

Chapter 3: Buried Treasure

If you remember our tale from yesterday, Clarence, our hero, had found a most valuable treasure. What he thought were pebbles (like the ones you have in your hands or on the table right now) turned out to be acorns, the greatest gift a Far-outer sheep could possess. Clarence glowed all the way home that day. As he walked, he imagined what he would do with his newfound wealth. Most of his daydreams involved showing the acorns to Midnight and Lightning and then relishing these delicacies while they watched in jealous helplessness.

Clarence strutted into the valley, where the few Far-outers who actually do live near one another dwell. The teasing and name-calling seemed to bounce right off of him.

“You don’t know the treasure I have right here,” he thought proudly.

Arriving at his little rock in the middle of the big field, he slipped into its shade and sat down.

“What a wonderful day!” he hummed to himself.

When he made sure no one was looking, he rolled the acorns out of his stubbly wool. They were shiny and beautiful. With his nose, he rolled them over and over, watching how they glowed deep brown in the sunlight. They were wonderful.

After a couple of days, the neighbors noticed the change in Clarence. He was no longer the angry young lamb of a week ago. Midnight and Lightning, try as they might, could not get under his skin with their insults or teasing. With head held high, Clarence felt that he was finally respectable, cowlick and all.

One afternoon when the sun was unusually hot, Clarence stayed in the shadow of his boulder, as usual, admiring his treasure. He was so intent that he did not even hear the hooves tiptoe across the field behind him. Before he knew it, he was pinned to the ground by a strong, black leg.

“So this is what’s got you so happy, Cowlick,” barked an evil voice.

“Looks like Clarence the Porcupine found a treasure,” hissed another voice that started laughing. “Well, now he is about to lose it!”

Rolling him onto his back, he saw the criminals: Midnight and Lightning, holding his acorns up triumphantly, smiling wickedly at him.

“How about a treat, King Clarence?” Midnight asked as he flicked a rock into the poor lamb’s mouth. They put the acorns into their mouths and chewed with relish.

“Now we’ll see how proud you are!” said Midnight as they began to kick and poke their

victim.

Clarence, having been stunned at first, now lashed out with all his strength. It was so unexpected that he freed himself from the scoundrels, and once on his feet he began to run. Tears blinded him as he galloped away. They could beat him up, but eat HIS ACORNS... That wasn't fair! He ran wildly, not caring where he was going. When night fell, he kept on going, stumbling ahead until he finally had to stop. Exhausted, he threw himself down and slept.

The sun was high in the sky when Clarence awoke. His whole body ached. He struggled to his feet and looked around. His mount dropped. Close by him was a large, dark mountain with three peaks.

"Mount Horrible," he exclaimed, trembling.

In the dark, he had wandered into the forbidden area! All animals on the edge of the desert knew that this towering mount and its surrounding area were dangerous. Strange things were said to happen there. Even the Far-outers, who only fear an empty stomach or having to follow a leader, avoided this place.

Clarence's stomach began to rumble. His mouth felt like the desert. If he went back, the only place he could eat would be the valley. There he'd have to face those terrible lambs. And if he went forward? He collected himself and listened. The silence was overwhelming and scary. Nothing seemed to move, just the wind. No birds or animals. The loneliness of it all made his knees feel weak. Closing his eyes, he listened harder. Nothing... and wait a minute. There! He heard it. The soft background music that anyone but a Far-outer would have ignored. "Water!" But the sound came from up the mountain. He was scared, but it was better than going home.

Swallowing his fear, he started to climb.

After a good half an hour of hard climbing, he arrived at a little niche in the heart of the mountain. A tiny flow of water gurgled out. It was surrounded by tufts of grass. Clarence looked up the mountain, then down. Nothing moved.

"The coast is clear," he thought and dipped his head toward the water. Clarence drank deeply and then munched on the grass. Only then did he remember yesterday. His acorns, his treasure, lost!

The whole incident replayed and replayed in his mind. Finally, he threw himself onto the flat ground of the niche and wept bitterly.

Tired from his crying, he rolled onto his back. As he adjusted his cowlick, he felt something roll out. Clarence sat up and stared down. His eyes nearly popped out. There on the ground was one of his acorns. His mouth gaped open.

“But... how?” he asked himself. Then it occurred to him that it might have gotten stuck in the cowlick when the bullies had rolled him over. Clarence was overjoyed.

For the longest time, our little sheep friend sat looking at his treasure. It was too good to be true. With his nose, he nudged the acorn to see it from another angle.

BA-BOOM!!!

A thunderclap came out of nowhere. The startled lamb jumped two feet in the air. Raising his head, he noticed that dark clouds were rapidly covering up the sun’s rays. Knowing that it was going to storm, he looked down for his precious acorn, and to his surprise, it was nowhere to be found. He searched frantically as the sky lit up again.

BA-BOOM!!!

Large, heavy raindrops began to smack the ground around him. Where could the acorn have gone? Then, in a crack next to the spring, he saw the soft varnish of the acorn shell. He tried to scrape it out with his hoof, push it out with his nose jab it, out but there was no way to get his acorn out. As he worked, the skies opened, and before he could scurry back into the shelter of the niche, he was sopping wet.

His treasure was buried on Mt. Horrible!

Joseph and Mary had to go to their own Mt. Horrible to have Jesus... the stable was the only place left. What to do when God does things we do not understand? This is the mystery of the mountain we all must face.

TASK: Make Mount Horrible out of cardboard. All can help. This can be the background of your nativity scene.