

# EASTER STORIES

❧ *Classic Tales for the Holy Season* ❧



C. S. Lewis • Leo Tolstoy • Oscar Wilde • Elizabeth Goudge  
Selma Lagerlöf • Anton Chekhov • Alan Paton • and others

# *Easter Stories*



# EASTER STORIES

*Classic Tales for the Holy Season*



*Compiled by Miriam LeBlanc*  
*Woodcuts by Lisa Toth*



PLOUGH PUBLISHING HOUSE

This is a preview. Get entire book here.

Published by Plough Publishing House  
Walden, New York  
Robertsbridge, England  
Elsmore, Australia  
www.plough.com

Copyright © 2015 by Plough Publishing House  
All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-0-87486-598-1  
21 20 19 18 17 16 15 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Illustrations by Lisa Toth.

Cover image by Rebecca Vincent, © Rebecca Vincent. Used by permission.

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.  
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Easter stories : classic tales for the holy season / compiled by Miriam  
LeBlanc ; woodcuts by Lisa Toth.

pages cm

ISBN 978-0-87486-598-1 (pbk.)

1. Easter--Literary collections I. LeBlanc, Miriam, compiler. II. Toth,  
Lisa illustrator.

PN6071.E2E3 2015

808.8'0334--dc 3

2014040600

Printed in the United States of America

This is a preview. Get entire book here.

## Carol of Hope

*Jane Tyson Clement*

The lambs leap in the meadow,  
The larks leap in the sky,  
and all the bells of heaven ring  
because our Lord rides by.

The sun lies golden on the bank,  
warmth wakens in the deepest root;  
like golden stars the celandine  
now opens to the day;  
the sherds of winter blow away  
and buds break unconfined.

Stars of the heart, now open wide!  
All frozen roots that once had died,  
rise again, oh rise!

The lambs leap in the meadow,  
The larks leap in the sky,  
and all the bells of heaven ring  
because our Lord rides by.

# Contents

<b>The White Lily</b> . . . . .	I
<i>Jane Tyson Clement</i>	
<b>The Coming of the King</b> . . . . .	9
<i>Laura E. Richards</i>	
<b>How Donkeys Got the Spirit of Contradiction</b> . . . . .	13
<i>André Trocmé</i>	
<b>The Church of the Washing of the Feet</b> . . . . .	27
<i>Alan Paton</i>	
<b>Stories from the Cotton Patch Gospel</b> . . . . .	41
<i>Clarence Jordan</i>	
<b>Saint Veronica's Kerchief</b> . . . . .	55
<i>Selma Lagerlöf</i>	
<b>The Way to the Cross</b> . . . . .	107
<i>Lew Wallace</i>	
<b>Robin Redbreast</b> . . . . .	129
<i>Selma Lagerlöf</i>	
<b>The Atonement</b> . . . . .	139
<i>Ludwig von Gerdtell</i>	
<b>The Flaming Heart of Danko</b> . . . . .	145
<i>Maxim Gorkey</i>	
<b>John</b> . . . . .	157
<i>Elizabeth Goudge</i>	
<b>The Legend of Christophorus</b> . . . . .	171
<i>Hans Thoma</i>	
<b>Robert of Sicily</b> . . . . .	179
<i>Sara Cone Bryant</i>	

<b>Two Old Men</b> . . . . .	187
<i>Leo Tolstoy</i>	
<b>The Golden Egg</b> . . . . .	219
<i>Ivy Bolton</i>	
<b>The Case of Rachoff</b> . . . . .	231
<i>Karl Josef Friedrich</i>	
<b>The Deserted Mine</b> . . . . .	267
<i>Ruth Sawyer</i>	
<b>The Student</b> . . . . .	277
<i>Anton Chekhov</i>	
<b>A Dust Rag for Easter Eggs</b> . . . . .	285
<i>Claire Huchet Bishop</i>	
<b>The Barge-Master's Easter</b> . . . . .	301
<i>J. W. Ooms</i>	
<b>The Ragman</b> . . . . .	313
<i>Walter Wangerin Jr.</i>	
<b>Easter Under a Park Bench</b> . . . . .	319
<i>Kirk Wareham</i>	
<b>The Death of the Lizard</b> . . . . .	329
<i>C. S. Lewis</i>	
<b>Mary's Child</b> . . . . .	339
<i>The Brothers Grimm</i>	
<b>The King and Death</b> . . . . .	347
<i>Ger Koopman</i>	
<b>The Selfish Giant</b> . . . . .	359
<i>Oscar Wilde</i>	
<b>From The Everlasting Mercy</b> . . . . .	367
<i>John Masefield</i>	
<b>Sources</b> . . . . .	373



This is a preview. Get entire book here.



# The White Lily

*Jane Tyson Clement*

*Adapted from Frances Jenkins Olcott*



ONCE LONG AGO, near a village far away, there lived an old peasant known as Ivan. He had a little hut, a small garden, a dog named Rubles, and a six-year-old nephew, Peter, who was an orphan. Ivan was not a bad man, as he did not murder, did not steal, told no lies, and did not meddle in other people's business. But on the other hand he couldn't be called a good man either. He was cross and dirty. He seldom spoke, and then only grudgingly and unpleasantly. He paid no attention to his neighbors, never showed them kindness, and refused any small courtesy or friendliness they offered him. Eventually they paid no attention to him either and let him go his own way. As for Rubles the dog, he was afraid of his master and never went near him. He would follow him at a distance to the village and back, would bark at all strangers as watchdogs should do, and he would drive off the foxes that tried to molest the hens. So Ivan kept the dog and left scraps for him, but never stroked or praised him.

Peter was a silent little boy, since he was never spoken to except in anger. He had no friends, for the village children feared his uncle too much to come near him, and Peter was too shy to speak to anyone. So he ran wild in the woods and made up his own lonely games. He feared his uncle Ivan, who had never beaten him hard but had laid a stick to him now and then, and who spoke to him so fiercely that Peter was quite cowed and frightened.

All this was bad enough, but added to it was filth and ugliness. The little cottage was brown and bleak, the windows (there were two quite nice ones) grimy and stained, the wooden rafters sooty, and all the walls and corners full of cobwebs. On the floor were the scraps and leavings of many meals, and the mud dragged in from many rainy months. The hearth was black, the pots and kettles dingy, the big bed for Ivan and the trundle bed for Peter tumbled and unmade, the table littered and smeared, and the chairs half-broken. It was all a sorry sight, and no better outdoors, for the doorsill was tumble-down, weeds grew everywhere, the vegetables came up as best they might, and not a flower was to be seen.

The living things themselves were even worse. Rubles was thin and dirty and full of burrs. Poor Peter wore rags, his hair grew long and was tangled with straw from his bed, and he was so filthy one could scarcely see the boy beneath. As for Ivan, he was huge. His black hair and beard were unkempt, and he looked quite terrifying. His clothes were as black with age and no washings as his hair. He was so unpleasant to look at that all he met turned their heads away, wrinkled their noses, and passed him as quickly as possible.

## *The White Lily*

One bleak March day, when it seemed as if all had been waiting for spring for many weeks, Ivan had to go to the village to fetch some beans. As he trudged along the road, homeward bound again, in the distance he saw a man coming toward him. Ivan was ready as usual to pass him by without a glance, but when he drew nearer, out of the tail of his eye Ivan noticed he was a stranger, and in spite of himself Ivan looked full at him. Then he could not look away. The stranger was young, tall and spare, in rough peasant dress, with a shepherd's staff. On one arm he carried a sheaf of white lilies, like the day lilies that grew wild in the fields, only so fair and glowing that they dazzled the eye. Ivan stopped in his tracks, and with a smile the stranger stopped also. While Ivan stared, the stranger looked him over slowly, from his broken boots to his lined and dirty face. Then he spoke:

“Good day, friend.”

When there was only silence, with Ivan staring, the stranger spoke again.

“What is it you see?”

Ivan lifted his eyes then to the man's face. The light there was like the lilies, and he looked at them again.

“Those flowers . . . I never saw any so fair.”

“One of them is yours,” said the stranger.

“Mine?” said Ivan.

The stranger took one of them and offered it to Ivan, who with astonishment and unbelief exclaimed, “What do you want for it? I am a poor man.”

“I want nothing in return, only that you should keep the flower clean and pure.”

Ivan wiped his dirty hands on his coat and reached for the lily. His fingers closed around the stem, and he stood

in the road staring at it for a long while, not knowing what to do with the precious thing now that he had it. When he looked up at last, the stranger had passed into the distance again. Carefully Ivan carried the lily home.

Once inside the door he stood doubtfully in the middle of the floor, looking all around at the filth and disorder and not knowing where to put the white shining lily. Peter had been sitting dejectedly by the dead fire, but now he stood up slowly, gazing at his uncle in amazement. At last he found his voice and said to him, "Where did you find it?"

And in a hushed tone Ivan answered, "A stranger gave it to me, for nothing, and told me only to keep it clean and pure. . . . What am I to do with it?"

In an eager voice Peter answered, "We must find something to hold it! On that high shelf you put an empty wine bottle last Easter. That would do."

"Then you must hold it while I fetch the bottle down. But your hands are too dirty! Draw water from the well and wash first!"

This Peter rushed to do, coming back at last with clean hands. Ivan carefully gave him the flower, but cried out when Peter put it to his face to smell it. "Wait! Your face is too dirty!" Ivan seized a rag and rushed outside to the well, where he drew a bucket of water and washed the rag first, and then came in and awkwardly scrubbed Peter's face. When he was through he stepped back, unbelieving, as the boy with care smelled the white flower. He thought he had never seen that boy before. Then he remembered the bottle and clambered up to get it. But it was dirty, too, and clogged with cobwebs. So out to the well it went, and came in clean and shining, filled with clear water. He set the lily in it and placed it on the window sill. Then they

## *The White Lily*

both looked at it. Its glow lit the dim and dingy room, and as they looked at it a wonder rose in Ivan at all the filth around him. "This fair lily cannot live in such a place!" he said aloud. "I must clean it."

"Can I help?" asked Peter.

It was a hard task and took more than one day. Windows were washed, walls and floors swept and scrubbed, pots and kettles scoured, and chairs mended. The table was washed, the beds aired and beaten and put in order, and the hearth polished till the long-neglected tiles gleamed in the firelight and the pots and kettles winked back. The unaccustomed daylight flooded in the windows and the dark rafters shone in the shadows. All the while the lily glowed on the window sill. When they were done, they looked about them in wonder and pleasure that the little house could be so fair. And then they saw each other.

"We don't belong in a house like this!" said Ivan. "Next we scrub ourselves."

By now he and the boy were friends, having worked so well together. So they scrubbed themselves, and Ivan went to the village to buy decent clothes for them both. He noticed Rubles following him at a distance. When he came home he thought to himself, "That dog is a sight, dirty and full of burrs. He doesn't belong to this house. He must be cleaned." But when he went to get him, the dog slunk away out of reach and feared to come to him. Ivan put gentleness into his tone, but it took nearly a day to win the dog, until with Peter's help he could brush him and wash him. After soft words and a good supper, Rubles no longer cowered and whined, but gazed at Ivan with a wondering love in his eyes, and beat his tail on the floor, and licked Ivan's hand. And Ivan felt a strange glow in his heart.

So all was well within. But without? What of the broken sill and the brown tumbled garden thick with last year's weeds? "A house like this cannot live in a garden like that," said Ivan in a cheerful voice. "We must clean it up." So they went to work, while Rubles sat on his haunches to look at them. And a neighbor passing by stopped to watch, perplexed and astounded and scarcely recognizing the two who worked.

"What are you staring at, neighbor?" called Ivan. "Come in to see our lily. But first go fetch your good wife."

And this the neighbor did, in haste and astonishment, eager to be friendly at last to the old man and his little boy.

For seven days the lily glowed and gleamed on the windowsill, and all the life around it was transformed. Then on the seventh day it vanished. There was no trace of it to be found, though Ivan and Peter searched for it everywhere. But when Ivan looked at Peter's face he thought, "The lily glows there still." When they saw the clean pure house, and spoke with love to each other, and greeted their neighbors, and tended the growing things in the new garden, each thought to himself, "The lily still lives, though we see it no longer."



This is a preview. Get entire book here.

# The Coming of the King

*Laura E. Richards*



SOME CHILDREN were at play in their playground one day, when a herald rode through the town, blowing a trumpet and crying aloud, “The king! The king passes by this road today. Make ready for the king!”

The children stopped their play and looked at one another. “Did you hear that?” they said. “The king is coming. He may look over the wall and see our playground; who knows? We must put it in order.”

The playground was sadly dirty, and in the corners were scraps of paper and broken toys, for these were careless children. But now, one brought a hoe, and another a rake, and a third ran to fetch the wheelbarrow from behind the garden gate. They labored hard till at length all was clean and tidy.

“Now it is clean!” they said. “But we must make it pretty, too, for kings are used to fine things; maybe he would not notice mere cleanness, for he may have it all the time.”

Then one brought sweet rushes and strewed them on the ground; others made garlands of oak leaves and pine



tassels and hung them on the walls; and the littlest one pulled marigold buds and threw them all about the playground, "to look like gold," he said.

When all was done, the playground was so beautiful that the children stood and looked at it and clapped their hands with pleasure.

"Let us keep it always like this!" said the littlest one; and the others cried, "Yes! Yes! That is what we will do."

They waited all day for the coming of the king, but he never came; only towards sunset a man, with travel-worn clothes and a kind, tired face, passed along the road and stopped to look over the wall.

"What a pleasant place!" said the man. "May I come in and rest, dear children?"

The children brought him in gladly and set him on the seat that they had made out of an old cask. They had covered it with the old red cloak to make it look like a throne, and it made a very good one.

"It is our playground!" they said. "We made it pretty for the king, but he did not come, and now we mean to keep it so for ourselves."

"That is good!" said the man.

"Because we think pretty and clean is nicer than ugly and dirty!" said another.

"That is better!" said the man.

"And for tired people to rest in!" said the littlest one.

"That is best of all!" said the man.

He sat and rested, and looked at the children with such kind eyes that they came about him and told him all they knew – about the five puppies in the barn, and the thrush's nest with four blue eggs, and the shore where the gold shells grew; and the man nodded and understood all about it.

## *The Coming of the King*

By and by he asked for a cup of water, and they brought it to him in the best cup, with the gold sprigs on it. Then he thanked the children and rose and went on his way; but before he went he laid his hand on their heads for a moment, and the touch went warm to their hearts.

The children stood by the wall and watched the man as he went slowly along. The sun was setting, and the light fell in long slanting rays across the road.

“He looks so tired!” said one of the children.

“But he was so kind!” said another.

“See!” said the littlest one. “How the sun shines on his hair! It looks like a crown of gold.”



This is a preview. Get entire book here.

# How Donkeys Got the Spirit of Contradiction

*André Trocmé*

*Translated by Nellie Trocmé Hewett*



*On a Christmas Day during World War II in Nazi-occupied France, Pastor André Trocmé gathered his congregation together in the Protestant church in the small mountain village of Le Chambon. The people of the area had formed an underground network for saving refugees, many of them Jewish children. Fear kept them from talking much to each other – none of them knew which of their neighbors might betray them to the German occupiers. The rescuers of Le Chambon knew that they might face concentration camp or worse if found out.*

*Wishing to strengthen his congregation in their resolve to do what is right, Pastor Trocmé told them stories about Jesus' life. Later collected into a book, these original, child-like stories testify to the power of faith to enable ordinary people to risk their lives for strangers.*

A Story about Saving Children,  
and the Courage It Takes to Go against  
Social Conventions and Expectations

UNTIL THE BIRTH OF JESUS, donkeys were like anyone else; that is, just like human beings. I mean just like grown-up human beings, not like children. Children have always had the Spirit of Contradiction. But donkeys used to be docile, just like grown-ups today.

Here is how things changed.

In Bethlehem at the entrance of the town lived a Samaritan. He was a good man. He tried as much as possible to help people forget he was a Samaritan. He thought, spoke, and dressed just like anyone else. He was a conformist.

Everyone respects social conventions. Each of us likes to welcome our guests into clean, well decorated homes. Our Samaritan, who was single and whose house was in disarray, preferred to receive no one. There was one exception – if his best friend warned him way ahead of time, he would allow him to come into his house.

Everyone belongs to a clique. We trust the members of our families and our intimate friends. We like to do them favors. But of strangers, everyone has distrust. We don't know whom we are dealing with.

So thought our Samaritan also.

Everyone is scared of traveling alone in deserted areas in the evening, when roads are especially dangerous. One hears so many terrible reports, so many stories about bandits! Our Samaritan, who was a peddler by trade, was always on the road. But just like everyone, he had common sense and managed not to be delayed.

## *How Donkeys Got the Spirit of Contradiction*

So, our Samaritan was almost like everyone. He did own a donkey, and not everyone could boast about owning such a donkey.

Why the big fuss, you will say, about owning a donkey?

Well, first of all, this donkey was indispensable. It was used as a truck, since in those days trucks had four legs instead of four wheels as they do today. The donkey carried heavy merchandise for the Samaritan. It carried the Samaritan's whole wealth.

Second, this donkey was a female, a very important fact for the rest of the story.

Third, one reason the Samaritan was so original was that his donkey was not like everyone. It had the Spirit of Contradiction.

Was the donkey, this female donkey, a descendant of Balaam's female donkey in the Old Testament? (Read the Book of Numbers, chapter 22, in the Bible.) Maybe. In any case, while other donkeys obeyed, this donkey was a thinking donkey, and its thoughts resulted in the most unexpected, the strangest, consequences.

Sometimes in the middle of the road the donkey came to a dead stop, smelling something with its grey muzzle. It resisted so firmly that neither blows nor shouts could force it to walk any further.

Oftentimes the donkey did just the opposite. It took off at a trot, its nostrils open to the wind, and nothing could stop it, neither the calls nor the angry objections of its master. Had a special smell or a light on the horizon attracted it? Then the donkey would come back much later, having satisfied its taste for adventure.

Everyone felt sorry for the poor Samaritan for owning such a donkey. He who wanted desperately to look like everyone else, suffered severely to stand out so noticeably.

Ridiculous confrontations occurred so often between him and his donkey that in faraway villages he was simply known as “the man with the donkey.” People talked endlessly about his adventures.

But the most humiliating factor was that when the donkey opposed him and everyone else, the stupid animal ended up being right.

### How the Donkey Revolted against the Rules of Social Conventions

**V**ERY LATE ONE EVENING, a man and a woman came to the door of the Samaritan. It was on the eve of the census ordered by the Governor Quirinius.

“Can’t you take us in?” they asked. “We come from far away and are very tired.”

“Impossible,” growled the Samaritan, thinking of his messy room. “Go elsewhere. There are hotels, and there are rich people with better lodging than I have.”

“We just came from the village,” answered the travelers, “and we knocked on every door. Everything is full. Wouldn’t you have a place in your barn? We could sleep on the hay.”

“I don’t have a barn. I keep my hay in haystacks. I have only a stable.”

“Oh! Put us in the stable,” begged the woman. “I can’t take one more step!”

## *How Donkeys Got the Spirit of Contradiction*

“It is too little. Both of you would not fit in it,” mumbled the peddler, lighting a torch to prove his point.

The stable was indeed very small and quite miserable. There was just enough room for the donkey that turned its head and stared at the flickering light of the torch with its big eyeballs.

“You see,” said the owner, “it’s impossible.”

“If you only put a bale of straw under the manger, we could manage,” suggested the woman.

Giving in to her persistence rather than to pity, the Samaritan accepted her idea. He untied the donkey to make it go out. For once, it would spend the night under the stars.

But the animal decided otherwise and launched a most ridiculous scene of stubbornness. Well-planted on its four legs, eyes protruding, nostrils dilated, it refused to move.

The Samaritan was furious. One really shouldn’t let people sleep under the muzzle of an animal. It is not correct! He kept jerking hard on the halter, swearing at the stupid animal. But knowing its habits, he knew ahead of time that he would not make the donkey budge.

“Nothing doing,” he said after a while, shrugging his shoulders.

“Leave it there,” said Mary with a smile. “We’ll get along fine with it.”

They got along so well, in fact, that the donkey became the quiet and patient witness of the birth of Jesus.

Joseph put the newborn child in the manger, above Mary. This way the breath of the dozing animal kept the child warm. Its big body also kept the stable warm, so that the child and its mother didn’t suffer anymore from the cold.



When he opened the door the next morning, the bewildered Samaritan discovered that the two travelers of the previous evening had become three.

“It is lucky my donkey refused to get out,” said he to Joseph. “The frost was so deep last night that without her in the stable, the newborn child would certainly have died from the cold!”

“Once more,” he murmured on his way home, “it is the donkey who was right and not me.”

### How the Donkey Taught Its Master about Helping Strangers

TEN DAYS LATER, Mary was up and nearly back to her normal health. Joseph was thinking about returning to Nazareth when, during the night, he was divinely warned of the threat hanging over the child’s head. They must flee, he was told, before morning came; they must go to Egypt.

He woke Mary, but soon realized that she wasn’t yet strong enough to take such a long trip on foot.

Joseph knocked on the door of the Samaritan.

“Lend me your donkey for one month,” said he, “or for six weeks at the most. We must flee to Egypt and my wife is still weary.”

“Don’t even dream of it,” answered the Samaritan. “I need my donkey to make a living, and also – I don’t know you. How do I know you would bring it back?”

“I promise,” said Joseph. “You can count on me.”

“No way,” cut in the Samaritan. “Can I trust the word of a stranger? The answer is no!”

## *How Donkeys Got the Spirit of Contradiction*

Very worried, the new parents and their baby started out before dawn. Joseph walked ahead, making the trail. Mary followed, stumbling sometimes as she carried the child. But what was the galloping sound they heard from far away? Were Herod's soldiers pursuing them? Already?

No, it was the donkey, who soon caught up with them, sniffing them in the night with its wet muzzle. Possessed by one of its wild whims, the donkey had gnawed at its tie, escaped from the stable, and left on its night adventure.

Awakened by the noise, the Samaritan went out, calling his animal back but without success. "It followed those strangers," he exclaimed furiously. "Well, I have to resign myself to the loss. Ah, cursed be that animal! What will become of me without it to work?"

Six weeks later Herod had died, and the Samaritan looked up to see Joseph walking toward him. Mary sat on the donkey, holding the child.

"Your animal saved us," said Joseph. "Without it, my wife could not have gone very far. The king's soldiers would have discovered us and killed the child."

"I was wrong again," said the peddler to himself, full of gratefulness. "There are some honest people, even among strangers! One must learn to trust them. It is God's way."

## How the Donkey Taught Its Master Courage

SEVERAL YEARS WENT BY. Conflicts between the donkey and its master became less frequent. Not that the animal had become more reasonable; instead, its master had, little by little, fallen into the habit of obeying the donkey. Its lunacy seemed wiser than the man's good sense.

One evening, and contrary to his habit, the Samaritan was delayed between Jerusalem and Jericho. His trip almost turned into tragedy.

He had heard about a band of robbers operating in that area, demanding money from travelers – that is, if they didn't kill them outright.

It was nightfall. The Samaritan spurred his animal on, exciting it as much as possible. Often he thought he heard soft steps behind him.

Suddenly the animal started one of its caprices and refused to advance any further. First the peddler pulled on the bridle. Then, overtaken by fear, he turned nasty. He tore the flesh in the donkey's mouth by jerking the bit roughly. Nothing changed the donkey's mind.

Discouraged, he stopped and started thinking. He was thinking of fleeing, of abandoning the animal and its precious cargo, when in the silence he heard a moan. He was not superstitious, but the noise in the darkness filled him with terror. Once more he tried to drag the animal along, but with its muzzle on the ground it arched its back and obstinately dug its hooves into the ground.

The moaning became a long wail. The Samaritan thought he detected a call coming from a ravine below the road. He thought to himself, "What if the donkey is right once more?" Mastering his fear, he walked down among the boulders and found an injured man who would die if he got no help. Using oil and wine, he dressed the wounds of this unfortunate man, hoisted him up on his donkey, and immediately took him to the nearest inn. He watched over him through the night. Whenever he saw him weaken, he poured a cordial between his clenched teeth to give him strength.

## *How Donkeys Got the Spirit of Contradiction*

The next morning the wounded man felt better. Convinced that the donkey had shown him what God wanted, the Samaritan pulled out nearly all the cash he had, gave it to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him. If you spend more than that, I'll pay you on my way back."

Although the innkeeper had no donkey to advise him, he trusted the Samaritan.

## How the Donkey Found What It Was Looking For

**T**HIRTY YEARS WENT BY. The Samaritan had left Bethlehem and moved to Bethphage by the gates of Jerusalem. It was a better location for his business.

The donkey was still alive. Donkeys live long, sometimes for thirty-five years. But this one's legs had become shaky, and its flanks had lost their luster and their fullness. Yet it was still the same courageous animal, only a little less original. In its mysterious animal consciousness, it had always looked for something, expected something. That's why it had not been like everyone, docile like those who do not look for anything.

Now death was approaching and the donkey had not found what it was looking for, neither in the tufts of grass nor on the distant horizon.

The donkey found some compensation, however. She had given birth to a little donkey, a shaggy and petulant foal, of which she was most proud. The foal was already strong and would soon be ready to work. The mother donkey had begun dreaming something like this: "He'll be the one to find what I always looked for."

Old people console themselves with comforting thoughts, hoping their children will someday accomplish what they haven't done themselves. And those children, when they grow old, will nurture the same dream. So it is with each generation.

One day, the donkey and its foal were tethered in front of their master's dwelling in Bethphage. Two men appeared, put their hands on the bridles, and appeared to be about to take the animals away.

The Samaritan made a big racket. Flying out of his room, he yelled to the passersby, "Thief! Thief!"

"The Lord needs them," the two strangers kept repeating.

"The Lord? The Lord? And who is the Lord?" shouted the indignant peddler. "These animals are mine. And, who are you? I don't know you."

"We'll return them to you," said the two men, who did look honest. "You can count on us."

The Samaritan was about ready to end the discussion with his usual answer – "No, the answer is no!" – when a faint memory came back to him, of a man and woman and his refusal to lend them his donkey long ago. They were strangers, and everyone would have done the same. You can't trust anybody. But then the donkey had run away, and it had been right in the end.

"Pull the old donkey by the bridle," he told the men. "It doesn't know you. If it obeys you, well, then we'll see!"

The man who held the donkey pulled, and the docile animal followed him, while its little foal trotted alongside.

When they were a short distance away, the peddler shouted to the disciples, "Take it to your Lord! This animal is always right!"

## *How Donkeys Got the Spirit of Contradiction*

And without worrying anymore, he went into his house.

As the prophet predicted, it was at the Bethphage gate that Jesus saw the donkey and its foal coming toward him. (The story is in Matthew 21:1–9.) Along the roadside, he picked a bunch of fragrant grass and offered it to the old donkey.

The donkey smelled it longingly with its grey muzzle. This was exactly what it had always looked for. A hundred times through the years it had trotted on this very same path and had hastily grazed this kind of grass. But today the grass held a new fragrance and flavor.

In their confused minds, as you know, animals see God less clearly than we do. They see God through their masters. This time, from the hand of the true Master, the donkey received the nourishment it had always hoped to find.

Jesus straddled the young donkey “which had never before been ridden.” The crowd spread clothing under its steps, and the old donkey followed behind, trampling it with its hooves.

A multitude of disciples waved palm branches, crying out, “Blessed be the kingdom which is coming, the kingdom of David, our father!”

When the procession reached the slope of the Mount of Olives, the old donkey noticed the white wall of Jerusalem. Through the years the donkey had traveled this path countless times, setting its eyes on the spectacle with the indifference common to animals. But today, these brilliant walls shining on the horizon seemed to be the sides of a Stable which it had always dreamed about and looked for.

The donkey raised its head and walked ahead more bravely.

Yet there was even more for the animal than the satisfaction carried by the fragrant grass and the vision of the Stable. On that morning, the old donkey also experienced the noblest of joys. It found itself in the middle of a large crowd acclaiming a King. And it had become the servant of this Prince who, it believed, was truly noble and truly good.

The old donkey's soul felt overwhelmed with joy. True, the Creator had assigned the animal to the humblest of duties; but it saw its little donkey assigned to a place of honor. Until death came, the old donkey would happily remain in last place, following the steps of its own offspring.

So why do you think donkeys have the Spirit of Contradiction? Because the young donkey inherited his mother's temperament. Later on, he married and had lots of children.

