

Characters: Narrator, **RAM**, **EWE**

Choir: Autumn Gives her Hand to Winter (Kieth Loftis – Pavane Publishing)

Narrator: Fall winds are making leaves fly, skittering colored clouds of them down through a green valley that reaches up into surrounding hills. Already a nip in the air warns the small flock of sheep that dead grass at hilltops would not be springing up again. Their young shepherd had led them down slowly through late summer to where there was still a good meal for his flock. They are all standing closer together now to protect the spring lambs from the wind. As the flock faces a frosty winter, it happens that one of them is better protected than the rest.

EWE ; You look smug with your two years' coat of wool. How did you skip the shearing the rest of us got?

RAM: Not easy – just lucky the dog was chasing a run-away lamb and I hunkered down in the reeds by our mountain stream. The dog wasn't fooled when he saw my dirty wet stomach, but by then the shearers had gone.

EWE: You won't get away with it a second time.

RAM: Yeah, I know. I hate the sound of those clippers, and the shearers are careless about nicking my skin.

Narrator: The flock went on grazing, moving slowly toward the village, when suddenly a ewe stumbled and fell. She was breathing heavily, bleating softly. The shepherd rushed to her side. He ran to get several strong friends, and they carried the ewe into the barn where she could be cared for. The doctor examined her, said the word, pneumonia.

RAM: **W**hat are we supposed to do with her kid? Not old enough to be on her own. Look at those spindly legs, that small crop of fuzz on her back.

EWE: The shepherd won't let her near her mother – no use two of them sick. Poor thing came so late in the birthing season she doesn't have the strength of the other kids. Look how she's shivering with cold.

Narrator: The flock gathered to consider their options, soon all eyes turned toward the ram and his thick wool coat.

RAM: Hold it! Why is everyone staring at me? I have nothing to do with this mess.

EWE: Well, you were the dim bulb who skipped shearing, so now you have coat enough to share – to warm a helpless lamb. She's all yours.

RAM: Are you crazy? I'll be a howling joke among all the rams. I'd never live this down. Imagine! Me a baby sitter!

EWE: Any ram who even snickers will have to deal with all the ewes, and we can make life miserable, eh, ladies?

RAM: Oh holy straw! I see I'm not going to get out of this. Where do you ewes get these crazy ideas, why pick on me?

Narrator: The ram worked out his annoyance with a lot of stomps, kicks, and snorts, but when he cracked a fence post and was worn out, he finally walked carefully up to the lamb.

RAM: You don't need to be scared or cold when all of us can take care of you. Just back your skinny hide up under my big warm chest and let's head for a patch of grass. Come on! , you're going to be the best looking lamb out here.

Narrator: The ewes kept their word. Not a single ram dared crack a smile, and even the shepherd laughed only to himself. The ram kept his word too. The lamb was never cold or wet. She got the best grass. If she took too long at the water trough, nobody dared push her on. By the time her now healthy mother returned to the flock, her lamb was growing fine.

Choir: Echoes of Kindness (Ruth Schram, Linda Marcus – Heritage Music Press)

Narrator: The sheep went on grazing and talking while life in the village grew more intense. Neighbors shared special food. Wreaths appeared on doors. In the small town's park a tree was draped with decorations, snowy popcorn balls hung too high for sheep to reach.

EWE: Looks like we're in the middle of something. I wonder what's gotten into these people?

RAM: People are always hard to figure, but I have it from grandma sheep that it's something called Christmas to honor a great man born long ago.

EWE: It looks like a lot of fun for them, but I suspect one of us is going to be the main dish.

RAM: Just pray for tough and stringy - spread the word. 3.

Narrator: The sheep continued to watch the unusual activity until evening when locked safely in the large pen, they heard the village choir tuning up. The old organ, wheezy as ever, led the hymns, and everyone came with the special offering they had saved up for this grand occasion. So let us join their celebrations and offer our own monetary gifts to sustain our community. Will our ushers come forward?

Choir: Any Christmas Medley

EWE: Well, if that don't beat all! I never heard sheep do that. I hear they call that . . . what's it called ? singing?

RAM: Humph! That bunch would freeze if it weren't for our wool. We have what you call "redeeming features".

Narrator: Celebrations reached a pitch of merriment with dancing and feasting. Plenty of wine from the summer's grapes made everyone giddy. But in the humblest house activity was more serious. The lady was about to have her first baby with only her husband to rely upon. He was frantic with worry waiting for the midwife from the next village to arrive. The young shepherd had been sent to get her and was so rattled he didn't latch the sheep pen.

EWE: Well, here's a break! I'm going to see if those popcorn balls really are hung too high.

RAM: I'm right behind you. These people are so silly by now they are bound to throw away something worth eating.

EWE: Uh oh! Here comes our shepherd with some old lady. Now we'll get it! Wait! He's going into the house. What's going on in there anyway?

RAM: There's a handy rip in this window cover. Let's just take a peek.

Narrator: The two sheep stared amazed as the woman and her helpers struggled to complete the birth.

EWE: Would you look at all that fuss! We sheep just drop them and walk off like it was nothing. Well, it looks like she made it. Just listen to that kid cry!

Narrator: With the new parents laughing and the shepherd whooping it up, there was much celebration. A few neighbors dropped in with good wishes. It was some time before the baby was settled quietly in his mother's arms.

Choir: Celtic Lullaby (Scholl..website under choral)

Narrator: The new mother placed her baby in an old corn crib she had fixed with a few thin blankets for protection. It didn't look very comfortable or warm enough.

EWE: Would you look at that. She doesn't have the simplest thing to keep that baby warm. They need a good wool comforter, and I know where they can get one.

RAM: Hold it! I know that look. I'm not involved here. All you women stop pushing. Wait! You want me sheared in the middle of winter? I'll catch hoof and mouth disease, un...uh...pneumonia, . . .uh. .malaria! Besides, it's a human baby – people eat us!!

EWE: Well, yes, occasionally. But they also feed us where there isn't any grass, and give us water when all the ponds are frozen. And we're never left outside in a storm. It's a baby – it's not going to hurt anything.

RAM: I'm not going to get out of this, am I? When you women get an idea, it's like talking to rocks!

EWE: You have enough fat to do without a lot of wool. We'll put you in the middle of the flock where there's less wind. You'll be fine, so get in there and do something decent.

Narrator: With the flock pushing at his back, the ram nudged the door open and slipped inside. The shepherd noticed and understood. He got his shears. From head to tail thick, dense wool fell off into a worn blanket. The mother sewed the blanket shut and placed the baby in its cloudy comfort. She put her hand on the ram's head and said "thank you, my friend".

RAM: I never knew human eyes could say so much. I hate to admit it, but I'm glad you made me give that wool. That baby is too.

EWE: Odd the way things work out. You won't have enough wool to bother with by May, so you'll get out of another shearing.

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Narrator: The shepherd was reconciled to losing the payment he would have gotten for all that wool. It was for a good cause, he told himself. And so the little village goes on. The flock slowly eats its way up the grass of the valley to the hilltops of high summer. The great cycle of life goes on with a new bunch of kids to romp about the meadows. All around them creatures come into life and leave it according to their nature. As the ram surveys his world from a rocky peak it seems to him that all is well.

Choir: New Mornings (Scholl. website under choral)
or Turn the World Around , Harry Belafonte