



by Amena Pendleton

A long time ago a young man named Joel was taken prisoner and carried captive to a wicked city. In this city dwelt many evil doers. But Joel was not wicked, he believed in the Lord. Every day he mourned and wished he could escape from the wicked city and go to a beautiful city of which he had heard, called the City of Palm Trees. But he knew he could not escape unless the Lord helped him, for the City in which he was held captive was guarded by a Black Giant. So he prayed every day and waited on the Lord.

At last one day an Angel appeared to him and said:

"Arise, Joel, and cease thy mourning. The Lord will deliver thee from bondage and sorrow."

Then Joel said, "I pray you, Sir, take me with you from this wicked City."

"No," said the Angel, "You must go alone. The Lord will be your guard."

But Joel wept and said, "Sir, I cannot go alone. There are Robbers without the City who will set upon me and slay me!"

"Fear not," replied the Angel, "ten thousand devils cannot prevail against the Lord."

Then the Angel took from beneath his robe a breastplate of gold, and putting back Joel's robe he buckled it across his breast. And Joel looked down at the gold breast-plate which was upon his breast and saw that it was shaped like a Heart. And he marveled at the beauty of the Golden Heart.

"The Lord be with thee, Joel," the Angel said. "Dread not the Robbers; when God blows they fly like chaff."

So saying, the Angel departed.

Then Joel arose and went out to the gate of the City; he opened it, and no one stayed his hand. Quickly he left the City, and, walking down a stony path, he came to a grey bridge which stretched over a chasm.

And as Joel crossed the bridge he dared not look over the parapet into the chasm beneath, for he knew that there below was fire and brimstone. When he reached the other side he saw guarding the bridge a great Black Giant. The Giant barred the way and would not let Joel pass.

Then Joel bethought him of his Golden Heart which the Angel had given him. And he drew back his robe and the Giant saw the Golden Heart. And when the Giant saw that sign upon Joel's breast, he uttered a loud cry and rushed down into the chasm, and was seen no more.

Then Joel quickly departed from that place, and followed the road that led through a Forest. The Forest was peopled with evil spirits and beasts, but Joel was not afraid because of the Golden Heart.

When he left the Forest he came to a place more terrible than the City or the Forest. It was the abode of Thieves and Robbers. The ground was stony, and on every side were caves whose deeps were shrouded in darkness. Birds of night and bats flew about uttering strange cries, and the face of the sun was covered so that it shone not.

Then Joel trembled, for there came forth from one of the caves a band of Robbers. They surrounded him to slay him.

The leader of the Robbers approached Joel; he was terrible to see. His face was covered with black hairs, his eyes were like burning coals, and he had large teeth. He took hold of Joel to slay him, and roughly pulled aside his outer garment. And lo, there was the Golden Heart glistening upon Joel's breast! The Robber uttered a piercing cry, and said to his companions:

"Beware, the Golden Heart!"

Then he fled, and they all followed him, running into their caves like rats into their holes, and crying for mercy.

And when Joel saw that the Robbers were fled, he fell upon his knees in the mire of the road, and, lifting his face toward Heaven, prayed to the Lord. And all fear and sorrow departed from him. Then he arose and saw before him a straight path leading upward that he had not seen before.

He followed it, and it led him through gardens and vineyards where birds sing and bees gather honey. The sun now shone in the heavens, and Joel saw in the distance the beautiful City of Palm Trees. This was the City he had longed to live in when he was held captive by the wicked.

He came to the gate of that Heavenly City. It was opened to him, and he entered and dwelt there forever.

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**Author's Preface:** "It is a wonderful thing for children to feel the beauty of the unseen, for them to see, however vaguely, that the spiritual world is more real and more interesting than the material world.... Very young children live in their imaginations. They are delighted to believe in a Heavenly Father who cares for all, and in Guardian Angels whom He sends to watch over his children.... [These] stories are offered to the children in the hope that they will strengthen this innocent faith...."

**Author's Note on "The Golden Heart":** "The idea of the Golden Heart as a protection from the evil was suggested by the following, from number 4732 of *Spiritual Experiences*: good spirits "have given them a breast-plate which is, as it were, a larger form of heart made of gold. When the evil or robbers meet them, and they draw aside their garments and show the golden heart, the robbers dare not do anything. Those who confess the Lord are given a breast-plate of gold." The name Joel was chosen for its meaning, the Lord is God, for only those who confess the Lord can wear the golden heart. The seven angels of the Apocalypse having their breasts girded with golden girdles will be recalled."

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