

Johnny Meets Little Turtle

Johnny Hancock knelt under the lilac bush. He peeked out at the black dragon coming toward him. Then he looked at his sister Mary's wooden doll, lying in the dirt. "Fear not, fair one," he said. "Saint George will save you."

He lifted his long stick. A cold drop of rain from the lilac leaves ran down his cheek.

The black dragon snorted and came closer to the garden.

The lilac bush stood behind Parson John Hancock's square white house in Braintree, in the royal colony of Massachusetts. Hancocks had lived near Boston, for a hundred years. Now it was the summer of 1742.

The black dragon was old Dame Clark's black pig, Daisy. Daisy was always getting loose. Then

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she would dig up the neighbors' gardens.

"You won't dig up our garden," five-year-old Johnny shouted. He ran toward the black pig, shaking his stick.

Daisy squealed, "Oink, oink," but she didn't run away. Instead, she ran right at Johnny. Before he could say "scat!" she dodged his stick and ran between his legs.



Johnny felt himself being lifted up. Suddenly he was riding on Daisy's slippery back. He started to slide off and he grabbed for her curly tail.

Then he bounced off and rolled into a puddle left from the rain. Daisy ran squealing around the house. Someone else would have to catch her. Suddenly Johnny heard someone laughing behind him.

"Ho, ho! Ha, ha!"

Then his friend John Adams came running up. John, who was past six, was short and sturdy. Johnny called him "Jay."

"That looked so funny," Jay said with a grin. He

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put down the basket he carried.

Johnny scrambled to his feet. The back of his dress was wet. Johnny had to wear a dress until he went to school, like all small boys did.

“Let’s see,” Jay Adams said. He pulled Johnny around. “You’ll be in trouble.”

“I will not,” Johnny said. “I have lots of clothes.” His dark eyes flashed, but he and his friend both knew that a parson’s son didn’t have many clothes.

“Johnny! Johnny Hancock!” Mary Hancock stepped out of the kitchen door. There was a smear of corn meal on her cheek. She was only two years older than Johnny, but she often helped their Mother.

“What have you done to your nice dress? Oh, Mother-r-r!” she called.

“Aw-w-w, I fell. The dragon knocked me over. Do you have to tell Mother?”

Mary frowned and gave him a gentle shove toward the kitchen door. Then she remembered her manners. “Will you come, too, Jay?”

“No, thank you, Mary,” Jay said. “I have to go to the mill and then back home. I stopped to tell Johnny I can go fishing with him tomorrow. There’s no school.”

The Adams family lived on a farm at the foot of Penn’s Hill. It was about a mile down the Coast

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Road which wound along Boston Bay. From the top of Penn's Hill one could see ten miles across Boston Bay to Boston Town itself.

Jay Adams picked up his basket of corn. He ran around the house to the road. Johnny followed his sister slowly into the kitchen. Mother glanced up from the fireplace. Her face looked warm under her frilled white cap. Mary turned Johnny around so that Mother could see his back. "He's all wet."

Mother stood up. She smoothed down the blue apron she wore over her blue and white striped skirt. "Maybe I should let you wash your own clothes. Then you might learn to stay clean."

"Yes, Mother."

"Go to your room and find a fresh dress," she said. "I am much too busy. A neighbor just brought me word from Boston Town. Your Uncle Thomas Hancock and Aunt Lydia are coming here to visit tomorrow."

"Uncle Tom!" Johnny clapped his hands. "Now I can ride in the carriage!"

"Mother," Mary said, "I think Johnny likes fine things too well. Doesn't Father say that is a sin?"

"That's what the old Puritans believed. But people are earning more than in the old days."

"Uncle Thomas has a fine house in Boston. He must have—" Mary began.

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Mother frowned. "Yes, your father's brother is very rich. He is a merchant and a trader with England. He has worked very hard. It is too bad he has no children."

Baby Ebenezer started to cry. He was learning to walk and had just taken a tumble in a corner of the kitchen.

"Oh, dear," said Mother. "Will you quiet him, Mary? Your father is working on his two Sunday sermons, and I must get my bread baked. If I'd only known Thomas and Lydia were coming I might have sent to Boston for wheat flour."

Johnny ran out of the room. When he came back in dry clothes he asked Mother, "When will they get here? I can't wait."

"I'll tell you about it at supper, son. We shall eat as soon as Father finishes his sermons. Now run along and don't bother me."

Johnny gave a sigh. "That will be a long time," he said. He went out to the barn to pet Father's horse, Betsy.



Johnny was eating breakfast early the next morning when he heard Jay Adams' whistle outside. The family ate often in the big kitchen, a room added on to the back of the house.

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Johnny looked at Father.

“Wait until we say the prayer, John.” Father smiled kindly at him.

Johnny had often heard people say that Parson Hancock was wise, kind, and a very good speaker. He knew that people came from far away to hear him preach.

When Johnny at last ran to the door, he saw his friend Jay waiting with a fishing pole over his shoulder.

“Good morrow to you,” Johnny said. “Do you have a pole for me?”

“No, I’ll cut you one from a young tree with my pocketknife,” Jay told him. “I have a fish hook for you, though.”

Mother went to the door. “Watch him well, Jay. Stay on the bridge to fish. I don’t want him falling into the creek.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“And be back for dinner this noon, Johnny. Today is Saturday. Your uncle and aunt will come this afternoon. Good-by, boys.”

Johnny tried hard to keep up with Jay Adams’ trot. They went up the dusty highway past a few scattered houses and some orchards to Black Creek. The creek flowed into Boston Bay.

When the boys reached the log bridge that

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crossed the creek, they were warm from the August sun. Jay put one of the worms he had brought with him on his hook. He gave his pole to Johnny to hold. Johnny dropped the hook and line into the water.

Then Jay found a long green stick on the creek bank and cut it with his knife. He tied a line and hook to it for Johnny.

The two boys fished and fished, but they didn't get a bite. Some dark clouds started to move across the sky.

"If I could just get one fish for my uncle and aunt," Johnny thought. "Everyone eats fish on Saturdays. And I'll have to go home soon."

Just then he looked up. He saw a head peek out from behind a tree. It was a boy with bright black eyes and long black hair.

Johnny gave Jay's foot a little kick. "Look!"

Jay's round face broke into a smile.

"Well! It's Little Turtle. He's one of the Ponkha-poag Indians. They're camping at Colonel Quincy's farm near the bay. They have to live on a place at Stoughton, but they come here each year for the fishing."

Now the Indian boy was standing at the end of the bridge. "Fish?" he asked. "How many?"

Jay made a face. "Not one, Little Turtle."

Little Turtle edged closer. "I catch."

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“Go ahead.”

“I get fish—you give hook?”

“Yes,” Johnny whispered eagerly to Jay. “Give him my hook.”

Jay nodded. “Show us, Little Turtle.”

Little Turtle rubbed his bare toes over the logs of the bridge. A slow smile spread across his face.

He pointed to a shiny blue dragonfly that had lighted on the rushing water. *Swish!* Bubbles marked the spot where a fish had snapped up the dragonfly.

“Fish eat flies, grasshoppers today,” Little Turtle said. He moved his brown hands like wings. “No worms.”

“Grasshoppers! We’ll catch some!” Johnny and Jay cried in the same breath.

Together the three boys roamed the creek banks. The sun went under a cloud, and they heard the rumble of summer thunder.

Soon each boy had a grasshopper in his closed fist. Little Turtle put a grasshopper on Johnny’s hook and handed the pole to Johnny. Jay put one on his hook.

Johnny’s grasshopper had floated downstream only a moment or two when Johnny felt a sudden tug. The grasshopper disappeared, and the pole pulled at Johnny’s hand as if it were alive.

“I got one!” he shouted. “What’ll I do?”

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“Hang on!” Jay shouted. “I have one, too.”

Johnny pulled and pulled. Would his green stick hold? It did not look strong.

Little Turtle put his hands on the stick. Together he and Johnny gave a great jerk. The fish flew out of the creek.

Jay flipped his fish out of the water, too. “Oh, did you ever see such a big one?” Johnny said excitedly. He dragged his gasping prize over beside Jay’s fish.

“Mine’s larger,” Jay declared after measuring the two fish carefully. “But yours is good for your first fish.”

Suddenly rain started to fall. “Oh, we’ve got to go!” Jay said. “Under those trees until it stops raining.”

“Tree no good in bad storm,” Little Turtle spoke up. “Lightning hit. Come. Go wigwam.”

Jay grabbed Johnny’s hand. “Let’s go,” he said. “Hurry!”

They followed the Indian boy along the creek bank. Johnny’s short legs had trouble keeping up with the older boys. His bare feet slipped on a muddy spot, and he fell to his knees. He brushed the rain out of his eyes.

He was glad, indeed, to crowd into Little Turtle’s wigwam. It was placed with several others among some pine trees. Fish nets were spread over low bushes near by. The fish that had been spread out

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to dry on trays and sticks were now covered with pieces of old canvas.

Inside the wigwam it was dark and smoky. An opening at the top let out the smoke from the tiny cook fire. A wet, thin dog smelling of fish steamed close to the fire.

Little Turtle's father, White Bear, sat cross-legged on the dirt floor. People gave him the English name of Moses and called him "King" because he was the last head of the small tribe.

Little Turtle spoke to his family in strange words. Then White Bear spoke. "Welcome to our wigwam, young braves."

"Thank you," the boys murmured and sat down on the ground.

Little Turtle's mother brought blackberries in a polished bowl made from a knot of maple wood. Johnny knew his mother prized one like it very highly.

Johnny stuffed the berries in his mouth.

White Bear spoke again. "We come here to catch fish and dry them. In winter we have only dried fish to eat. Now the Quincy family shares its fruit and cider with us. We share with you."

Johnny was sorry he had eaten the food. He sat and listened to the rain outside. Dogs and children were noisy in the next wigwam.

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Little Turtle's mother brought blackberries in a polished bowl made from maple wood.

Johnny felt hot and sticky in his damp clothes. He wanted to go home with his prize. He patted the dead fish, which was still fastened to the hook and line.

"Here's the hook we promised you," he said suddenly. He handed the fish over to Little Turtle, who

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easily took out the hook.

The rain stopped. Little Turtle went outside. In a moment he was back with a handful of long wet grass from the creek bank. He wrapped it around Johnny's fish and handed it back to him with a shy smile. Then he did the same for Jay.

Johnny and Jay looked outside. Sunlight danced through the wet pine branches and across the golden grain fields stretching down to the sea. The air grew hot again.

"Good-by and thanks!" Jay said to their Indian friends.

Johnny said, "I'll bring you some eggs."

As they ran back to the main road, the long grass whipped water over their bare legs.

When Johnny entered the kitchen, he heard a fish peddler's horn sounding down the road.

Sister Mary spied his fish. "Oh, you really caught one! See, Mother, isn't it fine?"

Mother already was broiling several of the peddler's fat codfish in a long-handled iron frying pan.

"Where have you been, Johnny? We were worried during the shower. I see you're muddy again."

"But look at my fish! Mother, I prom—"

"Aye, you've done well." She patted his head. "Give it to me and I shall clean it outside. Mary, hold the pan over the fire. Mind, don't burn your fingers."

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He was the first one of the family to see the open carriage with two horses as it pulled up before the gate. In it sat stout Uncle Thomas in his large powdered wig. Across from him spread Aunt Lydia, a mountain of a woman.

She stopped at the door. “Change to a clean dress, Johnny, and put on your shoes. You know Uncle Thomas and Aunt Lydia are coming.”

Uncle Thomas! Johnny stood still. He had forgotten in his excitement over the fish. He was the first one of the family to see the open carriage with two horses as it pulled up before the gate. In it sat stout Uncle Thomas in his large powdered wig. Across from him spread Aunt Lydia, a mountain of a woman.

Prince, the coachman, jumped down. He and Uncle Thomas helped Aunt Lydia unfold from the carriage and step down to the ground.

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Aunt Lydia's eyes were black and shiny as beetles. She had stern eyebrows. But Johnny was not afraid of her. He knew she loved him.

Uncle Tom, who looked splendid in blue silk and gold lace, lifted Johnny high in the air. He rode him on his broad shoulder into the house.

"Heh, heh!" he chuckled. "What a fine lad! Could be a mite heavier, though. Just come to Boston to visit us, my boy, and we'll fatten you up."

Mother took them into the cool parlor. Here she had her best silver candlesticks and chairs with seats of red velvet.

Aunt Lydia's chair squeaked when she let herself down into it. She and her wide skirts of soft Chinese cotton hid the entire chair. Johnny thought she looked as if she were sitting on nothing at all!

"Yes, indeed," she was saying. "We've come to hear one of your sermons tomorrow, Pastor John. See that it's a good one."

"I do my best, Lydia." Father smiled, not minding a bit. "And how is your shipping business in Boston Town, Tom?" He turned to his younger brother.

"Business is fine!" Uncle Tom replied with a chuckle. "But only because I was smart enough to lay in a large supply of whale oil before this war started in Europe. There's a big market for whale

oil in England.”

Then he frowned. “If only England would let us trade wherever we wanted to, instead of only with her. But we have ways of getting around that sometimes.”

Parson Hancock said, “We must guard our rights as free Englishmen, Thomas. Our royal Massachusetts charter gives us great freedom—more than we had in England. And we must keep it so.”

Johnny didn’t know what all this meant. But he knew better than to speak when grown-ups were talking.

He tugged at Uncle Tom’s arm. At last his uncle looked down at him with a smile. “Eh?”

“If you please, sir—” Johnny waved his hand toward the window. The carriage horses were still standing outside, tied to the hitching post in front of the house.

“Ah, you remember I promised you a ride the last time I came, do you? A ride you shall have, just as soon as the horses are rested a bit. They pulled quite a load from Boston Town.” He laughed, and Aunt Lydia frowned.

Later, when Johnny, Mary, and Uncle Tom were going out the door, Johnny suddenly stopped. He didn’t know what to say.

“My promise!” he thought. “I told the Indians I’d

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bring them eggs and I forgot!"

"I can't go," he said fiercely. He ran back to Mother and whispered in her ear. "May I borrow eggs to give to the Indians out at the Quincy farm? They gave me fruit when they took me in from the rain. I promised."

Mother smiled down at him with a shake of her head. "What shall I do with you, Johnny Hancock? You're like all the Hancocks, always giving. Yes, take that small basket of eggs out of the pantry. A neighbor brought us an extra dozen this morning."

Besides the money Braintree paid Parson Hancock, the villagers often brought the family food. "Country pay," it was called.

"Thank you, Mother," Johnny said. He got the eggs. Then Uncle Tom popped his head into the kitchen to see what Johnny was doing.

"So you want to walk way out to the Indian camp instead of riding with me, heh?"

"I-I want to go, Uncle, but I promised, and-and you said you would drive south on the road to Plymouth."

"You're a good boy, Johnny," Uncle Tom said. "I think Prince can turn the horses around the other way. We can drive out to the camp to deliver your eggs."

And so they did.