

# Adventures with Orla

## The Christmas Nativity

By: Kate McGrath





“Because of the  
dog’s joyfulness, our  
own is increased. It  
is no small gift.”

~Mary Oliver

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# About Orla



Orla is a seven year old Golden Retriever. She has been an Animal Assisted Pet Therapy Dog for the past six years, visiting patients in hospitals, nursing homes and hospices. Orla has also brought much joy (and distraction) to college students studying for mid-terms and final exams at local colleges. Her sweet and gentle personality are noticeable, although she also has a playful side to her as well. She has a history of eating things she is not supposed to, namely chocolate, and has a stubborn streak that sometimes gets the best of her.

Orla has been a gift to her humans and has brought joy and humor to their lives for seven wonderful years.



*About Orla*



After all of the figurines had been placed in their proper spot, Kate and Orla looked at the Nativity set. Just as the Shepherds, the Three Wise Men, Mary and Joseph were faced towards the manger, both Kate and Orla looked at the manger.

Looking at the Nativity Set, Kate imagined what it must have been like the night Jesus was born. Although it's hard to know exactly what Mary and Joseph felt that night, or what the shepherds experienced, Kate could imagine that everyone must have been feeling a sense of excitement and maybe even some fear or anxiety.

Orla knew though that what happened on that night was very special, and that this will always be her favorite time of year!



## The Christmas Nativity



Orla was stretched out on the couch, belly up as usual, taking her afternoon nap while Laddie was also sleeping, curled up in the recliner chair on the other side of the room. Orla and Laddie are Golden Retrievers, with big brown eyes and soft golden fur.

Orla is seven years old and Laddie is a one year old “pup,” as his humans call him. Both dogs live in a small New Hampshire town – not far from Manchester.



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While the dogs were warm and cozy inside the house, the wind was beginning to blow outside – swirling and twirling the leaves on the ground up into the air. The wind was strong enough to pull any remaining leaves that hung delicately on the trees right off their branches.

Tiny snowflakes had begun falling from the sky, dusting the ground with specks of white. They glistened in the sun, sparkling like tiny white diamonds.

This was Orla’s favorite time of year, where the time between the seasons of fall and winter seemed so special. Orla knew there was something important about this season. It was as if the air held a certain hope and wonder ... it was beautiful!



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Orla looked up at Kate, her eyes sparkling with wonder. “This figurine,” said Kate, as she held it for Orla to see, “will stay wrapped, and on Christmas day, we will unwrap it and place it where it belongs – resting in this tiny manger.”

Kate explained to Orla that the wrapped figurine is the baby Jesus. “Jesus is why we celebrate Christmas. We remember Jesus’ birth at Christmas and we celebrate that he is with us, always.”



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There were three more figurines in the box, all still wrapped in newspaper. Kate unwrapped the two taller figurines. “Orla, this is Mary, Jesus’ mother. And this is Joseph, Jesus’ earthly father. Both Mary and Joseph opened their hearts to receive Jesus. Like Mary and Joseph, we can open our hearts. When we open our hearts to let Jesus in, we know love.”

Kate placed Mary and Joseph at the center of the manger scene, right in the stable itself.

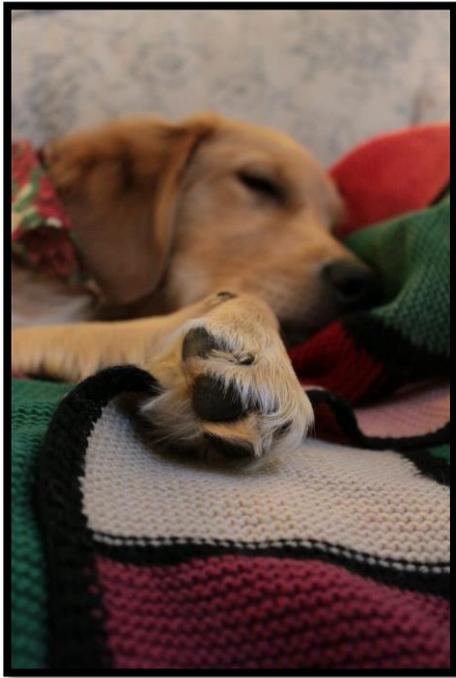


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“Thump!” Orla’s ears twitched at the sound. It’s probably Maxwell the cat, she thought. “Nothing to be afraid of.”

Maxwell is a tan, black and brown tabby cat who lives with Orla and Laddie. He is an old cat, but still playful – jumping off of something, onto something, across something or over something – usually his humans at four o’clock in the morning! He could fly through the air with ease, though always managed to land with a loud, “Thump!”

Orla repositioned herself on the couch, turning her body so that she was shaped like a crescent moon – her belly half showing and her legs dangling off the side of the couch. “Swoosh ... CRASH!!!”



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“What was that?” Laddie lifted his head from his paw and looked around the room, half awake, half still thinking of the dream he was having of chasing squirrels. Orla was now wide awake, stretching her body with her two front paws on the floor. She arched her back and stretched her hind legs before hopping them onto the floor as well.

“I’ll go see,” said Orla. Laddie stayed in the chair, lowering his head back onto his paw. “Okay,” said Laddie. “I’ll stay here.”



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As Kate unwrapped another figurine, Orla sniffed the newspaper and what Kate held in her hands. “This is the Angel. The Angel is the one who announced the great joy of Jesus’ birth. Like the Angel, we can share with others the joy of Jesus’ birth and what it means for us.”

Kate placed the Angel next to the shepherd, facing towards the stable.



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“Okay, let’s see what else is here.”

Orla’s eye brows lifted and tilted with expression as Kate spoke. “The Three Wise Men!”

“Orla, see – these are the Three Wise Men. They are the three Kings who brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the baby Jesus. They followed a twinkling star to Bethlehem. Like them, we follow Christ, who is the light – the shining star – in darkness.”

Kate put the Three Wise Men at a distance from the stable, telling Orla that the Three Wise Men are still on their way to Bethlehem. “We celebrate the coming of the Three Kings on Epiphany, which is in January.”



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As Orla walked toward the dining room – which is where the noise came from, she saw Maxwell the cat run quickly down the hallway into the kitchen. “That silly cat!” she thought. “He’s always getting into something.”

Orla peered into the dining room. She could see that the cat had successfully managed to knock a box of Christmas decorations off the table. The box had fallen with just enough force that it landed upside down. Amazingly, nothing fell out!

Orla’s curiosity sparked. She could tell there was something special in that box. Orla walked gingerly toward the box, her curiosity leading the way. One paw in front of the other, slowly, carefully, and with purpose.



Now Orla was standing over the box that had fallen. Her eyes investigating every inch of it ... they danced about the box with a wonder and awe like a child's, as her nose wiggled, taking in the different smells that came from the box: a mix of candy cane, apple cinnamon, and pine. Orla's tail began wagging, faster and faster – *swoosh, swoosh, swoosh*.

“Good thing I'm here,” thought Orla. She pushed the box with her nose, tipping it to its side – the cover now off, laying as it had fallen. Orla could see that there were Christmas decorations wrapped in pieces of newspaper. “What are these?” thought Orla. Though just as Orla got her nose into the box, she heard a car pull up into the driveway.

“Bark!, Bark!, Bark!, Bark!” “Woof!, Woof!, Woof!” “Gotta find a toy, gotta find a toy!” Orla and Laddie's human Kate had just come home and oh boy were Orla and Laddie happy to see her! Both could hear Kate as she walked up the front stairs and turned the key to unlock the door. “Oh boy, I'm so excited, and I'm so hungry, and I'm so excited,” thought Laddie. “I can't wait to give Kate a hug and have my belly rubbed,” thought Orla.



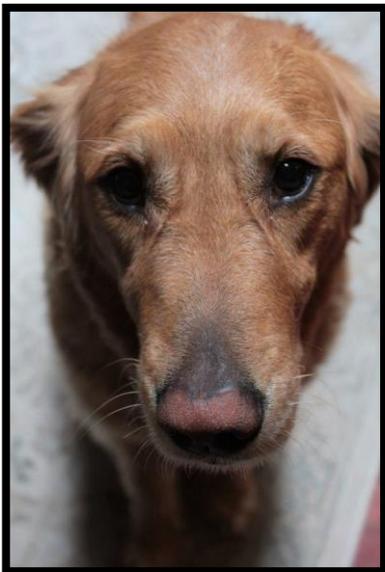
Kate took the first decoration, still carefully wrapped in old newspaper. As Kate unwrapped the decoration, a small metal hook-shaped rod fell out of the packaging, and with a soft “cling,” it hit the floor.

Orla backed away as the rod fell, but then went back over to sniff it once it landed. “Oops,” said Kate. “That's the Shepherd's staff. And here is the Shepherd.”

Orla sniffed the figurine Kate held in her hand. “You see, the Shepherds are the ones who gather the sheep. They keep their sheep safe, like God keeps us safe.”

Kate placed the shepherd figurine down and rummaged through the box to find the wooden stable. “Here it is,” said Kate as she pulled the stable out of the box. She placed the stable in the center of the dining room table. “Look at this, Orla,” said Kate. “This is the stable, which is where the Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus figurines are placed.”

Kate picked up the Shepherd figurine that she had placed on the table and stood it up next to the stable in such a way that it looked like the Shepherd was looking into the stable.



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Orla's black and brown wet nose could be seen just reaching the top of the dining room table and her eyes seen just beyond her snout – wide and bright with wonder.

“Orla, do you want to help?” asked Kate.

Orla's tail wagged and wiggled with excitement and joy!  
“Woof!”

“I take that as a yes!” said Kate. “Okay, well, you have to sit. I'll show you the decorations as I unwrap them, okay?”

“Woof!”

“Okay!”



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As Kate walked into the house, Orla and Laddie were both barking, excited and happily awaiting some attention from their human. “Oh, my two favorite dogs!” “I'm so happy to see you both!” said Kate. Out of the corner of her eye, Kate could see that one of the boxes that had Christmas decorations had fallen and was laying on its side with the cover off. “Uh oh – what happened?!” thought Kate. “I hope nothing broke.”



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Kate and her family were getting ready for Christmas – which was only ten days away! Although most of the Christmas decorations were up, Kate was looking for a special Christmas decoration that she put up each year – her grandmother’s nativity set. For some reason though, she hadn’t found it yet, though was hoping one of the boxes on the dining room table held what she was looking for.

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Kate let Laddie and Orla outside to “do their business,” and back in again to feed them their dinner. Laddie’s belly was very full after eating and he was getting tired. All of the excitement from earlier also made him feel tired, enough so that he found his way back to the chair in the family room and fell asleep. Orla’s curiosity however kept her awake. She wondered what was wrapped in all of the newspaper in that box Maxwell pushed off the table.

It was getting chilly in the house, so Kate made some hot chocolate. The warmth of the hot chocolate going down her throat made her feel cozy and put her in the spirit of decorating for Christmas. “Let’s turn on some Christmas music,” Kate said to Orla. Orla looked at Kate as if she understood. “How’s *Santa Paws is Coming to Town?*” asked Kate. Orla, still looking at Kate as if she understood, wagging her tail in agreement.

Kate walked into the dining room and picked up the box that had fallen. Taking the newspaper-wrapped Christmas decorations out of the box, one by one, Kate placed some of them gently on the table. “This might be what I’m looking for,” said Kate.