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Christmas Story (Contest Entry)

“Shhhhh!” brayed Embers, the ash-colored donkey. “Here they come! “

“What?”

“Who?”

“Who’s coming?”

“Move!”

”I can’t see a thing!”

“Let go of my tail!!” A noise of confusion went up from the stable.

“Quiet!” Bellowed Big Ben, the ox. “Who’s coming, is it the *boss* coming to feed us?” he said, licking his cow lips.

“No, no, no.” said Embers, stamping her foot impatiently, “It’s a man and a lady, with our boss’ wife, and a strange donkey I’ve never seen before; they’re coming into the stable, “and if you don’t mind,” she said louder, looking back at the other animals, “I’d like to hear what they’re saying.”

The other animals got quiet and peeked out, timidly staring at the new strangers that had just arrived.

They listened. This is what they heard: “Oh, I’m so sorry you have to stay in our stable and not the house.” said the boss’ wife.

Meanwhile, the animals had noticed that the man was looking for an empty stall to put their donkey in.

The animals looked nervously around. All the stalls were taken. The man asked, “Are there any other stalls than these?”

“No, but- what were your names again?” (“Mary and Joe” came the rushed reply.) “Oh, just put him in the big stall on the left. He can share with our sweet-tempered young donkey. It’s big enough for an ox, and I’m sure they’ll get along.” Said the boss’ wife.

The animals stared in shock at one another at this notion. The donkey she called sweet-tempered was exactly the opposite- she was rude and only cared about herself. Embers, on the other hand,

stamped her foot angrily and snorted, “share my stall? With a stranger? I’m of royal blood and I deserve to have this big stall myself! It’s not to be shared with anyone that doesn’t have anything to be the least bit proud of.” She stormed in the newly arrived guest’s face.

“Stop it! Said Big Ben (never make an ox or bull mad!) Enough Embers! If you don’t have anything good to say, don’t say it at all, Big Ben finished with a snort and glared at her.

Mean Embers went to the corner farthest away from everyone else. Muttering, “Fine, have it your way. No one should talk to royal blood that way, Hmmf...” and she lay down in the corner muttering and sulking.

Putting down its head, the new donkey said, “Oh, I’m so sorry for being a disturbance to everyone maybe I should just leave. But,” said the donkey proudly, “I have something to be very proud of.”

“What?” asked the other animals.

“I have...” started the donkey, “I’m not trying to boast...” he added quickly.

“Well,” said Embers, a bit confused, “why don’t you tell us after you tell us your name.”

“Okay,” said the donkey, “my name is-“ But suddenly, there was a sound of a baby crying. All the animals were irritated, all except the newcomer. All the animals wanted to do was greet the visitor donkey and then get to sleep.

Just then, there was a sound like a whole flock of sheep bleating outside. There was a knock at the door and the man named Joseph answered it. “This is going to be a long night,” said Embers, as she tried to ignore the noise and get to sleep.

The men outside said, “Greetings! We were told by angels that we were to come here to see the king.” The animals were puzzled.

Joseph stepped back and let them in and said, “Come in, friends.” So the shepherds came in and some sheep too. Some of the sheep went towards the manger, some of them went to the animals with the question-like faces.

“Hello-o-o-o” said the sheep in unison.

A leader of the sheep, a ram, stepped up and said, “Haven’t you hear-r-rd? Angels

appea-r-r-red to us in the fold. They told us to go to a stable in Be-e-e-ethlehem to see our Lord and king.”

The other sheep followed up, bleating, “Our lor-r-rd, our kin-n-ng, our kin-n-ng, kin-n-ng, our kin-n-nng!”

So said the ram, “Our master’s brought us here to se-e-ee him, so hee-e-ere we are.”

The other sheep bleated, “So he-e-ere we are, we are he-e-e-ere.”

Big Ben shook his head and said, “So the rest of the flock is outside? And you came all the way here because an *angel* told you to? Am I missing something? Are you *sure* you saw an angel? I can’t believe it, it’s not real.” he said, shaking his head.

“But it is!” said the ram, “and not only that, but after he spoke, a *multitude* of angels came and sang “Glory to God in the highest!”

“Glo-o-ory to God in the highest!” “Glo-o-ory to God!” “Glo-o-ory to God!” Glory to God in the highest!” bleated the sheep triumphantly.

“Okay, okay!”shouted Embers, rudely. “I hate this stable full of low, not-anything- to-be-proud-of freaks. I’m leaving!” she said, trying to kick open the door.

“Stop it!” said Big Ben.

“You can’t tell me what to do. I’ll be free in a minute. I’ll never-” Suddenly there came another knock, and as Joseph got to the door, there was a sound of a great many hooves.

As the door opened, three royally dressed men swept in carrying gifts. Bags and things. They said, “we have come to see him, the Son of God, the king.” Joseph stepped aside to let them in. The men were wearing gold crowns, tunics of silk and beautiful colors, and jewelry of gold, silver and brass. They laid gifts at the edge of the manger. Gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But that’s not all, three big camels slowly walked in led by servants and were watered and fed. The other animals peered out of their stalls nervously. The camels ate and drank thirstily.

Now the animals were very nervous, because camels are very noble creatures and respectable ones. It would be very rude not to say a greeting. But on the other hand, it would be very hard to speak to

them, because you get very nervous and tongue-tied. Silence. Finally, Big Ben spoke up, "Hello friends from across the desert. Please find shelter in this small but good bedded stable."

The camels looked up, startled; they looked around until they finally noticed the other animals. "Oh, I'm sorry, I thought we were the only ones here. I couldn't see you in this bad light, he paused, and squinted, trying to get a better look. Oh, yes, you want to know our names, I'm Alabaster, this to my left is Olmar, and here is Solomon."

Solomon lifted his head and said in a deep voice, "Hello, hello, it is an honor to be in your stable."

"Yes!" said Olmar, "since you have already seen the king. Isn't it a great honor for you that he should be born in your stable?"

The animals looked around them and said, "Who is this king everyone keeps talking about?" The camels frowned at their puzzled faces.

Alabaster said in a question-like tone, "You mean you haven't seen the true king?" The animals shrugged and shook their heads.

"Then why do you stand there?" Olmar said in a shocked voice. "You mean to say he has been born in your stable and you haven't even seen him or know who he is?!" he finished, shocked.

Then the stranger donkey spoke up, "I know who he is." The animals' gazes quickly turned to him. Even the shocked camels turned. "I was the donkey Joseph chose. I was the donkey that carried Mary, the chosen mother of Jesus. The king of everything, the Prince of Peace, the Way the Truth the Life: Jesus Christ!" Then a sound made all of the animals turn, even Embers, who had the whole time, had been sulking and doubting all that the others had been talking about, now turned with a new expression on her face. A look of wonder.

All the animals turned and stretched their necks to see a sight. Five shepherds standing, looking in awe, three wise kings bowing down with gifts in their hands, Joseph standing, looking at something, very stern, but with a look of peace and joy in his eyes, Mary kneeling down, looking in a manger, her face full of great joy, and finally, in a manger with hay, a newborn baby crying. It was Jesus Christ. Then the animals realized all that they had been missing, and their faces, instead of being puzzled,

were filled with peace and understanding.

Embers stood there and said in a mellow but sorry tone, "I get it now. All I ever thought was a lie was just a step away. I believe now." There was silence. She looked very sad. "I'm sorry I never believed and everything," she said after a few minutes. "I'm sorry I said so many mean things and was so unkind." she said, turning to the other animals.

Big Ben smiled warmly and said, "That's okay, Embers, I believe too."

"I'm starting to get it." said Embers. "I just don't understand- why is he the king? He's just a baby, and he was born in a stable. I thought royalty were born in palaces."

"Well you see," said Solomon, I was trying to tell everyone before, but no one was really listening," he sighed, "our masters study things. And sometimes we camels can hear their talks on the balcony. So we heard about lots of things. Like wars and far off tales."

"But we never tried to eavesdrop; we couldn't help it or get away from it." Olmar added sternly but quickly.

Solomon went on, "And we also heard them talking about a coming king. He would be born somewhere in Bethlehem. He was the promised Savior or king." The animals looked blank.

"Oh they still don't get it. Tell them about the star!" said Olmar.

Alabaster cleared his throat, then began, "One day, we heard our masters talking loud in excited tones. They said things like, come let us go and follow His star. Yes, let us go now-- wait! We don't want to arrive empty-handed. We shall bring him gifts. Then before we knew what was happening, someone was saddling us. Before we left, my master told me that we were going on a long journey. And we were going to follow his star. He kept going on about this, excitedly saying things like that, until he finally managed to calm down. Then we were traveling by day and night. We traveled for a very long time and I puzzled over what he said to me, until," he paused, "until we got here and we saw him. The prophecy and everything fit together. Then here we are."

The animals said things like, "Oh, how could we not *know*?" and, "What gifts do we have to give?"

"No, no, no." said Solomon, "it's not what you have to give, it's what he can give you. Just believe that

he is the son of God and believe he came to save us. Believe that he loves you and one day he will save you. And you will have eternal life” he finished, trying to persuade them.

So the animals looked at the baby, tried to believe that he was God’s only son. “It’s up to you now.” said Olmar.

Then turning to the other animals, Embers said, “I always had something inside me that wanted to believe.

Then smiles broke out among the animals. Even is you didn’t want to smile, you couldn’t resist it. The joy and happiness spread like water poured on a dry surface.