

Children's Stories

from



Vol. II

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from

The
Village
Shepherd

Vol. II

Janice B. Scott

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CHILDREN'S STORIES FROM THE VILLAGE SHEPHERD, VOLUME II

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To Claire

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Foreword

This second volume of short stories from *The Village Shepherd* is based on year C (the third year of the three-year cycle) of the Revised Common Lectionary, that is, the Bible readings selected for Sundays and used worldwide by mainstream Christian churches.

Each story is based on the gospel reading set for the Sunday. All the stories are suitable for use in church, although this collection is titled “Children’s Stories,” the stories can be enjoyed at a different level by adults.

Some familiar characters from Volume 1, like Praxis, the naughty pixie whose skin changes colour according to his moods, have marched into Volume 2 demanding to be heard. Other characters, like Roly the cuddly puppy, tentatively poke their heads around the door for the first time in this volume. Like the first volume, some of the stories are humorous, some have sadness within them, and some are full of joy. There are stories about success and failure, about bullying and hurt, about love and anger, joy and despondency, but above all, every story relates in some way to God and God’s deep, unconditional love for each one of us.

That said the stories are not very religious but are earthed in real life, even though that life — like that of fairies and pixies, gnomes and goblins — may be imaginary. The theme is usually obvious but the way the story relates to the Bible passage may be less obvious and occasionally may require some digging on the part of the reader.

A few of the stories are not original but are retellings of ancient legends because these stories contain deep truths that have already been beautifully expressed. “The Parable of Bamboo” is one such legend, providing a wonderful means of understanding the Easter story, and the two Christmas stories, “The Spider’s Web” and “The Christmas Thorn of Glastonbury” are well known and well loved tales. “Oscar’s Courage” is a simplified version of the story of Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of El Salvador who was martyred for his stand on behalf of the poor.

Most of these stories are suitable for primary age children upward, but one or two — such as “Oscar’s Courage” and “The Big City” — are perhaps more suitable for older children or teenagers.

As we move further away in time from the first century, so the gap between those who choose to attend church and those who do not is widening until it is not far short of an abyss. I believe we need to urgently find ways to bridge this abyss, so the aim of this little volume is to present the good news of Jesus Christ in a way that can be heard and understood by this present generation. It has been my experience that a life including God is a life full of fun, love, and enjoyment, even though things may not always go entirely smoothly. Even in the bad times when I cling onto faith by my fingertips, I am aware that God’s strong arms are holding me and that the fun and happiness are not so far away. It is my profound hope that all readers of this volume may experience that for themselves.

Roly Interprets the Signs

Luke 21:25-36

This is a difficult reading for adults, never mind children! So today's story is a simple story about Roly, an abandoned puppy who interprets various signs as meaning he is about to enjoy a very special day indeed.

Roly lay on the stone floor with his head on his paws. He wondered how much longer it was until it was time for food. Feeding time was the best time in the whole day, because then the humans came and rubbed his head and spoke to him and made a fuss of him.

Roly had lived in the Dogs' Home all his short life. He had a vague memory of a warm mother dog, against whom he used to snuggle with some other tiny puppies. But his next memory was of being pulled out of a river in a dripping, wet sack. Then he had arrived at the Dogs' Home where he had lived ever since.

The Dogs' Home people had called him Roly because of his long, round body and his tiny legs. He quite liked it in the Dogs' Home, because there were lots of other dogs of all different shapes and sizes, and it was good to be in company. And the humans were kind to him. But there were so many dogs to look after, that Roly often felt lonely and bored.

But today was different. Today Roly had woken with a feeling of anticipation, as though something special was going to happen. The humans who fed him in the early morning had seemed a bit happier than usual, although Roly had no idea why.

"Today's the day for one of you," one of the humans had remarked. "I wonder whose lucky day it is today?" And although he didn't know what that meant, Roly hoped and hoped it would be his lucky day.

Soon there was a great commotion in the Dogs' Home. All the different dogs were getting very excited, and Roly soon found himself

jumping up and down as high as his little legs would carry him and yapping and barking at the top of his voice. He wasn't sure why he was acting in this way, but he certainly was aware of great excitement in the air.

After a while, the door to the kennels opened and some strange humans came in. Some were normal sized humans, but three of them were very small humans with high voices. Roly liked the look of the little humans, and he began to bark more urgently and started to chase his tail just to capture their attention.

The little girl came and knelt at his cage. "Oh look!" she cried to her brothers. "This is a dear little dachshund. Do let's have him!"

Roly wasn't sure what she meant, but he was sure that she was a kind child, and he knew that he wanted desperately to stay with her. He sat in front of her with his head on one side and gazed beseechingly into her eyes. Then he gently began to lick her hand through the wires of the cage.

The two boys came over to join their sister, but Roly instinctively felt they would be more interested in a robust display of gymnastics. So he began to jump and turn and race around his cage.

"I really wanted a bigger dog," one of the boys said.

Roly immediately felt very anxious. He was the smallest dog in the Dogs' Home, and he knew he couldn't compete with Labradors and Retrievers, Boxers and Bulldogs.

The girl turned to her parents. "*Please,*" she said putting her hand into her father's and gazing into his eyes just as Roly had gazed into hers.

Roly wondered whether he had interpreted the signs right. Was this a special day for him? Or had he got it wrong? Perhaps it was a special day for some other dog. He lay down again and put his head on his paws, but he kept one eye on the little family.

The girl's mother said, "He does look awfully well behaved. And they say all the dogs are house-trained. Let's take him!"

And Roly knew that the signs were right and he was about to begin a new life.

Roly Makes a Straight Path

Luke 3:1-6

This is a story designed to relate the “making of a straight path” to everyday life. Lots of situations are bewildering and frightening for children, but salvation comes in unexpected ways. In this story, Roly the puppy “makes the path straight” for Alice because he can instinctively follow a scent.

Roly lay down with his head on his paws and felt lonely. But he wasn't lonely for long, for lots of people came to the entrance to the maze and petted him and patted him and stroked him and spoke to him. Roly perked up and wondered for the hundredth time what went on in a maze. Still, the family had told him very firmly to stay at the entrance in case he got lost in the maze, or worse, because he was so small, tripped people up by darting between their legs.

But suddenly, Roly pricked up his ears. He had heard a faint sob, and he knew immediately it was Alice. Before he had time to think he was off, racing into the maze, squeezing through small gaps at the bottom of the maze hedges and following Alice's scent. He found her very quickly and snuggled up to her, licking her hand to tell her how much he loved her.

Her brothers had run off laughing, leaving Alice somewhere in the maze all by herself. Alice had no idea which way to turn. At first she had tried to find her way to the centre of the maze, but she kept coming back to the same place and could neither find her way to the centre nor out again. Hence the tears, for it's very frightening when all you can see are tall hedges on either side and you can't find your way when you're all alone.

But it wasn't frightening for Roly. Dachshunds used to be hunting dogs, and although Roly had never hunted in his entire life, he had been born with the right instincts. He set off at a dash, wriggling under hedges and scraping through tiny spaces, with Alice close behind. As the

smallest and youngest of the three children, Alice was still small enough to wriggle through any holes in the maze hedges.

They didn't follow the conventional route of the pathways to the centre of the maze, but they reached the centre by a much more direct route and were waiting when the boys eventually managed to find their way there.

The boys were stunned. They had expected to pick up their little sister on the return journey, for they had been quite sure she would never find her way by herself. Unnoticed, Roly slipped quietly back to the entrance. And Alice never did tell her brothers how she had found her way to the centre of the maze.

Roly Shows the Way

Luke 3:7-18

At times we all behave badly and often don't realise until later what harm our behaviour has done. John the Baptist exhorted people to follow the true way, the way of Jesus. In this story, Roly the puppy shows the three children the right way to behave.

The three children were racing through the woods, and Roly was keeping up as best he could with his short legs. He was a reluctant participant in this escapade, for even though he loved nothing better than the woods, he had an inkling of what the children were about.

There was a battered old caravan standing in a glade deep in the woods. The children had come across it one day and had amused themselves peering in the gloomy windows and scrawling rude words on the dirty paintwork.

When the owner of the caravan, a derelict old man complete with long, unkempt beard, had suddenly materialised from the woods shouting and brandishing his fist at them, the children had run away laughing.

Since then, they had discovered the old man to be a constant source of amusement. So at every opportunity they raced to the woods to plague the old man. All three of them had high voices that carried well and irritated the old man beyond endurance. But the children were quick and nimble on their feet, so there was never any danger of the old man catching them.

It was only Roly the puppy who seemed to feel uneasy about the children's pranks. Having experienced ill treatment himself in his youngest days, Roly disliked being part of anything that might hurt or upset another creature, even when it was just fun. So today his heart was a little heavy even as he flew after the children as fast as he could.

But today the children were doomed to disappointment. The caravan appeared to be deserted for the old man was nowhere to be seen. No matter how much the children danced around singing silly songs and shouting rude remarks, nothing happened.

“Come on,” said Jem, the oldest. “We might as well go home. There’s no fun here today, the daft old fool’s not around.”

The other two turned to follow him, but Roly’s sharp ears picked up a faint murmur unheard by the children. He began to bark, urgently.

“Oh do come on, Roly,” called Jem. “We don’t want to wait around here for you.”

But Roly ran up to the door of the caravan and began to scratch at it with his sharp little claws. He whined and barked and yapped, anxious for the children to come and see what he was about.

Alice turned back. “I think he wants us to go to the caravan,” she said.

“Don’t be stupid, Alice,” growled Jem. “He’s only a silly puppy. What does he know?”

But Alice had already run over to Roly at the caravan. As Roly anxiously pawed at the door, she grasped the handle and turned it. The children had never been inside the caravan before, so it was a shock to Alice to see the state of the van. It was dingy inside, but as Alice’s eyes grew accustomed to the dim light she could see that the van was piled high with old newspapers, dirty washing, and unwashed crocks.

She called her brothers over, and together they entered the van. Then they all heard a faint groan. Underneath a pile of rags on the bed, was the old man. He was only semi-conscious.

“What shall we do?” asked Alice, suddenly frightened.

Jem took charge. “One of us must stay here and do the best we can for him, poor old fellow. The other two must run for help.”

Alice was terrified, for the old man looked as though he might die at any moment. But she knew both her brothers were much faster runners than she was, so she would have to stay while they went for help. Almost asked if he knew what she was thinking, Roly jumped up and licked her hand.

Alice immediately felt better. While they were waiting for the boys to return with adult help, Roly jumped onto the old man’s bed, and began to lick his face. After a while, the old man’s eyes flickered and opened. When he spotted Alice he groaned and closed his eyes again. Alice felt deeply ashamed of her previous behaviour. But she quickly poured some water into a bowl, found an old cloth, and began to wash the old man’s face.

His eyes flickered open again, and this time he looked astonished.

“I’m sorry we were so nasty to you,” muttered Alice, her lip trembling. “We didn’t know you were ill. My brothers have gone to fetch help. You’ll soon be all right.”

The old man was taken to hospital, where he made a complete recovery. While he was in hospital the three children set about cleaning up his caravan and restoring order inside it. They were all very ashamed of the way they had behaved and wanted to make amends.

“Roly showed us the way,” remarked Alice. “I don’t think Roly was ever very happy about the way we teased the old man. And if it hadn’t been for Roly, the old man would have died.”

After the old man came out of hospital the children got to know him really well. They discovered that they liked him a lot, and even more surprising, he liked them. When they tentatively told him how sorry they were for teasing him so mercilessly, he just smiled and said, “I was young once myself. And I reckon you saved my life, thanks to that puppy of yours, so now we’re quits. But you keep on the straight path, you kids. Believe me, that’s the only path to be on. Follow that all your lives, and you won’t go far wrong.”

And the children did just what he said.

Roly's First Christmas

Luke 1:39-45

This is the final story in the group of four Advent stories about Roly the puppy. In this story, Roly discovers the meaning of Christmas for himself.

Roly the dachshund puppy was feeling rather bewildered. He had just been getting used to his new family when something called "Christmas" seemed to be arriving. It was very upsetting, for the children were over-excited which meant there were lots of quarrels and bickering.

Roly didn't know why they were so excited, but he had a feeling something special was about to happen. The last time he'd had this feeling was when the family had found him in the Dogs' Home and had brought him here, to this new home. Roly hoped the feeling didn't mean he was going to have to move on again. But he felt a little uneasy and rather frightened, so he hid under the table whenever he heard raised voices.

One day, the family brought a tree into the house. Roly couldn't believe his eyes. Everyone, even small puppies, knew that trees belonged outside! Why on earth should the family bring a tree indoors? It was even stranger when the family began to decorate the tree. The boys, who were taller than Alice, put a little angel on the top of the tree, and draped the tree with brightly coloured lights. Alice hung glass baubles and tiny ornaments on all the branches she could reach. Then the children adorned the tree with tinsel from top to bottom.

Even Roly could see how grand the tree looked. Later, brightly wrapped packages and parcels of all shapes and sizes appeared at the foot of the tree. Roly sniffed and snuffled and explored with his nose, but was immediately shouted at by the family. He wasn't sure what he'd done wrong, but he realised the packages weren't for him so he retired under the table again.

Roly wasn't sure he liked Christmas very much. He wished everything would return to normal, when he could play with the children and trees lived outside the house where they belonged.

But when Christmas Day dawned, Roly discovered his food bowl was filled with all sorts of enticing things to eat. He began to think perhaps Christmas wasn't so bad after all. And when at lunchtime his bowl was refilled with something called "turkey," he gradually began to enjoy himself.

After lunch the family began to open all the parcels underneath the Christmas tree. Roly was afraid he might be shouted at again, so he hid beneath the table. But then he heard Alice calling him, so he ventured out onto the rug in front of the fire. Alice placed one of the parcels in front of him.

Roly looked up at her enquiringly, unsure what he was supposed to do.

"Come on, Roly," said Alice encouragingly. "This one is yours. It's my Christmas present to you, so you can open this one."

Roly put his head on one side. He wasn't entirely sure what she had said, but her voice sounded really kind so he began to tentatively snuffle at the parcel. When this didn't produce any shouts, he began to tear at the coloured paper with his teeth. Inside the parcel were some Doggy chews, some Doggy chocolate drops, a rubber toy that squeaked when he held it with his teeth, and a huge rubber bone. Roly was so excited that he began to play all over the room with his rubber toy, while the family laughed and cheered him on.

When he was tired out, Roly lay down on the rug in front of the fire and Alice came and lay beside him. Roly snuggled up to Alice, who put her arm around him. Roly felt completely, ecstatically happy. He couldn't remember ever having been so happy before. And suddenly he realised what Christmas was all about.

It was all about love, the love he felt in this family even if they occasionally shouted at him. And especially the love he felt from Alice and the love he felt for Alice. And as he fell asleep at the end of his first Christmas Day, Roly knew that for a puppy like him, the most important thing in the whole world was love.