

BENJAMIN LEARNS ABOUT JOY

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Felix and Friends:
The Fruit of the Spirit Series



The time seemed to fly since Patrik's rocky start with Felix and his family, and as the weeks turned into months, the two boys became fast friends. Felix worked hard at loving his cousin, and he found his earlier frustration turning into compassion and understanding. Instead of resenting having to share a room with Patrik, he discovered he actually enjoyed having someone to whisper stories and secrets with late into the night. The boys also found that they had many interests in common, and they loved playing and exploring together in the area surrounding the inn. They typically stayed close to home and didn't wander farther than the first clump of trees, remaining on their side of the bridge rather than crossing over the river to the meadows and fields beyond. The children were only allowed to cross the bridge with adult supervision, and they did so every week to attend church, which stood among a cluster of rocks in the first meadow on the far side of the river. Felix and Patrik's Aunt Elsa also lived across the river, just south of the church near Farmer Simon's field, and her newly minted fiancé, Oskar, happened to be the pastor of that very church. While the boys would have loved to be able to go visit their aunt more freely, they were mindful of the rules and stayed on their side of the river. That didn't mean, however, that they never pushed the boundaries on *their* side, and today, Felix and Patrik decided to walk just a bit farther than usual. But this time—unbeknownst to them— they weren't adventuring alone.





Felix and Patrik chatted happily as they followed the gentle path through the forest along the river. The day was warm and bright, and the excited hum of adventure hung hopefully in the air. It was the kind of day when anything seemed possible, and the boys were ready to meet it head-on.

They had not planned on anyone else tagging along today, but just as they reached a narrow bend in the path, a small voice carried through the wind in their direction.

“Wait up, Felix! Wait for me. I want to come with!”

It was Märta, Felix’s little sister. She had seen the boys taking off for a day of fun and excitement and had decided she wanted to join them. She never did like being left behind—she enjoyed adventures too, after all.

Felix paused mid-step with the sort of overly dramatic sigh that only an older brother can produce. He shook his head in exasperation.

“Oh, Märta, what are you doing here? I thought you were with Mom,” he whined.

Märta skipped down the path to catch up with her brother and cousin, unperturbed by the annoyance in Felix’s voice.

“I wanna play with you and Patrik today!” she declared with a determined stamp of her tiny paw.

Felix immediately rolled his eyes.

“We’re not *playing*” he over-emphasized. “We’re exploring. And you can’t come along, because you’ll just get in the way!”

“I will not!” Märta sniffed, pointing her nose in the air in defiance. “I can keep up,” she insisted.

Patrik stood off to the side and smirked as he watched his cousins bicker. He knew from experience that this could go on all day, and frankly, he didn’t feel like wasting all that time. He decided to give a bit of diplomacy and logic a try.

“We’re already pretty far from the inn, Felix,” Patrik began, bringing up an excellent point. “Maybe we should let her go with us. It’s too dangerous to send her back alone now.”

Then, in an appeal to Felix’s older brother protective instincts, Patrik added, “Remember those people we saw hiking back down the trail? What if they see her?”

That seemed to do the trick.

“Alright,” Felix muttered half resigned. “Come on, then. But be sure to keep up!”

Märta happily twirled in glee before taking a victory lap around the bemused boys. Then she scampered alongside them as they continued on with their explorations.

They hadn’t gotten far before she immediately asked, “So where are we going?”

“We don’t know,” Patrik answered kindly. “We’re just looking around.”

Märta nodded solemnly as if that made perfect sense to her.

“Okay,” she agreed.

But it wasn’t a moment later before she whispered, “What are we looking at?”

Felix sighed and waved his arms around at the forest in general with an edge of impatience he barely tried to tamp down. “Just whatever...you know...stuff!” he exclaimed in dramatic fashion.

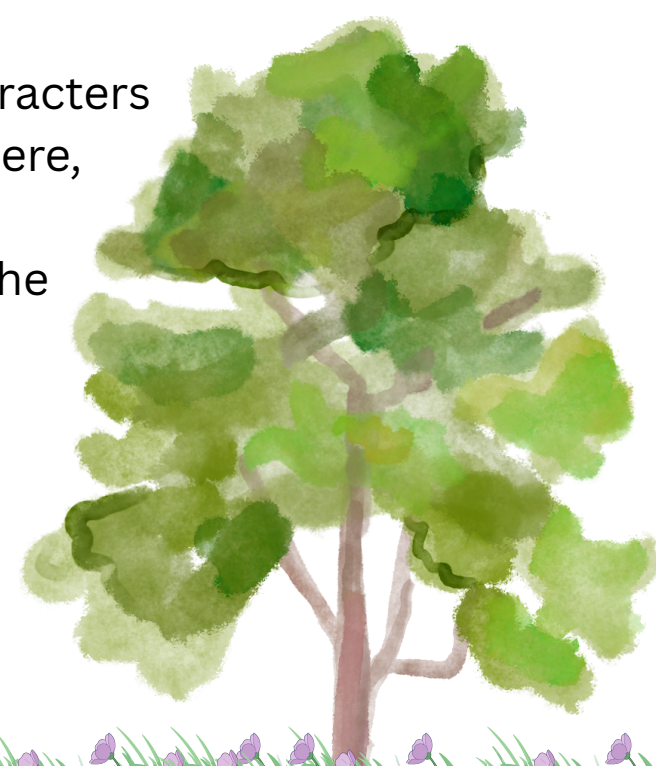
“But what stuff?” insisted Märta, for in her mind, adventures usually involved fascinating characters and daring deeds. All she could see was the forest, and if her brother was finding adventure here, she didn’t want to miss it.

Patrik laughed heartily. He patted Felix reassuringly on the shoulder before pointing off into the distance as a way of redirecting the situation.

“Come on,” he smiled, “let’s check out those rocks over there!”

It worked. Rock piles, after all, tend to be marvelous sources of adventure—as any kid would understand.

So the three mice bounded off down the trail to explore the rocks in the clearing ahead.





As the enthusiastic group arrived at the clearing, breathing heavily and hearts beating fast from exertion and thrill, Märta's eyes grew wide in amazement.

"Wow!" she exclaimed boisterously. "These rocks are so big! Like a mountain up to the sky."

Patrik chuckled good-naturedly at his little cousin's joy.

"Yeah, they're pretty cool," he smiled as he squinted his eyes against the sun and glanced up to the top of the pile.

The rocks before them seemed more an act of design than mere happenstance. The placement of each stone seemed careful and precise, the work of a builder with a clear plan in mind.

At the very top of the pile was a large hole. It looked like an entrance of some sort, and Patrik wondered if someone could be living inside.

He stood lost in thought, barely aware of Felix and Märta's presence as curiosity took hold of his imagination.

He vaguely heard Felix saying something about it being a good idea to check out the rocks, but it wasn't until Felix's sharp voice rang out that Patrik's mind pulled back into reality.

"Märta, be careful up there!" Felix called to his little sister, who was at that moment attempting to scale the steep slope of the rocks before them.

Patrik gasped, his paw flying to his mouth as he watched Märta climb ever so carefully toward the very top. It was quite a distance to cover for a little mouse—quite a distance up, and quite a distance down.

Felix's voice shook in fright as he continued to call up to her. She was so high, and he was worried that one misstep would send her to tumbling all the way back down. But then, just as Märta finally reached the very top, Felix was gripped by another fear: the hole. What if she fell into that very dark hole?

He called out again, his voice sharp with warning. "Be careful, Märta! You might—"

But before Felix could utter another word, a high-pitched scream tore through the air, filling both Patrik and Felix with terror.

"Ahhh!" Märta shrieked, as she tripped and barreled forward down into the hole.

"Märta!" both boys cried at once.

"Are you okay?" Felix called out, half asking and half pleading, his voice shaking with fear. He was already at the base of the rock pile and scrambling up it as fast as he could, desperate to reach his sister.

"Be careful!" cautioned Patrik. "You don't want to fall in after her!"

Felix continued to climb with determined steps.

"Märta? Märta, answer me!" he wailed.





For a moment, everything was silent. It was as if the entire forest held its breath.

Then, quite unexpectedly, the boys heard a giggle. Märta was laughing from somewhere deep inside the hole.

“Märta?” Felix called out tentatively.

“I’m okay, Felix!” Märta’s sweet little voice squeaked back, the sound muffled by the fact that she was, indeed, inside a hole. “I landed on someone soft,” she continued merrily, as if that statement alone should explain everything.

Patrik and Felix looked at each other in confusion.

“Someone?” they asked in unison.

Suddenly, the ground shifted, and the boys jumped at the sound of sliding dirt as small pebbles and clumps of dust tumbled down the face of the rock pile. Then, to their amazement, a grumpy-looking badger emerged from the depths of the hole—while Felix’s little sister sat perched happily on top of his head, her tiny fists clinging tightly to his thick fur. The badger snorted irritably and muttered, “Did you boys lose something? Perhaps this little mouse-ling belongs to you.”

A wave of relief swept over Felix.

“Märta! You’re safe!” he cried. “But what are you doing on that badger’s head?”

Märta simply laughed. “Weee! This is fun!” she beamed. “I like it up here!”

“Märta,” Felix began, “you need to get off him. You can’t just go around sitting on other people’s heads.”

“Yes, I would have to agree. And please do so with all due haste,” the badger added with a deep, impatient sigh.

Märta blinked. “Oh!” she whispered, her eyes widening. “I’m sorry, Mr. Badger.”

The badger looked a bit uncomfortable at the sudden tenderness. He cleared his throat awkwardly.

“You may call me Benjamin, I suppose,” he said.

Märta quickly scurried down from the badger’s head, taking extra care not to tug at his fur more than necessary.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Benjamin,” she said again. “I really didn’t mean to land on you. Thank you for the soft landing, though!”

Benjamin seemed uncertain what to do with all the kindness.

“Well, you’re, uh, welcome,” he managed. “I suppose no real harm has been done. You aren’t so very big, after all. It would have been worse, perhaps, had you been a squirrel—or a skunk!”

“A skunk?!” Märta giggled. “Pee-yoo!”





Felix laughed, so relieved that his sister was back on solid, safe ground once more. He turned to Benjamin.

“Thank you for helping my sister,” he said. “But I’m really sorry that we bothered you.”

He paused, glancing around, not quite sure what to do now. An awkward silence filled the clearing.

“We’ll just go play over there,” Felix offered after a few moments, his small voice seeming much louder as it broke through the quiet. He chewed nervously at his lip, then motioned to the others to follow as he turned to go, intending to leave the badger to his day in peace.

But as the children started down the trail, Benjamin hmped.

“Sure. Just land on a fellow’s head and then leave.”

The young mice stopped at once and glanced back at the cranky badger. He stood in the clearing with his arms crossed, looking for all the world as if his day had been objectively ruined.

“You want us to stay?” asked Patrik, confused.

Benjamin shrugged and sighed deeply.

“Stay...leave. What difference does it make to me?” he muttered, trying—unsuccessfully—to sound casual and uninterested.

Patrik looked over at Felix, who took a few cautious steps back toward Benjamin.

“Um...okay?” Felix said.

Benjamin seemed not to notice. He continued, “I mean, never mind that no one ever comes to visit a cranky badger like me. Never mind that these rocks are hot, and that my den is small and crowded, and that people come tramping by all the time so that I can’t get any rest. Never mind that when I finally get a bit of peace and quiet for a nap, a mouse falls onto my head.”

Märta looked up guiltily that. She opened her mouth to apologize again, but Benjamin carried on before she could say a word.

“No,” he murmured, “you just go on your happy way and leave me alone to wallow in my misery.”

For a moment, nobody moved, too surprised to say anything.

Then Patrik whispered kindly, “It sounds like you’re having a bad day.”

Märta’s little eyes filled with tears. She didn’t want Benjamin to be sad or lonely. She didn’t want anybody to be sad or lonely.

“Poor badger,” she cried, walking closer to Benjamin in an effort to offer some comfort. “I’m sorry I fell on your head and woke you up from your nap.”

“We can stay a bit if you want us to,” suggested Felix, hoping that the offer of some company might help.

“Yes, we can cheer you up!” Märta agreed brightly as she wiped away her tears with great determination.





Benjamin looked down at the little mouse trio, surprised by their offers of friendship and comfort. A sudden longing and hope flickered in his eyes for the briefest moment before he seemed to catch himself. He shook his head fervently, as if unable to accept that anyone would truly offer him kindness.

“Cheer me up?” he spat. “That’s not likely to happen.”

“Why not?” asked Felix, genuinely curious.

Benjamin cocked his head, considering his answer carefully.

“There’s nothing in my life to be happy about,” he finally said.

Märta’s eyes grew wide in wonder.

“Wow! Nothing?” she asked in amazement.

“Sounds rough,” Patrik added quietly.

“Not everyone can live carefree and happy lives like you children,” Benjamin muttered. “Some of us must deal with real trials and sorrows.”

“Like what?” Märta blurted out innocently.

Felix, horrified by his little sister’s bluntness, jumped in at once.

“Märta, that’s none of our business,” he sputtered in a loud whisper. But Benjamin merely waved him off.

“No, no, it’s quite alright,” he said gravely. “My woes may be freely discussed.” He sighed dramatically and turned to face little Märta.

“You see, little child, my life is full of trouble. My brother was tragically hit by a car. My parents won’t speak to me because they think it was my fault Leopold was killed. I have since wandered far from home only to choose the most crowded and uncomfortable rock hole you could find. On top of all that, I am hungry and tired, and you all have just ruined my nap. So, you see, there is nothing to be happy about.”

At that, Benjamin turned and walked over to a nearby fallen tree, sitting down heavily in his despair.





“I’m sorry about your brother,” Felix said gently after a pause, his voice full of compassion and genuine sorrow.

“Yeah, me too,” added Patrik softly, his shaky voice barely above a whisper. “I know how hard it is to lose someone you love.”

Benjamin started at that.

“Oh please!” he muttered. “Don’t be ridiculous. How could a child such as you know anything about such sorrows?”

Märta climbed up onto the tree stump next to the badger and patted his arm gently.

“His mommy and daddy died,” she explained carefully.

“Yeah,” Felix continued, “that’s why he lives with us. He’s really our cousin.”

Benjamin paused at that, looking apologetic at once.

“I see,” he said with a slight nod. “So you *do* understand. I apologize for my earlier comments and judgments. When did it happen? Was it long ago?”

“A few months ago,” answered Patrik.

“Indeed,” Benjamin said, surprised, his eyebrows rising. “I must say, I am impressed with your apparent ability to enjoy life in spite of such tragedy. I mean, to be out here playing with your cousins...How can you be so happy?”

Patrik shifted on his feet, a little uncomfortable with all the attention suddenly focused on him. But he answered honestly.

“I’m not always happy,” he began. “I get really sad about everything all the time. I mean, I always miss my parents so much. Every day. But Uncle Hans and Aunt Hazel—and of course Felix and Märta here—have been really great. They love me, and they’re there for me. They help me through the sad days. And they help me find joy even when my heart is crying.”

Patrik glanced over to Felix who smiled back encouragingly.

“Some days are harder than others,” Patrik admitted with a sad smile. “But the joy is always real.”





Benjamin listened carefully, sorrow in his eyes. He longed to have that kind of joy in his own life, but it didn't seem possible.

"How nice it must be to have someone who can be there for you," he lamented. "We don't all have that. Some of us are just alone in our woes."

"What about God?" asked Märta gently.

Benjamin blinked in apparent confusion.

"God?" he repeated. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

Märta stood up at once on the fallen tree trunk, arms wide and heart eager to share such wonderful news with her new badger friend.

"Mom says that God is always with me, even if I feel lonely or sad. He never goes away," she declared joyfully.

Patrik smiled at Märta's enthusiasm.

"She's right. God would love to be your friend too—truly. And because sin, all the bad things that we do or think or say, gets in the way of that relationship, God did something incredible to make it possible for us to be saved.

"God loved us so much that He gave His Son Jesus—who was perfect and never did anything wrong—to take all our sins on Himself and die for us on a cross.

"Our sin was a debt we could never repay no matter how much good we try to do to make it right. So Jesus paid sin's price for us. He's the only one who could do it.

"And because of that amazing love and grace, we can be forgiven. We can have a relationship with God. We can have real joy in life even when things are hard, even when we don't feel happy. That's because real joy doesn't depend on what's happening around us—it's based on what's inside us.

"We are all sinners in need of forgiveness, and God is ready to forgive. He is ready to save. By God's grace through faith, you can become a child of God, Benjamin. And if you do, the Holy Spirit will come and live inside you, and you will never be alone. You will always be loved."

Benjamin listened with rapt attention. His eyes grew wide and filled with such hope that it made Patrik's heart ache.

"Such love seems too good to be true," Benjamin whispered at last. "My own family doesn't even seem to love me that much."

"God's love is real!" encouraged Felix. "The Bible tells us all about it."





“It has been so long since I read the Bible,” admitted Benjamin sadly.

“Well, you can read it now,” said Märta with a bright, encouraging smile.

Benjamin chuckled, the sound feeling foreign even to him. But he was not deterred.

“I think maybe you’re right,” he agreed. “I would surely love to know more about this joy you talk about with such conviction.”

Patrik smiled.

“It’s that deep-inside knowing that God is good all the time, and that God loves me even when I feel sad. I have joy because I know that I will see my mom and dad in heaven one day. And I have that hope because of God’s love and sacrifice for me. As His child, He has promised me eternal life in heaven with Him. Imagine eternity with no pain, no sorrow, no loneliness!

“Things may be hard sometimes right now, but this life is only temporary.

“My joy doesn’t disappear just because everything around me goes crazy. My joy is in God. He’s my Heavenly Father and my best friend. He knows what it’s like to be sad, and He knows how to help me trust Him even when I’m sad and don’t understand why things are happening the way they are.

“Joy helps me see the bigger picture. One day all of this hard stuff will be long gone, and I will spend all eternity with God. Now that’s something to be joyful about!”

“Well,” said Benjamin thoughtfully, “you’ve certainly given me much to consider. And I will. I promise.”

Felix smiled, “Well, while you’re considering, maybe we can help.”

“How is that?” asked Benjamin curiously.

“We’ll be your friends!” shouted Märta eagerly.

“Definitely,” Patrik agreed.

“If you need us, we’re here for you,” Felix added.

“And we can help answer any questions you may have about God and His love for you,” promised Patrik with a warm grin.

Märta was practically buzzing with glee.

“Yeah! We want to help you find that real joy,” she announced.

“Hey, I just realized something,” proclaimed Felix suddenly.

“What?” asked Märta.

“Joy is a Fruit of the Spirit!”

Patrik nodded at once. “Just like love,” he affirmed.

Benjamin looked down at the children, puzzled.

“The Fruit of the Spirit?” he inquired.

“We’ll have to tell you about that,” Felix promised.

“Yeah!” said Märta, “And I know where it is in the Bible too. Daddy showed me!”

“Well,” grinned Benjamin, “I think I might just enjoy hearing all about it—here with my new friends!”





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