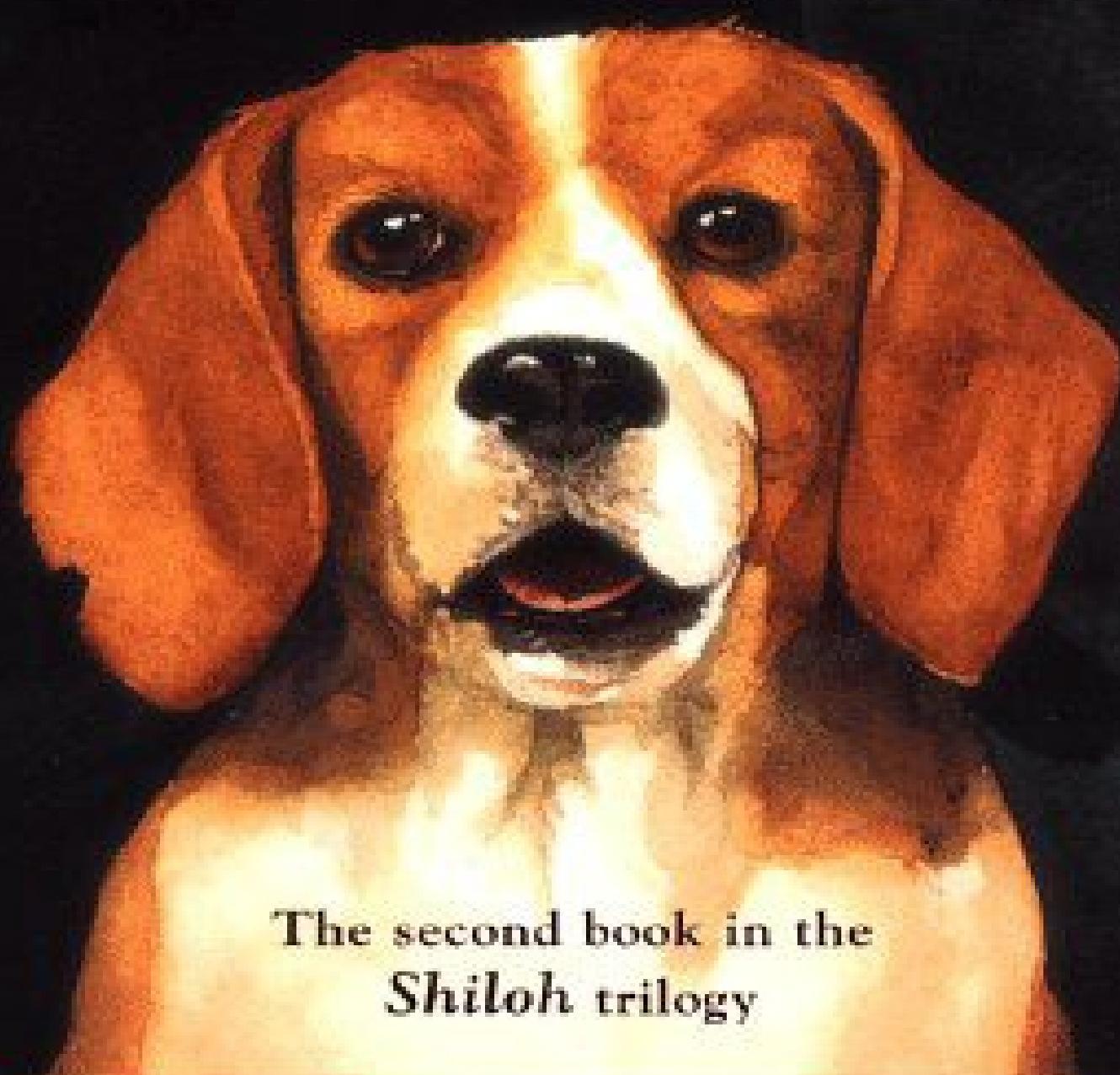


PHYLLIS REYNOLDS NAYLOR

Newbery Medal-winning author of *Shiloh*

SHILOH SEASON



The second book in the
Shiloh trilogy



ALADDIN

FICTION

Shiloh Season (Shiloh Trilogy, Book 2)

Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

To my granddaughters, Sophia and Tressa Naylor, with love

One

After Shiloh come to live with us, two things happened. Started out bad and ended good. The other started One's out good and ... Well, let me tell it the way it was.

Most everybody near Friendly, West Virginia, knows how Judd Travers treats his dogs, and how he bought this new little beagle to help him hunt, and how the beagle kept running away from Judd's kicks and curses. Ran to me.

They know the story of how I hid the dog in a pen I made for him up in our woods and named him Shiloh. Judd just calls his dogs cuss words. And everybody in Tyler County, almost, heard how a German shepherd jumped into that pen and tore up Shiloh something awful, and then the secret was out. My dad drove Shiloh over to Doc Murphy, who sewed him up and helped him live.

And then, because my friend David Howard has the biggest mouth from here to Sistersville, most everybody knows how I worked for Judd Travers two weeks to earn

2

that dog. So now he's mine. Mine and Ma's and Dad's and Dara Lynn's and Becky's. We all just love him so's he can hardly stand it sometimes; tail wags so hard you figure it's about to fly off.

Anyway, the thing that started out bad and ended good was that I promised

Doc Murphy I'd pay him every cent we owed him for fixing up Shiloh. I looked for bottles and aluminum cans the whole rest of the summer, but only earned two dollars and seventy cents.

When I took it to Doc Murphy, though, so he could subtract it from our bill, he says I can work off the rest, same as I worked for Judd. Next to Judd telling me I can have Shiloh for my own, that was the best news I'd heard in a long time.

And now for the good part that turned bad and then worse: after figuring that everything's okay now between me and Judd Travers-he even gave me a collar for Shiloh Judd starts drinking.

Not that he didn't drink before. Got a belly on him like a watermelon sticking out over his belt buckle, but now he's drinkin' hard.

First time I know anything about it, I'm coming up the road from Doc Murphy's, Shiloh trottin' along ahead or behind. That dog always finds something old he's got to smell twice or something new he ain't smelled at all, and his legs can hardly get him there fast enough. I think he was down in the creek while I was working at Doc's, and he's trying to make like he was with me the whole time.

I'm following along, thinking how happiness is a wet dog with a full stomach, when I hear this truck coming up the road behind me. I can tell by the sound that it's going faster than it should. My first thought, as I turn my head, is

3

that if it don't slow down, it won't make the bend, and then I see that it's Judd Travers's pickup.

I take this flying leap into the field, like I'm doing a belly flop in Middle Island Creek, and for a couple seconds I can't even breathe-it's knocked the

wind right out of me. I watch the truck go off the road a couple feet farther on, then weave back on again, over to the other side, and finally it starts slowing down for the bridge.

Shiloh comes running back, licks my face to see if I'm all right. The question in my mind is did Judd try to run me over or didn't he even see me, he's that drunk? And if Shiloh had been behind me instead of up front, would I be looking at a dead dog right now?

"Judd almost ran me over!" I say that night at supper. "He what?" says Ma. I tell my folks what happened.

"He do it on purpose?" asks Dara Lynn. Ma's fixed white beans and com bread, with little chunks of red ham in the beans, and Dara Lynn's counting out the pieces of ham on her plate. Wants to be sure she got as many as Ma gave me. "I don't know," I tell her.

Ma looks at Dad. "This is serious, Ray."

Dad nods. "I guess I've been hearing right, then. They say Judd's been stopping off at a bar down near Bens Run. Does his drinking nights and weekends."

Ma's anxious. "You'd best keep off the road, Marty," she says. "You, too, Dara Lynn. You hear his truck coming, give him plenty of room."

"All he's going to do is get himself arrested," I say. "Why's he start drinking so hard all of a sudden?" Even I know that when a person does that it means he's bothered.

"Maybe he's thirsty!" -says Becky, and we all laugh.

4

Becky's three. Dara Lynn laughs, too, even though it's something she might have said. Dara Lynn's seven. I'm four years older than that, and supposed to set an example for my sisters, says Ma, which is why it was so

hard on my folks when they found out I'd been hiding Judd's dog up in our woods.

"I think Judd drinks because he's unhappy," says Ma. She smooths out the margarine on her piece of corn bread, then takes a real slow bite.

"Maybe he misses Shiloh," says Becky, trying again. I wish she hadn't said that.

"Why?" asks Dara Lynn. "He's got all those other dogs to keep him company."

Ma chews real thoughtful. "I think he looks in the mirror and don't like what he sees," she says. "The fact that his dog kept running away and coming to you, Marty, and the way you kept on working for Judd even though he called you a fool-I think that made him take a good hard look at himself, and it wasn't pretty."

Becky nods her head up and down. "Judd's not pretty," she says, real serious, and we laugh again.

All this time, my dad is breaking up his corn bread over his pile of beans, and then he eats it mixed together, and I notice he's the one not laughing.

"What's worrying me is that Judd's been hunting up in our woods, I think. Rabbits, I expect. I found a beer can up there, the brand Judd drinks, and heard a couple shots yesterday, same as last weekend."

"We've got those woods posted!" Ma says, meaning we got signs up around the property saying we don't allow any hunting. But poachers sneak in there sometimes anyway.

5

Up in our woods, and even in our meadow on the far side of the hill.

Her gray eyes are fixed on Dad now. "Ray, you've got to tell him! I don't want him up there drunk, firing his gun off every which way. One of those

bullets could end up down here."

"I'll talk to him," Dad says.

I'm real quiet then. In fact, I'm through with the beans on my plate. Been thinking about taking a second helping, but suddenly I'm not hungry anymore, so I go outside and sit on the steps. It's been real warm and dry for September, and I like to catch a breeze.

Shiloh comes over and lies down beside me, head on my leg. Then he takes this big contented sigh and closes his eyes.

What my folks don't know-what nobody knows except me and Judd Travers-is how the only way I got Judd to let me keep his dog was that I saw him shoot a deer out of season. A doe it was, too. And when he knew I could report him to the game warden-I would have, too-he said I could keep Shiloh if I kept my mouth shut about the doe and if I worked for him two solid weeks. I swear Judd must have laid awake nights thinking of the hardest, meanest jobs he had for me to do, but I did 'em, every one.

So a promise is a promise, even if I shouldn't have made it in the first place. There wasn't any point in telling the secret now anyway. The doe and all traces of the killing were long gone.

I lean against the porch post and stroke the top of Shiloh's head, smooth as corn silk. Here I'd thought now that Judd and me were almost, but not quite, friends-you

6

couldn't be real friends with a man like Judd Travers-I wouldn't have to worry anymore. But Ma says drink will make a person do things he never in this world thought he'd do, and you put drink in Judd Travers, you got a bomb just waiting to blow up. He might not try to run over Shiloh, or shoot him out of spite, but what if he's up in our woods hunting and Shiloh runs

through? What if Judd shoots at the first thing that moves?

After supper Dad comes out, and he's carrying this beer can he found in our woods. He puts it on the front seat of the jeep, then climbs in and heads down the driveway.

I watch the jeep pause way out by the road, then turn right and go past the mill. It crosses the rusty bridge to the old Shiloh schoolhouse that's been closed as long as I can remember. After that it's out of sight and I know that in two or three minutes Dad will pull up outside the trailer where Judd Travers lives.

I listen. Yep. About two minutes later, way off in the distance, I hear all Judd's dogs barking at once, which means they hear the jeep. All those dogs are mean as nails, 'cause the only time Judd don't keep 'em chained is when he takes 'em hunting.

I figure that about this time Judd's looking out his window, wondering who's driving up to see him at seven o'clock on a Sunday night. Then he'll get up and come to the door in his undershirt.

Dad'll walk up the boards that serve as Judd's sidewalk, and they'll stand on Judd's steps awhile, talking about the kind of weather we've been having, and are the apples going to be any good this fall, and when is the county going to fix that big pothole just this side of the bridge.

And finally, after they say all that, Dad'll show Judd the

7

beer can and say he's sure Judd didn't mean to wander off up in our woods when he was hunting, but Dad figures the beer can is his, and he's been hearing these shots. He surely would appreciate it, he'll say, if Judd wouldn't hunt in our woods. He don't like to make a fuss, but when a man's got children, he's got to look out for them.

My mind can think up about a dozen ways Judd could answer back, none of 'em polite, but I don't let myself dwell on it. I'm running my hand over Shiloh's head real slow, and I can tell by his eyes how he likes it. If Shiloh was a cat, he'd purr.

Becky comes out to sit beside me, and pulls her dress way up to let the cool air fan her belly.

"Shouldn't do that way, Becky," I tell her. You got to start teaching her young or she'll do like that down in Sistersville sometime, not think twice about it.

"Why?" says Becky, smart-like, and pushes her face right up against mine.

"Cause it's not ladylike to show your underpants, is why," I tell her. I figure that's how Ma would answer.

Dara Lynn's out on the porch now, still eating a handful of cornbread crumbs, and she hears what I say to Becky. I can tell by her eyes she's up to mischief. Wipes her hands on her shorts, then sticks her thumbs down inside the elastic and starts snappin' it hard as she can-snap, snap, snap-the elastic on her shorts and underpants both, just to rile me.

Of course Becky laughs and then she's doing it, too, both of 'em snapping away at their underpants in a wild fit of the giggles. Girl children are the strangest people in the world sometimes.

But then I hear the Jeep coming back. Dara Lynn hears

8

it, too, and stops being' crazy. Finally Becky gives up and we all watch Dad's Jeep-the one he delivers his mail income across the old rusty bridge again, on up the road, then turn in at our driveway.

Ma comes out on the porch, hands resting on her hips. "Well?" she says, as Dad gets out. "What'd he say?" Dad don't answer for a moment. Just walks

over to the house and throws the beer can in our trash barrel.

"Might be a good idea if the kids didn't play up in the woods for a while," he says.

Ma stares after him as he goes inside.

9

Two

Miss Talbot's new to our school this year, and I've got her for sixth grade. She's young, younger than Ma, but she's got the same kind of cheekbones up high on her face. Wears her hair the same, too, pulled back on top and fixed with a barrette, then hanging loose around her shoulders.

David Howard and I sit next to each other. Miss Talbot said we could sit wherever we liked, but it was up to us whether or not she'd let us stay there. Just a polite way of saying that if we cause any trouble, she'll change our seats faster than you can spend a nickel.

Since she didn't know any of our names yet that first day, she asked each of us to tell her something about ourselves, and you wouldn't believe what some of the kids thought to tell.

Sarah Peters told how she fell off a swing last year and broke a tooth. Now who do you figure cares about that? Tooth's been fixed! Ain't nothing to see!

9

next to each other. Miss Talbot said we could sit wherever we liked, but it was up to us whether or not she'd let us stay there. Just a polite way of saying that if we cause any trouble, she'll change our seats faster than you can spend a nickel.

Since she didn't know any of our names yet that first day, she asked each of us to tell her something about ourselves, and you wouldn't believe what

some of the kids thought to tell.

Sarah Peters told how she fell off a swing last year and broke a tooth. Now who do you figure cares about that? Tooth's been fixed! Ain't nothing to see!

10

Fred Niles said they've got a new baby sister at his house, which wasn't exactly the biggest news in the world, 'cause he's got five sisters already.

Then David Howard told how his family flew to Denver the last week of August, and Denver's called the Mile-High City, because the state capitol's a mile up in the air, only nobody believed him. So Miss Talbot got out the encyclopedia and showed us he was right. Then she told us something else we didn't know: there's a Denver, West Virginia, too. In fact, two Denvers, one in Preston County and one in Marshall. Miss Talbot's sister lives in one of 'em, she said.

When it was my turn that day, I told about Shiloh and how I worked two weeks to make him mine, and then Michael Sholt told how there was this drunk man who drove by their house sometimes and once even knocked over their mailbox.

Everyone started whispering then, and the whisper went around the room: "... Judd ... Judd ... Judd...." it went, one person to the next.

Miss Talbot didn't know who Judd was. Somebody's father, maybe? So she just said she hoped that whoever this person was, he wouldn't get it in his head to drive the next time he was drinking, 'cause he might run over a child or a little dog. And since I was the only one who had told about a dog, she looked right at me, and it didn't make me feel one bit better about leaving Shiloh alone all day.

There's times I wish we could just keep Shiloh in the house while I'm at school. But Ma says when you love someone, you don't keep him locked up,