

Steve the Sheep

A Sew Powerful Parable by Dana Buck

It's a warm and lazy summer day
With wispy clouds unspooling
The sun shines brightly overhead
The wind is light and cooling

It's on this breeze a sound is heard
So faint you just can hear it
It makes one want to take a walk
To try and get more near it

So we stroll beyond the trees
Across a little brook
Then up a hill and down again
To have ourselves a look

There scattered on the hillside
Where the slope is not too steep
The sound that birthed our little quest
Comes from a flock of sheep

Their "baas" seem so contented
As they move across the glade
Feasting on the lush, green grass
Each yummy, scrumptious blade

We scan the flock from left to right
And when the counting's done
The total rams and lambs and ewes
Is ninety nine...plus one

I say "plus one" for if you look
Across the sunny vale
You'll see one sheep is wandering there
And herein lies our tale

So we head in that direction
As through the flock we weave
With a hurried pace, we're face to face
And we meet the sheep named Steve

This sunny day's made just for him
Or so it surely seems
To romp and play or simply lay
Lost in his sheep day dreams

Yes today Steve's quite relaxed
He fears no lion, bear or leopard
For he knows that watching 'ore the flock
Is the ever faithful shepherd

The shepherd leads them to the ground
Where the sweetest waters flow
Whether high up on the hillside
Or the pastures down below

He establishes their boundaries
Where they can run or eat or lie
And so they pass contented days
Beneath his watchful eye

What a peaceful, safe existence
From morning to the eve
So why tell this little story
Well, that brings us back to Steve

It's not that he's rebellious
No, that's not the tag that fits him
He just gets a little careless
When the mood to wander hits him

He also can't conceive of
What the fuss is all about
When the shepherd sets his limits
He's been known to whine and pout

"I'm not a little spring lamb"
"I know just as well as He"
"Where to eat and where to drink"
"What's good or bad for me"

"It's not like I will run away"
"The rules, I mostly heed 'em"
"I'm not hurting anybody"
"I just want a little freedom"

For the shepherd, just that morning
Had laid out their bound-a-ries
They were not to go beyond the brook
Nor past the line of trees

"The brook is swift and running cold"
The caring shepherd warned
"While in the woods live creatures"
"That may seek to do you harm"

"So stay here in the sunshine"
"And all will be just fine"
The sheep baaed their agreement
Well, at least the ninety nine

For Steve had spied some flowers
(He'd caught their scent upon the breeze)
And he'd quickly wandered over
Where the meadow meets the trees

He sniffed the violet petals
Then the yellow down below
He was about to smell the red ones
When from the woods he heard "hello"

Steve raised his head in wonder
He could see no face or form
As the voice came from the shadows
"My, the day has turned quite warm"

"It has" said Steve now blinking
From the sunshine in the glade
Said the voice "It's so much cooler"
"Out of the sun here in the shade"

"Why don't you come and rest awhile"
"And get out of this heat"
"There's better grass beyond these trees"
"And a stream to cool your feet"

Steve said, a little sheepishly
"I'm not supposed to leave the grass"
"No, the shepherd wouldn't like it"
"If beyond the trees I passed"

Came the reply "Oh yes, the shepherd..."
And the tone held some derision
"Must you always follow orders?"
"Can't you make your own decision?"

“As for me, I’m heading over”
“To that pasture cool and fair”
“If you ever feel grown up enough”
“Perhaps I’ll see you there”

Steve’s pose was one of puzzlement
As he stood there on the lawn
His “Hellos” all went unanswered
It was clear the voice was gone

So Steve began to ponder
For the voice had made him think
As his will grew up within him
His good sense began to shrink

“I could scout a new horizon”
“Find fresh grass for us to eat”
“I’d just walk until I found it”
“And then beat a quick retreat”

“When I return, I’ll be a hero”
“And the shepherd, he will see”
“That I can make my own decisions”
“That he can put his trust in me”

It was then Steve squared his shoulders
He slowly bent his knees
And taking one last look behind
Steve walked into the trees

There was a kind of trail
And it turned this way and that
Leading deeper, ever further
From where the sheep and shepherd sat

Rocks obscured the pathway
Making Steve step up and over
The ground was hard and full of weeds
There was no grass or clover

Second thoughts and worried glances
Clouded Steve's determination
This sheep that strode with bravado
Now paused with hesitation

The sun was soon diminished
By the canopy of leaves
Can you hear that thumping heartbeat?
Have no doubt, that heart is Steve's

And as his fears assailed him
He was about to turn around
When he felt himself now sinking
In what he'd thought was solid ground

Oh No! He'd walked into a bog
T'was filled with mud and slime
He struggled hard to reach the edge
He tried and tried to climb

When he thought that he might perish
He lunged with all his might
And with this heave he left the bog
But now wasn't he a sight!

His wool was dank and matted
Why, it made him look obese
For the muddy, filthy water
Had been soaked up by his fleece

So great now was his misery
The worst he'd ever known
He choked upon a sob and said
"That's it, I'm going home!"

He started his departure
And then found to his dismay
That he hadn't paid attention
And he didn't know the way

As he stood in desperation
What came rushing to his head
Were the warnings and instructions
All the words the shepherd said

"If only he would find me"
"Everything would be ok"
"I'd never wander off again"
"I'd never disobey"

"I'll listen and I'll honor"
"All the things you ask me to"
"Oh please, please come and find me"
"And I'll follow only you"

He promised and he promised
And when his pledge was done
He heard a voice behind him say
"Hello my little one"

He turned in joy and laughter
Then felt the blood within him freeze
For t'was not the shepherd speaking
T'was the voice from in the trees

Steve finally could see him
And the sight filled him with dread
That pointed nose, that bushy tail
That coat of brightest red

He'd heard the shepherd speak about
The one who sneaks and stalks
And here he was now face to face
With his worst nightmare, the fox

"My my, it's just so easy"
Said the fox, his manner cool
"To convince someone they're brilliant"
"When in truth they're just a fool"

"To leave the sun and safety"
He now mocked with his demeanor
"Don't you know the oldest trick"
"Is to promise grass that's greener?"

"I'll tell you now my secret"
The fox winked in cruel jest
"I just plant some discontentment"
"And it's your pride that does the rest"

Poor Steve could only stand there
And he cried because he knew
Despite the teasing and the taunting
All the fox had said was true

"I'll stop now" said the fox
"For it's clear I've pushed your button"
"As much as I like talking"
"I so much more enjoy mutton"

As the fox began advancing
And poor Steve was locked in dread
Something whistled through the air
And barely missed the fox's head

The shepherd stepped beside him
Before Steve could say a thing
He swiftly reached into his bag
And slipped a stone into his sling

He swung the stone around his head
But before the arc was done
The fox gave out a frightened cry
And ran as fast as he could run

Steve could scarce believe it
As he shouted his elation
He looked over to the shepherd
With great thanks and admiration

Then he suddenly remembered
All the trouble he had caused
His smile turned quickly downward
And his celebration paused

He eyes now filled with falling tears
He slowly dropped his head
Feeling sorry and ashamed for
All the things he'd thought and said

The shepherd softly smiled
And with eyes consumed with grace
He knelt and touched Steve's chin
And lifted up his face

“There you are my precious one”
“My wandering little waif”
“The fox is gone and I’m right here”
“Don’t cry now, you are safe”

“I’m not crying caused I’m frightened”
Steve blubbered and he brayed
“I’m crying ‘cause I let you down”
“I failed, I disobeyed”

“Yet set your expectations”
“And you gave us our instructions”
“But I chose my own ambitions”
“My opinions, my deductions”

Then Steve dissolved in silence
And the shepherd gently said
“Let’s don’t talk about your failures”
“But the truth you’ve learned instead”

“I don’t set my expectations”
“To put mindless rules above you”
“I do it because you’re precious”
“I do it because I love you”

Then Steve looked up believing
He was as loved as he could be
For grace had boldly saved him
And the truth had set him free

Then the shepherd hugged him tightly
There among the trees and boulders
And with his mighty, loving arms
He lifted Steve upon his shoulders

“Now you know me” said the shepherd
“And you know that you are mine”
“So hang on tight and don’t let go”
“Let’s rejoin the ninety nine”

Well many days have come and gone
Since Steve’s adventure in the woods
Now he follows all the shepherd’s words
‘Cause he knows they’re for his good

For Steve has learned the lesson
Understood by all the bright ones
Freedom’s not the lack of boundaries
It’s submitting to the right ones