

PURPLE GRASS

CHAPTER ONE

Oh what a beautiful morning to be born! The sun was shining brightly on the meadow, its warm rays kissing the newly formed buds on the clover. The honeybees buzzed merrily as they gathered their treasure of nectar, freely given by the clover to anyone that asked. The crickets chirped with glee, spreading the feeling started by the sun! It's a great day to be alive. It's a great day to be born. The message was picked up by the wind, and gentle breezes carried the story as they strummed the tall grasses of the meadow.

"Did you hear the news?" Whispered the wind. "We have a new life in the meadow. There is a new birth." The grasses shook with delight and waved back and forth echoing the message carried by the wind. The grasshoppers heard the story and jumped for joy, leaping high into the air.

The yellow and black furry bumblebee droned from flower to flower spreading the good news to everyone he met. "Did you hear the news?" he asked as he gently kissed the pretty flower. "We have a new life in the meadow today. It just happened moments ago."

"Oh, how wonderful," the flower cried with joy. "Did you hear the news?" She called to the little field mouse that scampered at her stem, nibbling on the seeds that lay by her roots. "We have a new life in the meadow."

"Where?" Asked the little mouse.

"Over there, by the bubbling brook," she replied, tossing her long beautiful petals in the breeze, showing the little mouse the way.

"I want to see this blessed event for myself," called the mouse as he disappeared into the grass,

brushing the morning dew as he passed. The wind told the leaves in the trees, and they told the birds, and soon the whole meadow was alive and excited. "We have a new life in the meadow. A very special event. A very special treasure."

The air of the world rushed into the lungs of the newborn lamb. He gasped in short bursts as his new lungs expanded with each inhale and prepared themselves for a new and larger experience with each exhale. "I can't do it," thought the little lamb as he gasped, fearing he would suffocate in the abundant world of air.

Throughout his life he would repeat those words "I can't do it," so many times as he encountered the obstacles before him, only to discover while he's crying "I can't do it," as he was doing in breathing, he in fact would be doing the very thing that he was saying "I can't do."

Deep inside, the little lamb knew that he was not part of this world by his own making. He did not create himself, but in fact was created by someone, something outside of himself. Some unknown that was greater than he caused this blessed event to occur. The little lamb had a purpose for being. He was created, not out of accident, but out of purpose. And as he grew, it would be his quest to discover that purpose. To discover the reason for his being.

The little lamb blinked his eyes in amazement. The long black eyelashes framed his big brown eyes and swept upward in a graceful curve. He blinked his eyes again and again; slowly at first as he gazed at the new sights before him. "What happened," he wondered? "Where am I?" He was bewildered. Perplexed at the new world that lay before him. A new start. A new beginning. This was the first day of his life. He was new. A brand new life in an old, ongoing world. There were no thoughts of did he belong? Did he have a right to be here? Who would he grow up to be? Right now, all the little lamb knew was what he was experiencing at this very moment. So many new things. The bright sun made his eyes squint in its brilliance of the day. Their rays transferred warm feelings to his still wet coat. A gentle breeze that caused the flowers to bob in its wake also caressed his wooly fur so very tenderly.

The little lamb was also aware of another gentle stroking on his side. He turned his head and saw his mother cleaning the moist birth fluids from his body as she licked him.

These moist fluids had been his world, surrounding his very being while he was growing inside her

womb. That same warmth of security and love which had enveloped him during his creation, he now felt as her tongue lovingly caressed his being. For a moment, their eyes met. Though the little lamb did not know how to speak, their thoughts transcended the unspoken words.

"You are my child," said the mother through her eyes. "You are the offspring of my love for your father. A wondrous gift that has come from God. A gift for us to nurture, love, teach and help grow into ram-hood. How very lucky we are."

The sudden change of birth was a shock to the little lamb's body. His world had been quiet, dark and tranquil. A refuge. A place of solace. Protected from any outside harm by his mother's body and the warm fluids of her womb. Suddenly, he was thrust from that secure world where all of his needs were met by her into a world where he would have to learn to meet his own needs as he grew in power, wisdom and stature. To make a transition from being totally dependent to learning independence. At this moment, he was very dependent. Not only for food and shelter, but also for love. He would seek that love from those closest to him; namely his mother, his father, the sheep he called friends, and those he trusted. As he journeyed in life, he would lean on that love, he would depend on that love as he struggled to discover who he was. So many obstacles the little lamb would have to climb. So many bridges he would have to build as he crossed over the chasms he encountered as he traveled the road of his life. But that was in his future, and the little lamb did not know what lay ahead of him. The future was an abstract term that had no meaning for him. The only concept he knew was the moment. The present. The here and now. For the little lamb was alive. He was here. It was now. The world was a good place to be. It was great to be alive. It was great to be loved. He belonged. He had a family, and in a larger sense, he was part of the flock. He was accepted. He was wanted. He was loved.

"That's my boy", boasted Poppa sheep, puffing on a big fat cigar gripped tightly between his teeth. The smoke twirled lazily across the meadow, carried on the currents of a gentle breeze. "Look at him", Poppa said proudly. "A spitting image of the old ram. My boy's gonna' grow up to be just like me. He's gonna' be a real ram. Look at the size of them shanks he's got. Just like me. He's gonna' be just like me. I'm so proud I don't know what to do. We done good Momma. We created a son."

Poppa sheep was so happy as he went about the meadow, proudly handing out cigars to everyone he met. "I've got a son," he exclaimed over and over. A blue haze hung over the meadow on that happy day from so many meadow folk smoking poppa's cigars. Even the crickets got cigars. There was no one, absolutely no one that didn't hear the news and listen to poppa's boasting. He was so proud to be a poppa and he wanted the world to know.

Momma sheep lay in the grass beside the love that had grown inside her. She too, knew the great pride that Poppa experienced. But hers was at a quieter level. She didn't need to tell the world. She felt no need to boast and shout it from the tree-tops. She was content to lie here in the warmth of the sun and be with her newborn. There are no accidents, but it is up to us to discover the truths that exist and have always existed since time began. But Momma sheep was not thinking about this at the moment. She had just given birth to a new life. A precious gift from God that grew within her. It was now a part of her task to continue that nurturance and growth outside of herself. Her thoughts turned inward to read the pages of her inner book that she had never seen before. The inner book that only mothers know was written inside her long ago before her birth. The author of that inner book called instinct, was the same Creator that caused this blessed event to occur. Gently, she closed her eyes and allowed that instinct to flow. Instinct had told her to clean this newborn, this offspring of her womb, this Lamb of God. And so she gently, with ever so much caring, with ever so much loving, began cleaning the new wet lamb with her tongue. This gentle stimulation told the little lamb, "all is well in your world. You are loved. You have a family. Welcome." Momma didn't miss a spot. She cleaned that little lamb from the tip of his nose, to the top of his toes. And then started all over again. Her pride glowed softly within as she gazed at this white furry creation that lay by her side. "This is my child," she thought lovingly. "I am so proud."

Far off in the distance, but yet so close it permeated all beings, a voice could be felt. A voice that transcended all forms of communications. A voice so quiet, yet so loud it could be heard above the loudest thunder. A voice so gentle, yet so strong, the mightiest of the mighty tremble in its power and majesty. Momma sheep heard the voice. Poppa sheep heard it. Even the little lamb heard it as it echoed throughout the meadow. "This is my creation," said the great voice. "This, is my creation, of which I am immensely proud. Rejoice, oh world. The wonders of the

universe are yours to enjoy. Celebrate life, and live."

The creatures of the meadow gathered to see this great new creation. They too had heard the word whispered in the wind and came to see for themselves and share in the joy. They stood and watched as Momma sheep cleansed her child. They could feel the love bond grow between them with each breath the newborn lamb took. Everyone in the meadow shared the same elements: the air, the water, the sun. Each took what they needed and returned what they did not use. How common we all are in our uncommonness. Yet we tend to forget how much alike we all are and how common are our needs.

Chubby Chipmunk first heard the news from Bumbly Bumblebee. Bumbly had some serious navigational problems. By all the laws of aerodynamics, big Bumbly Bumblebee should not fly. He was too big: too portly and should not be able to get off of the ground. Still, Bumbly knew deep inside that it was his purpose to fly, and so while the world told him, "Bumbly, you're just too big to fly," he merely roared up his engines, flapped his little wings as fast as he could, and ran down the runway with his short stubby little legs stumbling over themselves, but giving him the speed he needed to become airborne. With a great roar and a cloud of meadow dust, defying the laws of aerodynamics, Bumbly's huge body would leave the ground. He was flying. Though the world was telling him you cannot fly, he knew deep inside who he was, and what it was that he had to do. Once you get a large mass flying, it's hard to stop, and so Bumbly stopped by crashing into the soft, puffy flowers he was intending to pollinate, and the world laughed at him. It was in one of these soft puffs that Bumbly crashed, right above Chubby Chipmunk. "Did you hear the news?" gasped Bumbly, out of breath from his journey. "We have a new life in the meadow."

"No!" exclaimed Chubby. "Where?"

"Follow me", cried Bumbly as he began flapping his wings. The sound grew from a pleasant hum to an annoying roar as he buzzed off in the direction of the birth with Chubby climbing over rocks and grasses trying to keep up with the airborne wonder. Bumbly crash landed in a less than desirable flower. A burdock. "Over there," he said, pointing with one wing while picking splinters out of his backside with the other.

Chubby climbed over the stubble in the meadow until he could see the miracle of creation. The new

life. He saw the little lamb lying beside his mother. Innocent. Pure. An empty, open book, waiting for others of the flock to write on the blank pages of his life. Waiting for those who knew more than he to define who he was and who he should be. The little lamb did not know that he would have to carry that little book of filled-in pages wherever he would go. Whenever in doubt, he would open his black book and read the pages and follow the script that the flock had written for him. That blank book would be filled in by others as he grew in wisdom and stature.

"Look at him, he's trying to stand," cried Chubby. The little lamb was gaining strength by the moment. He really wasn't sure what he was doing, but his book of instinct also was in operation.

With wobbly, unsure legs, he was trying to stand; first raising his rear legs into position. Then, one by one, raising himself up on his front legs. The little lamb just stood there. All four legs quivering on unsteady muscles. He looked around at the crowd that had gathered. They were all watching him. Suddenly, as if on cue, his legs collapsed and his furry body crumpled down into a heap. It was almost as if someone had pulled a rug out from under him. At first, the crowd was stunned. Surprised. Then when they saw he was all right, they began to laugh. "Oh, I've made such a fool of myself," thought the little lamb. "Why didn't I wait until I felt stronger, or knew more before I tried something like this?"

His mother, sensing the hurt and disappointment, nuzzled him gently in the flank. She licked him behind the ear. "Go on," she whispered. "I believe in you. You are my child, and I'm so proud to call you mine. Nothing you could ever do would disappoint me. It is I that is lucky to have you. Now go ahead. Gather your strength. Take your time and try again." The little lamb looked into his mother's eyes, and in that gaze, he could see that he was loved. He saw acceptance. He saw approval. That gave him the courage to try once more.

"There he goes again," said Chubby.

The little lamb gathered his legs underneath his body. With great determination, he started to rise again. First raising himself on his hind legs. He stood there momentarily with his buttocks raised high in the air, his little tail whipping wildly back and forth, trying to find a sense of balance. Trying to locate something to hang onto. While the little lamb was in this awkward position, who should come upon the scene, but his father, cigar still clenched

between his teeth, smoke leaving a trail behind him. "What have we here?" asked Poppa in a deep bellowing voice.

The little lamb dropped to the ground, crouching, trembling in fear. This was the first time he had seen his father. So many other things were happening during his birth that he had only caught a glimpse of the sheep he would soon call Poppa. He looked so strong and tall and brave. Oh, and handsome. Poppa was the handsomest sheep in the flock. Not only was he handsome, but he was very good at business and was the leader in the community. Someone to look up to. Someone to admire. Someone to respect. And just perhaps, someone to fear. "Come on son", said Poppa, "Let's get with it." And Poppa grabbed the little lamb by his tail, lifting his backside in the air. "Get those legs under you."

"I'm trying, Poppa", thought the little lamb. "I'll work hard and try to please you."

"Come on, stand up", barked Poppa, lifting the tail higher.

"Poppa", said Momma softly, "it takes time. Give him time to learn. I know he'll be walking by evening. He'll do it. Just wait and see."

Poppa chewed a bit on his cigar, looked around the meadow, took a deep breath, and put his son down with a sigh. "I know", he said. "But you see," Poppa paused for a moment and looked at his son lying on the ground before him. "You see, that's my son. I have so many hopes for him. So many dreams. So much I want him to be - and I want it now. I've waited so long for this to happen. Waiting is hard. I want to show him off to the world. This is mine. I created him. World, hear me, I am his father. This," and he pointed at the little lamb, "this, is my son, of whom I am proud."

The little lamb looked up at his father towering above him. He could see the pride shining in Poppa's eyes. How they glistened in the morning sun. "I won't let you down, Poppa," thought the little lamb. "I'm gonna' try real hard to please you. Just wait and see, I'll make you proud of me." With renewed determination, the little lamb pushed his hindquarters in the air, his little tail wagging in the breeze. Then, with a little more fear showing, he began to raise his front. First the right leg. Trembling and shaky. "Got to do it", he thought. "There, right leg's now in place. Now for the left leg." The crowd stood in silence, holding their breath.

"He made it", cheered Chubby. "Look at him, he's standing up."

Momma lay quietly in the grass watching with pride. Her face beamed, as she was smiled. "He made it on his second try", she thought. "He's smart. Just like his poppa."

Poppa was grinning from ear to ear, chewing vigorously on the cigar. Puffing on it, belching clouds of smoke from the corner of his mouth. "Didn't I tell you," he proclaimed to the crowd. "That's my boy. Just look at him. There isn't anything that he can't do. Just wait until he grows up. He's gonna' be just like me." Poppa patted the little sheep on the shoulder. The crowd cheered with delight. The little lamb looked at all the friends that had gathered. For him, they were cheering for him. With great pride, he took a deep breath. Suddenly his right front leg buckled. Without warning, it just collapsed beneath him, and down came the little lamb, falling into a heap in the soft grass.

"Do something" cried Poppa sheep, grabbing the tail, the smile leaving his face. "Somebody, do something." He looked right at Momma.

"It's all right", she replied softly, trying to calm Poppa's fears. "It's all part of the Master Plan. The young are soft and bend with the breeze. The Master Creator designed them this way so they can fall and not break. They need time to learn, time to grow, and while they're doing this, they need protection from their mistakes. There are some things that we can teach, but there are also some things that the young must discover on their own. We need to know what we can teach them, and when to let go and let them learn on their own. This is one of those times. You can hold on to his tail all you want and try to teach our son how to walk. But in the end, it is only he that can do it. He needs to do what he needs to do. He's going to try, stumble and fall. We can dry his tears and soothe his pain, but it is he that will try over and over again, until one day he will walk and run for you. Give him time to discover himself and be proud of him in that discovery. Don't only be proud of the accomplishment."

Poppa stared at Momma. "She is so wise," he thought as he slowly let go of the tail. "I'm glad I chose her. I'm lucky." Though Poppa was handsome, and the business leader of the flock, he had one problem. Poppa would never express his feelings. Not his true feelings, that is. The thoughts he had as he looked at Momma, well, she would never know them, because she would never hear them. Even though thoughts can transcend everything, sometimes it's

hard to read the thoughts of others. Particularly those that have spent a lifetime building walls about themselves.

Those who are afraid, unsure. Hoping that by building strong, high walls and keeping the gate locked, they can protect themselves from anyone or anything that could hurt them. They are safe. Secure. Walling others out, but at the same time, walling themselves in. And so Momma would never know how Poppa felt at this moment. She would never know the pride and joy he felt for her. Pity, for she needs to know. Poppa looked over the crowd that had just been cheering for his son. Cheering for him. Cheering until his son fell. Now they were silent. Stunned. Looking at him, wondering what would happen now. Poppa looked into the big frightened brown eyes of the little lamb lying in the grass at his feet.

He blinked his eyes, fighting back the tears of disappointment. No one would ever know that part of Poppa. "You let me down", began Poppa, chomping on his cigar. The anger rising in his body, bulging the veins in his neck. "In front of my friends, you let me down." Poppa just stood there and shook his head.

"I'll show you Poppa", thought the little lamb. "Give me another chance.". He struggled to get up. Determination mixed with a desire to please Poppa, pushed that little lamb up on quivering legs. "See Poppa," thought the little lamb, looking at his father for approval as he stood. "See, I made it!"

Poppa sheep clenched the cigar between his teeth as he looked at his son standing wobbly before him. He watched as the little lamb's legs began to tremble, then buckle and finally collapse. He looked out over the crowd in disgust, took the cigar out of his mouth and spoke. "Go on home, the party's over. You're not going to see anything today." Then Poppa looked right at the little lamb. "When you're ready to walk like a real sheep, let me know." Poppa turned and walked away, leaving the little lamb lying in the grass with his mother.

Momma sheep watched with tenderness and compassion as her offspring struggled to stand once again. "Relax", she said calmly as she nuzzled him. "Give yourself a little more time. I know you can do it." The little lamb watched his departing father, feeling a sense of loss and pain. Momma could sense this from her offspring. "It will take you a while to understand him", she began. "He means well, but is a very strong-willed ram. He's used to having things his own way. He's very powerful in the business world and enjoys having sheep follow his leadership.

They always do as he says and follow right along. He gets very angry and upset when things don't go the way he plans. Give him time. Leaders expect to lead. I know he loves you, just as I love you." With that, Momma sheep licked the little lamb on the top of his nose. It tickled and made him smile. Momma knew how to make sheep feel good inside. The tickle spread and built up into a big sneeze.

"Kerchoo," sneezed the little lamb.

"Bless you", said Chubby Chipmunk, standing nearby.

The little lamb shifted his gaze from his mother to the little brown furry creature with the black stripes who scampered over to where he lay. With quivering nostrils, the little lamb extended his neck toward Chubby as he inhaled the scent, trying to identify who this new creature was that had come into his world. Friend or Foe? The chipmunk certainly looked different than his mother and father. "This is not a sheep," thought the little lamb.

"Hi," said Chubby in his usual bubbly manner, as he stood before the little lamb. "Do you want to be my friend? What's your name?" he asked as he rested his furry paws on the top of the lamb's nose.

Startled, the little lamb quickly pulled back, nestling in the fold of his mother's flank, looking to her for direction. "He doesn't have a name yet", replied Momma as she gently kissed her newborn.

"Oh," replied Chubby sheepishly. "But everything has a name. The flowers, the birds, the trees. They've all got names."

We haven't decided on a name for our little lamb yet," replied Momma.

"Oh," sighed the chipmunk. "Well, until you decide, I've got a name for him. I'm gonna' call him Little Lamb, because he's a little lamb. Do you want to play with me, Little Lamb?"

"He doesn't know how to walk yet."

"Oh," exclaimed Chubby, scratching his ear. "Can I teach him?"

"That would be very kind." Momma nodded, giving her approval.

"C'mon, Little Lamb. Lemme' see what you know," cried Chubby as he pulled on a front hoof.

The little lamb looked to Momma for a sense of direction. "It's all right," she said. "Go and play with

your new friend."

The little lamb looked into Momma's eyes. "Go on," she said. Then he looked at this furry striped creature pulling on his hoof.

"Come on," grunted Chubby. Let's play. I'll teach you to walk."

Slowly, the little lamb raised his hind flanks in the air with Chubby pushing underneath him. The little lamb's tail was wagging back and forth. Then carefully and ever so deliberately, he began raising himself on his front legs.

"Look at him", cried Chubby. "He's standing."

"Sure enough", thought the little lamb. "I'm standing. Now what?" He looked for direction from his new found friend.

"Here, let me help you," said Chubby as he began pushing. "Move this front foot forward and we'll teach you to walk.

"I'm not sure of this at all," thought the little lamb as he moved his right foot forward. The sudden change in weight caused him to tremble and sway in the breeze.

"Steady," cried the little chipmunk, running to the other foot. "Move this one now," and he began pushing the left front leg. The little lamb moved it. "Now this one," and the little chipmunk pushed on the right front leg again. He ran back and forth between those two front legs until he had that poor little lamb so stretched out that he collapsed in the soft grass. "We're not makin' much progress here," lamented Chubby.

"You've got to make your back legs work also," said Momma kindly.

"You know," called Chubby, " if you're gonna' fall, you gotta' let me know. If we're goin' to work together, we gotta' communicate. We gotta' talk. Understand?" The little lamb just looked at his friend. "Do you understand?" asked Chubby. "Do you hear me?" The chipmunk looked perplexed at Momma. "He doesn't speak very well, does he?" Chubby looked from side to side, not wanting any bystanders to hear. "Is he," Chubby paused and put one finger to his head and tapped, "Is he, mental? You know, defective?"

"No," chuckled Momma. "He's just a new little lamb. It takes time to learn to talk, just as you're finding out it takes time to learn to walk."

"Oh," exclaimed Chubby as he scratched the side of his head. "Now I understand."

"It's been a busy morning for my little lamb," said Momma. "I think it's time for lunch."

"Whew," said Chubby, wiping the perspiration from his brow. "This sure is hard work, teaching lambs to walk. Makes a little chipmunk awfully hungry. Whatcha' having for lunch? Can I stay?"

"Milk," replied Momma, licking her little lamb on his nose.

"Milk!" exclaimed Chubby. "Oh, I like milk. You got any chocolate chip cookies to go with it?"

"But, uhm", she stammered, "you see, this is kind of personal."

The little lamb, feeling hunger pangs deep within, searched his inner book of instinct to discover what he must do. Gently Momma pushed his head toward her flank as he instinctively sought out her nipple and began to nurse.

As Chubby watched, his little black eyes grew larger. He felt his cheeks and face turn red. "Oooh," he exclaimed, stuffing his hands in his pockets. "Now I understand." And he turned slowly on one heel, sheepishly walking away, looking over his shoulder. "I'll, uhm - be back. You know - uhm - later. After lunch. You know." He quickly waved and scampered into the low lying grasses.

The first meal of his first day. Everything seemed so warm. So secure. It was right for him to be. It was right for the little lamb to be here, at this spot, at this time. And he snuggled in to enjoy the experience, and be filled.

Chubby returned later that afternoon to play with his new found friend. As the day progressed, the little lamb grew stronger in sinew and in spirit. By nightfall he was frolicking and kicking up his heels in the meadow.

"Look what your little lamb can do," Chubby called across the meadow when he saw Poppa sheep approaching. A new cigar was held between his teeth, with a cloud of blue smoke trailing behind. The older ram watched as the little lamb chased around the flowers, trying to catch the graceful butterflies as they flew about the

meadow. He could run with the wind. He could kick up his heels in the flowers.

"That's my boy," thought Poppa sheep. "You're all right, kid," he called across the meadow. Just then, the little lamb stumbled and fell. "Hmph," grunted Poppa, as he turned and looked at Momma. "I've had a hard day at the office."

One by one, the stars came out in the clear dark night sky. Each one looked like a tiny candle that had been lit and placed in the heavens. Each one a guiding light, so if anyone should go astray and become lost, there would be a tiny light in the darkness, to show the way home. The brilliance of the moon gave an eerie blue cast to the meadow, and one by one, the creatures of the world closed their eyes in sleep. The little lamb, excited about his day, but his eyes heavy with sleep, found warmth and solace snuggling between Momma and Poppa. All was well in his world.

Momma sang a lullaby to him on his first night of his first day of his brand new life. In the future, at bedtime, after he said his prayers and just before he went to sleep, or whenever he felt frightened or lonely, Momma would sing this song and he would feel safe. Secure. Softly she sang, "Little Bo Peep, has lost her sheep, and doesn't know where to find him. Leave him alone, and he'll come home, wagging his tail behind him." Little lamb wagged his tail and snuggled in. He felt so happy to be alive. He had a home. He was loved. He belonged.

Sleep in peace, newborn. Oh gift from God, sleep in peace.

PURPLE GRASS

CHAPTER TWO

The third day of his life was a special event for the little lamb. It is a special event for every little lamb. No one was sure when the tradition started. Some say it began a long time ago and was done only to the little lambs who were part of the chosen flock. Thus, the world would know and readily identify which lambs were chosen and which lambs were not. Others say it was done for cleanliness, to prevent infection so dirt and body wastes could be easily washed away. For whatever reason, it was now a tradition that all newborn lambs would undergo on the third day of their life, the ceremony called "tail docking".

Poppa had showered and brushed his new wool suit. This was a special day for him. There was a macho element that went with tail docking. Though the procedure was painful, it was considered a mark of bravery to go through the ordeal without so much as a whimper. The test of a true young ram was how he withstood this ritual. "Now remember," began Poppa, as he looked at his son. "The whole flock will be watching you. I am the leader of the flock. What you do will be a reflection on who I am. Our family name rides on who you are and who you grow up to be. I expect my son to be brave, even in the face of pain or danger. You shall be brave, because I was brave. To cry in anguish or pain is a sign of weakness. Cowardice. No one in our family has ever let us down. Not for the last ten generations have we heard anyone cry out. I expect great things to come of you, my son. I expect you to follow in my hoof-prints, and be the kind of ram that I am. A leader among sheep. One that the flock looks up to. I shall be by your side during the ceremony. I shall be watching every action of yours. Remember you are my son! You have a family name to uphold. Let us be on our way. It is time to go."

The ceremony of the tail docking was to be held in the great temple, a large, magnificent structure that rose majestically from the center of the barnyard. The top spire of the peaked roof seemed to brush the tips of the clouds, it was so high. Swallows flew in graceful patterns in and out of the open windows of the great temple. No one knows how, or why, but each Fall the swallows depart from the temple, and return like clockwork each Spring. Their arrival has been so regular for so many centuries, you can mark the date on your calendar when they shall reappear. It was Spring, the time of the year when all lambs are born, and the swallows had returned to the great temple as they had done since time began.

The little lamb was frightened about what lay ahead. "Now remember, courage, my son," said Momma, soothing his fears as she brushed the curly locks away from his forehead. "Oh my, you look so nice. You make Momma so very proud. It may hurt just a little bit, but your bravery and courage will make the hurt so small, that you won't even know it happened."

Momma had never lied to the little lamb. She was the one he always turned to when he scuffed his knee, or when he fell, or whenever he needed love and security. She was always there. He trusted in her. He believed in her. She would write in his little black book of who he was, and he could always open that book and read the truth. Momma never lied. He could always believe in Momma.

The little lamb approached the steps of the great temple. They seemed so huge. So steep for a tiny little lamb such as he. Momma was on his right side and Poppa on his left. Each held his shiny little black hoof in their's. They were his support and he needed their help to climb up the steps of the great temple. It was a hard and most difficult climb for the little lamb, but he made it. When he reached the top, the great doors began to slide open. As they parted, the little lamb could see the treasures contained in the great temple. To his right was a vast area of clover, neatly bailed and stacked from the floor to as high in the rafters as the little lamb could see. To his left was a treasure of alfalfa, also neatly bailed and stacked. In the center was a great altar made of straw that soared from the floor to the rafters. Before the altar was a huge oak table decked with ornaments, jewels and silver chalices.

Momma and Poppa guided Little Lamb into the pew, seating their child between them. He felt the

excitement in the air. He also felt fear; confusion. He looked to Momma for support and courage. She smiled tenderly at her offspring as she lovingly brushed the locks of wool from his forehead.

"All hail and rise," boomed a voice from the side of the Great Temple. The sheep that had been kneeling on the sides now rose to their feet.

A long procession of sheep began entering through the huge center doors of the Great Temple. They were dressed with pomp and majesty, wearing fine garments and vestments of silk and satin. Purple and red in color, trimmed with gold garland, the vestments were a brilliant contrast against the white wool of the sheep. The lead sheep carried golden staffs. They were followed by other sheep carrying candles, followed by other sheep carrying the flags and banners of the flock. Sheep wearing different vestments began filing in behind the alter of the Great Temple. The room was deathly quiet. The quiet rustling of the robes and vestments were the only sounds heard. No one spoke. The little lamb looked up to his mother for guidance.

"Shhhh," she whispered quietly in his ear. "You are in the house of the Great Creator. You must be reverent and humble when you enter this temple. It is a very special place. A holy place where we come to communicate our thoughts with the Great Creator."

"Oh," whispered the little lamb as he looked around at the beautiful sight that was filling the room. A quiet tinkling of bells gently disturbed the silence. The little sheep strained his head to see the procession of young rams just entering the great doors, each with a little bell around his neck. As they walked, the bells rang with a beautiful sound.

"Who are they?" whispered the little lamb, asking his mother.

"Those are the altar lambs," she replied. "They are specially chosen. They are the finest of the fine."

The little lamb could feel the excitement surging within him as the altar lambs passed by. They all looked so very handsome. One in particular caught the little lamb's eye. "I want to grow up to be just like him," he thought. "Who is he?" the little lamb asked his mother, as this altar lamb that had caught his attention walked by.

"His name is Billy," replied his mother. "He is studying to be a holy sheep; a lamb who will some day

lead the flock in the principals from the Great Book. When he becomes a young ram, and has learned his lessons well, he will become the Chalice Bearer of the Holy One, the oldest, wisest sheep in the flock, the one who brings guidance to us all from the Good Shepherd."

The little lamb drew in a long deep breath, his nostrils quivering. He wanted to savor the scent of this new role model that was passing by. The scent, however slight, was overwhelming to the little lamb. He closed his eyes, wanting to hold on to the moment and the scent for as long as he could. "I want to be just like him," thought the little lamb.

Suddenly, the great temple was filled with beautiful sounds coming from the huge pipes lining the front of the altar. As air passed through them, the pipes produced sounds. Music. The choir behind the altar began singing and was soon joined by the voices of all the sheep in the flock. At the end of the procession, flanked by chalice bearers, slowly walked an old sheep. The Holy One. The Most Reverend. The spiritual leader of the flock. His wool was silver, and shone beautifully against the brilliant red vestment he wore about his neck. He had a gentle, warm, kind smile on his face. His eyes were old, for they had seen so much, and the skin of his face was etched with deep wrinkles. He looked from side to side as he walked down the aisle, smiling and nodding his head to the members of his flock as he passed by. When he reached the little lamb, he stopped. His eyes looked directly into those of the young ram. A peaceful tranquility came over the little lamb. The eyes of the old ram were so warm, so kind, so wise. "Welcome, my son," said the Holy One, nodding his head in approval. He smiled at the little lamb and continued on his journey to the altar, surrounded by the beautiful organ music and singing. When he reached the front, he turned, faced the congregation and raised his arms. The choir, organ and flock reached a crescendo in their music, then suddenly stopped. The Holy One gazed about the Great Temple, looking at the flock that stood before him. "We have gathered here today to celebrate the birth of the new lambs that have come into our flock." His voice was quiet, gentle and kind. "These lambs are priceless gifts from our Creator, given to us for our care, love, and nurturing. It is right that we take time from our busy schedules to give thanks for this blessed event and to share in the ritual of the joining of the flock. Let us rejoice in this blessed event." The room was filled with music once again as the happy flock

celebrated, not only the birth of the little lamb, but the other newborn lambs as well. The Holy One, accompanied by his chalice bearers, began making preparations for the ritual; pouring holy waters into the great cistern, unfolding special cloths, and chanting in a monotone as they proceeded. The Holy One turned to face the flock once again. The music died, and a quiet hush filled the room. "The altar is prepared", said the Holy One. "Bring forth the new lambs that we may receive them into the flock through the timeless ritual of consecration and taidocking."

One by one, the proud parents led their little lambs into the center aisle and patiently waited their turn to present their beloved offsprings to the Holy One for consecration to the flock. There were six ahead of the little lamb as he waited. The organ played softly in the background as the little lamb listened to the chanting. Sometimes he heard the bleating of other little lambs at the altar, but he could not see over the others to discover what was happening. Sometimes the bleating became very loud crying, almost like a scream.

"Some parents just don't know how to raise sheep," said Poppa. "Listen to that crying. No sense of family pride in those offsprings letting their parents down. No sense of discipline." Poppa looked at the little lamb standing by his side. "You are my son," he began. "I expect great things from you. You are part of the finest family in the flock. There is a family name and tradition I expect you to uphold. You are to remain silent during the entire ceremony. I don't want to hear a peep out of you. Little lambs are to be seen and not heard. That is a cardinal rule we all live by. We, as the male sheep of the family, are expected to endure any hardship or pain that may enter our lives. That is a mark of honor. A badge of courage. This is the first test of life for you. If you fail and cry out, you will not only bring dishonor to me, but the entire family name shall be discredited. No one has cried out in our family during the ceremony for over ten generations. I expect you to be brave, courageous, and most of all, to make your father proud."

The little lamb looked lovingly into the eyes of his father. "I won't let you down," said the little lamb. "You'll be proud of me, just wait and see."

It was now the little lamb's turn, and he walked up the steps leading to the alter, with Momma on one side and Poppa on the other. As he reached the top, there was commotion by the great doors. A lot of muttering that

became shouting as the flock gathered around the new intruder.

"Oh", gasped Momma, as she brought her hoof to her mouth. "The black sheep."

The Holy One looked up to see the commotion. "Get out of here," he shouted. The smile had left his face. His brow was furrowed. The kindness had left his eyes and was replaced by anger. Rage. "Get out of here. This is a holy place," he thundered. "You are unholy and unclean. Do not bring your dirty feet into this house of the Creator. You are not worthy to be here. You are a black sheep covered with sin. You are an outcast from the flock. We threw you out a long time ago. You are not wanted here. You are not worthy to be part of the flock."

"You cannot judge me," cried the black sheep from the rear of the Great Temple. "You have no power to judge who I am."

The old holy sheep's white face began turning red as his anger increased. "I am the judge," he thundered. "I have the authority which was given to me by the Great Creator. I have the power. It is I that have been chosen and given the wisdom to read from the Great Book and pass on its wisdom to the flock. The power has been given to me from above. I do judge you and find you to be unclean. You are sinful and it is written all over you. This sheep is not worthy. He is a black sheep for all to see, and shall be damned forever. Begone. In the name of the Great Creator, get out of His House. You are unworthy. Throw the sinner out."

There was a great furor in the back of the room as the ushers were physically wrestling with the black sheep, trying to throw him out. "You have no power to judge," bleated the black sheep. "The only one who can judge us is the Great Creator, and you're not that. In the words of the Good Shepherd, don't worry about the splinter in you neighbor's eye until you remove the log from your own."

"Get him out of here," thundered the Holy One. "We have a service to conduct, and sin has no place here. Throw him out, and bar the doors. He is not one of us."

The ushers carried the black sheep through the great doors, amidst much screaming and struggling, and threw him down the front steps. They quickly retreated into the celebration hall and swung the huge doors closed, barring them from the inside so that no one might enter.

The Holy One, visibly shaken, began stroking the hair on the top of his head with his hoof. After straightening his vestments which had gone askew when he shook his foot in the air, he took several deep breaths to cleanse himself of the experience. Then looking at the little lamb, he said, "That is something you never want to become, my son. A black sheep is the scourge for the entire flock. A symbol of sin and decadence. An outcast from all of sheepdom, spurned by his fellow sheep as well as the Great Creator. Watch your steps carefully, young sheep, so that you may grow in the grace of the Creator. Heed the words of the Great Book as I teach them to you, for they are the way, the only way to avoid eternal damnation." The old sheep brought his face to within inches of the little lamb's, looking him straight in the eye. "Do you want to be damned forever?" asked the Holy One. His voice was deep and stern and ominous. So quiet as he spoke in a whisper, yet so powerful, it cut through Little Lamb's body with fear.

"Nnn-no," stammered the little lamb, trembling with fear.

"Then listen to my words well," replied the Holy One, slowly mouthing each word. "To be worthy of this flock, you must listen to what I say, and obey the teachings of the Great Book. There can be no questioning, for the Great Creator is beyond question. 'It is He that has made you, and not you, yourself.' It is He that determined how to live your life, free from sin and corruption. To live a Creator-like life should be your constant aim. If at any time you fall short and feel sin coming into your life, come to me with great haste, for your eternal damnation is hanging in the balance. Come to me and we will review the Great Book for guidance and penance. The teachings of the ages are available to us, but only through me. You must learn to trust and believe in me and what I tell you, for these are truths. To neglect or ignore my teachings will most certainly condemn you to eternal damnation. Not only while you live, but even after your death. Damnation. Forever!" The Holy One's eyes had lost their kindness and had become steely grey. Their powerful gaze struck fear and terror into the heart of the little lamb. "Do you believe?" questioned the Holy One. His words echoed throughout the great temple. "Do you believe?" he shouted.

"I do," stammered the frightened lamb.

"He believes!" cried the Holy One to the crowd. "We have a new believer in our flock! Hallelujah! Keep him free from sin." The flock began chanting and singing. The Holy One placed his hoof on the forehead of the

little lamb. "Keep this new believer innocent and free from sin," he shouted. "Keep his blood pure, so there be no need to sacrifice it on the altar. Guide his hooves on the true path of your teaching. Let not his path ever cross that of the black sheep. Keep temptation and sin away from this priceless treasure you have given to us. In the name of the Great Creator, we pray." The crowd chanted in the background.

Poppa sheep looked proudly at his offspring. "That's my boy."

The Holy One waited for the excitement of the flock to die down. The old sheep was great at timing. His delivery had been finely honed through the years. He knew how to control sheep. How to raise them to a fevered pitch, and hold them in the cleavage of his hoof. He was a master of his trade, and he knew it. Whatever he demanded of the flock, they gave to him. Wealth. Prestige. Power. He was their spiritual leader. Their direct link between earth and the heavens. Their guidepost for eternal salvation. When the flock became silent, he asked, "Who brings this little lamb before the altar of the Great Creator?"

"His mother and I," replied Poppa.

"Do you solemnly promise to raise this little sheep according to the teachings of the Great Book, and follow the rules of the Great Creator?" asked the Holy One.

"We do," replied Poppa, firmly.

"Do you solemnly promise to keep him free from the path of sin, and follow the teachings of this Great Temple?" asked the old ram.

Little Lamb looked at Poppa. The he looked at Momma, as they both replied, "we do".

"Brethren of the flock", began the Holy One, extending his front legs to the congregation. "Do you accept this innocent young lamb as a member of the flock? Do you promise to guide his hooves on the path of truth and keep him from following the path of eternal damnation?"

"We do," responded the congregation.

"Step forward, my son," commanded the Holy One as he put his hoof in the silver chalice by the altar.

"This is holy water," he began as he spread the liquid over the forehead of the little sheep. "I cleanse your wool from

all worldly temptations. I prepare you for entry into the flock. May you graze safely with us in fields of green grass and never stray. I now consecrate you in the name of the Great Creator." The holy sheep brought forth more water with each statement. "In the name of the Good Shepherd." He gently touched the forehead of the little lamb. "And in the name of the Holy Spirit that lives among us eternally." A silence descended over the great hall. The silence was so ominous.

"Are you ready to join ranks with the flock?" asked the Holy One, his voice echoed, breaking the silence.

"Yes sir," answered the little one.

"Are you prepared to make the sacrifice necessary to symbolize the joining of the flock? To make the sacrifice so the whole world will know this lamb is a member of the flock? The chosen flock of the Great Creator?"

"Yes sir," replied the little lamb.

"Then come, the altar is ready for your sacrifice." The Holy One extended a foot to help the little lamb.

The young one looked at his parents. First at Poppa, then at Momma. "Don't let me down son," said Poppa. "Be brave."

"Don't worry," Momma said. "Trust me. It may hurt a little, but only a little. Make us proud of you."

The little lamb took several deep breaths as the Chalice Bearers attached shackles to his feet. He looked around the room. "I'm not sure what's happening," he thought. "But Momma and Poppa won't let anything happen to me. I trust them." He wiggled his little tail in the air.

"Are you ready to join the flock?" asked the Holy One, looking very kindly at the lamb.

"Yes sir," came the reply.

"Then give me your tail!" commanded the old sheep.

The little lamb felt confused, and so he looked to Momma for guidance. "It's all right," she said

reassuringly. "Give him your tail." He looked at Poppa. Poppa nodded his approval.

The little sheep stopped twitching his tail. He relaxed and placed his tail in the hoof of the Holy One. Trusting. Believing in his elders. For don't they know all of the right answers? All of the truths of the world? They have the wisdom and the knowledge. What does a little sheep know? Nothing. Only his feelings, and the elders tell him that feelings are not always correct and can lead you astray. Only the elders have the right answers, and can say "here, let me write these truths in your little book that you carry." He felt the Holy One pull on his tail, stretching it out until it was fully erect. As Little Lamb looked around the room, he had a strange feeling inside. He knew, but yet he wasn't aware that he knew, someone was opening his book. His very special private book that lay buried in his subconscious. "Let me write these words in your book so you never forget."

"Relax your tail," soothed the old sheep. "Close your eyes and relax."

The little lamb looked into the eyes of the elder. Such kindness. Such Truth. This was the holy leader of the flock. The transcriber of the great book. The wise teacher.

"Relax and close your eyes."

The little lamb obeyed, gently closing his eyes.

"WHAP!"

A sudden pain unlike anything the little lamb had ever experienced before in his life shot through his body. A searing experience that raced from the base of his tail and tore up his spinal cord, reaching the deepest part of his brain. An experience that shook his very being. His body thrust violently against the shackles that held him to the altar. His eyes jerked open with pain and fear. His little chest gasped violently for breath, and a cry began from the bottoms of his little feet, working its way through every nerve and sinew in his body. A cry that demanded to be expressed. Demanded to be heard. That cry got stuck in his throat. Paralyzed, he sat on the cry, keeping it within, hearing only the words of Poppa. "I expect you to be brave." "I will, Poppa. I will," thought the little lamb. He bit on his lower lip, for fear that if he opened his mouth, the cry of agony would echo throughout the countryside. "I will, Poppa. I will make you proud of me." A tiny whimper like a gentle breeze, waifed through his nostrils as the little

lamb sobbed from within, where only he could hear. The tears welled up in his big brown eyes, washing like waves on a beach when his long eyelashes blinked at the tears clouding his vision. The tears trickled from the corners of his eyelids, falling down his cheeks, dropping onto the altar cloth below. He saw the Holy One holding something in his hoof. Something long, white and furry, with a big red discoloration at one end, dripping blood. "Oh my God," thought the little lamb. "My tail. My beautiful tail. They've torn something very precious from my body, and called it a sacrifice. They took something I dearly loved. They made me the sacrifice. It is my blood that's dripping on this altar."

The little lamb looked at the Holy One. He threw the tail in a waiting bucket on the floor. "Next," he said to the Chalice Bearers.

"I gave you part of me," thought the little lamb. "I sacrificed part of me, and all you can say is 'next'. Not even a 'thank you'." The little lamb closed his eyes. Oh, the pain that wracked his body. It was intense. The little nubbin' that used to be his tail throbbed. Each throb was like an electric current that jolted through his body. "You said it wouldn't hurt," he thought. "You said it wouldn't hurt." Those were the last words on the little lamb's mind as he closed his eyes and slipped into the peace of the unconscious.

"Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep, and doesn't know where to find him. Leave him alone, and he'll come home, wagging his tail behind him." He was in the process of becoming lost. A little lost lamb, without a tail to wag behind him. How do you wag your tail behind you, when you no longer have a tail to wag? Little Lamb was beginning his journey.

PURPLE GRASS

CHAPTER THREE

The days sped by as the healing process went on with the little lamb's tail. At first there was great pain. Not only physical, but psychological as well. The little lamb had lost something very important to him. Something he enjoyed waving in the breeze as he ran through the fields. Now it was gone. Part of him was gone. Taken away from him. No one told him what was going to happen. He was only told to be brave, which he was. As brave as he knew how to be. He watched Poppa through big brown eyes as the family left the ceremony. "How did I do?" he wondered. "Did I pass? What score do I receive in my inner black book for bravery? For pleasing you, Poppa?"

"You cried," said Poppa sheep, looking sternly into Little Lamb's eyes. "I told you to be brave, and you cried. Crying is for babies. When you're ready to grow up, come talk with me."

The score for the black inner book, Little Lamb, minus three. "Failed that one, didn't you?" said a little voice inside him.

We all carry those little black books inside of us. We come into the world innocent, free of any concept of right or wrong. We're extremely dependent. Our basic survival is at stake. Without others, without adults, without our parents, we surely would perish. Each living thing has a basic instinct inscribed on the very first page of their own inner book. Survival. The compelling desire to live. To be. There is not a source in nature you can turn to, but that you see this number one instinct in operation. The tree whose seed landed in a forlorn and lonely crevice on a sheer granite cliff. The only tree on the cliff, with a tiny foothold on the rock. How can that be? We all come into

existence with page one already printed for us. Printed by someone, or something greater than we. "Survive! Against all odds, you have a right to be. A right to be here. You have a right to grow." It says so on page one. If it didn't, you wouldn't be here.

And so, the book began correctly, started by the best author the world has ever known. The creation was perfect. You may argue, saying, "There are many imperfections." But look at the world. It works. It is consistent and dependable. Consider all the variables, all the things that could go wrong, but didn't, all the complexities that make up the creation. It is perfect. It is just the way it is supposed to be. And so, all of us come into the world with the stamp of approval of the Master Creator. It says so on page one of our book. "You are perfect. Go and become. Survive and grow." The instinct to survive is so very strong. To the newborn, there is nothing wrong with them.

Ahh, but what happens when the basic needs for survival are met? What happens when you are not cold and are not hungry? Turn to the next entry written on the inner book. Turn the pages and read the words. Who put them there? Who wrote those words that you read and re-read over and over again? Who filled up the pages defining who you are? Was it the Great Creator? You are already defined on page one as a "perfect creation". Who changed that definition and made you feel less than perfect? By whose right did they do this? Who authorized them to write in your very special book? Your own, personal, holy book. Are they correct? Of course they're correct. They are adults. They know. You believe in them. You trust in them. You need their love for your survival. You need love too, as much as you need food and shelter. You need their love, and out of that need, you authorized them to write in your inner book. Who do they want you to be so that you might experience their love? You will be anything they want you to be. Even less than the perfect creation you were born to be.

"You don't walk well. You cried. I'm disappointed in you," they say. "Less than perfect?" you wonder. "Yes sir. But please, love me." Does anyone hear that plea? Does anyone even care . . . about meeting your basic needs?

PURPLE GRASS

CHAPTER FOUR

"Can Little Lamb come out and play with us?" called Chubby Chipmunk as he stood outside the home of Momma and Poppa sheep.

Momma looked out the window, wiping her feet on her apron. "Your friends are here," she said.

Little lamb came bounding out the door, still eating the last few bites of alfalfa quiche that Momma had prepared for lunch.

"Just be back in time for supper," she called after them. "You know how Poppa likes to eat on time."

The two friends went down the path together, skipping, singing, carefree and happy. It's nice to walk down the path to the meadow with a friend. They were soon joined by another.

Bumbly came buzzing along, crashing into flowers as he flew. What a delightful day to play in the meadow. Each of the friends would be "It" and play tag amongst the grasses and flowers. Leaping over the bubbling brook, Little Lamb could get away from Chubby.

"That's not fair," complained Chubby. "You know I don't like water and besides, I don't want to get my fur wet." They played tag for hours, and when they had tired, began exploring their world.

The meadow was a panoramic vista of beautiful flowers gently waving in the afternoon breeze. There was more beauty here than the eye could take in. From a distance, each flower looked like every other flower in the

meadow. But if you got down close and carefully examined them, you would find that each flower was not like all the others. Each flower was unique unto itself. A delicate work of art. One of a kind. But you must take time to discover the uniqueness of each flower, the specialness of that creation.

"Personally, I like the red ones," droned Bumbly. "They've got the best nectar." He flew off to a nearby red flower and began playing with the stamens and anthers, working his way deep into the very base of the flower, scattering pollen in the wind and covering himself with it as he drank of the nectar. He flew to another nearby red one and began the same process. Then to another, and another. The more he drank, the more erratic his behavior became. Instead of flying in a straight line, he began flying in a zig zag and loop de' loop manner like a stunt pilot. He finally reached a point where he could no longer fly directly from one flower to another. Sometimes he overshot his mark. Sometimes he crashed into the flower. Sometimes he crashed on the ground and crawled up the stalk, fighting the stamens and anthers as if they were mysterious foes doing battle with him, protecting their precious nectar and keeping him from his goal.

"Bumbly always goes for the red ones," chuckled Chubby as he watched the spectacle with the little lamb.

"Why?" questioned the young ram.

"They absorb the red rays of the sun and heat up more than the other flowers," replied Chubby as he munched on a sunflower seed.

"I don't understand." replied the little lamb, looking puzzled. "What does that have to do with anything?"

"Oh," giggled Chubby as he downed one sunflower seed and started on another. "I forget. You don't know Bumbly like I know Bumbly. He likes the sauce."

"Sauce?" questioned the little lamb, still looking confused.

"Sauce," nodded Chubby affirmatively. "Nectar. You know, fermented nectar. On a sunny afternoon day, temperatures really climb inside those flowers. Especially the red ones. They get the most heat and that speeds up

the fermentation of the nectar. Gets up as high as 90 proof. He goes for the good stuff. 'Course then," and Chubby shrugged his shoulders. "he drinks and drinks all afternoon, and look at him now."

Bumbly, fearful of losing his flying license was crawling on the ground; crawling up the stalk of one flower, getting his sip, falling off the petals and crashing down to the ground.

"Does he like ..." and the little lamb stammered for words. "Does he like doing that?"

"Oh, sure!" exclaimed Chubby, as he reached for another sunflower seed. "He likes nectar, just like I like my sunflower seeds."

"But does he like falling out of flowers?" asked the little lamb.

"No," said Chubby. "No more than I like being like this." And he patted his round belly.

"Then, why does he do it?" asked the little lamb inquisitively.

Chubby scratched his ear with his little foot. The scratching was so fast his foot was but a blur. He looked at his toenails, and spying one that was too long, chewed it down to its proper length.

"Good question," he said. "The answer is simple. Critters do what they gotta' do. So long as they need to do it -- well, they do it. When they don't need to do it, they stop doing it. It's that simple. Understand?"

"I'm not sure I know what you're talking about."

Chubby grabbed another seed. "Take this seed, for example. I like the way it tastes. I have always liked the way it tastes, and so I taste, and taste and taste. I like it."

"But look what it's doing to you," replied the little lamb.

Chubby looked down at his belly. "I'm fat. I know it. I'm a compulsive eater. I eat. I get fat. I know that too."

"If you know that," said the little lamb in a quiet, gentle voice, "why don't you stop? If you know the effects of your behavior, why don't you stop? Why do this to yourself?"

"The answer to that, my friend," and Chubby munched on another sunflower seed, "is that I go crazy when I try to stop. Absolutely crazy. There's something deep inside me that says 'eat'. Eat. Eat. And so I do. Other

chipmunks say to me, 'Chubby'," and he put one hand on his hip, waving the other in the air; "You don't have any will power. All you need is will power, the ability to say 'no'. You're weak. You've got to develop will power."

"Well?" the little lamb's eyes opened wide. His long eyelashes blinking gracefully.

"I spent more money trying to get over this darned thing, trying to have will power," said Chubby.

"Do you think I like being like this? I don't. Not one darned bit. I'd like to be like everybody else. It's so much easier. But I got this thing inside. I gotta' be me. I can't be anybody else. I'm the guy that's gotta' live with me, and I'm happier being me. I gotta' live with me, and nobody else does. Do you know what it's like to be different? To have others look at you and see the disgust in their eyes? Do you know what it's like to have this thing deep inside you that keeps telling you everyday of your life -- that you're different? You can't run away from that voice, and so you do what you've gotta' do. I tried to run from that voice. So far. So many times. But it goes with me, wherever I go. I've spent too much time hating me. Do you know what it's like to hate yourself? To hate yourself 'cause you're different?"

"I don't know that I've ever heard such a voice inside me," said the little lamb, blinking his eyes again in bewilderment.

"Well, let me tell you ... it's a ..." and Chubby's eyes began to fill up with tears. "It's the worst thing in the world. To be alone." He began to cry. "You're lucky. I wish I could be like you. It's so much easier not having that voice inside."

"I can see the pain in your eyes," said the little lamb. "I know you hurt, but I don't understand. I don't know how you hurt."

"Unless you know how to look at the world through my eyes," said Chubby, wiping the tears from them, "unless you can see as I see, you'll never know. I may not fully understand the vision Bumbly has, but I certainly know how he feels. Try to know how I feel, and then maybe you'll understand how I see." Bumbly had passed out at the foot of a bright red flower. "None of us got it put together real well, but we're working on it. I'm trying hard, real hard - with all I've got. But some days -- I don't know if it's worth it anymore. I get so tired. Some days I think about how much easier it would be just to give up and die."

The little lamb looked at his friend Chubby munching on another sunflower seed. He looked at his friend Bumbly snoring loudly at the base of his favorite red flower. He looked out over the meadow and the field of flowers. "How can there be so much unhappiness and frustration in a place as beautiful as this is?" thought the little lamb.

"Well, well," came a voice from above. "What have we here? A party?" It was a new voice the little lamb had not heard before. Kind of high-pitched yet had a distinct bass resonance.

"Hi, Mona," called Chubby. The little lamb looked up to see a beautiful, graceful winged creature hovering above them.

"And who's this?" questioned Mona, fluttering on iridescent brown wings with huge diamond spots in the center that burst each ray of sunlight into a rainbow of colors.

"Mona Monarch," cried Chubby. "this is my friend Little Lamb."

Mona fluttered her wings lazily just above the little lamb's nose, her long eyelashes blinking in a very seductive manner. Then, ever so gently, Mona came to rest on the tip of the little lamb's nose.

"Cha-a-a-a-rmed, I'm sure," she drawled in a seductive manner. "You'll have to pardon the way I look." and she began brushing a fine powder from her body. "Honestly! Just look at this." The more she brushed, the more the powder filled the air. "You'd think I was a sex maniac, covered with pollen the way I am. You have no idea of the frustrations I experience flitting around this meadow, playing Polly Pollen with all the flowers. Do you think it's fun playing with someone's stamens and anthers? Getting covered with all this sticky, gooey stuff. It's all over my body. I mean, pullleeeaaazze ... give me a break! This is hard work. And do you know the nerve of some flowers? They say, 'I don't want that kind of pollen. I want this kind of pollen.' Can you imagine that? Here I am bringing an airborne gift of love to those sedentary creatures, and they're being selective. I mean, Lord knows, I'm waiting for my own prince to come, and nobody's bringing him to me. I've got to go out and find him. I'm not choosey, yet I've got to work to find him. These pretty little prissy things just sit around and wait. I'm doing the best I can to be a matchmaker for them. And what does it get me? Nothing. Not even a 'thank you'. 'Oh, put that pollen here on my anther. No, no

.... that's not the right kind of pollen. Can't you find something different?' I mean, this poor girl's wings beat for days trying to find the best pollen in the area. Let me tell you, this is no easy task. Oh God, what I wouldn't give to be beautiful and just sit around waiting for someone to come along and pollinate me."

The little lamb looked at the butterfly resting on the tip of his nose. The huge wings opened and closed gracefully. Fine colored jewels adorned them, with small sequins dotting the entire edge of each wing, sparkling on the dark brown velvety band, contrasting with the satiny lighter reddish-orange interior. Blue eyeliner framed the dark almond eyes. Long eyelashes fluttered as Mona gazed into the eyes of the little lamb.

"You're kind of cute," she said.

"And you're beautiful!" replied the little lamb. "You're the most beautiful thing I've ever seen!"

Mona stroked her antennae. Primping and preening, she straightened her diamond studded tiara.

"Where did you ever discover this maaaarvelous creature? I could get to like him."

"Your wings," stammered the little lamb, awed by the beauty that perched on his nose. "They're so beautiful. I've never seen anything like them before."

"Do you really like them, my dear?" Mona purred as she spread her wings out fully so the little lamb could see them better. She trembled at the peak of her expansion, making the sequined borders shimmer in the sun.

"These?" and she shrugged her head, "Just some little trifle I've had laying around the closet at home. Just something I slipped into today."

The little lamb looked at the beauty before him. "You're a queen!" he exclaimed.

"Honey," began Mona as she stretched out her full length on the little lamb's nose. "I don't want to disappoint you, baby, but there's only one queen and she's my mother, and she's still alive. So long as she's alive -- I'm a princess."

"Well, you're still fantastically beautiful." insisted the little lamb.

Mona stood up, extending her long legs gracefully.

"Whoops!" she exclaimed. "Naughty me." She began dusting the little lamb's nose with her wing. "I got pollen all over you. Sha-a-ame on m-e-e-e. I should be so lucky." She bent down and kissed Little Lamb on his nose. "You're a sweetie. A real sweetie. Well folks, it's time for this pristine Goddess to continue her thankless task of bringing all the little flower Prince Charmings to all the little flower princesses who are just sitting out there in waiting. Too-de-doo and Taa-Taa!" And with that, she spread her wings and rose effortlessly and easily in the gentle summer breeze.

"She's so-o beautiful," said the little lamb.

"She certainly is," replied Chubby. "But you should have seen her yesterday."

"Yesterday?" questioned the little lamb.

"Oh yes," replied Chubby, scratching his ear again. "She had on the most beautiful yellow chiffon wings with white spots and a big diamond broach."

"You mean," continued the little lamb, "she can change her colors? I mean, her wings?"

"Oh yes," exclaimed Chubby. "Every day, and sometimes two or three times on Sundays."

"Ohhh!" exclaimed the little lamb in amazement. "She's beautiful!"

"I got more news for you my friend," said Chubby. "She's not a she. She's a he."

"Ohhhhh!" exclaimed the little lamb. "Well she, or he - is still beautiful. It really doesn't matter. Mona is beautiful."

"Mona is Mona," replied Chubby, checking his fingernails again. "Ain't another butterfly like Mona. A little bit flighty at times. But a heart that creature's got a heart so big and so pure. So much love. Can you see what she's doing for this meadow? Without her, where would all these flowers be? Every day, she goes around tirelessly trying to bring love into some poor soul's life. Do you think anyone says 'thanks'?" Chubby shook his head. "Nope. Nobody says thanks. They just pretend Mona doesn't even exist. They ignore her."

"But why?" asked the little lamb. "She's so beautiful."

"She's not what she appears to be," replied Chubby. "Some critters don't like other critters 'cause

they're not what they're supposed to be. Now you take this," and Chubby waved his arm over the flowering meadow. "This is your country club, garden variety flower growing here. All prim and proper. Prissy. Dressed just right. Not a petal out of place. They feel their's is the right way. If you don't conform to the world as they see it, they don't want you. No matter who you are. No matter how beautiful. No matter how big your heart, or how loving you are, if you're not like them, they don't want you. They feel everything should be just as it appears. Everything should conform to their reality."

"Oh!" exclaimed the little lamb in bewilderment.

"But do you know what I think?" asked Chubby.

"What?"

"They're the frauds. There isn't a one of them out there that's real. That's true to themselves. They just look at the flowers on either side of them and say, 'Oh! That's how I'm supposed to dress.' Or, 'Oh, that's how I'm supposed to behave.' And so, you've got a field of flowers, each one just like every other one. Now you take Mona. That's a real creation. That's a real soul. Those fluttering wings that she changes at a drop of a hat, that's Mona too. She's trying out different parts that were hidden inside of her. She's exploring all that she can be. Nobody's telling her, 'you can't be that, or you can't do this.' She's doing what she wants to do. And she's doing it with love. There isn't a mean bone in her body. What's wrong with that? But the price she pays for being herself - for being different, is rejection. If you don't fit in, you're out. She doesn't want to pay the price to fit in, to be someone she's not. To be somebody false. Everything has its price, you know. It's just what kind of price you are willing to pay. I don't want to pay that kind of price either. I need to be me. Even if that means being a compulsive eater. That's me. I can't be anybody else. I need to like me, and the only way I can like me is to be me. The price you pay for being false to yourself is far greater than being true to yourself. Does that make any sense?"

"I'm not sure," replied the little lamb. "I'll have to think about that for awhile. I do know one thing for sure."

"What's that?"

"I like Mona. I've never met anyone quite like that before."

The afternoon sped by quickly as the little lamb and Chubby Chipmunk explored the meadow with all of its treasures. How they frolicked and laughed among the flowers, playing tag with the crickets and honey bees. Skipping through fields of clover and rolling down the hills. The sun felt good on their fur.

"Oh!" exclaimed the little lamb. "It's getting late! Momma and Poppa will be worried about me. It's getting near supper time and I dare not be late."

"Can we play a little bit longer?" asked Chubby.

"I'd sure like to," replied the little lamb. "I really would. But Poppa wants to eat at 5:30 every night. He gets really mad when supper is delayed. You don't want to be around Poppa when he's mad. It's better not to get him that way."

"Will you always be my friend?" asked Chubby. "Will you always play with me?"

The little lamb smiled. "Sure," he said. "I would like that too. Will you always be my friend and play with me?"

"You bet!" cried Chubby, hugging the little lamb's leg. "Nothing would make me happier."

"I've really got to be on my way," said the little lamb. He looked at Bumbly snoring loudly at the base of his favorite red flower. "Can I help you with him?"

"No," replied Chubby. "He's my friend too. I'll just sit here by his side until he wakes up. He's really in no condition to fly home you know, and I don't want him crashing into anything. I'll just wait until he comes around."

The little lamb smiled again. "You're really a good friend to have. I'm glad I know you."

"Thanks," said Chubby, with a sheepish grin on his face. "Thanks a lot."

The little lamb slowly turned and trotted down the path of the meadow, then paused and looked over his shoulder at Chubby sitting beside the slightly defunct, near-sighted, overgrown sleeping bumblebee. "Bye," he called and waved.

"Can we play again tomorrow?" asked Chubby.

"Sure," shouted back the little lamb. "You're my friend. You can count on it."

The little lamb became increasingly aware how late it was. Maybe just a little too late. His trot hastened into a canter, and then into a full-fledged gallop. "I hope I'm not late." he thought to himself. Breathlessly, he raced up the path to the front door of his home, bursting in. Momma and Poppa were already seated at the table. The room was very silent as the little lamb approached the table. When he sat down and slid his chair into place, it squeaked loudly on the wooden floor. Every noise echoed throughout the room. "Am I late?" he asked.

Poppa took out the big gold watch that he always wore in his vest pocket. He squinted as he looked at the hands. "Two minutes," he said. "You're two minutes late. You'd better have a good excuse!"

"Oh I do," blurted out the little lamb. "I was down at the meadow ..."

"Hush," interrupted Poppa sternly. "You are late. There is no excuse. We will talk about this later after we say grace."

The little lamb bowed his head along with Momma. Poppa surveyed the two. Satisfied, he bowed his head and began. "Thank you, oh Great Creator, for your bountiful blessings which we have received this day. Grant us nourishment for our bodies and minds through this food which Thou hast given to us for our use. Grant that we may ever serve Thee better in obedience to Thy will. Keep us on the straight and narrow pathway of Thy will, so that we may not stray and become lost as sinners." Poppa paused for a moment, his head bowed. His eyes closed. "And now," he continued, "my son, Little Lamb, has a prayer of petition to ask you forgiveness for being late and causing disfavor with You and in this house of Your family."

"Poppa," pleaded the little lamb. "Please Poppa, do I have to?" His eyes looked up and met Poppa's, searching for some shred of kindness in them. Poppa's gaze was very stern. Little Lamb could see anger building deep within as Poppa's pupils dilated. Little Lamb looked to Momma for help. She nodded her head up and down slowly.

"Pray," she said quietly but firmly as she closed her eyes and bowed her head.

The little lamb looked around the room. At Momma. At Poppa. Oh how much he wanted their love.

How much he wanted their approval. Reluctantly, he lowered his head, closed his eyes and began: "Oh Great Creator, I kneel before you as a humble sinner. I am not worthy to come before you and or to pick up the crumbs from under Thy great table. I have sinned by not honoring the wishes of my earthly father. I have violated one of Your great commandments: 'Honor thy father and mother.' Please forgive me, oh Great Creator, for being late for supper. I didn't mean to be late. I was just having so much fun playing in the meadow. I even made some new friends today. Chubby Chipmunk, Bumbly Bumblebee and Mona Monarch. Thank you for them wanting me as a friend. I was having so much fun that I forgot about the time. It won't happen again. Ever. I promise. Cross my heart and hope to die. I swear it will never happen again. Only please forgive me for sinning. Please take away this sin. I am truly sorry and do heartily repent for this misdoing. Please love Poppa and Momma and help them raise me, a sinner, on the straight and narrow path. Help me become the kind of ram they want me to be, and help guide me so that they might be proud of who I am. In your blessed Name and in that of the Good Shepherd who watches over all the little lambs ... Amen."

"Amen," said Poppa and Momma.

"Bring on the supper," commanded Poppa in his stern, gruff voice.

Momma got up from the table and brought the steaming bowls of hot cream of green grass soup. First serving Poppa, then little lamb, then herself. When she was finished, she quietly sat down at the table. Poppa dipped his spoon into his soup, raised it to his lips and made a noisy, slurping sound as he inhaled the broth.

"Arrgh!" he cried, spitting the soup back into the bowl before him. "This is too hot," he complained.

"How many times do I have to tell you, I don't like my soup this hot."

Momma jumped up, exchanging Poppa's soup bowl for hers. "Here, have mine," she said. "It's cooler. I promise. I'm sorry I didn't test your soup before I served it. I'm sorry, Poppa."

"Harrumpf." grunted Poppa as he noisily slurped the new soup before him. He made no other comments, but just kept on slurping and eating. When he was finished, he looked at Little Lamb and at Momma.

"I just don't understand why you do things to annoy me," he continued. "You have no idea of the amount of displeasure you bring into my life. Do you have any idea what it's like to be a Ram in this world? To go

out, day after day, banging your head against stone walls so you can provide for your family? All you do," and he looked at Momma, "is sit around all day in the house frittering away your time while I'm out banging my head against those walls. And you," he looked at Little Lamb. "Playing in the meadow having fun when you should be learning skills to help you in the future. What do I get for all of my struggles? A wife who serves me scalding soup and a disobedient son. What did I do to deserve this? I try. Lord knows I try. Do I get any help from those around me? Do I get any appreciation? When is it my turn to play? To fritter away time? Well, let me tell you," he began shaking his hoof, "there are going to be some big changes around here. It's about time I get the respect and appreciation I deserve!"

Momma looked at Poppa. There was love and compassion in her eyes. "You've had a hard day today, haven't you, dear?"

"Oh," said Poppa, resting his head on his hoof. "You have no idea of the stone wall I had to deal with. It just wouldn't give, no matter how many times I butted into it. I gave it everything I had. Even spent overtime trying to make a crack in that cursed wall." He paused for a moment. "I've got a splitting headache from work."

Quickly, Momma rose from her chair, walked behind Poppa and began massaging the back of his neck. "There, there," she said. "Just relax, Poppa. This is your home. This is your castle. We'll make your day better. Won't we, Little Lamb?" She looked over at her son.

"Yes Momma," he said.

They sat in silence for several minutes, Momma rubbing Poppa's head and neck, trying to give him as much energy and strength from her body as can be passed through the healing power of touch. Putting as much love and tenderness into her massaging as she could. Slowly Poppa began to relax. The tenseness in his shoulders lessened. He rolled his head from side to side. Momma massaged his forehead. He opened his eyes and looked at Little Lamb.

"Chubby Chipmunk," began Poppa, "that's the fat little kid with the stripe down his back in the meadow, isn't it?"

"He is a little bit on the big side," replied the little lamb.

"Yeah." Poppa nodded. "I've seen him. I don't like him. I don't want you hanging around with no fat

kids."

"But Poppa," blurted out the little lamb. "He's my friend!"

"I don't care," interrupted Poppa sternly. "He's not somebody I want you to have as a friend. He's fat."

"Poppa," pleaded the little lamb, his eyes opened wide in disbelief..

"Don't you hear me?" thundered Poppa. "Don't you hear what I'm saying? How many times do I have to repeat myself in this house? He is not somebody I want you to be with! Do you understand?"

"Yes, Poppa," said the little lamb meekly, lowering his head.

"And this other one, what was his name?"

"Bumbly?" questioned the little lamb.

"Bumbly," said Poppa, nodding his head in acknowledgment. "That's it. Bumbly Bumblebee. The town drunk. You sure pick losers for friends, my son. What did I bring you up to be? I thought you had more class than to associate with drunks."

"Bumbly's a nice bee," pleaded the little lamb. "He just needs help every now and then."

"Help?" thundered Poppa. "Who helps me? You learn to help yourself. That's part of being a mature ram. You pull yourself up by your own hoof-straps. You don't go looking around for somebody to help you. Let me tell you something, boy. You go sticking your hand out helping everyone you meet along the path of life, and you're going to find yourself miserable, just like them. You're not going to pull them up out of the gutter. They're going to take your hand and drag you right down in the gutter beside them. Help? The world's full of suckers wanting to be helpful. I hope the Great Creator gave you some brains so you don't become no sucker. You give 'em your hand and they'll take it and everything else you got. Even things you don't own, they'll take. If you want to be a sinner, well then you just keep on being a sucker. Sinners and suckers, they're both alike. But so long as you're my son and living in my house, under my roof, and eating my food, you gotta' live by my rules. I run this house - or the Great Creator and I run this house. I am the master here, and He is my Master. You answer to me, and I answer to Him. That's the way

families of this Great Temple operate. It's in the Good Book. Do you understand me, boy?"

"Yes, Poppa," said the little lamb.

"Now this other friend you talked about," continued Poppa.

"You mean Mona?"

"Yeah," grunted Poppa. "Who is she?"

"Oh," sighed the little lamb. "She's beautiful. The most beautiful thing I've ever seen. She's got these big, gorgeous wings and flies around the meadow like a queen. So much grace and charm! I even called her a queen, but she corrected me and told me, 'The queen is my mother and she's still alive. So long as she lives, I'm a princess.' I didn't quite understand that. And when I told Chubby she's beautiful, he told me, 'I've got news for you. She's a he.' I didn't understand that either."

"Oh, my God!" gasped Poppa. "You didn't hang around with that fruit-cup butterfly, did you?"

Little Lamb looked confused.

"Not the one that changes her wings whenever the wind blows different?"

"She did mention having different wings back home in her closet," replied Little Lamb.

"Did she touch you?" asked Poppa.

"She sat on my nose," replied the little lamb. "A little bit of her powder fell on my wool."

"Oh, my God!" moaned Poppa. "My son is associating with a degenerate. A sexual pervert, and my son is calling her, him, or whatever you call it, a friend of his."

Momma looked at Little Lamb. Her face revealed her shock at his behavior. "You go upstairs and take a bath right after supper, young ram. You get that disgusting . . .", she wiped her hooves on her apron and shook her head as she spoke. "You wash that terrible powder out of your wool. Oh! How disgusting."

"Did anyone else see you with this ... this degenerate creature of depravity?" asked Poppa.

"Only Chubby and Bumbly," replied the little lamb innocently.

"Oh, thank God!" Poppa looked up at the ceiling as he raised his arms. "My name would be ruined in

this community if it ever got out that a son of mine had any contact with that sexual degenerate. No self-respecting male dresses up in female's things."

"But Mona was nice," pleaded the little lamb.

"Nice?" bellowed Poppa. "Are you stupid or something? Can't you recognize the devil when you see him? Rumors have it that pervert, that degenerate, preys on young, innocent little lambs. He lures you to his lair with promises of trinkets and goodies, and ... oh!" Poppa shuddered. "It's too vile and disgusting to even think about." He looked at his son. "I absolutely forbid you to hang around with anyone other than your own kind. No son of mine is going to grow up like that. You're going to become the kind of young ram I can be proud to call my son. Enough of this playing around in the meadow. It's time you learned how to become a ram. Momma," and he looked right at her. "It's time for our little lamb to start school. To start his training in ramhood. No son of mine's going to be a sissy. No son of mine's going to be a pansy. He's going to be a real ram." Poppa looked at Little Lamb. "Now eat your soup."

Little Lamb picked up his spoon and dipped it into the bowl of warm, dark-green, thick soup. He brought the liquid to his lips and tasted it. He closed his eyes, grimaced and shuddered at the taste. "What kind of soup is this?" he asked.

"It's cream of green grass," replied Momma.

"Oh, Momma," pleaded the little lamb. "You know I don't like cream of green grass soup."

"What?" thundered Poppa sheep. "Eat your soup. What kind of son do you think I have here? I never heard of a lamb not liking cream of green grass soup. Eat hearty. It's good for you. It puts wool on your chest. Eat it like a ram."

The little lamb looked to Momma for help. There was none. He looked back at Poppa.

"Eat your soup," he commanded.

The little lamb took a small amount in his spoon and slowly brought it to his lips. He opened his mouth, dreading the taste. "Maybe," he thought, "if I hold my breath while I eat, I won't taste it." He held his breath as he put the green grass soup in his mouth. It tasted so terrible to the little lamb. Even holding his breath didn't help. He

could still taste it. He tried swallowing, but the soup seemed to stick in the back of his throat. "Got to get rid of that awful taste," he thought as he took a refreshing drink of cool water. He was aware that Poppa was glaring at him. Why did he have to watch?

"Eat," commanded Poppa. "Take a big spoonful."

The little lamb dipped his spoon into the soup, hoping that his shaking arm would spill most of the soup on its' journey from the bowl to his mouth. He paused with the spoon at his lips.

"Eat!" bellowed Poppa in a frightening, threatening voice.

What happened from there on was reflex. Medically, they call it the gag reflex. When something goes into your mouth that is extremely repulsive and distasteful, a complex set of nerve reactions occur. Beginning at the back of the throat, nerve impulses are shot to the brain, which shoots another set of impulses to the diaphragm and abdominal muscles to contract in a retching fashion. Another set of impulses are shot to the throat opening the gates, along with more impulses to relax and dilate the esophagus and contract the stomach. The whole process is involuntary and totally beyond the control of any creature. Especially one, frightened, lonely little lamb who desperately does not want to experience this. Especially in front of the ram he is desperately trying to please, his father.

The sounds the little lamb made were outrageous and beyond description. The whole process took less than three seconds. Little Lamb watched helplessly as the flood gates opened, spewing forth the contents of his rumen all over the supper table. He watched the flowers of the meadow burst forth in a mixture of mucous and brown slimy, fluid. A stench filled the air as the puddle spread larger and larger on the table before him. He wished, with all his heart, that he could be any place but here.

Poppa glared at the little lamb. Tremendous anger blazed in his eyes. "Get out of here!" he bellowed. "Go to your room. Get out of my sight. You disgust me."

"Clean up this mess," he shouted to Momma. "That's your son for you."

The little lamb bolted from the table as fast as he could. Tears flooding his eyes and running down his cheeks. He was so ashamed. So embarrassed. He ran up the stairs and into his room closing the door behind him, and

throwing himself on his bed, he sobbed pitifully.

"Why can't I be like everyone else?" he questioned. "Am I so bad? Have I done something so terrible that I have to be like this? What did I do to deserve this? I just don't like green grass."

PURPLE GRASS

CHAPTER FIVE

The sun rose in brilliant splendor bathing the meadow in its warm energy. Morning dew clung stubbornly to the petals of the flowers as the new day began. The birds flitted in the branches of the trees, calling, "awake. Awake! Everything is new. A new beginning. A new day. Rejoice. You are alive. Rejoice!"

Little lamb heard the calling through his window as a gentle breeze wafted the curtains in his room. The night had been a long terrible ordeal for him. So much for a young mind to struggle with. A mind so

impressionable, a piece of clay being molded by those whom he loved so dearly. "How can you control your feelings?"

he wondered. "I try to feel one way, but my body reacts in a totally different way. I just don't understand."

He looked out the window over the meadow and could see the other lambs romping and frolicking in the grass. "They are like me," he thought. "They are my kind. Poppa doesn't like the friends I've made. I'll just make new ones. Friends that are part of the flock. Not outsiders like Mona or Chubby."

Little Lamb ran out the door into the sunlight. Into the world to find a place where he could belong. Trotting down the well worn path, he stopped at the crest of a grassy knoll to watch the young sheep play their games. The young rams would playfully chase each other around the meadow kicking their heels high in the air and laughing with delight. They were like a school of minnows, darting en' masse, from one side of the meadow to the other, changing directions without rhyme or reason. It looked like so much fun to the little lamb. To run as fast as your legs could carry you. To be like the breeze and be free.

He watched two young rams stop suddenly, separate themselves from the flock, face each other and inhale deeply to puff up their chests like formidable opponent. Looking at each other through fierce menacing eyes they would cry "Baaah", in the deepest voice they could utter. It was a mock battle of intimidation. Who could look the most awesome, the most frightening.

The young females stood by the side and giggled, saying, "Oh look at that one. Doesn't he look strong. Isn't he handsome?" They were all a twitter in their excitement.

Slowly, the young rams would lower their heads, scrape at the turf with their front hooves and charge at their opponent, crashing their heads together and falling head over heels from the impact, landing in the midst of the young females who would shriek with delight and run away from the young rams. Little Lamb watched all of this from his hill.

"C'mon and play with us," called one of the rams as he waved his leg in the air, motioning to Little Lamb .

Little Lamb shook his body, fluffing up his wool. "Why not," he thought. "That looks like fun." And with that thought, he trotted down into the meadow and joined the new found friends running from one area of the meadow to another, changing their directions rapidly. No one being really sure why they changed. But as a mass, as if on que, they changed and ran together as a flock. Little Lamb enjoyed the feeling. He had a sense of belonging. He was playing with his own kind.

As he ran by a group of young females, he overheard one of them say, "look at that one. He's so cute." The next time he ran by, he looked closer to see where the voice came from. A very pretty young ewe smiled at him as he ran by. She had a tiny black pug nose that wiggled when she smiled. Each time the flock of young rams raced by, he would catch another glimpse of that smile. Her long eyelashes framed the deepest, darkest almond eyes that Little Lamb had ever seen. "Oh my", he thought. "She is pretty."

With each pass they definitely noticed each other. Little Lamb was really enjoying this game. This time she winked at him. "Oh my," he thought. "This is fun."

"Hey you." His tranquil mood was shattered by a harsh, gravelly voice. "Yeah, you. I'm talking to you."

Little Lamb stopped his running to see who was calling to him. At first, all he could see was a cloud of meadow dust as the flock continued their run. Then, as if in a dream, this immense hulk of a young ram emerged from the cloud.

"Hey buddy, there's something you and me gotta' get straight." The closer this new ram came to Little Lamb, the more menacing he became. "My name is Big Bully," he said, thumping on his chest with his hoof. "That little chick over there," and he pointed at the pretty young sheep that had winked at Little Lamb. "That's my ewe." Big Bully walked closer, putting his face so close that Little Lamb could feel the heat from his breath. "Just a few words of advice for you if you want to survive. She's my property! Hands off! In other words, I don't wanna' see you even look at my chick. Do you understand me?"

Big Bully was pushing Little Lamb in his chest. Pushing him so hard that he was moving backwards from the shoves.

Little Lamb swallowed hard with a gulp. A feeling of fear built up deep within. It was a terrible feeling that he did not know what to do with. He had never met anyone like Big Bully before. "How do you deal with this type of a sheep?" he wondered.

"If I catch you lookin' at my chick again, I'm gonna' rearrange your face," bellowed Big Bully as he looked through tiny, beady, angry eyes, that seemed so small compared to the massive head. "Do I make myself clear? Bean Brain!"

"Yes sir!" stammered Little Lamb. He wasn't quite sure how to respond, but those words just popped out.

"Just stay clear of her," whispered Big Bully in a raspy, terrifying voice. "You don't wanna' mess with me or you're a dead little ram. Now get outta' my face before I get mad and do something to you."

Little Lamb didn't need any more clues on what to do. He tucked what little nubbin' of a tail he had left between his legs and joined the rest of the young rams as they ran about the meadow.

"Hi there," called a voice from somewhere in the mass of dust and running rams. This voice was much friendlier than the last one, calming Little Lamb's fears. "Hi there," it called again. Little Lamb looked in the direction of the new voice. It was Billy who was speaking.

"Don't let him get your goat," began Billy as the two ran together. "He likes to frighten young little rams like yourself with his gruff voice and tough appearance. He wouldn't dare pick on someone like me. He needs to kick someone around who is weaker than he is. Makes him feel important. He's really a pretty small sheep. Some day, if someone has the courage to stand up to him, his macho ram shell will collapse at his feet and everyone in the flock will know what he is. A fraud."

Little Lamb looked at Billy, thinking, "He is such a fine ram. So strong and courageous. I want to be just like him."

"Let's go down to the stream and get a drink," said Billy. "Running in the meadow on a dusty day like today makes me thirsty."

"Sounds like a great idea," replied Little Lamb as the two galloped through the grassy fields in the direction of the stream.

The water was cool and sweet. There's something wonderful about fresh spring water when your throat is parched from the dust of the road and the heat of the day. Something that goes beyond description, but it satisfies a deep inner craving of your being. Your body is so finely tuned that when a need is not being met, it cries out, "I need. I need." At first the call is quiet, but if un-met, it becomes louder and louder, demanding to be heard, until it is a deafening roar in your ears. The Great Creator knew what your needs were long before you ever were born. All those needs were provided for you. They're all here, on this planet. Everything you need is right here and all you need do is ask and it shall be given to you.

Needs like water are easily identified by thirst, and in most areas, water is but a step away. However, if the water is not available, the desire becomes stronger and stronger until all one thinks about is where to find water, for you need that to survive. Other needs are more insidious. Needs like friendship, compassion, and love. Sometimes they are like trying to find water on a desert, but unlike water, they are not necessary for our survival. Or are they? Don't we all die a little bit if some of these needs go un-met. The inner pain is no less severe than the thirst. The death just takes longer. Sometimes a lifetime.

Today Little Lamb had met another ram who offered him two basic needs in life. Water and friendship. It felt so good. So incredibly good to have both these needs met.

"Let's sit and rest in the shade of this giant oak tree," said Billy as he climbed a grassy knoll by the stream. It's one of my favorite places to be. I come here often to be by myself to rest and think." He watched Little Lamb scampering behind him on young ram legs, joining him at his side. "You know," he continued, "you were very brave during the tail docking ceremony. I watched all the other young rams as they went through the experience. Some were brought kicking and screaming to the altar. It took great effort to hold them down. Others cried with tears streaming down their faces. Only you showed great courage. You approached the altar with such serenity, such peace. Your eyes had trust in them when the High Holy One asked you to place your tail in his hand. Such an innocent little

lamb with such trust. I don't know if I've ever seen anyone act as you did. Not a cry from your lips. Not even a whimper when part of your being was separated from your body. And when I saw that one lone tear trickle down your cheek, it brought tears to my eyes. What a brave little lamb, I thought." Billy put his arm on Little Lamb's shoulder. "You're going to be somebody. Some day, you're going to be somebody very important. A lamb like you is not created without purpose. Trust me when I tell you your courage will serve you well in life. Some day you will be counted as one of the flocks most valuable assets."

Little Lamb looked down at his feet, digging in the dirt with his hooves. "I don't know," he began slowly. "Poppa doesn't think so. Whatever I do, I always seem to fail him. I try. I really do try very hard to please him. I suppose I haven't tried hard enough. I will just have to try harder in the future."

"Well perhaps Poppa is wrong," continued Billy. "He doesn't know the potential that exists inside of you. Maybe some day he'll see that."

"Does your Poppa know the potential inside of you?" asked Little Lamb.

Billy paused for a moment, looking at Little Lamb. "Not really," he began. "No Poppa does. But my Poppa wants me to be the best I know how to be, and he's left that in my hands and the hands of my Higher Power. My Creator. That's where potential comes from. My Poppa teaches me, but recognizes that making mistakes is part of growing up. He gives me space to make mistakes and then learn from them. He is my protector from danger. My Poppa and my Momma teach me love. They love me, and encourage me. They are the foundation on which I build my principals. They teach me truth and courage and wisdom. They believe in me."

"I wish my Momma and Poppa were like that," said Little Lamb.

"Ahhh," sighed Billy as he lay back in the grassy shade, resting his arms behind his head. "Maybe some day. See those clouds?" he asked as he waved his hoof in the air. "Be like one of them."

Little Lamb looked up at the puffy white clouds that dotted a brilliant blue sky. They just lazily ambled by. No hurry to go anywhere; just slowly drifting.

"Nobody taught clouds how to be clouds," continued Billy. "They just were created to be clouds. Their only purpose

in life is to be a cloud. Nothing more, nothing less. Imagine what it would be like to be free like a cloud and let the wind blow you. No preconceived ideas of who you should be or how you should act. And look at them." Billy waved his arm in a great sweeping gesture. "Not a one of them alike. Each one is different. That's the way it's supposed to be. None of them is alike and none of us are alike either."

"They don't have a Poppa like my Poppa," exclaimed Little Lamb. "I just can't float around in the breeze like a cloud. Momma and Poppa want me to be who they want me to be. They want me to be more than a cloud."

Billy looked at Little Lamb. Their eyes connected in a deep penetrating gaze. "That makes it harder when your Momma and Poppa want you to be something other than yourself."

"What am I supposed to be?" asked Little Lamb.

"I don't know," chuckled Billy. "Only you can answer that. Sometimes when I feel a bit lost, I go to my quiet place, here by this old oak tree and just be still for a while. It is in the silence I hear the voice that tells me who I am and who I can be."

"Do you come here often?" asked Little Lamb.

"As often as I need to."

"Do you wonder about who you are?" asked Little Lamb.

Billy looked up at the clouds, gently moving by. "It depends on whose voice I listen to."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Little Lamb.

"If I listen to the noisy voices of those around me, I get confused. No, then I don't know who I am. But if I listen in the silence without, for that quiet voice within," Billy paused and closed his eyes for a moment. "That voice tells me beyond any doubt who I am and what I must do."

Little Lamb closed his eyes like he saw Billy doing. "I don't hear anything", he exclaimed.

"Practice," replied Billy. "It's a very quiet voice."

"C'mon Billy", cried a young ram from the flock as it thundered by. "Let's play some more."

Billy looked at the sun as it stood out brightly overhead. "One more romp around the meadow before lunch. What cha' say?"

Billy paused for a moment. "Oh, by the way, what's your name?"

"My friends call me Little Lamb".

"Hi, Little Lamb. My name's Billy".

"I know," replied Little Lamb.

"Want to be my friend?" asked Billy

"I'd like that," said the little lamb. "I'd like that a lot."

The two galloped through the dust joining the flock, and ran one more lap around the meadow before Billy departed. Little Lamb was having so much fun that he just kept on running with the flock, kicking up his heels as he ran past the group of young ewes. He couldn't help but notice that pretty little ewe smiling at him every time he ran by.

"Hey you, bean brain", called that unforgettable voice from the flock. "I thought I told you to keep your face away from my girl. Looks like I gotta' teach you a lesson."

Little Lamb stopped as the flock thundered on by. There was Big Bully blocking the path before him.

"I'm going to knock your block off," said Big Bully as he lowered his head and scraped up the turf with his hoof. He let out a deep rumbling "Baaaah" that echoed throughout the hills of the meadow.

Little Lamb swallowed hard and looked at the distant flock which had stopped their running to observe the conflict. "Can anyone help me?" thought Little Lamb. He closed his eyes. "Quiet voice, what am I to be? What am I to do?" There was only silence.

"Baaaah," boomed Big Bully again in his deepest, most threatening voice.

Little Lamb looked up at the clouds. "Oh to be a cloud," he thought. "They don't have to do this. Oh wind, please blow me away like the clouds. I would like to flee all the bullies of the world. I don't know that I have

the courage to stand up to this one." The fear just lay in the pit of his rumen. Nagging, gnawing inside him, urging him to run away. He looked at the large figure of Big Bully pawing at the earth. "I can do that," thought Little Lamb as he mimicked Big Bully. He pulled a big clod of earth out with his hoof and tossed it in a cloud of dust over his shoulder.

"Baaah," thundered Big Bully again.

Little Lamb took in a deep breath, as deep a breath as his little lungs could hold. Then, with his neck extended, he opened his mouth. A very pitiful, weak "baaah" bleated out of his mouth. "Not very good," he thought. "Got to try harder." Another deep breath. The second baaah was no better than the first. It sounded almost like the bleating of a ewe. Certainly not that of a young ram.

Big Bully heard the puny little baah carried on the breeze. It just struck him as being so pitiful that he fell down on the ground convulsing with laughter. The whole flock of young rams picked up on the laughter and echoed like a chorus. Big Bully continued laughing as he shouted back to Little Lamb. "I don't fight with ewes. Come back to me when you decide to be a young ram. You're no threat to me."

Little Lamb hung his head in shame. "What happened to my voice?" he questioned. The laughter of the flock echoed in his ears as he turned and walked away from the humiliation he had just experienced. With his head hung low, he slowly walked away and kept on walking until he could no longer hear the laughter. He kept walking until he found himself before the big oak tree by the stream. He collapsed in a tiny ball lying on the ground and began sobbing. "Why do I have to be different? Why can't I be like all the other young rams?"

How lonely it is to be by yourself when you would rather be with others like you. But what if you are not like the others who look like you? What if you don't feel the same as the others who look like you. What if you are different? Where does a little lamb go when a little lamb feels lost. When he doesn't feel like he belongs? Little Lamb was continuing his journey on the path of becoming lost. Oh what a lonely journey to be on.

"What's wrong? Why are you crying?"

Little Lamb looked up, blinking away the tears to see who was calling to him. He saw a smiling,

friendly, familiar face. "Chubby Chipmunk," Little Lamb cried with joy. "Oh, I'm so happy to see you. You're not like me, but yet you are like me. You're someone who understands," he bleated through the tears.

"What happened?" Chubby asked kindly as he kissed the little lamb on his nose. "Why are you so sad?"

"I played with the other little lambs this morning," replied Little Lamb.

"Playing doesn't sound sad," exclaimed Chubby.

"Oh no, I had fun. That part wasn't sad at all. But you see, this Big Bully doesn't like me. He tried to pick a fight with me. First he threw dirt at me, and I thought I can do that, and I threw dirt back at him. Then he opened his mouth and screamed "Baaaah" at me across the meadow in a great big booming voice that really frightened me. I gathered my courage, took a deep breath, opened my mouth, and do you know what came out?"

Chubby shook his head.

"Not a big booming "Baaah." Not a sound that would frighten anybody. Especially a big bully. Instead this puny, whimpering, frightened cry came out of me. Big Bully fell down on the ground laughing at me. He said I sounded like a ewe. He couldn't fight with someone that sounded like a little ewe. Then the whole flock started laughing at me. I felt so ashamed, I wanted to run away and die. Just curl up and disappear." And the tears began flowing again.

"There, there," comforted Chubby as he stroked little lamb's cheek with his paw. "It's not so bad."

"Oh, it's terrible. To have someone call you a little ewe when you're trying to be a big ram. It's terrible. My voice, my baaah," little lamb sat upright. "I'll never bleat again. No one will ever hear that voice."

"I know of someone who can teach you to "baaah" different. Someone who can show you how to deepen your voice. Someone who can teach you how to speak like the ram you want to be," replied Chubby.

"Who could teach me that?"

"Bullroy Bullfrog," replied Chubby. "He has the deepest, bassiest voice in the meadow. I know you've heard him singing every evening in the marsh. There's no one that has a deeper voice than he."

"Do you really think that he could help me?" asked Little Lamb.

"Why don't we give him a try and you can see for yourself. Follow me," cried Chubby as he waved his arm in the air, beckoning his friend to come along.

The two made their way over the meadow, tracing the edges of the stream until it ended in the marsh.

"Oh," exclaimed Chubby. "You know how I hate to get my fur wet," he said as he carefully walked on tip toes, trying to balance on the lily pads as he walked, the water splashing on the edges. Suddenly, the lily pad he was on pivoted, tipping Chubby into the water. He came up sputtering, squirting water like a geyser from his mouth. "Now I'm all wet," he cried in disgust. "What I don't go through to help a friend." He looked at Little Lamb. "You are my friend, you know."

Little Lamb looked back at Chubby and suddenly started crying again.

"What's that all about?" asked Chubby.

"It's Poppa", cried Little Lamb through his tears. "He doesn't want me to be friends with you anymore. He says you're not the kind of person he wants me to have as a friend."

"Well, I don't care what your Poppa says," exclaimed Chubby as he swam in the marsh. "I am your friend!" He pulled himself up on the bank, shaking the water from his fur as he climbed. "You need a friend, and I'm here. I want you to know that I will always be here if you need me. I don't care if you "baaah" like a ewe, I don't care if you change your wool. I don't even care if you wear Monah's wings. I like the young little ram that I see before me. I not only like that little ram, I love that little ram. That's what friends are. I see you for who you are, and that's who I like. Your Poppa can go swim in the swamp for all I care. He sure doesn't seem to be your friend."

Little Lamb smiled at his friend. "Thanks," he said. "Thanks for being my friend."

"Well, we better get hustlin' on these voice lessons," said Chubby. "Bullroy," he called. "Bullroy, where are you?"

"Broooaachit," came the response to Chubby's plea. Bullroy jumped from pad to pad as he made his way across the marsh to the pair. He wasn't a huge frog and certainly not the size you would expect such a deep

resonating sound to come from. "Brooaachit," he croaked again.

"Hi, Bullroy," cried Chubby greeting his aquatic friend. "This is my friend Little Lamb."

"Brooaaachit," replied Bullroy.

"We came to you because Little Lamb needs voice lessons. His voice is too high and I thought you, having the lowest voice in the meadow, could teach him how to speak in a lower, more powerful voice." Chubby looked at Little Lamb, then he looked back at Bullroy. "Can you teach him?"

"Suu-rrre," croaked Bullroy. "Noo-thing tooo ii-tt," he croaked in a deep slow voice. "It's all in breath control and the diaphragm."

"What must I do?" asked Little Lamb.

"First," croaked Bullroy, "we will practice some exercises in strengthening your diaphragm. Now do as I say. Place your hoof over your belly button."

Little Lamb stood on his hind legs and did as he was told.

"Now," continued Bullroy, "say Ho, Ho, Ho."

Little Lamb did as he was told.

"Feel your stomach muscles and diaphragm push on your hoof as you press in on your stomach and say Ho, Ho, Ho."

"I can feel it," replied Little Lamb.

"Now push real hard as you say Ho, Ho, Ho."

Little Lamb did as he was told.

"Louder," cried Bullroy.

"Ho, Ho, Ho," cried Little Lamb.

"Push harder with those muscles and be louder."

"HO, HO, HO," cried Little Lamb with a voice that echoed over the marsh.

"That's good," croaked Bullroy. "Don't tip your head up. That makes your voice higher. Keep your

head level and let your mind see your voice starting deep inside you. So very deep and let your diaphragm push that deep voice out through your chest over relaxed vocal cords."

"HO, HO, HO," said Little Lamb in a deep bass resonating voice.

"That's good", encouraged Bullroy. "Now do Baaaahhhhh."

"Baaaa," bleated Little Lamb in a puny little voice.

"Keep it deep in your throat", replied Bullroy. "Don't tighten up those vocal cords. Keep them loose and drop your lower jaw fully. You're baaa'ing too much through your nose and your mouth is too narrow. Concentrate on making an Ahhhh sound, not an Aaaae sound."

"Baaahiee," bleated Little Lamb.

"Open your mouth wider," croaked Bullroy.

"Baaaahhhiiee".

"Wider. Stick your foot in your mouth."

Baaahhhhhh," said Little Lamb in very deep resonating tone.

"That's it," cried Chubby. "You've got it."

"Baaaahhhhh," resonated Little Lamb. Over and over again.

"Push with the diaphragm," croaked Bullroy. "Louder."

BAAAHHHHHH," said Little Lamb proudly. "I don't know what to say. I can't thank you enough."

Little Lamb bent over and kissed Bullroy on his forehead. "

"A simple thank you would have done," croaked Bullroy.

"Thank you," replied Little Lamb.

"Well," stammered Bullroy, "I've been kissed by a lot of things, but never been kissed by a lamb before."

"I've never kissed a frog before either," replied Little Lamb sheepishly as he blushed.

"I guess", continued Bullroy, "if you kiss enough frogs, one day you'll find your prince."

"What's that supposed to mean?" asked Little Lamb.

"One day you'll understand", replied Bullroy. "Now if you'll excuse me, I need to rest and work on a few warts before dark. I do my best work in the dark when the night is still young and there are many frogs to kiss in the moonlight before I find my prince. Broaachit". And with that, he jumped into the water and disappeared.

"BAAHHHH!" bleated Little Lamb.

"Oh, I love it", squealed Chubby as he clapped his hands with impish glee. "You sound so. . ."

Chubby paused and looked at Little Lamb with a great big grin on his face. "So Macho."

"Let's go show the flock," exclaimed Little Lamb.

The two raced from the marshy bank back to the meadow. They positioned themselves on a grassy knoll as the thundering flock approached in a cloud of meadow dust. Little Lamb took in a deep breath, expanding his chest and lungs to their full capacity. With his mouth opened wide, his head erect and his vocal cords relaxed, he pushed his diaphragm with all his might. The air rushed out, strumming his vocal cords in a loud resonating tone.

"BAAAHHHH!" he shouted.

The sound bounced from one hill to another, echoing across the meadow.

"BAAAHHH!" He echoed again.

The flock stopped suddenly as the meadow dust continued moving in the afternoon breeze. The ears of all the young sheep perked up as they heard the echo throughout the meadow. "Who was that?" they wondered. All eyes looked to the grassy knoll from where the sound emanated. "Could it be . . . Little Lamb?" they wondered.

"BAAAHHH!" Little lamb dug at the turf with his hoof, throwing a clod of earth in the air.

Big Bully separated himself from the flock, looking at Little Lamb through his tiny, beady eyes. He too, pawed at the earth with his hoof, sending a clod flying through the air. He took a deep breath. "BAaahh!" he cried, though not as forceful as Little Lamb.

"BAAAHHHHH!" responded Little Lamb in his biggest, boomiest baahh.

Big Bully studied his opponent. "He doesn't look that big," he thought, "but he sure sounds mean."

He looked at the herd. They were all watching him. His career was on the line. If he challenged this young upstart and lost, his power would be gone. Deep inside he knew that. "Challenging Little Lamb would not be helpful to my career," thought Bully. He trotted up to Little Lamb with his most swaggering gait. "I really don't want to butt heads with you," began Big Bully. "I mean, we could both have a splitting headache by sundown. It's a big meadow out there, and I think there's room for both of us to run and play. What 'cha say?"

Little Lamb didn't know what to say. This isn't what he was expecting at all. He wanted to go home and tell Poppa how he had whipped Big Bully in the meadow. He looked at his friend Chubby for guidance. Chubby motioned Little Lamb to join him a short distance away. "Just a minute," replied Little Lamb. "I gotta' talk with my coach." He trotted over to Chubby.

"What should I do?" he whispered. "Should I challenge him?"

"He'll sweep the meadow with your face," replied Chubby. "That ram is absolutely immense. He has no neck. His head just sits on his shoulders. All brawn and no brain. Use your brain. You don't have any brawn. I think if you challenge him, Bully will separate your head from your shoulders. This is a good time for conflict resolution with a win - win attitude."

"How do I do that?" asked Little Lamb.

"Use your brain," replied Chubby, tapping the side of his head as he winked. "That ram doesn't have one. He only has a body. Think of a game where he doesn't lose face and you don't have to confront his body."

Little Lamb looked up at the clouds for a moment. "I've got it," he cried in delight, and slowly swaggered towards Big Bully, mimicking his walk. "Look," he said softly to Big Bully. "You were worried because your ewe was looking at me. Isn't that right?"

"Uh huh," grunted the hulk, nodding his head in agreement.

"What about a contest where I promise you, that you will be the winner? Where your ewe will be so impressed with your bravery that she will never take her eyes off of you. A contest where you will win your ewe and your name, and I will win my self esteem. Would you be interested?"

"Uh huh", grunted the hulk again.

Little Lamb brought his head close to Big Bully's as he whispered the plan in his ear. Big Bully nodded his head gleefully in approval as he giggled in anticipation.

They both turned to face the anxious flock. "Anyone can butt heads with anyone," began the Little Lamb. "That doesn't prove anything except somebody wants to get a headache. We're going to have a different contest."

The crowd murmured in excitement. The standard way of solving conflict in this flock had always been to butt heads with your opponent. The one who was still standing at the end was the winner. Now someone dared to offer another solution. "What could it be," they murmured to each other.

Little Lamb held his hooves in the air, calling for silence. "he who butts and wins only proves that he has a stronger head," he began. "He who runs the race only proves that he has the fleeter hooves. Winners of contests do not prove that they can win anything except the contest. A winner always has to defend his title, and ultimately, he will always lose, for someone will come along who is bigger, stronger, smarter, or more crafty. Winning contests proves nothing, except that someone must be a winner and someone must be a loser. In our contest, there is no loser. Today is the battle of the banquets. We will all have a feast in the meadow. You are invited to join us in the feast. "You are what you eat," he continued, his big booming voice echoing off of the hills. "Everybody in sheep-dom, pig-out. "Let's party!"

The flock of young rams and ewes cheered in excitement. No one had ever thought of a party as a way to resolve a conflict. It sounded great. Why fight when you can play? The sheep playfully rolled in the succulent grasses of the meadow, tossing the blades in the air, catching them on their tongue in the breeze.

Little Lamb gathered a hoof-full of thick Timothy Hay and flowering blossoms of alfalfa and presented them to Big Bully. "This is my peace offering," he said.

Big Bully didn't quite know how to respond to kindness. His life had always been one of cruelty. Humiliation. Abuse. Suddenly, this little tiny lamb is offering him a gift. He grunted as he took the bouquet of food,

and chomped off the flowers. He looked around, wondering what to give the little lamb in return. His eyes fixed on a thistle. One with long, thorny, spiky prickles. The largest, meanest looking thistle in the meadow. He picked it and presented it to Little Lamb. "For you," he said.

"Thank you," said the Little Lamb sheepishly. "What am I supposed to do with this?"

"Eat it," replied Big Bully.

Little Lamb swallowed hard as he looked at the prickly bramble he held in his hoof. Gently, he reached out his tongue to taste the sinister flower. "Oh!" he cried as the thistle pricked his tongue. "Those are sharp. I don't think this is quite right for me. I don't know that I'm strong enough yet to eat something this powerful. Are you . . . strong enough to handle this?" Little Lamb offered the present back to the presenter.

Big Bully chuckled with delight. "Of course, I'm strong enough," he bellowed as his girl friend watched in amazement. "Just watch this." He took the thistle from Little Lamb, tipped his head back and slid the spiny thistle, shaft and all down his throat. He looked like a sword swallower, taking the dangerous blade up to the hilt. Then, closing his teeth and lips about the stem, he slowly withdrew the shaft, trapping the prickles and thistle in his mouth. "Mmmmh," he moaned. "Just what I needed for desert." His jaws moved from side to side as he crunched and macerated his tidbit.

"Ohhh," exclaimed the young, starry eyed ewe that stood by his side. "You are so brave. So strong. So much courage. You're wonderful."

Big Bully's chest swelled with pride as he looked at his ewe. He then looked at Little Lamb and smiled. "Some day, maybe I'll teach you how to be a tough ram and eat thistles."

"Oh, I hope so," replied Little Lamb. He turned and frolicked in the meadow, kicking his heels in the air with delight at the win-win solution to his dilemma. As he raced through the field, his eye caught a different kind of plant that was growing un-noticed by an old grey fence post. He stopped to investigate it further. It was partially hidden by the other grasses. But it was the color that caught Little Lamb's eye. It was different from the surrounding foliage. It was not green. It was more . . . purple. The blades of grass were purple. Little Lamb reached out and

plucked the blades with his hoof. The aroma was powerful. Intense. Overwhelming to the Little Lamb. It filled his lungs and body with such an electrifying, ecstatic feeling. Unlike anything he had ever experienced before. His foot throbbed as the essence of the purple grass touched his hoof. He hastily ran back to show Big Bully his new found treasure.

Big Bully was basking in his glory, being showered with attention from all the young ewes on his bravado. They were feeling his muscles and were so impressed with his daring deed.

"Look what I found", exclaimed Little Lamb, panting to catch his breath. "What is this?" He extended his closed hoof to Big Bully.

Big Bully shook off the ewes and extended his open hoof to Little Lamb. The tightly clutched treasure, dropped from Little Lamb's hoof into Big Bully's. Big Bully was laughing at the ewes as he brought this unknown find to his face. His eyes bugged out in disbelief. "Arghh," he cried in disgust, throwing the gift on the ground, frantically shaking his foot, trying to get rid of the residue that clung to his hoof. "Arghh," he screamed again, stomping the grass into the earth. "Purple Grass," he cried. "That's Purple Grass."

The flock moaned in disbelief. A few of the braver rams timidly approached Big Bully and joined him in trampling on the purple grass. The more cowardly, frightened members cowered and whispered amongst themselves. "Did you see what Little Lamb brought into our flock. Purple Grass. How could he do such a thing? What kind of a perverted sheep is he? Doesn't he know?"

"Where did you find this?" bellowed Big Bully.

"Over there. In the meadow," replied Little Lamb as he pointed. "By that old fence post."

"We've got to get rid of that," cried Big Bully in alarm. "We can't allow trash like that to get into our meadow. We've got to destroy it before it contaminates everything and everybody. Let's get rid of it." Big Bully galloped off in the direction of the fence post, followed by the brave rams, followed by the sheepish flock, followed by one lonely straggler. Little Lamb.

The angry mob stirred up quite a cloud of dust as they stomped their hooves around the fence post.

"Kill! Kill! Kill!" they cried in a maniacal chant. "Kill! Kill! Kill!" One by one, more of the flock joined in the chant, until the whole flock was stomping and chanting. There was great frenzy and fury present in the meadow, late that afternoon.

Big Bully pushed his way through the crowd until he found Little Lamb. "Don't you ever do that again," he bellowed. "Don't you ever bring purple grass into my life or anyone's in this flock. You're sick. You're disgusting. You're perverted."

"But," pleaded Little Lamb. "I didn't know what it was. I've never seen it before. How was I to know."

"You know now," scowled Big Bully. "Don't you ever play that kind of trick on me again. The next time we meet, we'll solve this my way. You'll be history." He turned and moved his massive hulk of a body through the flock. The other young rams and ewes parted to give him passage. The flock joined Big Bully as he led them through the meadow on their return journey to their homes for the night.

Little Lamb trotted to catch up with the flock. "Get away from us," cried a sheep from the end of the fold. "You're not one of us," cried another. "You're weird. Perverted. We don't want sheep like you. Get away."

Little Lamb stopped and watched the departing flock move away from him. He felt incredibly alone. Lonely. Isolated and unwanted. He slowly turned around and with head hung low, he walked the opposite direction from the flock. His journey took him to an isolated lonely hill, where he sat beneath a giant old oak tree.

"Where are you, quiet voice?" He cried. "Speak to me," he shouted at the clouds above, their bellies reflecting the brilliant red hues of the setting sun. "Does anybody hear me? Does anyone care. What should I do? What can I do?" He brought his hoof up to his cheek to wipe away a tear. He noticed a purple stain on his hoof from where he had held the grass. He gently touched that stain to his tongue. "Ohhh," he moaned as the taste overwhelmed his body. The beauty, the joy, the ecstasy he experienced in a fraction of a second was overpowering. He collapsed in the grass. "How can something that makes me feel this good be so bad? Why is everyone afraid of . . . purple grass? What is so evil about it? Arghh!" He moaned in disgust as he jumped up and began stomping his hooves into the

earth. "Got to get rid of it," he exclaimed. "It's poison to my body. It's no good. What do I know? There's no quiet voice to tell me what to do. The flock! The flock is my voice. They say this is poison. They say this is sin. They say this is perversion. So it must be. I can't ever let this happen again. No! No more. Never again." He kicked at the earth with his hooves. "No more. I've got to be good. I've got to be a good Little Lamb."

The Little Lamb looked at the trampled earth by his feet. He watched the sun descending in the west, casting long shadows as it slipped off of the earth. "I need to be home before dark," he thought as he trotted after the departing sun. "Little Lambs get lost in the dark. They can't find the path. They can't find their way home." Little Lamb was beginning his journey into the shadows of the unknown. He was starting to become lost.

PURPLE GRASS

CHAPTER SIX

When he came of age, Little Lamb was duly enrolled in the Flock School. It was here that he would receive training for his role in the flock. He would be taught the necessary tools to get along in the world. To get along in the flock. To survive. The school was a joint effort put together by the organizers of the Holy Temple and the community leaders of the flock. Through this school, the young lambs would receive a well rounded education in spiritual as well as community values as dictated by the flock leaders.

Miss Righteous was his teacher. She had spent her whole life in the school which was named 'Ding Dong' School because of the bell that hung in the peaked tower above the school entrance. It always went "ding dong" when it pealed. Each day Miss Righteous would ring the bell, announcing that school was to begin, calling the young little lambs in from the playground. Because of her role in pealing the bell, the students sometimes referred to her as Miss Ding Dong, a name she was never called to her face because she resented it. But when the bell rang, the students would often say, "Ding Dong's at it again. She's ringing her chimes. Time to see what she has to say today."

Miss Righteous was a pristine older ewe who wore her wool tied tightly in a bun on top of her head. Her wool had changed through the years. It had been silky and beautiful in her youth, but now it was old and kinky. Nobody knew exactly how old she was, but the general consensus was that she was ancient. She had been around 'Ding

Dong' School for as long as anyone could remember. She wore tiny wire rimmed spectacles, or as she called them, her "windows to the world". She was always pushing them up the bridge of her nose for they constantly slid down, allowing her to peer over the top of them at the class. She always kept a wooden ruler on the right side of her oak desk. She called it her "peaceful paddle" and said it would remain peaceful so long as there was no disturbance in the classroom. It never remained peaceful very long, for she always found a reason to use it on some poor little lamb who had fallen into disfavor. She was a tough, angry, old ewe. Some joked that the only thing warm that ever touched her shanks was a washcloth. If she could have had more than that in her life, perhaps she wouldn't have been so crotchety. She was feared by everyone in her class. More than that, she was feared by everyone outside of her class, for everyone in the flock had been through her class. She was their teacher. She passed on the value systems of the flock. She was the source of knowledge.

"Students of 'Ding Dong School'," she began, "today we shall play a game I call 'Follow The Leader'. Not only is it a game, but it is a valuable lesson for you and for the flock. Our leaders are trusted and chosen sheep. They have not earned their rank without great effort. They are in those positions because they are the best of the very best. We must learn to follow them without question, for it is they who are wise, and it is we who are ignorant of the truth. They have more knowledge and understanding than we do. That is why they are where they are, and we are where we are. Now, follow me. You must do as I do, and do as I say. I do not have to do everything you do, because I've already done it. I have learned my lessons. But you must do it because you haven't. Understand? Good. Now follow me."

Miss Righteous began the lesson by standing up. The entire class stood up in blind obedience. She began marching in place. The class did the same. She began marching around the room weaving up and down the aisles. The little lambs followed right behind her without question, without hesitancy. She marched them under the Ding Dong bell, through the doors of the school and out onto the playground. She marched them to the edge of the asphalt where she stopped. "Now keep marching straight ahead," she commanded. "Go forward. Always go forward. Never go backward, for that is retreat, and sheep of this flock never retreat." The little sheep marched forward, one by one in a straight line. The weeds became thicker as they went down the hill. The path became less distinct. "The blackberry brambles are ahead," cried the little ewe who was second in line.

"Silence!" commanded Miss Righteous. "Keep marching ever forward. Never question the reasons of your leader. I know what I am doing and it is in your best interest. Now march forward." And so, one by one, the line of little sheep marched down the hill, through the thick weeds and into the blackberry brambles. One by one, they became entangled in the vines and thorns. One by one, their forward passage was halted as they became ensnared by their environment.

"Now," cried Miss Righteous from the top of the hill, "it is recess. Time for you to play. But before you play, you must figure out how to get yourself out of the predicament you find yourself in. There is a lesson here that I will teach to you after recess."

The little sheep grumbled and groaned about the mess they found themselves in. Every time they turned, the thorns cut deeper and deeper into their flesh.

"There is no way to get free", they cried as the vines tangled tighter and tighter in their wool. The more they struggled, the more ensnared they became. Some became frightened and started to cry.

"Hey, wait a minute," exclaimed Little Lamb. "We need to help one another. I can't free myself all alone. I can't do it by myself. But if you help me, I can help you. You can reach where I can't."

One by one, the little sheep discovered they could help each other. At first the prospects seemed gloomy, but as each helped the other, they found they could extricate themselves from the entanglements that had ensnared them. Finally, the last little sheep was free, and they all climbed the hill to the playground. The air echoed with their laughter and joy. There is no happier sound than little sheep playing on a playground. Their joy ended with the piercing bong of the 'Ding Dong' bell. Miss Righteous pulled on the rope with great piety and a grim sense of purpose. Her life hadn't had any laughter in it for years. Laughter was a sign of immaturity for her. "Life is too serious for laughter", she thought. "That is for children, not for grown ups. Adults have to be responsible and that is a serious business not to be taken lightly." Miss Righteous had spent most of her adult ewe-hood being responsible. Being serious. Being the teacher of young, impressionable, innocent, trusting minds. She was the keeper of their precious little black books. She carefully wrote the lessons in them. Lessons the little sheep would read and re-read, over and over again for as long as they lived. She liked that responsibility. She liked her role as a teacher. She was the role model for the flock. She pulled the rope with great fervor and vigor, calling her class to assembly. She liked pulling the little sheep's strings. The little lambs dutifully took their places at

their assigned desks, sitting at attention and awaiting their lessons. "Now, lambs," she began. "You played that game well."

"You tricked us," cried a timid voice from the back of the room.

"Who said that?" Asked Miss Righteous.

A tiny hoof was raised near the back. "I did," came a voice, frightened, but courageous.

"Stand up, Little Lamb," said the teacher, firmly.

"You tricked us," he repeated as he rose from the desk.

Miss Righteous rose from her desk slowly but with determination. She casually picked up the ruler, as she walked to Little Lamb's side. "So you think I tricked you," she said sarcastically.

"Whaap," She hit Little Lamb across the side his head with the ruler.

"So you think I trick little lambs?"

"Whaap," she struck him again.

"Don't you ever question me again, young ram. Your Momma and Poppa have entrusted your educational future to me because I have the answers. You do not. I know the world and you do not. Don't you ever question what I do again."

"Whaap."

She shook the ruler under his nose. "I am your teacher," she said sternly, her voice so sharp it could cut glass. "I know what is best for you. You do not, and that is why I am at the front of the room and you are part of the class. You are here to learn, and I am here to teach."

"But I thought," interjected the Little Lamb.

"Don't think," she shot back. "You're not old enough to think. I will teach you how to think, and when you can think on your own, we will give you a diploma, a certificate of achievement that shows the world you learned the lessons of the flock. Only then can you begin to think for yourself. Until that day, I do the thinking around here!"

"But I felt you were wrong," replied Little Lamb bravely.

"Whaap," went the ruler again. Her hand was very fast. Miss Righteous could snap that ruler against your cheek faster than you could blink an eyelash.

"Don't feel," she commanded. "Little Lambs have no feelings, because they don't know what it means to truly feel. You must learn how to feel, and that is also why I am here. To teach you how you should feel. Your feelings will lead you astray without the proper teaching and guidance. I am here to guide you on the path of proper feelings. Listen to my words and teachings. Print them forever in your mind if you want to be a member in good standing of this flock. Trust me. I know which feelings are good for you. Do you have any questions, young ram?" She stood towering above the little lamb. From his tiny perspective, she looked like a huge towering giant who could kill him with her ruler. She had tremendous power. "Well," she demanded. "Do you?"

"No, ma'am," he replied sheepishly.

"Well then, learn to hold your tongue," she shot back as she walked to the front of the classroom. "Little Lambs are to be seen and not heard. They're obnoxious when they're heard for they have nothing to say. If you have nothing to say, keep your mouth closed and be silent. You need knowledge in order to say something. Only fools would dare open their mouths and speak when they have nothing to say. They

open their mouths and stick their hooves inside. Now class, are we fools and speak like Little Lamb, when we have nothing to say?"

"No Miss Righteous," echoed the class in unison. Little Lamb felt humiliated before the whole class.

"Good," she replied. "Well then, maybe we can learn something today, if certain young rams will keep their mouths shut and not make fools of themselves." She moved to the blackboard, ruler still in hand, and picked up a piece of chalk in her hoof, writing on the board in big letters, T-R-U-S-T. "Trust," she said. Always trust your leaders. That is the first lesson you must learn, for without trust, we cannot lead. We cannot govern. We cannot rule. Do you know what kind of a world you would live in without leaders? Without rulers? "

The little lambs shook their heads. They did not know what kind of a world it would be.

"I'll tell you what kind of a world it would be," Miss Righteous continued. "There would be chaos. Sheer chaos. There would be destruction. Sheep doing whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted to do it. Can you imagine what kind of a world we would live in if sheep did whatever they wanted to do, whenever they wanted to do it? Everything that we know would collapse in ruins. We need order. We need predictability. We need to know how you are going to behave in order to govern effectively. We need to teach you how to behave so that we can be the best leaders for you. But in order to do that, we need you to trust us. Trust us to know that we have your best interest at heart. That in the end, we will give you the happiness, security and safety that you seek. That is our charge as your trusted leaders." She paced back and forth

before the class, rapping the ruler sharply on her front hooves. The cracking sound echoed throughout the stillness of the room.

"Do you trust the leaders of the flock," she cried, waiving her ruler above her head.

"Yes Miss Righteous," wailed the class of sheep in unison.

"Do you trust me?" She demanded in a booming voice, cracking the ruler on her hooves.

"Yes Miss Righteous," responded the class again.

"Good," she replied in a sickeningly sweet voice. "Good. You are nice little lambs. Now that we understand each other, we can continue with our lesson." Miss Righteous walked to the front of her desk and rested her backside against it as she spoke. "Today we discovered that sometimes we find ourselves trapped in situations we do not like. The more we struggle to free ourselves, the tighter we become ensnared. The more ensnared we become, the more frightened we are. And the more frightened we become, the poorer we feel our chances for escape. There are times in our lives when we feel there is no way out. We are trapped. We are helpless. We feel there is nowhere to turn. But there is a way to turn. A place to go. A refuge from our troubles."

She walked to the door leading to an inner office and opened it. "Come in, Reverend. The sheep are ready for you. They are prepared to hear your important message of truth from the Great Creator."

The Holy One entered the classroom. His wool was white as snow. The red overlay garment he wore shone brightly in contrast with his wool. He was an

overpowering, dazzling sight. A heavy gold chain hung about his neck. A large gold cross dangled at the end of it, swaying to and fro' as he walked.

"Class, rise and say 'good morning High Holy One'," ordered Miss Righteous.

There was a shuffling of hooves as the little lambs rose from their desks. "Good morning, High Holy One". The class spoke as one.

"Good morning, little ones," said the Reverend most graciously. Most piously. "Miss Righteous informs me you were stuck today in a most unfortunate, untimely predicament. Well, I am here to teach you how to get un-stuck when you find yourself in that most undesirable position in life." He looked towards the door. "Billy," he called. "Oh Billy. Come in here and bring the Good Book."

Billy entered the room wearing his cherub, chalice bearing vestments. They were purple with gold filigree borders. His wool was not so white as the High Holy One's, but he was a striking, dashing figure of a young ram. In his outstretched arms, he carried a large, massive book that made the muscles in his forearms swell.

"He is so handsome," thought Little Lamb to himself. He is so strong. Some day I want to be just like him, walking into this classroom carrying the Good Book. Being the right hand ram to the Holy One. Some day. Some day."

Billy placed the Good Book on the desk before the most Reverend. He opened the book, bent forward and gently kissed the open pages. Then bowing before the High Holy One, he backed away to the blackboard, his head bowed with his hooves pressed together piously before his chest.

"This," began the Most Reverend, "is where all of the answers to life lie. And I mean all of the answers. If you are troubled; if you are perplexed; if you are confused; if you are hurt; if you are lost; if you are frightened. All the answers to your problems lie here." And he placed his hoof on the open pages of the Good Book. "The lost sheep feel they have all the answers they need. That is why they became lost. The Good Book is your road-map to life. Without a road-map, you are doomed to be lost, roaming the unhappy back-roads of life, for you know not where to go. I stand here today to tell you there is a way. There is only one way, and this is it." He raised his hoof to the heavens. "Our Great Creator gave us this." And he again pointed to the book. "This is His word, handed down through all the ages. Those who believe in His word shall be saved. Those who believe in their own words shall be lost. Do you wish to be saved, or do you wish to be lost?"

"Saved," chorused the class.

"His word gives you freedom Your word gives you entrapment," preached the reverend. "Which do you want for yourselves? Freedom or entrapment?"

"Freedom," cried the class.

"His word gives you light. Your word gives you darkness. Which do you choose? Light or darkness?"

"Light!" cheered the class.

"His word gives you heaven. Your word gives you Hell. Which do you want? Heaven or Hell?"

"Heaven!" shouted the class.

"His word gives you love and salvation. Your word gives you hate and eternal damnation. Which do you choose? Salvation or damnation?"

"Salvation!" cried the class, their voices rising in a fevered pitch.

"Love or Hate?" screamed the Reverend in a frenzied, energy- charged voice.

"Love!" shouted the class.

"Again!" cried the Reverend.

"Love!" echoed the class.

"Again!"

"Love!"

"Again, and again, and again." The Reverend was dancing in the front of the classroom. He jumped on top of Miss Righteous's desk, waving his arms at the class as if directing an orchestra.

"Love! Love! Love!" Chanted the class in a hypnotic frenzied spiritual chant.

"Do you want to be loved by the Great Creator?" cried the Holy One.

"Yes!" chanted the class.

"Do you want to be saved?"

"Yes, save me!" pleaded the little ones.

"The only way," and the Holy One warbled the word "only", holding on to that word for a long time. His staging was very good. He had carefully honed his art to a fine science. He had that class in the cleavage of his hoof. "The only way you can

be saved is by the Good Shepherd. The Son of the Great Creator. It is only through Him that you shall be saved. And do you know the only way that he will save you?"

A hush fell over the class room. Several of the little lambs were crying. Tears streaming down their cheeks.

"The only way," he warbled again, raising his hoof toward the sky. "The only way that the Good Shepherd shall save you," and he looked right at Little Lamb, "the only way the Good Shepherd shall save you is if you are good little sheep and obey His word." He paused to let the full impact set in. His voice fell to a quiet whisper. "You are only a good little lamb if you obey His word."

He leaped down from Miss Righteous' desk. "Here!" he cried in a guttural growl. "Here is his word! It sits right before you." His voice rose again as did his enthusiasm. "On salvation day you may cry 'Lord! Lord! Remember me?' And the Good Shepherd will look at you and say, 'I do not know you, for you were not a good little lamb. You heard my word and heeded me not. Go into eternal damnation, for I know you not.'"

The little sheep were awe-struck, their mouths open, gasping at the words they were hearing.

"I know you not." The reverend pointed to the class. "Get out of my Holy Kingdom, for you have sinned. You have been a bad little lamb who has sinned. You have not kept my word and I know you not. Live in your sin. Live in your hell. You created it. Be damned forever. Get out of my sight you despicable creature. Woe is the day that ever you were born. Get out. Get out. "

The classroom was so silent you could hear a pin drop. The Most Reverend squatted before a little young ewe seated in the front desk. She was crying. No, she was sobbing. The Holy One put his hoof on her shoulder. She looked into his eyes. He spoke so very softly. So very tenderly. So very kindly. "You don't want the Good Shepherd to say 'Get out', now do you?"

The little ewe looked so sad, so frightened. She shook her head. "No," she sobbed.

The Holy One rose to the height of his majestic grandeur, his gold cross swinging as he stood up. "Does anyone here want the Good Shepherd to say 'Get Out. Get Out of my kingdom'?"

"No!" shouted the class. Little Lamb shouted louder than anyone, "No!"

"Do you want to be bad lambs?" Asked the Reverend.

"No!" came the reply.

"Do you want to be good lambs?"

"Yes!" screamed the class.

"Then listen to these words as for your very lives depend on remembering this message!" and he swirled behind the oak desk, pointing to the Good Book. "Love your Momma and Poppa," he said with force. "Be the kind of little lambs they can be proud of. They have sacrificed so much for you. Now it is your job to give back to them the pride that they so richly deserve. You are worth nothing without them. The Great Creator is your Heavenly Father. He gave you an earthly father so that you might know Him. He took a rib from the first ram's side and made your mother. Both your Momma and your Poppa are holy. Love them."

The sheep nodded their heads in approval.

"Now," continued the Holy One, "there are some great sins that you must avoid at all costs if you wish to be saved. If you wish to avoid being trapped. They are the work of evil. Do not succumb to them, lest you be cast out of the flock and the kingdom. The greatest of these is to lust after Purple Grass."

The class murmured at the word. Purple Grass was something you did not utter out loud. It was something you kept hushed and never spoke.

"The Great Creator provided the flock with green grass," said the Reverend, waving his arms over the class. "There is plenty of green grass. More than enough for everyone. Plenty to satisfy all of your hunger. There is no need for any lamb to even think of Purple Grass. To think those thoughts is depravity. Despicable perversion. Sinful thinking. Push those thoughts from your mind. They are unclean. Unholy." He moved to the Good Book and pointed to it, shrieking, "It is here! It says so right here in the Good Book! Here for you to read and re-read whenever you doubt or are confused. Here in black and white. The Great Creator's word. 'Thou shalt not consume Purple Grass'. Thou shalt not even think of consuming Purple Grass for such thoughts are wicked and sinful."

The class was silent.

The Holy One bowed his head and closed his eyes, saying, "Let us pray."

The class followed his example.

"Oh Great Creator," he began. "We want so much to be good little lambs. To follow you so that we may be worthy members of this flock. Teach us to follow your teachings."

Teach us to follow our leaders. Teach us to follow - Your way. Not our way, but Your way as it is written in the Good Book. Keep us free from sin, so that we may be acceptable in thy sight. Amen."

"Amen," repeated the class of little lambs.

Billy stepped forward, curtsied before the Good Book, kissed the opened pages, and gently closed the large text. He picked up the heavy book, holding it once again in his outstretched arms, causing his biceps to bulge.

"Class," said Miss Righteous. "Say 'Thank you High Holy one!'"

"Thank you, High Holy One," they followed her directions.

"We certainly thank you for this wonderful lesson today," she continued. "Please come back and teach us some more whenever you are near Ding Dong School. Today I will ring the bell, just for you. When you hear it 'dong', you will know how thankful we are for the message you have given us."

"Thank you," replied the Reverend. He had this syrupy-sweet voice that charmed. "You are wonderful little rams and ewes. I am so glad that you are part of our flock. Thank you for having me come today." He looked at Miss Righteous. "I shall look forward to hearing your bell ring. I shall look forward to hearing your 'dong'." He turned and looked at the class. "Good-bye Little rams and ewes." He waved at them and walked out of the door, his vestments flowing gracefully behind him. Billy followed, carrying the Great Book.

"Well, class," Miss Righteous exclaimed. "Isn't he exciting?"

"He certainly is," thought Little Lamb.

"Isn't the High Holy One exciting?" she repeated.

"Whoops", thought Little Lamb. "Wrong excitement."

"Class Dismissed!" Said Miss Righteous.

The class cheered as they leaped from their desks and rushed to the door.

She clapped her hooves together sharply three times. "Hold on there just a minute," she shouted above the noise. "This is not the way good little rams and good little ewes are dismissed. You know the rules. We stand one row at a time and exit single file. No talking in line. There is to be no noise until you are out of the building. No running. No pushing. No laughing. Now, everyone return to your seats. Because you cannot follow directions you shall stay after school for fifteen minutes. Then you can explain to your Momma and Poppa why you were late getting home from school. While you sit at your desks, you can occupy your minds by thanking the Most Reverend for his message today and think about how much you appreciate his teaching. We will write him a letter and express our thoughts."

Little Lamb sat at his desk staring at his hoof that held the pen, resting on a blank white sheet of paper. "This hoof of mine held purple grass," he thought. "I touched it. I tasted it. I did a terrible deed." With pen poised, he wrote, "Please forgive me, for I have sinned. I don't want to go to hell. I want to be saved. Please save me." Sadly, he closed his eyes. "What is wrong with me?" he asked himself. "What is so terribly wrong with me that I can't be a good little lamb me?"

Time moved slowly for the class that afternoon. The minutes dragged by, with each minute lasting an eternity. At last Miss Righteous stood and clapped her hooves together. "Class dismissed. Right side first."

The right row stood first and exited silently, single file. The second row followed in a silent line. The third, then the fourth, until the entire school was empty, except for Miss Righteous. She sat silently at her desk, organizing her papers. Tidying up her tidy desk. She picked up an eraser and cleaned the black board. "Trust". That was the word written in big, bold letters on the board. She looked at the word for a moment. "Hmph," she murmured, thinking her own private thoughts. Then she smiled and moved toward the bell rope. Reaching up on the rope as high as she could, she pulled with all her strength, swinging the huge clapper on the heavy bell. It struck the outer shell with great fervor and vigor. The sound echoed over the countryside.

Little Lamb was racing home. He didn't want to be late. He didn't want Momma and Poppa to be angry. He didn't want the Good Shepherd to say "Get Out" because he had let Momma and Poppa down. He paused for a moment as he heard the bell peal. "She's rung her dong for him", he mused to himself. Then, slowly he turned around and trotted down the path.

PURPLE GRASS

CHAPTER SEVEN

As time passed, Little Lamb grew in spirit, wisdom and stature. And true to the flock tradition, he was enrolled in the Great Temple School so that he might learn the Holy Word as taught in the Great Book. Each afternoon, he would run across the village from Ding Dong School and its lessons and go to the Great Temple to learn its teachings.

He never dared to be late. It was considered a gross insult to the temple and the flock to come to class late. There was no time to play after Ding Dong School. Just enough time to run between buildings.

"Idle time is the Devil's playground," the High Holy one would always say. "We can't have little lambs frittering away their lives playing. They must learn the responsibilities of being a flock member.

Each day, the students would light a candle at the altar. This was their own special candle, their own path to the Great Creator. "You always want your light to shine in this Holy Temple," the most Reverend would say. "Its' glow will light up your path and show you the way. You must never stray from the straight and narrow path, for if you do," and the High Holy One would lean out over the class from his pulpit, "if you do, you shall become lost. Eternally Lost." Little Lamb always offered his own private, silent prayer as he struck the match. "Help keep me on the path, for I don't want to become lost. Guide me on my way."

When all the candles had been lit, the High Holy One would enter the sanctuary in all his splendor. The sound of his rustling, trailing robes would echo in the stillness of the room. He would be followed by the Head Chalice Bearer, who was in a very important position. A very honored one, for the young ram who bore the chalice

was the chosen one of the Most Reverend. The ram who would follow in the footsteps of the High Holy One. It was a spiritual calling. The Chalice Bearer would dedicate his life to the ministry and its callings. He began as an altar ram, moving through the different stations of the church. There was only one Head Chalice Bearer in the flock church. The hope for the future generation lay in the training of this young ram. Little Lamb watched each day in awe. "How very lucky these sheep must be, to be able to communicate with the Great Creator," he thought "To live a life free of sin and give one's life totally to such a holy purpose. Some day I want to be the Head Chalice Bearer. To be the chosen one of the High Holy One. His special ram."

He watched the Head Chalice Bearer enter the room. There could have been no finer choice than Billy for that position. He was so handsome a ram. So strong. So popular with the other young rams. He was the favored son of all the elders in the flock. Whatever Billy did, he did exceptionally well. No one would ever find fault with Billy. Truly, he was the best of all the young rams. "I want to be just like him," thought Little Lamb as he watched his hero walk by.

Each day, the students would bow on their knees and recite the prayer of humility: "Oh Great Creator, I am not worthy to even gather the crumbs from under Thy Table. Forgive me, humble sinner that I am."

The High Holy One would begin his lesson with the statement: "Only the humble shall enter the Great Kingdom. Not the proud, not the rich, but the humble. You little lambs need to humble yourselves before your Great Creator, because as the prayer of humility tells you, you are not worthy. The only way to become worthy is through the words in this Good Book."

Billy waved the silver chalice above the altar as the High Holy One spoke. Then, bowing down before the Good Book on the altar he would open its pages to the selected reading, kiss the pages and back off to the side of the altar where he remained kneeling during the entire lesson.

Each day, the High Holy One would read a passage from the Good Book. The passages varied from day to day, but the message remained the same: The only route to happiness lay through obeying the rules in the Good Book. Each night, the lambs were given homework: To study the rule of the day, and apply it to their daily lives.

Little Lamb tried to pay attention to what was going on in the room, but sometimes the High Holy One would drone on and on. Then his thoughts would wander. He often thought about playing in the meadow, remembering the fun he used to have when he had friends like Chubby, Bumbly and Mona. Every now and then a strange thought would creep into his mind. Purple Grass. It was a thought that was not to be thought about. But sometimes, no matter how much Little Lamb would think about not thinking about it, the thought would appear. And again, he would try not thinking about it, and again it would appear.

Have you ever tried not thinking about something. The more you try not to think about it, the more you have to force yourself to try not thinking about what you're not supposed to be thinking about.

That's what was happening this day. As the old ram droned on with his pontifications and platitudes, Little Lamb found himself day dreaming about what he tried not to think about. Purple Grass.

PURPLE GRASS

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Little lamb journeyed home from the Great Temple School, walking the heavily trod path that he knew so well. As he approached the crossroads he felt great fear and timidity. He had always taken the right road before, but now, something deep down inside was telling him it was time. Time to seek out a new, unknown path. Something deep inside was calling. He had heard the voice before, but always pretended he hadn't

heard. Oh, he tried so hard to pretend the voice wasn't there. Why was it only he alone could hear its call? What was it that made Little Lamb the only one who heard it? In a crowd of sheep, why must he be different from all the others? The little lamb brought his feet to his ears, trying desperately to shut out the voice. "Go away!" he cried. "Leave me! I want to lead the kind of life that will make Momma and Poppa proud of me! I am their lamb and seek no harm for them. I don't want to disappoint them. I don't want to hurt them."

He stopped at the crossroads and just stood there, his heart beating loudly in his ears. Dare he give in to that voice? Dare he walk a new path? Dare he risk? "Come," said the voice quietly. "Come, and become."

The little lamb looked up the right path as far as his eyes could see. There was no one else around. He was all alone. He took several deep breaths and then, gathering all his courage, he took the first step on a new path. That first step led to a second and to a third. The path didn't seem any different from the one he normally walked. With each step, his courage increased. "No one will ever know," he thought as he began his new journey. The path went up one hill and down the next as he walked through a new part of the meadow. The path took a sharp turn to the left, and disappeared into a grove of Eucalyptus trees. The darkness ahead frightened him. So many unseen monsters lurked in the shadows, waiting to pounce on an unsuspecting innocent little lamb. The hooting of an owl in the overhead branches shook the very being of the little lamb. It was such a terrifying sound. Should he continue, or go back? He stopped in the path, wondering. He looked behind him, knowing where he had been.

He looked ahead, not knowing what lay before him. He felt great fear inside his body. Yet the voice continued. "Why must I hear you?" cried the little lamb softly to himself. "Why must I be different? Is this my cross to carry? Why must I have this load to bear?"

"Come." called the quiet voice within. "Do not stop now. Come."

The little lamb peered into the darkness of the unknown that lay before him, his eyes trying to part the mantle of night. Ever so faintly, ever so dimly, he could see the pale moonlight on the path ahead. There was a break in the trees. The little lamb continued his journey at a faster pace, wanting to move from the shadows into the open field that lay before him. The branches of the trees parted, revealing a magnificent star-studded sky. The heavens were ablaze with their twinkling beacons. "Why were you afraid?" the little voice said from within. "The stars are there to guide you on your journey. I placed them there so you would not become lost." The little lamb scampered out of the shadows of the trees into the refreshing blue light of the moon. He felt so happy to see the stars again. The journey now seemed easy as the path took a sharp turn to the left. Suddenly, the little lamb froze on the path. He swallowed hard and blinked his eyes. There it was, just before him, bathed in the moonlight. There, lay the field of The little lamb could barely think the thought, he was so paralyzed with fear and anxiety. There lay the field of "Purple Grass". That which he had thought about so often lately now lay before him.

He quietly laid down beside the road, his eyes carefully taking in everything. A soft gentle breeze blew across the field of purple grass. The little lamb's nostrils quivered as the aroma reached him. Ever so gently, ever so slowly, he tested the essence of the aroma. With short, tiny breaths, he allowed the aroma in, ready to blow it out at the first

sign of danger. He was very much on his guard, for this was the greatest danger in the world. That was what he had been told. That was what he had been taught. Yet with all the teachings, and with all the tellings, he had reached this point in time and space. He was here in the forbidden area of his life, the space he had vowed never to enter. Oh, those first few whiffs! This was totally unlike anything the little lamb had ever experienced before. And yet, it was something he had always known deep inside. Instinctively. This was something he needed to experience. The little lamb extended his head, trying to catch a little more of the aroma. Again he tested the air with short breaths. Such energy filled his system. His whole body radiated with the feeling. "How can this be bad?" he thought. "How can something that smells so good be so bad? Perhaps the aroma is not bad. Perhaps it is the grass itself that is bad, like poison ivy. So long as you don't touch it, you are safe. I'm not going to touch it. I'm not going to go anywhere near it. I'm just going to lie here on the side of the road. No closer. I'm just going to watch and smell."

A fresh breeze brought an even stronger aroma of the "purple grass". The little lamb took another breath, deeper than his first tentative whiffs. A wave of dizziness rippled throughout his young body. "Oh, such ecstasy!" thought the little lamb as he swooned. "Oh," he moaned. "I have never felt like this before. I feel so . . ." His thoughts trailed off for he had no words in his vocabulary to describe the tremendous feelings he was experiencing. The aroma was more beautiful than any flowers he had ever smelled. More invigorating than anything the little lamb had ever experienced. Electricity filled his body, starting deep within and radiating its tingling sensation over his back, neck, and legs. What was this profound something that others told him was so

evil? "How can something that is so beautiful, smells like the most precious of flowers and makes you feel so incredibly good and happy; how can this be evil?" he thought.

Time passed quickly. It was late, and the little lamb became worried. "What will Momma and Poppa think? They must be wondering where I am. What will I tell them? Poppa will be very angry with me if he finds out I did not follow the right path. I don't want to disappoint him. I don't want to hurt him. Not my Poppa. I love him too much. I'm never going to come back to this place again. Beautiful as it is, I'm never going to come back here, ever again." The little lamb rose to his feet, and shook off the dust of the road. He started walking back home, pausing briefly to look back at the field of purple grass.

"No more." he exclaimed, shaking his head. "No more." The little lamb exhaled deeply, trying to expel the last residue of the aroma of purple grass that remained in his lungs. "No more." Tears began to fill his eyes as he trotted home. "No more. This is not good for me." Something deep inside kept telling the little lamb, "Stay. This is where you belong." "No more. No more." he chanted as he trotted down the path that lead to the "right road", the road that would take him home.

PURPLE GRASS

CHAPTER NINE

It was the day of the big game. The whole flock would be at the stadium to watch the two teams battle for the final trophy. The winners would be declared the strongest, the toughest, the bravest. The winning team would be honored at the homecoming dance that evening, "The Billy Goat's Ball." The losers would go down in defeat. Humiliation. They would forever carry the title of Second Best. Even though no one would call them that, inside they would always carry the title "Loser."

You could feel the excitement in the air that day in the downtown area of the flock village. Flags were waving in the breeze. The sun was shining. Everyone was talking about the big game that afternoon. All the stores closed for the event, for no one would miss it. The flock team was always the winner. It had been a winner for as long as anyone could remember. It seemed to be expected now, for this flock always produced strong young rams, ones that could run and carry the ball like no other rams. They trained very hard. They always had the best coaches who stressed teamwork. The game was a joint effort. The team was only as strong as the weakest link.

Poppa was on the street, talking to anyone and everyone. "I remember the big game against 'Rowdy Rams' when I was a young ram on the team," he would say as he chomped on his cigar, belching smoke as he talked. "What a game that was! The score was tied, fifteen to fifteen. Only twenty seconds left to play. We came out of the huddle determined to win. My class would never go down in defeat. The whole future of the flock depended on us being winners. There was no room for losers in our flock. The pressure was intense. You could feel it in the air. The crowd, oh the crowd was on its feet screaming as we formed the line. They were cheering for us, pulling for us.

The ball was snapped to the quarterback. I charged forward from my end position, head down. I gave it my all, with all the strength I could muster. I charged into my opponent and caught him full force with the brunt of my horns. Caught him right between his eyes and knocked him out of the game. I ran fast and did a button-hook maneuver, outfoxing everybody on the field. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see the quarterback fade back for a pass. Then, there it was, the ball hurling my way. Coming to me. The crowd was on its feet, cheering for us, cheering for me. Oh! The thrill of it all!

I still can remember how the ball felt as I captured it in my hooves. I had twenty yards to go to cross the goal line. Twenty grueling, torturous yards with so many hostile opponents to do battle with before I could make the touchdown.

"I lowered my head and charged forward into the masses. A towering hulk was coming my way to stop me. The clock was ticking. I felt fear deep inside of me. But this was no time to stop and worry about being afraid. The future of the flock depended on me. I lowered my head, closed my eyes, and charged. We collided with such bone crushing force. His horns crashing into mine. Everyone who was there still talks of that moment. The noise! The crashing noise echoed throughout the stadium. The noise of our colliding overshadowed the roar of the crowd. It was like a tremendous crack of thunder. I was stunned from the blow, my vision was blurred. I had hit him with such tremendous force! I watched him collapse at my feet. He was my last obstacle and I had overcome him. The goal lay just before me. Only two yards to go! I hugged the ball in the crook of my arm and charged across."

"The crowd went wild with hysteria. I was a hero. They couldn't have done it without me. The crowd raised me on their shoulders and cheered for me, their hero!"

Poppa puffed on his cigar, his hands gesturing wildly as he told his story. "What a day in history that was! I'll never forget it! There I was, crouched down". And Poppa got down on his haunches again, his arm extended in front of him. "The score was tied at fifteen to fifteen." He began his story again. He never tired of telling about his moment of glory. The crowd grew larger and cheered with him as he remembered and told of his place in the history of the flock.

Poppa had enrolled Little Lamb in the "Head Butting School." "We're going to make a ram out of him," he told Momma. "He plays with too many sissies. Chubby Chipmunk, Bumbly Bumble bee, and what's his name? You know, that fairy princess. Oh yeah. Mona. Mona Monarch. Sometimes, you know Momma, that boy makes me sick to my stomach. I gotta' make a ram outta' him. He's gotta' be a chip off the old block if he's to follow in my hoof-steps. Head-butting is where it's at. That's what life is all about. You learn to smash your opponent on his horns and smash him good. Knock him silly so he learns his lesson. Nobody tackles with this ram. I am the strongest. I am the flock leader. I'm the one with the courage. I - - am - -," said poppa proudly, pointing at his chest. "I am proud of who I am, and everyone in the flock will back me up on that."

And so, even against his protesting, Little Lamb was signed up for "Head-Butting School." He would much rather have been playing in the meadow with his friends. But no, pleasing Momma and Poppa was more important. He wanted their approval. He wanted to please them. But most of all, he wanted their love.

Little Lamb had practiced hard for the past several months at the school scrimmages. He was trained to crouch down in a protective, fear provoking position, pulling his head down into his shoulders so that only his horns were menacingly visible. How to lunge forward with great strength, so the force of his legs was driven forward along his backbone into his horns. To be a massive battering ram of muscle and sinew.

Even though he was part of the team, he was not part of the team. He felt like he never quite fit in. That he didn't belong. He learned all the plays. He learned all the maneuvers. He could run, oh so fast. Yet his heart was not in it. The other young

rams loved smashing their heads into another's. They took great joy in doing it and bragged in the locker room: "Did you see his eyes? The way they bulged out when I hit him? He'll remember that for a long time. Boy, did I clobber him a good one."

Little Lamb would always try to disappear as soon as practice was over. He didn't like being in the locker-room with the other young rams. They would tease him, chase after him, make fun of him. The little lamb was doing this for Momma and Poppa, not for himself.

There was excitement this afternoon in the team locker room. The smell of old sweaty wool socks permeated the air. It was a sour smell reflecting the masculine odor of young rams. The aura of excitement electrified the odor. The team was getting ready, putting on their shoulder pads, their supporters, the cleats on their hooves. Some were chasing each other around the locker-room, playfully butting their mock opponent in the buttocks. "Hey," shouted one of the young rams. "There's Little Lamb. Let's get him." And they began to chase after the little lamb.

"Leave me alone," he hollered, brushing off their horny advances with his hoof. "Go away! Leave me alone!" He pushed another one away.

"Go away. Leave me alone," mimicked one of the young rams. He struck a pose on the locker room bench, raising one leg in the air, bent at the wrist, leaving his hoof hanging limp. He pursed his lips together and fluttered his eyelashes. "Go away. Leave me alone," he said in a falsetto voice. "Can't you see I don't like playing like this?" The young ram dropped his voice to a deep masculine level. "He doesn't like playing like this. Poor baby. He must be one of those." And he let his hoof go limp again. "See how he carries his shank. He must be one of those. I think he likes

purple grass. Let's catch him and throw him in the field of purple grass. I know he'd like that. Maybe that will get him strong for the game today. Let's get him." The team charged the poor, helpless overpowered little lamb.

"Stop!" he screamed. "Get off of me! Get away from me!" The team piled on top of him, playfully butting him with their horns. "Stop. Get off of me," mimicked another young ram in a falsetto voice. "Get away from me," and he waved his hoof in an unbecoming gesture. The group laughed and kept taunting Little Lamb.

"Stop!" echoed a loud, powerful, masculine, booming voice. The jeering and jostling stopped immediately. "Get off of him," commanded the voice. One by one, the young rams removed themselves from the pile on top of Little Lamb. As the load lightened, he wondered who his rescuer was. Who his savior would be. Evidently, the team respected him, for they obeyed immediately. Little Lamb opened his eyes as he lay on the floor. "Billy," he exclaimed.

"Are you all right?" asked Billy, kneeling down beside the little lamb.

"I think so," replied Little Lamb. "Nothing hurt except my feelings."

"You should be ashamed of yourselves," growled Billy. "We're supposed to be a team. Little Lamb is part of that team. What makes you think you're so good that you can treat him like that?"

"Aw, just look at him," cried one of the young rams. "He's not like us. Look at the way he walks. Look at the way he carries his shank. He's one of them. You know." And the young ram swished around the locker room. "He likes purple grass."

Billy was angry. "He's good enough to be part of the team. He is like us and deserves to be treated like any other member of this team. What he does when

he's not at practice is nobody's business but his own. So long as I am captain of this team, I expect . . .no, I demand that each team member be treated with dignity and respect. If you can't do that, then get the hell off this team, or get yourself another captain, because I don't care to associate with rams that humiliate and stand on top of others to make themselves feel taller. Now you apologize to Little Lamb right now, or I'm through with each and every one of you, and you can get yourself a new quarterback. I either play with a team that works as a team, or you can play alone with yourselves. Now what is your choice?"

The young rams knew that without Billy the team didn't stand a chance of winning. He was the best quarterback to come along in years. The flock knew if he continued with it as a career, he would be destined for the "Head-Butting Hall of Fame." He was that good. Yet he didn't show it in his daily life. He was always a friend to those who needed a friend. He was always kind and loving. So many wanted to reach out and touch him or be touched by him. He could have had anyone or anything he desired. He was that sought after. He was that popular. And so when Billy spoke, the young sheep of the flock paid attention. He was the role model for the younger sheep. He was the beloved peer of his generation. He was the favored son of the church and of the older generation of sheep. He was all that anyone could have desired to be and more.

"What is your choice?" he asked again, kindly, but firm enough that he demanded an answer, now.

"I'm sorry," began one of the young rams, extending his hoof toward Little Lamb. "I behaved badly," commented another. One by one, the young ram team members approached Little Lamb sheepishly and expressed their apologies. Little Lamb

had never heard someone else express an apology. The words "I'm sorry" had only been uttered by Little Lamb. He was always apologizing to others, saying "I'm sorry." Now someone else was saying those very words to him.

"Aw," replied Little Lamb to the team sheepishly. "You guys were only playing around. I know that. You didn't mean it."

"That's the team spirit I'm proud to play with," shouted Billy. "Now let's get suited up, physically and mentally, and go out there and win that game."

The rams huddled together in the locker room and gave each other a big hug, followed by a resounding cheer. "Rah. Rah. Rah. Rah," they chanted as they got ready for the big game.

They ran from the locker room onto the playing field amidst the noisy cheers from the packed stadium. The clock ticked off the time as the game played on.

They played hard. Their opponents were tough, really tough. They were big woolly sheep that looked like they ate nails for breakfast. They held their ground and pushed and butted like formidable foes. They were tough. They were good.

The score was tied, fifteen to fifteen. Only twenty seconds remained in the game. The young rams had the ball on their 15 yard line. It was the third down.

"Let's do play 69", said Billy in the huddle. "Little Lamb, you do a button-hook at the two-yard line. No one will expect me to throw the ball to you. If you're in the clear, I'm going to throw it your way. Look for it. Be sharp - and remember guys, we're a team. We play this game together. Now let's get 'em."

"Hraah," the young rams shouted as they ran from the huddle to their places on the field. The crowd in the stands was on their feet, cheering at the top of their

lungs. The noise was deafening. From his end position on the line, Little Lamb could see Poppa chomping on that cigar clenched between his teeth. He waved a pennant in the air with one hand and waved at Little Lamb with the other. "Watch me, Poppa," thought Little lamb. "Just watch me. This one's for you. Watch me win."

The ball was snapped to Billy and Little Lamb charged forward into the line. His head low, his horns poised, he crashed into his opponent with all his strength. He felt the rough wooly lineman stagger as he plowed into him with his horns. He felt the opponent give way and collapse at Little Lambs' feet, stunned by the force of the blow. Little Lamb raced to the end zone and doubled back across the line, doing his button-hook. There was no one around him. He was in the clear. The crowd was cheering. Poppa was standing on his feet, the cigar falling from his mouth as he cheered hysterically. Little Lamb saw the ball flying through the air. It was coming toward him. Billy had thrown the ball to him. It slid gracefully into his open, waiting arms, like a mother accepting her child. He caught the ball and the crowd went crazy. As he turned to cross the goal line, fear gripped his heart when he saw his formidable opponent. The tiny, beady, red eyes were set in a massive head with no neck that just blended into muscular shoulders. A thick battering ram topped off with menacing horns. It was Big Bully all grown up. If Little Lamb had met this hulk in an alley, he would have run for his life. But this was not an alley. It was the playing field, and his world was watching him.

"So," snorted Big Bully. "We meet again. No noise this time. Only action. You're not getting by me again." Slowly, Big Bully lowered his head and pawed at the ground, pulling large chunks of earth up with his hooves. "BAAHHH," bellowed

Big Bully as he slowly started charging at Little Lamb like a locomotive building speed with each step.

Little Lamb watched this approaching mass of horn, head and muscle. He took a deep breath, opened his mouth wide and pushed hard with his diaphragm. "BAAAHHHH," he bellowed loudly as he lowered his head and pawed at the earth. He gathered all the courage within him. He was going to be just like Poppa. To re-live the story Poppa so often told. He was going to make the winning touchdown. He charged forward.

The crack of horn smashing on horn echoed throughout the stadium, like a clap of thunder that overpowered the noise of the crowd. The crack was intense. Full of power. Full of determination. Suddenly, the world went black. One moment Little Lamb's ears heard the deafening roar of the crowd. His eyes saw Poppa screaming in delight. The next moment, a head splitting crack, and Little Lamb heard no more. Little Lamb saw no more. Little Lamb felt no more, for Little Lamb was knocked unconscious from the blow. He lay on the field for what seemed like a lifetime, trying to regain his senses, trying to get a sense of where he was and what he must do. He struggled to raise his head. He felt so dizzy, his vision was blurred.

He heard the announcer screaming over the loudspeaker, "And Little Lamb has dropped the ball. Little Lamb fumbled the ball on the one yard line and Big Bully has recovered the ball and is running the entire length of the field. Look at that guy go! Nothing's stopping him! He's butting everybody out of the way. Look at those legs carry him!"

The crowd was going absolutely wild with frenzy. Such an upset! The game was in the bag and Little Lamb fumbled. He fumbled the ball. He blew the game.

Big Bully ran across the goal line. Little Lamb watched in disgrace as Big Bully scored, breaking the tie. He lay all alone on his end of the field, one yard from the goal line. He looked up at the stands where Poppa had been seated. No one was there. The seat was empty. A crushed cigar lay on the floor. "Almost made it, didn't you kid. But then, you're not quite good enough to make it. Not quite good enough to be a winner. You're a loser. You'll always be a loser." That voice echoed in his head as the message was permanently inscribed in the pages of his little black book.

Little Lamb slowly lowered his head to his arms and cried. His whole life flowed out through those tears. Not only had he let his team down, his entire team, but he had let Poppa down with the whole flock as witnesses. The whole flock had seen him blow the game. Fumble the ball. On the one yard line, he fumbled the ball, and the game was lost because of him. Because he wasn't good enough. Because he couldn't measure up. He had humiliated himself and Poppa publicly before the whole flock. Little Lamb wanted to disappear. To dry up and disappear. To die. He closed his eyes and prayed to die.

How black, black, how very black is the night when a little lamb is lost? Leave him alone, and he'll come home, wagging his tail behind him. No! No one wants a loser . . . on their team. Who wants a loser to come home? They have no home. Just leave him alone. Leave him be. Maybe. . . just maybe, he'll get lost and just disappear.

PURPLE GRASS

CHAPTER TEN

The Great Temple school ran late that day. The sun was already setting as the Holy One dismissed the class. As the little lamb descended the steps, he heard a voice behind him.

"Do you mind if I walk along with you?"

The little lamb turned to see who was speaking. There, at the top of the steps, standing between the great doors, was Billy.

"I had to stay late to polish the chalices. We have a big service tomorrow, and I fell behind in my duties," said Billy. "You know," he continued with a sigh, "if things aren't just so, the Holy One really blows his stack."

"You're kidding," responded the little lamb.

"No," replied Billy as he began walking down the steps. "There are many sides to the old ram. Most of 'em you never get to see. The only one that's really visible to the public is when he's up front. When he's on stage doing his thing."

"How can you talk like that?" questioned Little Lamb. "He's the Holy One. He gets his inspiration from the Great Creator. He is my spiritual leader. My teacher."

"Well, I guess when you're on the inside as I am," continued Billy, "you see the whole picture. You discover that life has a lot of illusions. Nothing is as it appears. It's only an illusion."

"I need someone to look up to," replied Little Lamb as he paused at the bottom of the steps. "I need the source of truth. I need something to hold on to."

"Why?" questioned Billy.

"Well," choked the little lamb. "You've got to have a sense of direction. Without that, you're lost. You're doomed."

"Don't you have a sense of direction?" asked Billy as they began walking down the path leading toward the meadow.

"Sometimes I don't," replied Little Lamb. "When I feel lost and don't know where I'm going, I look to others for my sense of direction."

Billy looked at the trusting, innocent lamb walking by his side. "Beware," he said. "They may lead you astray. Even the High Holy One. I know there are some days, even he doesn't know where he is going."

"I find that hard to believe," replied Little lamb.

The two walked in silence for a long time. The fireflies were blinking merrily as the approached the meadow. The full moon gave a beautiful blue light to their world. Everything looked different in the moonlight. The stars twinkled in the heavens above, like tiny little candles, lit by the Creator for some lost soul to find his way home. The little lamb was aware that something strange was going on inside of him. He wanted to talk, and yet his mouth was dry. He felt fear. He wasn't sure why he felt fear, but he recognized its presence. He hadn't felt that way until Billy began walking beside him. Something about that young ram's presence frightened him. Yet there was something overwhelming that was driving the little lamb on, even in the presence of fear. Little Lamb wanted to look at Billy, but he was afraid. Afraid to look at his companion on the path, frightened that perhaps Billy might see something in his eyes, something that even the little lamb wasn't sure about. Something strange. Something that lay just beyond the conscious grasp of Little Lamb's mind. Something that he felt best be hidden; not only from the world, but from himself as well. And so that strange something remained just below the surface, just below consciousness. But the little lamb knew it was there.

"Look at those stars," began Billy. "It never ceases to amaze me. Each night, when the sky is clear, they're there. Since the beginning of time, they have been there. Consistent. Dependable. You say you need a source of truth? Well there it is, in all its majesty and glory."

"I . . . I don't understand," stammered the little lamb.

"Those stars," continued Billy, "those tiny bright specks of light against the black vastness of empty night are assurance to us that there is a tomorrow. There is hope beyond today. Whatever you did today is now over. Part of the past. Tomorrow everything begins brand new, and that promise began with the first daybreak that followed the first night. There are some things you can depend on. That is one of them."

The two stopped on the path and looked up at the heavens at the vast myriad of bright, twinkling stars. "Do you see that one up there?" and Billy pointed north in the direction of the brightest star in the heavens. "That's your star, my friend. If ever you should feel lost, seek it out. Get your sense of direction through it. That star was there long before you came into being, and it will be there long after you leave. Don't ever let anyone tell you that star was not put there just for you. That star was put there for none other than you." Billy put his other arm around the shoulder of his young friend. "Always remember that."

The little lamb looked up into the heavens as Billy spoke. "Could it be that simple?" thought Little Lamb. "Is life that simple? But what about all the rules? The laws? The 'shoulds' and 'should nots' of the world?" His train of thought came suddenly to a halt when he felt Billy's arm rest on his shoulder. His heart began racing wildly. He could feel the thump, thump, thump of his life slamming into his chest. The pounding

continued up through his throat. He felt so weak, so woozy that he stumbled as he moved forward.

"Are you all right?" asked Billy as he quickly knelt by the young lamb's side. There was an air of loving concern in the young ram's voice.

"I'm . . . o.k.," said the little lamb. For a moment, just the briefest of moments, he looked at Billy and saw his own eyes reflected in those of the Chalice Bearer. The little lamb was thankful for the night. His face was flushed with embarrassment. In the shadows, Billy would not see. He looked away quickly as he stood up, brushing the dust from his wool. "What a dumb thing to do," he said as he kicked at a rock in the path. "Stupid rock."

"Do you need any help?" asked Billy.

"Nn-no," stammered the little lamb. "I'll be all right. Just a little light-headed, that's all," and thought: "that was a stupid thing to say."

The two continued walking quietly in the moonlight on the path in the meadow. Neither spoke. The only sound was the soft scraping of their hooves as they walked. They reached a point where the path divided. One fork went to the right, the other to the left.

"Ah, decisions, decisions, decisions," began Billy. "Which path? A fork in the road. Which path shall I take? Shall I take the one that is familiar? The one I have always taken, or shall I travel life on a new and different path? Which one shall we take?"

"My house is on the right path," said Little Lamb.

"Perhaps you live on the wrong path," challenged Billy.

"Oh no!" exclaimed the little lamb. "Momma says, 'Little Lamb, you always take the right path. Listen to me. Always take the right path!' And Momma's always right. She knows."

"Let's take the left path," joshed Billy. "No one will ever know."

"But, my home is on the right path," repeated the little lamb. "I can't go with you."

"What're you gonna' do when you don't live there anymore?" questioned Billy. "Which path are you gonna' take when that's not your home?"

"That will always be my home," Little Lamb shot back in long drawn out tones. "I will always live there."

"Where do little lambs go when they grow up?" asked Billy. "Where do they call home when they become the adults of the world? Aren't you curious where other paths lead?"

"Sure I am," replied the little lamb. "But I don't want to let Momma and Poppa down. It would hurt them very much if I took another path. They expect me to be home by supper, and it's late already."

"Well," drawled Billy, "you go home. They're waiting for you, and that's the right thing to do. But as for me, I'm going to take the other path home."

"Aren't you worried?" stammered the little sheep. "Aren't you worried about . . . don't you know that road goes by the field of. . . ," and the little lamb's voice dropped to a quiet whisper, "purple grass?"

"Where?" asked Billy.

"Purple grass," the little lamb whispered.

"Purple grass?" shouted Billy in response.

"Shhh," whispered the little lamb. "Someone might hear you!"

"Are you worried about that?" asked Billy.

"Aren't you?"

"Naw," replied Billy. "I don't worry about things like that anymore. Words? How can the words 'purple grass' make you worry?"

"I don't know," shrugged the little lamb. "I just feel uncomfortable around the word."

"You ever seen purple grass?" asked Billy.

The little lamb looked up at the sky. The clouds drifted slowly by, bathed in the moonlight. "Why can't I be free?" thought the little lamb. He felt uncomfortable.

"Well?" asked Billy again. "You ever seen purple grass?"

The little lamb looked at Billy. Could he trust him enough to tell? His heart was pounding in his throat.

"I have," continued Billy.

"You have?" stammered the little lamb.

"You sound surprised," replied Billy.

"I am," exclaimed the little lamb. "I just never thought that you, the Head Chalice bearer . . . would . . ." the little lamb stammered for words.

"Be curious?"

"Yes. Be curious."

"Aren't you curious?" asked Billy.

The little lamb swallowed hard, not knowing how to answer. "Well, kind of. I saw it once. But not for very long. I was very frightened."

"And what did you think?" asked Billy.

"I'm almost ashamed to tell you," replied the little lamb.

"Go on," encouraged Billy with such a kind and understanding voice.

"Well," began the little lamb, "I just wanted a quick look. I was curious, you know. The wind blew in my direction and I caught the aroma of the field. I've never experienced anything like it before in my life."

Billy began walking on the left path of the fork in the road. The little lamb paused at the junction. Dare he go? He could hear the voice of the Holy One saying, "No. No. No." Yet something deep inside that little lamb said, "Go. This is where you belong."

"Come on," called Billy. "Don't be afraid."

The little lamb swallowed hard, took two deep breaths and then trotted down the left path, joining Billy.

The two continued down the path, the moon lighting the way, casting eerie shadows as it peeked through the branches of the trees. The little lamb was very much aware of the dryness in his mouth. He tried to swallow, but there was nothing there. He could feel his heart racing wildly in his chest. A peculiar tingling spread over his body. Several times he paused on the path, not knowing what to say. Did he really want to proceed any farther? Was this right? What would Momma and Poppa say? So many thoughts flooded his mind. So many things to be sorted through. Yet even in the confusion and turmoil, there was one consistent, tiny little voice that spoke deep within him. A voice as crisp and clear in its presence as a bright star in the black expansive space of night. Though the night is terrifying, the blackness, the darkness, the unknown, that star stands out in its brilliance against the blackness and makes its presence known. That voice stood out in the stillness. "Come," it said. Ever so gently. Ever so kindly, yet ever so

strongly. "Come. This is where you belong. This is where you should be. This is who you are."

"Don't be afraid." said Billy again, seeing the little lamb hesitate on the path. "Here, take my hand."

Billy reached out and touched the little lamb near his forearm. Such tenderness, such excitement, such fear raced through the little lamb's body. His heart raced up into his throat, choking him on his words. "No," he heard coming out of his mouth. That wasn't the word he wanted to say, but that was the word that came out. "Just let me go at my own pace. Please."

"Sure," replied Billy. "Take your time. I know what it's like."

"No. No, you don't know," said the little lamb. He was frightened. So very frightened. "Nobody knows how I feel except me."

"Don't you know, Little Lamb? I've walked the same path you're walking now. I've been right where you are now. I know the fears and the pain that you're experiencing. I just want you to know, it's all right. You don't need to be frightened."

The little lamb stopped in the path just before the moonlight was swallowed up in the blackness of the Eucalyptus grove. "I'm sorry," he said, shaking his head. "I can't go any further. I just can't."

Billy reached out and touched the little lamb on his shoulder. "I understand. I've been where you are. Be kind to yourself. Don't judge yourself harshly by what others may tell you. Only you know who you are and where you should be. No one can judge you but you. But remember my friend, please be kind to yourself. You deserve that kindness. More than you know."

"I'm sorry, but I've got to go. It's late and Momma and Poppa will worry." The little lamb turned and began walking slowly down the path. He paused about twenty feet away, turned and looked at Billy.

"I'm still your friend," called Billy softly. "Now you know something different about me that very few others know. I hope you will still be my friend. I hope that my difference won't make a difference."

The little lamb looked at Billy standing in the bluish glow of the moonlight. The shadows from the branches overhead cast a delicate pattern on Billy's face as they swayed gently in the evening breeze. The little lamb lifted his arm and waved slowly. "You go - - but not me. See you later."

He turned and started his journey home. His long journey home. Back to where he had always been. Back to a world he'd always known. Leaving a new, unknown, exciting yet frightening world, for one that was safe, secure, familiar, acceptable. He walked slowly down the path for about one hundred yards and paused. "Is this what I really want?" he thought. "Do I really want to go home? 'This above all else, to thine own self be true. Thou canst not then be false to no man.' Shakespeare," thought the little lamb. Something he had learned in school. "Believe in that, and you will believe in yourself," the voice inside said quietly. "Funny," thought the little lamb. "Why should I think of that now?" He turned around and looked down the path where Billy had walked. It was empty. There was no Billy. The path ended in the blackness of the trees. Somewhere beyond that blackness was Billy. The little lamb sat down on a rock. "What should I do?" he thought. "Go home? Go to the field of purple grass? Sit here?" Oh, the struggle the little lamb went through in making his decision. No one shall ever know the

pain and agony involved in that struggle. "It's not easy to say to yourself, 'be true to you. I like purple grass,'" thought the little lamb. It's not easy to admit that to yourself, because when you do, you also say, "I am everything I thought was wrong and offensive. I am bad. Different. Different than anyone else I know." The little lamb was deep in thought, deep in conflict. "Until this night, I thought I was the only lamb in the world that liked purple grass."

"It is time," the little voice said inside. "Turn around and walk down that new path. That is where you should be. That is where you belong. Be true to you." Slowly, Little Lamb rose from the rock he had been sitting on. Deliberately and with great courage, he cautiously placed one foot in front of the other. 'The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.'

"Funny," he thought. "Why should I think of that now?" Dismissing any further thoughts, he trotted down the path and entered the shadows of the unknown.

Black fingers of fear reached out and touched the little lamb inside as he proceeded through the shadows. Unseen monsters lurked behind every tree, waiting to pounce on an innocent little lamb undertaking a new and fearful journey. His eyes strained to part the mantle of darkness in the forest. His feet stumbled in the blackness as he searched for the solid footing of the path. He seemed to walk forever. Suddenly, there is was! The opening in the trees. The moonlight. The stars. The opening to a new life and a new world. "There is still time to turn back," thought the little lamb.

"No," the voice inside answered. "It is time to discover who your are. Who you really are."

He walked over the little hill and there, stretching before him in the moonlight, lay the field of purple grass. The field seemed empty. "Where was Billy?" wondered Little Lamb as he crouched behind a blackberry bush.

The aroma was more overwhelming than he had remembered. Gently waving grasses beckoned to him. "Come," they whispered on the breeze. Reaching through the raspberry brambles he tried to touch the grass not more than three feet away from him. So close, and yet so far away. He reached and reached and strained until his hoof was inches away from his destiny. Suddenly, the brambles dug into his skin, tangling themselves in his wool. He pulled, trying to untangle himself. The thorns only cut deeper into his flesh, drawing blood as they cut. The more he moved, the firmer they held.

"Ohh," he moaned softly at his frustration and pain.

Billy had been lying in the field, watching the tassels of grass waving above his head in the moonlight, enjoying the moment. The noise startled him. "Who's there?" he called out as he quickly sat up. He heard a soft whimpering come from behind the blackberry bush. "Who's there?" he jumped to his feet.

"It's me," Little Lamb exclaimed as he struggled with the brambles. He was embarrassed. "Please," he said softly, pleading. "Can you help me? I seem to be stuck."

"In more ways than one," chuckled Billy. "How'd you ever get yourself into this predicament?"

"I was curious, I just wanted to see, but I didn't want to be seen. I tried to touch the purple grass from my hiding place, to see what it felt like, to experience it for myself. But I didn't want anyone to see me. I didn't want anyone to know I had been here. I just

wanted to touch -- and now look at me. I'm all tangled in the blackberry brambles. Can you help free me?"

"More than you know," replied Billy as he began untangling Little Lamb's wool from the thorns. He did it with great patience, kindness, and love. The whole process took more than thirty minutes, but it gave the two time. Time to talk. "You've been stuck for a long time, haven't you?"

"No, not very long," said the little lamb quietly. "I've only been here a short time."

"No," chuckled Billy again. "I don't mean here, at this point in time. I mean, you've been stuck for along time in a world that you don't belong in. You just didn't fit, and you knew it. Deep down inside, you were stuck and you knew it."

"How do you know?" asked the little lamb.

"I told you," replied Billy as he worked on the thorns, "I've walked the same path you are now on. I know what you are going through."

"How long . . .?" The little lamb stammered and paused, looking down at the ground.

"Have I been eating purple grass?" replied Billy.

"Umm-Hmmm," the little lamb nodded as he slowly raised his eyes to Billy's.

"About two years," replied Billy as he continued his task, not returning the gaze.

"Were you frightened?" questioned the little lamb.

"Just as much as you are now," said Billy. He looked up and met Little Lamb's eyes. There was so much understanding, so much empathy in those eyes. "Maybe even more frightened than you are now."

"Why?" queried the little lamb.

"Because of my position in the Holy Temple," replied Billy. "The Head Chalice Bearer. The right hand ram to the Holy One. The specially chosen one to follow in his footsteps as the religious leader of the flock. Were it known that I like purple grass, it would cause such an upheaval, such turmoil. I have the stamp of approval from the Holy One, from the bishop and a letter of acclamation from the holiest of holy's, the Head Monarch of all of the holy temples of all the flocks. I am their chosen ram. Their fair-haired lad, being groomed for responsible positions of leadership. My future is secure: to hold positions of prominence and respect. Possibly, as the years pass - to be head of all the flocks. To be their spiritual leader."

"Does anyone know?" asked the little lamb.

"No," replied Billy. "If word ever got out that I ate purple grass . . ." he paused to gather his thoughts . . . "So many would be hurt. Prominent sheep. Important sheep that have given their stamp of approval of me. The future of so many others hinge on me and who I appear to be. I can't let them down. I can't disappoint them."

"But how?" and the little lamb stammered and looked at Billy. "How do you deal with your feelings?"

Billy looked back at the entangled thorns, working on them, not speaking for awhile. Then he paused for a moment and looked at Little Lamb. "It's very difficult," he began. "I sneak out under the cover of night, hoping that darkness will hide me from prying eyes. I lead two lives. One life by daylight. In that life, I am everything everyone wants me to be. My parents. The other rams. The Holy One. Whom do you want me to be today, sir? Thank you, sir. I shall. Just watch me mold myself into the image you would like. I am a very plastic, pliable, moldable sheep. I'll be anything you want me to be. I'll

do whatever you expect of me. And another life under the cover of darkness, where I explore the hidden side of me. That side that very few know. That side of who I really am."

"And how do you feel?" questioned the little lamb, seeing the pain in Billy's eyes.

Billy's eyes became misty with tears. "I'm a fake," he replied quietly. "I'm the world's number one fraud. Look world!" he cried out. "Look at me! The great deceiver. The master of disguise. The world's biggest fraud," and he broke down and began to cry.

Little Lamb reached out and stroked the hairs on Billy's forehead. Tenderly. Gently. Lovingly.

Billy hugged the little lamb, burying his face in the soft wool of Little Lamb's chest. He sobbed and sobbed. His shoulders shook as his dam broke, letting loose a flood of tears.

The little lamb held his friend and rocked him gently. Holding and rocking. There's a great deal of comfort in that. As time passed, the crying became less and less. The shaking began to subside. The healer was being healed.

Billy sighed a long sigh of relief. Like a great burden, a great weight had been lifted from him. "I'm such a fraud," he continued. "I'm being torn apart inside. Part of me is being pulled in one direction and another part is going on a totally different path. I'm being destroyed, and I helplessly stand on the sidelines and watch the process go on. I feel so powerless. I feel like my life is in the hands of others. My destiny is in their hands, not mine. It is they who are determining my future. Not me." Billy looked up at Little Lamb. Once again, their eyes met. "I am such a coward. I have such great fears that hold me as a prisoner. I don't like being here, but I don't have the courage to stand

up and face the world, and say, this . . . is who I am. This is who I really am. A young ram who likes purple grass. Hear me world," and he cried out at the evening sky. ***"I LIKE PURPLE GRASS. CAN YOU ACCEPT ME? CAN YOU LOVE A YOUNG RAM WHO LIKES PURPLE GRASS?"*** Billy's head dropped and looked back at the ground. "But I'm not strong enough, I'm not brave enough to hear their answer."

"But, you don't know what their answer would be," replied the little lamb. "How do you know that they would not accept you? How do you know that they would not love you?"

Billy gazed back again at the little lamb. "Oh, naive little sheep," he began. "Just look around you! What do you hear preached? What do you read? Do you find any acceptance in any of that? Do you find any evidence of a shred of love? Look at all those who have gone before us? Those that have publicly stood up before the masses and proclaimed: 'I like purple grass!' What was their fate? I'll tell you what their fate was. They were persecuted. Hated. Scorned. Beaten. Even murdered. All in the name of the Good Shepherd. And why?" Billy paused and looked at the myriad of stars in the heavens. "Because we like purple grass." He cried in frustration, raising his open, outstretched arms to the heavens. "We are who we are. Created like this. Born like this. Is this the burden we must carry throughout our entire life? Is this the cross we must bear? Is our self destruction our salvation? Are we damned forever for being who we are? Or are we damned forever for trying to be something, somebody we are not? However we play the game," and Billy looked back at little lamb, "we lose. Be false to yourself and die from within of inner loneliness. Be true to yourself and die from without of rejection and outer loneliness." Billy raised his hoof to the sky and shook it in anger.

"What kind of a damnable curse do you place upon us? What kind of a loving Creator are you, to put us in such a position?" He dropped his arm in frustration and sighed.

"Sometimes I think the only way to escape all of this is to die. To end my life. To commit suicide."

"Billy," exclaimed the little lamb. He was shocked. "How can you think of such a thing?"

Billy looked at the little lamb. "I told you that I have walked the road that you now travel, that I know how you feel. I am farther along the road, and have seen and experienced more, so much more than you have. Wait until you have traveled as far on the path as I have. When you have reached the obstacles I try to climb, then you will understand how I feel. It is then that you will understand my words. I cry out in my desire to be who I am, and yet recoil in fear and shame. And so I hide who I am, living part of my life in secrecy and fear. Frightened, oh so terribly frightened, that someone who knows me may come along this path some dark night, and hide, just as you did, and discover that the young ram called Billy, the Chalice Bearer, the chosen one of the Holy One, has this deep, dark, hidden, terrible secret."

Billy bent down and broke off a bud of purple grass. He brought it up to his nose and gently inhaled the aroma. He looked at the bud. Then he looked at Little Lamb. Their eyes met, and each looked deep inside the other. "This revered young holy ram called Billy - - " began the Head Chalice bearer, "eats purple grass. And I tremble in fear for that day when I shall be discovered." He gently slipped the bud into his mouth and chewed on its essence. He sighed deeply as the grass worked its strange mysterious effects.

"Do you like purple grass?" asked Little Lamb.

"I love purple grass," replied Billy. "I denied my feelings for so many years. It's a natural, normal part of me, and I separated myself from that important part that was truly me. I denied part of me. Now that I'm in touch with that lost part of me, I feel more whole. More complete. The only time I feel torn apart is when I have to hide . . . part of me from the world. That's the hard part."

"I know how you feel." said the little lamb with great compassion. "I have the feelings, but I don't act on them. Some days I try to pretend they don't exist. But I always know they're there."

"And how do you feel now?" asked Billy.

"I feel like I would like to try some - - with you." Little Lamb's voice trailed off as he looked down at his feet, ashamed to admit his feelings. He looked back up at Billy, expecting rejection, humiliation, even revulsion. Instead he saw Billy standing there tall, smiling, understanding, and offering him a bud of purple grass. Holding it in his hoof in his outstretched arm.

"Come. Become," the tiny quiet voice said deep within Little Lamb. And he reached out and accepted the offer of his friend. He accepted purple grass into his hoof, into his body, into his life, and into his heart. He accepted who he was.

The two frolicked in the field of purple grass, bathed in moonlight. The gentle breezes blew as the night became one of the most memorable in Little Lamb's history.

Thereafter, they would meet regularly in the field. In the field of purple grass.

PURPLE GRASS

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Little lamb hurried home from school. He had been playing with his friends and time had slipped away. The sun was setting, casting long shadows as it descended in the heavens. "Can't be late," thought the little lamb. Poppa would be very angry. He burst through the door just as Momma and Poppa were sitting down at the table. "Whew," he sighed in relief, taking his position by his plate. He bowed his head and closed his eyes as poppa said the evening grace.

"Oh great Creator," began Poppa, "thank you for the gifts of food and life. I ask your forgiveness for the terrible sins that have come upon this household. Show me the way, that I might correct the wrong and punish the sinner. Amen. "

Little lamb wondered what Poppa meant in his prayer. With his head still bowed, he slowly opened his eyes and stared at his plate in disbelief. An overwhelming feeling of panic and horror crept over his body. There, in the center of his plate were some blades and blossoms of purple grass. He felt his heart pounding in his chest as he slowly closed his eyes, hoping, praying that he had not seen what he had seen. "Go away", he thought. "Don't be there." He opened his eyes again. The few blades of purple grass stood out brightly against the white background of his plate. He looked at Momma. She was looking down at her lap, refusing to look at her son. Ever so slowly, with fear building up inside his body, he shifted his eyes to Poppa. Their eyes met. Poppa was glaring at his son. There was anger in those eyes. The silence was deafening. The glare, demeaning, humiliating. Little lamb wanted nothing more at that moment than to die and disappear.

Poppa broke the silence. "Where did you get this?" he asked ever so slowly, chewing on each word and spitting it in Little Lamb's face. His voice had a controlled quiet rage. Each word, a sharp dagger that pierced his heart as it was uttered.

Little Lamb swallowed hard and stared at the plate before him. "I -- I ", he stammered. "I don't know. Where did this come from? I don't know."

"Don't be cute with me!" replied Poppa. His voice becoming louder and angrier as he spoke.

"I don't know," said little lamb. He looked at Poppa. Looking for sympathy or understanding in his eyes. He saw nothing but a black hole inside Poppa's dilated pupils. The blackness frightened Little Lamb. "That's not mine."

"Don't lie to me, young man," said Poppa rising from the table. His massive hoof crashed down, making the dishes rattle with its force and violence. He brought his face so close to Little Lambs' that he could feel the heat in Poppa's breath. The words were spoken in a controlled, yet ever so forceful whisper. It felt like he was standing at the brink of a volcano, feeling the heat rise from a violent inner core. You knew it would erupt, but you did not know when. "Don't you ever lie to me!"

Little Lamb recoiled in fear and terror. With a shaking voice, he replied, "Where did you get that from?"

"Your mother found that in your dresser drawer," said poppa as he looked at momma sitting there, still with her head bowed. "The horror! The disgust! The shame you brought upon that poor woman! To bring that filth into our home. That perversion that defiles your creator and everything that is holy. Have you no pride in

who you are? No common decency? What kind of a vile, filthy creature have we raised? To think you would stoop so low, and become this! How dare you?"

Little Lamb looked at Momma. "I didn't meant to hurt anyone", he began. "I just . . . I was curious. I just wanted to experience a little. I meant no harm."

"Curious?" Poppa exploded. "Meant no harm? You have committed a terrible sin in the eyes of the Great Creator. It is written in the Holy Book: 'thou shalt not partake of, nor indulge in purple grass.' You knew the writings! You violated them! How can you call that being curious and meaning no harm?"

Little Lamb looked at Poppa. He was so huge, towering above him. Little Lamb felt so small. He wished he could be so small that he would disappear. Just disappear forever. That way he would not disappoint and hurt those he loved. "I just couldn't help myself, Poppa. Something deep inside said, this is where you belong. This is part of you."

Poppa shook his head. "Disgusting," he said. "Do you have any idea how perverted this is? How utterly abnormal? It is an abomination! Your poor mother touched this! She has been washing her hooves ever since. She feels so unclean. So unholy. By your curiosity, you have contaminated your mother with your perversion. I have never seen such a filthy thing in my entire life."

Momma raised her head and looked at Little Lamb. Her eyes looked very sad. Very red from crying. "Poppa," she began, her gaze changing from her son to her husband. "Our little boy needs help! He is sick with the disease we dare not even mention its name. It is beyond our ability. His thinking is distorted. We must take him

to see the sheep shrink. He needs someone stronger than we are to cure him of his disease."

"The sheep shrink?" cried Poppa in a wail of despair. "Never! This is such a hideous despicable thing! My God, what if the other rams found out what kind of a son I have raised? I am disgraced . . . by my own flesh and blood! "

"No one need know," replied Momma. "These conferences are confidential. No one but this family will know what is going on,"

Poppa looked off into the distance. Thinking. Wanting to forget. Hoping this would go away. "I thought head butting school would strengthen him, both physically and mentally. Hmmph," grunted Poppa. "I don't know what else to do. Perhaps you are right. I do know that no son of mine is going to graze on purple grass. Whatever it takes to knock this silly idea out of his head is okay with me. Change him to a son that I can be proud of. "

Little Lamb hung his head in shame, yet his mind was very active. He raised his head and looked at Momma. "Why did you go through my drawers?" he asked. "Those are private. They contain my personal things. That's my world."

Momma looked confused. "I was only putting your laundry away, and there," she paused and wiped her hooves on her apron. "There that stuff was."

"No," replied Little Lamb. "That stuff was not just there. I had it hidden. You had to look. You searched through my things. Those were my private affairs. You had no right . . ."

"Whaap." Poppa struck his son across the side of his head. "Don't you ever talk like that to your mother. We are raising you and so long as you are under our

roof, you live by our rules. This is a God-fearing house, and you will also live by His rules." Poppa raised his hoof in the air, pointing at the ceiling. "You have violated both. You must have felt shame or you wouldn't have had to sneak around like a thief in the night, hiding your perversion. I ought to beat you senseless for violating the Creators' rules. Rights? You have no rights except as we and your Creator give them to you."

"Please," pleaded Momma, her eyes darting from her husband to her son. "Anger and violence will not solve our problems. We need help. Our son needs help. Enough of this. Tomorrow is another day. Let's eat our supper. Tomorrow Little Lamb will see the sheep shrink." She got up to begin serving supper.

"I'm not hungry," said Little Lamb in a quiet voice. "I don't feel very good tonight. I think I'll go to my room and go to bed. May I be excused? Please?" He looked at Momma. He looked at Poppa.

Poppa looked at Momma. Then he looked at Little Lamb. Their eyes met. Little Lamb looked away. He looked down at his plate. He looked at the purple grass.

"Get out of my sight", growled Poppa. "Go to your room and think about what you've done to this family. Think about the disgrace you've brought to this table. Get out of here."

Little Lamb quickly rose from the table. He ran up the stairs into his room, closing the door behind him. He threw himself on the bed, buried his head in the pillow and began to cry. "Why?" He sobbed softly. "Why am I like this? How come I am so bad? How come I sin? Oh, Great Creator, please forgive me. I didn't mean to sin. I didn't mean to hurt Momma and Poppa. I love them. Please help me. Please help me.

I don't want to sin anymore. Please take away this hurt. Please take away these feelings. I want to be a good little lamb. I want to follow your words. I want to be whole. Please forgive me. Take away my sin." Little Lamb cried into the lonely, alone hours of the night until there were no more tears and sleep kindly and mercifully took away his misery, took away his pain. And as he slipped into the realm of unconsciousness where dreams dwell, he heard a gentle lullaby humming in his mind. 'Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep and doesn't know where to find him.'

Once upon a time there was a little lamb, born into this world, not of his doing, but never the less, he was here. There comes a period in everyone's life where you question what you are about, who you are, and where you are going with your life. This was one of those times for the little lamb, who was lost . . . very, very lost. And how black, black, how very black is the night for the little lamb who is lost and doesn't know where to go and doesn't know where to find himself. When part of you is lost, separated from the whole, how terrible the loneliness, the emptiness! The striving to be whole, and yet deep inside you know that you can never be whole, because the most fundamental part of you is not wanted. Not desired. Not loved. You are split. Divided into pieces, and those pieces are dashed under the hooves of those who claim they love you. Yes, they love you, if If perhaps you can be something you're not. If you can live the lie they want you to believe. If you can be false to who you really are. If you can deceive yourself and believe the lie, then perhaps you can find love. Perhaps then, you can find peace. But until you can believe the lie with your total being, you are lost in that eternal blackness . . . where little lambs go to disappear, to let those essential parts of their being . . . die . . . and disappear.

'Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep and doesn't know where to find him.'
How haunting a nightmare for a lonely, frightened little lamb who only wanted to please those who claim they love him.

PURPLE GRASS

CHAPTER TWELVE

Little Lamb sat sheepishly in the office of Dr. Sheepshrink, the noted flock psychologist. Feeling very uncomfortable, his eyes scanned the office. He couldn't help but notice the many sheepskins lining the walls, neatly framed with gold seals. "I wonder who's hide these came from," mused little lamb. "I hope my hide never graces these walls." The furnishings in the office looked expensive. Rumor had it that Dr. Sheepshrink was not only the best in the flock, he was the most expensive.

"What a funny, short little ram," thought Little Lamb as he his eyes took in the balding figure before him. His shoulders barely reached above the huge oak desk that separated the two. A pair of pinch-on spectacles rested on the doctor's nose, just below his cherry red cheeks. He twirled a pencil between his hooves. "Vell," he began in a heavy German accent. "Vas ist loss mitt du"?

Little Lamb looked confused. "Ach," said the doctor smiling. "I forgot. Diss iss not my native home. Sometimes I forget tings like datt. Vy are you here? Vass iss wrong mitt you?"

Little Lamb felt funny inside. "Who is this ram?" he thought to himself. Momma and Poppa must believe in him. "They know what is right for me. He will help me get rid of my . . . sin." Little Lamb's face began to blush. "I . . . I," he stammered.

"Schpitt it out, boy," said Dr. Sheepshrink. "I cannot help you if I do not know vatt cher problem iss. Now, vass iss itt?"

"I, . . . I, I like pur --," and Little Lamb's voice trailed off into a whisper on the words "purple grass".

"Vatt? Vatt? I kan't hear you," replied the noted psychiatrist. "Schpeak upp boy."

"I like," and Little Lamb looked down at his hooves, avoiding the eyes of the doctor. "I ate purple grass." he said with great shame.

"Oh, I see," replied the doctor, twirling the pencil. "Undt ditt ju like itt?"

The little lamb squirmed in his seat. He looked quickly at the doctor, then looked back at his feet. "I . . . I'm not sure." He spoke those words very slowly.

"Come, come, my boy," the short ram said as he leaned forward onto the desk. "I need to know your feelings if I am to help you. Be honest mitt me. Vee don't haff time to play games. Trust me. I am your friend. I can help you."

Little Lamb looked at the sheepshrink. "Can you really help me?"

"Yess," nodded the doctor.

Little Lamb looked around the room, trying to gather the courage to speak the unspeakable. To utter the words that dare not be uttered. He took a deep breath and spoke in a very frightened, quivering voice. "Yes," he muttered sheepishly, staring at the twirling pencil. "I liked it."

"Hmmm," murmured Sheepshrink. His brow became very furrowed. "You are zick!" He put the pencil down on the desk and rubbed the long hairs of his

goatee, looking very knowledgeable and scholarly. "Far zicker dan I thought. If you try purple grass, dat's one ting. It's a phase you will get over. If you try purple grass und like it - - dat's very serious. Dat means you're very, very zick."

Little Lamb started crying. "Can you help me? Can you please help me?"

Their eyes met. Tears flowed down the cheeks of the young ram. His eyes pleaded as he spoke. "I'll not do it again. I promise. Cross my heart and hope to die, I'll never touch purple grass again as long as I live. Please help me!"

"Hrumph," grunted Sheepshrink as he cleared his throat. "Vott chu haff here iss called a defense mechanism. It iss only a symptom off a more serious defect vich lies buried deep in your subconscious. It's going to take a lot off vork, if vee are going to be successful. Now, vill you vork mitt me? Iff you do not vork mitt all the strength you have, then you do not vant dis bad enuff. If vee are to cure you, you must vant this very very bad, or it vill not vork. I cannot do anyting unless you vant to change your vays."

"Oh, I want to be different! I want to change!" cried Little Lamb. "I don't want to like purple grass. I want to be like all the other young lambs. I want to be normal."

"Goot," replied the older ram, rubbing his hooves together. "I always wanted to cure vun uff you, but nobody wanted it bad enuff. I believe you vant it bad enuff. Don't you?"

Little Lamb nodded quickly.

"Now," began Sheepshrink, "as I told you, liking purple grass is a defense mechanism, vich is covering up someting else. Defending it. Prooo-tectink it. Do you understand?"

Little lamb nodded quickly again.

"Goot. Now, vatt are you covering up?"

Little Lamb looked puzzled. He shook his head. "I don't know."

"Come come, young ram, how am I going to help you if you don't giff me some answers to your puzzle. Only you know vat you're covering up. Now tell me, do you like yourself?"

"No," replied little lamb quietly.

"Aha," cried the old ram. "Now ve're on to someting. Do you know vy you don't like yourself?"

"Just look at me," replied Little Lamb. "What good am I? I can't seem to please the ones who love me most. I always fall short of their expectations. I hurt them. I let them down. I make them angry at me."

"Do you feel loved?" Asked Sheepshrink.

The little lamb paused and looked around the room. He was blinking back the tears that he felt inside. "No," he replied quietly. "Not now."

"Did you ever feel loved?"

"A long time ago. When I was young. Poppa was always distant. Far away. He was busy at work and had other things on his mind. But Momma, oh, she loved me when I was young."

"Vott happened to make dat luff go away?"

The little lamb thought deeply for a moment, exploring the thoughts of his childhood. "I don't know," he began. "It just seemed to disappear as I got older. I must have done something wrong. I must not have pleased her enough, and it just disappeared." He looked at the psychiatrist. "I must have done something wrong. I must be a bad sheep. I must be a black sheep in white sheep's clothing. I must be bad, and don't deserve being loved."

"Aha!" exclaimed Sheepshrink. "Now ve're getting somevere. You're absolutely right, young ram. Ven you start doing tings dat are bad und wrong, den off course, your momma und your poppa vill not luff you anymore. Can you blame dem? A lamb such as you, dat used to be such a goot little lamb, suddenly starts tinking und doing very bad tings. Off course, such a lamb does not deserve being luffed by his momma und poppa."

"But how do I get their love back?" Pleaded the little lamb, his eyes open wide, looking anxious.

"Iss very simple," continued the doctor. "The problem iss mitt your thoughts. You begin mitt vott I call der shtinkink thinking, undt of course, der's a change in your behavior. Vonce you start mitt dat shtinking thinking, den you establish de major premise uff your life. Dot you are unluffable. Vonce dot premise is in your mind, den your behavior must substantiate dot premise. Undt your behavior continues to be bad, so you can maintain dat premise. Dat you are unluffable. Ach, dis iss so simple undt plain. Can you not see it?"

Little Lamb looked a little confused. "I'm not sure. I sort of get the general idea, but how does it apply to me?"

"Look," replied Sheepshrink, as he leaned forward on his desk. "Vonce you vere a nice, luffable little lamb. Your momma luffed you. Your poppa luffed you. Denn, you get dis schtinking thinking going on in your mind. Dey don't like vott dey see undt so dey try to change you back into dot nice little luffable lamb dey vonce had. Did dey beat you?"

"Once in a while Poppa would. When he was angry with me. But not very often," replied Little Lamb. "Momma never raised a hoof to me."

"Ach der veider shoen," cried the old ram. "Dott vas der first mischtake. Spare der rod, undt schpoil der little lamb. Little lambs need punishment to keep them in line. A goot schmart schvitch to der buttocks could have saved us all a lot of trouble. Dott's vere dey vent wrong. If dey vould have schpanked you, den you vould have felt dey luffed you. But dey didn't. Dey just withdrew their luff in frustration. Dey should have schpanked you. I must tell dem about schpanking to keep you in line."

Dr. Sheepshrink sat back in his chair and lit up his pipe, watching the smoke slowly rise, curling in the air. He leaned forward again, taking the pipe from his mouth, waving it in the air as he spoke. "Der problem is der schtinking thinking, undt ve must change datt. Vonce a young lamb feels he is unluffable, he continues nicht der schtinking thinking. He must prove his premise, dott he is unluffable. Undt so der vicious cycle continues. He tinks undt does bad things, so dat nobody vill luff him. Undt he continues mitt his belief dat he is unluffable. "

Sheepshrink sat back in his chair.. "Ach," he moaned. "It's too bad datt nobody luffed you enuff to punish you for datt schtinking thinking. It's in der goot book -

to punish datt schtinking thinking. To vipp it right out uff your body undt your mind. Here." And the good doctor shoved the Good Book towards the little lamb.

"I know it's there," replied Little Lamb. "I've read it, and I feel guilty about my sins. Can you help me?"

"Ach, yaah," exclaimed Sheepshrink. "Vee must begin vere it all schtartet. In your mind mitt der schtinking thinking. Change those thoughts from schtinking to goot. Now, each day, I vant you to come here, right from school. I haff a plan to change your tinkung. Vee used dis plan in my motherland, Germany. Undt it vorked very vell to change people's thinking." Sheepshrink was getting very excited, grinning broadly as he rubbed his front hooves together. "Ach", he continued. "I haff wanted to do dis to a sheep for a very, very, very long time. Undt now, here I have a villing subject. Dis vill be fun. Vee see you here tomorrow, right after school. Undt vee keep up der plan until vee change your schtinking tinkung. Denn, ve begin to luff you."

Little Lamb left the office feeling excited about tomorrow. There was a cure for his problem. It was so simple, too. Sure, he felt unloved. Unlovable. Because he had this stinking thinking, which contributed to all of his problems. So long as he had this stinking thinking, he would always feel unloved. It drove others away. He literally ran from school the next day to Dr. Sheepshrink's office. He was so excited.

Dr. Sheepshrink was seated in the same position behind his desk. "Today is der first day uff der rest uff your life," he began. "You can change, if you really vant to change. It's up to you, if you vant to change or not. If you vant to be luffed. Do you vant to change?"

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Little Lamb. "Please help me change. Help me be the kind of little lamb Momma and Poppa want me to be. Help me be worthy of their love."

"Goot," replied Sheepshrink. "Now vee begin der vurk." He reached into his desk drawer and produced two bowls. Little Lamb gasped as he saw their contents. One was gloriously filled with purple grass, unlike anything the little lamb had ever seen before. His nostrils quivered and trembled as he inhaled the aroma. The other bowl was filled with green grass.

Dr. Sheepshrink walked across the room to an electronic box behind Little Lamb. The box was covered with gauges and dials and lights. He attached some electrodes to Little Lamb's shanks. These were attached to the box by some wires. "This is called Electro-Shock Therapy," he began. "It's the most effective, harmless way to change behavior patterns. Dott Schtinking tinkling must be stopped."

He returned to his desk and held a switchboard that connected to the electronic box. "Now," he continued. "Venever der schtinking thinking comes into your head, vee simply push diss button here, undt you receive an electric shock. Ve keep increasing der voltage until der mind gets de message datt diss is unhealthy thinking. Undt ve change der schtinking thinking into goodt thinking. Now, explore the purple grass in front of you."

Little Lamb felt puzzled at the request. He looked at Sheepshrink, now seated behind his huge oak desk. His hooves resting on an electronic keyboard. "Are you sure?" questioned Little Lamb?

"Uff Course," replied Sheepshrink in a loud, powerful voice. "Diss is vere der vurk begins. It's hard vurk, but iff you vant to be vell, den ve begin."

"Are you sure you want me to explore the purple grass in front of me?" questioned Little Lamb. "I've always been told it was bad. Now you're telling me to go ahead. I don't understand."

"Dott vas den. Dis is now," replied the psychiatrist. "Diss is a controlled experiment. I am a trained psychiatrist. You must trust me. I know vat I am doing. I shall lead you down some spooky und terrible paths dat you must valk upon so dat you can come out of the forest of schtinking tinkling. Out of the dark and into the light. Trust me dat I know vott I am doing. Do you trust me?"

Little Lamb looked at the small figure of the old ram, hiding behind his desk. His eyes were tiny and beady as they stared back at Little Lamb. He had a grin on his face. He was going to enjoy what was coming. "I want to trust you - but I'm afraid," replied little lamb.

Sheepshrink leaned forward on his desk, his eyes staring into Little Lamb's. "You must swallow your fears," began Sheepshrink. "No pain, no gain. Vee vant you to be vell. To be vell, you must go through the valley of the shadow of pain, undt I am your leader. Look around this room." He made sweeping gestures with his arms. "Look at all these diplomas. Do you think the major Universities of dis world would have giffen me dese diplomas if I vere not goot? Dese tell the vorld dat I, Dr. Wolf Sheepshrink, am an authority on die mind. Dat I know vott is going on inside dat head of yours. See dat vun dere?"

Little Lamb looked at the diploma Sheepshrink was pointing out. It had ribbons on it and a great big gold seal, neatly embossed with the state emblem.

"Datt vun is a license," continued Sheepshrink. "Datt means der State says I am goot. Datt I can play around nicht little sheeps's minds undt remake their schtinking tinkung into healthy tinkung. Der kind of thinking datt der flock wants. So you fit in mitt der flock. If der Universities trust me enuff to giff me a diploma datt says I am goot; If der state trusts me enuff to giff me a license to play around mitt your mind undt change your thinking from schtinking tinkung to healthy thinking; If your momma undt poppa trust me enuff to turn you over to me; if all dese people undt institutions trust me enough, den vy can't you?"

"I want to," replied Little Lamb. "I want to so very much."

"Goot," said Sheepshrink. "Den do as I say, undt trust dat I know vatt I am doing and vatt I am doing is for your own goot. Now explore the purple grass before you."

Little Lamb swallowed hard. He felt self conscious. He felt embarrassed. But he wanted to be well. He wanted to believe that Dr. Wolf Sheepshrink could make him well, could make him fit in with the flock. He leaned over the bowl, and slowly inhaled the aroma of the purple grass. He felt a warm, tingly feeling rise up his nostrils and explode into his brain with ecstasy. "Oh how wonderful", he thought.

"Do you like that?" asked Sheepshrink?

"Oh," moaned little lamb in ecstasy. "It's wonderful!"

"Take a deeper breath," encouraged Sheepshrink.

Little Lamb inhaled fully. The essence of the aroma filled his lungs. He felt the power surge through his lungs and into his blood, making his whole body tingle. His heart pounded in his chest with excitement. His body was engulfed with feelings that felt euphoric. So incredibly wonderful. So incredibly high.

"Touch it," encouraged Sheepshrink. "Feel it. It feels good, doesn't it?"

Little Lamb cautiously touched the tip of his hoof to the purple grass. His arm shivered with excitement. Chills and tingles raced up and down his arm. "Oh, yes!" he exclaimed. "It feels so good!"

"Taste it," said Sheepshrink, his voice low and quiet, almost seductive. "Go on," he encouraged. "You want to taste it, don't you?"

Little Lamb nodded.

"Vell den, go on," said Sheepshrink seductively. "Go on. Enjoy. I von't tell anyone. You can trust me. Taste it. Do vat you vant to do mitt it. Trust me."

Little Lamb picked out a radiant, juicy purple bud and brought it to his lips. He kissed it. Then, ever so gently, he touched the tip of the bud with the tip of his tongue. "Oh God," he moaned as he let his tongue roll around the tip of the bud, feeling the softness, the tenderness, the exquisite taste. "Oh, this is heaven!" he exclaimed, as he let the full length of the bud enter his mouth. His taste buds erupted with ecstasy and delight. Even his teeth tingled from the taste as the bud slipped over his tongue and into the back of his throat. "This is where I belong. This is what I've always wanted to do."

"Enjoy!" crooned Sheepshrink. "Just let yourself go." The words were hypnotic. Little Lamb was in another world, another place. "Are you happy?" The question penetrated the mantle of foggy ecstasy in Little Lamb's mind.

"Oh," he moaned. "Incredibly. I am unbelievably happy." Wave after wave of pleasure engulfed Little Lamb's body, surging and pulling. His eyes were closed. His head rocked gently back and forth as he let the waves carry him further into greater ecstasy. "How wonderful," he murmured.

Suddenly, abruptly, that ecstasy was violently shattered by a sudden charge that smashed into his body. A million and one atoms exploded as the surge of electricity violated his being. His body stiffened as his muscles went into violent spasms. The pain was incredibly severe, and there was no running from it. Little Lamb was frozen in his chair as one surge of electricity after another raped him.

Dr. Sheepshrink was smiling. He enjoyed manipulating the dials. He was in control, and he enjoyed it. He would turn the dial and watch Little Lamb's body violently go into spasms as the electricity surged into the young ram's body.

"Do you still like it"? He asked as he pulled another lever, increasing the current and forcing the little lamb into even greater spasm.

Little Lamb's jaw muscles shuddered as they quivered. He wanted to cry out, but the electricity kept him locked in spasm. He could not move. He could not run. He could not speak. He could not open his eyes to see what was happening. He was locked in a violent spasm. With all his strength and courage, somehow from deep in his being he was able to bring forth a guttural scream - - "STOP!" he cried. Tears flooded his eyes, slowly cracking the dam of his tightly closed lids, gently trickling down his cheek.

Dr. Sheepshrink gave one final twist on the dial. One final surge of electricity for good measure. Then he brought the dial back to zero.

Little Lamb's body stiffened one last time and then collapsed in his chair, the bowl of purple grass spilling on the floor by his feet. His body shook uncontrollably, violently. He trembled. There was not a muscle in his body that wasn't trembling; his eyelids, scalp, legs, arms, temples. All his muscles trembled from the severe spasm they had undergone. Suddenly, he began to sob. His chest heaved to inhale air that had been deprived him during the spasm. He gasped to take it into his oxygen starved body. And with each exhale, he sobbed. Tears flowed down his cheeks. All he could do was cry, sobbing hysterically.

"Did you enjoy that journey mit Purple Grass?" asked the psychiatrist.

Little Lamb continued to sob. "No," he whimpered.

"Are you ever going to touch purple grass again?" asked Sheepshrink.

His voice rising feverishly as he spoke. "Remember the pain dat comes mit purple grass. Neffer, effer touch it! Don't even tink about it. If you tink about it, the pain vill come back. I promise you, the pain vill come back, if you do anything so disgusting, so perverse as even tink about der purple grass. Vee have no room for schtinking tinking in your mind. Vee cast it out undt neffer tink dose kind of thoughts again. Because the pain - the pain vill come over your body undt you vill remember how much it hurts. You will neffer forget how much it hurts ven you even tink about purple grass.

Sheepshrink spun the dial back up to high, a final time, throwing Little Lamb into severe tetany, his muscles again locked in violent spasm. "Even der vord purple grass will giff you much pain," muttered the psychiatrist as he once again sadistically violated the little lambs body with electrical shock. "Always remember dis pain. You vill neffer, effer, tink of purple grass." He turned the machine off, leaving

Little Lamb shivering in his chair, trembling, crying, frightened and alone.

Sheepshrink opened the door to his office and began to walk out.

"Come back tomorrow," he said as he peered around the door. "Tomorrow, vee shall explore the pleasures in green grass, undt find out how to behave normally." He disappeared behind the closing door, leaving Little Lamb sobbing softly in his chair.

How black, black, how very black the night when a poor little lamb is lost. How empty, lonely, frightening is the world, when you look to others for a light to guide you to the path you've lost. Others who are in positions of authority, others who know more than you and their walls are covered with sheepskins. Others who society tells you to trust because they alone can lead you out of your darkness. How very black is the night when the one you trust blows out the tiny, feeble candle you were carrying to guide you on the path. The only light you had left. And now, you are betrayed. Abandoned in the dark. How frightening is the world when you're lost in the darkness and don't know how to go to find your way back home to yourself.

PURPLE GRASS

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Little Lamb sat for a long time in Dr. Sheepshrink's office. He was stunned. Not just from the electricity, but from the whole experience. He trusted the doctor. He trusted Momma and Poppa. Somehow, and he wasn't sure how, somehow his trust had been violated. His mind struggled to grasp the concept of trusting and being hurt at the same time. It just didn't seem to add up. When someone asks for your trust, they shouldn't hurt you. Little Lamb's whole body ached from the therapy. His muscles trembled. "Is this what life has to offer me?" he wondered. "Why do I always experience

pain when I'm looking for love and understanding. I want to please so very much. I want Momma and Poppa to be proud of me, to love me. I want to become who they want me to be. I want to make them happy. I'm trying my best, and yet I always seem to fail them. I even put my body through an ordeal today, so that they might say, 'This is my son, of whom I am proud.' Yet those words stick in their throats, and I fear I shall never hear those words, 'I'm proud of you, son.' I don't know how much more I can give."

He looked at the purple grass that had spilled at his feet. His body shuddered as he gazed. He closed his eyes to block it out. He could still feel the tingling in his hooves from the electro-shock. He opened his eyes and looked at the bowl of green grass on the desk before him. He shook again. Not from the memory of the shock. He just knew inside that he did not like green grass. He sniffed at it, his nostrils quivering as he inhaled the odor. He began choking and coughing, gasping for breath. This was not the kind of air he wanted to breath. "I don't know if I can ever get to like green grass," he lamented to himself. "But I'm going to try. I'm going to make Momma and Poppa proud of me. I've just got to."

The sun was setting as Little Lamb made his way home. He ran as he approached the front gate. "Got to be home on time," he thought to himself. "Can't make Poppa angry at me. He's angry enough. I can't handle any more of his anger. I'm afraid of what he might do to me if he let loose."

Momma greeted Little Lamb with a hug as he walked through the front door. It felt like a hug, yet there didn't seem to be much feeling behind it. As if it were a mother's duty - her obligation - but it didn't feel right. He felt as if he were hugging someone who was behind a stone wall. He could almost feel it, but not quite. "Come,"

she said, motioning towards the table, "sit down. We're just getting ready to have supper."

Little Lamb quickly took his place at the supper table, and bowed his head as Poppa said grace.

"Oh Great Creator," he began, "Thank you for your bountiful blessings. This food. This family. We pray that you will remove the heavy sin that hangs over this household. That you keep Little Lamb's hooves on the narrow path of righteousness. Forgive him, even though he doesn't deserve your forgiveness. Forgive him for his abomination. Forgive his most terrible of sins. Please don't let anyone in the flock know of his sin, lest the wrath of others fall upon this household. Bless this food to our bodies and to our spirit."

A hovering foreboding silence hung over the table like a heavy fog bank. No one spoke. The noise of silverware clanging on plates echoed inside the fog. Little Lamb was not hungry; food was the last thing his body needed.

"How was Dr. Sheepshrink?" Momma broke the silence.

"He says he can help me," replied Little Lamb.

"How much will it cost?" demanded Poppa.

"Oh hush," chided Momma. "Is that all you can think of? Money? Our boy is ill and needs help. Can't you realize that?"

"All I realize is that this boy does not fit in this family. His values are very different from mine and I don't care to support a young ram who doesn't believe and think and function as I do. I work hard for a living, butting my head into stone walls and nobody seems to care about that. Nobody says 'thank you'. What do I need to do? Get

sick and eat some purple grass so you will feel sorry for me and pay attention to the bread winner?"

"Please, Poppa," pleaded Momma, "give him a chance. This was only his first visit. Give him some time. You want to please Poppa, don't you?" She looked at Little Lamb.

He nodded his head slowly.

"We love you," she continued. "We only want the best for you."

"Can I be excused?" Asked Little Lamb. "I don't feel very good tonight. I think I'm coming down with the rumen flu. I just want to go to bed. I need to be fresh in the morning to meet with Dr. Sheepshrink again. We're working very hard and he's going to cure me so I will never, ever even think about purple grass."

"Of course," said Momma. "We understand."

Little Lamb went to bed, but did not sleep well. He tossed and turned and dreamed all night long, the hours painfully dragged slowly by. His mind was churning about the past day's experience. The rising sun brought no peace to his troubled mind. He rose and went downstairs for breakfast. There was little conversation between Little Lamb, Momma, or Poppa. The ominous quiet hung heavily over the table. A spoon touching a bowl sounded like a loud thunderous explosion, shattering the silence. Little Lamb had no appetite and was relieved to hear Momma say, "I think it's time for you to leave for your appointment with Dr. Sheepshrink. You don't want to be late, you know." He raced out of the house, happy to leave that frightening silence that he called home.

He finally sat before Dr. Sheepshrink once again. Sheepshrink squinted through his pinch-on glasses at the little lamb seated before him. "Now then," he began, "Ve vill begin vere ve left off yesterday." He rose from behind his desk and began attaching the electrodes once again to Little Lamb's legs. "Oh no, not again," pleaded Little Lamb. "I promise I've been good. I didn't even think about what I wasn't supposed to think about. I can't even remember the name of what I was supposed to not think about. See, I've forgotten it completely."

"Let me refresh your memory," said Sheepshrink as he sat behind his desk once again. He opened his desk drawer and pulled out two bowls. "Remember this?" The psychiatrist pushed the bowl of purple grass towards Little Lamb. "Don't you want to smell it?" Sheepshrink's hoof rested on the electrical dial. "Try it", he taunted. "You'll like it."

"No! No!" screamed Little Lamb. "Get that away from me!" He turned in his chair, trying to climb over the back to get away from the purple grass. "No more. Please no more."

"Not even just a little?" Sheepshrink turned the electric dial just a little bit. Enough to give an unpleasant tingle to Little Lamb.

"Not even just a little," shrieked Little Lamb in terror. "Get it away from me." He began crying. Sobbing. Shaking his head from side to side.

Have you learned your lesson?" asked Sheepshrink.

"Oh, yes! yes!" cried Little Lamb softly.

"Goot," said the doctor. "You learn qvickly. Now, I haffe someting goot for you. Someting you vill really enjoy." He pushed the other bowl towards Little Lamb. "A big bowl of pure, healthy green grass. Someting all young rams need."

Little Lamb watched as the psychiatrist pushed the bowl towards him. He grimaced and shuddered.

"Smell it," commanded Sheepshrink. "Take in a healthy aroma for a change. It's goot for you. Trust me. I know vat is goot for you."

Little Lamb tried hard, he really did, but the aroma caused him to cough and wheeze and gasp for air.

"Touch it," commanded Sheepshrink. "Feel it between your hooves. Feel how goot it feels."

Little Lamb closed his eyes. What it felt like to him was cold, wet spring days in the barnyard when the rain had softened the manure and it mixed with the mud and oozed between your toes when you walked. And you could not get away from that stinky, sticky mess between your toes. The manure of the entire flock, stuck between your toes. How repulsive.

"Feels good, doesn't it?" Sheepshrink's voice echoed inside his brain. "Now taste it," he commanded. "Green grass is someting all young rams seek out. It's part of their hormones. It's part of their nature. It is natural and it is goot. The Creator put green grass here for young rams to feed on undt grow strong. It is natural and it is goot. Now eat some."

Little Lamb brought his hoof to his mouth. He put some green grass on his tongue. He held his breath, not wanting to inhale the odor. By holding his breath, he

would not fully taste the green grass in his mouth. As his saliva began softening and melting the green grass on his tongue, the only thought Little Lamb could think of was "the manure of the entire flock, stuck between your toes and now it is in my mouth." Little Lamb shuddered. He hated the taste. It didn't belong in his mouth. It sickened him inside.

"Ya, it's goot, isn't it?" Asked Sheepshrink. "It's goot for you. Now swallow it."

Little Lamb tried, but there are some things in life you just can't swallow. He forced it to the back of his throat and tried to swallow, but it no sooner went down than his rumen violently rejected it. The same reflex reaction that had gone on so often at the family table happened in the doctor's office. He gagged and retched, expelling the small clump of green grass along with the fermented contents of his rumen, expelling this stinking, steaming, swirling mass all over the desk of Dr. Sheepshrink.

The good doctor was startled, never expecting such a reaction to his therapy. He was caught off guard as the river of vomit spilled off his desk, flowing into his lap, soiling his dark gray pin striped suit, seeping into his wool. "Ach der Lieberstein!" he shouted angrily. "Look at what you have done to me! You are a very, very sick sheep. Dere is only vun way to deal mit a sickness such as yours." He left the room, returning a few minutes later wearing a new suit and carrying a needle and syringe in his hoof.

"Do you see dis?" He waved the syringe before Little Lamb's nose. "Dis is a drug called apomorphine. I only use it on de sickest of der sick, ven I am pushed to my limits and must use desperate methods in my treatment. It is an emetic. It makes you vomit when I inject it into your body. Ve haff to fight fire mit fire. If you are

going to vomit over eating green grass, you are going to vomit ten times worse ven you eat purple grass. You still like dat schtinking purple grass stuff and I am going to make you so sick to your stomach, dat your stomach vill beg for green grass. Vee are going to overstimulate der emetic center in your brain, so you vill hate purple grass, and it vill make you sick. Vee vill make you so-o sick." He pushed the bowl of purple grass toward Little Lamb and started to prepare the back of the young ram's arm for the injection.

"Stop!" screamed Little Lamb. "I'm not sick at all. You're making me sick. You and everyone in this fuckin' flock make me sick to my stomach. My only problem is I don't have the same tastes as you do. That doesn't make me wrong. I just have a different taste. You say I'm not healthy. What you're doing to me is horribly unhealthy. Terribly wrong. You have no right to violate my body like this. You have no right to play games with my mind. Your aversion therapy is sick. You like what you do. You like playing mind trips with innocent young lambs. I'm sorry, but I can't allow you to make me the sick one. It's the society I live in that's sick. You sheep are all sick, because you can't find room in your flock for one young ram who is different. You're so frightened to find out that you're not all the same. Well, I'm living proof. We're not all the same. I am me and I am unique. There is not another sheep in the world quite like me. I need to like me. More than that, I need to love me. Even if I am different than any other sheep, I need to love who I am, and you're not helping me in my search. Electro-shock and aversion therapy. That's sick."

Sheepshrink stepped back a bit. He was dumfounded at the resistance. "You are in denial," he shot back. You don't see your sickness. You don't see the

stinking tinkling trap you are in. Look at my diplomas. I have the authority. I have the recognition of the world. I am right in my tinkling. You are wrong. But den, you are only a stupid lamb, who vill not follow. I must report to your Momma and Poppa that I cannot help you. Your perversion runs too deep. You are much sicker dan any sheep I have effer treated. You are beyond treatment. Get out of my office, you insolent, ungrateful, unlovable, perverted sheep. I cannot help you, you poor wretched creature."

With that comment, Little Lamb leaped out of his chair and ran out the door, trembling as he fled. "Oh, my God!" he thought. "What have I done? What have I said? I don't know if there's any hope for me now." He was frightened, thoroughly frightened. "Where to go now?" he wondered. "The church. The church," he thought. "That's where the hope is. The church has always been a home for the hopeless. A haven for the helpless. A source of light for the lost. A source of strength for the weary. I am all of that and more," he cried. "The church will help me. I need the Great Creator. I need to find the Good Shepherd to guide me. That is the light I need."

Little Lamb raced from Dr. Sheepshrink's office onto the path, that familiar path that he had trod so often to learn the message from the Great Book. That path that led to the source of all wisdom and knowledge. That path would lead him to the truth. "Of course," thought Little Lamb. "This is the place to do battle with sin. The Holy Temple. Why didn't I think of this before? The High Holy One, the Most Reverend. He is the wisest of the sheep. He is the chosen of the Great Creator. He has the answers. He has the solution to my problem."

He raced up the huge granite steps that led to the massive oak doors. He opened them and entered the sanctuary. There was a solemn stillness here. This was a

place of peace, a place to bring your problems and leave them on the altar, and depart much lighter, for your heavy burden has been removed. The ultimate place for forgiveness. "This is the home of the Great Creator," thought Little Lamb. He fell to his knees before the altar, bowed his head and began to cry. "Oh, Great Creator," he wailed, "please help me for I have sinned and I know not where to go anymore. I carry this curse inside of me and I don't know how to get rid of it. It follows me wherever I go. It nags at my brain, and try as I may to stuff it away, those thoughts keep coming back into my consciousness. Those unclean thoughts. Those sinful thoughts. Those unhealthy thoughts about purple grass. I try so hard to be good. I try so hard to honor my father and mother. I try so hard to please them and be the good little sheep that they deserve. I try so hard, and yet I fail. Please help me. Please hear me. Please give me an answer."

His voice echoed throughout the empty sanctuary. The sun shone brightly through the hayloft doors above, streaming its golden rays on the altar and the small figure of a desolate, despised, frightened, lonely little lamb.

"My son". The words startled the little lamb as he felt a gentle hoof on his shoulder. He turned to see the Most Reverend standing behind him. "My son," the Holy One said kindly. "Why are you troubled? I heard your words of pain. No young lamb should carry such a burden. Tell me of your troubles that I might heal you."

The little lamb shook his head sadly. "I cannot tell you. It's a secret that only I must carry. To tell you would make you disappointed with me. It's bad enough that I am disappointed with me. I struggle so hard, and yet I fail."

"I am the messenger of the Great Creator. I study His Word. As His messenger, I bring His Word to you. His Word is good. His Word can heal your pain.

Nothing is so terrible in His eyes, but that it cannot be forgiven. No sin is too great. No burden too heavy. Trust me. I have the power to take away your sin. I am your path to the Great Creator. "

He put his arm around the shoulder of the Little Lamb. It felt so good. He looked so wise. So kind. So loving. So understanding. "Surely, he must be the path to the Great Creator," thought Little Lamb. "Perhaps he can heal the hurt that I have been carrying inside for so long. Perhaps he can lift my burden. Perhaps he can be trusted."

"I have sinned, most Holy One," cried the Little Lamb. "I have sinned against the word of the Great Creator."

"And how have you sinned?" Asked the Holy One, standing in front of Little Lamb, looking at him in his eyes,

"I dare not even say the sin in this holy place," said Little Lamb.

"You may speak," replied the Holy One, so very kindly, with so much understanding. "In this sanctuary, sin is exposed so it can be corrected. It is part of the Holy Book that you confess of your sins, and do it in the house of the Great Creator where He can hear you. Speak. Confess of your sins to me."

"I," Little Lamb stammered and looked down at his feet. "I have eaten Purple Grass."

There was a sudden gasp from the lips of the Holy One. He tried to cover it up by bringing his hoof to his mouth, but Little Lamb heard the gasp. "That, is a great sin," exclaimed the Holy One. "How many times have you eaten Purple Grass?"

"Several times", sighed Little Lamb.

"This is very serious," replied the Holy One, pondering his words as he spoke. "Do you wish to pay penance for your sins?" He asked. "Do you wish to be forgiven?"

"Oh Yes!" blurted out Little Lamb through his tears.

"Are you contrite in heart and heartily sorry for these your misdoings," questioned the Holy One.

"Oh, Yes," bleated the Little Lamb. "Yes. Yes. I am heartily sorry for what I have done. I am contrite in heart."

"Penance for this sin," continued the Holy One, "is most severe, for this is one of the most severe sins a little lamb could commit. Are you prepared for severe penance?"

"Yes, I am," replied Little Lamb, looking at the Holy One through tear-stained eyes. "I need to be forgiven. Whatever the price I need to pay, I need to be forgiven, for I have sinned." Little Lamb fell to his knees before the Most Reverend.

"The altar is the sacred place for sacrifice," said the Holy One. "Where we offer all that we have to the Great Creator, for he is the ultimate Father and Master. We give of ourselves to the Great Creator, so that He may use us in His master plan. We give our will to him. It is no longer our own, but belongs to the Mightiest of Mighty's. Are you prepared to give up your will to your Creator. To your Heavenly Father?"

"Yes", cried Little Lamb.

"Lie down on the altar", commanded the Holy One.

Little Lamb crawled up on the altar. He was frightened. He remembered the tail-docking ceremony as he before this very altar. He remembered the

pain when he sacrificed that part of his body that used to wave happily in the breeze as he ran through the meadow. Now, the High Holy One was asking him to sacrifice more. His will. How much more of his body did he have to give to the Great Creator? Little Lamb lay on that altar in silence and in fear. No, fear is not the right word. Little Lamb lay on that altar in terror.

The Holy One moved down to a large ornamental box which rested before the chancel rail. As he opened it, the lid fell to the side with a loud crash. Little Lamb jumped at the noise. The Holy One removed something from the box, but Little Lamb could not see what it was, for he was lying on his stomach on the altar.

As the Holy One approached the altar, Little Lamb heard the rustling of his robes echo through the stillness of the sanctuary. He could see the hooves of the Holy One protruding beneath the scarlet red robes he wore. The Holy One held something in his hand, something that seemed to blend in with the folds of his garments and trailed behind him. "It is written," began the old ram, "'spare the rod and spoil the child.' Sinful thoughts come only from the mind of an undisciplined, spoiled child. The penance for purple grass is flogging. Whipping. This sin must be driven out of your body. It is there because evil lives within you. It is the sin of evil that you carry, and it must be driven out of you. We must punish the evil, but not the lamb. Pray that the pain of the flogging shall render you free from your heinous sin and your abomination shall flee your body and mind. Close your eyes and pray to the Great Creator that I have the strength to drive this evil from your body."

Little Lamb closed his eyes tightly. "Oh, Great Creator", he prayed. "Please help the Holy One drive the evil from me. Help me, for I have sinned."

"Whaap." The whip cracked across Little Lamb's shoulder. The pain was excruciating as the whip crack echoed throughout the sanctuary of the Holy Temple and the sanctuary of the mind of a frightened, lonely, confused little lamb.

"Please forgive me, oh Great Creator, for I have -"

"Whaap." The whip struck again, this time across the flat of the Little Lamb's back.

"Our Good Shepherd was flogged for sins he did not commit," said the Most Reverend. "He was sinless and yet he was flogged when he knew he was going to die. You have sinned and deserve to be flogged, and it is through the flogging that you shall identify with the Good Shepherd. You as a sinner shall know how he felt, though he was without sin. It is through that identification that you shall know forgiveness and you shall be purged of your sin of eating purple grass."

"Whaap."

"That's three", cried the old ram.

"Whaap."

Little Lamb screamed in pain. He felt a trickle on his shoulder and opened his eyes to see blood dripping from his shoulder onto the altar. "Stop!" he screamed, glaring at the Holy One that stood before him. "Am I asked to give the ultimate sacrifice? Do you want my blood all over this altar. Is that the kind of atonement you ask for? Do you need to beat me for my sins? Is that what forgiveness is all about? That I bleed and maybe die for being me?"

"Your penance is not yet complete," said the old ram sternly to the Little Lamb. "I am not finished with you."

"My penance is complete," shot back the Little Lamb. "I don't know what price you're putting on my sins, but it's too high a price for me to pay. If that is what the Great Creator demands for penance, then I don't need the Great Creator in my life. I curse you, for trying to destroy who I am. Damn you anyhow. Damn the Creator for creating me. I curse both of you."

"Blasphemy!" cried the Most Reverend, waving his arms in the air. The folds of his robes flapping like angels' wings. "Taking the name of the Great Creator in vain. And in his Holy Temple as well. That is blasphemy. You are doomed to spend eternity in hell for your blasphemy and your sin. Your abomination." He raised his hand again trying to strike the Little Lamb with the cat o' nine tail whip, but Little Lamb jerked it from his hoof.

"You'll not do that to me, ever again," cried the Little Lamb in anger. "You can take your whip and your credences and your pontificating platitudes and rot in hell. You're not my leader, not my spiritual leader. You're not fit to lead anybody anywhere."

"Get out of the house of the Great Creator!" screamed the Holy One. His face was beet red, the veins in his neck stood out like ropes. They throbbed and pulsated with each angry heartbeat. "You have desecrated holy ground with your blasphemy and sin of eating purple grass. You have no place in a hallowed temple like this. There is no temple on this earth that is large enough to hold your sin of blasphemy and purple grass. You are cursed. Despicably cursed by me and by the Great Creator. May He have mercy on your soul. You are damned for all eternity and may you rot in hell for who you are and what you stand for. You vile, filthy creature. Get out of my

sight and never darken these hallowed halls with your presence again. Get out of here. Get out! Get out!" he screamed in a fervored pitch, his voice rising in a crescendo as he screamed, over and over. "Get out of here! Get out!"

His words thundered in the huge sanctuary. A few parishioners coming for evening vespers were startled, seeing the Holy One shouting and screaming at the fleeing Little Lamb. They gossiped amongst themselves about Little Lamb, about what he must have done to evoke the wrath of the simple, kind, understanding, loving Holy Leader of the flock.

PURPLE GRASS

CHAPTER 14

Little Lamb ran down the huge steps of the Holy Temple, past the startled glances of sheep coming for evening vespers. The angry words of the Holy One echoed through the huge oak doors. "Get out! Get out!" They thundered with all the hell-fire and brimstone the old ram could muster. They drowned out the rattling of Little Lamb's hooves as he raced down the granite steps. The words followed him as his hooves struck the quiet, soft earth of the path. Even when he ran several blocks away, the words still echoed in his mind. He put his hooves to his ears trying to block the sound, but they chased him as he ran. Those words were permanently burned in his mind.

"Where to go", wondered Little Lamb in despair. He had destroyed the last shred of hope he had of remaining in this flock. The word would be out. Enough sheep heard and saw. It would be just a matter of time before Momma and Poppa found out. Little Lamb couldn't bear the thought of hurting Momma and Poppa, of being there when they heard the news. He didn't want to let them down. He didn't want to be there

when they found out. He had to get away, but there was nowhere to go, and no turning back.

A large red bloodstain on his shoulder stood out in stark contrast against his white wool. The other sheep had to wonder why Little Lamb was bleeding; why was he running. Several tried to stop him on the path, but he raced on past them without comment. Nothing he could say would change his destiny. The damage had been done. He had done it. "What a terrible little lamb I am," he thought as he raced up the path to his home. "My home," he thought. "No," his thoughts continued as he shook his head. "Not any more. I don't belong there. It's no longer a place I feel safe in. It's not home. I don't know where to go, but I can't stay there."

He ran through the front door. No one was home. "Good," he thought. "Poppa's still at work, and Momma's playing tennis with the ewes. Thank God they don't have to see me like this."

He ran up the stairs to his room and hastily threw a few belongings into a bag. He looked around the place he knew so well. All the things that had made up his life were in this room: his pictures, his mementoes, his treasures. All here, and he had to leave. He had to leave everything he loved, everything that was valuable and important to him. He wanted to cry. The sadness was just beneath the surface, just waiting for the tiniest scratch to open the flood gates to his feelings and they would come rushing forth. But Little Lamb kept the gates closed. There was no time for sadness. Not now. Only time to do what had to be done. Just gather enough things to get him by for a while. Enough to survive.

"Got to get out of here before Momma and Poppa return," he thought.

"But I can't just leave without telling them something. I can't just disappear and fall off the face of the earth without saying good-bye."

Sitting down at his desk, he took out a pen and paper, and fighting back the tears, began writing the most difficult letter he had ever written.

'Dear Momma and dear Poppa,

You always taught me to stand up for what I believe in. To search deep within when I was not sure what I believed in; to search deep and find the truth, and stand up for that truth. Even in the presence of the bullies of the world, to stand up for the truth that is within me. Oh, Momma and Poppa, the world is full of bullies that terrify me, and cause me to run in fear from them. To lie. To deceive. I was taught, "this above all else - to thine own self be true, thou can'st not then be false to no man." I have reached a crossroads in my life where I cannot run any longer. I cannot lie. I cannot deceive. I cannot be false anymore. I need to claim these feelings as my own. I cannot pretend that they do not exist. I cannot push them deep into the corners of my mind, hoping someday they will go away. Try as I may to run from them, I can no longer do that. I need to claim ownership for my feelings. I need to be true to myself. I need to start learning to love - - me.

The sheep shrink raped my body with electricity, shocking me into convulsions trying to condition me. To try to take away that which was a basic part of me, Purple Grass. When that didn't work, he wanted to give me drugs that would make me sick to my stomach.

I fled to the Holy One for help. He is not the kind, gentle old ram you believe in. When I confessed my innermost feelings to him, he did not preach love and compassion to me. He flogged me. He shouted hell-fire and damnation in my face. He screamed at me that I have sinned. That I am unworthy and unclean in the eyes of the Great Creator. He cast me out of the Great Temple. The young rams ridicule me, and I see fear and hatred in their eyes when they pass me by. Does no one understand? Does no one know the inner churning and turmoil I live with every moment of my life? The inner hatred I have for me, trying to please? Trying to be somebody that I cannot possibly be? I have tried. God knows, I have tried. And I have failed. I tried your way; so very hard, and I have failed. I cannot continue to live my life as a failure. Some place, somewhere, there must be room for a little lamb who likes purple grass. But that place and that room is not here. This world, your world, has no place for me. There is no room for a little lamb who likes purple grass in your world.

I have to find a world where there is room for my kind. I need to find love and acceptance, somewhere. Do you understand? Do you know how much this hurts me? Do you know the pain and agony I go through every day I live my life as a lie? Enough! Enough. I cannot do this anymore.

I love you, so very much. I want you to know that. I always have and I always will. The last thing in the world I want to do is hurt either of you. If I stay here in the flock, I know you will experience more pain, and I love you too much to let that happen. It is easier for me to just disappear from the flock. To leave the home that I have known since I was born. To prevent further pain and more embarrassment to you, I have made the decision to leave tonight. I cannot bear to see the look in your eyes if I

told you in person, and so I chose the easy way out by writing you this letter. Even though you may feel it's the coward's way, it's the bravest thing I've ever done in my life.

I'm terribly frightened. I don't know what's out there. I don't know where I'll stay, or what I'll do. But I know it's the only choice I have. You taught me how to be brave, Poppa. How not to cry. Well, I'm crying now because it hurts so much. But even through the tears, I feel pride starting inside me. I want to stand up and say, "I like purple grass," and not feel like I have to run and hide somewhere. I know this is hard for you to understand, but please believe me, I do love you. I love you very much.

I need to go away, and be by myself. To discover who I am. To discover and be friends with that little voice that lives inside of me. That little voice that says, "Come. Become." I must be true to myself. I have been false far too long. I need to find room to be true.

Don't worry about me. You taught me well. I'm a survivor. I'm a winner. After I discover who I am, and what I am, I'll let you know where I am.

I love you Momma.

I love you Poppa.

I hope you can love me too.

Goodbye & All My Love,

Your little lamb.'

He put the pen down. His lower lip quivered as he re-read his words, blinking back the tears. Slowly, he folded his arms over the paper and gently lowered his

head until it rested on his arms and the tears gently fell on his words below. No one in the flock would ever know the pain this poor little lamb was going through. All he wanted was acceptance . . for who he was. All he needed was love from those he loved so dearly; his Mother and his Father. Is that asking so much?

The only message that was written on those pages of his little black book was "Get out." We have no room in our flock . . No room for a little lamb like you. There is no love or acceptance for a little lamb . . . who likes purple grass.

PURPLE GRASS

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

And so the little lamb disappeared, from momma, from poppa, from the flock. He just disappeared. He was lost and on a journey, trying to find that lost little lamb within. "Leave him alone, and he'll come home ". Where do little lambs go when there is no home to come home to? Little lamb has lost his sheep and doesn't know where to find him.

Little Lamb disappeared from the flock and ran to the anonymity of the big city, a place where little lost lambs go to search, hoping to find that part inside of them that was lost somewhere along the path of their life. There are many lost little lambs in the city. It's an easy place to go and disappear when you become lost. But it can also be a place to begin. A place where no one knows you or who you should be. A place where you can either lose yourself further, or begin the journey of discovering who you are.

Little Lamb began to carve out his niche in life. He had a home to call his own. He was poor. His possessions were few and meager, but for the first time in his

life, he could call things his own. A sense of pride was developing in him as he discovered he could survive on his own. He had the ability. He could read page one in his inner book and say, "I am a survivor".

Little Lamb walked many paths as he journeyed through life. After satisfying the need to find a job and a place to call home, he began to explore the vastness of the city. In his odyssey, he discovered that he was not the only little lamb who liked purple grass. There was a whole network of sheep who thought and felt just like he did. At last, he discovered that he was not alone. There were many just like him in that part of the city where Little Lamb lived. A small but growing community called "Lavender Heights." And they all liked purple grass. The sheep would gather at different watering holes, that to the outsider, looked like green grass watering holes. But when you walked through the doors, it was a very different world.

There, in the bar was purple grass in so many shapes and styles it made Little Lamb's head spin with delirium. Bowls of purple grass, mugs of purple grass, purple grass cocktails, salads, hors d'oeu-vre, shakes, perfumes, tonics. Whatever the mind could devise, it was there in some way, shape or form. When Little Lamb discovered this here-to-fore unknown banquet table, he gorged himself. He could not get enough. He experimented. New-found friends would tell him, "Try this," and he would. He overindulged to the point his life began to suffer. He stayed out until the early dawn hours, partying, rolling in purple grass, covering himself from head to toe in it. He neglected his eating habits, thinking only of purple grass. It occupied his thoughts at work. He could only think of how many minutes to the end of the workday so he could indulge in his favorite pastime.

He met so many sheep that were into different forms of enjoying purple grass. Little Lamb never knew there was so much variety while he lived with the flock. He discovered were sheep that liked wearing other hides beside their own. There were motorcycle sheep, cowboy sheep, preppie sheep, sheep that called themselves queens, nellie sheep, dyke sheep, lumberjack sheep, old sheep, young sheep, male sheep, female sheep, black sheep, white sheep, disco sheep even sheep that reminded Little Lamb of Mona the Monarch because they wore such elegant clothes. The list went on and on. Each day brought a new experience for the Little Lamb. He did not like all the sheep he encountered, but there was a common thread woven in the fabric that they all shared. They all liked purple grass, and they gathered together to find strength in unity. To know they were not alone with their feelings.

As time went by, Little Lamb started to temper his life with moderation and he began to feel better. He slept regularly and ate well balanced meals. He worked hard and concentrated on his job, putting purple grass in the back of his mind. He discovered there were other things in life equally as important as purple grass. But when he first discovered purple grass, he felt like a sheep that had been deprived of water his entire life. His thirst and dehydration was tremendous. His cravings were intense. All he could think about was cool, refreshing water to satisfy his thirst. Mirages popped up all over his life. Then, suddenly, he discovered a huge lake, with all the water he could possibly ever want. He jumped in, drank until he could hold no more, splashed in it, rolled in it. He overindulged and Little Lamb discovered if he was not careful, he could drown in the huge body of water. But, Little Lamb did not drown. He grew further in stature, mind and spirit, balancing the essential ingredients of his life. His needs. His

wants. His responsibilities. Oh, he became a fine specimen, a handsome, strong, creative young ram.

He often thought about the flock. About Momma and Poppa. He wanted to return home, but held back. What was accepted in the city of Lavender Heights, would never be accepted in the flock. He resigned himself to the idea that you can never go back home. And so his world became the city and his life blended with the lives of so many little lambs, all looking for the same things: Love. Acceptance. Approval. That's not asking for too much, is it?

PURPLE GRASS

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

It had been a good evening for the little lamb. He had seen many of his friends at the bar called "The Ram". But now the hour was late and he was tired. As he trotted down the path that led to his home, he felt an overwhelming sense of happiness and peace. He no longer felt like an outsider trying to fit in. He had found a world where he belonged. He had a right to be here. He looked up into the heavens. The sky was ablaze with stars. The moon bathed the road in a bright blue light, showing him the way. Little Lamb inhaled deeply, enjoying the cool dampness of the night air. It smelled clean. It smelled fresh. He was glad to be alive, and skipped merrily down the road in the moonlight.

As he walked, Little Lamb passed a shadowy figure of another sheep lying by the side of the road, huddled in a fetal position, curled up in a tiny little ball. All Little Lamb could see was the back of this curled-up sheep. The mass, partially hidden in the shadows of the trees, moaned as he passed by. Little Lamb paused for a moment, staring at the huddled form lying by the side of the road. A soft whimpering came from the shadows, like a child crying. Little Lamb walked a bit farther down the road, but the quiet moan kept ringing in his ears like a haunting melody. It was a sound he could not ignore. He stopped and looked back.

"What should I do?" he thought. "Someone is lying by the side of the road crying, moaning. It sounds like he is hurting. But I'm tired. It's been a long day and I've got to get up and go to work in the morning. Do I want to become involved? Why? Who is this to me? Why should I care? There are many sheep in this world that can stop and care for someone lying beside the path. Why me? What's my reward?"

Little Lamb looked at the crumpled figure lying beside the road. It lay so still, so death-like. Only an ever so slight rise and fall of the chest with the slow, labored breathing revealed that this poor creature still struggled to survive. Occasionally a soft moan floated on the evening breeze across the path. The little lamb looked up at the stars, perhaps searching for an answer, perhaps searching for an excuse. He looked up and down the road, his eyes trying to penetrate the darkness. The road was empty. No one else was there. Just the little lamb, the huddled mass of an unknown sheep, the stars, and the vastness of the Universe. Two creatures brought together, two creations at the same point in time, at the same point in space. The little lamb looked at the huddled form, then looked back at the stars. Projecting his thoughts outward into the Universe looking for answers to questions one does not care to ask. In a moment of silence, in a moment of peace, in a moment of solitude, the little lamb heard a quiet voice from deep within him speak softly, yet un-mistakingly clear. "If not me, then who? If not now, then when?" it said. Little lamb pondered the meaning in the message. He gazed into the heavens. "Not me. Not now," he thought.

"Who? When?" came the reply.

The little lamb took a deep breath and looked up and down the path, hoping that someone would be walking along who could relieve him of the task. There was no one. "I guess it's up to me," he said shrugging his shoulders and began walking toward the huddled sheep on the ground.

"What a wretched creature," thought the little lamb as he approached the downed sheep. "Just look at him," he thought. "There's nothing to him. He's just bones, with some loose fur hanging on them. There's nothing left of him anymore. He's just a

skeleton with all the life drained from him. He probably wasted his money and life on drinks. Probably never did anything worthwhile in his entire life. Why am I doing this for some wretched creature that doesn't even care about his own life? Why should I get involved?" The closer Little Lamb got, the more emaciation - the more of the wasting could be seen. The sheep on the ground shivered in the cool night air. His body trembled, struggling to keep warm. Little lamb cautiously extended his hoof to touch the poor wretched creature. "Are you all right?" he asked, as he touched the back of the unknown. The recumbent sheep moaned again softly as he rolled over to see who was by his side. The eyes were sunken in their sockets, the whites reddened with congestion. The eyelids struggled to open even wider, fighting against the gummy matter that tried to seal them shut for eternity. As they parted, green pus hung like lacy cobwebs drooping on the eyes. The look in those eyes was so far distant that they did not even reflect life. They revealed the empty staring of death. The muscles of the face had deteriorated so badly that the face itself looked like death. A skeleton with wet tissue paper covering the bones, sinking into all of the crevices of the skull. Thick, tenacious green mucus had accumulated around the nose, and moved in and out of the nostrils with each breath, making a sickening bubbling sound. As each bubble burst, the fetid mass fell silently to the earth below. A hoarse raspiness rattled from the chest with each breath. The smell of wet wool mingled with the stench of diarrhea. The entire backside of the emaciated sheep was smeared with the foul stuff. Little Lamb took in the entire sight in a fraction of a second. The grotesque image of what he saw was forever burned in his mind.

Suddenly, through all the grotesqueness, through all the wretchedness, through all the terrifying sights Little Lamb was seeing, there came a sudden impact of awareness; a jolt

of recognition that rocked him to the very depths of his soul. "Oh, my God," he moaned in agony. His eyes filled with tears as he reached down and touched the sallow face lying before him. "Billy!" he cried. "Oh, my God. Billy. Billy. Billy." He cradled the head of his friend in his arms, rocking back and forth, softly crying over and over again. "Billy. Billy. Billy." He closed his eyes for a moment as he rocked his friend. A thousand thoughts and vivid memories exploded in his mind. "This strong, handsome idol of his youth that once carried the head chalice with muscles bulging, this chosen one of the High Holy One, this symbol of all the hopes for the future of the flock, this once proud, promising leader of young rams . . . How can this be? This is not real! I'm dreaming. Open my eyes and the nightmare is over." He opened his eyes, and through foggy tears, he saw what remained of the once proud, handsome, hero of his youth. He was holding those remains. This was no dream. The nightmare was real and he was living it.

Eyes that stared distantly out into space struggled to focus on this new figure that had entered his life. Billy blinked lazily, as if in a drunken stupor, trying to see who was holding him. "Oh," whispered Billy weakly. "It's you,," he exclaimed as a smile spread weakly across his face. "I'm so glad you're here." The words were spoken with great difficulty through parched, cracked lips, that faltered on each syllable releasing it only after much pain.

"What happened to you?" asked the little lamb.

Billy licked his lips with his tongue, trying to lubricate them so they could speak the words that lay buried within. He attempted to swallow, but found there was nothing to

swallow. His mouth was dry. He looked at the friend holding him and slowly and deliberately said, "I have the wasting disease."

"Oh, Billy!" gasped the little lamb. A thousand thoughts went through his mind in a fraction of a second. His first impulse was to drop his friend in his own manure and go running down the path screaming, "No! No! Not you. Not here. Not now. Get away from me. Don't tell me things like this. I don't want to hear it. I don't want to know it." At the same time, his mind was flooded with the thoughts of "Why? How? Not you! I'm so sorry! I don't know what to do. I'm so helpless. What if I get it from you? I don't want to die. I don't want this disease. I'm afraid. I want to run and hide. Why me? God, why me?"

Billy reached up and touched the arm of the little lamb that was holding him. "I'm glad you're here," he said. "I've laid here all day." Speaking for Billy was a great effort. He could only say a few words before he was exhausted. He would pause after several words and breathe. There was a sense of desperation with each breath. A struggle to force the air into his lungs. Each inhale was accompanied by terrible sounding rattle deep in Billy's chest. Each exhale produced an even more ominous rattle of impending doom. "I'm so weak," he gasped. "Too weak to move. So many have passed me by." He coughed and the mucous rattled in the windpipe, for the cough was not even strong enough to expel this poisonous waste from his chest. "Very few would even look at me, and those that did;" Billy paused to breath . . . "pretended like they never saw me. They just walked right on by. Only you stopped." His lower lip quivered and trembled as he looked at Little Lamb. "I'm so glad you're here." Billy went through all the motions of crying, but the tears were not there. He was so dehydrated from the diarrhea that there

were no tears. He was so ill that he could not even get relief from his emotional pain by crying.

Little Lamb looked into the face of his friend. Their eyes met and said ten thousand things without a single word being spoken. Billy's eyes said, "I need." And the little lamb's eyes responded with, "I can, and I will."

Billy opened his mouth to speak. Just forming the words with his lips took great effort. "I'm thirsty." he whispered. "I'm so very thirsty. May I please have a drink?"

Little Lamb blinked back the tears that formed in his eyes. "Oh my God," he thought. "this - - this is my friend I hold. How did he - - get to be like this? Water. He needs water." He slid his arms under Billy. He felt the moisture of the fetid diarrhea touch his arm.

"The stream is nearby," said the little lamb. "I'll carry you there. Hold on." And Little Lamb rose slowly, holding his frail, fragile friend. Carefully, he made his way down the path through the grove of Eucalyptus trees. The scent from the trees was sweet and hung in the night air like the finest perfume. "How can the world be so beautiful and so ugly at the same time?" wondered the little lamb. "What kind of a Creator can make such beauty and such horror in the same place?"

As he approached the slowly moving stream, he could hear the resonating croaking of the frogs serenading the moon. The cat tails on the nearby shore waved gently in the evening breeze. The moon was reflected in the gentle ripples of the water as the stream moved on its endless, tireless journey. "So peaceful and serene," thought Little Lamb. "How can this be? It isn't fair." He tenderly lay Billy in the soft marsh grass by the side

of the stream, and gently cradling his head, guided Billy's mouth to the cool, refreshing waters. "Drink, my friend." said Little Lamb.

The cool wetness of the water was like heaven when it touched Billy's parched lips. How sweet water can be when you are thirsty! How precious the ordinary things of life become when we no longer have them. The very basics become so important when they are slipping out of our lives. Billy slowly stretched out his tongue and lapped weakly at the cool stream water. At times, the throat mechanics would not swallow as the water reached his pharynx, and Billy would cough. Little Lamb could hear the rattle deep within Billy's chest as he coughed. The buildup of fluids that comes with pneumonia produced an ominous sound that made Little Lamb clear his own throat and cough as if he were trying to help Billy get rid of that thick tenacious mucus.

Billy paused to breath. It was labored. It was deliberate. "Ohh," he sighed, "that tastes so good." He rested his head on the stream bank. He was so weak, so tired. The mere act of drinking sapped so much of his strength that he was exhausted.

Little Lamb repositioned himself and cradled Billy's head in his lap. Dipping his foot in the slow moving stream, wetting the fur of his forearm he wiped Billy's eyes with the cool water. The mucus clung stubbornly to his eyelids. Gently yet persistently, working in the light of the moon, the little lamb patiently and lovingly cleaned Billy's eyes so that he could see. The two looked at each other. A bond was forming, a very special bond that few ever experience. When one is terribly weak, helpless and so utterly and completely dependent on another, you lose that which you have spent your life building: Your independence. You need another for your survival. And if another can respond to those vulnerable feelings of helplessness and dependency with a gift of love, then this is

the treasured bond I speak of. The bond of unconditional love. To be able give of yourself, so totally and completely to one who needs and not ask for anything in return. A bonding so special is born that can only compare to a mother and her newborn. Such complete dependency, such vulnerability, such trust; yet each needing the other far more than words could ever convey. Love in its purest form was in the making in a quiet secluded bank of a stream, where only two would ever know this special moment in time. We do not live in this world alone. We need each other. We cannot love . . . in a vacuum . . . alone.

"How long have you been sick like this?" asked the little lamb as he proceeded to clean the foul soiling's from Billy's wool.

"About seven months," replied Billy.

"But, what happened to you," asked Little Lamb? "What happened to your life and all your dreams."

"I never expected anything like this," began Billy. The words came in short sentences between gasping breaths, punctuated with that horrible rattle that echoed as he spoke. "I had a future. I was the golden haired ram of the flock and could do no wrong. Then, one day at vesper services, I felt so dizzy and the diarrhea began. I had to excuse myself and told the High Holy One that I feared I had eaten some spoiled silage and it gave me the "rumen flu". As time passed, nights were filled with sweats that drenched my sheets and by morning, my wool was saturated with my own perspiration. I was terrified. What was happening inside of me?. I would look in the mirror in the morning and see my body slowly wasting away. If I brushed my wool just right, no one could see it, but me. Even though none could see, I knew. Deep down inside, I knew some great tragedy was

happening to me. Then one morning, I noticed a spot on my cheek. A purplish spot that was not there the day before. I felt terror inside. This cannot be, I told myself, and put powder over the spot so it blended in with my wool. The next day there was another spot. I now had two of those hideous things. I lived in terror. Someone would find out.

I wanted no one in the flock to know about this, and so I made an appointment to see a physician in another city. He took some of my blood for tests and I came back the next week. He sat me down and said, 'young ram, I have some bad news for you. You. . . You have the wasting disease.' I ran out of his office, into an alley. I was so sick to my stomach that I vomited in the alley. An old beggar sheep watched. I felt so ashamed, I wanted to die.

I spent the rest of the day, wandering the streets of the city, not knowing what to do or where to turn to. I knew that I could not bring disgrace upon my family. I could not continue living in the flock. It would be just a matter of time before others would notice how ill I was. I found an old rooming house in a poor section of the city that I could afford. A place where I could hide, and just disappear. Oh, the sheep that live there have nothing. No future, no hope. 'These are the sheep I belong with', I thought. 'I don't belong anyplace else.'

I returned that evening to the flock and told the High Holy One that I needed to go on a spiritual retreat into the mountains to meditate and pray for direction in my life. I was at a crossroads and needed to be by myself, just like the Good Shepherd needed time by himself in the hills. I left with his blessings. I just disappeared off the face of the earth. No one knew where I went."

"How did you get this dreaded disease? Why? Why you?" asked the little lamb.

Billy slowly shook his head. "I don't know," he began. "One day the diarrhea started, then the night sweats, and then the weakness. The weakness comes out of nowhere and suddenly you have no strength anymore. You can't even move out of your own diarrhea." Billy began to cry softly. "I'm so tired, so weary. I'm lonely and alone. There's no place for me to go, no one to turn to for help. I'm an outcast, the leper of this day and age. I don't know what to do. It keeps getting worse and there's no stopping it. I'm wasting away. I see it every day in the mirror. I used to be a strong young ram, full of energy and vigor. Good looking. But look at me now. My skin just hangs on my bones. There's no muscle anymore. The body that I used to be so proud of is gone. I'm just wasting away. Soon there will be nothing left of me." Billy buried his head in the soft fold of Little Lamb's arm and sobbed softly.

The little lamb sat there holding his friend, rocking him back and forth in his arms, not really knowing what to do, and so he did the only thing he knew how to do. Offer compassion. Offer love. He held his friend and rocked him, much as Momma used to do for him when he had hurt himself or was frightened by a bad dream. Momma would hold him, sing to him, and rock him back and forth until he fell asleep.

Little Lamb watched Billy slip into a restless sleep. Even the peace that normally comes with sleep eluded Billy. Each breath was a struggle to inhale clean, fresh air followed by a forced exhale. It was no longer a simple relaxation like a sigh, but an exhausting effort to expel the old, spent air. From deep within that sunken rib cage, with

every inhale there came a hideous rattle. With each exhale there was that same ominous sound. "Was there no way to escape that dreadful, pitiful noise?" thought the little lamb.

Many things are written in that black book that we all carry inside. Who we are is defined within those pages by others we meet during our lives. The more important role they play in our life, the more prominent place we give them in our book. We carefully record their words, both spoken and unspoken, and carry those words in our book as truths. That fills a lot of pages in our book. However, the first page was not written casually by others we have met in life. Page one was written by the Creator before we were born. The subject of that first page is on survival. Even when all else is gone, the will to survive remains. To hang on. Against all odds. To hang on. Little Lamb watched Billy struggle to survive. Even in his terrible illness, Billy was reading and re-reading his page one.

On page two, (and we all have a page two) are the most noble words in our book, the finest words ever written by the Creator, and repeated by the Good Shepherd: LOVE ONE ANOTHER, EVEN AS I HAVE LOVED YOU. There isn't a creation alive that doesn't have a page one and a page two. The most important of all the pages in their book is page two. Survival is important, but survival without love? Without loving? That makes life incredibly hard and empty. Without loving and being loved, survival has little purpose. "Who, me?" you may ask. "I have no page two in my book. Love? Who needs that? All it brings is pain and hurt. I can get along perfectly well without it." Oh, it's there alright, but so often we close the book and pretend it does not exist.

Little Lamb had been lucky. He had a momma who gave him love. But what about all the other sheep whose momma's didn't? For whatever reason, they couldn't give love.

What about those sheep? What's on their page two? LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. There isn't a lamb alive that doesn't know deep inside how they would like to be treated. There isn't a little lamb alive that can't look inside and dream how they would like to be loved. Lying beside the road, as Billy was, . . . how they would like to be treated? How they would like to be loved? How they would feel, deep inside, when someone would stop, look, and pass them by? Those unloved, unlucky lambs know how it would feel. Billy knew. He was there. Something deep within Little Lamb begged him, "Stop. Oh please, stop." He did, and his life would never be the same again.

Billy began to cough, and the coughing woke him up. Opening his eyes, he looked at Little Lamb. "I'm so glad you're still here. I had this terrible dream that you had left . . . and I was all alone again. I don't want to be alone. I'm afraid. I don't want to die alone. Please be with me. Stay with me."

Little Lamb looked into the eyes of his friend. "I won't leave you," he promised. "I'll stay with you, however long you need me." Suddenly, Billy began to cough again, gasping for breath. "You need to rest," said Little Lamb. Oh, how he wanted to heal the hurt he saw in the eyes of his friend. "I need to help you home where it's warm and dry."

Billy shook his head. "I have no home. When others in the rooming house found out I had the wasting disease, they threw me out into the street. They threw out my clothing, my bags, my furniture, everything I owned. They threw it all out into the street. They threw me out into the street to die. I have no home. The street is where I have lived for the past week."

"I've got to find you a place to stay." said Little Lamb, shaking his head in disbelief.

"Nobody wants me," cried Billy. "When you've got this disease, nobody wants you. You don't exist anymore. You're part of the walking dead. You're there, but no one cares. No one gives a damn. They want you dead and out of the road so they don't have to see you, so they don't have to deal with you."

Little Lamb looked back at Billy. A thousand thoughts flooded his mind. "Why me? Of all the thousands of sheep out there, why me?" he wondered. "What about your parents?" he asked.

Billy shook his head. "They suspected something was wrong for a long time. One day, my father asked me, 'you're sick aren't you?' I replied 'yes'. 'What do you have?' he asked. I told him." Billy began to cry. "He threw me out of the house I grew up in. He threw me out and said 'get out of here. You are not my son. I no longer have a son. I am ashamed of who you are and what you stand for. No one will ever know why you left for I will not bring shame upon this family. Your sin and your secret will die with you. Now get out.' Then, he slammed the door on me."

"How can parents do that?" questioned Little Lamb. "You're his own flesh and blood. "How can he just throw you out as if you never existed? There must be a place where you can stay," he said as he picked up Billy in his arms and carried him down the road.

"There is no place for a lamb with the wasting disease," whimpered Billy.

"We'll find a place. I'll find a place for you to stay."

The stars shone brightly that night. Little Lamb looked up into the heavens as he carried his homeless, helpless friend. Billy's words echoed in his ears. "There's a star out there to guide you when you've lost your way. When you don't know your way home,

you find that star and zero in on it. It will show you the way home. Those stars were put there by the Great Creator to help you find your way home."

Physically, there was nothing left of Billy. He was a mere shell of what used to be a fine young ram. Once he had been strong, muscular, sure footed, secure. Now he was like an emptied sack. Once, full and complete, but now, he was a delicate, fragile, empty package of fur and bones with nothing in between. The load Little Lamb carried was light compared to the heavy load that Billy carried deep within himself. The pain. The agony. The loneliness and aloneness that comes with being isolated and cut off from your world, and the words of the world echoed in his mind. "Be gone. Damned you, be gone."

"How light he is," thought Little Lamb. "This friend that once carried me - - - Now it is I that carry him."

The Holy Temple loomed ahead on the road. The tall spires of the silos pierced the sky. It was an edifice, a monument built by mortals in their feeble attempts to build a scaffold to the heavens. If built high enough and strong enough, they could reach out and touch the hand of God. The great temple stood on hallowed ground as a monument to that endeavor. It was a holy place. The home of God, the Great Creator.

"Of course," thought the little lamb. "The holy temple. Surely we can find a place to stay in the home of God."

He knocked at the massive temple door. It was early in the morning, and all those within were sleeping. "Does no one hear my knocking?" thought Little Lamb as he rapped again and again on the doors of the home of God.

He heard rustling sounds followed by the squeaking latch on the other side of the temple door as it slowly opened. "Who's there?" asked the Holy One, poking his head through the partially opened door. His eyes were heavy with sleep and his brain was dulled with drowsiness as he shoved a lantern in the face of the little lamb. "Oh," grumbled the Holy One. "It's you. I thought I told you never to darken the halls of this holy building ever again unless you were ready to repent and make the necessary sacrifices to put you right with God." He paused for a moment, noticing the sheep that Little Lamb carried. "Who's that with you? Who's that you're carrying there?" The Holy One directed the beam of light onto the wretched package Little Lamb held in his arms.

"It's Billy, Sir. I found him lying beside the road. You see, he's very sick, Sir. He's been thrown out of his home. He has no place to stay. No one to care for him. No place to go. I thought he might be able to stay here. He's so sick, Sir."

The Holy One opened the door farther and reached out and touched the huddled figure. There was love in his touch and compassion in his voice, for he did not know of Billy's disease. "Billy," he said softly. "Billy, is that you? What is wrong?"

Billy's face was cradled in the shoulder of the little lamb, hidden in the shadows where it was not seen. He turned his head to see the Holy One.

"Arggh," cried the Holy One recoiling as he saw Billy's face, dropping the lantern at his feet. It was a deep guttural cry of fear and disgust. The old ram stooped down to pick up the lantern with great haste. "Get out of here!" he cried. "You have the Wasting Disease. Get him out of here!" He was waving his arms in the air like a madman. "We have no place for sheep like you."

"Please, Sir," pleaded the little lamb. "Billy's very sick. He needs help. He needs a place to stay."

"There is no place here for anyone like him or you." There was intense hatred and disgust in the voice of the old Holy One. Eyes that once had shone with love when he first gazed on the little lamb during the ceremonies, were now filled with bitterness and hatred. "We have no room for sheep like you here. Don't desecrate this holy place by your presence."

"Please, sir," pleaded the little lamb once again, extending forth the weak bundle he held in his arms. "This is Billy. Your favorite one. Your chalice bearer. A lamb of God. In all that is merciful, please give him care and shelter. Please help him."

"This is no lamb of God," replied the Holy One as he pulled back from the debilitated lamb being offered to him. "This is an insult to the holy idea of a lamb of God. You have made your choices in the world of purple grass. Now experience the full wrath of God that you have brought forth upon your own heads. Do you expect God to show mercy to sheep like you? You have brought your own damnation into your soul. It was by your own doing. Now experience the full punishment for your sins. You're getting just what you asked for by your choices in life. Now experience the damnation of God. Fall on your knees and ask forgiveness for being the wretched creatures that you are. The both of you. The scum of the earth. Hope and pray that God can find some mercy for sinners such as you."

"Please sir," pleaded Little Lamb. Billy is terribly ill. We did nothing wrong. Please help Billy."

"Get out of the house of God!" thundered the old ram. "Wrong? You say you did nothing wrong? You have violated the teachings of the Great Book. You have willfully and wantonly sinned against the flock, your families, the church, and most of all, you have violated the teachings and sinned against God almighty."

"Please sir, don't judge us like that, for we don't deserve it."

"Judge you? I pass no judgement on you, but God the Father Almighty has already judged you and found you unworthy. His wrath is reflected in everything you are, in every sin you have committed. Pray that God will have mercy on your souls, for unless you do that, you are damned to rot in hell for all that you are. You are unclean. Unworthy. Sinners. Both of you."

"Billy's dying."

"Die someplace else!" commanded the High Holy One as he spit the words in the faces of the two lost sheep. "This is holy ground and shall never be contaminated by sinners such as you. This is God's house. His holy temple. Not yours. Now get out of here."

The Holy One forcefully pushed Little Lamb and his frail burden out of the doorway, pushing them backwards down the steps as he slammed the huge doors of the Holy Temple in their faces.

The massive oak doors of the temple closed with a thunderous clap that rolled across the barnyard and into the meadow. It echoed throughout the countryside, bouncing off one hill, then another. The quiet peace of the early dawn, shattered by the angry sound of rejection. The dull clanging of the inner bolt as it locked the door from within confirmed the reality. The words "Die someplace else, for this is holy ground and shall never be contaminated by sinners such as you," echoed in the quiet confines of Little Lamb's mind.

He could not believe what he had just heard from the mouth of the Holy One. How carefully the lips had formed each syllable of every word and spit them in contempt on the two who had come to the house of God seeking help. Hatred danced in the eyes of the Holy One as he spoke. Little Lamb would never forget those eyes. Eyes that once gazed on him in tenderness, love and compassion when they first met in this holy place, were now filled with hate, contempt and disgust. "What had he done that was so terribly wrong," wondered the little lamb. "Was it wrong to discover a friend lying on the path needing help? So many passed him by, and only Little Lamb stopped. Is that so wrong? Is that so terrible? Does the Great Creator condemn for trying to help?" Little Lamb felt confused. His thoughts were clear, but the events of the night were muddy. "I told you," said Billy, his voice very weak. Each word took great effort to produce, and after each word he gasped desperately for breath and the strength to speak again. "I am despised by all that come near me, shunned by those who loved me. Spurned by those who nurtured me." He closed his eyes and buried his head in the arms of this friend who carried him, sobbing softly, shedding his tiny tears. "My God - - why have you done this to me? Why have you abandoned me?" He cried softly, "My God ,where are you?"

The little lamb's heart wept for this delicate,fragile bundle he held in his arms, this creation of God that the world had turned its back on. Where is the love that Little Lamb had heard preached from the pulpit of the Holy Temple? Where was the compassion from the members of the flock? "Momma," he thought. "Momma has always loved. She has always cared. Momma and Poppa will give us shelter." Little Lamb turned and carried his frail bundle down the steps of the Holy Temple.

As they made their way through the village, the vast blackness of the heavens was penetrated by the faint glow of morning. Another day was beginning. Another day to hope, to begin anew. A day promising more than yesterday had given. Little Lamb walked up the familiar path to the cottage of Momma and Poppa. The path he had trod so many times before. The right path. Had he taken the wrong path? Little Lamb wondered. Was purple grass the wrong path? A small light from the kitchen window broke the darkness. It was like a homing beacon for a ship lost in the endless sea of night. A ship looking for safe passage, a place to spend the night. A place to call home. "Good," he thought, "Momma is up preparing breakfast for Poppa." He rapped at the front door, listening to the footsteps of Momma as she left the kitchen and approached the living room. The door opened a crack. "Who's there?" she asked timidly through the narrow opening.

"Momma," replied Little Lamb. "It's me."

"Oh, my God," she cried out, throwing the door open wide. "You're here. You're alive. Oh, thank God!" Her eyes filled with tears as she reached out to embrace and hold the most valuable thing she had ever created, this offspring of her womb, this gift of love from the Great Creator, to her and through her, a gift to the world. "What's this?" she exclaimed, stopping short of the embrace. "Who are you carrying?"

Billy rolled his head from the safety of Little Lamb's arms turning in the direction of Momma's voice. Slowly, he opened his gummy, pus-filled sunken eyes. He tried to blink away the matter that clung to the lids. His mucus-encrusted nose had dried and cracked. The infection was all over his face. A small trickle of blood ran down the matted white fur of his cheek.

"Ohhhh!" Momma gasped as she stepped back. There was no doubt about the shock and revulsion reflected in her voice. She stepped back even farther, wiping her hands on her apron as if trying to wipe off some flour or other mysterious substance that had contaminated her.

"It's Billy," cried the little lamb. "My friend. I found him lying by the side of the road. He's very ill, Momma. He's so sick and has no place to go."

Momma looked frightened. "You thought," and she paused, looking at the pair standing in her doorway. "you thought he could stay here?" Her voice faltered.

"Momma, you've always loved everything. You always taught me to love. To care. To reach out to those who need."

Momma took a handkerchief from her apron and dabbed at the corners of her eyes. "Oh my poor Little Lamb. Do you not know what he has? That the young ram you hold has the Wasting Disease?"

"He's sick, Momma." pleaded the little lamb. "He needs help."

"But why you?" asked Momma as she put her handkerchief back. "Why you?" she asked again.

"Why not me? If not me, then who?" asked the little lamb. "I was there. I saw him. There was no one else that would help."

"Oh my boy." exclaimed Momma. "Do you know what you have done? You exposed yourself to the Wasting Disease! And now you've brought him here? To our house?"

"What's going on down there?" grumbled Poppa sheep as he walked sleepily down the stairs, tying his bath-robe as he moved. "Who's at our door, Momma?" Poppa looked at the figure in the early dawn light through squinting eyes, rubbing the sleep from them.

"You!" he exclaimed loudly in his Poppa-like voice. "What are you doing here? I thought you had left for good. Just walked out of the house. Disappeared. Nobody knows where you'd gone. No word from you."

"Poppa," began the little lamb. "I've come home. Like the prodigal son in the Good Book, I've come home."

"Don't speak to me about prodigal sons. If you want to speak to me, speak to me of sons who have disappointed their father."

"I didn't want to hurt you, Poppa. Or you, Momma. I needed space to discover who lives inside this body of mine. I needed to take time to become friends with me. To like who I am."

"How can you like who you are?" interrupted Poppa. "Any lamb that eats purple grass, and publicly acknowledges that fact to the flock . . . Arghh," moaned Poppa.

"That's disgusting. It's degrading. It's humiliating. How dare you stand at my doorstep and tell me you needed time to like who you are. You're a pervert. A sinner. You've committed the foulest of crimes, and you dare to tell me that you like yourself? You like what you've become? Momma, what did we do to deserve a son that turns out like this?"

"Please, Poppa." pleaded Little Lamb. "Please, Momma. Do you think it's easy for me? Can you imagine, for one moment, what it's like to live inside this body of mine? To know, deep inside that I like purple grass? To experience the reactions of those around me when they discover I am different? To see the hatred and scorn in their eyes? To fear the rejection of those I love so much? Do you know how much pain I go through each and every day of my life carrying this incredibly heavy weight of self-hatred on my shoulders? Do you know what it's like to hate yourself? To honestly and truly hate

yourself, twenty-four hours of every day that you live? And why?" Little Lamb's voice cracked, choked with the emotions that he had so long buried deep within. "Why do I hate myself? I hate myself for one simple reason: I like purple grass, and you hate me because I do - and so does everyone else in this flock. Because I am different from them. I need to stand proud and tall, and say to myself that it's okay to like purple grass. To say to myself that I count for something in this world. I belong here. I have a right to be here and claim my place in this world knowing the Great Creator brought me here for a purpose."

"You're sinning, boy," said Poppa. "It's in the Good Book. To eat purple grass, to consciously and deliberately choose to roll in a field of purple grass, is one of the greatest sins you can commit. You have so much green grass all around you, and you choose to eat purple grass. Why? For God's sake, why?"

"It's not a choice." replied Little Lamb. "Don't you see? Do you think I would choose this, knowing the hatred and scorn I was to receive? Who in their right mind would choose to bring this tragedy on themselves? I've tried. I've tried so hard to like green grass. My life would be so much easier if only I could like green grass. But it's not up to me to choose. It's not as simple as choosing which clothes to wear, or how to cut my wool. It's not that simple. Please believe me when I tell you It's not a choice." The little lamb began to cry. "I am who I am, and I need to love the creation that I am. I knew from early on that I was different from all the other lamb's in the flock, and I lived my life as a fraud. Trying to be something that I was not. I am not like all the others. I have tried. God knows, I have tried to be like all the others. I tried so hard to please you,

Poppa, and be the kind of son you always wanted me to be. I tried to move heaven and earth for you, to be something that I was not. To be someone I cannot be."

"You can't make me believe that there is no choice in the kind of life-style you lead," said Poppa. "You choose to like purple grass. You choose to be who you are, and who you are is no one that I choose to be proud of. I am ashamed to show my face in public because of you. You humiliate me. You brought shame upon this family and upon this flock. Renounce your sin. Give up your purple grass. Eat green grass and be like all the others in the flock. Do that, and you may take your place beside me as a son.

Acknowledge your sin publicly before the flock. Cleanse our family name by asking for forgiveness from the Holy One. Fall on your knees and confess your wrongdoing's and humbly ask for forgiveness. Choose the right way. Choose the Creator's way."

"Poppa," began the little lamb. He took a deep breath and looked directly at his father. Their eyes met and fixed on each other. Little Lamb took another deep breath. "I want nothing more in the whole world than to be your son. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than for you to extend your arms to me and say, 'Son, I love you. I love who you are.' To be embraced by you and hear you say, 'I am proud to call you my son.'"

"You'll never hear that from me," shot back Poppa sheep. "You've made your choices. You are no son of mine. You are one of those outcasts who have no place in the world, and rightly so. Any soul that likes purple grass has no place in my home; you do not belong here. You chose your life. Get out of my world. I no longer have a son."

"Poppa," pleaded Little Lamb. "I need your love. I need your love so badly. Please, Poppa. Please don't do this to me. Please love me."

"Love?" shouted Poppa. "I have no love for you."

"Please open your heart, Poppa," said the little lamb. "Please help us."

"Us? Who are you carrying?" bellowed Poppa.

"It's Billy," replied Momma, as she held Poppa by the arm.

"Billy?" questioned Poppa. "Why are you carrying him?"

"He has the Wasting Disease," said Momma, pulling Poppa back by his arm.

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Poppa. "You not only bring shame to my house by your choosing purple grass, but you dare to bring this pestilence across my doorstep. You dare to expose your mother and myself to this disease? What kind of a child are you? Have you no respect? No consideration? To bring this contaminated refuse here. This is the reward for your life-style. Isn't something telling you that you are wrong? How dense are you? You're holding your future in your arms. As he is now, so shall you be. Can't you see what lies ahead of you? Are you blind? Choose life. My God, throw this scum away, and live. Don't die in the gutter like him."

"Do you think that Billy should die in the gutter?" cried Little Lamb. "Do you think he deserves this? Do you think any little lamb deserves this? Can't you see he needs help? Can't you at least give him shelter in the back shed? If not in the house, then in the back shed? Billy is so very ill. Can he not spend his last days surrounded by love? Can he not die with dignity in the presence of those who care?"

"Die someplace else, but not in my house." said Poppa. "Get out of here, and take your trash with you."

"Momma," pleaded Little Lamb, his eyes searching hers for that kindness that he remembered, that sense of loving that only a mother possesses, searching for the least little flicker of caring.

"Your father has spoken," replied Momma coldly. "He is the head of this household and his word is the law. The Good Book says that I as the wife shall obey my husband. I chose your father to be my husband. I did not choose you. I married him, and not you. It is his world I live in, not yours. We all make choices. You have made yours, and I have made mine."

"Momma," pleaded the little lamb. "I have no choice."

"Well, I have," replied Momma. "I choose your father, his world, and his wishes. He has no son, therefore I have none either."

Little Lamb stood in the doorway, utterly and completely destroyed. The home of his childhood - the home that was always home was no more. That mother that bore him, that carried him deep inside her body, that had been his source of nourishment, his source of nurturing, his source of love - - it was no more. All the sharing, and the caring, and the crying, and the healing was all part of the past.

"I no longer have a son," said Momma, holding onto the arm of Poppa. "You no longer are my son. Now go."

Little Lamb backed up as Momma began to close the door to the home Little Lamb had loved so much. His mind thought ten thousand things that he wanted to say to them before the door closed, but the words would not come. These people - Momma and Poppa, were the most important figures in the world to one frightened, lonely, lost sheep. These most important figures that began writing in Little Lamb's book, from the day of his birth . . . that very important book that he always carried within . . . these parents who had defined who he is, now, in big bold letters, smeared the final pages with the words:

"Sinner. Outcast. Dead. My son is dead. As of this date, his book is closed, and our son is no more."

"Please don't close that door," pleaded Little Lamb, pushing against his mother's pressure on the closing door. "Please don't shut me out of your life." He could feel the added strength of his father, combining with his mother, forcing the door closed. Little Lamb gave one last desperate push, trying to stop the closure. "Please," he pleaded through the tiny crack that remained.

"Click," went the door latch as it closed. "Blamm" went the dead bolt in the lock. Then silence. Complete, absolute silence, broken only by the bubbling sounds of Billy's labored breathing. The sticky thick yellow tenacious mucus had so plugged up Billy's nostrils there was little room for air to pass through. Billy gasped through his open mouth. His parched tongue had cracked from dehydration.

"I'll take you to the stream and make you more comfortable," said Little Lamb to his frail friend. "You're not going to be alone. I won't leave you, no matter what. I'm your friend, and if no one else in the world cares about you, I do."

He watched Billy struggle to look into his eyes. He saw the gummy pus smeared across the eyes. No longer a lacy delicate spider web of strands, it now clung to everything it touched in huge globs. The rattling of mucus throttled in the throat and chest of his friend. Their eyes met, each gazing deep into the others. A very rare and special communication and communion between two souls. Tears formed in the eyes of Little Lamb and slowly etched a glistening path down his cheeks, dropping onto the wasting form that he carried in his arms. Little Lamb lowered his head to Billy's and ever so gently and ever so lovingly, he kissed Billy on the lips. "I love you," he said softly,

and then he began to sob, his shoulders shaking as the dam burst, letting loose his feelings in a flood of tears. "Oh my friend, I love you," he said as Billy curled his head in the protective fold of his arm. "Nothing's going to hurt you anymore. I'm here. I'll always be here. I'll take care of you."

PURPLE GRASS

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The rising sun cast long deep shadows on the path as Little Lamb made his way down to the stream, carrying his friend. "What kind of a world do I live in?" he thought. "Everything anyone ever taught me is a lie. Where is the truth in anything? The church, Momma, Poppa, they teach me one thing, but when asked to stand up for what they teach and believe in -- they collapse. Where is love? Where is compassion? What kind of a world is this?"

Billy's breathing became more labored as the mucus increased. "Hang on, Billy." cried Little Lamb, hurrying. "We're almost there. Just a few more steps." He quickly laid his friend by the bank of the stream and began washing Billy's face with the cool, clean water. "There, my friend." But as he worked loose the clots of pus and mucus from Billy's nose and eyes, bits of flesh pulled loose with the clots. Small drops of blood oozed from where the clots had been. The pain must have been intense, but there was not a murmur from Billy, for he could breath again.

The rustling of the nearby bushes startled the little lamb. "Who's there?" he cried out.

The bushes parted revealing the head and shoulders of another sheep. The face was familiar, though Little Lamb had not seen it since he was a baby lamb. He thought back and remembered his first time in the Holy Temple during the "Tail Docking Ceremony". The commotion at the door, the fear and hatred he had seen in the Holy One's eyes when this

intruder first appeared. He saw that same look of fear in those eyes as he held Billy before those temple doors. "The black sheep!" exclaimed Little Lamb.

"Don't be frightened," said the black sheep in a soothing, calming voice. "I mean you no harm. I come here early in the morning before the flock arises so that I may clean myself and gather my water for the day. Please do not cry out, for I mean you no harm. The flock would not appreciate my being here and would stone me if they knew."

"I never knew what it was like to be an outcast before today," said Little Lamb. "I always thought I had a home, a place where I belonged, and suddenly I've discovered that my home is no more. I've been thrown out. I'm not wanted anymore. I don't belong."

The black sheep moved closer to the stream, moving farther and farther from the protection of the bushes. "What have we here?" he asked as he approached the frail figure lying by the stream.

"It's Billy," said the little lamb as he watched the black sheep come closer and closer, waiting to see the reaction he had seen so often before. Fear. Hatred. Cursing. Yet the black sheep continued his approach. The sun was rising. Surely the black sheep could see. "I must warn you, sir. Billy has the Wasting Disease."

The black sheep continued to approach the fallen figure. He knelt beside Billy. "Ohhh," he sighed and began shaking his head slowly. "Not Billy." He reached out and stroked the hair on Billy's forehead. "Oh, this poor little lamb. This poor, undeserving little lamb." The black sheep continued stroking Billy's forehead for several minutes. Then he slowly turned his head and looked at Little Lamb. There were tears in his eyes. "Are you. . . his friend?" asked the black sheep.

"Yes." replied Little Lamb, nodding his head in agreement.

"That is good," said the black sheep, "for I have seen too many young rams die of this wretched disease. Without friends. Frightened. Lonely. Alone. It is good that Billy has you for his friend. I wish there were more little lambs like you -- who cared." The black sheep turned his attention back to Billy, stroking his forehead again.

"Such tenderness and love," thought the little lamb. "But this is the black sheep." he continued with his thoughts. "The black sheep that was thrown out of the flock. Hated and despised. Yet, here he is, loving the unlovable. Caring for someone that no one else would. I just don't understand this world."

"Where are you staying?" asked the black sheep.

Little Lamb shook his head. "We have no place. No one will have us."

"Then the answer is very plain," replied the black sheep. "You'll stay with me and we'll make Billy as comfortable as we know how."

"But why?" began the little lamb. "Why you? The black sheep?"

The black sheep seemed surprised. "Why not me? You need help, and I'm here."

"Aren't you worried about yourself? About the wasting disease?" asked Little Lamb.

"I have weathered the slings and arrows of an intolerant, unloving society throughout my entire life. At times, my life was in danger, put there by those who claimed to love me. I am in far greater danger being close to those who claim they love me, than by being close to those who need me. Do you realize all of the things you could catch that might be fatal? Each night when you go to bed, it is a miracle that you are still alive in the morning. Do you realize all the things that could have happened to you during the day? Things that could have, that should have, destroyed you? You could be dead. But they didn't, and you're not. We have a kind Creator that works in mysterious ways and I have placed my faith and trust

in the kindness of that Creator. The fact that I am alive and on this earth means that I belong here. I have no choice whether I shall wake up tomorrow or not. That choice is entirely out of my hands. All I know is what I must do today. And your paths have crossed mine. That is not by accident. There are no accidents in this world. You and I are here together. That speaks for itself. Fear be damned. I'm too old to be frightened, but not too old to have faith and believe in a higher power. It was once said that 'the man who loses himself for my sake, shall find himself'. I have found that to be one of the great truths of my life."

Suddenly, there was a great commotion on the bank of the stream. A group of ewes had come to the water to do their morning chores. "Oh," shrieked one of them. "Look. It's the black sheep! Get out of here." She reached down to the bank, picked up a jagged rock and hurled it at the black sheep. The other ewes did the same, and suddenly the trio found themselves being stoned.

"Stop!" cried Little Lamb, standing fully erect before the crowd. "What right have you to do this to one of your own kind? Where is your sense of decency?"

The ewe who had started the commotion approached the little lamb. "What are doing with him?" she demanded boldly. "And who's that lying in the grass?"

"That's Billy," replied Little Lamb. "He's dying, and the black sheep is the only one who has offered us any help at all."

"And what's Billy dying of?" asked the ewe.

The little lamb looked at the menacing crowd of approaching sheep. He took a deep breath. "The Wasting Disease."

Gasps and shrieks erupted from the crowd. "Get out of here!" shouted one. "Get out of our water!" shouted another. Suddenly a rock came through the air. Then another and another.

"We are like you," cried Little Lamb. "Please stop. Don't do this to us. We are like you." A rock struck Little Lamb on the side of his head, knocking him to his knees.

"Let's get out of here!" cried the black sheep. "That's an angry crowd that will surely kill us if they can." Deftly, he picked up Billy and they ran for the safety of the fork in the road. To the place where one fork leads to the village, and the other leads to the field of purple grass. "They won't follow us very far down that path," shouted the black sheep as he approached the fork. "They're frightened of that path and we'll be safe. There it is. Right through the trees."

And just as the black sheep had predicted, no one in the flock dared to follow. The crowd gathered at the fork in the road, hurling rocks and obscenities at the fleeing trio, but not a one of the flock would follow.

"I need to stop a bit and catch my breath," said the winded black sheep as he slowed his pace. "I'm not as young as I used to be."

"Here, let me carry Billy for awhile," said Little Lamb, extending his arms.

"That would be very kind of you," replied the black sheep as he transferred Billy to the little lamb. "Thank you."

Billy curled up in the arms of his friend. His breath was more relaxed.

"Where do you live?" inquired Little Lamb.

"Just a bit farther down this road," replied the black sheep.

"B - B - But," stammered the little lamb, "this road goes by the field of purple grass."

"I know," replied the black sheep calmly.

"But," and Little Lamb hesitated, looking at the black sheep.

"Do I eat purple grass?" asked the black sheep responding to the unspoken question in Little Lamb's mind.

"Um-Hmmm," nodded the little lamb.

"No," said the black sheep, shaking his head slowly. "I've tried it, but it isn't right for me. But I have many friends that do, so I understand their world. And their world has become part of mine. When you're an outcast from the flock, for whatever reason, you have a common bond. It's hard to be on the outside, looking in, no matter what the reason. It's hard to be different. I know. I wear my difference on the outside where all can see. My color. You," and the black sheep paused and looked at the little lamb. "You have it much harder. You wear your difference on the inside, where only you can see. I cannot hide my difference. It's there for all to see. But you . . . how hard it must be to know that you are different and be the only one that sees it. How frightening that must be, wondering when someone will lift up that mask, and know, and see who you really are. We all experience unjust hatred. Me, I've gotten used to it. I can't hide it. But you. You've been hiding it a long time, haven't you?"

"Oh, if you only knew!" replied the little lamb.

"I know," said the black sheep nodding his head. "More than you realize. There, my house is over the next hill." They continued walking in silence.

A small cottage lay before them. The black sheep opened the front door. "It's not much, but whatever I have, I share with those in need. Someday I may need, and I hope someone

will give that gift back to me. Put Billy on the couch and I'll boil some water. The steam will help loosen the phlegm in his chest and make his breathing a lot easier."

Little Lamb laid Billy on the couch and sat down beside him, holding his friend's head in his lap. At last, his world seemed to be sane. More stable. Truly, this was a home of peace.

The day passed quickly. The steam made Billy's breathing less labored so his sleep was more peaceful. However, even during sleep, Little Lamb refused to leave his side. Oh, how he wanted to take away his friend's pain; make him well. When Billy opened his eyes, it was the middle of the afternoon. Little Lamb stroked the forehead of his friend. "How did you sleep?" he asked kindly.

Billy coughed, loosening the phlegm that collected deep in his chest. "Oh", he sighed, smiling at Little Lamb. "I slept so well. A peace came over me that I find hard to describe. I felt so comfortable and secure, knowing you were here." Billy coughed again and that deep ominous rattle echoed within his chest.

The Little Lamb worked hard in caring for his friend. He cooked for Billy, fed him, nursed him, held him, cried with him. He cleaned up the fetid stench that soiled the once beautiful white wool of his friend. He gave Billy everything he knew how to give, and then gave more. There were days when Billy could care for himself. And then, there were other days when he was totally helpless and dependent. It was on one of those dependent days when Little Lamb broke down and cried.

He had walked down to the stream to fill his bucket with water to bathe Billy. As he bent over the gently moving stream to fill his bucket with the cool, clear water, he saw his reflection in the mirrored pool. Suddenly, all the rage inside him erupted. All the pain he was experiencing at the moment, combined with all the pain he had experienced in his entire

life: the pain of being different, the pain of not fitting in with the flock. The pain of not being wanted. The pain of helplessly standing by and watching his friend die, and the pain of being powerless in the face of that destruction. He stood up fully, dropping his bucket in the stream. "DAMN YOU!" he screamed as he shook his foot at the sky. With tears streaming down his cheeks, he began to sob. "Why?" He cried, blinking through the tears, looking for an answer in the heavens. There was no reply, except the gentle splashing of the stream as it cascaded over the boulders. He looked down at his reflection in the pool of water. "Why?" He whispered, looking deep into his own eyes. "Why?" He murmured ever so softly to himself. Then, he gently closed his eyes, trying to shut out everything. The pain. The heartache. The struggle. He squeezed his eyelids ever so tightly, hoping it was a bad dream and now he could wake up. He opened his eyes. There was no bad dream. He was living the dream. It was his life.

He took a deep breath and splashed his face with the cool water. It felt good to wash away the salty tears from his eyes and cheeks. "Time to go back to Billy," he thought as he filled the bucket and made his way up the path to the cottage.

He bathed Billy, washing the fetid diarrhea that had soiled the once beautiful white wool of his friend. Little Lamb thought, "How strong Billy used to be. So handsome. So virile and full of life. Now he is so weak that he can't even roll out of his own excrement." The task and the odor was insignificant compared to the sad sight Little Lamb saw lying before him. The sight combined with memories of who Billy had been were overwhelming.

Billy reached out and tenderly touched his arm. Their eyes met as Billy smiled warmly. "Thank you", he said quietly. "You have no idea how your love touches me. Thank you". He patted Little Lamb on his arm, closed his eyes and slipped into a deep peaceful sleep.

Little Lamb took the bucket of soiled water out to the front porch and emptied it. As he watched the water splash to the soil below and spread in an ever widening circle, the flood gates of his emotions burst open again as his feelings poured out of his subconscious. Feelings he had worked so hard to suppress as he cared for his friend, Billy. He hurled the bucket to the ground as his anger swelled.

"Dammit all to hell. Why? What did this poor sheep do to deserve this? What kind of a Creator are you? This is not the kind of love I expected to find in your world. This is cruelty. This is a curse upon all of us that we do not deserve. Billy loved you. He worshipped you, as I did. Is this how you repay love? Well, damned you. DAMNED YOU!" he screamed. The tears started again as he sat down on the porch step and buried his head in his arms. "Why? Why? Why?" he moaned over and over again through the tears.

The black sheep came out of the kitchen and sat down on the porch beside the little lamb. "I know," he began, "this is very hard. He put his arm around the shoulder of his young friend. "With some things in life, the answers are very easy. With other things, the answers elude us." Little Lamb rested his head on the black sheep's shoulder.

"I'm so very angry." cried Little Lamb.

"I know," replied the black sheep. "You have every right to be angry. I have every right to be angry."

"I hurt so much for him. He's my friend and I want to help . . . but I don't know what to do. I feel so helpless."

"I was taught a prayer, many years ago", said the Black Sheep, "by a friend who cared very deeply about me and about the pain I was experiencing in my life. I find this prayer to

be very valuable when I feel confused, lonely, am in pain and don't know what to do. Would you like to hear it?"

Little Lamb lifted his head and looked at the Black Sheep through tear stained eyes. "Yes", he spoke softly, his breathing coming through jerky sobs.

"Please say it with me", replied the Black Sheep.

Little Lamb nodded his head and wiped a tear from the corner of his eye.

"God", he began, with Little Lamb repeating the words. "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Little Lamb nestled his head in the shoulder of the Black Sheep. "Ohhh," he moaned. "Life is so hard. Your life hasn't been easy either. How do you cope? How do you manage . . . to survive? How can you enjoy life?"

"Forgive." said the older sheep. "I have learned one of the hardest but most valuable lessons in life."

"Forgive?" questioned Little Lamb, lifting his head and looking at his friend. "How can I forgive something like this? The injustice. The cruelty."

"That's where the pain lies." replied the black sheep, kindly. "It is in the inability to forgive, where the pain lies. As long as we cannot forgive, we shall experience the pain. The source of all conflict is the inability to forgive. Until we learn the lesson of forgiving, the pain remains with us."

"You're asking the impossible," shot back Little Lamb.

"Forgiving is a fundamental truth of life," answered the black sheep. "Examine that truth in any and all conflicts of your life. Try to tear that truth apart. Look at those conflicts under

a magnifying glass and you will discover this to be a fundamental truth. Until you can forgive, you will always experience conflict.

"Will I be loved if I forgive?" asked Little Lamb.

"If you do not forgive, you will not experience love, but only fear and anger. To be loved, you must first love. You can only love to the limits of your ability to forgive."

"It's not fair." cried the little lamb. "The sheep in the flock are wrong. Absolutely wrong. In how they think. In how they treat us. And the world looks on and does nothing. They are wrong. I cannot forgive someone who has done me wrong."

"You must begin by forgiving your parents for rejecting who you are," replied the black sheep with kindness, but with strength and conviction in his voice.

"You are out of your mind," cried Little Lamb. His voice was agitated. His anger was boiling. "Have you forgiven yours?" he asked.

"More than you'll ever know," replied the black sheep. "Even if they were wrong, in the eyes of tens of thousands, until you can forgive them, you will experience conflict and find it impossible to love them. Even with all of their shortcomings, you must learn to love them for the sheep that they are, and until you can forgive them, peace will elude you."

"But you don't understand," cried Little Lamb. "They were wrong. I only want their acceptance. I only want their love. I did nothing to deserve this. I cannot forgive them for what they have done to me."

"What price, forgiveness?" asked the black sheep. "Forgive, so that you may once again love them."

"But they don't want my love. It is they who threw me out of their lives," said the little lamb.

"Forgiveness does not mean acceptance that what they did was right." said the black sheep. "What they did to you was wrong, and many would agree with you. I agree with you. They were wrong. But so long as you hang on to your inability to forgive them, you shall hang on to your anger. If you feel hanging on to your anger is valuable, then hang on to it. But you're not punishing them with your anger, you're only punishing yourself. It is you who hurts, not them. It is you who carries the burden, not them. What is the price of forgiveness? Being willing to let go of your anger towards them. Let it go." whispered the wise sheep. "Let it go. It can only destroy you, not them."

"How can I let it go?" asked Little Lamb.

"By understanding them, knowing that they could only work with the tools they had: Their mind, their education, their prejudices. Someone gave them those tools, and these are the only tools they know how to use. They can only build what they are capable of building. If they had better tools, they could build better. It is sad that their tools are broken and defective. Because they built their world with worn out and defective tools does not mean that your world needs to be built the same way. You have a choice: you can develop new and more effective tools. Forgive them for not having the tools, and let go of your anger."

"You don't know how much it hurts to be rejected." said Little Lamb.

The black sheep looked down at the color of his wool. "Do you think I can walk down the street and not be rejected? Do you think that does not hurt?"

"I mean," stammered Little Lamb, "you don't know what it's like to be rejected by those who are supposed to love you. Your Momma and Poppa?"

The black sheep rose from the steps and walked to the edge of the porch, gathering his thoughts. "I'm not sure how to respond to that." he replied. "I have told no one of my

background. Not a soul knows where I came from, or how I came to be. Perhaps, by knowing me, and who I am, you can better come to know your own feelings and heal the hurt inside of you, as I had to heal the hurt in me. My father," and the black sheep looked up at the clouds in the sky. "My father is the most prominent figure in your flock. Well known. Well respected. If the flock ever found out who my father is, his life would be destroyed." The black sheep turned and faced Little Lamb. "My father is," and he paused and took a deep breath. "My father is - - - - the High Holy One. The Most Reverend. The great teacher at the Holy Temple. The old ram that everyone in the flock looks up to. Respects. Admires. He is my father and he has rejected me."

Little Lamb sat dumfounded. "The High Holy One," he gasped.

"My mother is also of your flock," continued the black sheep.

Little Lamb looked puzzled, confused. "But," he stammered, "you're black. We have a white flock. There is no black ewe amongst us. Surely, I would know that. I can see."

"She is amongst you. And she too, is well-known. Well-respected," replied the black sheep.

"But how can a black sheep be white?" asked Little Lamb.

"She bleached her wool," responded the black sheep as he looked again at the clouds. "She bleached her black wool to white many years ago. She knew that the things she wanted were not available with her own kind, the flock of the black sheep, so she changed her wool from black to white, and came into your flock as one of your own kind."

"But," asked Little Lamb with great excitement in his voice, "Who is she?"

"Your teacher," replied the black sheep, looking at Little Lamb seated on the steps.

"Miss Righteous?" exclaimed Little Lamb.

"Miss Righteous!" replied the black sheep, nodding his head affirmatively.

"Oh, my gosh," gasped Little Lamb, bringing his hoof to his mouth. "Miss Righteous and the High Holy One. Your Momma and Poppa. I just can't believe it."

"Why not?" asked the black sheep.

"But they're our leaders. The leaders of the flock. They wouldn't. . . . They couldn't. . . . Do such a thing."

"They're only sheep," replied the black one.

"But they set the examples for us." said Little Lamb.

"Wrong," said the black sheep emphatically. "They set illusions, and we make their illusions our reality."

"But what of the Good Book?" questioned Little Lamb. "They have violated the rules. They have sinned."

"They are only sheep." replied the black sheep. "Not Gods."

"Wow!" exclaimed Little Lamb. "How do you," and he got up and walked over to the black sheep. "How do you forgive them?"

"For abandoning me?" questioned the black one. "I was angry. For a long time I hated them. They kept me hidden in a far away flock. A place where their secret would forever remain a secret. For years, I tried to find out who my parents really were. I knew I had not been wanted, not been appreciated by my Momma and Poppa. And so, I became a great detective. I was determined to track them down. And I did. One day, I stood at the entrance to Ding Dong School. The classroom was empty. Only Miss Righteous was there, sitting at her oak desk. I stood in the doorway and bleated out 'Momma'. She looked up from her

papers. I'll never forget the look in her eyes. It was terror. Absolute terror. 'Momma,' I cried again."

"'Don't come near me.' she uttered in a frightened growl, as she rose from her desk. 'Don't come anywhere near me.' I stood at the schoolhouse door. 'Momma,' I pleaded. 'Don't you know me? I'm your little lost lamb. A child of your womb. Your child. Don't you know me?' 'Get out of here!' she screamed at me. 'I don't know you. I don't want to ever know you. You're part of my past that is dead and buried. I don't want it unearthed. Don't ever come here again.'"

"Later," continued the black sheep, "I met with her. She brought my father along to the meeting. They offered me money. A great deal of money to disappear. I needed the money, more than I needed their love, or so I thought. I disappeared. For many years, I traveled this world - on their money. I saw and experienced much, thanks to them. Then, when I grew older, I returned to where my roots are. They are my parents, and I, am their child. That bond shall always exist for me, even though they deny its existence."

"How can you forgive that?" asked Little Lamb.

"For years, I was bitter," replied the dark one. "I hated them. I hated what they had done to me. I even hated the fact that I was born. What kind of child was I whose parents wouldn't even acknowledge his existence? I hated myself. I felt that there must be something terribly wrong with me for them to reject me. Somehow, it must have been my fault. Then one day I had a great awakening. I did nothing wrong - except to be born to parents who could not accept who I was. I was born into a family with rotten, ineffectual tools. It was they who had the problem, not I. Once I discovered that, my self-hatred began to disappear. Now I was angry with them. I lay many a night plotting my revenge of how I

would bring about their downfall. How I would topple them from their lofty peaks of grandeur and self-delusion. But, then I thought, what purpose would that serve? Instead of one unhappy sheep, there would be three. Would their unhappiness be the balm I needed to have a happy life? Would my revenge undo the wrong they had wrought? Could I ever punish them enough to wash away my pain? The answer was 'no'. Only I could heal my pain and so long as I kept hanging on to that festering, purulent sore, I would always be in pain. To free myself from pain, I had to forgive them. Forgive them for their ignorance. Forgive them for their callousness. Forgive them for their lack of sensitivity. Forgive them for being ordinary, frail sheep with shortcomings. I must forgive so that I might be healed."

"Did you?" asked Little Lamb.

The black sheep put his hoof on Little Lamb's shoulder as he spoke. "Forgiveness is a process that is not done in one day, nor is it done alone. It takes work, but the end-product, peace, is worth the effort. Each day, life becomes easier and the peace becomes more abundant. Now, I hardly think of it at all. And when my day is not peaceful, I look at what I need to forgive, and work on that forgiveness."

"Aren't you bitter?" asked the little lamb.

"I used to be." replied the black sheep. "But not anymore. I am sad that I did not have the kind of life I wished for, but no, I am not bitter. It is they who are paying the price, and what a bitter price to pay, for there is no peace in their lives. We all carry secrets inside. She bleached her black wool white. That's her secret. He broke his vows of chastity. That's his, and I'm the offspring of their secrets. They live in constant terror that someday they shall be found out. I am a living testimony to their failure of not being real, not being who they appear to be. They work so hard at maintaining their illusions. They are not true to

themselves. Their lives are frauds. Even if only they know it, they know it. They can never escape from that inner fear; that they are false to themselves and some day shall have to account for their illusions. They can preach and teach and pontificate all they want, but until they are true to themselves, they are false. They are a myth.

Let go of your anger. It is a caustic cancer which will destroy you. Let it go and forgive."

Little Lamb looked into the eyes of the black sheep. He put his arms around the older ram, hugged him and buried his head in his soft wool, his soft black wool. "Thank you." he whispered. "Thank you."

PURPLE GRASS

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Billy was resting under the big oak tree near the cottage as Little Lamb walked toward him. This was his favorite place to be, and so, each day Little Lamb carried his friend to that special place to rest in the warm sun. He liked lying in the soft billowy grass beneath the tree, watching the clouds slowly drift by. He struggled to sit up as he saw his friend coming up the path. His body trembled as he used all his strength to position himself, resting against the base of the towering oak tree. "Come. Sit by me, my friend," he said in a quiet, gentle voice, patting the grass with his hoof.

Little Lamb looked at his friend lying helpless on the ground. "Oh, what a fine specimen of young ramhood Billy had been," he thought. "Strong. Handsome. Courageous. Embarking on a career with great promise. And look at him now, - - - helpless, emaciated, all his muscles disappearing. He's wasting away into nothing before my eyes." He blinked his eyes, fighting hard against the feelings that lay just below the surface. He couldn't hold them down any longer.

"I'm sorry Billy," he cried. "I'm so very sorry. You don't need this in your day." He sat down beside Billy, resting his head on his friend's chest, and wept.

Billy enfolded the little lamb's head within his arms. At first the crying was like the small whimper of a child, but with each sob, it became more and more intense. He was crying in anguish from the very depths of his soul, as if he was being slowly torn apart.

"Why? Why? Why?" he sobbed over and over again.

Billy held Little Lamb, closely and lovingly, rocking back and forth with his young friend. "There, there," he whispered quietly as he stroked the forehead of his friend.

"Everything will be all right. Don't you know that?"

Little Lamb choked through his sobs. "No, its not. How can you say that?" He turned his head to look at Billy. "You're -- " he stammered, fighting back the tears. "You're," and he shook his head back and forth, fighting the thought.

"Go on," urged Billy with great kindness. In the storm of Little Lamb's turmoil, it was Billy who calmed the troubled waters. "Go on."

"You're . . .dying." Little Lamb's voice trailed off into a silent whisper as he said the fatal word.

Billy continued stroking the little lamb's forehead. "Are those tears for me?" There was a long pause. "Or for you?"

"I don't know," replied Little Lamb, shaking his head slowly. "I try to be so strong, but I'm not strong at all and I feel so bad inside. I started crying for you, but I find I'm crying for me, too." And he began sobbing again. "They're for both of us."

"Then cry," said Billy with kindness. "Cry until the tears of sadness are gone and you are cleansed and can change the tears from sadness to joy."

"These tears can never be joyful," sobbed the little lamb as he raised his head, looking at Billy through tear stained eyes.

"They can, and they will," replied Billy. "Some day when you can forgive."

"Forgive?" The remark startled Little Lamb.

"Forgive me," replied Billy.

"Forgive you?" echoed Little Lamb. "Why should I need to forgive you? You have done nothing. You don't deserve what's happening to you. It is you who needs to forgive me."

"Why?" questioned Billy in amazement. "Why should I need to forgive you."

"I've let you down," said Little Lamb softly, pleading for understanding. "I tried to be strong, I really did. But here I am crying to you, on your shoulder. It is I who should be the strong one, and you who should be crying on me. I failed you. I am weak. I have let you down. Please forgive me for being such a baby." And once again, he buried his head in his friends shoulder and spilled his tears. "I'm so frightened."

"There, there," comforted Billy, rubbing the back of Little Lamb's head. "You have not let me down. You have always been there when I needed you. When the world passed me by, it was you," and he directed Little Lambs head so their eyes gazed into each others. "It was you," he whispered, "only you, who was strong enough to stop, stoop down and carry me. There is no one in this world stronger than you, my friend. Shedding your tears is not a sign of weakness. It is not a sign of a child, but the sign of a strong, sensitive ram in touch with his feelings and who cares enough about me to shed his tears. Do you not know how special that makes me feel. To know you care that much . . . for me . . . that my pain causes you pain. That my loss, becomes your loss. That

you cry . . . for me. Those are not tears, shed by a child. They are tears of love, spilled by a kind, sensitive, caring ram whom I am proud to call my friend. Those tears must never fall on the ground, for they are sacred. They are holy. They are tears spilled in love." Billy kissed the tears that beaded in drops on the cheeks of his friend. "Thank you for this most beautiful gift that you have given me."

Little Lamb gazed into Billy's eyes. It was in the depth of that vision that he saw a glimmer of truth. The vision was cloudy and not clear enough for total understanding, but he saw the slender light of love.

"Do you not see what is happening here?" asked Billy. "I am dying. Forgive me for that."

Billy began coughing violently. He was gasping for air. The rattle in his chest became more prominent as he coughed.

"Don't!" cried Little Lamb, sitting up quickly. "Not now. You can't leave me. I'm not ready for this."

Billy's gasping became less desperate. The coughing subsided. His tense body started to relax.

"Here," said Little Lamb. "Lie down beside me. Can I get you anything?"

Billy shook his head slowly, and with determined effort, he slid down with Little Lamb's help, from his position against the tree. "That's better," he said weakly. He turned his head and watched the red rays of the sun slowly begin their descent in the western sky, painting the underside's of the clouds with brilliant reds, oranges and purple's. "This is my last sunset," he whispered. "I know it. I feel it deep inside. Please stay by me. I need you here. I don't want to go through this alone."

"I'm here," said Little Lamb, holding his friend's hoof in his own. "I'll never leave you. You can trust me."

Billy turned his head and looked at his friend. He smiled and chuckled a bit. "Trust," he said nodding his head weakly in approval. "I do believe I can trust you." He closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them again to look deep into Little Lamb's. "I am dying," said Billy, slowly. "There are some things I want you to know. Some things I want to tell you before I leave."

"Don't talk like this now," said Little Lamb.

"Please," and Billy reached out and touched the arm of his friend. "I need to say this. Not only because I want you to hear it, but I need to hear it myself. It isn't often that a person knows that he is dying, and has the chance to say the words that if not said now, will never be spoken. I want to tell you what I want not only you, but everyone to hear. When you know your end is soon, suddenly you know that all the things you wanted to do and wanted to be . . . well they're never going to happen." And Billy's lip quivered with his emotions. "I know time has run out. There is no more left for me. All my dreams, all my hopes, everything I loved and valued, dies with me. What I need to say, I need to say now. No more bullshit. No more images or illusions. This is real! I don't have time to be fake. I need to be true. I need to be true to myself."

"So much of my life was spent wasting time and wasting energy to maintain illusions. When it comes down to the last final hours, none of those things are important. The sheep that gathered around me because they were attracted to the illusions I worked so hard to develop, how many of them are here? By me now? When the illusions fall away, what am I? Who am I? Why was I here? What did I do that amounted to anything?"

What was my purpose for being? What do I leave? I want so much to get out of this bed and climb to the highest mountain and chisel on its' granite face, for all the world to see. To read my inscription on that forever stone. 'Billy lived. Billy loved. He was here.' Please don't ever forget that. Please remember." he whispered.

"I'll remember," said Little Lamb.

"Please hold me," said Billy. "I'm frightened."

Little Lamb cradled Billy's frail head and shoulders in his bosom. There's something special about being held, about holding. Something about touching that transcends any words in any language, that goes beyond any thoughts. Something so special that money could never buy. It is a treasure, a very special treasure that can only be had, can only be received, as a gift, from one to another.

The two lay on the grassy hillside under the giant old oak tree, watching the sun slowly slide off the edge of the world. Once it had been a blazing ball of energy, a fiery source of life for everything on this planet. Now, its life, like Billy's, was ebbing from existence. To disappear, perhaps never to rise again. The two held each other closely and watched silently as the heavens changed from blue, to red, and then to an ever-deepening purple, creating a changing spectrum of color on the bellies of lacy clouds that gently rolled by. They shared so much and yet, never spoke a word. They just held each other; touching; caressing. Though words remained unspoken, they talked endlessly with each other through the unspoken language of tenderness. They spoke in the braille language of love, through their touch.

As the purple deepened, the stars began to appear, one by one, against the black mantle of night. A gentle wind wafted across the meadow rustling the tall grasses waving in the evening breeze. The oak tree branches swayed lazily in the evening sky.

"I have a favor to ask of you," said Billy.

"Anything," replied Little Lamb. "Anything in the world."

"May I rest my head in your lap?" asked Billy.

"I would be honored," replied Little Lamb as he gently cradled the head of his friend, brushing the hair on Billy's forehead, as the two watched the galaxies unfold in the night sky.

"So many times I feel lonely. So much alone and so frightened," began Little Lamb. "I feel like a tiny young lamb, helpless, not knowing what to do or how to act. At times like that, when my mother didn't have the answers, she would take me to the Great Temple. We would kneel at the altar and speak with the Creator. Now, I don't know where to go with my fears. I don't know where to turn, and I'm frightened. Since I've been turned away from the Great Temple, I've lost my Creator and don't know where to find Him."

Billy looked up at the stars in the heavens. "Look at the sky," he said. "Look at the vastness of the night sky. The universe. Who made all that?"

"The Great Creator," replied the little lamb.

"And where do you expect to find the Great Creator?" asked Billy.

"In the Holy Temple," replied Little Lamb. "His Holy Temple."

"Do you think a Creator that could make the beautiful world you see would choose to live in a tiny box? Do you think a Power that could create anything this vast would

choose to live in something small like a Holy Temple? Temples are created by sheep of narrow vision. Sheep that measure the Creator's work by cubits and definable limits. How do you place infinity in a box? If I were the Creator, and this were my world, would I want to live in a house? What temple can begin to match the beauty of this creation? Would I want to box my world in with fences and walls? Lock myself within and lock others out?"

The two lay under the tree in the softness of the meadow grass, gazing at the evening sky. "No, my friend," continued Billy. "Just because you were thrown out of the holy temple does not mean you were thrown out of the creation. You were created, just as I was created. I've never felt comfortable talking with my Creator inside walls. Inside buildings. My Creator's world is too large to be contained in a box. I need to be where my Creator lives. In the world." He slowly stretched his arm across the sky. "Those stars are the candles that light the way. My faith tells me that even on dark, cloudy, thundery, starless nights, those stars are always there, even though I may not see them. They are always there. My Creator put them there to remind me how big and vast my world is, how infinitely great that Creator is. No matter how tiny or insignificant or frightened I feel inside, even in the darkest of nights, wherever I am, whenever I need it, if I open myself up to that light which has always been, I find my Creator is within me, and with that light comes peace. No matter what other sheep may say, I was created by the Great Creator. I was created in love, and that love is always there. No matter how lost, or lonely, or how dark the night, that love, like the stars, is always there. Whenever I need it, that love is always there."

"I wish I could believe that," whimpered Little Lamb.

"If you have faith, but the size of a mustard seed, you can move the mountains," replied Billy.

"How can you have faith," asked the little lamb, "when so much is going wrong in this world? We're thrown out of the Holy Temple, we're damned by everyone around because we like purple grass. You're terribly ill. How can you have faith?"

"Without faith, I am lonely and frightened. Helpless. Hopeless. With faith, I am not alone. I am loved, and I believe in my purpose for being here."

"Purpose?" cried Little Lamb. "What possible purpose is there in what you're experiencing? In what we're experiencing? How can there be a purpose in any of this?"

"Do you not know?" asked Billy.

"No, I don't know," shouted Little Lamb angrily.

"Look at me," commanded Billy.

The little lamb looked at the pus-filled nostrils, the gummy eyelids, the sunken eyes. The pitiful sight that he held in his lap brought tears to his eyes again and he began to weep.

"Do you love me?" asked Billy quietly.

The little lamb squeezed his eyelids tightly shut, trying to block out the tears. "Oh God, yes," he said.

"Look at me," commanded Billy again. This time the command was gentle, yet firm.

Little lamb blinked at the tears in his eyes, finally able to gaze into the eyes of his friend. A strange feeling came over Little Lamb as their eyes met. Suddenly, through Billy's eyes, he saw the world unfolding as he never saw it before.

"Do you love me?" asked Billy again.

"Yes," he whispered, nodding his head. "I love you."

Billy smiled and spoke quietly. "That, my friend, is the purpose. Without love, there is no purpose for anything. The fact that you love me makes everything worthwhile. Love gives meaning. To me. To you. Love gives purpose. Love is all."

Little Lamb bowed his head and gently kissed Billy on his forehead. "I do love you," he whispered.

Billy closed his eyes for a moment. A small tear glistened in the corner of one eye. Then he opened them, looking deep into Little Lamb's. "Remember my eyes, as I shall remember yours. Someday, I shall once again look into your eyes. Remember me," he whispered quietly.

"I'll never forget you," said Little Lamb, his voice quivering, as he tried to hold back his pain.

"Remember this moment, for you shall see me again. Remember, only you were here - with me. I will always remember that in my heart." He coughed again and the rattle grew deeper.

Billy coughed again, trying to clear that rattle from his lungs. It hung on. "I'm going on a journey, tonight," he said. "I'm going far, far away, to a place where there is no hatred. Where lambs are free to be who they were created to be. Where each one is unique. Each one is an individual. Where we are not herded into flocks. Where we do not follow a leader who doesn't know how to lead. In that place, each one of us is our own leader, for no one can lead us where better than ourselves. Where we are our own best friend and where we trust ourselves more than any other, so we can trust others far

more than we ever believed." He swallowed hard, trying to find the moisture to lubricate his crackling vocal cords.

"Do you want a drink of water?" asked Little Lamb.

Weakly, Billy shook his head 'no'. "Stay by me. Don't leave me now." He swallowed again. "To make this journey, I have to leave this body of mine behind." His breath was coming in short gasps and talking was difficult for the young ram. "It's grown frail and weak. It can no longer serve me, and so I must make the journey without it. It has served me well. I remember how good it felt to run through the fields and feel the wind on my face."

Suddenly, Billy stopped talking. His eyes took on a strange, bewildered expression. "I'm frightened," he said quickly. "I'm cold. Oh, so cold. Hold me," he pleaded. "Lie down next to me. Snuggle into me. Hold me. Keep me warm."

Little Lamb gently rested Billy's head on the soft earth beneath the big oak tree. He snuggled down in front of Billy, looking into his eyes. He wrapped his arms about Billy's body holding him close. He could feel Billy's coldness against his own warmth. "Is that better?" he asked.

Billy closed his eyes and nodded weakly. He opened them slowly. They looked more relaxed. "You're so warm," he said. "I feel so safe here in your arms. Nothing can hurt me now. I know that. I'm safe with my friend. You know me for exactly the ram that I am, and yet, you still love me. I . . .," and Billy sighed, exhaling deeply. "I never thought I could find acceptance and love. Thank you." And Billy gently kissed Little Lamb on his cheek.

"No," whispered Little Lamb. "It is I who must thank you, for it is you who accepted me. It is you who loves me, and I thank you for that gift." And Little Lamb, with tears welling up in his eyes, kissed his friend on his cheek.

Billy blinked slowly and looked into his friend's eyes. "I am at peace," he said quietly. Suddenly, his gaze shifted into the star-studded night sky. "There," he cried out. "Little Lamb, that's my star. It's calling to me." He looked deeply into his friend's eyes. "Remember." And with that, he gently closed his eyes, sighed deeply, and died.

"Billy!" Little Lamb cried out. "Billy!" And with tears streaming down his face, he pressed his cheek to that of his friend. "Billy. Billy, oh Billy."

He held his friend through the long night, trying to keep him warm. Hugging him. Rubbing him. Talking to him. Singing to him.

"Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep, and doesn't know where to find him. Leave him alone, and he'll come home, wagging his tail behind him." He sang that song to Billy. All through the darkness of the night, he sang. Little Lamb had lost his friend, and didn't know where to find him.

PURPLE GRASS

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Little Lamb rocked Billy, cradled him in his arms and sang to him all night long. As the night wore on, Billy's withered body became colder, as cold as the damp evening dew on the meadow grass. He held Billy tightly, trying to keep him warm. Trying desperately to bring back that spark of life that once occupied the body he now

held. Hoping the heat of his body would keep Billy warm, and this was but a bad dream and in the morning he would wake up, and so would Billy.

The black night sky was giving way to gray in the east. Birds began to stir and call to each other, "Wake up. It's morning." At first, only the early birds would rise and begin their song to the new morning sun. As the sky grew brighter, turning from gray to blue, more birds joined in the chorus, until a symphony of song was born. "Wake up, it's morning."

Little Lamb looked at the treasure he cradled in his arms. How peaceful Billy looked. No longer was there the desperate gasping for air. No longer was there the deep rattle that echoed with each breath. No longer was there the fetid outpourings from Billy's body. No longer was there pain and fear in Billy's eyes. He just lay there in Little Lamb's arms. He kissed Billy on his forehead, feeling the coldness of Billy's skin on his warm lips. "Wake up, it's morning," he whispered softly. "Can you hear them calling?" He looked at Billy, hoping for a response. "Just a little breath," he thought. His eyes took in the image of his lost friend, lying there in his arms, Billy's head resting gently on his shoulder. He rocked him back and forth singing again. "Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep and doesn't know where to find him. Leave him alone, and he'll come home, wagging his tail behind him."

The black sheep was walking down the path to the stream for his morning bath, when he came upon the two under the giant oak tree. "How's Billy?" He asked as he stood beside them.

Little Lamb looked up at the black sheep. His lower lip quivered as the tears started all over again. He closed his eyes and tightly slowly shook his head. The

black sheep knelt down beside the two, and gently, tenderly enfolded the pair in his arms and rocked them both.

Little Lamb buried his head in the shoulder of the black sheep. "Why? Why? Why?" He repeated the same question he had asked so many times before.

The black sheep softly stroked the back of Little Lamb's head as he held him that morning. He looked off into the rising sun. The majesty of its brilliance lighting up the puffy white clouds. "I don't know why," he began. "I have asked myself the same question hundreds of times. Why? Why? Why? That answer still eludes me."

He turned and looked at Little Lamb, who returned his gaze. "I only know I have but one purpose with my life," continued the black sheep, "and that is to live it. To go deep within and discover my highest good and share that good with the world. That is my only purpose for being here."

He touched Billy's cheek. "Billy has lived his life. We will never know if he lived his highest purpose. Only he knows that. Ask not why. Ask only, 'have you lived your highest purpose?'"

Little Lamb looked at the Black Sheep. "What is my highest good?" He asked. "What is my purpose?"

"Only you can discover that," replied the black sheep kindly. "Only you can answer that."

"What's the good," shot back Little Lamb, feeling angry.

"Life," replied the black sheep. "Your life."

"Look what I hold in my arms," cried Little Lamb in anguish. "Where is the life here? It all ends. There's nothing. To spend your life and end up like this! It's a waste. A senseless waste."

The black sheep gazed at the pair in his arms. "Is this the end?" He asked. "Or is it the beginning? The sun set last night and it seemed like the end, with blackness all around us, and in that blackness was born our fear. The fear that it was over. Was the disappearance of the sun the end? Or was it merely the end of that day, with a new morning to begin anew after the blackness? When does it begin and when is it over? I do not know."

"It's not fair", cried Little Lamb.

"You're absolutely right," replied the black sheep. "It is not fair." He took a deep breath. "Make your peace with Billy. When you are ready, I will help you bury your friend."

Little Lamb looked at Billy. "I carried him in life," he began. "I carried him all alone. It is only fitting that I be the one to bury him in death. Please understand. I need to do this by myself."

"I understand," replied the black sheep. "If you need me, just call. I'll leave you to be with Billy." Slowly he rose and disappeared down the meadow path.

Little Lamb sat and comforted his departed friend, or perhaps it is more correct to say, Little Lamb was comforted by his departed friend. There was a certain peace, an indescribable peace at that point in time, in that space, in that place called the meadow. A peace that passeth all understanding.

Little Lamb buried Billy late that afternoon. He buried his friend in the meadow under the big oak tree, in that place that Billy loved. He found an old piece of wood and wrote the following inscription for Billy's tombstone: "Billy lived. Billy loved. Billy lies here. He was here. Please don't ever forget that. Please remember."

After placing the epitaph on the head of Billy's grave, Little lamb looked up into the heavens and raised his hoof in anger. "You want to know how heavy a load I can carry before I break?" He screamed. "Well you've got your answer. You've broken me. I hope you got what you were looking for. Damn you! Damn you, anyhow. Blasphemy? I'm not afraid of you. You can't hurt me anymore than you already have. You want my life, too? You've got it, because I don't want it anymore. Take it. It's worth more to you than it is to me. I don't want to live this kind of life. It's too hard. You gave me a burden to carry and it's killing me. I can't stand your cruel joke anymore. Wherever I rot, be it in hell or on this hillside, I don't care anymore. You're not a kind, loving Creator. You're a sadistic, uncaring, unloving Father. Just like Poppa. I could never live up to his expectations, and I can't live up to your standards and don't care to live by your rules. I don't care to live in a world where I'm hated, persecuted, unloved. I try my best, but it's not good enough for you, Father. It's not good enough for you Poppa. You created me. Why the hell did you make me like this? Why couldn't you make me to like green grass, like all the other little lambs? You like destroying little lambs. You even destroyed your own son. If you do that to him, who you claim to love, why should you do anything more for me, who you don't even know? Created in your image? I spit on that image, just as I am spit on by those around me. When they spit on me, I hope you know how it feels. I can't take it anymore. You've done your best to destroy me. Take

this refuse and do with it as you want, because I don't want me anymore. I'm sick to death of who I am, what I am, and where I've been. You offer me nothing, and death is my only outlet. My only friend."

Little Lamb threw the shovel on Billy's freshly dug grave. The blade pierced the soil. The handle pointed toward the sky.

"Damned you, anyhow!" cursed Little Lamb as he walked down the hill, as he continued his journey, to walk out of his life.

Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep and doesn't know where to find him. Where does a little lamb go, when a little lamb gets lost? So lost, that no one can find him. Not even himself. Who knows? Who cares . . . about one little lamb . . . who likes purple grass? A little lamb who became lost because he likes purple grass. He became lost by living in a world that constantly told him, " You don't belong here. Get out. Get lost. Good bye and good riddance to bad rubbish."

Oh world, you've done a remarkably good job in pushing a little lamb out of existence. A remarkably good job in losing one tiny, insignificant, irreplaceable, innocent little lamb, who's only fault in your eyes is to be different . . . different, because he likes purple grass.

Where does a little lamb go, when a little lamb gets lost? So lost that no one can find him.

PURPLE GRASS
Chapter 20
Denny Hamann

The air was heavy with the stale smell of spent ale and old smoke that hung in a

blue layered haze, slowly undulating with the air currents, like lazy waves of the sea, moving to and fro, going nowhere. Just existing and being at the mercy of the currents. Wherever the current moved it, so went the smoke, becoming less and less with each breeze, until finally it disappeared. And so it now was with Little Lamb's life, hanging onto the last few currents of air, slowly becoming less and less. Going nowhere, slowly disappearing with each breath.

The world has never looked good when viewed through the bottom of a glass, but it was the only solution Little Lamb knew. Liquid courage from a bottle to help him waste himself. This was to be the last day of the rest of his life. He had made the decision that there was no reason to continue living, no reason to be. "I have lost the only friend I had in the world," thought Little Lamb. "The only one who ever accepted me for who I was. In his eyes, I never had to be anything more in this world than me. He never judged. He only loved me, and I loved him. I felt so good in his company and now he's gone, and I find no reason to live. Billy had the right solution. You get the hell out of a world that doesn't want you. You run away. You disappear. You die. I can no longer live in a world where I feel so unworthy, so unclean. Billy's wastes' smeared on me were easier to carry than what the world has deposited in my mind. No matter how much I wash, I cannot cleanse my mind. I have sinned against the flock and my Creator. Disappointed and let my parents down. I am worthless. Worse than that, I am the scum of the earth. Tomorrow offers nothing better than today did. It's not worth the struggle. The world is better off without me. What good am I? A little lamb that likes purple grass. I contribute nothing but hurt, pain and disappointment to those around me, but most of all, I am the biggest disappointment to myself. I have failed and there is no

reason for me to be.

The little lamb was sorting out the options available to him. Guns? Knives? Pills? Oh the struggle was intense inside. He cried so painfully, but the cry was buried deep within. No one knew how painful. No one knew the agony he was experiencing. "My God," he cried quietly, hopelessly, desperately. "Why? Why did you make me like this? Why did you give me this curse to carry? This damnable curse? How much do I need to suffer, before I cry, enough? It is enough. I can't handle this anymore. You may love others, but not this little lamb. If it's a sacrifice you want, then you've got me. I can't go on living like this. I've been thrown out of the flock, thrown out of my parent's world, held my best friend as he died, lived a life of secrecy, deceit and lies. I am rejected. Thoroughly, totally, and completely, rejected by You and by everyone. The world will be better off without me. At least I won't be causing others pain, but more than that, I won't have to feel the pain anymore. I won't be living the pain. I'm a failure. I can't be what you want me to be."

He emptied the ale from his glass, watching the last few bubbles slowly slide from the bottom and felt them drip on his tongue. "Drink your last," he told himself. "Numb your pain with the ale. that will make your next job a lot easier." He was filled with fear. Making this decision is not easy. To voluntarily give up the most precious gift you have ever received, your very life, is an inner hell, wracked with pain and agony. It's not a decision made lightly. It's not a decision made quickly. To come from the most joyous of moments at one's birth, to take this most precious of gifts, and cry "I don't want it anymore." To prepare to tear out the very first page of you inner black book, inscribed by the Master Creator. To give up your basic right to survive. To exist. To be. Well,

my friend, you have no idea how that rattles the heavens. Every time a life is lost, no matter how insignificant that life may have been, a void in the universe is created, and that void, no matter how small, no matter how insignificant, that void is felt by every other living thing in the universe. Nothing is ever created or lost but that we are not aware of it. We just choose not to listen. We close our eyes and do not see.

Little Lamb folded his arms before him and rested his head on the soft wool. He could smell the dank odor of spilled ale on the bar beneath his head. He inhaled deeply, gathering courage for what he must do. As he thought about his death, tears filled his eyes and dropped slowly onto his wool. Pray, that you never know the agony of a little lamb who likes purple grass. The hell he lives is not because he likes purple grass. The hell is that he must live in a world of others who hate and scorn him for who he is, and what he is, and that is not of his own choosing. It is not a matter simply of choosing or not choosing. If it were that simple, the choice would be easy. There is no choice to be made for the little lambs who like purple grass. They need purple grass as much as they need air to breathe, and food to eat. They need it for their basic survival. It is part of them, and try as they might to deny its existence, that need is a basic part of them. And so they are left with only two choices: ignore the world and try to find a small corner of safety where they can learn to love themselves, or live in the world, listen to it, and hate themselves so badly that they have no other choice but to die, for that is what the world tells Them. The world wrote the words inside the inner black book. Open it! Read the words for yourself. The hatred seen in the eyes of others. The violence experienced internally and externally, all in the name of the Great Creator. It's all in that book. Read it and weep.

Little Lamb sobbed softly, not wanting to end his life, but seeing no other choice. The tears were real, the pain intense. The end was now. He felt so lost, so lonely, so alone.

No one present that day, in that bar called "The Ram", heard the quiet knock at the door. No one present that day, in the bar called "The Ram", noticed that door open and a light shine through the hazy, smoky darkness. No one present that day, in the bar called "The Ram", saw the tall stranger walk through that opened door and stand behind the little lamb. No one present that day, in that bar called "The Ram", knew a miracle was taking place that would forever change the life of one tiny, insignificant, helpless, hopeless, despised little lamb. No one knew that the universe was being moved because of one lonely cry in the darkness. No one present that day, in that bar called "The Ram", knew.

Little Lamb sat on the stool, his head resting on his arm. He could smell the stale odor of ale. His cheeks and arm were wet with tears. A strange sense of peace suddenly came upon him. "So this is what it's like," he thought. "This is what it's like when you've made the final decision to end it all. Peace. You experience peace." But as he sat there, experiencing the peace, he became aware that he was being watched. Someone was looking at him. Someone was standing behind him. Slowly the he lifted his head, wiped the tears from his eyes, and turned on the bar stool until he was facing the stranger behind him.

"You!" said the little lamb in a quiet surprised voice. Though he had never seen the stranger before, instinctively, he knew him. Deep inside he knew who this stranger was. It was as if a dear loved, long-lost friend had come back. A friend he thought had

forgotten him.

"What are you doing here?" asked the little lamb.

"Looking for you," replied the stranger.

"Oh," cried Little Lamb. "you don't want me. Nobody wants me. Anyone that's ever counted in my life – anyone that's ever loved me – has turned their back on me. Told me I'm no good. Told me to get out of their world." His eyes met those of the Good Shepherd. The little lamb pleaded, "Do you know what it's like to be all alone? Anything I've ever loved has been hurt." He shook his head sadly. "By me. I'm no good. Not for myself or for any other living thing. The world is better off without me. Nobody will notice I'm gone. There won't be any void in this worthless space I occupy. In fact, some will be glad I'm gone. They'll be happy I've died."

The Good Shepherd looked at the little lamb before him. He touched the broken lamb on his shoulder. "Do you not know love?" He asked, ever so kindly, ever so gently.

"Love?" blurted the little lamb. "Who could love me? I am the foulest of the foul, the most wretched lamb on the face of the earth. The only fitting thing for me is a tombstone. Here lies a little lamb. Cold. Alone. Lonely. He deserved his fate. He ate purple grass. Oh no," said the little lamb, shaking his head. "I don't know love. No one wants me."

The stranger looked deep into the eyes of the little lamb. It was a look unlike anything Little Lamb had ever experienced before. An overwhelming feeling of love flowed through the eyes of the stranger, enfolding the body of the frightened, hopeless, helpless, little lamb.

"Oh, but you're wrong," began the stranger. "I do want you, for it is you that I

have been searching for."

"You don't want me," replied Little Lamb. "Don't you know?" "I like purple grass." he whispered ashamedly.

"So?" questioned the stranger.

"But it's wrong to like purple grass. I've tried not to like it, I really have," cried the little lamb. "But I have sinned against the Creator, against everyone and everything. I have sinned because I like purple grass."

"Who told you that?" demanded the stranger. His voice was firm. Powerful.

"Who told you that?" It was now kinder, filled with love.

"The Great Book. The Holy One. The flock. My parents." cried the little lamb.

"They all told me I had sinned. That I was damned forever."

"And what did they do to you?" asked the stranger.

"They threw me out," sobbed the little lamb. "They threw me out of the Holy Temple. They threw me out of the flock. They threw me out of my home. They threw me out of their world." He fell to the floor at the feet of the stranger, sobbing.

The stranger knelt beside the figure lying at his feet. He gently stroked the forehead of the broken lamb. "And what did you do that was so terrible for them to throw you out?"

Little Lamb slowly shook his head from side to side. "I like purple grass," he cried quietly.

The stranger also shook his head, slowly and sadly. "Will they never learn?" he asked. "How many times must I teach before they learn?"

"I am damned," sobbed the little lamb. "I have sinned."

"And how do you know this?" asked the stranger, with kindness and love in his voice. "How do you know that you have sinned? How do you know you are damned?"

"It is in the Great Book," replied Little Lamb. "The Holy One showed it to me. It is there. I saw it. With my own eyes, I saw it."

"Did I say that?" asked the stranger gently but forcefully.

"It's in the Good Book."

"It may be there, but who told you that? Did I tell you that? Did I ever tell anyone that? Did I write that in your book? In your Great Book?"

Little Lamb shook his head again. "I don't understand," he said. "I don't know what you mean."

"Rise up and follow me," commanded the stranger, "and you will know. You will understand." He offered his hand and helped Little Lamb to his feet. He turned and walked out of the darkness of the bar called "The Ram" and into the sunlight of the world called "Life". Little Lamb trotted along beside him, rubbing his eyes, squinting in the bright light of the day. They walked out of the city, into the country, into the meadow, where they sat in the soft grass. Nearby was the great oak tree where Little Lamb had fought his battles within; had suffered through his wounds from life, became lost and died on the battlefield.

"The Great Book is full of rules created by men," began the stranger. "The men were good and believed in what they wrote. But the rules created much confusion among men. Even the wisest of wise were confused with so many rules. If you looked in the Great Book, one rule would say, 'Do this.' If you looked elsewhere, another rule would say, 'Don't do this.'"

"Because of so many conflicting and confusing rules, the wisest of the wise one day approached me and asked, 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?' I thought about all the rules in the Great Book, and answered him: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul and mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. The second most important is similar: 'Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself.' All the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets stem from these two laws and are fulfilled if you obey them. Keep only these and you will find that you are obeying all the others. It was I that spoke those words to the wisest of the wise, because they too, were lost and confused. My words are in the Great Book, Matthew 22, verse 36. The rules I just gave you are the most important rules. Oh, my little lamb," and the stranger held the broken lamb's face in his hands, and gazed into his eyes. A feeling of belonging, peace and love filled the body of the little lamb as he looked into the stranger's eyes. "Oh, my poor little lamb. Who dared to tell you that you have fallen from grace with me? You have kept these words and obeyed my commandments. You have loved my Father with all your heart, and all your soul, and all you mind. If you have erred, it is only because you could not love your neighbor has much as you loved yourself. You could not possibly love yourself. All you knew was self hatred, and that hate was not of your doing. Others have written in your book and taught you, not how to love yourself, but taught you how to hate yourself. I am here to tell you that I love you. The time is now for you to rewrite your book, and for you to begin to love the most important of lambs . Yourself."

Tears filled Little Lamb's eyes as he looked at the stranger. "Who would love me?" he cried. "I like purple grass."

"No matter where you go, no matter how far you flee, no matter how lost or how dark the path you are on, I will always find you to tell you that you are worth being loved. To tell you that I love you. My words are also written in John 15, verse 13 of the Great Book, 'No man has greater love than this. But that he lay down his life for his friend.' You, my lost little lamb, are the friend that I speak of."

Little Lamb kissed the hands of the stranger, and for the first time, he noticed the wounds. Once again, he looked into the eyes of the stranger, confused, troubled by what he saw on the hands.

"I love you," said the stranger with such kindness. "I have known you even before you existed. I loved you even before you knew who you were. I knew you and I loved you, and I call you my friend. I have laid down my life for you."

"How can you call me your friend?" cried Little Lamb. "I like purple grass. I am different from the others in the flock. They threw me out because I like purple grass."

"Do you not know the ones I chose as my friends were outcasts of the flock?" replied the stranger.

"The people you called your friends," began Little Lamb, cautiously yet curiously, "were these friends really sinners?"

"It all depends who you ask," replied the Good Shepherd. "If you ask the members of the flock, yes. Definitely, yes, my friends were sinners. They were outcasts, undesirable in the eyes of the flock. Read the Great Book. My friends, my disciples, my chosen ones were not wanted by anyone, yet I chose them. Out of all the possible choices I could have made, I chose them. Hear my words: 'Two men went to the temple to pray. One was a proud, self-righteous Pharisee, and the other a cheating tax collector.

The proud Pharisee prayed this prayer: Thank God, I am not a sinner like everyone else, especially like that tax collector over there. For I never cheat. I don't commit adultery. I go without food twice a week, and I give to God a tenth of everything I earn.

But the corrupt tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed, but beat upon his chest in sorrow, exclaiming, God be merciful to me, a sinner. I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home forgiven. For the proud shall be humbled, and the humble shall be honored.' Luke 18:10-14

The ones I chose as friends, the ones I ate with, the ones I walked with, the ones I loved, were all outcasts, unacceptable to the flock. Prostitutes, tax collectors, fisherman and doubters. Ordinary, common folk. Sinners. If you doubt that, read the Great Book, Matthew 9, verse 10. Later, as I and my disciples were eating dinner (at Matthew's house), there were many notorious swindlers there as guests. The Pharisees were indignant. 'Why does your teacher associate with men like that?'

'Because people who are well don't need a doctor. It's the sick people who do,' was my reply. Then I added, 'Now go away and learn the meaning of this verse of scripture.'

It isn't your sacrifices and your gifts I want. I want you to be merciful. For I have come to urge sinners, not the self-righteous back to God. Mark 2:15-16."

"But I don't understand," cried the little lamb. "You don't want something like me, a lamb that likes purple grass. I am no good. Not for you. Not for anyone. No one likes a little lamb who likes purple grass. I have sinned. The Great Book says so."

"Listen first to my words," said the Good Shepherd. "I came, so the world might know; so the world might learn from my teachings. Heed my teachings first, and believe

my words to be the truth. Believe only my words, and if you follow them, you follow me. Read Luke 15. 'Dishonest tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to my sermons; but this caused complaints from the religious leaders because I was associating with such despicable people . . . even eating with them. So I used this illustration: If you had a hundred sheep and one of them strayed away and was lost in the wilderness, wouldn't you leave the ninety and nine others to go and search for the lost one until you found it? And then you would joyfully carry it home on your shoulders. When you arrived you call together your friends and neighbors to rejoice with you because your lost sheep was found. Well, in the same way, heaven will be happier over one lost sinner who returns to God than over ninety-nine others who haven't strayed away."

"You, my friend," continued the Good Shepherd, "have gone astray, but not because you have sinned. Oh no, my friend, you were pushed out. You were thrown out. 'If a man has a hundred sheep, and one wanders away and is lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others and go out into the hills to search for the lost one? And if he finds it, he will rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine others safe at home. Just so, it is not my Father's will that even one of these little ones should perish.' Matthew 18: 12 verse 14."

"Oh my little sheep," said the Good Shepherd gently and kindly, "you were lost. It is you I have been searching for. For those who cast you out of the flock, hear my words, 'But if any of you causes one of these little ones who trusts in me to lose his faith, it would be better for you to have a rock tied to your neck and be thrown into the sea.' Matthew 18:6."

"You came into this world as an innocent lamb." continued the Good Shepherd.
"Free from all concepts of who you are and who you should be. You, by the fact of your existence, are a perfect creation of my Father. You are a perfect lamb."

"But I like purple grass," interrupted the little lamb.

"You are a perfect creation. If it were not so, you would not be here. Believe and trust me. There is a reason you are here, and a reason you were created differently. You were not created bad, only different, and that does not make the creation bad. The creation is perfect. If there are any sins here, it is the sin of those who wrote in your inner black book, you Holy Book. It is the sin of those who smeared the pages of your book with self-hatred. I came to teach love, not hate. I came to teach joy, not fear. The people who smeared your book do not know how to love. Their actions betray their words. They stand as hypocrites on the street shouting how much they love, but their hearts and eyes and actions betray their words as lies. They preach fear instead of joy. They preach hate for little lambs who are different, hate for little lambs who like purple grass. They teach the little lambs how to hate themselves. I came to teach love. Whoever hears my voice knows my love, and loves their neighbor. Whoever hates their neighbor hears not my voice, and knows me not. I tell you, their words and actions will cause their own destruction, their own judgement.

'Show me much compassion as your father does. Never criticize or condemn , or it will all come back on you. Go easy on others, then they will do the same for you. For if you give, you shall receive. Your gift will return to you in full and overflowing measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. Whatever measure you use to give, large or small, will be used to measure what is given

back to you.' Luke 6:38.

'A good man produces good deeds from a good heart. And an evil man produces evil deeds from his wickedness. Whatever is in the heart overflows into speech. So why do you call me Lord, when you won't obey me?' Luke 6:45-46.

'The door to heaven is narrow. Work hard to get in, for the truth is that many will try to enter but when the head of the house has locked the door, it will be too late. Then if you stand outside knocking, and pleading, 'Lord, open the door for us.', he will reply, 'I do not know you.'

'But we ate with you, and you taught in our streets.' you will say.

And he will reply, 'I tell you, I don't know you. You can't come in here, guilty as you are. Go away.'

And there shall be great weeping and gnashing of teeth. Some who are despised now will be greatly honored then; and some who are highly thought of now will be least important then.' Luke 14:24-30."

"The flock that cast you into exile does not know love. Their actions betray their words. They do not love. They do not know me. They call my name, but they do not know me, and I do not know them. Do you not understand? It is by their own actions that they have cast their lot in life. It is they that have sinned by not loving. By not loving their neighbor. You lived with them, and in their self-righteousness, they cast you out in hatred and in fear. They have violated the second most important of my commandments. They knew, and yet they violated my commandment. I hold them accountable. My Father in heaven made you, just as you are. The choice of liking or not liking purple grass was my Father's, not yours. Just as the choice of the color of your

eyes was His, not yours. The choice of loving or hating is different than the choice of liking or not liking purple grass. You have no choice in liking or not liking purple grass, but you do have a choice in loving or hating. That is the choice you are held accountable for."

"The world has always scorned those who are different." said the Good Shepherd. "So long as we live in a world where hatred and injustice are acceptable in any form, we live in a world that is not acceptable to the Great Creator. He created a world of harmony and balance. It is the flock that creates disharmony and imbalance. Until we learn to love ourselves fully and completely for who we were created to be – and each of us knows inside who that is – until we love ourselves, we cannot love another completely and fully.

The only thing you can offer the world is your love. Anything else is superfluous. You cannot improve upon the works of the Great Creator. You cannot out create the Creator. The only thing lacking in this world that only you can provide is your love. Without it, the world is poorer. With it, the world is infinitely richer. Only you can give your love. No other sheep can."

"What if I cannot give?" asked the little lamb.

"Then look to the Great Creator," commanded the Good Shepherd. "He is the source of everything. He created everything in love. Everything."

"Even me?" the little lamb bleated hopefully.

"Even you."

"But I like purple grass," pleaded the little lamb.

"So," said the kind Shepherd, "you are here. You were created in love. Look to

your Creator and find that love. Open yourself up to that power which is your birthright. The power of love that flows from the creator to you.

God doesn't create you, send you into the world and then abandon you. If you could ever separate yourself from that Creator, you would not exist. Love always flows from that Creator to you. Love is the candle you carry to light an ever darkening world. You were created to carry that light.

To live your life is the most important thing you've ever done. Don't run from knowing yourself. Resistance to yourself and who you are separates you from your Creator and from His love. If you feel there is no love in you, look to the light. Look to the star. Look to your Creator. Teach only love, for that is your highest good. When you are lost and look for a direction, ask yourself, is this love? Does it come from love? If it is not love, let it go, because it is meaningless, and you will only become more lost."

"My Father did not send me into the world to condemn the world. If I did not come to condemn, by what right does anyone else claim that they have the power or authority to condemn? I came, that they might experience love, and not hate; peace and not fear; joy and not sorrow. To those that condemn you, and curse you, and feel hate for you, I say, 'Do not pass judgement, that you may not be judged; for the way you judge you will be judged and with what yardstick you measure you will be measured. But why notice the splinter in your brother's eye without taking notice of the beam in your own eyes? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me extract that splinter from your eye' when there is a beam in your own eye?' Matthew 7:1-4."

"Are you sure you can love me?" asked the Little Lamb.

"The one I loved the most, the one called Peter, let me down. Three times he

denied me. He looked right at me and said, 'I do not know this man. I do not know you.' When I needed a friend the most, he ran away. And what does the Great Book say of that? 'Peter,' it says, 'you are the rock upon which I shall build my church.' If I love Peter, the man who denied me . . . not once . . . not twice . . . but three times. If I love a man like that and call him my friend, if I love a man like that and trust him to be the foundation, the very rock upon which I shall build everything, why shall I not love a poor little lost, lonely lamb who feels he has sinned because he likes purple grass? If I loved Peter for who he was, then surely I love you for who you are. Do you not know how important you are to me? How valuable you are to my Father? He loves you as much as I, for it is He that created you."

The Good Shepherd lovingly held the face of the little lamb in his hands. "Do you not know me?" he asked, looking into the eyes of his friend.

"You are the Good Shepherd." replied the little lamb.

"Do you not know me?" asked the Good Shepherd a second time. "Do you not know who I am? Look deep. Deep into me, deep into you. Look at me, and know."

Little Lamb looked deep into the eyes of his friend. He saw love. He saw understanding. He saw compassion. Suddenly, there was an overwhelming sense of recognition. An awesome understanding that shook the little lamb to the very core of his being. As he stared into those deep, compassionate eyes, he was suddenly transported back in time. He saw himself under the great oak tree, staring into those same eyes as he held his dying friend in his arms. He now knew who this stranger was. "Billy!" he gasped. "It's you! Ohhh." His voice trembled in fear and awe. "You're here. You're really here. I'm so glad to see you." He embraced his friend, and held him, and cried on

his shoulder. "Oh, Billy. Billy. Billy," he sobbed over and over again, holding and loving his friend, and being held and loved in return. "But I held you, and felt you die in my arms." Little Lamb lifted his head from the shoulder of the Good Shepherd, and looked at him through teary eyes. "You died. In my arms. I . . . I don't understand."

"Hear my words," said the Good Shepherd, "that you may understand. There is a reason for everything. There are no accidents. There has always been hatred in the world. Hatred based on fear. I came to the world to offer freedom from those two tragedies, hatred and fear. I came into the world to offer one precious gift. Love. Love, is it so difficult to learn? The great sins of mankind are fear and hatred. I offered love and the world chooses fear and hate. They claim to love, but they do not know me. They fail to follow the only two rules I set down for them. The two most important rules. Love the Lord your God with all you heart, and with all your strength, and with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself. Once, a man wanted to justify his lack of love for some kinds of people so he asked, 'Which neighbors?' Luke 11:29. I told him this story: 'A man going on a trip from Jerusalem to Jericho was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes and money and beat him up and left him lying half dead beside the road. By chance, a devout religious man came along, and when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A templeÄassistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he too went on. But a despised one came along, and when he saw the injured man, he felt deep pity. Kneeling before him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with medicine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his donkey and walked along beside him until they came to an inn, where he cared for him through the night.' Luke 11:30Ä36. Do you know me not, my

friend?"

The little lamb looked into the eyes of the Good Shepherd. "It was you," he said. "It was you, lying by the side of the road. It was you that had the wasting disease."

"Do you know how many others passed me by?" asked the Good Shepherd. "Do you know how many others saw me, and turned their backs in scorn? In hatred? It was you who took pity on me. Only you offered me love. Only you cared enough to stop. It is written in the Great Book, 'For the man who uses well what he is given shall be given more, and he shall have abundance. But from the man who is unfaithful, even what little responsibility he has shall be taken from him. And throw the useless servant out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. But when I, the Messiah, shall come in my glory, and all the angels with me, then I shall sit upon my throne of glory. And all the nations shall be gathered before me. And I will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and place the sheep at my right hand, and the goats at my left. Then I, the King shall say to those at my right, 'Come, blessed of my Father, into the Kingdom prepared for you from the founding of the world. For I was hungry and you fed me; I was thirsty and you gave me water; I was a stranger and you invited me into your homes; naked and you clothed me; sick and in prison, and you visited me.'

Then these righteous ones will reply, 'Sir, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you anything to drink? Or a stranger, and help you? Or naked, and clothe you? When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?'

And I, the King, will tell them, 'When you did it to these my brothers you were doing it to me.' Then I will turn to those on my left and say, 'Away with you, you cursed

ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons. For I was hungry and you wouldn't feed me; thirsty, and you wouldn't give me anything to drink; a stranger, and you refused me hospitality; naked and you wouldn't clothe me; sick and in prison, and you didn't visit me.'

Then they will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?'

And I will answer, 'When you refused to help the least of these my brothers, you were refusing help to me.' Matthew 25:29-45."

"Even now, there is a great wailing and gnashing of teeth among the members of your flock, among the ones who cast you out. Even now, they are being led astray by the leaders of the flock, the ones who tell them what is right and what is proper behavior and attitude for members of the flock. They preach, but have not love. They are but like sheep, who think not for themselves, and follow blindly to the slaughter. They have not love for the one little lamb who needs it most of all. They have thrown him out into the darkness. They have not learned what I taught. They have twisted my words of love and made them into words of hate. They claim to know me and call me Lord, but they do not know me. Even now, the sheep of your flock are being led to their own slaughter. To their own destruction, wrought by their own hands. Their hearts speak not love. Their actions speak not love. I am love, and they do not know me. I came to them, and they knew me not."

"There are no accidents." repeated the Good Shepherd. "There is a purpose to the world. To our existence. Our only purpose for being part of this world is to love. And that is all I came to teach. Love. Is that so hard? I never condemned you or any other

lamb for liking purple grass. I never spoke those words. They may be in the Great Book, but they are not my words. There are many words in that book and no one, absolutely no one follows all the words. For example: it is written in Deuteronomy 14 :8, pigs may not be eaten. You may not even touch the dead bodies of such animals. Or 15, 'At the end of every seventh year, there is to be a canceling of all debts. Every creditor shall write, "Paid in full" on any promissory note he holds'. Or 21:18 'If a man has a stubborn, rebellious son who will not obey his father or mother, even though they punish him the men of the city shall stone him to death.' Or 22:5 'A woman must not wear men's clothing, and a man must not wear women's clothing. This is abhorrent to the Lord your God.' Or 22:22 'If a man is discovered committing adultery, both he and the other man's wife must be killed.' Or 22:28 'If a man rapes a girl who is not engaged and is caught in the act, he must pay a fine to the girl's father and marry her: he may not divorce her.' Or 23:2 'A bastard may not enter the sanctuary, nor any of his descendants for ten generations.' Or 24:1 'If a man doesn't like something about his wife, he may write a letter stating that he has divorced her, give her the letter and send her away.' It is also written that women who are menstruating are unclean and are not allowed into the holy temple. Women's heads should be shaved if they enter the temple without a head covering. If a woman touches the genitals of a married man, not her husband, her hand shall be cut off. If all these rules were followed, there would be many dead sinners lying in the streets and many one handed women. There would be no King David to be a chosen one, because of the life he led."

"That's not in there, is it?" responded Little Lamb to the Good Shepherd's revelation.

"It is there, and much much more," replied the Good Shepherd. "Read the Great Book for yourself and discover the truths that lie between the words. Do not allow anyone to tell you what your truths should be or how you should believe. That is why you have been given your life. It is your journey to discover your own truths that you have tested and found those truths to be absolute.

I have never condemned you. Those words never came from me. You may hear it said that the Wasting Disease is your just punishment for liking purple grass, a punishment created by God, the Father Almighty. My Father wants only love. What kind of loving Father would create a precious life and then write in the book of the new lamb he just created, the instructions: you shall like purple grass? Make that inscription so bold that the little lamb could never forget its presence, could never escape the knowledge that he likes purple grass. What kind of a loving Father would create such a little lamb and then write a Great Book, and say all little lambs that like purple grass have sinned and are damned forever? What kind of loving Father would create that type of a conflict in one of his little lambs? That would not be a loving Father at all. You are a perfect creation of a loving Father. All of that creation is perfect. If there be a falling away from the Father, it is because of the absence of love. And you, my friend, loved me when I was helpless, naked, sick and dying. When all others passed me by, it was you who loved. The wasting disease is not a curse. It is a test. A test for the world. Can you love me, the least of these my brothers? The down trodden, the oppressed, the hated? Can you love these, the least of these, my brothers? Yes, Little Lamb," said the Shepherd. "It is you that I want."

"Do you really want me?" asked Little Lamb again. No one but Billy had ever

wanted him, just for the way he was, just as he was created. He couldn't believe someone anyone, especially the Good Shepherd would really want him.

"Yes," said the Good Shepherd. "I really want you."

"Why me?" Little Lamb still couldn't understand.

The Good Shepherd gazed at the little lamb before him. "You know the pain of rejection as I knew it. You see the hatred in the eyes of others as I saw it. You know how it feels when others hurl hatred upon you and want you to die. You know me more than those who call my name. You know who I am: despised; rejected; persecuted. Because I was different. You know me, and I know you."

"What do you want of me?" asked the little lamb.

"Rise and follow me," commanded the Good Shepherd.

Little Lamb stood up beside his new friend and followed, not knowing where he was going, or what lay ahead. They walked out of the meadow, back to the path, back to the city. Their journey took them to the large oak door of the bar called "The Ram". The Good Shepherd opened the door and walked in. Little Lamb followed. Blackness suddenly enveloped him as he walked from the sunlight into the dark shadows within. It took several moments for his eyes to adjust to the darkness. He looked around the bar, the dim figures of the sheep within, lining the walls in various positions. He saw the outlines of sheep seated on stools, talking or isolating themselves in their aloneness. His eyes looked over the crowd, but he did not see the Good Shepherd.

"Where are you?" he called softly. "I do not see you."

"I am here," he heard a quiet voice respond. "I am here inside of you, where I always have been, You need not see me to know that I am here, for I have always been

here and shall always be here."

"How shall I know you are there?" questioned the little lamb.

"Be still, and hear the quiet voice within," commanded the Good Shepherd.

"What is it you want me to do?" asked the little lamb.

"Look around you," said the quiet voice within.

Little Lamb moved his eyes around the room, noticing each sheep.

"Go into the world," commanded the voice within. "The world needs the love you have to give. Go in my name. Love one another, even as I have loved you. These are my sheep. This is my flock. Feed my sheep. Feed my sheep."

And the little lamb wasn't lost anymore. He had a reason for being. The little lamb who liked purple grass had a purpose. A reason for his life. To love. To love his neighbor as himself.

How did this little lamb learn to love himself? Perhaps a better question is where did this love come from? The answer is it came from the ultimate source of love – the Great Creator – that infinite higher power that loves His creation. Even a little lamb who is different. Even a little lamb who likes purple grass.

PURPLE GRASS

AUTHOR

Once upon a time, there was a little lamb born into this world. His birth was not of his choosing, and at times he felt like he was in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong feelings inside. Yet he was here and struggled to find his niche in this world. To find a place where he belonged and could be all that he could be. That little lamb was me.

When I was a very young lamb, I embarked on a religious journey. That route took me through Sunday School, Catechism, and finally confirmation. Along the journey I was taught certain fundamental religious beliefs that I was told were truths. Undeniable truths from God. As I grew in wisdom and stature, I found some of these undeniable truths did not ring true. That my teachers followed the principal "do as I say, and not as I do." To practice the truths as I had been taught caused a tremendous splitting in who I really was and whom my teachers said I should be. As I became more knowledgeable and educated, I found many of the truths to be false for the world in which I live.

I was raised Methodist. When my mother was a girl, there was no dancing allowed in the church for it violated some spiritual truths. When I was a boy, that same church held dances for us. I remember the men of the church, dressed neatly in suits and white shirts, cramming into a tiny, dirty boiler room next to the coal hopper to smoke. There was no smoking allowed in the church. Who made these rules? The very men smoking in that tiny dirty room. As if that were proper penance for their vice. Throughout my life, I have been confronted by rules. When I was a young lamb, I believed my elders, those holding political and economic power, those in authority: be they judge, police, clergy, teachers, shopkeepers - almost anyone who had some rank above me, had the right to make rules, and I as the humble servant had the responsibility to believe and carry out those rules without question. That those who were brighter, more educated, and could see "the bigger picture", had wisdom that far surpassed mine and that gave them the authority and credence to make rules. Then, of course, there was the good book; the bible. The ultimate source of rules. Who would dare question the word of God? Certainly not a little lamb like myself. I was raised very carefully to be a believer in rules.

There is something about an education which causes a person to question. Knowledge is a very powerful tool in

dispelling many myths. How come during one era it is sinful to dance and is all right during another?

When I attended Michigan State University, there were strict rules. Women were to be in their dormitories by 11 p.m. weekday evenings and by 1 a.m. on weekends or suffer serious punishments. Any student of any age having alcohol in their living quarters, drinking on campus, or drinking at a campus related function anywhere in the State, was subject to immediate suspension. How ironic when I attended my class reunion to discover the rules have now been changed. The once sexually segregated dormitories at different parts of the campus, are now sexually integrated with men and women sharing the same building with no hours or curfews. Alcohol? That's for drinking, isn't it?

I spent a great part of my life following the rules others had made for me. I believed the rules to be unquestionable truths. Perhaps, like Eve, I have eaten the apple of knowledge, which now makes me question the rules. I no longer believe them to be truths. The bible is often quoted, but seldom read in its entirety. Whereas there are many truths in that book, there are also many inconsistencies and contradictions which are glibly explained away by some religious leaders. When I first read that good book, I was appalled at some of the material. "Why didn't they teach me this in Sunday School?" Knowledge is truth and the truth shall set you free.

I struggled with my curse. My homosexuality. That word that I dared not speak. Not in the church, not in my family, not in the University. I was ashamed of who I was and kept that part of me hidden. The harder I tried to suppress my thoughts and feelings, the more I hated who I was. I prayed. How I prayed to have that curse removed from me. I had groups lay hands on me and pray for me, never revealing what my curse was, only that I carried a burden that was killing me inside. Please take it away," I cried. When the alter calls would ask what you want to unload to the Lord, it was always my curse. I tried psychotherapy and analysis for years to be "cured". I even tried aversion therapy and almost gave myself an injection of apomorphine to make myself vomit to be "cured". I was desperate. What brought me to this point in desperation? The teachings of the church that claimed to be the truth.

Historically, the church has wrought great destruction on groups of people in the name of God. In the name of truths. The holy wars. The heretic trials. The burning of the witches.

Interestingly, the word "fagot" is a bundle of sticks, twigs or branches, especially for use as fuel. I am told that homosexuals (fagots) were soaked in oil and were the kindling material for burning the witches. A group of people, the Christians, who claim their mission in life is to convert the world to the teachings of Christ, have wreaked a trail of havoc, and destruction of other human beings. All in the name of God. In the past, the destruction has been physical. In the present, the destruction is psychological.

In my journeys, I have met so many young lambs who feel they carry the curse of "purple grass." They have been cursed, spat upon, beaten, thrown out of the church, their families, and their communities. Many are carried to the brink of suicide because their secret has been a festering cancer that is destroying them internally with self hatred and disgust with who they are. What a needless, senseless tragedy. That one of these precious, sacred little lambs should become so lost in their journey that the light of their life is snuffed out physically or psychologically. That they are ripped into so many pieces by hiding their secret, or exposing themselves to rejection by those they love.

And who is responsible for this tragedy. Oh no, not the little lamb who likes purple grass. Don't lay that guilt trip on them. He or she did not bring this malady as a curse. The responsibility lies with the creators of religious truths who write in big bold letters on the pages of the personal inner book of the innocent little lamb. They write in big letters, SINNER.

As I grew in wisdom and stature, I discovered there are many roads that lead to the truth. The religious leaders claim their's is the only path. I have discovered another road called the spiritual path. Whereas the two may be similar in some areas, they can be very different. So many have become disillusioned with the religious path, that they have lost the quest they started as little lambs. They have confused religion with spirituality. Because the religious God of their childhood failed them as adults, and out of frustration trying to be a whole human being in the face of religious persecution, they have left all paths entirely and discarded their spirituality.

To be a happy, healthy human being, I believe you need a balance between your physical, mental, and spiritual parts of your being. If you discard anyone of them, you create an imbalance and your life suffers. If the God of your childhood is not a truth for you, discard that old truth, but do not discard your spirituality.

All too often, current religious values revolve around fears. Fear of not following the prescribed rules and being cast into eternal damnation for your sins. I do not believe that was the original purpose of religion. Raising any child, any little lamb in the environment of fear creates some long lasting and severe damage in those little students. Those believing, trusting, wanting to love and be loved, innocent little children. Where is there room for a kind, loving, benevolent creator who takes joy in his creation? Where is the Good Shepherd whose only teaching was love? Unconditional love. Certainly not in the world of fear. Certainly not in the world of rejection because your value systems do not blend with the flock's. This is the Creator. The God of our childhood.

I have worked with and experienced the struggles of persons, living with Aids. Early in my work, I discovered a young man, seriously ill with the disease. He returned home, seeking solace from his parents, presenting them with what is sometimes termed, "the double whammy." "Mom and Dad. I'm gay and I have Aids." His parents response is an all too familiar story. His father told him, "get out of my life and never come back into this house. You are no son of mine." His mother went along with these dictates. The young man died several months later. His father brings fresh flowers to his grave every day. That father will have to live with his actions. How foolish we are. To throw out part of our very being because we believed something to be the truth. If there is not love; if there is not compassion, then I believe there cannot be a truth.

Another young man, living with Aids, comes from a small town in the Southeast. His parents know, and still love him, but they cannot share their pain with anyone in that town for fear they will be shunned and isolated. The son cannot return to the town he grew up in, because he does not want to disgrace his parents. What undeserved shame, we the parents, we the adults of the world heap upon our innocent little lambs. Where is our home when we no longer are welcome in our home?

A very high percentage of persons with Aids that I have met, have rejected, not only their childhood God, but any concept of spirituality. And justly so. There is nothing available to them in the traditional religious values to give them any solace or refuge. The only thing available is self hatred and who needs anymore of that. Many have spent a lifetime filled

with that.

My spiritual odyssey brought me to the west coast to pursue a new career and a new life and lifestyle. Having gone through a divorce, leaving family and friends back in the midwest, I was lonely and at times, despondent, bordering on the brink of suicide. A friend brought me to Metropolitan Community Church in Sacramento. I heard a different message that first Sunday. "That I, was acceptable and loved, just the way I was. I did not have to be anyone other than me." After all of my years of feeling unworthy. Unacceptable. Dare I believe this to be the truth?

The following Sunday, I asked my visiting brother if he would go to church with me. He replied, "No. Those are not my kind of people. I would have trouble accepting them." I went alone and sat in the pew. I'll never forget that day. In front of and to the right of me was a very large tall man dressed in drag. A tall blond wig, heavy eye makeup, very long fingernails and a blue satin dress. I later discovered he was called "Candy". In front of me sat a street bum, dressed in shabby, tattered clothes and quite unkempt. To the left of me sat a group of very tough looking "dykes" who had parked their motorcycles on the sidewalk in front of the church. They had chains hanging from their shoulders. Their leather motorcycle jackets had the words "Leather and Lace", emblazoned on them.

None of these people would have been acceptable to the midwestern suburban churches I had attended and grown up in. As I looked over this assortment of people, I thought, "I'm having trouble accepting these people. As the congregation said the Lord's prayer, I watched Candy. His head was bowed. His long eyelashes covered his closed eyes. His long painted fingernails and fingers were intertwined with those of the opposite hand. His lips spoke the words. He was praying. Suddenly, I found myself crying and thinking, "this is the first place I have ever experienced where people have the freedom to worship their Creator in the style and manner that they see fit. And they are accepted for who they are. Though I may not always understand, these are my people, and I have found a home."

My spiritual journey is different from my religious path. It involves a program called the 12 steps in Alanon or A.C.A.. Whereas the religious path involves someone else teaching, the spiritual journey is one of self enlightenment and self discovery. There is no one preaching to you. Instead you are encouraged to discover a "Higher Power", in whatever

shape or form you choose. A "Higher Power" that is always there in a far greater capacity and far more loving than the God of my childhood could ever be. Forgive? What? For being human? I needed to learn to be kind to myself. I needed to forgive me. I needed to "take time and hear that quiet voice within." That voice that has always been there and will always guide me, no matter how dark my world, no matter how lost I become, no matter how frightened I am, that voice is always there, if I but take time to heed that. When I have no home, I have that quiet space within, that shall always be my home, wherever I go. Too often, I associate the word God with my childhood, with all its fears and imposing and overbearing truths with no room for being human. Hence the concept of a "Higher Power", allows me to develop a spiritual resource very unlike that childhood image, yet very similar to a loving God. I no longer get hooked on a word and can grow in my spirituality, believing - - firmly believing that I, am a perfect human being. That I, have a right to be here, and experience all that life has to offer me. That I can proudly claim ownership for my feelings and say this is who I am. This is who I was created to be and take delight in specialness of that creation. That spirit of truth lies within me and can tap into it and feel good about where my life leads me.

I was once challenged with the statement, "go deep within yourself and discover your highest good and bring it forth and share it with the world." For so many years, I felt so alone and lonely with my feelings. Terrified to share them with those I loved, for fear I would be rejected. I felt I was the only one in the world who had these strange, frightening desires. I think my highest good is to tell you that you are not alone. That you are not the only one with those feelings. There are at least two. You - - and me - - and we, are not alone anymore.

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PURPLE GRASS

EPILOGUE

"There were ninety and nine that safely lay
in the shelter of the fold,
but one was out on the hills away,
far from the gates of gold.

Away on the mountains wild and bare,
away from the tender Shepherd's care,
Away from the tender Shepherd's care."

"Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine;

Are they not enough for Thee?"

But the Shepherd made answer;

"This of mine has wandered away from me;

And although the road be rough and steep

I go to the desert to find my sheep.

I go to the desert to find my sheep."

"But none of the ransomed ever knew

how deep were the waters crossed;

nor how dark was the night that the

Lord passed thro'

Ere he found His sheep that was lost.

Out in the desert He heard its cry

So sick and so helpless and ready to die.

So sick and so helpless and ready to die.

"Lord whence are those blood-drops all the way

that mark out the mountain's track?

They were shed for one who had gone astray

Ere the Shepherd could bring him back.

Lord whence are Thy hands so rent and torn?

They are pierc'd tonight by many a thorn.

They are pierc'd tonight by many a thorn."

"But all thro' the mountains, thunder-riven,

and up from the rocky steep,

There arose a glad cry to the gate of heaven,

Rejoice! I have found my sheep!

And the angels echoed around the throne,

Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own.

Rejoice, for the Lord brings back his own."

Elizabeth C. Clephane, 1830-1869 Ira D. Sankey, 1840-1908

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