



SIMON'S HOLIDAY

The school holidays had started.

The weather was excellent and promised to be good for the next few weeks.

Simon, who was going to be twelve, next month, had an uncle and aunty who lived on a farm about 300 kilometers from his place.

You can imagine how pleased Simon was when one day last week the postman delivered an invitation to stay with his uncle and aunty on the farm.

The following Monday he was going to leave already and his Dad and Mum wanted him to come back on Saturday. He was very excited about staying on the farm. He had heard from his Dad and Mum how much fun you could have there. Also his uncle and aunty were very friendly people.



On that Monday the bus was going to leave at 9 o'clock in the morning.

His mum had dropped him off at the bus terminal and the bus driver put his case and sleeping bag in the luggage compartment. Simon kissed his mother good bye and was

lucky to find a good seat near the window. His mother stood on the footpath waving to him.

But just as the bus was about to leave a middle aged man came running down the footpath on the opposite side of the road. He was nearly run over as he crossed the busy street. He raced up to the ticket office, quickly bought a ticket and jumped onto the bus.

He was totally out of breath and seemed quite agitated and anxious. His clothes were untidy and quite dirty. There was an empty seat next to Simon but fortunately the man did not notice it and managed to find a seat somewhere at the back of the bus.



As soon as the strange and dirty man had sat down the bus driver maneuvered the bus into the busy traffic.



Just as they started to move Simon thought he saw a Police car coming around the corner. Probably on their way to an accident, he thought.

It was not long before the bus had left the city behind and they were now on their way to the next town. The paddocks were quite green for it had rained quite a lot during the last few weeks. What a difference with some weeks ago when it all looked so dry and brown.

There were hundreds of sheep in the paddocks. He also saw large fields of yellow canola flowers. That looked very pretty and colourful.

Canola seeds were used to produce oil and margarine. The leftovers, called canola meal, were often sold as stock feed.

Now and then Simon glanced back at the strange man in the back of the bus. It looked as if he had not shaved for a while. The other passengers on the bus also looked at the man suspiciously, perhaps wondering what sort of a man he was. After a while the stranger nodded off to sleep. He must have been tired from running.

After the bus passed through some more towns they finally came to the place where Simon had to get off. He was hoping that his uncle and aunty would be there to meet him. Dad had telephoned them and told them what time the bus would arrive. Sure enough they were both there with their car ready to pick him up. Simon jumped off the bus and was warmly greeted by his Uncle Phil and Aunty Grace. He even got a big hug from Aunty Grace which made him feel really welcome.

The bus driver gave him his luggage and Uncle Phil put it on the back seat.



As they drove off towards the farm Simon looked through the rear window of the vehicle and caught a glimpse of the stranger from the bus. He had not noticed him getting off.

Soon they were on their way and Simon forgot all about the stranger. Uncle and Aunty both chatted all the way and asked him about his Dad and Mum. The time passed very quickly and it was not long before they arrived at the farm where they were greeted by a large German shepherd.



Fortunately Simon had never been frightened of dogs and he was sure they would soon become good friends. Uncle said he was a good and faithful guard dog and nobody would dare to come near the farm if they saw Pluto or heard his loud and fierce bark.

After Simon had put his luggage away in the caravan where he was going to sleep that night it was time for the evening meal. Aunty proved to be a good cook and here they also read the Bible at the table and prayed for a blessing. It made him feel at home.

After the meal he helped Aunty Grace with the dishes and after a couple of games it was time to go to bed.

Aunty tucked him into bed and gave him a kiss just like his mother always did at home.

STRANGE NOISES

He was tired from the trip and it was no wonder that he was asleep very quickly. However, towards midnight he thought he heard Pluto's big bark. He couldn't wake up properly because he was so tired. After a while Pluto stopped barking and Simon went back to sleep. But this time it was a restless sleep for he could not get the barking out of his mind. Then suddenly he thought he heard a shuffle just outside the window of his



caravan. He thought it was strange. He carefully looked out of the little window and couldn't see anything for it was pitch dark outside. The sky was very cloudy. After a while the clouds moved away from the moon and he thought he saw someone outside. He wondered why Pluto had stopped barking but did not give it much more thought for suddenly he thought he recognized the man outside.

Was it perhaps.....?

No, it couldn't be.

Then more clouds moved in front of the moon again and he could not see anything for a while. When the moon showed again he definitely saw the man again, this time closer to the hay shed. Now he was too far away to recognize him. But he had the strange feeling it was that dirty looking man from the bus. What would he be doing here? He must be up to no good.

What should he do now? Should he wake up Uncle and Aunty?

But that would mean he would have to leave his safe caravan and cross the distance between the caravan and the house. Anything could happen to him.

Maybe he was wrong. Perhaps it wasn't the man from the bus. He must have been imagining it. He should go back to sleep and forget about it. But no matter how hard he tried he just could not go back to sleep. Carefully he looked through the window again. But it was too dark. He could not see anything.



After a while Simon plucked up enough courage and ran to the house as fast as he could. He woke up Uncle and Aunty. At first Uncle wouldn't believe him. But he told Uncle and Aunty he was almost sure.

“Alright then”, Uncle said. “Let us go and get Pluto. He'll certainly scare this man away”. But when Uncle whistled for Pluto the dog did not come.



So they walked around the hay shed and then Simon nearly tripped. When they looked carefully they noticed it was Pluto.

Pluto seemed dead.

He did not move at all. Uncle bent over and felt him all over. He was still breathing so he was not dead yet.

What could have happened to him?

They decided to quickly call the vet even though it was late in the night.

Twenty minutes later the vet arrived and examined Pluto.

“I think he has been poisoned”. He said. “I’ll see what I can do. If I can get him to empty his stomach he could be alright”.

So the vet poured some fluid down Pluto’s throat and within moments Pluto vomited everything out including the poison. “That’s good”, said the vet. “At least now we have a chance to save him”.

After a while Pluto started to stir.

“I’ll take him with me for a night”, the vet said.

“And hopefully by tomorrow he will be much better. Just call in at the surgery tomorrow morning and perhaps you can take him home then”.

“I hope so”, said Uncle. He was very fond of his dog.

After the vet left Uncle said to Simon:

”I am sure you must have been right about that stranger. He must have been the man who tried to poison Pluto.

With Pluto out of the way he would be able to do whatever he wanted to do. I wonder what he was up to, though.

He certainly could not have had any good intentions”.

They decided it was best to go to bed first.



THE NEXT DAY

The following morning Simon was awake quite early. The sound of many birds was a delight.



“Yes, God’s creation is wonderful”, Uncle said.

“Indeed, each day we are amazed about the wonders of creation”, Aunty added. “We see the most beautiful flowers around here, too”.

At the breakfast table Uncle Phil read Psalm 19 about the heavens declare the glory of God. He said this was so very appropriate after their discussion earlier that morning about the wonders of creation.

“Perhaps you should go for a walk after breakfast and see for yourself how beautiful it is around here”, Aunty said.

But Uncle thought he might want to come for the ride into town to see Pluto.

Simon helped Aunty with the dishes and then he and Uncle Phil went to town to see the vet and ask about Pluto.

“Come in”, said the vet. “Pluto has improved so much. He is just about back to normal. If your young guest had not called you in the middle of the night you would not have found Pluto in time. He would have been dead by the morning”.

Pluto was so pleased to see them. He wagged his tail with excitement. The vet said they could take him home.

On the way home Uncle asked Simon if he noticed how Pluto wagged his tail when he saw them. “Well”, he said, “dogs make friends because they wag their tail. But people often make enemies because they wag their tongue too much”.

That afternoon Simon took Pluto for a walk around the farm. It was a lovely sunny day and he enjoyed it very much.



Behind the hay shed the weeds were quite high. Nobody ever went there. It was a piece of land that was useless and forgotten.

As they were walking around there Simon suddenly noticed a small piece of land that seemed to be freshly dug up. Pluto also showed a sudden interest. He started sniffing around that area and scratched with his paws.

It looked as if someone had made a hole there to hide something there.

Simon had to think of that stranger in the night. Could that have something to do with it? Maybe he should tell Uncle.

Simon and Pluto quickly ran around the hay shed back to the farmhouse where they found Uncle and Aunty.

“Come and have a look behind the hay shed, Uncle. I don’t trust it”.

Uncle did not think much of it but just to please Simon he followed him.

And sure enough there behind the shed was some freshly dug up soil.

Uncle could not imagine what that would mean. One thing he knew for certain and that was that he had not stirred up that soil.

So Uncle went to the tool shed and came back with a spade. He started to dig. After a while he hit something solid.

And guess what he found!

A small tin!

He quickly opened it and inside was some money and jewellery. What could all this mean? Just like Simon, Uncle Phil also made a connection with what happened the previous night. That’s why Pluto had to be poisoned, of course. The man needed a free hand. And a barking dog would have woken everybody up.

They took the tin into the house and discussed what they ought to do.

“We had better ring the police”, said Aunty Grace.

“Yes, I think you are right”, said Uncle.

“It is better to leave it to the experts”, he added.



So they did. Uncle spoke to the police officer of their town. He promised to be there soon. After about half an hour a police car drove onto their property and two policemen came to the door.



Uncle explained to them what had happened during the night and how Pluto had nearly been killed. Then he showed them the tin with the money and jewellery. The two policemen looked at each other and said:

”This is what we needed. Our colleagues were following a man in the city and lost his tracks. We think he broke into a jewellery shop and stole all this stuff. We have no idea where he is now but what you people have shown us will be of great help to us.”

The older of the two policemen then said:

”This is what we will do. We will take this with us to the police station and let you know if we need more help from you”.

ACTION

The following day the same two policemen visited the farm again. They said that they expected this stranger to come back to the farm to collect his tin. They thought he was forced to hide it because the police was close on his tail and did not want to be caught with the stolen goods.

They expect him back within the next few days when he feels that it will be safe enough to return.

The plan was to hide somewhere on the farm and catch him red handed.

However, the policemen did not expect things to happen so quickly.

For what happened?

That same night Simon heard a noise again outside. Simon looked through the window of the caravan and saw a man quietly walking outside trying not to make any noise.

Soon after that Pluto started to bark fiercely. Of course, the stranger had not expected to hear Pluto's bark. He thought he had poisoned this dog. And naturally he thought the dog would be dead.



The moon was a bit bigger this time so Simon could now clearly recognize the man from the bus.

What was he to do now?

He knew he should warn Uncle Phil and Aunty Grace.

But he was scared that the man might see him and harm

him. After a while he thought he would feel quite safe with

Pluto so close by. So he quietly opened the door of the caravan and walked on tip toes to the farmhouse. He woke up his Uncle and Aunty and in a few words quickly told them what was going on outside.

Uncle grabbed his big torch as well as a big stick just in case he needed to defend himself and Simon.

When they came outside they heard Pluto's big bark already in the distance. They also heard the voice of a man who was yelling at the ferocious dog.

As they came closer they noticed by the light of the moon that the man was jumping around in circles while the dog was continually snapping at him. Then as the dog got hold of the man the stranger suddenly pulled out a big knife and tried to slash at the dog with the knife. But fortunately Pluto realised the danger and quickly jumped sideways. This gave the stranger an opportunity to run away. But Pluto raced after him and again caught him by the leg.

By that time Uncle Phil and Simon had come closer.

Uncle Phil told the man to stand still and give himself up otherwise he would let Pluto really get to work on him. This frightened the man so much that he quietly gave himself up.



While Pluto guarded the man Uncle Phil went to the tool shed and came back with some rope. He tied up the man's hands and took him to the house.

Aunty Grace had already put the kettle on and she made everyone a warm drink. She also gave the stranger a warm drink.

Then Uncle said that he had to phone the police and hand over the man to them. He did not like doing it but he had no choice, he explained. If the man was a criminal then it was his duty to hand him over to the police. About twenty minutes later the same two policemen arrived and Uncle Phil handed the man over to them.

The policemen thanked Uncle Phil wholeheartedly. Especially Simon received some very nice compliments from the policemen for his part in the whole drama.

They promised that Simon would hear from them again.

The first few days of his holiday certainly were very exciting.