confessed his laziness and careless unconcern to Jesus. He asked Him to forgive him and to save his soul, and Jesus did! Benny became a willing and joyful worker both for Jesus and his parents . . . and he was oh-h-h, so happy now!

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June, 1971

Story 6

OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF BABES

Grandfather settled his tottery frame in the much-used wicker rocker on the big front porch. A soft breeze whisked by him, playing teasingly at his snow-white hair and carelessly blowing a thin strand over his faded blue eyes. Very patiently he stroked it back in place. With his handkerchief he mopped the sweat from his brow, at the same instant gazing intently to the garden where Mildred was bent industriously over a row of beans. How he wished he could help his daughter! Hot tears stung his eyes. He tried to rise but his legs, both feeble and tottery with old age, forced him quickly back into the chair.

A mocking bird lighted in the purple-pink crepe myrtle tree to his right and let forth such a volume of music and lusty singing that the dear old soul forgot about his failing health. In profound silence and sincerest admiration grandfather watched the grayblue feathered songster presenting songs and notes as varied, interesting, and beautiful as a teenager's moods.

Quite suddenly voices broke through from shade and shelter of the giant magnolia tree in the yard.

"I'm glad I'm not a 'grown-up,' Susan." It was Linda Sue.

"But you will be a 'grown-up' some day, Linda, if you live long enough," her seven-year-old sister reminded. "Mother often tells us what she did when she was a little girl like you and me, and she's a big lady now."

Susan was silent for a long time. Save for the song of the mocking bird and the soft 'clink' of tiny cups being set in tiny saucers on the little table beneath the mammoth tree, everything else was quiet. After a long pause, between sips of imaginary tea, Susan continued; "Big people seem so unhappy."

"Not Mother and Father," Linda reminded, in her soft easy-to-listen-to voice. "Nor dear Grandfather, either. They're happy all of the time."

Susan either didn't feel like answering or she hadn't heard. She went on, "Big people are... are..., hard to please and..., and..., not satisfied like you and me, Linda."

Linda, a real peace-maker for such a little girl, gulped hard on the imaginary tea. Susan was right. Maybe she was just a little girl, but she was right! She had spoken the truth! It hurt Linda as she thought of the many big people she knew who were dissatisfied and unhappy and grumpy.

"Maybe it's because they don't know Jesus, Susan," she blurted out on impulse. "Maybe that's what makes them always want things . . . and . . . and more things!"

"Why is Mrs. Withers so grumpy?" Susan wanted to know, her pretty face wearing a puzzled look. "She gets awful cross with Jimmy and scolds him bad. I like Jimmy."

Linda swallowed again. "She doesn't know Jesus, Susan. She's just like you and I were until we got saved. Maybe we should tell her that Jesus can make her happy like He did for us."

"I'm a happy little girl since Jesus took my sins all away down at the altar at the camp meeting."

"So am I, Susan, and mama says she has the sweetest and best little girls in the whole wide world now. Even Grandpa says it's just like Heaven in our home since you and I got saved and don't fuss and argue anymore."

"This makes Father very, very happy," Susan exclaimed, smiling broadly. "I think I know one reason why mama and daddy are so happy, Susan we don't fight over playthings any more."

Susan looked awfully sad. "We were dreadful sinners, Linda!"

"But we're not sinners any more, Susan. My heart is all clean and white now, and I can't understand how I could be so hateful to you. You're a wonderful sister and I love you with all-l-l my heart."

"And because we love each other Jesus is very, very pleased with us. I don't want to grow big. I'd rather stay a little girl, a happy little girl; not a grumpy, cross grown-up."

"But don't you see, Susan? We don't need to grow up being grumpy and dissatisfied and cross. The dear Lord Jesus Who took the arguing out of us can help us to grow up to be loving and sweet and kind like Mother and Father and dear Grandfather. Jesus has kept them sweet and good and... and different from the grumpy, dissatisfied people we know."

"Why, He has! Hasn't He!" Susan exclaimed, sudden light breaking through upon her childish heart. "It will be fun to grow up then and... and... be satisfied with the very things we have."

"We'll have to pray every single day, Susan, if we are to grow up kind, and different from the grouchy persons we know. We'll have to read the Bible, too," she added.

"You didn't read to me today," Susan reminded.

"I'll do it right now," Linda said. "Janie and Mary Lou can just sit where they are they may be our tiniest dollies but they're not too little to listen. Mother said you can't begin teaching a child too young."

Linda Lou took the New Testament from the table and began reading as best a seven-year-old can read.

Grandpa wiped happy tears from his kind, faded-blue eyes. He would read to the two little girls later in the day. Yes, Sir! He was old but he could render that necessary service -- and right from the old wicker rocker, too! Suddenly, grandfather didn't seem nearly so old and tired any more! He was not too old to be of some help to two very dear little girls!

* * * * *

July, 1971

Story 7

THE FIREFLIES

Becky and Jimmy were playing hide-and-go-seek with their cousins, Debbie and Johnny. What a time they were having.

"You're 'it!'" Becky shouted to Johnny. "I found you."

Laughing loudly, Johnny came happily toward his playmates.

"This is fun!" he exclaimed. "Especially since the fireflies are out with their little lanterns. Honestly, Jimmy, you and Becky just don't know how lucky you are. We never see fireflies in the city." Looking wistfully at Jimmy and Becky he added, "Its just no fun living in an apartment. I wish my folks would move to the country."

"Oh, I do, too!" Jimmy shouted. "Right next door to us. Miller's farm, I mean."

"You know that will never happen, Johnny," Debbie chided poutingly. "Daddy's job is in the city so that is where we'll have to stay."

Johnny fell suddenly silent. He didn't like the thought of the city.

"At least we can hope!" Jimmy exclaimed, giving his cousin a sympathizing smile and a word of condolence.

"I love the fireflies," Johnny asserted, "and I love the birds and the animals and . . . and . . . just everything and I wish...."

"Stop wishing, Johnny," his sister admonished. "It's not going to do you and me one single bit of good. We're just plain lucky to get to come to Uncle John and Aunt Edith's farm every summer."

"When I grow up to be a man I'm moving to the country," Johnny said positively. "I'm going to be a farmer just like Uncle John. And I'll have a farmer's wife just like Aunt Edith, too. She'll bake me home-made bread and lots and lots of apple pies and chocolate cakes and she'll make me all the fried chicken I can eat . . . every bit of it!" A far-away look crept into the young dreamer's eyes.

"Oh, Johnny, stop dreaming!" Debbie scolded. "Jimmy and Becky are just plain lucky to have a father who's a farmer and a mother who bakes the best bread in all the world."

"Now, now." It was Aunt Edith Jimmy and Becky's mother. She came up to the children quite suddenly and unexpectedly. "You musn't flatter Uncle John and me so!" she teased, laughing softly.

"But we mean it!" Johnny and Debbie exclaimed together.

"I know you do," Aunt Edith said. "But hadn't we better come inside now and start getting ready for bed?"

"Can't I watch the fireflies just a little while longer?" Johnny pleaded. "Please? They are such pretty things and we never get to see them in the city."

"You like our friendly little creatures, don't you, Johnny?"

"I love them!" the boy exclaimed.

"Sit down awhile.. I'll tell you something about the fireflies."

Without hesitation the children seated themselves in a semi-circle around Becky and Jimmy's mother.

"Fireflies are wonderful!" Aunt Edith said, speaking softly and pleasantly. "They make the night become magic. They are one of God's miracles of creation. They tell us that two layers of tissue cause this tiny bug to light. But no one knows what keeps the little light on. That's still a mystery.."

Johnny clapped his hands with glee. "They're smart?" He laughed. "They have a secret all their own! No one knows their secret. Goody! Goody!"

"God, Who made them, knows," Aunt Edith said. "There's a story told about fireflies that I want you to hear."

"Tell it! Tell it!" the children exclaimed with glee.

"In 1898 some American soldiers were fighting in Cuba. One of the soldiers was badly wounded and needed surgery. The doctor was operating on this soldier when his light went out. Quickly, the men gathered a bottle of fireflies and the doctor finished the operation."

"No wonder I love them so!" Johnny said, smiling broadly. "They bring the nicest kind of light to the dark."

"They certainly do," Aunt Edith admitted. "This world is full of darkness. Light takes darkness away. Jesus says to those of us who are Christian, 'Ye are the light of the world.' Matt. 5:13. Man doesn't know what keeps the fireflies shining. Neither can the world understand what keeps a Christian shining through days of dark adversity, deep sorrow, and keen disappointments and severe trials and testings."

"What does keep a Christian shining, Aunt Edith?" Debbie asked, solemn-faced. "I often wondered how you and Uncle John stayed sweet and patient, and kind and good under some of the trying circumstances you've been through. You're poor, really, compared to father and mother, but you never complain. And you were thankful to God even when that dreadful disease killed most of your cows and pigs. How can this be?"

"Uncle John and I have Jesus and His Holy Spirit living in our hearts, Debbie, This is what makes all the difference in the world. Since we belong to Jesus, He lights us from the inside out . . . much like the firefly. He uses us to show others what He is like and what His power can do. Shining is God's purpose for the firefly. It is God's purpose for the Christian, too . . . that others may find the way to Him."

"I want to shine for Jesus," Debbie said. "Will you pray for me, Aunt Edith?"

"Me, too?" It was Johnny.

And there on the sprawling farmyard lawn, Debbie and Johnny found Jesus and got saved and, they became shining lights for Jesus.

* * * * *

August, 1971

Story 8
THE BRIDGE

Betty Ruth skipped lightly alongside Grandfather. How warm and sturdy his big hand felt holding her small one!

She cast a quick glance up at Grandfather's fine old face. How kind were his eyes and how friendly-looking was his face. Grandfather was wonderful. He looked just like she felt Jesus would look if she could see Him and His wonderful face. At least, Grandfather had the light and the glow and the shine on his face like she had always heard that Jesus had.

"What are you thinking of, my little pet?" Grandfather asked, looking down at Betty Ruth's radiant face.

"About you," the girl answered, giving her long, silky, blonde hair a quick toss.

"About me! Well, if that isn't nice!" Grandfather exclaimed, laughing ever so softly.

"I think you're the nicest, goodest, grandest, wonderfulest ..."

"Whoa, there, my little one! You don't want Grandfather to get the 'big head', do you?"

"But you are wonderful, Grandfather. You're the best in all the world and your face shines like Jesus'."

"That's because Jesus lives in my heart, Betty Ruth."

"I know," the little girl answered, "and it makes you be-au-ti-ful!"

"Jesus makes everyone beautiful. He promised to beautify the meek with salvation."

"Oh, that's wonderful. Does my face shine, too, since Jesus came into my heart?" Betty Ruth asked.

"Indeed it does. Why, only this morning Mrs. Claypool remarked that she believed you were more angel than mortal."

"But I'm not an angel. I'm Betty Ruth Worthington and you're grandpa. I can prove it. See, you have hold of my hand and you're taking me for a walk in the woods."

Grandfather laughed softly again and gave the girl's hand a tight little squeeze.

"Indeed you are Betty Ruth Worthington and I am ... positively so ... your loving and proud grandfather, There!"

Betty Ruth laughed loudly and melodiously. It was funny, Mrs. Claypool thinking she was an angel! But she was glad that her face shone just like Grandfather's. In a big way, she was testifying that she belonged to Jesus.

Suddenly Grandfather stopped dead in his tracks. "Sh-h-h!" he whispered.

"What is it?" Betty Ruth asked. "A mother squirrel with her baby. Look!" and the aged man pointed to a giant oak tree in front of them.

"They ... they're playing tag!" Betty Ruth whispered, dancing about on her tiny feet.

"And can that little fellow ever make tracks!" Grandfather exclaimed, laughing under his breath.

"Oh, Grandpa, you always show me the most exciting things. See! They're jumping from tree to tree. What fun they're having! I wish I could climb trees and jump from limb to limb, too." Betty Ruth said, watching with delight as the two squirrels cavorted in the trees.

"God made humans to walk upright, honey. He made us in His image and in His likeness. We're not made to climb trees and jump from limb to limb."

"Oh!" Betty exclaimed, in a satisfied way.

They walked farther on where they could watch the action of the mother and her baby better.

"Look, Grandpa!" Betty shouted.

"The mother jumped across that little stream. Oh, that poor, poor baby! He wants to cross too but he's afraid. What will happen to him, grandfather? He'll get lost if the mother makes him stay on this side of the stream all alone."

"We'll be very quiet and watch, little girl. It's not likely the mother will forsake her baby. She's very fond of him, as you can see," Grandfather comforted, as he seated himself on a log nearby. Betty Ruth sat down too.

Over and over, the mother squirrel jumped the stream. Back and forth, back and forth. Each time she did her best to coax the little fellow to try his strength. "Jump! Jump!" she seemed to be saying, but the little squirrel wouldn't jump. He seemed to be nervous. Afraid, too. The mother chattered coaxingly and even scolded; but the frightened baby only ran up and down the bank, searching for an easier way to cross.

Suddenly the mother made a way! Grandfather and Betty Ruth were fascinated. The mother squirrel tugged and wrestled with a branch that seemed entirely too heavy for her, but soon she had it in the water. Then, pushing with all her strength, she forced it to touch the other side of the stream. In a twinkling the baby squirrel had crossed the frail bridge and was at his mother's side. Quickly, the squirrels were swallowed up in the dense woods.

"Wasn't that exciting!" Betty said, "She sure was a brave mother!"

"That she was. And that reminds me of another bridge," grandfather said, folding Betty Ruth's eager little hand in his big strong one, "a bridge that was made by One Who at great cost found a way to bridge the great gulf that separated man from God."

Betty Ruth's expressive blue eyes searched grandfather's face eagerly. It was Jesus, she knew, but she loved to hear grandfather tell the wonderful story.

"To make that bridge, our Savior shed His precious blood on the cruel cross. No other bridge would do... nor any other way. For Jesus said, 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.' "

"And I crossed that bridge!" Betty said joyously, with eyes full of wonder and awe and tears.

* * * * *

September, 1971

Story 9

GHOST FOREST

"Everybody ready?" Mr. White called through the kitchen door to his eight lively sons and daughters.

"Ready, Papa," a group of happy voices chimed back.

"But what about Mama?" asked blue-eyed, blonde-haired Ella Mae. "We're not leaving Mama all alone, are we?" and she looked fondly at her mother.

"I rather think it will be a treat for your mother, Ella Mae, to be left alone, with every thing peaceful and quiet for a change." Mr. White laughed as he said it.

Ella Mae lingered behind to ask, "Don't you really mind if we all go, Mama? I'll stay with you if..."

"Run along now, dear, and have a good time," Mother said. "Of course I'll miss my darlings, but you'll soon be back home again." Kissing the silken head of her smallest daughter, she watched as she skipped lightly down the cobblestone walk through the wicket gate after her father.

Every few weeks Mr. White thought of something exciting to do with the children; generally planning it so his wife would have the most of the day to herself.... "for peace and quiet," as he so aptly phrased it.

Today, with lunches packed and small sacks for hickory nuts, butternuts and chestnuts, the group was going on a hiking expedition to the very summit of Jack's Mountain and down the opposite side!

The first hour of climbing was done with eager enthusiasm and nimble limbs; as the party climbed higher and higher they had to stop repeatedly to rest.

"We may as well take it slow," Mr. White said, "We have all day."

"Oh, Daddy," Sammy exclaimed, "I wouldn't have missed this for anything! See what Joe and I killed." And he held up a snake on a stick which sent the girls shrieking into their father's arms.

"It's dead, silly!" Joe said, half disgusted.

"I found berries.., all kinds of them!" William called to the group far below him.

"Coming!" echoed Charles and the boys. In a mad scramble all were up the steep mountainside.

They entered a dense area of fir, spruce, and hemlock where a thick soft carpet of pale green moss was spread for them, then they plunged into a rhododendron and buck laurel thicket.

"Quiet, everybody." Daddy whispered softly. "This is where the deer like to come to rest and to eat. If we're still enough and the wind's favorable we may see some deer."

Everybody settled down on the thick moss and leaf carpet to rest when, quite unexpectedly, a mother deer and two spotted fawns crossed a short distance in front of them never once noticing the excited children and their father. The young took gentle nibbles at the tender leaves, then raised their heads in a graceful manner and darted quickly out of sight.

Again the party of happy people started on their upward climb. At length they came to a clearing where there were trees stripped of every leaf and all their bark. Long, gnarled, grotesque-looking limbs and trunks seemed to be glaring at them as skeletons of the past . . . all white and naked looking!

"I don't like it here!" Ella Mae exclaimed, taking a tight grip on her father's strong hand. "I . . . I'm scared,"

"Those trees can't hurt you, Honey." Father said comfortingly. "Let's sit down here, shall we? These trees remind me of something."

The children gathered around their father. "These trees were one day as green and as beautiful as all the other trees we have seen," Father began. "This area was smitten by blight of some kind which killed the very life of the trees... hence no leaves, no bark, no nothing; only a hollow, dead tree trunk and branches. They're mere tree ghosts of the past."

"But, Daddy, how . . .?" Albert began.

"Many professors today are like these trees," Mr. White continued "There was a day when they really loved the Lord and were full of life and zeal for Him . . . they were green and fat and flourishing in their souls; they had that holy fire which God gives. But they have been hit by a terrible blight which has robbed them of their joy and peace in the Lord and killed their inner life."

"It . . . it has? What is the blight, Daddy?" Mary Ann asked.

"It's a subtle blight, Honey, but it has hit the mark it aimed at. It is the blight of 'no harm' and the blight of 'television.' The killing, blight of 'no harm' gets people to thinking nothing's wrong and soon one is doing wrong things contrary to the Bible and its teachings, whereupon he gets stripped of all the power and the glory of God's presence until his soul (if we could see it) looks like these trees . . . naked and bare and stripped of their beauty and glory. The television blight creates unholy thoughts and desires in one's heart and mind and robs him of precious time and money. David says 'I will set no evil thing before mine eyes.' Oh! we must watch and pray and always be careful that we please the Lord lest we become like those people who see no harm in anything anymore or we, too, will become like these trees in this ghost forest ... mere dead skeletons of the past; dead, withered, dried up within, and hollow!"

"This is a very real picture of those who claim to love the Lord but in reality have left their first love. John tells us something about these people in Revelations: 'I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and are dead.' Yes, many today are walking spiritual corpses. If we pray every day and read the Bible and walk in all the light God has shown us and: always are obedient to His voice this great spiritual blight can never touch our hearts, children."

"Then . . . Daddy . . . I'd like to pray," Robert said brokenly. "I didn't pray till I prayed through this morning. I was too excited about the trip. But I see that God must always have first place in my heart or He won't stay there at all."

"Good boy, Robert!" Father exclaimed hoarsely. "God will use you one of these days if you remain tender and pliable in His hands. We'll all pray now."

Beneath a sky as blue as a robin's egg and the sun splashing golden jewels all around them, the family knelt. The tree trunks seemed to reflect a peculiar radiance as the prayers were wafted heavenward and the glory fell like a torrential rain.

* * * * *

October, 1971

Story 10
QUICKSAND

"May Rachael and I go over to Miller's and play, Mother?" Ralph asked, out of breath. "What's wrong with playing in our own yard?" Mrs. Wood asked of her eleven-year-old, whose twin was Rachael.

"Nothing, really. It's just that Glenn wanted us over. They have lots and lots of woods to play in."

"But wouldn't Rachael feel terribly out of place..., playing with two boys?"

"O, I won't be playing with Glenn and Ralph, Mother," the girl said, coming noiselessly into the kitchen. "Cherie's home from the hospital now and Mrs. Miller was hoping I could come over and read to her. But if you think we shouldn't . . ." Rachael's voice trailed away. She was a very obedient girl and always accepted their decisions sweetly and submissively. Rachael was a Christian.

"Aw, go on, Sis!" Ralph whined and complained. "It won't hurt for us to go over there."

"You have a wrong attitude, Ralph," Mrs. Wood reprimanded.

"Were it not for Cherie, I'd make you stay home. For Cherie's sake and enjoyment, you both may go. She's been ill so long."

"O thank you, Mother! Thank you!" Rachael exclaimed joyfully. "I shall take "Little Pilgrim's Progress" over and read to her. We both love this book.

"Tell Mrs. Miller we'll be over to see Cherie as soon as possible. Be home before supper and Ralph, don't go near the swamp. You know what's in that area."

"O. K., Morn," the boy said, rushing out the door and racing madly down the porch steps, Waggle Tail bouncing merrily beside him.

"Come on, old pal," Ralph encouraged the cocker spaniel by his side, "we're going to have a grand time today. A really grand time. Mom treats me like I'm a little baby; but I'm not, old boy. I can take care of myself!"

Waggle Tail wagged his tail fiercely and barked joyously as though he understood everything Ralph had said.

Every now and then the black cocker paused and looked back to see where Rachael was.

"Aw, c'mon!" Ralph scolded. "If you're going with me you'll have to hurry. I'm not waiting for any slow poke of a sister."

Waggle Tail stopped dead still and watched the house. He whined pitifully after Ralph's disappearing figure, then with a single bound he followed.

The afternoon seemed to speed by on winged swiftness for Cherie and Rachael.

"O Rachael, you read so well!" Cherie praised. "And it's so sweet of you to come over and read to me. I feel so much better already just having you here with me."

"I love being with you, Cherie. Mother and Father will be over just as soon as they can. Ralph and I'll come along, too.. Maybe I can bring a new color book for you then."

Cherie smiled sweetly. "You're so kind and unselfish, Rachael."

"Jesus makes everyone kind and unselfish, Cherie. Remember one of our Scripture memory verses in Mrs. Bridges' class?"

Cherie studied hard for a minute. "You mean, 'Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted'"

"That's the one," Rachael said, laughing. Then she got an idea.

"O Cherie, let's see how many of our Scripture verses we can say."

The girls were having an enjoyable time saying their memory verses when Mrs. Miller walked into the room.

"Did Waggle Tail come with you, Rachael?" she asked.

"He came with Ralph. Why?" "I think I hear him barking furiously down towards the woods. Listen! Isn't that him?"

Rachael was very still and silent. "That's Waggle Tail all right," she said, laughing. "He gets so excited over everything."

"But he's been barking like that for nearly two hours now. And he cries at times, too. Wails, I should say."

Rachael's laughing stopped. "Mrs. Miller . . . you . . . don't suppose Ralph and Glenn disobeyed and . . . and . . . went to the swamp . . .?" Rachael's face was suddenly pale. She raced toward the barking dog like she had wings on her feet.

The cocker jumped up and down, wailing frantically, when he saw her.

"What is it, Wags?" she asked. "Where are the boys? Where is Ralph?"

The excited dog raced wildly toward . . . the swamp!

"O no!" Rachael lamented. "Did Ralph disobey again? Ralph! Ralph! Glenn! Glenn!" she called loudly.

The only sound that reached her ears was the wind moaning and sighing through the trees.

Waggle Tail bit gently at her heels and continued his barking and lamentable wailing . . . incessantly, every little while running ahead as if beckoning her to follow him.

The dog led her to the far side of the swamp. Near a clump of birch, he paused. Jumping up and down, he tried to tell Rachael which direction to go.

"Ralph! Glenn!" she called.

"H-e-l-p!" It was a single plea, an agonizing plea, that reached Rachael's ears.

"I'll get help," she called, then ran frantically toward the Miller house.

"They're in the quicksand, Mrs. Miller! The quicksand!" she exclaimed again.

A startled gasp escaped Mrs. Miller's lips.

Just then Mr. Miller came into the house. "Why all the excitement and rush?" he asked good-naturedly.

"Quicksand!"

The word set Mr. Miller in action. Grabbing a length of rope, he hurried to the swamp. Mrs. Miller and Rachael followed close behind.

"H-e-l-p! H-e-l-p!" Ralph and Glenn shouted, their voices hoarse and their strength almost gone from struggling to free themselves from the sucking, devouring sand.

"Coming," a strong voice shouted.

Picking his way carefully through the treacherous swamp, Mr. Miller was soon near enough to the boys to throw out the rope.

"Catch the rope, Ralph! he shouted. "Fasten the noose about your waist then I'll pull. You're next, Glenn."

Eagerly, Ralph fastened the rope beneath his arms. After much hard labor, he was free. His face was the color of death.

Glenn was the next. "Under your armpits, Son!" Mr. Miller urged.

"But . . . Dad, I'm . . . nearly sunk"

"Fasten the rope, Glenn. Under your armpits. Quick!"

Within another twenty minutes, Glenn was free.

"Now, why did you go to the swamp?" Mr. Miller asked. "I've forbidden you to go near here...ever! Why did you disobey?" The boy dropped his head.

"I I'm... to blame," Ralph confessed. "I... thought I'd show mother and father how smart I was. I disobeyed . . willfully and stubbornly. Glenn didn't want to... come . . . down here. But ..I... called him a... a... sissy. Forgive me, please."

Ralph was sobbing bitterly. "I... was almost gone; and... and . . . if . . . I'd have died I'd .. be...in hell now. Will you all pray for me? I have a real bad heart, a wicked and defiant heart."

On a thick clump of swamp grass, Ralph repented of all his sins and got saved. Glenn did, too.

"And to think I thought I was so smart!" Ralph exclaimed after he was cleaned up and dressed in some of Glenn's clothing. "I've learned my lesson . . . a sure enough good-lesson! I'll never, never disobey father and mother again. Never!"

"Me neither!" Glenn replied. "That was a close call for both of us."

"But it was my disobedience and rebellion that almost cost us both our lives. That must be what the Bible means when it says about none of us living unto himself and dying unto himself."

"Exactly!" Mr. Miller assured. "Each of us is taking someone with us to heaven or hell . . . depending on the life we live. And sin is always costly.., very costly! 'The soul that sinneth, it shall die,' the Bible says."

Die! Ralph shuddered again, remembering how close to death he and Glenn really were.

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November, 1971

Story 11

HERMAN AND THE THANKSGIVING OFFERING

"Well, there comes another offering and nothing for us to give!" Susan exclaimed sadly to her twin, Sandra.

Sandra cupped her chin in her hands. She was thinking hard. "We may be little girls, Susan," she said, "but I'm sure we could do something to earn money for that Thanksgiving offering at church."

"What can we do?" Susan lamented, her great dark-brown eyes filling with sudden tears. "It's a shame that little boys and girls can't give money like grown people!"

"I know one thing," Sandra asserted firmly, "if I had as much money as Mr. Parkins has I'd put it all in that Thanksgiving offering. I would!"

"And that you would!" grandmother said, coming suddenly into the living room where the girls sat with crestfallen faces. "It's a shame you don't have as much money as that man has," the dear old lady said, her eyes all a twinkle. "The Lord's cause wouldn't be suffering as much if Mr. Parkins' money were in your unselfish hands, girls."

"But Grandma, little girls are handicapped." Susan gulped as she said the last word, hoping she used it rightly. "What can we do? Nobody wants little children to do their work; and mother and father are too poor to give us an allowance"

"I know!" Sandra shouted, jumping to her feet. "We can make pot-holders and sell them. Mother has all kinds of scrap material and"

"O, Sandy, you're wonderful! Why didn't we think of it before?" and Susan hugged her twin soundly.

"Let's go to the scrap bag and pick out the brightest, gayest, prettiest --"

"Girls, Mr. Parkins is on the phone," mother called. "He wants to speak with either 'Miss Sandra' or 'Miss Susan,' he said."

"Mr. Parkins?" the girls queried. "Oh, I wonder if anything happened to Herman"

"Hello, Mr. Parkins, this is Susan. Mother said you wanted to talk to Sandy or me"

"That's right," Mr. Parkins answered, "and I shall get to the point immediately; there's no use wasting precious time making senseless sentences. It's Herman"

"Is he sick? Did he die?" Susan was scared now.

"No. No. No." Mr. Parkins could be so short and tart! "Nothing of the kind. I must be out of town for a week-and-a-half business. You understand? And I was wondering if you and Sandra would baby-sit with Herman for me. I wouldn't trust him with just anybody"

"Babysit! O, Mr. Parkins, we'd love it! We'd love it! Wouldn't we, Sandy?"

Love it! Baby-sit? With Mr. Parkins! Sandra's big dark-brown eyes were full and round with surprise. Baby-sit with old Mr. Parkins! How funny!

"You'll do it then?" the old man asked, sounding greatly relieved.

"Of course we'll do it," Susan reassured. "We'll be happy to."

"Oh, Susan, why ever did you promise to baby, sit with old Mr. Parkins? I don't think it's a good idea at all. It's . . . well, it's funny!"

"Not Mr. Parkins, Sandy . . . with Herman."

Sandy laughed out loud., long and loud. "Oh, Susan, how funny! Babysitting with Herman!"

"Well, it will be a whole lot easier and nicer than babysitting for Mr. Parkins," Susan said, laughing mischievously. "At least Herman can't talk and he can sleep in our basement at night. All we'll have to do is exercise him well morning and night and feed him good and that will be fun."

"Can't you just see all the other poor dogs in our humble neighborhood going around with the tuckhead . . . feeling so utterly inferior and . . . and insecure as you exercise the great but homely-looking Herman of Mr. Parkins' estate!" mother teased. The girls laughed heartily.

"At least we'll be getting something for keeping him," Susan added, sobering.

"You...you...mean...?"

"Yes, Mr. Parkins said he'd pay us well for taking care of him while he's gone."

"Oh-h!" Sandy gasped. "I wonder what he'll give us. He's awfully tight."

"It really doesn't matter what he pays us: we'll go right ahead and make our pot-holders," Susan said wisely, "that way we'll have pot-holder money to give in case Mr. Parkins doesn't give us anything much for babysitting with Herman."

" 'Dog-sitting', you mean," Sandy teased.

"And that would be the more proper term," grandma said, smiling. "But why don't you pray and ask the Lord to impress Mr. Parkins to give you a goodly sum of money for watching his dog? You're wanting it for a most needy and worthy cause and while God didn't compel the enemies of the children of Israel to leave their land so the Israelites could inhabit it, He sent the hornets among them which just made them all too willing to leave. And there, before the Israelites, was that rich and prosperous and productive land . . . all ready and waiting for them to inherit and possess. God is still a wonder working God. I wouldn't think to suggest the matter of prayer if you were wanting money for selfish, wasteful purposes," Grandma added, "Chances are that you would only become more selfish and grasping with each additional coin you added to your coffers. But this is a different situation."

"Thank you, dear Grandmother!" the twins exclaimed. "We will pray about it."

Thus the twins began a venture of faith.

In the days that followed, Herman was the most exercised dog in all the neighborhood. His short, stubby little legs and his full round abdomen all seemed to be nearer to dragging the ground

than anything else; but with the twins doing their duty faithfully, diligently, and obediently, Herman was soon sleek and slender and in excellent physical shape for a dog of ten summers and winters having passed over his funny little head.

The day Mr. Parkins returned home was an exciting day. Before ever going to his big, fine, fancy estate, he hurried to Sandy and Susan's house.

The girls met him at the door. Herman, too.

"Herman, my boy!" the old man exclaimed to the dog. What a queer old man Mr. Parkins was... calling Herman 'my boy,' the twins thought as they watched his eyes sparkle and shine as he looked at the now-sleek and slender Herman.

"We exercised him every single day!" Sandy said proudly.

"Both morning and night," Susan added.

"And we fed him his dog-food just like you told us to," Sandy said, remembering the special food the man had left with them.

"He's in wonderful shape!" the old man said in a pleased and satisfied tone of voice, hugging Herman to him soundly. "Why, I do believe he's in the very best shape I've ever seen him. Here," he said, drawing a fifty-dollar bill from his bulging wallet, "buy something nice with this. Something you've always wanted."

The twins' eyes bulged. Finally, and almost breathless from shock, Susan said, "Thank you, Mr. Parkins. Thank you. We were praying for money to put into the Thanksgiving offering at our church and the Lord has answered our prayers."

"Thanksgiving offering! For what?" Mr. Parkins asked, still over-excited at finding Herman in such a state of excellent physical fitness.

"It all goes for foreign missions," Sandy explained brightly. "We're taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to lands and places where people haven't heard about Him," she added.

"You are? Hm-m. In that case I'd better double that. Here!" and he added another fifty to the one he had already given.

"Oh-h-h! Thank you!" the girls gasped in what was little more than a whisper.

"And thank you for taking such good care of my Herman!" the man exclaimed, beaming proudly down on the dog.

He set his hat carefully on the top of his head and started to leave.

"Don't be too surprised if you see this old man down at your church sometime," he laughed, holding Herman in his trembly old arms.

"Oh, we won't," the girls answered. "God doesn't compel people; He just makes them willing to go."

"Eh? Oh, yes. Yes. That's right! So it is!" Mr. Parkins commented.

So it came to pass that a portion of Mr. Parkins' great wealth was placed by loving, generous, girlish hands into the offering plate that Sunday morning . . . in the Thanksgiving Offering . . . for foreign missions!

Two little hearts were blest. Four big brown eyes shone bright; Two girlish voices sang praise To the God of all power and might!

* * * * *

December, 1971

Story 12

JOHNNY'S NEW YEAR

Sally rushed into the house and tossed her books on the table. She pulled her cap and mittens off and folded them carefully before she stuffed them into her coat pocket. Her cheeks were flushed and red from the cold and her tiny turned-up nose looked like a bright red cherry.

"Guess what?" she said, facing her mother.

Mother turned from her cooking for a minute and faced her excited daughter. "It must be something good, Sally . . . from the happy look on your dear face," she said, laughing softly and kissing the long golden curls of her eight-year-old.

"Oh, it is! It is!" Sally exclaimed enthusiastically. "Miss Shannon asked us to write everything good we did this past year and everything bad."

Mother's eyes twinkled merrily. "Did you do it?"

"Oh, yes , Sally answered. Her face shone. "And, Mother, I was so happy I could have cried."

Mother stood watching her little girl.

"I was happy because I was a Christian and . . . and this year I wasn't bad. All because of Jesus living in my heart!"

Johnny had followed his sister into the house. Very quietly he tip-toed up the stairs. He was ashamed of this past year.

Very, very quietly he hung his jacket in the closet in his bedroom then he crawled under the bed. He was soon fast asleep . . . and dreaming.

In his dream, an old man with tottery steps, sad eyes and a long white beard walked into his bedroom. His sad old eyes pierced through the bedspread down to the spot where Johnny lay hiding beneath the bed.

"Johnny!" he called with his tired old voice that sounded like a booming echo. "Johnny, I have come to settle the year's score with you."

Trembling from head to foot, Johnny advanced slowly toward the man. He tried to speak, only to discover that his voice had fled.

"See here," the old man said, pointing to what looked like a calendar-book.

Johnny's eyes followed the long, bony index finger of the man. Solemnly and seriously he read: "The Record of Johnny Baker."

The old man opened the book to the first month of the old year January.

The first page was nice and clean, but farther along in the month things changed.

"Johnny told a lie to his mother today," was written in bold, black lettering for January 15th.

"Johnny stole a ball from his best friend," was recorded on another page.

"Ho... how..., did you know?" Johnny stuttered to the tottery old man before him.

The old man made no answer. He merely glanced at Johnny as he continued turning the calendar pages. His eyes seemed to burn their way into Johnny's heart and mind.

"Johnny slapped Sally today. He was disobedient to his father, too," a page in February read.

"He stole a dime from a classmate's desk today. Watch him? He's headed for trouble. Every thief had his beginning with 'little things.'" was recorded one day in March.

April's calendar record ran much the same. So did May's. In June, it read: "Johnny was disobedient again today, he went swimming in spite of his father's 'no swimming' orders. He would have drowned if Jimmy Black had not saved him."

"He went swimming again this hot July day, lied to his mother when asked where he'd been. It's getting easier all the time now for Johnny to lie. He's searing his conscience till it doesn't bother him much anymore."

"Johnny's a real thief now! He stole more than a dozen watermelons in this month of August and sold some of them, too!"

On and on the pages went . . . September, October, November and on into the first of December. There, on the fifth page of December's calendar page was a dirty, dirty black record: "Johnny's far gone!" It looked like the hand must have trembled and shaken violently as it wrote the words. There were tear stains on the page, too. "He stole nineteen dollars and sixty-seven cents from the church this Sunday"

"Stop it! Stop it!" Johnny screamed aloud. "How did you know? Who told you?"

"I'm an old man, Johnny. Soon I shall leave this earth to never again reappear. I am the old year. Perhaps the reason I appear so very, very old and feeble and tottery is because I record all the bad deeds that are done by every living mortal. What you have done this past year, Johnny, can never be undone. Your record is here! And it's very, very dirty! Dirty!" the old man exclaimed sadly. "I would be glad to leave this earth if I had the assurance that you would change your ways and become a Christian like Sally. You must repent, Johnny . . . repent. . . repent., repent"

The hollow, echo voice seemed to shriek the word in Johnny's ears . . . "repent . . . repent . . . repent"

"Stop! Stop!" Johnny screamed. "Don't torture me any longer. I will! I will!"

"You will what, son?" Mother, hearing Johnny's wild screams, had run up to the bedroom "What will you do, Johnny?" she asked softly again.

"Repent!" Johnny exclaimed, crawling out from beneath the bed. "I'll repent and confess, Mother . . . to God and to man." And Johnny was on his knees crying and begging God to forgive him for stealing and lying and being disobedient and hateful.

"I'll take Mike's ball back and I'll pay Mr. Cook for the watermelons," he told the Lord. "I'll confess to the whole church that I stole that money, too, dear Lord; and I'll pay it all back with the money from my paper route. Only save me and forgive me"

Johnny was soon shouting for joy. His face glowed with an inner heavenly radiance. He was forgiven. He was saved and his old record was all blotted out through Jesus' blood.

"It's not too late to begin, is it, Mother?" he asked.

"Begin what, Johnny?"

"A new record. My new record."

"Indeed it isn't!" mother exclaimed. "It's an ideal time to begin. The baby new year has just entered and it's a wonderful time to begin serving the Lord."

"And this year my record shall be like Sally's . . . clean and spotlessly white!"

* * * * *

THE END