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More Than Three Bears

MOUNT DIABLO DREAMS

Richer Than Diamonds

A Star Named Timmy

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MORE THAN THREE BEARS

BY

ELMER TOWNS

MORE THAN THREE BEARS

By:

Elmer L. Towns

Once upon a time, longer than long ago, in a place farther than far away, there were three bears, who were fatter than fat. Mama Bear prepared a yummier than yummy lunch. "Umm Umm good," said the three bears, more roly than poly. Papa Bear tried to sip the chicken noodle soup that was hotter than hot. He yelled,

"Yike-e-e-e-e-e . . . !!!"

Baby Bear blew in his broth that was soupier than soup. He was hungry as a bear, more hungry than he had ever been in his life.

"Yike-e-e-e-e-e . . . !!!" He yelled not quite as loud as Papa Bear.

"Let's go walk a walk, we'll go quicker than quick," Papa Bear suggested. "The soup will be more perfect than perfect when we get back."

Along came the cutest little girl you've ever seen. She was cuter than cute because her golden locks were blonder than blond. She didn't know where she was. She was more lost than lost.

"Look . . . a cottage that is homier than home," she exclaimed when she saw the bears' home.

She tapped on the door, more gentle than firm. The door opened more than a little. Looking around, she saw more than she could see.

Quietly she more than tippied on her toes into the cottage that was more than charming. She wanted help because she was scareder than scared. So she whispered more loudly than loud.

"Is anyone home in this home?"

The house was quieter than quiet. Nothing was stirring not even a mouse.

The cuter than cute little girl found the kitchen more than inviting. She saw three bowls of chicken noodle soup that looked tastier than tasty. The bigger than big bowl still had steam curling from its broth.

"It’s hotter than hot," she said.

She spied a middle size bowl that was more average than average. "It’s colder than cold," she said.

Then she spied the little bowl, that was tinier than tiny. Because it was tastier than tasty, she ate it all up.

"This is the best of the best."

She more than ate it all up. By the time she finished, the bowl was emptier than empty.

The cuter than cute little girl with golden locks that were blonder than blond went into the sitting room. She saw three chairs that were more than inviting. She sat in the bigger than big chair.

"It’s harder than hard."

She tried the more medium than medium sized chair.

"Its softer than soft," she said. "It won't rock like a rocky chair."

Then she spied the more perfect than perfect chair. It was just her size. She sat down and tried to rock like a rocking chair. But it just had four legs like a four legged chair.

It more than crashed. It was more broken than she had ever seen a broken chair in her life.

Now she was sleepier than sleepy. Seeing the bigger than big bed, she tried it out.

"Ouch," she said. "This bed is harder than hard."

The more than middle size bed was next. She more than crawled up to try it out.

It was softer than soft.

Next she spied the bed that was just right for her. The cuter than cute little girl, more than cuddled under the fluffier than fluffy quilt.

She went sounder than sleep.

The three hungrier than hungry bears returned home. They saw the door that was more than open. Poking his head in the door, Papa Bear tried to see more than could be seen.

"Somebody tasted my soup," he growled.

"Somebody tasted my soup," Mama Bear exclaimed.

"Somebody more than tasted my soup," Little bear said, he was sadder than sad. "And they more than ate it up."

The three more than curious bears tippied on their toes into the sitting room. They were more than surprised at what they saw. The room was messier than a mess.

"Somebody sat in my chair," Papa Bear growled.

"Somebody sat in my chair," Mama Bear exclaimed.

"Somebody more than sat in my chair," Little bear said, he was sorrier than sorry. "And they more than smashed it to bits."

Now, three bears, more puzzled than puzzled, tippied on their toes into the bed room. They were quieter than quiet.

"Somebody's been laying in my harder than hard bed," Papa Bear growled.

"Somebody's been laying in my harder than hard bed," Mama Bear growled.

"Somebody has more than laid in my fluffier than fluffy bed," Little Bear said, "And she's still sounder than sleep.

"Oh!" The cuter than cute little girl said more than once. "Oh," she said again.

"I'm sorrier than sorry," Golden Locks said, "I must get home before it gets darker than dark."

She ran away faster than fast.

The three bears, more roly than poly and more fatter than fat waved goodbye. They more than knew that her apology was truer than true.

MOUNT DIABLO DREAMS

BY

ELMER TOWNS

CHAPTER ONE

DREAMS OF FROM MOUNT DIABLO

by

Elmer Towns

Rug Crawler shivered in the night air. He pulled his shepherd's robe tightly around his cold aching body. The bright moon and clear stars left dark shadows on the desert floor. Mount Diablo could be seen on the horizon, the moonlight glistened off its snow cap.

"MY FRIENDS DO NOTHING," Rug Crawler complained, "THEN THEY CLAIM TO GET TIRED DOING NOTHING."

He watched his fattest friend Thumb Sucker crouch close to the fire. Being comfortable was the plump boy's main reason to live. Thumb Sucker was staring at the small flame. The other friend, a thoughtful teenager, second guessed everything . He was wrapped in a blanket, perched against a rock, hoping to absorb a little heat from the rock left from the burning rays of the sun. Book Reader gazed at the stars.

The three young men were sent to the desert to watch their family's sheep. Rug Crawler dreamed of adventure . . . he wanted to climb Mount Diablo, something no other had done. Book Reader yearned for charts and maps of Diablo. He dreamed of talking to thoughtful wisemen and adventurers who had attempted to climb the forbidden peak. Thumb Sucker wanted to sit in the kitchen and stare out the window like his grand poppy. After breakfast, he'd sit all day, and he'd be first for supper. He'd sit and look at beautiful Diablo all day. He loved the mountain's majestic forest and in the winter, the mountain was capped with sparkling white snow.

Suddenly a voice shattered their thoughts.

"I know your dreams," a voice startled the three boys into full attention. A penetrating blue light burned their eyes. They hid their faces to the ground. The dark evening sky became lighter than noon.

"Your dreams are not bad dreams," the shy voice of the young maiden spoke to them. She took away some of their fears. "You three guys want what all young men want." Her voice reassured them, but they couldn't look into the blinding light. When Rug Crawler peeked between his fingers, the blinding glare was like a sand storm scratching his eyes.

"Follow my instructions," the voice charmed them, "and you'll live your dreams." She promised to lead them in paths that no one else has ever followed. She promised to lead them to the top of Diablo in one day. She promised them that they would do what no one else had ever done.

"Tell me . . .," said Rug Crawler, "I am the leader." The two friends did not disagree. "I will lead us to our dreams."

"Go to Diablo Mountain," the light-talker instructed Rug Crawler. "It is the mountain of fear." Rug Crawler knew all the stories of those who were last on the mountain. He had been told to never go there, but the mountain was a challenge. The adventure excited him. The possibility of going to the top of Diablo was awesome.

“There’s a first command,” Light Talker said. "Once you begin to climb," she cautioned, "never look back or never look down . . ." Her voice trailed off into a whisper, "You'll go blind

. . . your eyes will no longer see."

"Why . . . ?" questioned Book Reader. He always asked the question “Why?” When the voice didn't immediately answer, Book Reader asked again.

"Why?"

"Because you need help to accomplish your dreams," the young girl’s voice almost pleaded for Book Reader to believe her. "Your greatest help will come from within you . . . so look within . . . don’t look for help without . . . don’t look back . . . don’t look down.”

Dream Maker doubted the voice talker.

"If you look back," she explained, "you’ll deny any help you can find within; you’ll go blind.”

The three boys listened intensely to their task. They were going to climb Diablo . . . to the top . . . something no one else has ever done.

There’s a second command,” Light-Talker warned the three boys. "When you begin climbing, do not stop . . . do not go back," the Light-Talker spoke from behind the eerie blue glare. "If you stop or go back,. . . your heart will turn to stone . . . you'll kill your dreams.”

"Hard as a rock . . . ?" Rug Crawler asked.

The Light-Talker agreed with him, saying, "Your heart will be so hard . . . your dreams will die."

"Why should we climb?" Book Reader questioned the voice. "Why can't we just read about going to the top of Diablo Mountain?"

"Because at the top of the mountain," she coaxed the three boys, "you'll see what you can't see from any other place." Then she added, “Your dreams are at the top.”

"If I don't know what it is," Book Reader responded to the pleasant voice behind the lights, "how do I know if I'll like it?"

"Because . . .," the voice began to fade . . . the light began to dim. Rug Crawler blinked his eyes several times. He could barely make out the outline of a beautiful young girl. She said in benediction:

"Because . . . I know your dreams . . . I know what every young man wants . . . and what you want is at the top of Diablo Mountain."

She was gone . . . the light went out . . . and darkness gushed around them like someone splashing water on a dirty floor.

"Did I really see her?" Book Reader asked.

"Yes!"

"Let's go . . .," Rug Crawler sprang to his feet. "Let's go now."

"No!" both friends answered in unison.

"It's too dark," complained Thumb Sucker, who hated the thought of physical work.

"There's nothing on the top," reasoned Book Reader who was his argumentative self.

Rug Crawler was the group's spokesman and his two friends usually went where he led . . . but not very willingly. Rug Crawler suggested,

"If we don't go to the top, we'll always know we've missed something great," Rug Crawler explained. "But, if we go and nothing is there . . . we'll always know that we tried ." Then he explained, "At least we'll be the first to the top of ol' Diablo."

The two boys couldn't say anything against Rug Crawler's argument . . .but they didn't move.

"So . . . let's go in the morning," Rug Crawler knew he had to compromise his friends to get them to go along.

"O.K."

"In the morning, we'll climb Diablo."

CHAPTER TWO

HE SAW EVERYWHERE HE HAD BEEN

"Come on guys," Rug Crawler yelled to his two friends who were lagging behind. "We'll never make it to the top."

They had been climbing for two hours. At first, they followed a deep path through the thick scrub oaks that grew close to the ground. Without a path, they would never have gotten this high . . . this easy . . . this quick. Suddenly they walked into a clearing . . . no underbrush . . . only a few scattered Hickory Nut trees.

"Let's eat a few for strength," Thumb Sucker stopped to crush a nut.

"O.K.," the leader Rug Crawler stopped to let his friends eat.

"I wonder if we can see our village from here?" Book Reader casually threw out a question.

Rug Crawler jumped toward Book Reader, throwing his hands over Book Reader’s eyes.

"Don't look back," Rug Crawler commanded, "your heart will turn to stone!"

"It was an idle thought," the repented Book Reader answered.

A few minutes later they were again walking on a hidden path.

The footpath got steeper, and their breathing got heavier. A fresh breeze whipped their faces . . . there were fewer trees to protect them from the wind.

"We can see a million miles," Book Reader teased his friend about looking back.

Don't look back," Rug Crawler warned. "I know what you're thinking!"

"The Light-Talker didn't mean we couldn't enjoy the view," Book Reader rationalized.

He had always argued when his father gave him a job and told him how to do it.

"I won't look back to go back," Book Reader said; "I just want to see how far we've come."

"Don't . . .," the two friends yelled.

Before the words were out of their mouth, Book Reader had turned around to look out over the valley. He saw the streams where sheep watered, and he saw his village. He saw everywhere he had been.

"I see my home . . ." Book Reader yelled to his friends. "I see where we've come from."

Rug Crawler and Thumb Sucker fell to the ground, put their hands over their eyes and refused to look.

"Nothing's happened to me," Book Reader boasted. "I can still see my village."

Book Reader stood a long time looking back. Rug Crawler and Thumb Sucker watched him, but they wouldn't look back at what he saw. They didn't know what to think. The Light-Talker had told them they would go blind they looked back. Now they were confused. Book Reader had looked back, but he was not blind. Book Talker could see what he saw. When the two friends looked into his eyes, they hadn't changed.

"He's not blind," Thumb Sucker observed.

Then a cloud gently drifted around them, like the cool early morning fog near the stream.

When the cloud passed by, Rug Crawler pointed to the top of Diablo and pleaded for his friends to continue to climb.

"Now we can see the top," Rug Crawler encouraged them.

"I don't see the top," Book Reader said plainly. "There is no top of this mountain. And if there is a top, I don't want to see it."

"Every mountain must have a top," Rug Crawler explained, "just like every bucket must have a bottom."

"I can't go where I can't see," Book Reader's voice sounded differently. "I'm not going to a place that doesn't exist."

Rug Crawler and Thumb Sucker both had a strange feeling about their friend, Book Reader. He appeared the same to them, but there was a different glint in his eyes. Something had happened to Book Reader.

"I have seen where I played as a child," Book Reader explained. "That is where I want to go."

As Book Reader left to return down Diablo, Rug Crawler realized that what the Light-Talker had warned was true. His friend Book Reader had looked back, and now was blind. Not physically blind, but he could no longer see the dreams of his heart. Book Reader could only see yesterday, not tomorrow.

CHAPTER THREE

HIS HARD HEART WOULDN'T GO ON

The two boys walked slowly, with Rug Crawler in front and Thumb Sucker constantly slowing down the pace. Rug Crawler was frustrated, he wanted to run ahead, but Thumb Sucker held him back. But both boys were frustrated. Thumb Sucker was comfortable with an enjoyable leisurely pace, but was irritated at Thumb Sucker's constant demand to, "Pick up the pace."

They had not seen a tree for an hour, gigantic rocks were scattered over the terrain . . . only a few meadows of yellow grass this high up the mountain. The clouds that frequently covered Mount Diablo were damp. The boy's outside clothing was wet from the atmosphere, their bodies were wet with perspiration.

"Let's stop to rest," Thumb Sucker bitterly complained of the progress.

"No . . .," Rug Crawler warned his friend. "The Light-Talker told us our heart would turn to stone if we stopped."

"She meant if we permanently stopped," Thumb Sucker retorted. "Light-Talker knew we needed rest . . . there's nothing wrong with resting."

"No!" Rug Crawler refused to stop.

The pace got even slower, they were barely walking. They creeped along like two boys sneaking up on someone who didn't know they were coming.

"We might as well stop," Rug Crawler relented.

Thumb Sucker fell to the ground out of fatigue, his arms and legs spread out in total ease. Rug Crawler looked into the sky. He was worried. Then he cupped his hands to yell into the sky,

"I don't know if you can hear us, . . . " yelled Rug Crawler into the clean, chilled air, "but we're just resting . . . we'll start walking soon."

Rug Crawler sat to rest, but was careful not to look down the mountain, nor to look back. He cast a wistful look toward the top. He could see the peak was not too far away. He heard heavy breathing from Thumb Sucker, but let him sleep so they could soon start again.

After several moments, Rug Crawler shook Thumb Sucker out of his stupor; he pointed to the top.

“Let’s go, . . .”

"I don't think I want to go on, . . ." Thumb Sucker complained. "I'm too tired . . . maybe after I sleep a while, I'll feel like climbing again."

Rug Crawler let his friends drift back into sleep. Then he noticed something he had not seen before.

Shadows.

The day light was burning up. The high sun was beginning to slip toward the horizon.

"We must go," Rug Crawler yelled as he violently shook Thumb Sucker. "We must go before it gets dark."

"No, . . . " Thumb Sucker announced in the clarity of a declaration sentence. "I no longer want to go to the top."

"But your dreams," Rug Crawler begged his friend to think about all the things they had dreamed together. "Don't stop . . . you heart will turn to stone."

"I don't care about that," Thumb Sucker answered his friend. "I don't care about going on . . . I don't care about my dreams . . . I just don't care."

Thumb Sucker lay back down, arms and legs outstretched. Then with little concern for the warning of Light-Talker, the sound of his heavy breathing drifted over the hillside.

Rug Crawler realized the consequences that Light-Talker had described had happened. She said if they stopped, their heart would turn to stone. When Thumb Sucker stopped, he no longer wanted to go to the top. He hardened his heart to his dreams.

CHAPTER FOUR

SEEING WHAT YOU SEE

Rug Crawler walked by himself. The path was more difficult because there were more rocks than before. The higher he went, the more frequent a cloud obstructed his view.

"I'LL GET LOST," Rug Crawler thought to himself. "I NEED TO SEE THE TOP, TO WALK TO THE PEAK."

When the next cloud covered the mountain, Rug Crawler watched the ground and climbed higher with each step. He made sure his feet didn't go sideways or turn down the mountain.

"DIABLO," he spoke to the mountain, "I KNOW YOU'RE A VICIOUS FOE . . . BUT I'LL CONQUER YOU TODAY."

When the cloud passed, Rug Crawler could see the top clearer than ever. But it seemed the closer he got, it was more difficult to walk because the pathway got steeper. The sun was behind the Diablo Mountain, and Rug Crawler climbed in the late afternoon shadows.

"I WONDER IF BOOK READER GOT HOME," Rug Crawler's thoughts were on his friend who turned back at noon. Book Reader turned back, his eyes became blind so he couldn't see the top.

"YET BOOK READER COULD SEE TO WALK DOWN THE MOUTAIN," Rug Crawler thought to himself. "I WONDER WHAT HE SEES?"

Rug Crawler was tempted to turn and search the base of Diablo for Book Reader, but he remembered the warning of Light-Talker. He didn't look back..

Rug Crawler wondered about Thumb Sucker. "IS HE STILL ASLEEP?" Rug Crawler asked himself. He knew the evening descent would be easier for Thumb Sucker than was the morning climb.

Rug Crawler didn't look back to search for Thumb Sucker.

All grass and vegetation were gone. Patches of snow appeared. The bitter breeze chilled his rosy cheeks. He pulled his shepherd's coat closer to fend off the wind.

His feet were cold . . . cold like the blizzards of deep winter. Rug Crawler remembered the shepherd’s fire that toasted his feet. He remembered his mother bringing him hot broth. But that was home, and he was on Diablo. He couldn't stop . . . he couldn't go back. He wrapped his arms around his chest to keep warm. Every once and awhile, he waved his arms to keep the blood circulating.

Then right before him, Rug Crawler saw the top. Not more than 50 steps, and he would be there. He began to run toward the top. The exhilaration of success carried him toward his dream. He'd be the first to the top of Diablo.

Then right before getting to the top, the sun blinded him. Three steps from the top, the golden sun poured over the top of Diablo, temporarily blinding Rug Crawler. He stumbled the last steps to the top, his eyes stinging from looking directly into the yellow-blinding sun.

Although the sun stung his eyes, it also warmed his aching muscles. The sun on the rocks warmed his swollen feet.

Rug Crawler rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand until the sun spots in his eyes went away. He could see clearly. He looked at his hands. Then he looked at his feet.

Putting his hand up to shield the blinding sun, he did something no one else had ever done. He looked on the other side of Diablo. Then he saw it.

Rug Crawler saw the sea.

RICHER THAN DIAMONDS

By:

Elmer Towns

CHAPTER ONE

RICHER THAN DIAMONDS

By:

Elmer Towns

Three young shepherds squatted before the small fire. Their hands stretched toward the little flame . . . palms first. It had taken them longer than they thought to find one lost sheep. Now they were cold . . . hungry . . . and irritated.

"I'm tired," Rug Crawler broke the silence, "I searched all the valley Barrier Creek looking for that lamb." Rug Crawler was the most energetic of the three. He pushed his hands to the front of the fire . . . pushing the other two out of the way.

"Quit it," Thumb Sucker, the second shepherd boy complained. He pulled his tunic tight around his waist. "You are always pushing us out of the way."

"Yea . . . " Book Reader agreed. The third fat shepherd wrapped his hands in a scarf to keep them warm.

"But I found the lamb . . . you didn't." Rug Crawler boasted. "I went the farthest . . . I climbed the highest . . . I ran the fastest."

They argued amongst themselves, not realizing the flame was almost out. None of the shepherd boys were willing to serve his other two friends. No one was willing to gather more firewood.

The fire died.

"I want servants to wait on me," Rug Crawler dreamed of ease. "When I get rich I'll send my servant to gather wood. He talked about a warm room in a huge palace. He talked of a feast every day.

His two friends agreed. They wouldn't tend sheep outside on cold days like they were doing that evening.

Suddenly, a massive blanket of stars dropped from heaven covering them with light. It was like someone shattered the evening star and small slivers of stars rained down on them. Each sparkling light was so close the boys could touch them. But they didn't. They pulled their shepherd robes around them in fear.

"You can have servants to fetch wood," the smooth voice spoke from outside the canopy of light. "You can have a warm room in a palace . . . and royal robes . . . and a banquet every day."

The boys pulled their tattered scarves over their faces to hide from the light.

"How . . . ?" Rug Crawler stammered, "How can we become rich?"

"If you do what I tell you," Light Talker said, "I will give you your heart's desire."

"Why will you make us rich?" Rug Crawler asked.

"Because when you obey me . . . ," Light Talker paused to let the shepherd boys think about their decision. "You will have passed the test. You will be worthy of riches."

The shepherd boys uncovered their heads and tried to see the person behind the light. All they could do was squint into the blinding glare. They slowly dropped their tunics to warm themselves in the sea of lights surrounding them.

"Will you do what I tell you?" Light Talker asked.

"YES . . . !!" Three voices in unison enthusiastically blurted pledges of their obedience.

"When you do what I tell you . . . you will be worthy . . . and when you are worthy . . . you'll have riches more than diamonds."

The three shepherd boys slowly stood in the canopy of lights. They promised Light Talker to obey all he asked them to do.

"First you must cross Barrier Creek," Light Talker commanded. Thumb Sucker had heard the waters were icy.

"Then you will climb Tradition Hill," Light Talker said. Book Reader didn't want to venture anywhere he had not been before. He had heard that no one had ever dared climb to the top of Tradition Hill. But he said nothing, just as Rug Crawler said nothing.

"Wait for me in Monotonous Meadow," was the final instruction from Light Talker. "It is there that you will walk away with your riches." Then the lights suddenly disappeared, just as suddenly as they appeared. The dark night was blacker because their eyes were still blinded with the light. They rubbed their eyes and blinked to understand. Then all three heard the promise.

"I'll meet you in Monotonous Meadow."

"WAIT . . . !" Rug Crawler yelled into the sky. But no one was there to hear him. "COME BACK," he shouted at the lone evening star. But the star didn't speak back.

Book Reader sitting there with a silly grin was the first to speak. "I don't believe it's real," he said. "We just saw a vision. It's not real."

Book Reader said he saw lights and heard a voice, but he didn't believe it really happened. He didn't think they should go to Monotonous Meadow, and if they did, there would be no money.

"My eyes were blinded," Rug Crawler answered. "I know what I saw . . . I know what I heard."

Thumb Sucker spoke up. "Barrier Creek is too dangerous to cross . . . we're too young." He was always complaining and this was no different. "We don't know if anyone can climb

Tradition Hill." Then pulling his robe tightly around his body to keep off the chilly evening breeze added.

"I'm afraid of Monotonous Meadow . . . "

"Listen at you," Rug Crawler jumped up before his two friends. "We were promised riches more than diamonds . . . ," he let his words drift off into nothing. Then picking up he said, "We can have millions . . . servants . . . and warmth." He adjusted his coat for warmth.

Rug Crawler had always been aggressive. As a baby he crawled earlier than most, and crawled all over the rug in his father's tent. That was when he got his name.

"If we go to Monotonous Meadow and nothing happens," Rug Crawler reasoned, "we'll still be poor. But if we remain as shepherds, and don't go, we'll still be poor."

"Yea," the two agreed about being poor.

"We have nothing to lose," Rug Crawler tried to motivate his friends.

"But our lives," they answered.

"If we don't obey the Light Talker," Rug Crawler told his two friends, "We'll never know if he was telling us the truth." He got serious, "And we'll regret it the rest of our lives."

"Yea."

"So let's go," Rug Crawler coaxed.

"But that's a lot of work," Book Reader didn't want to do anything that was not necessary. He always objected to strenuous activities.

"If we go to Monotonous Meadow and nothing happens," Rug Crawler suggested. "At least we'll know in our hearts that we tried."

"If we stay here," he argued. "We'll never have a chance to be rich."

"Yea . . . !!" All three said together.

Rug Crawler's eyes became moist as he pleaded. "Let's go . . . we may never get this opportunity again to be richer than diamonds."

"Yea . . . !!"

CHAPTER TWO

Barrier Creek

The water in Barrier Creek runs purple. No one knows where the violet colors originated. Some say the color comes from the purple violets that use to grow on its bank. Mountain people are sure the color comes from the deep blue granite. A few old timers tell tales of a prehistoric dinosaur that was killed there. Everyone knows a dinosaur's blood is purple.

"Purple scares me," Thumb Sucker said he wouldn't try to touch the water of Barrier Creek, much less swim in it. When Rug Crawler scooped up a cup of water, Thumb Sucker held it up to the sun. He couldn't see anything but told his friends that no one could see poison.

"We can't obey Light Talker on this side of Barrier Creek," Book Reader said with a finality that told the others he didn't want to brave the water.

"Think of the diamonds," Rug Crawler answered.

"Hummm . . . " The two objecting friends responded.

"If you don't have to get wet . . . will you go?"

"Yea."

Rug Crawler began to look for a tall tree with a limb that hung out over the water. He knew where he could find long vines to make a swing. "WITH VINES WE CAN SWING ACROSS THE CREEK," he thought.

"The vines will break . . . " Thumb Sucker replied when told about swinging over the water.

"I'll cut down a tree to fall across the creek," suggested Rug Crawler. "We can walk safely across." Before he finished talking, he went running off to find a tall tree.

"Don't go," Book Reader yelled after him. "We don't have an ax. Besides, it's too much work." Book Reader then gave his toothy smile that crinkled his eyes. His freckles gleemed on his chubby face. He sat down to wait for his friends to do something because sitting was more comfortable than standing.

Rug Crawler was not getting anywhere with his friends. They didn't like anything he suggested. Then it dawned on him. He was the only one trying to cross Barrier Creek. So he threw out the challenge.

"You two come up with an idea to cross the creek," said Rug Crawler. "Then I'll make it work."

The complacent Book Reader couldn't think of any way to cross the creek. He was happy sitting down. Thumb Sucker always complained, but gave it some thought. Then he said, "Why don't we look for rocks. We can jump from one rock to another till we cross the creek?"

"Good idea . . . " the two other shepherds agreed.

Since Rug Crawler liked to run, he decided to go up stream. Thumb Sucker and Book Reader wanted the easier route. They headed off down stream to the flat pastures. About a mile away, Rug Crawler saw where Barrier Creek cut through a small sand hill. The spring floods had washed away the white sand, revealing several large round rocks.

When Rug Crawler returned, he found his two friends sitting in the shade. They were discussing the best way to find rocks in the stream.

"Dummys . . . " he shouted at them. "You can't find rock by talking . . . you find rocks by looking for them."

The three walked the mile to where huge boulders stretched across the stream of purple water.

"We'll fall in," the two reluctant friends said.

"I'll hold your hands."

"Both of us are two heavy for you."

"I'll take you one at a time."

"I just don't wanna . . . " Thumb Sucker said.

"That's it," Rug Crawler yelled at his two friends. "You're just making excuses, the problem is you just don't want to do it."

Rug Crawler was looking for ways to cross over Barrier Creek. His two friends only saw problems.

"I'll go by myself," Rug Crawler told them.

"No!" They both spoke together. "Don't leave us, we want to go with you." The two friends began to cry. "We want to be richer than diamonds."

The two boys were not sure whether they were crying out of fear of the purple water . . . or whether they were just disappointed with themselves.

"Grab my hand," Rug Crawler reached out to Thumb Sucker. Together they jumped from rock to rock. The last jump was the farthest. They had to jump to a rock on the shore. The soft ground was a little farther. But they decided to jump the rock anyway.

"Jump far," Rug Crawler told his friend.

With a gigantic leap, Thumb Sucker's feet hit the rock on the other side, but his foot slipped. He skinned his knees as he fell.

Next it was Book Reader's turn. He held tightly to Rug Crawler as they jumped from rock to rock. Then they came to the last long jump.

"Let me help you," Rug Crawler suggested.

"No."

Book Reader's jump was half-hearted. He fell into the purple water of Barrier Creek. He flayed at the water, getting some in his mouth. Crawling on to the shore he tried to spit everything out of his mouth. Trying so hard, he became sick at heaving. He was sick from the water, for they found out it was not poison. Book Reader's gagging made him sick.

The boys had crossed the first obstacle to their dreams. They lay on the ground . . . resting, Thumb Sucker was nursing a skinned knee. Book Reader had a stomach ache.

"BARRIER CREEK DIDN'T HURT THEM," Rug Crawler smiled an inward thought. "IT MADE THEM HURT THEMSELVES."

CHAPTER THREE

Tradition Hill

Tradition Hill had a gentile grade to the top, but the three shepherd boys were puffing as if they were climbing a steep cliff. The path was not slippery, but they often stumbled. The hill had no trees, rocks or bushes, but they constantly got lost, wandering back and forth.

"Let's rest," Book Reader begged the others to stop.

"Not now . . . ," Rug Crawler wanted to climb on. He wiped perspiration from his forehead.

The path meandered all over the place. It went everywhere but up. They seldom faced the top. When they looked left, they walked left. When they looked right, they walked right.

"Look," Rug Crawler yelled. "There's the path to the top above us." He directed his friends to look straight up toward the top. "The path is up there."

"We can't go that way," Thumb Sucker angrily shook his head. "There's no path from here to there." The critical shepherd pleaded with the other two pilgrims. "We'll get lost if we don't stay on the path."

"We can go where we see," Rug Crawler answered. "Let's just walk toward the top."

"I don't wanna," Thumb Sucker objected.

"I wanna rest," Book Reader pleaded.

The two refused to leave the safety of the path. Shortly their steps became easier. The pace of walking picked up. They were almost running.

"See . . . ," Thumb Sucker boasted. "We stayed on the path and it got easier." Thumb Sucker usually complained about everything. So now he gloated in his victory.

"But we're going down hill," Rug Crawler threw both arms into the air with frustration. "We're heading the wrong direction." He told them to look straight out down toward Barrier Creek. "We've already been there."

The three shepherds kept on walking on the path. In a few minutes the path turned up hill. Thumb Sucker told his friend.

"We must always follow those who have gone before us." The pessimistic Thumb Sucker liked his logic, so he smiled to himself.

"But there is a quicker way," Rug Crawler again pointed to the path they could see near the top.

"I'm not happy . . . " Book Reader noticed. "The Light Talker told us to obey him and he would make us happy . . . " He added, "This is not fun."

"The Light Talker promised to make us richer than diamonds . . . if we passed the test." Rug Crawler corrected his friend.

"We can't give up," Rug Crawler continued his appeal. "Remember the blanket of lights . . . remember the warmth."

"Suppose he wasn't real?" Book Reader had lost his smile. "Suppose we only dreamed it all," Book Reader was discouraged.

"We were cold when Light Talker appeared," Rug Crawler reminded them. "We were poor when Light Talker covered us with a blanket of light." Rug Crawler stopped. He made his two friends listen to him. He explained that if they went back, they would only be cold and poor. If they obey Light Talker and passed the test, they could be richer than diamonds.

"Let's go," Rug Crawler encouraged them. They stepped off the path and walked straight to the top.

"How can we keep from getting lost?" Thumb Sucker asked.

"Keep looking up to the top," Rug Crawler answered.

They walked rapidly. No one stumbled. They were surprised how quickly they were going higher on Tradition Hill.

"Someone told me there was danger off the path." Thumb Sucker's voice expressed fear.

"Paths were made by people," Rug Crawler said. "These crooked paths tell us the people before us didn't keep their eyes on the top of the hill."

As the boys walked through the grass, the path again appeared in front of them. So they followed it toward the top. This time the path didn't veer to the left or right. The path sloped gradually to the top.

"We'll be there soon," Book Reader comforted himself.

Suddenly the path ended. It didn't turn either to the left or right. It just stopped. But the top was right in front of them. All three boys could race there in less than a minute.

"Let's don't go," Thumb Sucker warned. "No one has been there before . . . that's why the path ended."

"Let's stay here," Book Reader suggested. "There must be danger up ahead . . . maybe it's too hard. There must be some reason why no one has made a path to the top."

The boys stood on tippy toes. They could see all the way to the top. They didn't see any danger. They didn't see anything.

"Let's be the first to get to the top." Rug Crawler encouraged them. "Someone has to make the path, why not us?" He knew what he said was sensible. He added, "Someone has to be the first to the top, why not us?"

Two of the boys wouldn't move. Thumb Sucker and Book Reader sat down on the trail. They wouldn't budge.

"I'm going without you," Rug Crawler warned.

"Go ahead."

Rug Crawler slowly began to walk to the top. He saw nothing to scare him. His steps were firm. He kept his eyes on the top. As he got closer, his heart beat with excitement. Then he began to run. Before he knew it, Rug Crawler was alone on the peak.

"Come on," he turned and yelled to his two friends. "The last part is easiest."

Thumb Sucker and Book Reader walked to the top. They followed where the steps of Rug Crawler led. Little did they realize that they were beginning to make a path, where someday others might follow.

Rug Crawler looked in every direction. The view was spectacular. He saw things never before seen. He thought to himself, "TRADITION HILL WAS EASY TO CLIMB, THE HARDEST PART WAS OVERCOMING THE DIFFICULTIES IN YOUR MIND."

CHAPTER FOUR

Monotonous Meadow was like a place they had seen somewhere before. The sun shone brightly in the sky, but there were no shadows. It was like a dreary cloudy day. There were clumps of sparkling green grass, but it was not alive. Little creeks of water about as wide as a man's hand were everywhere. And when you stepped in them, you didn't get wet.

Monotonous Meadow was a flat plane of rocks as far as the eye can see . . . big stones the size of a man's fist . . . small ones like a marble . . . and tiny ones the size of a pin head. But the rocks were not like other rocks, they were not heavy.

There was no dirt in Monotonous Meadow, only rock crystals that felt like salt when it spilled through your fingers . . . and sounded like crunching salt when you walked.

"This is a terrible place . . . ," groaned Thumb Sucker. He looked every direction but saw only the same of what he had already seen. He drank of the creek, but his thirst wasn't quenched. He splashed water on his face, but it didn't refresh him.

"This is not comfortable," complained with a frown. He tried sitting on several rocks piled together, but they were not comfortable.

"Let's get going," exhorted Rug Crawler. "We've got to find Light Talker."

"Let him find us," Thumb Sucker sneered. "There's no place to go . . . there's no mountains to climb . . . there's no creek to cross." He didn't like the idea of going anywhere. "Every place is just like this place."

Rug Crawler convinced the two to begin walking. Book Reader didn't like doing anything if he didn't have to. Thumb Sucker just didn't like anything.

"Where will we go?" The critical Thumb Sucker asked.

"Let's head toward the setting sun," Rug Crawler advised them. "The sun must know where he's going, let's follow him."

They began walking toward the setting sun. But they couldn't see clearly. Thumb Sucker stumbled over a rock.

"I wish these rocks would go away," he complained.

"Yea . . . ," Book Reader agreed.

Thumb Sucker stumbled again and cursed the rock.

"The rock didn't do anything," Rug Crawler rebuked his friend. "The rock just sits there . . . it's not the rock's fault. You should watch where you set. A rock can't get out of your way."

Thumb Sucker didn't listen. He cursed another rock when he stumbled again.

"I'm not having fun," Book Reader said. "Light Talker promised to make me happier with diamonds."

"No . . . ," Rug Crawler again corrected his friend. "Light Talker promised to make us richer than diamonds . . . if we passed the test."

The discussion about Light Talker pricked Thumb Sucker's thoughts. They had walked a long time, but were not going anywhere. He asked his friends.

"Where is Light Talker?" All three friends looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders. Thumb Sucker continued,

"He told us to come to Monotonous Meadow . . . here we are." Then asking his friends, "Where is Light Talker."

"We don't know."

"He promised to make us richer than diamonds . . . Where are the diamonds?"

"We don't know."

"What are we gonna do?"

"We don't know."

The three shepherds walked into the night. There were no stars in the sky, yet the sky was not dark. There was no moon, and still there was moon light everywhere. They knew it was night because they were chilly. They agreed to lay down and sleep so they would be strong for tomorrow. They pushed aside the large rocks and squashed down into the crystal earth, like pushing your hand into the sand at the beach.

Unknown to them, they were covered with a quilt of sparkling stars. And like pulling banquet around your neck to sleep comfortably, the boys dreamed of being richer than diamonds. Light Talker let them sleep.

In the middle of the night, Thumb Sucker turned over. The stars twinkled between the slits of his eyes. Sitting up quickly, he shook his friends.

"You have made me happy," Light Talker spoke his smooth words, "Because you have crossed Barrier Creek . . . you have climbed Tradition Hill . . . and you've arrived at Monotonous Meadow."

"Where's the money?" Thumb Sucker impertinently asked.

"Not so fast," Light Talker quitted him. "You've obeyed me with your bodies, but not with your attitudes. You've been full of complaints and procrastination."

Light Talker knew they were greedy and had only followed his instructions to get something. They had not passed the test.

"I have more instructions for you," Light Talker told the three boys. "I'll give you one more chance to pass the test."

"What do you want us to do?" Rug Crawler asked.

"Nothing difficult," Thumb Sucker resisted the idea of doing anything else. Book Reader nodded his head in agreement. But Rug Crawler jumped to his feet in anguish. He spoke toward the voice of Light Talker.

"Please give us another chance," Rug Crawler pleaded. "We were cold before you covered us with stars. We were poor before you promised us diamonds." He held out a hand to his friends. "They will help me do what you say . . . they will do willingly what you tell us."

"Tomorrow you will pick up as many rocks as you can and take them out of Monotonous Meadow," the voice instructed them. "When you have passed the test, you will be richer than diamonds."

An anxious sleep came over the boys. They wanted to do what they were told, but knew the distance out of Monotonous Meadow was a walk too far. They couldn't do what they wanted to do, and wanted to do what they couldn't do. Three boys, cold and poor, tossed and turned until the morning.

CHAPTER FIVE

The glistening sun arose the next morning, but Monotonous Meadow was half-lit like a thunderstorm was coming. The only light was the glistening beams off the rocks that cluttered the landscape. To the boys, the rocks seemed bigger than last night.

"Light Talker has made the rocks bigger to punish us," complained Thumb Sucker.

"You're not right," Rug Crawler corrected. "The rocks are the same size." He explained why there seemed to be bigger rocks. "It's the glistening sun."

"Awwww," Thumb Sucker expressed his disagreement with Rug Crawler.

"Also, there appears to be bigger rocks," Rug Crawler explained, "because yesterday we didn't have to carry them. Today we see how big our job really is."

Rug Crawler convinced his friends to begin the task. They discussed how they would carry the rocks. Grin Maker wanted to fill his pocket with the rocks the size of pin heads. Thumb Sucker decided to carry one large rock at a time. They were not as heavy as they appeared. Rug Crawler took off his tunic and made a sack out of it. Then filled it with marble size pebbles. Throwing the sack over his shoulder, he began walking toward the rising sun. It was the way home.

"This will take forever," Thumb Sucker complained in his usual manner.

"Maybe Light Talker wants us to serve him forever," Rug Crawler answered.

"This is too hard," the lazy Grin Maker complained. Both friends remembered Grin Maker didn't like to do hard things.

"Maybe Light Talker wants us to serve him with all our strength," Rug Crawler answered.

They continued walking toward home, shushing through the small creeks but not getting wet. They stomped through the sparkling green grass that was not alive. And they struggled with the rocks that were not heavy. The noon sun became hotter, although they couldn't feel its rays.

"I can't take it anymore," Grin Maker said with finality. And with his pronouncement, he dropped his rock to the ground.

"Why should we work," Grin Maker lifted his hands in surrender. "We will never get it done, so why try?" Turning he walked away from his friends. Watching him go, Thumb Sucker yelled after him.

"You'll be cold and poor," he coaxed his friend to return. You'll just be a shepherd."

"But I won't have work that never ends," Grin Maker yelled back. His voice became more difficult to understand as he walked farther away. The last thing the two friends heard Grin Maker say was, "I'm gonna just sit and watch sheep."

Toward evening, the two boys were bone-weary. Their feet hurt as they continued to stumble over the rocks that were everywhere. They had not said much that afternoon. Both were thinking about Grin Maker's decision to leave. Rug Crawler thought Grin Maker was foolish to give up so much. Thumb Sucker thought Grin Maker was smart to go do what he wanted to do.

"SUPPOSE WE DREAMED THIS UP . . . ," Thumb Sucker thought. "SUPPOSE I DO ALL THIS WORK FOR NOTHING." With that thought Thumb Sucker made up his mind. He stopped and turned his pockets inside out. The crystallized rock fluttered in the breeze before settling to the earth.

"I'm going back to the sheep," Thumb Sucker answered triumphantly, as though he won a battle. And with that pronouncement he walked away.

The next morning Rug Crawler awoke early to begin the journey. But it was lonely without his friends. The water was not wet enough to refresh him. He hadn't eaten in three days. True, chasing sheep he had gone longer without food, but this was different.

The hot morning sun convinced him to dump some of his rocks to lighted his load. After a couple of hours he repeated the process. The afternoon sun was so hot, he was forced to rest.

"I CAN NEVER FINISH THIS TASK BY MYSELF," he thought. So he untied the knot in his tunic and let the marble-like rocks fall to the ground. He was hungry . . . hot . . . tired . . . and discouraged. His strong will no longer desired to be richer than diamonds.

After three nights of fitful sleep, Rug Crawler woke up in his own home. Through his weariness, he could smell breakfast cooking on the fire. Although he hadn't accomplished his dream, he felt good because at least he tried.

As he stood in the front door, the morning breeze was chilly so he wrapped his tunic around him. Then he felt something in the hem of the garment. It was one of the marble-like rocks that he had been carrying. It was a pebble that was not heavy.

"THIS PEBBLE WILL BE A SOUVENIR OF MY JOURNEY," Rug Crawler thought to himself. Then tying leather thongs around it, the rock hung around his neck like a necklace. Then entering the busy street for the first time in several weeks, he heard the cry.

"The King is coming."

And with the cry, the crowd pushed Rug Crawler to the ground with the rest of the crowd. They were bowing. With his face to the ground the souvenir rock tied to the leather thong swung away from his body. It rested on the ground.

"Stop!!" The King commanded. He had caught a glistening beam in his eye. It could only come from a diamond. The King examined the souvenir rock carefully, Rug Crawler could only see a pebble like so many others he'd seen in Monotonous Meadow. The King saw the most beautiful diamond in the world. It sparkled like green grass that was not alive. It was crystal clear like water that was not wet. It was the largest diamond the King had ever seen, yet it was not heavy.

"What is your price?" The King demanded, "I must have it. In payment for this treasure," the King promised, "I'll make you richer than diamonds."

EPILOGUE

Life is a choice. The kind of person we are determines the choices we make and then those decisions determine what we shall become.

You can't go back. The three shepherds are not sure Monotonous Meadow ever existed. They searched, but never again found the place with rocks that were not heavy, that stretched as far as the eye could see.

Now is forever. They realized that some first opportunities are never offered a second time.

A STAR NAMED TIMMY

by:

Elmer Towns

I ran to the window to see if he was still up there. And through the icy window I saw him. He winked at me through the Elm tree in the corner of the yard. I could clearly see the star wink because the red fall leaves had recently dropped into the yard.

I winked back.

He winked again.

"Timmy, you're a special friend." I quietly called my favorite star by name. I didn't want to wake mom in the next room.

When I felt lonely, Timmy star cheered me up. No one loved me, except Mom . . . but sometimes she fussed at me. But I could always count on Timmy star.

I called the star . . . Timmy star . . . because Timmy was my favorite name. Before we moved, my special buddy at Sunday School was Timmy. I didn't always listen to the teacher, but Timmy did. I didn't like Sunday School, but Timmy did. Timmy and I liked to play on the swing in the church yard. It was at the church swing I first loved stars. We called the swing . . . Apollo One . . . because we soared through space on that swing. Timmy and I took turns piloting our rocketship to the stars. When Timmy was the ground crew, he pushed, I went higher than the stars. Timmy could fly over the stars too.

In school, I'd dream about the swing. Then I'd look across the classroom to Timmy.

He'd wink.

I knew what the wink meant. When Timmy winked, it meant, "I'll meet you at Ground Zero . . . we're going to the stars."

Once, another boy and I played rocketship at the swing. But it wasn't as fun. He couldn't see the stars.

When we moved, I missed Timmy because there was no one to swing with me. One night as I was tucked in warm and toasty. I saw a star through the window.

It winked at me.

That was Timmy's wink. I tip toed through the chilly room to get a big look at all the stars in the sky. There were a zillion stars, but this star was special. I couldn't take my eyes off it.

The star winked again.

None of the other stars winked at me.

I felt a shiver of excitement, just like when Timmy winked at school. Timmy's wink said, "I'll meet you at the swing . . . we'll cruise the stars."

The next day Mom took me to a new church. She had friends there because she had grown up in this church. She had gone to Sunday School in the basement. She wanted me to be just like her when she was my age.

But Timmy wasn't in Sunday School to wink at me across the room. No one wanted to meet at the swing. After a few weeks, I didn't like this one any better than the other one. I told Mom,

"Do we hafta go?" I didn't have any friends there.

"You'll make friends," Mom promised.

In spite of my objection, we went to Sunday School. I still didn't like it. No one took Timmy's place. But I did hear some good news. Next Friday they promised every student would get a special present at the Christmas pageant. There'd be plenty of candy, stockings and fun.

Mom and I got to the Christmas program early and sat on the second row. We sat on the Christmas tree side. It was big. Bigger than one I had see at the mall. But the tree lights were not lit. How could they have a Christmas tree without turning on the lights? Also, there was another problem.

"There's no star on the tree," I whispered to Mom so the people next to us couldn't hear.

"Don't they know that stars are important?" Then I added, "I like stars."

A man who look like a grandfather with soft blue eyes walked slowly to the padded yellow chair next to the tree. He turned and smiled at me. I was the only one he smiled at. Then, he opened a book to read,

"Three kings went looking for a baby. Not just any baby. They were looking for a special baby that would be a king . . .

"The baby would be a king greater than any of them.

"The kindly old man hunkered down the soft chair to tell how the kings rode camels in search of the babe."

"Would their search be successful?" He waited for an answer from the audience but there was none. Then looking back into his book, he read, "A star guided the three kings to the right spot."

When I heard the word "star," I straightened up so I could see what was happening. Two big people were blocking my view. I wanted to know about the star. I liked stars.

The old man explained the star traveled in front of the kings, almost like headlights in a car. Except the star was in the sky. The star kept moving and the kings kept following. The star lighted their way. Then a smile crept across the old man's wrinkled face. He closed the book and said.

"The star led them to Jesus," he explained, "God places stars in the sky to tell us He loves us."

The elderly man turned in his seat and pointed to the tree. Someone flicked the switch and the lights on the tree dimmed. Then, the lights in the room were dimmed. I could feel people stirring. Then everyone turned to the back of the room. They strained to see a little kindergarten girl dressed like an angel coming down the aisle. She was scared so she walked real slow.

I had to stand to see what she was holding. And there in her hands she had a glistening star. When she got to the Christmas tree, she gave the sparkling star to a big high school boy. He climbed a step ladder to place the shining star on the very top of the tree. I had to tilt my head straight back to look up to see it. Then all the lights went out in the room, including the lights on the Christmas tree. Only the star was left shining.

"Wow . . . " I thought. "If Timmy could be here, he'd like this church."

Then it happened. Maybe it happened because God heard me. Maybe it happened because of Timmy. But from that moment on I knew I'd like this church. I knew God loved me.

"The star winked at me."