

Martin Hunčár

**HOW JOHNNY WALNUT
DEFEATED THE DRAGON**



Word of Life international Bratislava

HOW JOHNNY WALNUT DEFEATED THE DRAGON

About book:

An exciting Christian adventure story.

The main hero wanders away from his parents and gets lost. He finds himself in a fairy story where he meets and overcomes many dangers and temptations, which are relevant to today's society.

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1. How Johnny Walnut was born



Little Johnny was born. Everyone was very happy about it. His Mommy and Daddy thanked God for blessing them with such a beautiful baby. He was cute and sweet, although he was somewhat small. But his parents didn't let that bother them; they just prayed for their boy. Mommy cooked all sorts of good things for him, so that he would eat and grow bigger, but he didn't really eat much. The one thing he really liked to eat was walnuts. He could eat them all the time, for breakfast, for lunch, and for dinner. Fortunately they had a big walnut tree in front of their house. They were not rich, infact they didn't have much at home at all. They lived very simply. Johnny loved nuts with honey, with apples, and quite often ate them on macaroni, with butter and powdered sugar. So they began to call him Johnny Walnut.

Johnny was not troubled at all, quite the opposite, he soon got used to that name. When the neighborhood boys started to laugh and said that he was as small as a walnut, then it bothered him. So when he prayed before bedtime, he always remembered the words that he had heard in church; that the Lord Jesus loves all children, and has a great plan for them. Johnny believed that even though he was small, God could do great things through him.

2. The trip to heaven

One day, Johnny Walnut was very tired, and as usual before bedtime, he prayed the Lord's Prayer. Since his eyes were blinking good night, and starting to close, he only added, "Lord Jesus, I love you", and blew a kiss towards heaven.

In just a minute he was sound asleep, his face glowed as he dreamt an unusual dream.

Nobody knew where it came from, but suddenly there stood a great angel in front of him, dressed all in white. And imagine - he came in a white car! What a beautiful car it was! Johnny could already recognize all types of cars, but he had never seen such an amazing and shiny one like this before.

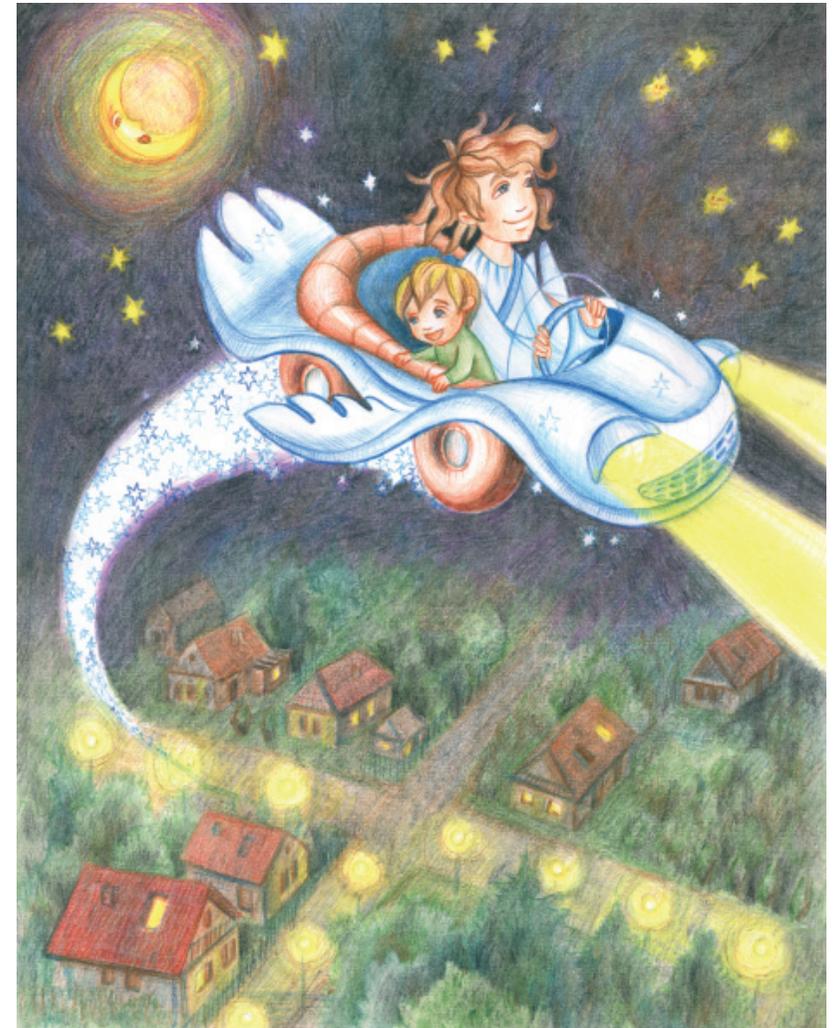
"Get in, we'll fly to Heaven!" said the angel.

"Yeah!" cried Johnny as they started to rise up towards the clouds. Their house got smaller until it looked like a little matchbox, and finally it totally disappeared. They flew higher and higher. It seemed that even the moon was jealous of how high they reached, and all the stars twinkled cheerfully as they spun around them.

The car stopped in front of the Gates of Heaven. How they gleamed! In front of the gates stood another mighty angel.

„He is even bigger than my Dad,“ Johnny thought.

The angel held a big book in his hands and His face was serious. He looked carefully at Johnny and it seemed that he



wasn't looking at Johnny's pajamas, but at his heart. Johnny looked at it too. Surprised, he almost forgot to close his mouth. His heart was completely dark. He became very sad about it, and wished he could paint it white, but there was no brush, no paint. He tried to hide it with his hands, but the more he tried to hide it, the darker it became. He started to cry. He asked the

angel why he had a heart like that.

“Do you remember when you were moaning? Mommy told you it was time for bed, but you wanted to play. You were so angry that you cried, even though nothing hurt.”

Johnny knew that what the angel said was true.

“And what about yesterday, when Daddy picked up your little sister Suzy and kissed her. You felt upset that he hugged her and not you! Do you know how nasty that was? Should I continue?” the angel asked Johnny who was ashamed and bowed his head.



“No, don’t tell me anymore,” begged Johnny. “Yes, I know I was disobedient, Daddy told me too. But I was also good! I picked flowers for Mommy when I played outside, and I told her that I loved her. And I gave my sister Suzy four kisses, one on the forehead, one on the cheek, one on the nose, and one on her mouth. Daddy and I said we would kiss her to death!”

“That was very nice,” answered the angel.

Johnny felt a little better and the angel continued.

“Do you remember how you played on the seesaw with Daddy? You sat on one end, and the other end stayed up in the air. Then Daddy came and sat on the other side. Since he is much heavier than you are, you were lifted up. That’s how it is with our good deeds and our bad deeds. If you do something good, it is like when you sat on the seesaw. But when you do something bad, it is bigger than all the good things. One single sin outweighs all the good, and darkens your heart.

Johnny was surprised. He didn’t understand it at all.



“So what kind of hearts do children have?” he asked the angel excitedly.

“Every baby is born with a clean white heart, which has clear little windows through which we can see Jesus. But when children are disobedient, the windows are dirtied, their heart is darkened and they can no longer see Jesus. But He knocks on the windows, and if you ask Him, he will wash and clean your heart, so it is clean and white again.”

Johnny recalled how he recently fell into the mud in the garden and got his pants very dirty. They were black as a coal. Mommy told him that he looked like a piglet. But then she put them into the washing machine, and they were as white as snow again.

He listened to the angel and imagined a washing machine for hearts. He really wished that his heart would be clean.

“I want to have a clean heart!” he told the angel with determination.

“Only those whose names are written in the Book of Life have white hearts. And only they get into heaven,” said the angel.

“What is the Book of Life?” Johnny asked eagerly, but with that, the angel started to fade. Instead of the answer, he heard Mommy’s voice,

“Johnny, wake up, it’s late!”

He would have liked to have spoken more with the angel, but he was fully awake now.

“Mommy, tell me, what is the Book of Life?”

“Where have you heard about it?” his Mom stared.

“An angel told me that only those whose names are written in it will pass through the Gates of Heaven.”

Mommy thought for a moment whether Johnny could really have spoken with an angel, and then she continued, “Those who accept Jesus into their hearts are written into the Book of Life in Heaven.”

Oh, how Johnny longed for that. So he and Mom prayed together.

“Lord Jesus, forgive me for my disobedience. Take my dark heart, and make it clean. Enter my heart and be my best friend. Please, write my name into the Book of Life.”

Johnny was floating with deep, amazing peace and happiness. He dived into Mommy’s arms.

“Now I will surely be allowed to pass through the Heavenly Gates,” he thought to himself.



3. How to stay as white as snow

Today everyone is happy, because it is Johnny's little sister Suzy's birthday. Mommy baked a cake, and hid a big chocolate bar in the store cupboard for her. Johnny saw her put it there, but Mommy warned him not to eat it, because it was a gift for his sister.

But in a few minutes he found himself alone in the kitchen. The door to the store cupboard was really attracting him. The chocolate that Mommy put there began to make his mouth water. Something was telling him not to do it, but he immediately thought that no one would be angry if he bit off just a little. He quickly went into the cupboard, looked around to make sure that no one was watching him, and climbed up on a chair. In a minute he found the wishful chocolate, carefully unwrapped it and tasted it. What excellent chocolate it was! Such yummy milk chocolate and it even had nuts in it! It tasted so good to him, that he took two more big bites. Immediately he felt that he shouldn't have done, but what could he do now? There wasn't much left, so he grabbed the rest of the chocolate, took it to his room and finished it. The sweet taste was still in his mouth, but he started to feel very upset.

"What will happen when they find out?"

He would have admitted to it, but he was afraid and so he decided to say nothing. When Suzy was opening her gifts, he was sad, and would have liked to have run to his room, but he



knew he couldn't. Then his Mommy turned to the cupboard and looked inside for quite some time. After a while she asked sternly,

"Johnny, did you eat it?" she looked at him with anger.

"I...I...I didn't!" Johnny defended himself, frightened and blushing. Mommy came closer and looked at his hands, which were still dirty from the chocolate. She stared at Daddy who immediately carried Johnny to his room.

Johnny knew he was in trouble and yelled, "No! No, I don't want a telling-off."

But Daddy looked at him very strictly and said, "You shouldn't have done that. But since you did, you should have come to us and admitted it, and not lied to Mommy on top of it all!"

Daddy shared some cross words with Johnny. HE was very

disappointed in him. Johnny remained there alone and burst in tears. His feelings were hurt, but he was very sorry for what he had done to his sister. He wondered if the Lord Jesus would still be his friend.

The frightened boy sobbed: "I want to pray!"

The door opened. Daddy came back in, still looking serious, but it seemed that he was glad that Johnny called out. So they began to pray together that Jesus would cleanse him. Little rivers of tears still ran down Johnny's face, but he knew that Jesus had already forgiven him and that he was as white as snow again. Daddy hugged him tightly against his chest, and that calmed him down even more. Then he asked everyone in the family if they would forgive him. How relieved he was when Mommy kissed him and even his sister shook his hand.

Then Daddy said, "Johnny was guilty because he ate the chocolate that didn't belong to him. But we forgave him, and therefore even the Lord Jesus will forgive us our sins."



4. The flyaway balloon

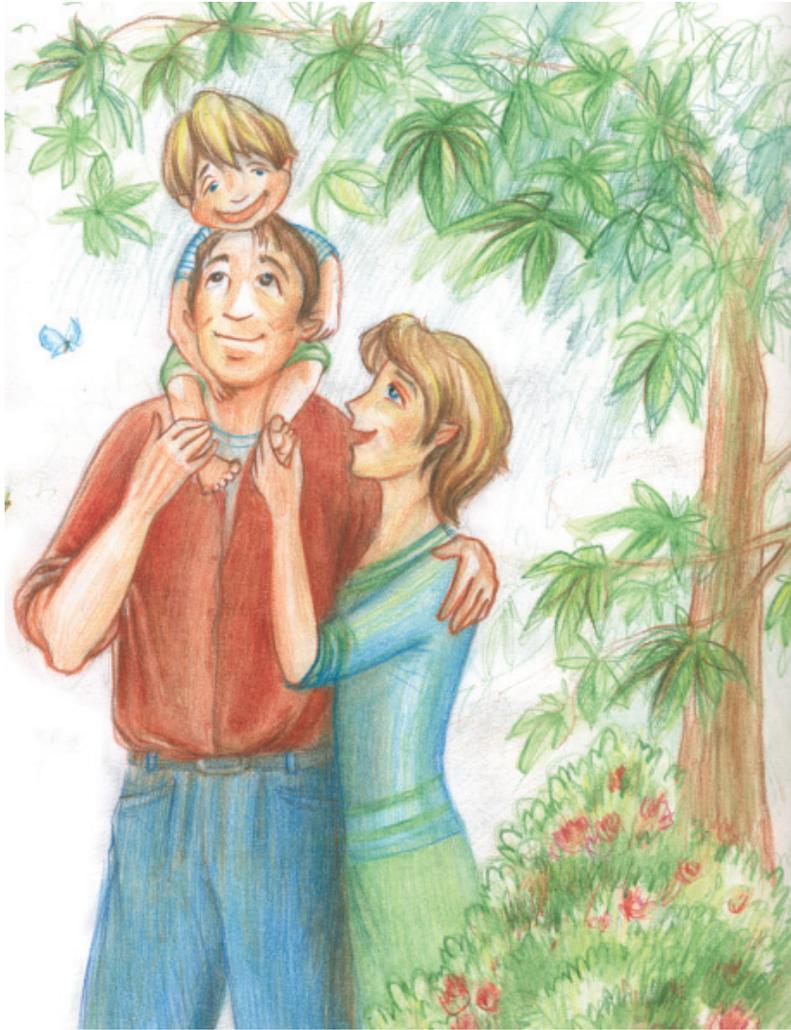
From that day forward, Johnny Walnut was a Goody. Goodies are children who obey their parents the first time they are asked. Baddies only obey when they got a telling off.

Johnny grew and tried to bring joy to his parents. Even if sometimes he was a bit too rough, as boys are, he never forgot to ask Jesus for forgiveness.

On this particular day he tried to obey perfectly because there were trucks with caravans parking nearby. Johnny immediately guessed who had come.

"Off we go to the carnival!" announced Daddy. Johnny leapt for joy and was the first one ready. Into the backpack, in which he always carried his Bible and a flashlight, he also packed some walnuts and a stuffed hedgehog. It was one of the last beautiful summer days and so lots of families had gone for a walk.

Near the carousel were stands selling funnel cakes and popcorn. The smell of hot dogs was in the air. People were pushing and shoving. Johnny noticed that there were toys too, and he immediately became interested in the man who was selling balloons. He was already asking Daddy to buy him one, of course the biggest one. At first, Daddy didn't agree, but when Johnny said please, he finally gave in. The man selling them filled it with helium and handed it to him. Then they struggled through the crowd again. There was a new kind of amusement that hadn't



been in their town before, and all the children wanted to try it. With all the shoving, someone bumped into Johnny and he let go of his balloon.

The wind caught it and Johnny began to chase it. He musn't lose that balloon! He completely forgot about his parents and

gradually drifted away from them. A breeze blew his balloon behind one of the rides; it was very near the ground and it seemed that Johnny would catch it. Then it was as if the wind wanted to play with the balloon and it flew just in front of Johnny's nose. He stopped somewhere beyond the town, out of breath. He felt that he should go back, but he didn't want to loose the balloon! Just then he noticed that the balloon got caught on a nearby tree. The wind grew stronger, waving the branches and whistling as if in a contest.

"Now I've got you!" said Johnny and climbed up the tree like a squirrel. He freed the balloon from the branch and tied it to his hand. Suddenly a huge gust of wind blew, as if wanting to show

that it was the strongest in the world. In a second Johnny was lifted from the ground and to his surprise, he was flying. He became frightened, and cried for help, but no one heard him because of the wind. The balloon carried him over a river. When he reached the distant bank, the wind stopped and Johnny landed on soft grass.



5. The Playful little ant

“Mommy! Daddy!” Johnny Walnut called with all his might as he found himself on the bank. But his voice couldn’t be heard across the river. He wondered how he could get to the other side, but when he looked at the water, the waves crashed and seemed to say:

“It won’t be easy to cross us and get to the other side.”

All at once an ant stood before him. “Is it you who is doing all that shouting? What has happened to you?”

Johnny was frightened, because never in his life had he seen such a big bug. He was almost as tall as his waist. Moreover, he was surprised that the ant was speaking like a person. But there was still one thing that made him happy: he had finally met someone.

“What is your name?” he asked the ant shyly.

“My name is Playful. I am the biggest ant in the world, though I am just in my first form. But because I’m always playing, they call me Playful.

To prove that, he straightened even more and got on his toes so he reached Johnny’s stomach. „And who are you?”

“I’m Johnny Walnut. My balloon carried me here, and I need to get back quickly to the carnival where my Daddy and Mommy are!”

“But there is no carnival on the other side; you are in Storybook Land.”

“That can’t be! I have to get to the other side!”

“I wouldn’t recommend that! Do you have any idea what awaits you there?”

No one can cross the river because there is a big, bad fish swimming in it. His name is Evilfish” he instructed him, and left.

Johnny started to cry. “Oh, why did I chase after that balloon? If only I had held Daddy’s hand! How will I get home now?”

He began crying again, but then he stopped. He remembered Jesus and so he asked Him to forgive him and to help him. Suddenly it seemed that someone else was calling for help. He concentrated and went towards the voice.

To his great surprise, it was Playful.

“Heeeeelp! Heeeeelp!” Johnny followed the voice so he could get closer to the ant. He found him in a hole someone had dug. He leaned closer in order to help, but the ant was deep down in the hole.

“What can we do?” he tried to think of some emergency plan. He recalled how the watering can once fell into the well. His Daddy took a hockey stick, caught the watering can with it, and pulled it out. Only there was no hockey stick here. He began to look around for something.

“Look! Those blades of grass are thicker and stronger than the rest, and are even bent like a hockey stick.”

Johnny picked up one of them, and held it toward the ant. It was very dangerous. Just a bit further and Johnny could have fallen into the hole too. But the love he suddenly felt toward the ant was bigger than his fear.



The ant was happy. He caught the blade of grass and Johnny slowly began to pull him out of the hole. First it went well and Johnny had enough strength, but when the ant was almost out, Johnny was not able to pull anymore. He was weak and thin. He remembered how his Mom pleaded with him not to eat just nuts, but also meat, vegetables and fruit. Too late! The only thing he could do now was to pray.

“Lord Jesus, please help me pull the ant out.”

With that he was filled with new strength and pulled the ant out. Playful was so happy he was leaping for joy. He began to thank Johnny.

“Thank Jesus,” Johnny interrupted him, „It was Him who helped you. I would not be able to pull you out alone. He can be your best friend if you accept Him into your heart. Jesus loves you, you know.”

“I know that He loves everyone, why I go to church on Sunday. My parents take me there, even though I would rather stay home and play instead, if I could. It seems to me that God doesn’t take much delight in me.” the ant replied.

“God doesn’t mind that you want to play. But He wants to play with you,” continued Johnny.

Playful the ant was surprised. He had never heard anything like that. He wanted to repay Johnny’s kindness somehow, and so he promised to help him to build a boat, so that Johnny would get to the other side before dark.

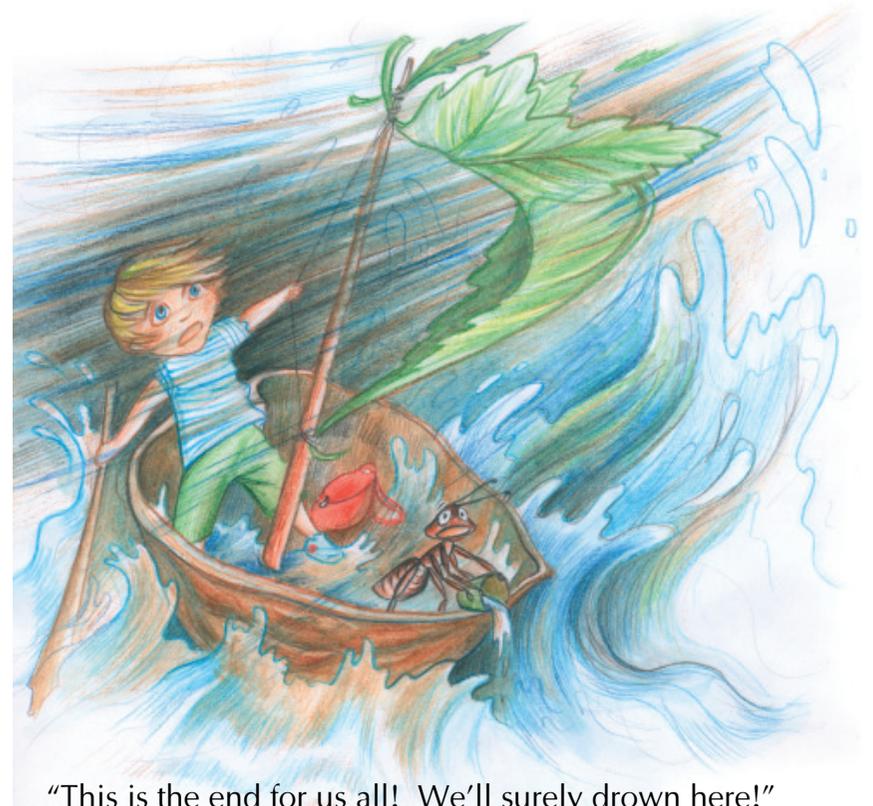
6. Meeting Evilfish

Johnny and Playful thought of a plan to get across the river. The ant had read somewhere how to make a sailboat and so he suggested he'd make a boat from a walnut shell. Johnny found out that he would fit into it. This pleased him. He found himself really starting to believe the ant, that he was in Storybook Land.

Whilst thinking about this, he was interrupted by the ant who had just found a toothpick that someone had dropped on the ground. With it, they made a mast. From a shoelace they made a line from which they hung the sail they had made from a maple leaf. They made oars from bark, pushed off from the bank, and began to float.

The sun peeked shyly through the clouds and it seemed that the wind became wiser too. The waves calmed down and began to gently rock the walnut shell. Johnny recalled how he liked to go on the swings in the playground, but rocking in the boat was even better. The little fish liked the new travelers too. Johnny made little balls of bread and threw them into the water. The little fishes gratefully swallowed the bread and in thanks leapt from the water, as if they wanted to jump all the way to heaven.

After a while, the wind stirred and blew big dark clouds over the river which now hid the sun. Before long the first drops of rain began to fall into the boat. The ant was nervous, and started to be afraid.



“This is the end for us all! We’ll surely drown here!”

Johnny Walnut just comforted and encouraged him.

“Don’t be afraid, just believe!”

The waves began to show their strength and throw them dangerously around the boat. Johnny held onto the boat with one hand, and with the second held onto the rope so that the wind wouldn’t blow their sail off. Meanwhile, the ant dumped buckets of water out of the boat with all his might. The rain became stronger. The thunder and lightning became louder and brighter as if it were showing off. Now even Johnny started to be afraid. He forgot all about the story when Jesus quietened the storm at sea, and how Peter walked on water. At that

moment his faith was smaller than a nutshell. The more frightened he was, the more his strength was failing. He didn't know how to swim and the water was already up to his knees.

"I'll probably never see my Mommy again," he thought to himself.

Suddenly a large wave grabbed them and threw them into the water.

"I should have listened more carefully when Daddy was teaching me how to swim. I only wanted to play with the tube, and now I can't swim!" It came to his mind in a moment.

Then all he could see were bubbles that floated in front of him. He couldn't breathe anymore. Suddenly Evilfish appeared before him. It opened its great mouth and swallowed him. The stream of water brought Johnny through the whole fish and he landed in its belly. There was no water in there, but it was very dark. He turned on his flashlight and saw Playful the ant. How happy he was! At least he was not alone there. But the ant had tears in his eyes as he blamed him,

"Now we're in trouble! Oh why did I ever go with you? How will we get out now?"

"Stop! Don't cry!" said Johnny. He remembered how he liked to play with a stop sign at home. When he would cry, Daddy would show him the sign and it meant that he should stop crying. Johnny stood up, took Playful by the hand and assured him: „Don't be afraid, we will find the way out.“

In the fish there were crossroads after every step. Johnny and the ant wandered along the long and crooked passages. Playful complained all the time, and almost got lost in the fish. But they quickly found each other again. When they had been

jogging in there for quite a while, their teeth were chattering from the cold, but Johnny still believed that they would get out somehow. In Evilfish, Johnny remembered the story from Scripture about Jonah who was in the belly of a whale.



"That way will get us straight into the tail or somewhere," Playful shook his head in doubt.

"You are like that disciple Thomas who always doubted," Johnny told him.

"Accchhooooo!" sneezed Playful.

It seemed really funny to Johnny.

"Don't laugh at me," said the ant, insulted.

"Wait, I've just had an idea. Do you know how we'll get out of here? We have to find Evilfish's nose and tickle it so he'll sneeze."

“That’s a great idea! We’ll fly out and will be in the fresh air!” cried the ant with joy.

“Seek and ye shall find!” they said at once and began to search. After a long exploration, they started to think they had found the right place. They tried to tickle the fish - and it worked! He opened his big mouth, sneezed, and Johnny and the ant flew out crying. Fortunately they landed right on the shore. Evilfish just showed his teeth to them, but he couldn’t hurt them anymore. They leapt with happiness and both began to sing in thanks:

“Who is King of the jungle? Who is Lord of the sea, who is Lord of universe, jungles and water, I’ll tell you: J-E-S-U-S...”



The longer the ant sang, the more he realized that he also needed to invite the Lord Jesus into his heart. He asked Johnny how to do it, and they prayed together. The ant immediately felt as if something heavy fell from his heart. It seemed to him that he was lighter than a feather. Totally beside himself, he sang.

7. About the fox and the bear

Johnny looked around. He knew he was in a kind of strange country, yet he still searched for his little town on the horizon. But it was in vain. Far and wide there was nothing to show them that they were near. He realized, that while they were wandering through the belly of Evilfish, the water could have taken them far down the river.

The sun wanted to guide them for as long as possible, but finally it had to go towardsthe horizon to sleep. Once more the sun gathered all its strength, smiled one last time, then dropped behind the hills. They were both so tired that they slept like logs.

Only in the morning as Johnny awoke, he found out that he wasn’t at home, snuggled and warm in his bed. The sun tickled his face and invited him to begin his morning prayers.

Playful the ant was not angry with him anymore. After all, what they had gone through together was better than sitting at home in front of the television. He became interested in other adventures. Other than that, they got along very well. Johnny was truly a better friend than the others in the woods. They sometimes said mean things to him, but not Johnny, he was an example for him. Because of that, he decided to stay with Johnny for a while, to accompany him on the way to his Mommy, and after that he would return home. Johnny was glad to be with the ant too. He recalled that Jesus’ disciples also traveled the world in pairs.

Eventually they got into the woods. The road was overgrown and dark. They walked around a big, old oak tree which looked very sad. Its branches were hanging down as if upset by something. Even the little mushrooms hid themselves from them. It seemed that they were afraid of them. Just then a fox ran by them as quick as a motorcycle and behind her ran a bear. This was no game, and Johnny immediately knew that the bear wanted to hurt the fox. When the bear tackled her, Johnny summoned all his courage and cried out:

“Let her go right now!”

He surprised even himself that he had such bravery hidden in him. The bear slowly turned his huge head. For a minute he tried to find from where the voice had come. He stood up on his big back legs.

“Who is calling that?” he yelled.

“Me, Johnny Walnut. I want to tell you that such a strong animal as yourself, should not hurt a weaker one. In case you haven’t heard, Jesus is the strongest of all, but he never harmed anyone.”

“But you don’t know what the fox did to me! She lied and told me that there were blueberries at the top of the hill. When I climbed up there I found nothing but daisies. From a distance, she sneered and laughed at me,” the bear defended himself.

“You should have picked some of the flowers and brought her a bouquet. You know, Lord Jesus himself said that we should even love our enemies,” Johnny answered merrily.

Then he turned to the fox and told her strictly, “And you, naughty fox, you should say sorry to him immediately.”

The fox hung her head and frowned. “Okay, I’m sorry. I won’t do it anymore.”



But that still didn’t seem to be enough for the bear. “Who is this Lord Jesus? I, the bear named Wrath, am the Master of the Enchanted Forest,.”

“This is the Enchanted Forest?” Johnny wondered but continued, “But then where is my town, and where are the amusements?”

But neither the fox nor the bear had heard about the town,

or the carnival. So Johnny told himself that whilst he searched for the way home, he would tell them something about Jesus.

All of it was new to the animals. Sometimes Playful added something too, because he wanted to show off what he already knew about Jesus. They all really liked the stories from God's Word, and willingly listened to them. Wrathful began to change. He stopped getting so angry, just a little when flies and mosquitoes annoyed and bit him.

The fox changed a lot too. She stopped making fun of the others and didn't even tell tales because the little ant told her she shouldn't lie. Since the fox was very clever, she happily learned all the verses in the Children's Bible by heart. And she spoke to everyone about it. In a little while the other animals in the Enchanted Forest also learnt the news.



8. The church service in the woods

The animals loved Johnny very much. They liked to listen to him, and didn't want to let him leave them. So many of them assembled, that the mushrooms offered to act as chairs. The old stump was pleased that Johnny could use him as a pulpit.

It wasn't long before all the mushrooms were occupied. Johnny leaned a bit on his knees, as he realized that all eyes were on him. The owl quietly assessed him, the cricket chirped softly. Only the hippopotamus frowned at him and kept yawning. But the ant, the fox, the bear, and some other friends nodded encouragingly.

Johnny opened his Children's Bible and began to preach. Sometimes he stopped for a moment and even stuttered a bit, but the animals didn't mind. Only the hippopotamus kept muttering and finally left. Johnny was sorry about that, but he recalled how the Pharisees didn't listen to Jesus. They were people who, while looking nice on the outside, did not want to change inside.

When Johnny told the animals stories, it seemed to them as if he drew a picture before their eyes. When he finished, all the animals longed to have their hearts cleansed too. Of course, some of them didn't understand everything, so Johnny told himself that he must explain it to them.

“Imagine that you drop something into a deep river. Can you pull it out?”

The fox immediately recalled how the wind once blew a little flower from her hands, into the water and she never saw it again.

“That is how it is with your sins,” Johnny continued. „When you admit them, God throws them into such a deep river that no one can pull them out of it.” All the animals nodded.



The owl really liked the story of Anna, who prayed very often and then was one of the first to see Jesus after his birth. The owl never wanted to go to sleep even though her Mommy told her over and over again. Now she decided that she would pray every night. And she did. She always prayed the Lord’s Prayer, and then continued praying to God for all the other animals. How well she slept then!

The crickets favourite part of the Bible was when Paul and Silas sang songs to God in the night. Often he felt alone at night and he didn’t feel like singing his poor little song over again. From now on, every evening he was filled with happiness and when he played praises to God, his violin played as if it were born again. So much so, that the other crickets wondered where he learnt it.

Even though the bear could not sing well, he tried to join the merry choir.

Johnny encouraged him: “When your song gets to Heaven, the Heavenly bees will carry it to God’s ears. While they fly, they will fix all the bad notes, and when Jesus hears it, it will be as sweet as honey.”

So the bear wasn’t ashamed of his singing anymore. Only the owl noticed that he sang off key and because of that he didn’t want to sit near him. But the bear refused to be discouraged, and continued to sing from his whole heart. He didn’t bother what the owl thought, after all, he was not singing to her, but to God.

The leaves had already fallen from the trees and it reminded everyone that they had to get ready for winter. The bear who had alot of strength, and lately even alot of willingness, decided that he and the other animals would build a lovely church in the woods. He brought all the fallen trees in the wood. He made a roof of pine boughs that the beavers had brought.

The fox, with the help of the squirrel, swept and cleaned it beautifully. The mushrooms put on their new hats and competed among themselves to offer seats to the new visitors to this Forest Temple.

9. The train to the Promised Land

The animals happily met for worship services. Since the fox had stopped telling lies she was appropriately called Wise, because she was smart and learned much from God's word. Even the bear was no longer called Wrathful for he wasn't angry and bad tempered anymore. Indeed, the Word of God spread throughout the untouched scrubs, largest hillsides and deepest valleys even to the ends of this strange country.

One day, unexpectedly, bad news came to the Enchanted Forest. It was rumoured that a four headed, fire breathing dragon was coming. All the animals began to feel afraid. The more they talked about the dragon, the worse it seemed. They didn't even feel like meeting together anymore. The cricket only played music once in a while, and even then it was halfheartedly. The fox was always angry about something.

Johnny was very sad about it. Moreover, he was troubled that even the bear had said it was awful because the dragon would conquer them. When Playful the ant started to show his sadness and talk a lot about the monkey bars that he had made at home from a blade of grass, little Johnny fell on his knees and poured out his heart in prayer. He didn't understand what was going on so he asked Jesus what he should do.

Finally he fell asleep, worn out and tired. He dreamt that he was waiting at the station and a train stopped in front of him. The

locomotive was all red like a ripe strawberry, and important looking. A special device caught Johnny's attention. It was a motor, but Johnny was interested in it. He went closer to get a better look. With surprise, he realized that it didn't run on any gas or fuel. But the prayers and praise songs of the passengers were like steam, rising up to the ceiling where it flowed into pipes. So the prayer steam powered the locomotive.



It seemed to Johnny that the brakes were somewhat strange too. He noticed that when someone on the train used the Lord's name badly or spoke nonsense, that the words fell through the floor of the train, turned into sand and slowed the wheels with friction. Of course, there weren't many bad words used and the wheels were shining with the Heavenly grease that had been rubbed on them. Everything about the train attracted him, so he ran to the ticket window so he could quickly buy a ticket.

He had seen the person in the ticket window somewhere before. The mysterious man instructed him that he couldn't buy a ticket with money, he just had to say his name.

"My name is Johnny Walnut."

While the man searched for something in a big book, Johnny wondered where he had seen the book before. He remembered just as soon as the angel found his name.

"Hey, that's the Book of Life that I saw in front of the Gates of Heaven." With that, he recognized the angel. The angel smiled at him and gave him a ticket. Johnny still had time to ask him where the train was going.

"To the Promised Land!" the angel exclaimed.

Johnny was happy since he had heard so much about that land. He had always imagined how the brooks flowed with milk, and the holes in the trees were full of honey. When he had talked about it one Sunday in their church in the woods, the bear started to lick his lips, and ran home to eat some sweet honey immediately after the service.

Johnny boarded the train. He noticed how well the train cars were connected, almost as if they were holding hands. The happier the passenger children were, the closer the train seemed to hold together. But when they quarreled and misbehaved, the wagons barely held together. Some of them had accordion like constructions in the middle. When they turned corners they played beautiful, holy music rather than squealing. The wagons were full of children Johnny didn't know, but he found some old friends amongst them too.

When they had passed several stations, Johnny began to notice some things that he didn't like at all. Some passengers were play-



ing with nasty toys, or frightening video games, and others were pretending to shoot one another with toy guns. Some girls held mirrors in front of themselves and were putting on so much makeup that it wasn't at all pretty. Others painted their nails and dyed their hair. He was surprised how many children didn't pray or sing before eating.

"Surely no one has taught them any better," Johnny thought to himself.

Some didn't even say hello to him, they only kicked one another underneath the tables and said all sorts of bad things. Only a few children read their Children's Bible, but even they became more distracted by the nasty toys. It was then that Johnny noticed how the dust slowed down the wheels, which now squealed horribly. But there was so much noise inside that the children didn't even hear it.

Johnny walked through the other wagons and it was the same everywhere. He found himself almost at the locomotive, and there was the prayer engine before him. It was running out of fuel and begging for some prayers. Johnny knelt down and began praying. After awhile, his gaze fell on the door to the locomotive, and Johnny felt an irresistible desire to open it. He did, and a light shone on him. He couldn't stand it anymore, and fell gently to the floor. The One who stood there looked like an angel, but he was much more majestic than the one who gave him his ticket. He wore a long white gown, which fell all the way to His feet, and His eyes reminded him of flames. His feet shone, and His voice was like the sound of a waterfall.

"I know what bothers you. It makes me very sad too. At some stations boys and girls without tickets entered the train. They brought some nasty toys onto the train. Those whose hearts had been cleansed didn't tell them about the Lord Jesus, and what's worse, some of them started to behave the same way."

"What will happen now?" asked Johnny fearfully.

"In a little while, that train will come to the final station, and it will seem to be in a desert."

"A desert?" Johnny shook his head in doubt. "This train is supposed to go to the station in the Promised Land."

"It will happen like this, so that the hearts of the passengers will be revealed. Everyone will get off but only those whose hearts have been cleansed will see the Promised Land. They will join hands and together with Me, they will enter the land which is flowing with milk and honey. Those who have unclean hearts will begin to grumble and won't believe that behind the desert could be the Promised Land. So some of them will board the

train and tell the others who will hesitate, that they should just return.

How Johnny wished that all the children had tickets! Otherwise, they wouldn't recognize the Promised Land. As he considered this, the Man looked straight into his eyes.

"Now I am sending you to a huge dragon which has four heads," he told him in a firm voice. "He breathes fire, does great damage, and lies to people. You are the one who can strike him."

"Why does it have to be me? I'm just little Johnny Walnut, you know. How can I conquer a huge dragon?"

"Do not be afraid," the Extraordinary Man encouraged him.

Johnny noticed his eyes again and had to admit that even his pretty Mom didn't have such beautiful eyes. Johnny heard urgency in His voice but also love and assurance, so that all his fear left him.

"You are not going alone. I will help you. I will always be with you. If you rely on me, and on what I did on the cross, you will achieve it! And when you have slain the dragon, you will find the way home to your Mom and Dad.

Then Johnny recognized him. It was the Lord Jesus! He fell on his knees before him and tears welled up in his eyes. He started to sing to him. "Jesus, I love you, Jesus I love you, Jesus, I love you, Jesus...."



10. Saying Goodbye to Friends

Johnny was still dreaming and quietly singing praises to Jesus Christ's glory, although Jesus was slowly disappearing before his eyes. Suddenly someone was pulling on his leg. "Get up, our meeting starts in just a minute!"

Johnny opened his eyes. Around him stood his closest friends: the ant, the bear, the fox, the owl and the cricket. They looked sad, but they still came for the Sunday worship service. Johnny hugged them all so tightly that they were very surprised. Then he told them about his dream. There are dreams which are best forgotten, and which don't mean anything. Yet this dream was very different. When he spoke of the train, the animals listened breathlessly. But what surprised them most was when he told them that Jesus had sent him after the dragon. Of course, none of them had considered that Little Johnny could slay a dragon. They were even a bit afraid for Johnny. They loved him a lot, and didn't want to lose him. Ever since the talk had started about the dragon in the Enchanted Forest, all the animals had been afraid. Now a new hope could be seen in their eyes. Johnny shone like the sun, and it was clear that he had decided to face the dragon.

The news of the adventurous expedition quickly spread through the whole forest. And soon the time came for Johnny to say good bye. The ant called Playful cried the most.



„Don't be afraid, I will come back soon,“ Johnny cheered him up. „You, with the other animals, better pray for me every day, for I am facing a difficult task.“

Even the bear who was not used to expressing his emotions, had to wipe tears from his eyes. Johnny asked him before all the other animals to encourage their friends in hard times. And the bear gave his solemn vow.

The animals threw a farewell party for him. It was not sad at all, indeed they had made such a party, that they recalled it over and over, and even today, they tell it as a bedtime story to the young animals.

As they walked him out of the forest, the old oak waved goodbye with her big branches. She was not as sad as she had been when Johnny first arrived. She now had hope too. And the little mushrooms? They competed amongst themselves to give him the most beautiful smile. They were thankful that they had found someone who was not afraid of the Awful Dragon.



11. The mysterious dove

Johnny started the journey with determination. Even though he was looking forward to going home, he knew that he must first conquer the dragon. Since the Lord Jesus himself had sent him, and all the animals were depending on him, he couldn't disappoint them.

The journey seemed to be going quite quickly until he reached a river. It wasn't as rough as the one where Evilfish swam, but it was so wide that Johnny couldn't even see to the bank on the other side. While he was wondering how he could get to the other side, he noticed that a dove was standing on the bank. What a nice dove she was! But she was at least twice as big as doves used to be in our world. She was old in years, and greeted him in just a whisper. Walnut realized that she had a sore throat and this made him very sad.

"Do you want the Lord Jesus to heal you?"

"I do. But I have no one who would pray for me."

"I would be happy to pray for you!" Johnny was rejoicing, and already placing his little hands on the dove's neck. And a wonder happened there and then - Jesus performed a miracle. Right then the dove began to coo praises to the Lord.

As they rejoiced together, a ferry approached the river bank. On the boat was a ferry man. He told them that he could take only one of them to the other side. Although the dove had been healed, she



was nonetheless very old, and it would be very risky for her to fly to the other side.

“When will you come again?” asked Johnny.

“Not until the spring. Fall is coming to an end, and a difficult winter is on the way during which I cannot transport anyone”

Johnny thought for a while. It was true that the dove had been on the bank first, but he was on a very important mission. He simply couldn't wait until the spring. He wanted to ask the dove if she wouldn't mind waiting, but in that moment he heard a quiet voice in his heart. “Let the dove go on the boat!”

Johnny immediately remembered how once he had given up his seat on the bus to an old woman. How good he felt afterwards. So he firmly decided to let the dove go, and to put the rest in God's hands.

“My dear dove, get on quickly, because a cold wind is beginning to blow.”

“But how will you get to the other side?” she worried.

“Don't worry about me. The Lord Jesus promised me that he would always be with me. He will surely take care of me.”

The dove thanked him. As she was waving goodbye she suddenly said:

“Up there, above the bank of the river, is a cave. You will find three treasures there. Through these you will know how to find the dragon.”

Johnny was amazed, because he had not told the dove anything about the dragon.

“The Holy Spirit must have told her about it, otherwise, how would she know,” he thought to himself. How great it was that he had let the dove take the ferry. If he had decided to go instead, he would never have received this important message, and he wouldn't have found the dragon on the other shore.



12. The Three Treasures

Johnny slowly climbed the hill toward the cave. All at once he heard a rustling sound behind him. He turned quickly and almost couldn't believe his eyes.

"Playful, what are you doing here?"

"I have to help you kill the dragon!" said the ant seriously and he tried to make himself look fearless.

But the truth was that he had come because he really missed Johnny. Playful boasted that he had studied combat skills and tried to show off his knowledge. Johnny had to hold him back, since they wouldn't be able to fight the dragon with their own strength, and any kind of military training would just be a burden.

The entrance to the cave was like a tunnel. Johnny really liked tunnels, as long as there was light. A flashlight! That would be helpful now, but Johnny had lost his in the belly of Evilfish. What would light their way?

They carefully entered the cave. The darkness was thick enough to cut. The ant clung to Johnny like a tick, and kept asking him if he was sure he had really understood the dove. But Johnny was so certain, he was able to calm him down. He remembered when the electricity had gone out once while he and Dad were going to visit the neighbours on the tenth floor of their apartment building. His Dad held his hand tightly in the darkness and sang a song which he suddenly recalled.

"A fire lit in me, it burns within my heart, it guards me from sin and my soul lives..."

It was strange that as long as Johnny sang, he wasn't afraid at all even though he couldn't see a step ahead of him. As he continued singing, he saw his own cleansed heart. He had believed that it was clean, but he had never seen it. It was as clean as a crystal clear stream. It shone as if it had a light inside it, bright enough to light the whole cave. It was a gorgeous cave! Johnny had never seen one so beautiful. From above hung golden icicles and the path beneath their feet was made from lovely sparkling diamonds.

Johnny thought to himself: "I surely must have found the treasure! But which diamonds should I take? They all seem to be smiling at me strangely."

The ant was wild with excitement and happiness, and picked up such a big pile of precious stones that it was almost impossible to see him behind it. Johnny also wanted to put the biggest and most sparkling stones into his pockets, when he suddenly tripped over something else. He stood up and looked curiously at three



gray stones.

“What are those ordinary stones doing amongst so many beautiful diamonds?”

Then it came to his mind that Jesus had left his glory and beauty in Heaven so that he could become an ordinary man. And when he hung on the cross, he didn't seem at all like a rare gem. The longer Johnny stared at those rocks, the more he wanted to pick them up.

“Don't even think of picking those up!” Playful seemed to read his mind. “Don't be silly. Take this big jewel. Later you can sell it and you will be able to buy all the toys in the world!” the ant continued to daydream.

Johnny considered it for a while too. Lately all he had to play with was his stuffed hedgehog. It always seemed to him that his friends had better toys than he had. Once, while in the store with his Mom he saw many toys, and he wanted to get one of each. Now he could choose the diamonds, with which he would be able to buy the whole toy store. He was already imagining that he had the most toys of all.

Suddenly Johnny recalled how the devil tempted Jesus with all the wealth in the world. He pulled himself together at once. He felt that this was a similar test. Once more he gazed appreciatively over the diamonds but finally his eyes fell again on those three gray stones. Then it all became clear.

Surely those are the three treasures that the dove meant! Johnny took confidence, placed them in his backpack and continued on the path.

Finally he convinced the ant to put the diamonds down. When he did, the first rays of sunlight shone into the cave and the ant

cheered up. As they left the cave, the sun's lovely, warm rays wrapped around them as if wanting to hug them for making the right choice.

Johnny and the ant had come a long way, and were getting hungry, so they took some nuts from the backpack. As they were taking them, Playful noticed the stones had cracked.

“I shouldn't have let you talk me into it. I could have been rich! From all those beautiful stones we chose gray rocks and now they have even burst!” cried the ant who still didn't understand that the most rare and valuable things were often simply clothed. Even Jesus was born in a stable and laid in a manger among the cows and sheep rather than in a palace. And He was the King of Kings! He was the most valuable jewel, and so many didn't even notice him...

When Johnny studied the cracks in the rocks, he found out that those rocks could be opened like some kind of box. He held his breath as he opened the first of the rocks. There was a message, which read:

“Whoever wants to conquer the dragon must pass through the Land of Chocolate without touching anything.”

He opened the second, and the message read:

“Whoever wants to conquer the dragon must pass through Whingeland without complaining.”

He opened the third.

“Whoever wants to conquer the dragon must pass through the Land of Forbidden Toys and be courageous.”

When Johnny had read the hidden messages in the stones, he understood what great worth those ordinary gray stones had. What fantastic wisdom was hidden in them, and how good God was to reveal His secrets to him!

13. The Land of Chocolate

Johnny and Playful skipped along happily, whistling familiar songs. Meanwhile the ant was constantly trying to persuade Johnny that it was his idea to pick up the gray stones. He claimed that he sensed something special about them from the beginning. Johnny found this somewhat funny, but he didn't want to spoil the ant's mood once he had finally cheered up. Suddenly they smelled a very familiar smell.

"They must be making chocolate here!" Johnny called out.

Though they didn't see any factory anywhere, the smell was getting stronger, and both of them were licking their lips. It had been such a long time since they had eaten any chocolate! Playful was so curious that he ran ahead of Johnny. Suddenly he saw a large, brown stone. He climbed onto it, but it was so soft, that he sunk into it all the way up to his knees. He began to cheer up because he found out that the rock was real chocolate.

After a second he found more rocks like that, and the little brook ran with chocolate sauce. No doubt at all, it really was Chocolate Land. Instead of flowers, candy grew among the grass. There were trees stranger than any Johnny had ever dreamt of. For one thing, instead of apples on the tree, cookies grew, and some bushes had chewing gum instead of leaves.

At first Johnny like this place, but then he realized that there was something weird about it. The animals were all stiff in

chocolate and couldn't even move. The gingerbread birds couldn't even chirp God's praises, and only stared silently. Everything there seemed dead.

In the distance, Johnny saw a big nut tree and was speechless with surprise when he came close to it. The whole tree was made from hazelnut chocolate which he loved. The tree had many leaves and branches which grew out in all directions. The longer he stared at the tree the more beautiful it seemed and the more it attracted him. From one of the branches hung a kind of nut that Johnny had never seen before in his life. It was as big as a melon and clear writing towered upon it:

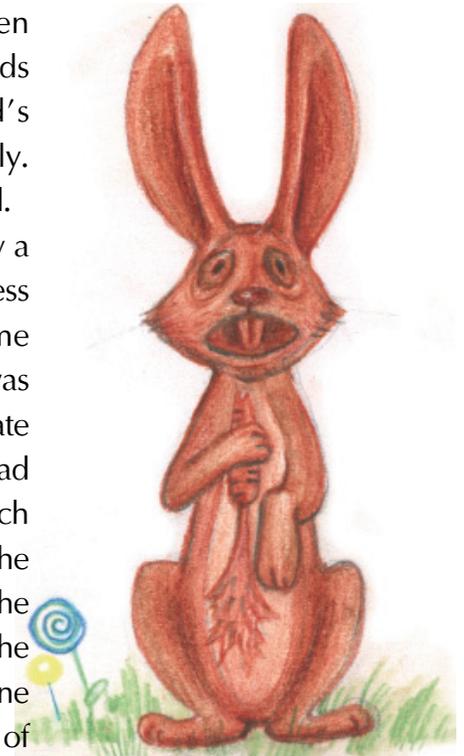
"Whoever eats me will become the biggest of all."

The nut stared back at him, and seemed to say, "Come on, eat me!"

"Climb up and get it!" yelled Playful, and both of them were already reaching their hands out toward the big nut.

"Wait!" Johnny stopped. In a wink of the eye, he remembered the secret message which had been hidden in the grey stone.

"Whoever wants to conquer the dragon must pass through the Land of Chocolate without touching anything."



Johnny immediately pulled his hand away, and in his mind he imagined his sister Suzy's birthday. Then, he hadn't been able to control himself and so he had gradually eaten all the chocolate. He also recalled the telling off he got, and the promise he made that he would not do that again. Now the same thing was attracting him. What was he to do? The nut was looking at him so sweetly! The temptation seemed impossible to resist at first. It pulled him like a powerful magnet. What did the nut promise? The he would be the biggest of all?

"I've got it!" the ant's voice interrupted his thoughts. "Now I know how we will conquer the dragon. Look, compared to the dragon, we are like locusts. When we find him, he probably won't even notice us coming. But if we eat that chocolate nut, we'll be like giants and that means we'll grow bigger than him even. We'll crush him in our hands as if he were a cherry. We'll show him who is the Lord!" the ant threatened.

Johnny didn't really like this idea, though it seemed to make sense. Otherwise, how would they slay the dragon? Many thoughts were swirling through his mind. When the kids at school laughed at him for being the smallest, Jesus always comforted him, and he calmed down, yet he still wished he were bigger. But why should he believe in a nut? Only fools believe everything! He recalled his Mom telling him that even



though he was small in size, God surely loved him and had a big plan for him.

At once Johnny got it. He was on that journey to kill the dragon, and not to stay in the Land of Chocolate! He had told so many others the gospel, he could not stop now. What would the bear say

when he found out that instead of the mean dragon he had devoted himself to sweet chocolates!

Johnny was still fighting on the inside. One minute he was tempted to taste just a little bit of the chocolate, and the next his thoughts told him that he must not. He knew that Eve, the first woman struggled with a similar temptation when the bad snake was misleading her. She did not overcome it, and then she had to leave the beautiful garden called Eden. But what could he do right now? It occurred to him that Jesus commanded the storm, and other times even cast out evil spirits.

Johnny got it. "The same Lord Jesus is now in me!"

He grabbed Playful and ran quickly away from the nut. It is better to flee from temptation, than to let it overcome you. Without looking back, he then cried with all his might: "Temptation, get away from me!"

Suddenly a storm broke and from the clouds big raindrops were already falling. It was strange. Raining cats and dogs, really thick, but so gently at the same time, that it felt pleasant. It wasn't long, before the grass was green again, and the chocolate had all run out of the bushes. The brook made cheerful noises and the water was as clear as glass. Johnny was happiest when the chocolate also fell off the animals. They were leaping with joy and praising God for freeing them from their horrible prison. All at once the whole land changed and the birds sang many songs.

Only the nut didn't turn green, instead the chocolate turned into stone, and it remains there until this day. This is so that all who pass by would know that they should avoid and fight temptation.

14. Whingeland

Johnny was very happy that he had successfully passed through the Land of Chocolate. He learned there how to control his desires, and so he became stronger. Playful the ant was pleased too, but as he did at the cave of treasures, he again started to make up stories.

"You probably won't believe it, but I really guessed that there was something wrong with that tree. That nut was too big, and from the beginning the tree reminded me of a snake."

This time Johnny didn't let it go, and tried to show the ant that he was just making things up.

"If you don't stop telling those lies, you won't get very far!"

But the ant kept blabbing on about how no one understood him.

They got out of the forest and saw big mountains before them. They assumed that the peaks stayed covered with snow all year long. They towered high and were covered in mist. The ant was just hoping their journey would not take them there. At the beginning, the road became steeper very gradually, so it wasn't any problem for them, after all both of them were quite athletic. Back at home Johnny used to run about with his friends in the playground almost every day. In winter he played hockey, in the summer he played football, and he rode his bike, and would have loved most of all to go to the supermarket with rollerblades. He wasn't one of those kids who were often bored, or who only sat in front of the computer. The ant used to be the same way.

The massive mountains still rose higher before them and now they were sure they would not pass them by. Though now, Johnny was starting to feel tired. The ant was already lagging behind. Giant rocks around them boasted proudly, as if they were trying to scare them into just turning back.

Step by step Johnny felt that his feet obeyed him less and less. He remembered when he had gone hiking with his Dad, when he was very tired, his Daddy had let him ride on his shoulders. It was great up there! From there he could see even more than Daddy could. He became weaker. He would really have liked to ride on someone's shoulders now, but there was no one to offer it.

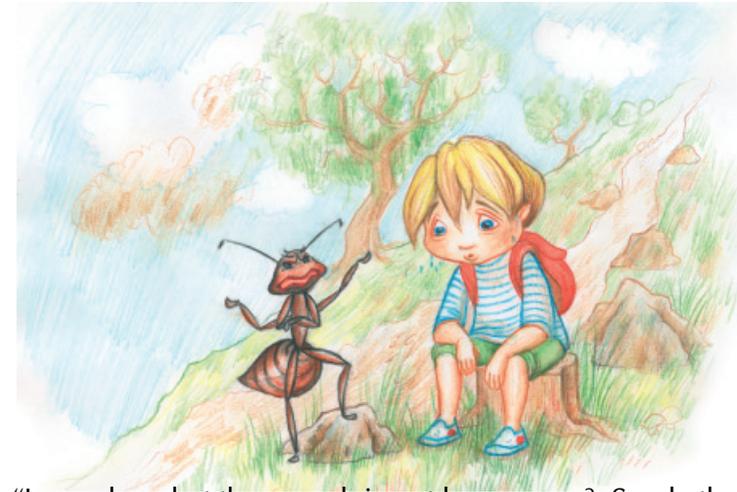
On the way up, sometimes someone would pass Johnny, but no one wanted to talk to him; they all just moaned. One complained about the cold, another's feet hurt, others were thirsty and only cried and whinged. The worst of all was that Playful seemed to get along quite well with them, and it seemed that they took from him what little strength he had left.

"Be careful of your tongue! Even though it is small, a tiny spark can start a big fire," Johnny tried to warn the ant. „Do you know, that a small rudder can steer a great ship?"

Johnny resisted whining and complaining, but the higher he climbed, the more he wanted to complain too. Right when he was thinking about how difficult it all was, the secret in the second gray stone came to his mind:

"Whoever wants to conquer the dragon must pass through Whingeland without complaining.

After a moment he arrived at a clearing and sat down so that he could rest a bit and wait for Playful. Again his thoughts turned to his parents.



"I wonder what they are doing at home now? Surely they must be very worried, and they would be happy if I came home now."

He stopped. He realized that he must first slay the bad dragon. But why did it have to take so long? He had thought that he would fight him just like that, but since he had begun, a long time had passed and he had only suffered and struggled with temptations. His supply of nuts was running out and his feet were hurting .

He thought to himself,

"I wish I could be at home, getting a bath right away, and going to sleep in my own bed."

Finally Playful caught up to him. Completely out of strength, he was constantly moaning that if they didn't reach the peak in a second, he would surely turn back. He didn't want to freeze to death there. When Johnny saw the pitiful state he was in, he agreed that they could rest for awhile.

As they were resting, some animals passed them. It seemed strange to Johnny that after a moment, they could no longer be seen ahead of them. Playful and Johnny set off again, but just ahead of them the road suddenly divided in two.

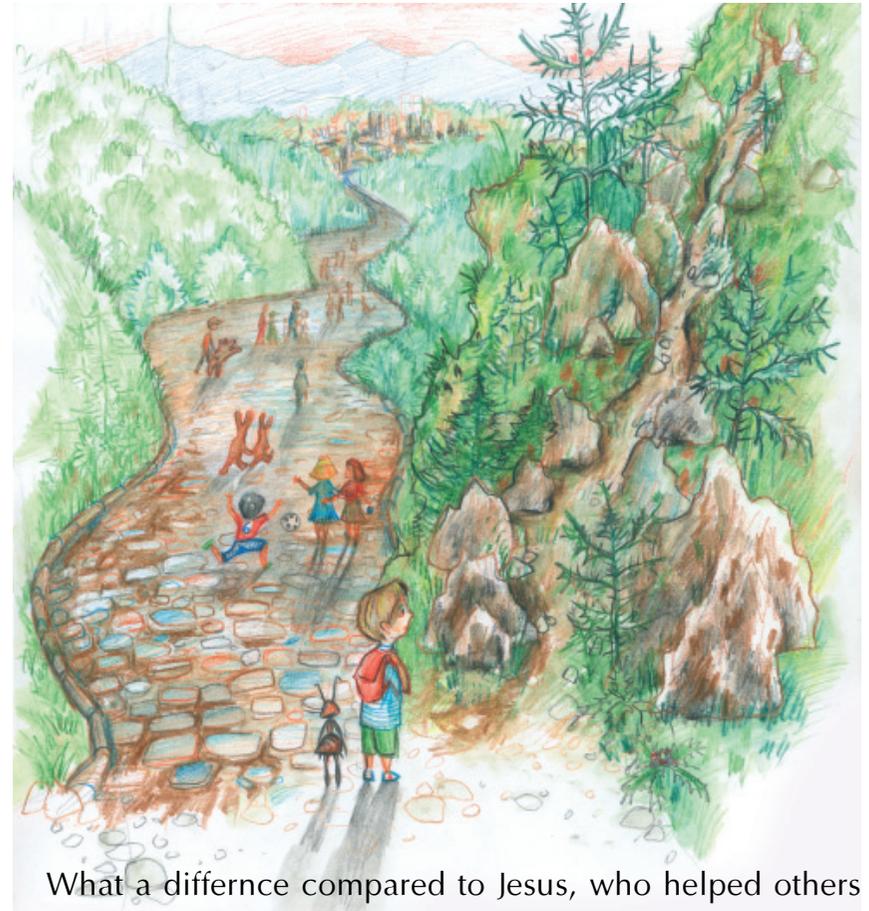
15. The narrow road and the wide road

One road was wide, it was covered with pretty stones, and went down into the valley. Everyone around was attracted to it. Although Johnny couldn't see the end of the road, it seemed to him that there was a little town in the distance. He looked in that direction, and saw that a lot of the animals who had been complaining and crying were on that road. Then he understood why they were out of sight. They had chosen the easier road and maybe even believed that it was a shortcut. In the distance, he also recognized one spoiled boy who was constantly trying to get his own way by winging to his parents.

"Oh, that is really bad behaviour, surely Jesus doesn't like it," thought Johnny.

Then he looked at the second path. It seemed just to be for heroes; it was narrow, curvy, and overgrown with weeds. Probably no one had walked on it for a long time. It went sharply uphill, as if to the highest heavens and looked quite dangerous.

Johnny hesitated. He couldn't decide. He began to remember how once a boy was saying nasty things, and all the other children copied him and said it too. They didn't even know why, they just repeated him like parrots. Then the teacher scolded them. Even now it was similar; it seemed like none of them had a mind of their own, and were obsessed with the wide road; aimed at their own comfort, their toys, their sweets, their own interests and fun.



What a difference compared to Jesus, who helped others and didn't tend to his own comfort. He healed those who were sick, He divided the bread between those who were hungry. And He himself spoke about the wide and narrow roads. And what about the animals? Johnny remembered very well how frightened they were when they had heard of the dragon. They were expecting him to help them.

He hesitated because it occurred to him that the little town down at the end of the wide road might be the one where he had lived with Mommy and Daddy. He wanted,

just then, to snuggle with Mommy and to fling himself into Daddy's arms. But Jesus had said in the dream that he must first kill the dragon and then he would find the road home. If he gave up now, the fox might start making up lies again, and he would surely disappoint the owl who had begun to pray regularly.

His feet wanted to step onto the wide road, but his heart commanded him to choose the narrow one. Finally he listened to the voice in his heart. With his remaining strength, he put himself on the narrow road and climbed the steep hill. A nice surprise was waiting for him there. A crystal clear lake spread in front of him. On the shore stood an angel. It was the same one he saw in his dream, and who later appeared at the station and had given him his ticket for the train to the Promised Land.

The angel picked Johnny up, stroked him gently, rocked him and when he touched Johnny's tired and hurting feet, they were suddenly healed. This time the angel wasn't angry at all, he just smiled at him.

"You have done excellently so far," he encouraged him. „Only one more task awaits you. Then you will face the dragon."

"Tell me, what is your name?" Johnny asked quickly before the angel disappeared again.

"I am the angel Gabriel, and the Lord Jesus sends me to those who have clean hearts. I help them and my greatest joy is when I see that they remain faithful to God."

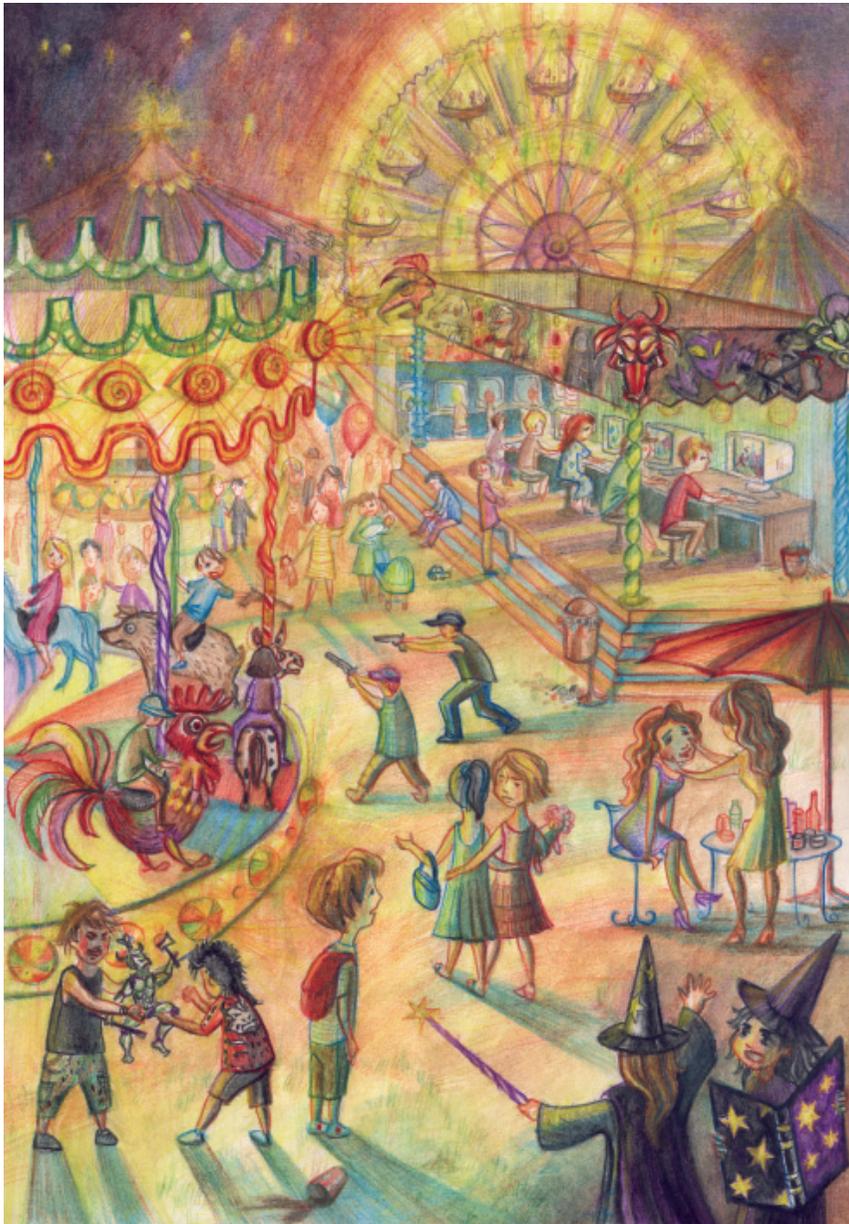
16. The land of Forbidden Toys

The angel had made Johnny very happy. Finally he found out that he was called Gabriel. He wanted to ask him many more things, but again he disappeared. Maybe so he didn't come to depend on him, but instead asked God for everything. But where was the ant, Playful? He looked in all directions but he couldn't even see his footprints. He called out to him, and waited for a minute, but he didn't come. Could that ant have chosen the wide road?

Johnny was very worried about Playful, and didn't even feel like continuing. But then he realized that he wouldn't help anyone that way. So he knelt down and for a long time asked his Heavenly Father to protect Playful and to lead him back.

Then he entered the valley where the little town spread out before him. He stepped off the path, and at the entrance to the town, he stopped as if he were petrified from shock. He was standing before a scary looking park. There were carousels, but they didn't really compare with the ones he knew back at home. These looked much bigger, more inviting, but frightening as they whistled and blinked.

Walnut moved closer, and noticed that every child was holding a toy in his hands. Some girls were constantly looking into mirrors, and kept putting on cream and makeup in all sorts of colors which repelled Johnny. Others played all the time with dolls and wanted



to be as thin as Barbie. The boys were shooting with toy guns. Others were spending their time with frightening fighting robots, playing cards or reading books about spells and wizards. A lot of them even started to look like that. A big group of children sat in front of monitors playing creepy games on computers. Others just stared at the television screen where monsters sneered at them. They were even afraid, but still they couldn't look away from the television.

Johnny remembered a boy in the neighborhood who sat for hours in front of the television because his Mommy and Daddy were not interested in him. Johnny was so proud of his own parents! So much that tears filled his eyes. They played with him, took him places, and even when he didn't listen, they still loved him and always prayed with him. How he loved his Mommy and Daddy! When he had slain the dragon, he would return home and surely be a Goody.

Maybe the parents of the children in the enchanted park didn't take good care of them, Johnny didn't see them anywhere. He asked one boy where they had gotten the toys.

"You don't have to pay for them. All you have to do is do something wrong, and tell it to the beast. As a reward, he will give you any kind of toy you want."

Johnny was horrified. People without God were always bad, but it seemed that that this Enchanted Park had particularly unusual, scary rules. He walked through the park and quietly prayed for each child.

17. Christina

Johnny noticed one little girl in the park. From his first glance, she was different from the rest, and she seemed somewhat sad to him. She sat in the corner, and had no toys. He noticed that she went to the others and asked to borrow their mirror for a minute.

"You know how it goes here," one little girl snapped. "Do something bad, and the beast will give you any kind of mirror you want. But I'm not lending you mine."

The boys were not interested in her either since she wasn't as prettily dressed as the other girls were. She didn't go to the children's disco, because it all seemed pointless and foolish to her. The girls there pretended and behaved as if they were grown up girls, but when at home alone, they cried into their pillows. Sometimes she cried at home too because her Mommy had died a few years earlier. The little girl lived with only her Daddy, and she felt very lonely. She sometimes thought that she might do something bad, so that she could be like the others and so they wouldn't laugh at her anymore.

Yet that day she had prayed: "Lord Jesus, I beg you to send me someone who believes as I do, because I can't bear this any longer."

Johnny recalled his little sister Suzy and felt like speaking with the girl.

"Hello! What is your name?" Johnny broke the ice.

"I am called Christina," she said shyly.

Johnny began to tell her about his adventures. Christina was so pleased. It was the answer to her prayers, that she met him. She listened to him almost without breathing. Just then a voice was heard which drowned out everything else. Even the carousel stopped turning, the movies and games were interrupted, and a monster appeared on the monitors.

"Who is that?" Johnny asked Christina.

"That is the beast," she informed him.

They heard him announce to everyone:



“Tomorrow is my birthday. You do not have to give me your toys as gifts. You can keep them yourselves. But when you hear a siren sound, everyone must kneel on the ground and bow before your toys. If anyone does not, I will take his toys away.”

Some children cried glory to the beast. It didn't bother them at all that they would have to worship their toys. Others were quiet, maybe their conscience was showing them that they should not do such a thing. But none of them had enough courage inside to stand against it.

Christina didn't have any toys. Walnut worked it out and remembered that his stuffed hedgehog was in his backpack. Since Johnny had decided to go after the dragon, quite often he found himself alone, and so he was happy that he had at least the hedgehog beside him. But he didn't want to bow before it. He would, of course, never do that. The Lord God had clearly said:

“For you shall worship no other Gods” and “you shall not make any molten god's.”

The next day it was the beast's birthday. Some of the children didn't care at all, as if they didn't realize what a great danger was threatening them. Because worshipping anything other than God is idolatry, and God will not allow those people into Heaven.

First thing in the morning Johnny and Christina prayed, but it was hard for Johnny. He would have liked to have run away from there. Of course then he remembered the secret in the third gray rock.

“Whoever wants to conquer the dragon must pass through the Land of Forbidden Toys and be courageous.”

So he couldn't just run off. And what would happen to the other children? If they gave in to the beast, they would become



completely blinded and it would be hard for them ever to see that they have dark hearts that need changing.

Suddenly the siren was heard, and the beast was before them. Today he was really looked smart. He thought that since he was

so beautifully dressed, that he would be the most beautiful of all. But real beauty is not that which can be seen on the outside. Truly the smartest clothes in the world, nor the most splendid accessories and jewelry can hide a dark heart. And the beast had the darkest heart of them all. He showed off in front of everyone, strutting and drawing attention to himself. He was prepared to command the children to bow before their toys.

Johnny could not stand it any longer and cried out with all his strength. "That is enough! We will not kneel before toys!"

The beast stopped and looked his rival up and down. Johnny's knees were trembling a little, and Christina decided to hide behind him.

For safety's sake, Walnut was saying to himself, "He who is in me, is greater than he who is in the beast."

The beast smelled Johnny's courage. He was afraid to attack Johnny and so he just cried out.

"Children, these two have decided that they will destroy your toys!" he lied and continued, "So if you love your toys, catch those two villains!"

Some of the children started to run toward them. Johnny and Christina fled and ran like never before. Even Walnut himself was surprised by how fast he ran. Surely Angel Gabriel who had touched his feet, had a hand in it! He realized that they were not only healed, but were made faster. Together with Christina he ran through the town gates to safety and then quietly praised God for protecting them.

18. The prodigal son returns

Johnny and Christina heard footsteps behind them. Just to be safe, they quickly hid in the bushes. To their great surprise, the ant suddenly appeared before them.

"This is not possible! Playful, is it really you?" Johnny jumped out in happiness.

"Yes, it's me. And as you can see I'm alive!" replied the ant happily. They hugged as if they had not seen one another for an eternity.

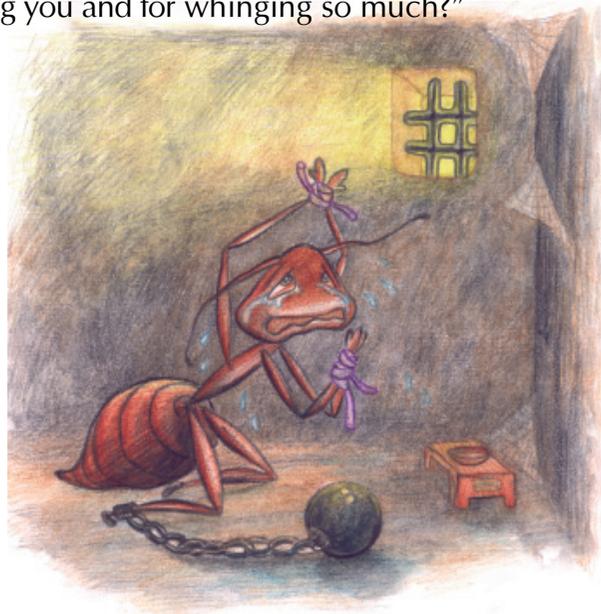
Johnny became curious. "So what happened to you, tell me!"

This time the ant didn't brag, and by his voice, one could hear that something had changed.

"When we found ourselves in front of those two roads, you disappeared before my eyes. The wide road tricked me. I thought for sure that it would take me to my anthill. Then I saw that narrow road which went steeply up. I didn't hesitate any longer and chose the wide one." Johnny and Christina listened breathlessly.

Playful explained further: "I could already see how I would take a bath at home, I was looking forward to putting my feet up and doing nothing for at least a week. Suddenly a peculiar being showed up in front of me. I realized too late that it was a beast. He attracted me. He claimed he knew the way to my anthill. But instead he took me to an enchanted park. And do you know how he threatened me then? That he would turn me into a toy for

naughty children," the ant said in a trembling voice and continued in shame "He locked me in a dark room of clay. I cried and cried. I couldn't believe that I would end up a toy in the hands of those bad children. Likewise as the prodigal son left his own good father, I also left my kind, Heavenly Father. I wanted to return to Him of course, and so I asked for His forgiveness," the ant said, already sounding calmer and bolder. "All at once I felt Jesus's embrace. He cuddled me and covered me with love. Because of that, the bonds that the beast had bound me with were broken. I opened the door to the hole where the beast had locked me and I saw how he was showing off. Suddenly I heard you, and how you fearlessly stood up to him. And when the children chased you, I ran away from there too. I might have broken a world record." Playful almost smiled, but then he became serious again and told Johnny, "Would you please forgive me too, for not believing you and for whinging so much?"



Johnny hugged him again. They cheered each other so much. In a moment, they were about to set out on their journey again. It was then that Johnny noticed that Christina was crying.

"I don't have any toys," Christina announced sadly, "and I will miss you so much,".

Johnny thought how he could please Christina, and what he could give her. Except for his hedgehog he didn't have any toys with him. But he certainly couldn't give her that. Then he wouldn't have anything to play with himself. Any other toy he would have given her immediately, but his stuffed hedgehog was at the moment the dearest thing he had.

As he thought about that, he realized that God, because of His love, gave us the most valuable thing He had, His own Son. That's how much he loved us! And truly, sometimes God asks us to give up the dearest and most valuable thing we have.

Johnny didn't hesitate any longer. He stroked his hedgehog one last time and gave it to Christina. She cried with happiness. She liked the hedgehog very much, it was so cute. She looked at Johnny thankfully and smiled.

"I have for you only a small thing. I have a rubber band for jumping, which I used to jump over with the other girls, when we played during recess at school. And a key which Mommy left me when she went to heaven. She told me that that key could lock a door so that a dragon could not climb out of a deep crack."

Johnny felt a chill up and down his spine, for he realized the strange ways in which God worked on this journey. He thanked Christina for the key and was about to leave. It was not easy to part, they even cried a little, but somehow they all felt sure that God would look after each one of them.

19. Going after the dragon

Although up until now Playful the ant had been like a burden to Johnny, he had changed just in time. He was determined to go all the way to the end. Finally he became useful for Johnny.

Along the road they sang happily, cited verses from the Bible, and prepared for their encounter with the dragon. They were passing through a very strange land. All around were thorns, no birds were flying anywhere. Once in a while spiders appeared by the road, but even they hurried straight back to their hiding place when they saw them. The air carried an ugly smell - it truly was an enchanted land.

Our two heroes began to feel very strange. Such a dislike came over them that they had to wonder about it themselves. And so they encouraged each other and reminded each other of the story about how little David overcame huge Goliath.

With that they came to the edge of a deep crack. It was covered with a grate and looked like a huge cage. Johnny started to investigate it. His attention was caught by the biggest hinges he had ever seen. They were attached to the grate by a guy rope and carried a massive iron door which was now opened. Yet there was no doubt that once shut, they would take someone captive in the deep crack. But now they didn't see anybody inside. Above the other side of the deep crack stood a hill and on it they saw the dragon for the first time. They looked him over from a distance, and tried to guess how big he could be.

"He is a gargoyle, but I imagined he would be even bigger than he is," Playful summed it up and recalled how they were talking about him at bedtime with the other animals in the Enchanted Forest. In their imaginations, the dragon gained giant proportions.

Johnny and the ant realized that the only way to the dragon was through the huge, deep crack. But who wanted to go down into this pit? And how exactly would they get there?

Then Johnny had a great idea: „The rubber band! The one which Christina gave me. It could help.“

They looked into the crack and tested the band to see if it would reach the bottom. It became evident that it was too short and they would be stuck hanging above the ground. Had they come on such a long journey only to give up? After so many fights? After so many victories?

Johnny and Playful had no other chance left than to take a courageous step of faith. So they tightly fastened the band at the root of a tree that lurked at the foot of the slope, held tightly to the other end and both threw themselves down.

Walnut felt like Peter, the disciple who faced the rough waves during the storm. Peter had walked with faith, not looking at the scary waves, but fixed his eyes on Jesus.

"It is like bungee jumping!" the ant called out, laughing. "I never thought I would try it," he yelled to Johnny as they flew down into the deep crack.

It was really deep. They weren't sure if the rubber band was unusual, or if God had performed a miracle, but the result was worth it. It stretched so much that it reached the bottom. As soon as Johnny and Playful felt the ground under their feet, they both dropped the rubber. The band backed off with a buzz and wound around the root of the tree. They found themselves at the bottom of the crack.



20. The fight with the dragon

“We made it, woohooo!” the ant cried joyfully, but they both stopped laughing very quickly, because several dangerous snakes were near them.

“This will be the end of us!” the ant feared. He immediately returned to his old ways.

“No. This is the beginning of our victory!” Johnny corrected him. “You know that the Lord Jesus said that we will walk over snakes and scorpions.”



They ordered their fear to leave them and fearlessly stepped forward. The snakes were so surprised that at once they turned and tried to jump into their holes as soon as possible.

“Glory to God!” our two heroes cried out in one voice as if on command.

The echo of their cry poured out over the whole deep crack. They were surprised at how loud an echo it was. It was as if bells were ringing to proclaim that victory was nearly in their hands. They looked up and it seemed that in spite of the distance the dragon heard it too. Totally dazed, he turned in all directions. He had no idea where the sound was coming from.

“You see, that dragon doesn’t know everything, he hasn’t even noticed us yet,” Johnny calmed down the ant.

The echo silenced now. Johnny and Playful realized where their enemy had his weakest spot. So they decided to call out with all their strength.

“Jesus Christ is Lord!”

They confessed verses from the Scripture aloud, and to their surprise, the words shot a fire-ball, as if it were from a canon. They struck the dragon and caused him several wounds. He became even more flustered, and started to tremble all over.

“It’s working!” Playful joyfully cried. Then with more determination and new enthusiasm they confessed more of God’s words before the dragon.

The dragon became fully alert, and he began to breathe fire from his mouth. Then he began to spit flame into the deep crack. Wherever the fire fell, it looked as if a bomb had exploded and it left giant craters there.

Johnny remembered when he had seen an action film at his friend’s house, and though he hadn’t admitted to anybody, he had been very much afraid because there was a lot of shooting. When he came home, he couldn’t fall asleep. Under the quilt, he kept asking Jesus to protect him. Unfortunately, now these explosions were right before his eyes!

It was starting to be a fierce battle. It seemed that if the dragon would continue doing that, sooner or later he would hit them. Fortunately Johnny remembered his dream about going on the train to the Promised Land. In the locomotive he had met Jesus alone, and Jesus had sent him to the dragon. He had finally found the dragon, but what now?

“What was it that Jesus told me then?” he tried to remember quickly.

“You are not going alone. I will help you. I will always be with you. If you rely on me, and on what I did on the cross, you will achieve it!”

“That’s it! We have to remind him of Calvary!” cried Playful. They didn’t wait a second.



In one voice they called: “Dragon, you are defeated! Jesus Christ is the victor and he has defeated you on the cross at Calvary!”

A terrible shot sounded and dust swirled around them. It was because they just fired a destructive round at the enemy. The dragon had his hardest hit yet. Knocked out, he fell on his side and almost fell over into the deep crack on top of them.

Johnny and the ant saw their chance. Now was the perfect time to get closer to him. So they approached the other wall of the deep crack. It didn’t look as steep as the side they had needed to get down, and so they climbed up it. They made their way to the

top, then they stood directly in front of the dragon. He looked like a mean dinosaur. But the difference from the ancient monsters was that it had four heads. They only noticed that now. From afar, they saw just one. Besides that, in the middle of the battle they had different troubles than to count heads.

All four heads lay helplessly on the ground. Each one was bigger than they were, but they weren't afraid anymore.

Johnny went to the first head and on it there was written: "The Land of Chocolate."

The second one said: "Whinge Land"

And on the third he read: "The Land of Forbidden Toys."

And on the fourth, the biggest, stood: "The dragon."

Johnny realized that throughout his journey he had destroyed three of the heads. That was the reason why, from the deep crack they struggled just with one. How long, tiring and useless the journey had seemed to him. Yet each resisted temptation had brought him closer to victory.

They both knew that there was just one step left. After the last, strong hit, the dragon was lying just on the edge of the deep crack. All they had to do was to push him a bit further. But how could they do it? Johnny and Playful were both so small, that they couldn't even think of doing it.

"Compared to the dragon we are as small as locusts. „Just if we....“ suddenly something came to Johnny's mind. „Do you know who Joshua was?" he questioned the ant.

"Sure, he was one of the spies who Moses sent to the Promised Land. Ten other spies came back with a message of fear, but he believed that God is powerful and they would be victorious in the battle."

At the moment when Playful finished his sentence, the spirit of

faith descended upon both heroes. At once they had no doubt that God would help them when they would lean with all their might on the dragon. They only needed to push him a tiny bit further and his own weight would pull him down into the crack.

"Let's push the dragon like Samson. When he leaned against two columns, the whole building shook and fell," suggested the ant.

What was that? Did it only seem that way to Johnny, or was it true? A man in white was standing beside him. Of course, it was the angel Gabriel who had come to help them!

The Heavenly herald joined Johnny and Playful, who were pushing the dragon with all their strength but still, with no result. The angel only touched him with his finger. With that there was a loud crash. They thought that an earthquake had come or something like that. But it was the dragon falling into the crack! Even the



earth shook. They yelled praises to God and through the open door of the grate looked victoriously down at the dragon. He had made such a hole there that it looked as if a comet had fallen. But what was worse, whilst falling, he woke up!

“It’s no good!” moaned Playful when he saw the dragon turning and shaking his head in disbelief. Probably his silly dragon head couldn’t understand how it was that he found himself at the bottom of the deep crack. Unfortunately, in spite of his wounds, he started to climb back up the hill. He aimed straight towards the iron doors which were still open. He was just an inch away from where Johnny and Playful were standing! Since the dragon was huge, he would only need to take a few steps. In no time at all he could be up again and it would be not good for our friends.

Yet just at the right moment, Johnny remembered the key from Christina.

„She said I could close a door with it so that the dragon couldn’t get out of the deep crack!“

He quickly opened his backpack, pulled out the key and stuck it into the lock. He turned the key as fast as he could and with a crash the iron door shut and the grate shook. He just made it in time. The terrible creature was already climbing up, and had Johnny been any later, the dragon would have grabbed him. But now he was stuck in his prison. He groaned in anger, but he had no way to hurt them now.

“We won!” the ant hopped like crazy. When he had no more strength, he admitted: „But it was pretty close.“

Johnny thought to himself and added wisely,

“That’s truly how it works. Our God is never late, and He always comes to help at the right time!“

21. The Blessed Forest

Johnny and Playful sang so that their song could be heard far and wide.

“Jesus is Lord, Jesus is Lord, he conquered Satan, Jesus broke the power of death...”

They couldn’t stop praying and praising God. Whilst doing that, they felt their strength returning. How thankful they were to God for the great victory!

The news about of the imprisoned dragon quickly spread, as fast as the birds could fly. When Johnny and the ant began to think about the journey back, a big eagle landed like a plane, just for them.

“Climb aboard, heroes!” he told them with adoration.

“Who are you?” asked Playful.

“I have been sent from the forest, so that I could take you there as soon as possible. All the animals can’t wait to see you and are planning a huge party.”

Johnny and the ant quickly got on, when they were in the air, they asked the eagle to make one stop along the way. Of course Johnny couldn’t forget Christina. He wanted to thank her for the rubber band and the key; but mostly for the prayers, which surely helped them most of all.

Christina couldn’t believe her eyes. She began to weep with happiness when she saw them. Yet she didn’t want to let them leave, because she would miss them. But Johnny said they must



leave because they still had a long trip ahead of them, and so there was nothing left but to wave goodbye.

When they landed in the forest, our returning friends were greeted like presidents. At the airstrip in the woods, they were greeted first by their old friends: the bear, the fox, the owl, and the cricket. Playful let them carry him on their shoulders, but Johnny didn't like it. And absolutely not when they wanted to sing praises to him.

"You must know that it wasn't me who won that huge battle, but the Lord Jesus," he told them all. „Let us praise Him instead. He was victorious! Let's give ourselves to Him, let's serve Him, let's love Him and let's follow Him."

Johnny didn't even know that he had just fulfilled the last, but by no means the least difficult task. He had just defeated the hidden enemy who is called Pride. She comes very quietly and unnoticed, and always after a great victory.

The animals organized a worship service, and so many came that they couldn't all fit into God's house. So they moved their meeting to a large meadow. Anyway, God's true home is in the hearts of those who believe in the Lord Jesus.



Johnny had to report all that had happened on the long journey. It was so thrilling that no one was in a hurry to go home. Everyone was listening carefully. In their hearts, new flames of God's love were lit.

Johnny finished his speech with these words.

"From now on, this forest will not be called Enchanted. From today forward we will call it the Blessed Forest!"

All the animals clapped in agreement. "We live in the Blessed Forest!" they called out joyfully again and again. Their happy voices were heard all around. The endless echo cast out even the last

remaining darkness from the forest forever.

The cricket played a beautiful song of praise. In the end, Johnny surprised everyone.

“Surely God will now show me the way home. Yet Playful will stay here with you. He has learned much about God during our common journey, so you don’t need to be afraid of anything.”

The animals didn’t want to let Johnny go, but since he insisted, with respect they received the ant among themselves.

Johnny said goodbye to everyone, of course crying with those he knew best. Then he sat on the eagle and took off. The mushrooms waved their caps to him as he left. Walnut looked at all the animals as long as he could. He wanted to keep them in his memory. When he was very high, he could only recognize the big oak. With thankfulness, the oak was waving goodbye with his huge branches. Johnny remembered how sadly he had welcomed him to the forest at first, and now he was the last to send him on his way with love.

22. Home at last

The eagle flew nobly over the river where Evilfish swam and moved like a storm above the land, which was dusted with a fresh blanket of snow. Maybe the eagle himself felt that Walnut was reaching his goal, and so he sped ahead even more. In the distance, as if by a miracle, the town where Johnny was born appeared, and in a moment they landed.

Johnny thanked the eagle and said a heartfelt goodbye. He passed by his favourite tree - the walnut one and ran to his front door. He opened it, and saw his Daddy, Mommy and his little sister Suzy praying at the table. Everything was decorated ready for a holiday. Of course, it was Christmas!

Mommy and Daddy had cried so much when they weren’t able to find Johnny. They blamed themselves that they hadn’t held his hand tighter. Everyone they knew had searched for him but they had finally found only his balloon on the other side of the river. Many people said that he would never return and that he had drowned in the river. But deep in their hearts they had faith and prayed for him every day.

They all turned towards the creaking sound of the front door. At first they didn’t know if it was a vision, or if they were really seeing their beloved Johnny. But then they all hugged him and wept with joy. They couldn’t speak from happiness. How handsome he had grown! It was so great to look at him! Finally the family was all together, as it should be.



Johnny asked them for forgiveness for following that balloon without thinking.

“Of course, we forgave you a long time ago, we just wished for one thing, that you would return to us,” Mummy hugged him again.

Daddy suggested that they eat their Christmas Eve dinner. It was fantastic.

Mushroom soup, then traditional wafers with apples and honey and.....of course, with walnuts. After eating the fish, they went to the Christmas tree to see the gifts.

Johnny promised them with sparkling eyes that he would be the most obedient child. It was then that his parents realized that they had not a single present for him. How sad they were about that. But Johnny just hugged them again, and told them no to worry about it at all.

“You know that the greatest gift of all is the Lord Jesus, and he lives in my heart!”

Then they all sat together and Johnny began to tell them his story. It was a magnificent Christmas Eve. Everyone listened breathlessly to Johnny and from the corner of their eyes looked out of the window at the gorgeous and shimmering blanket of snow. Glistening snow flakes fell from the heavens. It was as if God wanted to say to Johnny,

“You are my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.”

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