

Towards the end of July the weather seemed to take a turn for the better and, presuming that all the snow that was going to melt had now done so, George could see the water level dropping. The days were lengthening slowly so George was able to cross the stream as soon as it was light and spend the day checking his pregnant ewes and seeking out new lambs. Roy happily splashed across the stream and shook from nose to tail on the far bank to remove the water from his coat. He loved scampering between the shrubs and finding sheep. He knew which plants to avoid. The ones with the long spikes were the worst. It really hurt if he caught his paw on one of those low growing, spreading bushes. And there was a strappy grass-like plant with razor edges which he knew he had to avoid too, he had the scars to prove it. George would follow him on horseback occasionally giving him a whistled instruction and by lunchtime Roy, George and the horse were panting and sweating and in need of a break.

But on one particular day George had found a bigger tree under which he and Roy could sit for their cold lunch. It was only when he sat down that George noticed the grey clouds gathering and the wind rising. By the time he had eaten his bread and cheese, saving the crusts for Roy, an odd drop of rain had started to fall. He shivered and said to his dog, "We'd better head for home, Roy. Before the rain comes." Roy responded with a single bark before setting off in the wrong direction.

"Come back you stupid boy," called George, but to no avail. It was clear that Roy had picked up a scent. Pulling his oilskin coat around him and pushing his brimmed hat down firmly to avoid it flying away in the growing wind, George mounted his horse and followed the dog. His eyes stung with the rain which was now falling steadily. Star didn't like these conditions one bit. He tossed his head and shook it from side to side to get rid of the water which stopped him seeing where he was going. It was at the very last minute that George found Roy standing to attention indicating in the direction of a ewe who was obviously in distress. Jumping from his horse George could see a tail hanging down from the rear of the sheep as she stood panting with discomfort and the effort of a breech birth. "Bother," thought George, "This could take some time."

He set too with untying some ropes from his saddle and began the job of extracting each leg from the writhing ewe by attaching a rope and pulling as hard as he could. It was strenuous work for George and the ewe. Slowly he was able to turn the lamb so that the top of his head could be seen. Although the poor ewe was exhausted she pushed and pushed. All of a sudden the awkward lamb slithered to the ground in a heap of blood and fluids. George rushed to clear his nose and mouth and rubbed the tiny body vigorously. Expecting that he may lose a lamb and a mother, it took several minutes before he heard a gasp and a plaintive bleating from the babe. Mother, who had lain exhausted and lifeless, rallied at the sound and turned around to begin the task of licking her new lamb. George stepped back and left them to it. He never ceased in his sense of wonder at new life starting and the bond between mother and child. It reminded him of Sophia and Freddie.

"Roy, we had better get home before dark, my boy," he had to shout over the storm which seemed to have intensified in the last few minutes. He could hear thunder rumbling over the hills and the rain fell in sheets which seemed to hit him like slaps in the face. He struggled to mount his horse who by now was fair spooked by the weather. Darkness was only a half hour away and he cursed at not bringing a lantern, fully expecting to be home in daylight. They made slow progress. Even Roy had slowed to a crawl with muddy paws and sodden coat. He was a miserable dog and yearned for his warm, dry bed. But he wouldn't dream of leaving his Master's side, of course.

As the sorry looking group approached the stream George heard the roaring of the water before he could see how fully it was running in the stream. Crossing was going to be difficult. He could just see a light in the house across the water but the river had become a raging torrent. Should he find shelter on this bank? Or should he try to get home? George was tired and cold and hungry. He decided he needed to be home. He certainly didn't want Sophia to come looking for him in these conditions.

The crossing point that he had spent so much time building was nowhere to be seen. The lack of light made it hard to find a suitable place for his horse to enter the water. If he could find a safe step down the bank George thought they could wade through carefully. He called Roy to jump up on the saddle. Roy liked travelling this way normally, but he wasn't too sure about his slippery seat today. Nevertheless, he wasn't brave enough to swim across, so he would take up his seat, tummy across the saddle in front of his master.

George had been aware of lightning flashes behind him, followed a few seconds later by thunder which seemed to rumble on for minutes at a time. Rain still fell and the wind blew in huge gusts. He thought he had found a good place. He clicked his teeth and pushed his heels in to make his ride step forward. Bravely the horse put his front feet down onto the slippery bank and prepared to take the next leap into the water. But just as he was about to jump a huge flash of lightning lit up the sky with a crackle, followed almost immediately by rolling thunder. It was just too much for the poor beast. He reared up with eyes rolling and nose snorting white flecks of saliva. With only his back legs for traction there was no way he could stay upright and he fell sideways into the raging torrent, tipping George and Roy in too.