

# Digby Dog and Friends Do a Good Work

By Shirley Young



**F**ar out in the countryside lived an elderly man called Mr Tolly. He lived in a small cottage with a very large garden. Mr Tolly delighted in his garden and kept it immaculately tidy. It was full of beautiful shrubs, flowers, trees and vegetables. The garden was bordered on one side by a small field with sheep in it and on the other side was woodland.

Mr Tolly had lived alone since the death of his wife and he had no children. However, he did have one faithful companion, and that was his dog, Digby. Digby was a collie dog and went everywhere with Mr Tolly, guarding his master faithfully.

Digby loved Mr Tolly, and so did the birds and animals from the surrounding woods because Mr Tolly was very kind to them. Each day he threw out bread for the birds. He hung up halves of coconut shells and bags of peanuts on his bird table for the blue tits - and even the local woodpecker found plenty to eat in the cracks of Mr Tolly's old tree!

Mr Tolly also knew that a fox came at night to the edge of his garden because he had seen its tracks, so he sometimes put out pieces of chicken for it. He also put out a saucer of milk on the patio for Hetty Hedgehog, who lived under the bushes.

But on this particular day in late autumn, Mr Tolly sat in his chair by the window and looked out onto his garden with a sad expression. Digby was stretched out by his side.

Two weeks earlier, Mr Tolly had fallen on the stairs and badly bruised his back and hip. The doctor had warned him against doing any gardening until he felt a lot better. But the grass needed to be cut before the winter, the Michaelmas daisies needed to be cut back, and all of the crocus and

daffodil bulbs had to be planted for the spring. And now, to top it all off, there had been a gale in the night, and it had dumped masses of brown leaves and twigs all over the garden and broken off some of his prize plants!

"Oh dear, Digby!" sighed the old man. "I don't know what to do. Winter will soon be here and by the time my back is better it will be too late to do all the gardening."

Digby lifted his head and rested it on his master's knee as Mr Tolly closed his eyes and lay back in his chair for his afternoon nap. He soon fell into a light sleep.

Digby hated to see his master sad, so while Mr Tolly slept, Digby stayed awake wondering what he could do to help him. Gradually a plan began to take shape in Digby's mind. He knew just what could be done to help Mr Tolly with the gardening! But he would need an awful lot of help.

So late that evening, after his master had gone to bed, Digby crept out of his kennel and headed down the garden and into the woodland. "Wuf, wuf — WOOF, WOOF, WOOF — wuf, wuf, wuf!" he barked. Digby's three short, three long, and three short barks meant **S - O - S**. It was an emergency call to all the birds and animals to come to their meeting place.

When they heard Digby barking, owl, fox and badger, who were already out and about on their nightly patrols, ran quickly into the woodland clearing where Digby waited. It wasn't long before they were joined by the squirrels, rabbits, wild cat, Millie mole, Maggie magpie and Hetty hedgehog. The crows, together with Woody woodpecker, soon followed with the little birds.

As they all waited expectantly, Digby climbed up onto the stump of a tree so he could address his audience. He quickly told them about Mr Tolly's accident and explained that all the gardening needed to be done before the winter.

Since the animals loved Mr Tolly because of his kindness to them, they were all anxious to help and do whatever they could. So Digby explained to them that God had given each of them different gifts and talents, which they could now use to be of service to Mr Tolly.

The animals nodded in agreement and grew very excited as the bare outline of a plan was put before them. They then sat chattering and murmuring together through the night, plotting and planning exactly what each of them could do.

The next day the animals could hardly wait for night to come, but as soon as Digby saw the light go out in his master's bedroom, he gave the pre-arranged signal and all the animals leapt into action!

Swooping down from the sky, Carrie Crow used her sharp beak to snap through the string that fastened the gate into the field where the sheep lived. Digby thrust it open and raced in. Being a collie dog, he knew exactly how to deal with sheep and he quickly rounded up four of them, herding them into his master's garden where they immediately began chewing down the long grass. There had never been four better mowers for Mr Tolly's lawn.

As Digby did this, Carrie Crow flew back to the garden and snipped off all the dead heads of the autumn flowers with her scissor-like beak. At the same time, Maggie Magpie, who was fascinated by glittering things, flew about collecting up all the small pieces of silver paper that the wind had blown into Mr Tolly's garden. The hedgehog, squirrels and mice also scurried to and fro, removing every last fallen leaf and twig.

While all of this activity was going on, the starlings, who were just sitting up in the branches watching, began to applaud and chatter among themselves. This brought a severe scolding from Mr Owl, who told them that if they couldn't keep quiet they would be sent home in disgrace!

In the silence that followed, the only sound to be heard was the "swish swish" of Freddie Fox's tail as he brushed it vigorously to and fro across the patio, sweeping it clean of every last speck of dirt.

Freddie Fox, having had plenty of practise opening Farmer Fry's chicken shed, had already managed to open the door of Mr Tolly's garden shed! So as Digby ran in and dragged out the bags of crocus and daffodil bulbs that needed planting, Bert Badger busily dug over the borders. Millie Mole followed on behind him, making holes for the bulbs to be dropped into.

"Don't dig too deep, Millie." Digby whispered. "We don't want the flowers coming up in Australia!"

Millie laughed quietly, and obligingly adjusted her digging skills. Digby followed along, plopping one bulb into each of the holes. Willie the Wildcat then came last, doing a very neat cover-over job until all the borders were planted and tidied.

The night wore on as the silent but frenzied activity continued. Then, just as the eastern sky began to lighten with the coming of dawn, everything was finished.

The birds and animals quickly hurried away and melted into the wood, hiding themselves behind the trees and bushes. They didn't go too far away because they wanted to watch and keep a close eye on Mr Tolly's house.

Digby escorted the sheep back to their field. "Thanks for your help, ladies," he whispered softly. "You've done a great job." The sheep baaed quietly and the dog pushed the gate shut behind them.

Digby took one last hurried look around the garden to check that everything was neat and tidy and that the shed was closed again. He then raced back to his kennel and put his head down on his paws, panting for breath. No sooner had he done this than the back door opened and Mr Tolly came out onto the patio.

"Good morning, Digby!" he called. "Did you have a good night, old chap?"

Digby rather tiredly struggled to his feet and trotted over to his master. He pushed his nose into Mr Tolly's hand as the old gentleman bent to pat his head. As Mr Tolly straightened up, the bright rays of the early morning sunshine shone down through the trees and lit up the garden like a spotlight directed on to a stage.

Mr Tolly stared about him in amazement. "Digby!" he gasped, pointing his finger. "Look at my garden. It's perfect! Someone has been here in the night and done all my gardening work for me. Whoever could have done it?"

Digby gently brushed against Mr Tolly's leg and began to lead him down the garden to the edge of the wood. As they walked through the garden, a blackbird struck up his song, the sparrows chirped in chorus, the owl hooted and all the thrushes and other birds joined in. Millie Mole then popped up out of her hole and Hetty Hedgehog, Bert Badger and the other animals peered around the bushes. Even Freddie Fox and the squirrels peeped out from behind the trees.

When Mr Tolly saw all these little eyes intently fixed upon him, he knew instantly who had done his gardening! "It was all of you!" he exclaimed. "And I can guess who was behind it - - - **DIGBY!**"

As the old man again bent down to pat his dog, his eyes misted over with tears of gratitude so that he could barely see, and for a moment he could not speak.

"I'll never forget this kindness you have shown me," he finally said in a choked voice. "Tomorrow you shall all receive a big reward! Digby and I will go into the village and buy nuts, maize, a loaf of bread, apples and something for all of you, to show my appreciation."

The animals looked very pleased and the birds sang even louder.

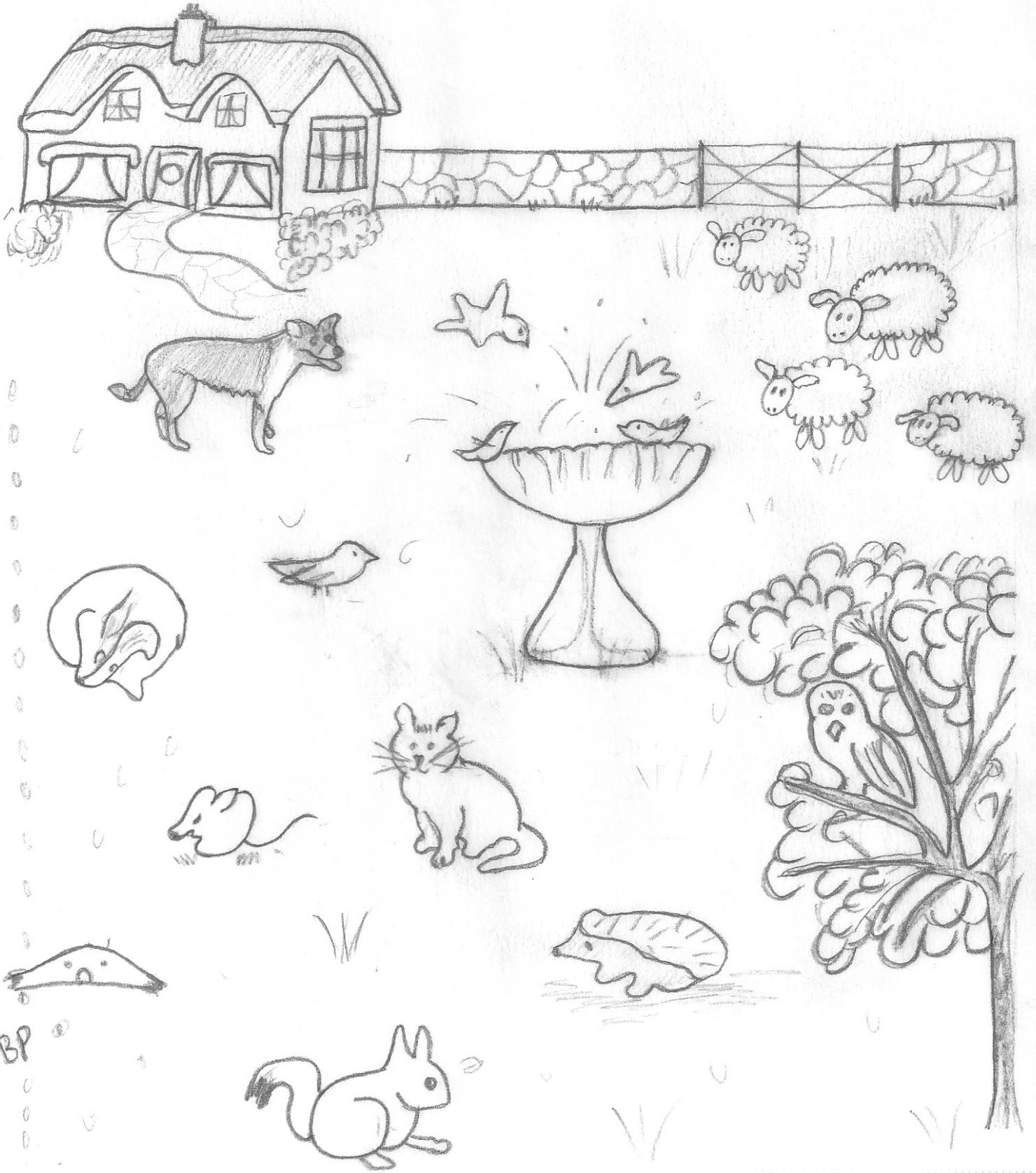
As Mr Tolly and Digby slowly walked back to the house, Mr Tolly put his hand on Digby's collar: "I especially won't forget you, Digby," he said. "I'll go to the butcher's shop and buy you the best bone he has available!"

Digby licked his lips in anticipation.

"A man couldn't have been blessed with a more loyal and faithful friend than you, Digby," the old man added, stroking the dog's ears.

Digby looked pleased and was glad that he had been able to serve his master. Then he flopped down on the patio and promptly fell asleep, dreaming of the biggest, juiciest bone a dog had ever seen!

*The End*



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