

The Lost Sheep

Once upon a time there was a shepherd called Bartholomew, or Bart for short. Now Bart was not a very clever shepherd but he was a very good shepherd. He loved his sheep very much and knew each of them by name. In fact he thought it was only polite to make sure he knew all their names. After all, all the sheep knew his name, and never got it wrong! Baa, Baa, they would always say.

Bart had one hundred sheep. There was: Allie and Billy, and Curly, and Dilly, and Ellie and Folly, and Gummy, and Harry, and Inky and Jolly, and ... Well you get the idea, but I won't tell you all their names today.

Every night Bart slept out in the field with his sheep. Everyday he led them across the hillsides looking for the greenest grass and the clearest water for them to eat and drink. Then every day, in fact several times every day, Bart counted his sheep.

He would stand on a rock and look down over them all. Then he would start counting:

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8..... 30, 31, 32, 33, 34..... 56, 57, 58, 59..... 96, 97, 98, 99, 100! And having counted his sheep, Bart would feel very happy knowing that every one of them was safe and happy.

One evening though, after a long day of walking across the hills, Bart started to count his sheep: 1, 2, 3, 4 he started. But as he counted something terrible happened: 97, 98, 99, and there were no more to count.

"I must have miscounted," thought Bart to himself. So he counted again. But again there were only 99 and not 100 sheep.

Bart counted again and again, and the fourth time as he counted he realised something. Tilly was not there, she was missing. Bart walked around the flock calling: "Tilly, Tilly," but there was no familiar: "Baa," in reply.

"Oh no, Oh no!" thought Bart to himself . "This is a shepherd's worst nightmare, I've got 99 sheep to look after and one sheep that is lost. What do I do? If I go off and look for Tilly a wolf may come and take some of the other sheep. But then if I don't go and find Tilly she will certainly get eaten by a wolf!"

Poor Bart really didn't know what to do. But then he remembered something. He rummaged through his large shepherd's bag that he always carried about with him and pulled out a long long piece of rope. He herded the 99 sheep as close together as possible. Then, using a few convenient rocks, he wound the rope right round the outside of them so they couldn't escape. Then Bart rushed off, all the time saying under his breath: "I hope they'll be safe! I hope they'll be safe!"

All that night Bart stumbled over rocks and slid down hillsides and splashed through streams. He walked all the way back over the days travels, but he couldn't find Tilly anywhere. There was no moon so it was very dark. He couldn't

see anything. He had to keep stopping and calling and listening for the faintest sound that might have been Tilly in the distance. But all Bart heard was the distant baying of wolves and howling of wild dogs as they scavenged for food.

Bart called for the last time, and there was no reply. " Well that's it," he thought to himself . "Tilly is gone. Probably she's been"

Suddenly he stopped. He thought he heard something. He listened carefully, but there was no noise. "It must have been my imagination," he thought to himself. But as he started off he heard the noise again. There was no doubt this time. Somewhere in the distance he had definitely heard a very very faint "Baa, baa." "Tilly? Tilly?" called Bart. "Baa! Baa!" came the very faint reply again.

Bart went crashing off through the bushes in the direction of the sound. "Tilly! Tilly!" he shouted. "Baa! Baa!" came the reply.

Suddenly though Bart tripped. He fell to the ground with a great thud and his head hit a rock. Everything went dark and still and Bart lay on the ground not moving at all.

Suddenly Bart felt a strange feeling on his face. He opened his eyes and instead of it being night time the sun was just coming up. He felt the strange feeling on his face again and he turned his head, and ... Well you can probably guess what he found can't you?

Yes it was Tilly, right beside him, with one leg stuck in a prickly bush, licking his face.

Bart dragged himself up on his feet, and even though he had a thumping head ache and a massive bump, he forgot all about them when he realised that it was Tilly. Bart freed Tilly's leg. He picked her up and put her across his shoulders and carried her back to the other sheep.

When he got there the first thing Bart did was to count:
1, 2, 3, 4, 25, 26, 27, 54, 55, 56, 78, 79, 80, 97, 98
99, 100! They were all there.

"Well, that's grand!" said Bart. "I think this is worth having a party about." And when he got back to his village, once he'd cleaned up the big cut on his head, that's exactly what he did.

Copyright (c) John Beauchamp/Kingdomstory.net 2010 All rights reserved.
Please refer to www.kingdomstory.net for copyright restrictions and permissions.