

Cricket®

Sheep Lessons

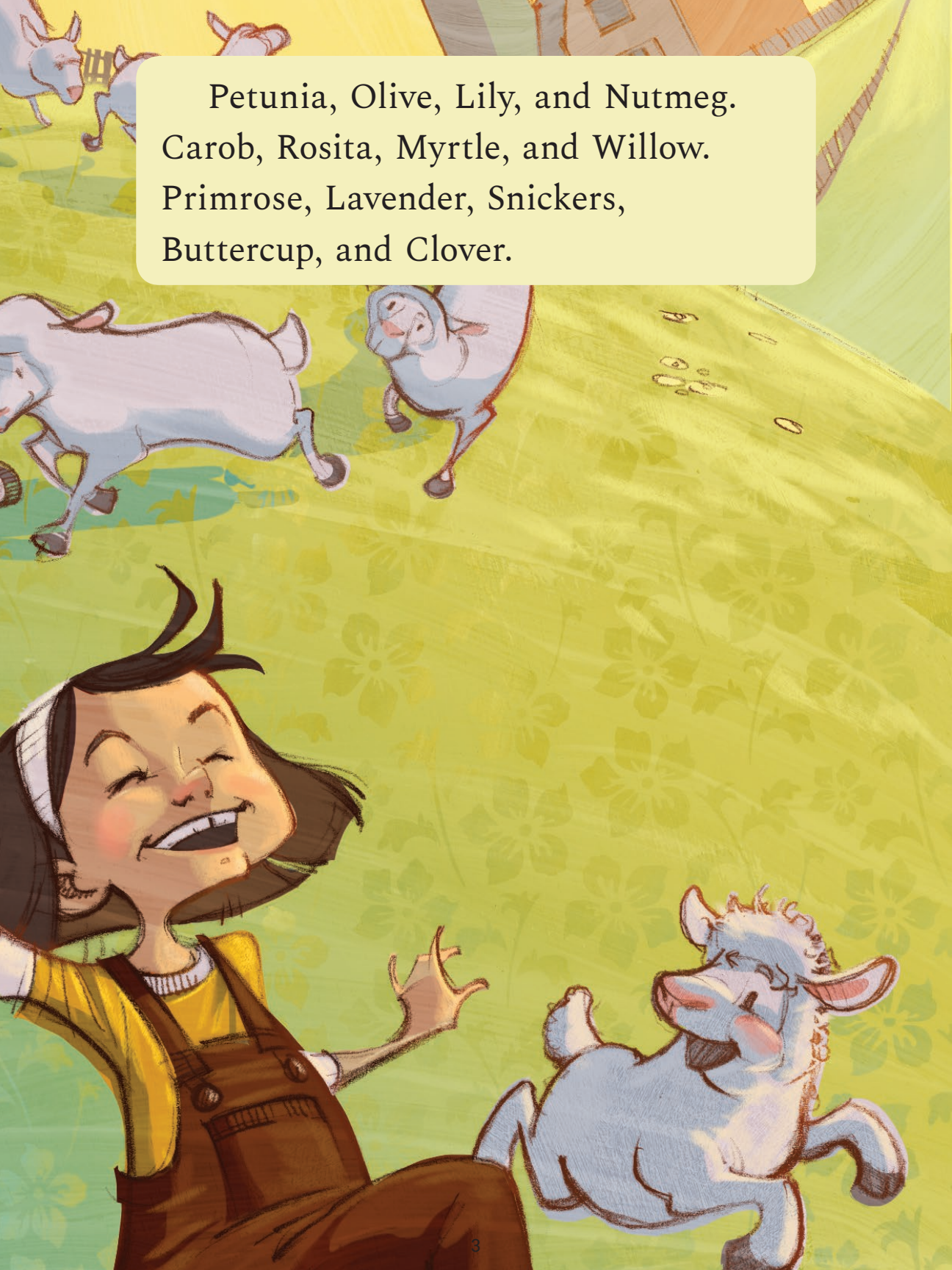
by Brenda Danko • Art by David Hohn





Meridith Brown loved sheep.

Hi! I'm Ladybug.
I hope this sheep
doesn't mind I'm
catching a ride!



Petunia, Olive, Lily, and Nutmeg.
Carob, Rosita, Myrtle, and Willow.
Primrose, Lavender, Snickers,
Buttercup, and Clover.

And the latest addition, born on a spring night, Vanilla.

Every day, Merri cared for her little Shetland sheep. She scattered the hay. She cleaned and filled the water buckets. She plucked briars and burs from the fields where the sheep grazed. She herded them into the pasture in the morning and corralled them back into the barn at night.

“I won’t ever leave my sheep,” Merri said.

But that summer, Merri turned five. “In the fall, you’ll start kindergarten,” her mother told her.

Merri lowered her head like a ram, ready to butt. She glared at her mother. “I don’t have time for school,” she said. “I have sheep to look after.”



“You can still tend your sheep,” Merri’s mother explained. “After school.”

Merri snorted. “I’m not going to school.”

“We’ll see,” her mother replied, and walked off humming.

Merri had no time to fret. On Saturday, she was showing Vanilla at the county fair.

“I think you’ll win a ribbon,” she whispered in Vanilla’s ear as they waited outside the ring. But the lamb was skittish. She was the only Shetland there and she was half the size of the other spring lambs.





“Hush, now, hush,” Merri whispered. She could feel Vanilla’s heart pattering beneath her hand.

Vanilla did not win a ribbon. “I’m proud of you anyhow,” Merri told her. “You were brave.”

On the way home, they passed Pinewood Elementary School. “Your teacher’s name is Miss Padilla,” her mother said.

Merri scowled and sank into her seat. “That’s a silly name,” she grumbled.

A few weeks before school started, Merri’s mother took her shopping. Merri picked out overalls and rubber boots. “All I need,” she announced.

Her mother picked up a sweater and some soft corduroys. Merri wrinkled her nose. “Ugly,” she said.

That night, Merri dreamed about a coyote chasing her sheep. Merri couldn't help them. She was locked inside the school with a mean teacher holding a shepherd's crook.

Merri woke up crying. Her mother came into the bedroom.

“School is an awful place, and I don't want to go,” Merri sobbed.



Her mother sat on the edge of the bed and rubbed her back.



Maybe a
bedtime
story will
help?



“Petunia doesn’t like to have her hoofs trimmed, does she? She hides behind the other sheep, and we have to catch her. She *baaahs* the whole time.”

Merri flipped over. “She’s a silly one, for sure.”

“And remember when you were training Rosita?” Merri’s mother said, shaking her head. “She wouldn’t cooperate.”

“I remember,” Merri said. “I had to move slowly and make that clicking noise she likes.”

“What about the time Aunt Frieda’s Chihuahua got under the fence?”



Merri nodded. “My silly sheep acted like a wolf was in the pasture instead of tiny Bonito.”

“And the fair was a new and scary place for Vanilla, but you helped her through it.” Her mother tucked the blanket under her.

“I guess it’s my turn to be brave,” Merri said.

Her mother kissed her forehead. “You will be.”





On a warm fall day, Meredith Brown walked into Pinewood Elementary School. She met her teacher, Miss Padilla, who smiled and said, “Welcome, Meredith,” in a cheery voice. In Miss Padilla’s classroom, Merri saw brightly colored tables covered with boxes of papers, crayons, and markers. She saw a long aquarium with shiny fish against one wall. There were also rows of cubbies, and one of them had her name, “Meredith,” across the top. Merri liked the room, but there was one problem. There were no sheep. No sheep anywhere.

Miss Padilla pointed at one of the tables. “You can sit here, Merri, beside Olive, and draw whatever you’d like.”

Merri stared at the little girl. “Your name is Olive?” she asked.

“Yes, it is,” the girl replied.

“I love that name,” Merri said, sitting down to work on her picture. First, she chose the biggest piece of paper she could find. She knew exactly what she wanted to draw and she would need lots of room.





Afterward, Miss Padilla's class played word games and put puzzles together. They painted with sponges. Miss Padilla played a guitar and taught them a silly song about letters. Then they all had alphabet crackers and juice. Finally, Miss Padilla strung a bright cord from one side of the room to the other. She hung all their artwork from it. Merri looked at her picture and smiled. She liked kindergarten. There were good things here—even sheep. 🐑

Do you think Merri will share her snack with me?





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