

A large flock of sheep is grazing on a green hillside. The sheep are scattered across the slope, some standing and some lying down. In the foreground, a wooden fence with a post and wire is visible. The sky is overcast and grey. The title "Finding the Lost Sheep" is written in large, bold, yellow, italicized font across the middle of the image.

Finding the Lost Sheep

by William Loader

“1, 2, 3, 4, 5, ...”

The shepherd was counting the sheep.



Clea, the sheepdog stood quietly by, watching, but a little worried



It was very cold at night, so Clea used to bring all the sheep inside to their resting place overnight, which had three big gates.

When the shepherd got to 50 sheep, Owl called out: “That’s only half way! Do you remember how many there are supposed to be?”

Owl remembered.



The shepherd knew
and so did Clea,
but she was worried.

The counting went on until it reached: 91, 92, 93, 94, ... and Clea became really worried and so did the shepherd.



There were supposed to be 100 sheep, but there only 99. One was missing out in the cold dark night.



“Don’t worry,” grunted one of the goats. “Sheep don’t matter. They are just goats who have forgotten how to climb and are good for nothing”

“Forget about number 100. Sheep are stupid,” said Dummy, the Donkey.



Clea and the shepherd frowned.

“No, every sheep matters,” said the shepherd.

Then one of the sheep spoke up: “I know who is missing. It’s that silly old ewe. Old sheep don’t matter.”



“Yes, they do,”
barked Clea in reply.

Another sheep said: “That old sheep is not like the rest of us. She says ‘Bah!’ in a strange way and she didn’t come from our farm.”

But Clea and shepherd did not wait. They jumped onto the horses and soon they were on their way to the far off hills.



When they got down from the horses,
the shepherd said:
“It’s very dark tonight.”

“Don’t worry,”
barked Clea.



“My nose will find the way.
I can smell things a long way off.”



They passed by Molly the moo-cow, who mumbled: “You should both be at home. Why are you wandering around in the dark?”



“Be careful, you two,” said Kylie, the kangaroo.

“There are lots of dangers out there!”



Nothing stopped Clea and the shepherd, not even Owl, who flew along for the ride, because owls like to fly around at night.

“Have you thought about this?” she said. “You have 3 rooms in the shelter and 99 sheep. That’s perfect. Each room will have ...”



But they were in too much of a hurry and didn’t hear the rest.

“I hope that old sheep
is not injured
and in pain,”
said the shepherd.



“And it is very scary to
be lost and all alone,”
said Clea.

“Woof!” Suddenly Clea smelt the old ewe.

“She must be over there,” she said.

“That’s where the
scent is coming from.”

And sure enough, the
old sheep must have
heard the “Woof”
and let out a very weak,
“Bah! Please come and help me.”



Soon they found her, stuck in a thorn bush.



The shepherd pulled away the branches and Clea pushed her free with her nose.

Clea wagged her tail in happiness.

The shepherd had a big smile.

And the old sheep shed lots of tears of joy which mixed up with the tears of sadness so that her wool all around her face was soaking wet.

“You cared about me so much and you came and found me – thank you, thank you, thank you!”



“Now for the ride back home”, said the shepherd, as he lifted the old ewe onto the back of the horse, while Clea sat in between, trying not to fall off. They were so happy.



As they were riding along, suddenly there was a bright light in the clouds and they heard music.



Molly the Moo-cow

growled: “They’re singing ‘Jingle bells’; they should be using real bells, cow bells!”

“No, they’re not,” said Clea. “They’re singing, ‘The Lord’s my shepherd’.” “I think it sounds like, ‘Amazing grace’,” said the shepherd.

They were just imagining things, as you do sometimes in the night.

Back at the shelter, the shepherd unloaded the old ewe, but Dummy the Donkey said: “I’m afraid it’s too late. We’ve shut up the three rooms and all the sheep are asleep.”



“Then we’ll just have to settle for the stable where the bigger animals are,” said the shepherd.

“No, that’s not possible,” said Dummy. “There’s a baby in there and they didn’t have a cot so they put him to sleep in one of the animal’s feeder boxes.”



“I’m sure there’s a place for an old ewe, too,”
said the shepherd.

And, for sure, there was.

For there was the
baby Jesus and Mary
and Joseph and they
said: “Please come
in. We don’t want
anyone to be left out
in the cold. Everyone
matters, even an old
sheep.”



Many years later when the real Jesus told stories, he told one about a shepherd who had 100 sheep and had lost one and cared so much that he went out to find it.

“That’s how much God cares for us and that’s how much we need to care for each other”.

That’s the true part of the story.



The other part was just something that Clea told me once when we were playing together.

