

The Lost Sheep

There was once a boy
who shepherded a flock of a hundred sheep.
Every morning, he led them out
to graze in the meadows by the lake,
and every evening,
he counted them one by one
as they returned to the fold.

He knew them all by name:
Wobblekins and Butterbean,
Snorflehoof and Starwhistle,
Bumblepuff and Thimbleberry.
And he took pride in being their protector,
their guide,
their shepherd.

One night, after a long day of grazing,
the boy fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.
When he awoke, the fold was empty.
Not a single sheep remained —
except for a lone lamb,
named Lamby,
bleating at him insistently.

The boy's heart pounded.
He rushed to the hills,
calling their names,
scouring every hollow and ravine.
But there was no answer.
No bleating,
no hoofprints,
no sign of struggle or wolves.
It was as if the entire flock
had simply vanished.

Day after day, he searched.
Lamby followed him everywhere,
stumbling through brambles and streams,
her plaintive cry piercing the silence.
Sometimes she would run ahead,
bleating urgently,
darting in a direction he didn't expect,
other times nipping at his pant legs.

But he would scoop her up
and carry her in his arms.
“There now,” he would whisper,
“Don’t be afraid.
We’ll find them.”

Weeks passed.
The boy grew ragged and hollow-eyed.

At last, one evening,
he climbed a high ridge at the edge of the valley.
There, through a break in the mist,
he saw a great green valley beyond the mountains —
lush pastures shimmering in moonlight.

And there, far below,
his flock!
Every single sheep, grazing peacefully,
as if they had never been lost.
Their wool shone like silver in the night.

The boy’s joy turned to confusion.
Why had they gone there without him?
Why had they left him behind?

As he gazed, Lamby leapt and spun,
bleating with delight.
She nipped at his trousers,
just as she had been doing all along.

And suddenly, he understood.

The flock had not been lost.
He had been keeping them in the same place
long after it could sustain them.
So while he slept, they had moved on
to where they could thrive.
And this little lamb —
whom he had misunderstood,
even scolded —
had been left behind
to guide him home.

Tears stung his eyes.
He lifted Lamby into his arms,
her heartbeat warm against his chest.
For the first time,
he followed rather than led,
crossing the ridge under the rising dawn.

When he reached the valley,
the flock surrounded him with gentle bleats,
pressing close as if to say,
“You were never abandoned.”

From that day forward,
the boy no longer thought of himself as their leader,
but as their companion —
the hundred-and-first sheep.

And sometimes,
when the sun sank low
and shadows stretched long,
he would remember the night
when he realized that
the lost sheep was himself.

— *William Zeitler*
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