

A short story by Nigel Coates

Shane Sheep

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It was an extremely cold night when Shane was born - the coldest night in spring for many years. He and several other lambs all lay freshly delivered on the cold earth. It was a stark fright compared to the warmth and comfort of his mothers' womb. As he took his first breaths he looked around in a panic. Shane's first impressions of life were none too favoured - until he was introduced to love. His mother cleaned him and lay close in the way of the wind. The rest of the flock wandered between the newborns, nervously wishing them well.

Shane lay on his back and looked at the stars. They were so bright and there were so many! They enlivened his imagination. His perspective was great. But Shane's wonder of his new world was side-tracked by the coldness he could feel creeping into his body. His thin coat was no match against the deathly chill. Shane knew he had to warm himself from the inside if he was to survive. He imagined himself a star - and shone as brightly as he could.

The darkness of night seemingly stretched forever. Shining brightly and believing in himself became as natural as breath.

The eventual break of day came with immense relief. Shane had made it. Several of the other newborns didn't. He found his feet as the first morning rays slowly melted the pained numbness of his limbs. He spent his first day on earth wandering gingerly between the great joy and sorrow of those in the flock.



This very same morning saw another new addition to the farm. The farmer walked with an animal that demanded respect. Smoke blew from his nostrils in the still chilled morning air. His footsteps echoed deeply through the thin morning mist. All of the animals on the farm were drawn to see it. It was a young stallion, as white as a cloud.

He was locked in the top paddock, and the farmer walked back towards his wife and child, who were leaning against the fence looking for newborn lambs. The farmer walked through the flock and plucked Shane off his feeble legs. He looked him over and was about to put him down. "Let me see!" called the girl. Her father smiled and carried Shane to the fence. The girl held the lamb like a doll, and smiled ever so kindly in amazement. She did not want to let him go, but after a few minutes the farmer placed Shane back with his mother before the family returned to their farmhouse.

Shane was too young to remember this day.



As wild as fire the stallion burned. He reared and bucked and ran the fence line of his paddock. His wide eyes glowed with energy and he stamped his foot repeatedly to let all the animals on the farm know he was the boss.

Having spent a few weeks getting used to his legs, Shane ran over to investigate the commotion. While most of the other animals hid in fright when the stallion was in a mood like this, Shane poked his head through the wires to get a closer look.

"It is surely the king of animals!" he exclaimed to himself in awe, as the stallion masterfully balanced on his hind legs and reached for the sky.

He could only ever dream of having such power as he stared with wide eyes of his own.

"Shane, come away from there!" his mother requested him urgently. But Shane did not want to look away. He did not want to miss the majesty. Where was the thrill in going to join the flock?

Shane wanted to continue to bask in the power and glory of the stallion, while he wished secretly for similar power of his own.

After a few minutes the stallion settled– but Shane was still excited. He looked around to see that the rest of the flock were at the far end of the paddock and ran to a soft patch of grass out of sight. He, too, wanted to be great. He could not contain his smile as he wondered just how great he could be. He wanted others to look at him in awe. He bent his front legs and pushed into the air. For just the shortest time, he was standing on his back legs!

"Wo Wo Wo -- What a rush!"

Shane's eyes grew as wild as the stallion's. He again reared to his back legs – this time jumping with such enthusiasm he flipped right over onto his back! He quickly gained composure and sprung to his feet. He reared again, this time balancing a little longer than the first. And again – even longer. He could hardly contain his glee.

After only a short time of practice, Shane could balance on his hind legs with confidence. He looked down the hill and could see all of the sheep slowly eating their way back towards him. He wanted to show them his newfound greatness. He wanted to earn their respect. Shane drew breath – and bleated louder than he ever had before. Every sheep in the flock turned its head quickly to see.

Shane was rearing towards the sky. They could see his small silhouette delicately balanced on his hind legs, while his front legs thrashed for balance. They all burst into laughter. Having just seen the stallion showing his might and power, they all thought Shane looked ridiculous. Most passed a snide comment to their nearest neighbour before returning to eating the grass with a chuckle.

Shane could not understand. He had just accomplished something that was very difficult to do. Did they think it was easy to rear up in the air? Or did they think he hadn't done a very good job? All he could decide was to continue practicing until he got it just right. Shane's mother walked towards him at great pace.

"Shane! Stop it now," she bleated. "You *must* stop this instant!"

But rearing made Shane feel happy. He continued to smile widely as though worthy of reward. He could not understand his mother's disapproval. He could not understand why the flock had laughed. He just wanted to be complimented on his discovery. He wanted his mother to feel proud.

Shane reared into the air and found his balance. Just as he was taking a deep breath to again roar to all of the other animals on the farm, his mother rushed close and pushed him from his feet. Shane flipped and stumbled and rolled on the ground before jumping back to his feet in shock. He could not believe it. His mother looked embarrassed. He looked around to see some of the other sheep still laughing at him. They thought he was a fool. They turned their backs in disrespect. They again passed comment on his behaviour.

Shane looked to his mother to see that she was very ashamed by his actions. He did not understand why. He hung his head low and felt worthless. He knew he was not as mighty as the stallion – but he was just a lamb, after all! And he had only practiced a short time! He could not understand why the flock was laughing at him when he was trying his best. He could not understand why his mother would not give him support. Confusion and doubts filled his mind. Tears filled his eyes.

His mother led him to a quiet corner of the paddock.

"Shane! You have done it again! Why can't you just behave like normal?"

"But Mum, I was just having fun!" Although only weeks old, Shane had already used that reply several times.

"The rest of us are having fun, and do you see us behaving differently?"

He looked through the railings to see the elders being shorn. It seemed a most unpleasant experience, and he did not look forward to the day that he had a thick coat. He hid quietly at the back of the group of lambs.

Then the young girl appeared at the gate to his pen. She looked quizzically at the faces of the lambs before her as they pushed to the back of the pen in fear. Shane was pushed to the front and caught her eye. He walked slowly towards her and carefully sniffed her hand as she held it outstretched. She scratched him behind the ear and Shane surrendered to the pleasant touch. She was definitely the nicest human of them all, and Shane was sad when her father's call took her away.

Shane returned to the other lambs. He listened in on a conversation between a group of young males. They were all very relieved as they had thought it was their last day. Shane asked for more.

"One day soon, no different than what happened today, all of us sheep are brought here." Shane listened eagerly. "And we lambs are separated from our mothers." All of the lambs trembled at the thought. "The girl lambs are returned to the flock and the boys are taken..." Shane looked confused.

"Taken?"

"So the humans can eat us!" finished one of the scared little lambs. Every other lamb bleated nervously at the thought of death.

Shane was shocked. He had never before thought of death. He had only been interested in life. He had happily missed the repeated conversations of the flock, but now realised he had missed something very important. Soon he would die! But death did not immediately fill him with fear like the others. He was intrigued by it. He wanted to know more about it before he made up his mind. He wanted to learn as much as possible – about life, about death, about everything.

The flock was soon re-united and driven back to its paddock by the nasty dogs. The elders spread themselves thinly around the paddock while they adjusted to their new appearance. Shane thought they all looked hilarious, but knew better than to tell them.

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"Mother, is it true I will soon die?" His mother answered without concern.

"Yes Shane, it is the way. We are sheep. The women bear offspring and give wool, the young men are eaten."

Shane was still shocked by this revelation. He did not understand why it had to be this way.

"Why did no one protest?" he thought. "Why did no one choose to live differently?"

He walked to the top of the paddock and looked towards the stallion – by far the mightiest of all creatures on the farm. The stallion caught Shane's eye and whinnied a confident call. He knew the stallion would not fear death, and Shane decided then that neither would he.

But the more Shane thought of death, the more he thought of life. He wondered what life could offer him. He had only ever known the space of his paddock, the sheep of his flock, and the few other animals he had met through the fence. He wondered what else there could be in the world. What was over the hill in the stallion's paddock? What was beyond the shed? How many things were there that he could discover? What could he learn?

Shane ran to his mother.

"Mother, I am not afraid to die, I am just not ready. I first want more from my life."

As his mother looked at her defiant son, for the first time a glint of admiration glazed her eye. Only in her wildest dreams could she wish for the strength to govern her own fate. But even after her continual requests to behave and having felt the scold of the flock, Shane continued to live each breath in wonder. Her heart tingled. She was at first unsure of the feeling. Then she came to realise she was proud – but she did not tell Shane. She believed his radical behaviour and free thought should not be encouraged. She wanted him to follow the right ways of the world.

"We are only sheep, Shane. It is not for us to decide. We must behave as sheep – that is our place."

Shane found a quiet spot at the top of the paddock to think about her words. His mother was asking him to accept death, with the only reason being, 'that is the way,' but it was in Shane's nature to question *the way!*

Shane was not yet prepared to die. He would not accept his fate. He did not want the next sound of the motorbike and barking dogs to signal his end. Before he died, he wanted to know more of life. He was sure.

As the flock stood in a group, Shane shared his thoughts.

"I am not yet ready to die. I will not let it happen."

His mother begged and pleaded for him to behave. She could not understand his rebellious and defiant nature, just as he couldn't understand her reservations. The flock laughed at his words and wishes. They had always thought Shane was foolish, but to have the hide to question his own destiny they could not believe! They said he was not worthy to be called a sheep – and that is what hurt.

Shane was trying to open their minds, to better their lives, to allow them to see ... but he was now an outcast. Although he would walk around the same paddock, it would not be as part of the flock. He had been ignored before, but this time was different. This time they would never show forgiveness. He immediately felt sad – but then came to realise they had just given him permission not to behave in their way. He no longer had to concern himself with the expectations of the flock. There was nothing more they could do to him. The limitations they had always placed on him were no longer of concern. Shane was free to be himself.

Shane was free to do whatever he wanted and become whoever he wished. He knew there would be a day when he showed the world who he was, and he knew he would feel proud.



For several days Shane thought over the developments. Now that his options were without limit, he did not know where to begin. Changing his fate seemed like a good idea, but that decision only had influence in his mind. He knew he had to put his thoughts into practice, for the real world to notice he wanted a new destiny. But taking action wasn't as easy to do as say.

He wandered around his paddock waiting for inspiration. As the days passed – life stayed the same. The other sheep were now practiced at ignoring him. They happily ate the grass by their feet and shared their repeated conversations. Shane wandered to every part of the paddock, and always ended up standing alone in the top corner.

Shane began to panic that he would not be able to change his destiny. He was just a lamb after all. Sheep have a certain path to follow – it is well worn for all to see. It was his duty to be eaten. It was why he was born. But, he was different from the other sheep. He was not normal. He could choose his own path. And like a pendulum, his thoughts bounced between the acceptance and defiance of death.



Shane looked over to the hill across the next paddock, and that was it. That was his motivation – so simple. The hill climbed steadily upwards, and then... nothing. What was on the other side of that hill? Answering that question was all Shane needed to confirm he was different. He wanted to see with his own eyes what no other sheep had seen. Shane was filled with determination. Even if he was soon to face death, it would only be after catching a glimpse of what was over the hill. He was sure.

The stallion was resting easily by some trees as Shane started his mission.

He walked up and down the fence looking for a way through. Several ties of wire were loose near the top post. He had never noticed before – but, he had never had reason to look before. It was a tight squeeze, but soon he was through. He looked over his shoulder to see that the flock all had their heads down. They had grown tired of glancing in his direction. “What did they care?” As he ran across the vacant paddock he felt his troubles trail behind him. They were of no concern. As he ran towards the unknown he was fuelled by desire. He longed for the rush of making a new discovery. Life, death, his mother and the flock, all blended into one and disappeared. He thought only of the moment.

Shane reached the next fence that kept the stallion. He was closer to the summit, but could still see no more than before. He had to go farther. He paced the fence looking for a way through, thinking only of the new lands he would see and the new things he would discover. If he could get past this next hurdle, he would prove to himself and the world that *normal* was not the only way.

In an almighty roar the stallion was upon him. Shane looked up to see him rearing overhead. He landed and stamped his hoof loudly a half step from Shane on the other side of the fence. Shane had not seen the stallion move from the trees – but he had been watching quietly all along. His wild whinny crossed the farm. Shane continued to look up in amazement. The stallion was even more powerful than he thought! But Shane did not feel scared. The stallion was also more beautiful than he thought, and that is what he focused on.

The wild eyes of the stallion were no deterrent. Neither was his overwhelming size and fearsome roar. Even if harm was to befall Shane it did not matter. He was striving for his dreams. He had faith in his belief and did not fear death.

Shane’s only concern was to see over the hill – and focusing on the goal, the obstacles did not seem so big. Without further thought Shane launched himself into the air and landed masterfully on his hind legs. He reared with pride and grandeur. He thrashed his forward legs

wildly in front. He tried to climb so high he bounced on his spot. He bleated with all the strength he could muster. He felt as powerful as the stallion, and his determined voice was heard by all on the farm.

The stallion could not believe it. In shock, he again reared up and roared. Not that Shane had noticed, but every animal on the farm was leaning against the fence to see. They looked on to see a stallion and lamb rearing toe to toe. They could not believe their eyes. Who did this lamb dare to be?

The stallion was first to settle. Shane also came to rest, though his heart felt like it was going to pound right out of his chest. The stallion lowered his head to look in Shane's eyes. They met at the fence and touched noses.

"What could possess a sheep to act in such a way?" asked the stallion in disbelief. "Why do you not fear me?"

"Oh, you did give me a fright!" replied Shane with a smile, "but I must see what is over the hill, beyond your paddock. You see, I am soon to face death, and I cannot do so willingly until I know more."

The stallion was still amazed by the lamb – one so little with a heart so big – one from the flock who dared to stand alone.

"Know more of what?" he asked as he looked over his shoulder to what he had always thought was just another mundane hill.

"Know more of life," replied Shane.

"And what you seek is over this hill?"

"Well, what I seek is beyond *my* paddock," justified Shane. "I must learn of the unknown."

The stallion thought over his words, as Shane resumed looking for a way through the fence. The stallion looked across the paddock from where the sheep had come from. The entire flock was standing along the fence-line with their heads poking through the holes. Their jaws all hung low. The stallion realised what a great effort the lamb had already made to come this far. And who was he to stand in the way of such a strong desire? He reached over the fence and grabbed the lamb by the scruff of his neck. And just like that – Shane was over, and standing at the base of his greatest ever ambition.

And with nothing more in his way, Shane smiled at the clear path before him. He quickly thanked the stallion and started his sprint towards the top of the hill. He ran without burden. He ran without fear. He bounced across the ground with the greatest of ease.

In no time at all Shane reached the summit. He stopped to draw breath and to realise the thoughts in his mind. The lands stretched as far as he could see. He had never imagined the world to be so big! He could see a million trees, hundreds of paddocks, and animals of all sorts confined in their own worlds. He wondered if those animals had thought of the unknown. He wondered if they, too, had dared to dream, and wonder about all they could be.

The stallion appeared at his side.

"So are you now content to die? Having seen over this hill?"

Shane looked at the view before him and thought. Then he looked over his shoulder back to his paddock. He saw all of the eager onlookers and was shocked. He had never stood so far from his flock and felt a fright when he could not pick which one was his mother. But then, they were just sheep – normal sheep. He guessed they would be mocking him and he was glad he could not hear the laughs. He looked back to the horizon for several moments to think of life and death.

"No, I'm not."

"You are obviously not a normal sheep, so it's fair to say you do not need to behave as normal," stated the stallion as he nodded his head. Shane like the encouragement and smiled as he thought of his life till now. His life was what he had made it – and he vowed to continue.

The stallion helped him back over the fence and Shane ran to the post he had squeezed past. The other sheep surrounded him as he emerged. Shane was preparing for another lecture from his mother and to feel the wrath of the flock, but all of the sheep were excited!

"What is over the hill?"

"What did you see?"

"What did you say to the stallion?"

Now it was Shane whose jaw hung in shock. They were genuinely curious about the unknown. They wanted to know what he had discovered. They were not mocking his ways. Shane realised that deep down, they, too, wanted to know more of life and death and the ways of the world – but they had been too afraid to question it.

Shane was filled with the understanding of a universal truth. At one time, long ago, sheep did think deeply about all matters. But farmers locked them in paddocks and placed expectations on them. It was no longer acceptable for a sheep to act freely. They lived with control. And with time, no matter the grandeur of an idea, they did not have the courage or ability to take action in the real world. They succumbed to expectation – and as the generations passed and life settled to a simple routine, it is what the elders taught the lambs. They taught them only of normal.



The sound of an approaching motorbike and barking dogs broke Shane's thoughts and scattered the circle of sheep that had stood around him. One sheep at the back of the group was the first to panic, and she ran for the far end of the paddock. The rest all followed, even though they had no idea where they were running to. Their instincts were habitual.

Shane's inner voice told him to run in the opposite direction, and he reached the protection of the trees just as the farmer opened the gate. The dogs bolted through with their flashing white teeth cutting the air. Their barks filled him with fright and he wanted to run to his mother – but he knew it was not the way. He crouched behind a tree, daring only occasionally to peek around the trunk to see what was happening. The flock was rounded through the gate and run towards the shed. The bleats from the other young male lambs pained his heart. They knew their time was near.

The farmer's daughter perched eagerly on the fence of the holding pen. She looked at all the young lambs that scurried between the elders. She did not recognise her special lamb, and her bright face lost its shine.

The sheep reluctantly ran up the ramp into the shed. Mothers and sons desperately tried to express their farewells, but all too quickly the farmer grabbed the lambs and put the males in a separate pen. Their pained bleats told the world of their misery. They only just realised that they did not want to die. They wanted to choose life and govern their own destiny. They had not thought it possible until Shane had just showed them how. They wished they had listened to him earlier. They wish they had spent less time mocking him and more time trying to understand his point of view. But it was too late for them to fight their fate. Their desires would go without reward.



The young girl walked down the dirt road towards the sheep paddock. She was sad she could not find her little friend. Shane was still hiding behind his tree. He saw a tear run down the girl's cheek and could hide no longer. He jumped from his spot and ran towards her. Shane sniffed her outstretched hand, before she scratched him behind the ear. Again they shared a smile. She picked Shane from the ground and held him tightly in her arms as she had on the day he was born.

"You are a special one, aren't you?" she asked without expecting a reply.

Shane bleated eagerly and rubbed his face on her arm.

But the sound of the motorbike returning made Shane jump in panic. The girl held him tightly and tried to keep him calm. Her father rode close, as the rest of the flock ran desperately back into their paddock – relieved to again return to their home, and all that they knew to be true.

The mothers of the lambs left behind bleated tears of pain. All years previous they felt only mild sorrow, believing in *normal*, and *the way of the world* for sheep. Shane's recent actions now made them question their beliefs.

"What's that one you got there girl?" asked the farmer. "Is it sick or injured?"

"No father, this lamb is special." The farmer approached to look closer.

"He looks normal enough to me!"

Shane feared for his life and kicked free of the girl's grasp. He bound towards the farmer and reared high into the air. He thrashed his legs and bleated like the mighty stallion. The farmer jumped back in shock!

"Well I'll be!" he gasped as he re-positioned his hat and shook his head. He looked around to see if anybody else had seen. He thought about it only a second.

"But he's a male lamb, honey; his time had come." The farmer lunged at Shane.

The girl cried out in tears as Shane ran for his life, narrowly missing the farmer's grasp. He bolted towards the top of the paddock to the hole in the fence. He dared not look back, for he could hear the dogs, the farmer starting his bike, and the girl pleading helplessly. He could also hear the panicked calls from those in his flock, but there was nothing they could do to save him. Shane slipped through the hole and raced across the next paddock towards the stallion. Shane's fate was in his control.

The farmer stopped at the first fence to open the gate. The dogs circled by his feet in panic as this lamb was not behaving as normal, and the farmer was yet to give them any clear directions. The farmer looked up just in time to see his stallion lift the sheep over the fence by the scruff of the neck. He rubbed his eyes to be sure. The girl caught up to him as he stared at the lamb without word. Her pleas broke his daze and he rode at great speed to the stallion's fence and climbed over. The dogs quickly followed. Shane was hiding behind the stallion.

"C'mon dogs -- Around," he called anxiously. The dogs nervously set to motion. At once both the stallion and Shane reared and roared. The dogs feared being clipped or squashed by a thrashing leg and kept their distance. The farmer was flabbergasted.

"See, father," cried the girl as she drew near, "He is special!" And the farmer could not deny it.

"Dogs, heel!" he commanded. "OK, OK, darling, this one can live..." He was still shaking his head.

Shane quickly became comfortable in his new surrounds. His new friends were now his family. Each had a unique personality, and none were concerned with normal. His knowledge of the world was expanding greatly, for he now had many people he could talk to about his ideas – knowing that none of them would laugh at him for questioning *the way*.



Shane also studied the workings of the farm. He wanted to see how everybody fit into the bigger picture. He knew the ducks and chickens were for eggs. The cats kept away the mice and rats. The dogs were pets that were trained for work. The nanny goat had been on the farm for 20 years and was granted honorary membership. And the kookaburra – well, he'd lost the confidence to fly in the open sky.

Shane was told that no sheep had ever stepped foot in the house paddock before, and he felt like an explorer – an explorer of new lands and new ideas.

Whenever Bethany was in sight, Shane was by her side. He followed her everywhere. If she would sit to read a book, he would lie by her feet. If she walked to the orchard to pick an apple he would circle beneath the tree. But when she went to the river, Shane was no idle spectator. Bethany would swing on a rope into the middle of the river, and Shane would dive from the bank and swim towards her. He loved to swim! Not so much when his ears went under - but when he kicked his legs to swim forward, he felt like he was flying. The farmer looked up from fixing the irrigation pump. Shane's little head bobbed above the water and it looked like he was smiling. As Shane called to Bethany, it sounded like he was laughing.



With the passing of several weeks, Shane realised how far he had come. When he slept back in his paddock, his wildest dreams didn't come even close to his new life at the farmhouse, so he assumed that his current dreams could also be far succeeded. Shane still had an appetite to learn more.

He tried to imagine a world that was even bigger than the farm. The family of humans would often go down the long dirt road away from the farmhouse, and Bethany would be gone for most of every day. Shane knew there was still so much to learn.

But then it came to school holidays and Bethany went to visit her auntie at the beach. Shane had to spend all of his time on the farm. He started to follow the farmer. At first the farmer was none too comfortable having a lamb watch his every move, but he soon developed an increased fondness for Shane. Even when Bethany returned, Shane divided his time between the two of them.

Shane was encouraged to ride on the petrol tank of the motorbike, balanced between the farmer's legs. He was riding like this the first time he again saw his flock. The farmer rode the length of the fence, and the flock could not believe the sight of Shane smiling widely, ears flapping in the breeze, riding proudly on the motorbike. He had tamed the beast whose sound had always brought fear. He bleated his happiness to the flock. He heard them call back. They were sorry they had mocked him. They wished they had believed. They asked for forgiveness and invited him back to the flock. Shane was so thankful for a world full of goodness. He shone brightly from inside.

But then the farmer stopped at the gate. It gave a moment for the dogs to catch up. Shane remained balanced on the tank as the farmer let himself through the gate before closing it. The dogs jumped over the fence. Shane could not understand – if the gate was shut, how could the flock get to the shed?

The farmer gave his dogs strict instructions, and they ran off at great pace. The flock ran from one end of the paddock to the other in fear of the dogs and their sharp flashing teeth. Further instructions, and then the dogs ran them all the way back. The farmer ran the sheep this way and that - without reason. Shane could hear from their frightened cries; they were getting very tired, but the farmer kept running them. He kept encouraging the dogs. Shane felt helpless. He could not understand why the farmer would do such a terrible thing to his flock.

Over the madness, he heard his mother's exhausted cry. Shane could resist no longer. He jumped from the motorbike and cleared the fence in a bound. He raced towards the commotion and flew past the farmer's leg in such a flash he nearly jumped right out of his boots!

Shane lined up the dog standing closest to his mother. As hard and as fast as he could; he head-butted the dog in the bottom. The dog flew up into the air and spun out of control. He hit the ground in a thud and lay for a second in shock. He looked up to see nearly twenty sheep angrily looking down on him. The dog got the fright of his life and yelped in panic. He stumbled to his feet and made an awkward dash to freedom.

"Well done!" cried his mother, and the flock all bleated to agree. It was strange to hear the flock call in unison. It unsettled both the farmer and his dogs.

Shane turned to face the remaining two dogs, who were only a short distance away. They did not know what to do. They had never seen a sheep attack a dog before! Shane raced towards them while bleating a fearsome cry. He pulled up just a few meters short. They had not yet moved, for they did not know what to do. Shane reared up and thrashed his legs. He felt worthy of the power he felt. He bleated with such passion, it was heard far and wide.

The dogs became even more nervous. They broke Shane's gaze to look at each other. They could both see the other's face was shaped by fear. They ran with their tails between their legs to the protection of the farmer.

Shane raced to his mother's side, and the other sheep circled around. The farmer had been so amazed watching all of this he had forgotten to breathe. His head became light, and he fell to one knee. The three dogs he had been training for the country show all sulked behind the motorbike. The farmer took several minutes to compose himself.

When he finally started his motorbike, Shane ran from the flock and jumped over the fence, quickly hopping back onto the petrol tank. The dogs all circled nervously, unable to look Shane in the eye. Shane could not understand why the farmer had done this to his flock, but he was glad to see them again all the same. He filled with warmth knowing they had invited him back to the family. He considered staying with them, but he knew there was more to learn at the farmhouse. Shane sat quietly for the ride home. When they arrived, it was difficult for the farmer to tell what happened to his family, for he did not think they would believe him. Bethany believed without question.



And for just a few days things were back to normal. Shane mingled with the animals of the house paddock and discussed events both current and in theory. He walked warmly in the sunshine and drank freely from the trough.

But early one morning there was movement in the house. Shane could hear the family having breakfast even before the sun was up. He pushed open the barn door to see the lorry packed full. A trailer was attached with the dog's asleep inside. Shane knew the family was going to go to a new part of the world, and he wished that he had been invited.

He climbed up onto the front section of the trailer and jumped onto the back of the lorry. He nestled down between the other pieces of luggage. He wriggled around and soon became quite comfortable. The family came out of the house, jumped into the car, and drove down the driveway. All of the animals who had been spying from the barn could not help but smile at Shane's mischief.

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They arrived at the same time as hundreds of other people. Shane looked around to see a nearly full car park, but his heart skipped a beat when he noticed all of the dogs. Some were being walked, others were barking from inside their trailers. Several more were riding in the back of utes. Shane felt sick inside. So many dogs! What had he done?

"Shane!" cried Bethany as her dad rushed to see. He nearly fell backward off his feet when he looked up to see Shane had hitch-hiked a ride. Shane smiled at Bethany and felt on top of the world – until he looked at his view and remembered all of the dogs. He jumped from the back and ran to her feet. She could not take a step without Shane pressing against her leg. The farmer put his dogs on leashes and walked towards the entrance of the showground. Bethany skipped with the excitement of having Shane there, and he trotted nervously by her side.

Without even trying to, Bethany and Shane drew a lot of attention to themselves. They would approach dogs that were ferociously snarling and growling at each other as though they wanted to fight – and then everything would fall quiet in an instant when they caught sight of Shane. A sheep – running free – at the dog trials! The odd silence followed them as they walked across the car park. Heads turned towards them from every direction.

Word spread quickly throughout the ranks of dogs. There had been whispers of a sheep that had not been behaving as it should, and this was one thing dogs took very seriously. If sheep were not afraid of them, the farmer would not need them. But the fact the rumours were true hit them with such shock; they could do nothing but stare. The rumours were fact! And the courage of a lamb that would face them all at once puzzled their minds. Who did this lamb dare to be?

As they walked through the gates, the dogs were taken one way and the people directed the other. Shane followed Bethany and was relieved to be able to relax a little. It didn't take long until a circle of children were tickling him all over.

Shane and Bethany made their way to the grandstand. From there Shane got a good look at what was happening. Sheep were in stalls, and dogs were ready. A farmer would release the sheep and get his dogs to run them through obstacles. Shane realised why the farmer had made his flock run all over.

Shane's first concern was subdued. The humans were using several different groups of sheep for the trials, and they were getting a good rest between events. They didn't sound very happy, but at least they were safe.

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The day proved to be very exciting. The crowd cheered loudly, and everyone was smiling. Bethany was especially happy, as her father had made it to the final four contestants.

Shane ran to the top step of the grandstand as he was having difficulty seeing through the growing crowd. With this greater perspective on the world, he took a moment to think of how far he had come. He thought back to his earliest days. He was so determined to explore the world to find new discoveries. Now, he realised his search of the unknown could be as much within, as it was without. Making new discoveries in the world was great, but of greater satisfaction to Shane were the realisations in his mind – discoveries of thought. He smiled at his own continued amazement at life.

The announcer stood in the centre of the ring. He waved to the grandstand requesting silence as he was ready to announce the winner. The final four farmers and their dogs stood behind him. Bethany stood in the centre with her father.

"I am proud to announce the winner of this year's muster. Congratulations, David Doyle!"

Everyone in the grandstand jumped into the air. They screamed and clapped and cheered. Shane could not see a thing. He was nearly trodden on from every direction. He ran down to the fence for safety and to see what was going on. Bethany and her father were celebrating. Her mother ran to them, and the three of them held tight in an embrace. Shane was missing out! He ran along the fence to the gate. Several people pointed and laughed at the lamb running through the crowd at such speed. Shane ran around the gate post onto the competition ring. A wild whistle from one of the judges drew the attention of everyone who wasn't already looking. A lamb running free!

The laughter of the crowd broke the family's hug. They turned to see Shane running towards them. Bethany bent down to welcome Shane with open arms, but one of the dogs belonging to another farmer was not so happy. He hated that a sheep was running free. Sheep belonged in pens, and it was a dogs' duty to keep them there. With the dog's lightning start, the leash pulled from his owner's hand before he knew what was going on. The dog pinned his ears and ran towards Shane. His teeth were clenched with determination. Everything that happened next happened so fast.

Bethany reached out to grab Shane, Shane jumped for her arms, and the dog raced between them with his teeth flashing white. Shane was bowled to the ground and Bethany screamed in fright. The dog ran a wide circle back to his master. Shane jumped to his feet and looked towards Bethany. She held one hand in the other and blood was dripping from her clasp. Tears of fear and shock filled her eyes. Her parents wrapped her in an embrace. The crowd all gasped as one. Such a light-hearted moment had turned so bad.

Shane had to act. He couldn't just stand there and do nothing. He recalled his fright when he was bitten. His insides churned and fuelled the desire. Those dogs had to learn. He had to teach them. Shane walked calmly to where the announcer had stood. He had run over to Bethany. Shane was standing alone, between the farmer and their dogs, and all of the people in the grandstand. And for a while he just stood there.

The dogs knew they were in trouble. A dog could be shot for biting a human! They nervously exchanged glances and waited fearfully for the lamb to do something. The crowd all stared as one. There was not a noise to be heard.

Shane did not really have a plan. He was acting purely from instinct. He thought he would show them his first trick. He lay down, rolled over on his back to his other side, and gracefully stood back up. But still no one said a word. Shane did not understand. Every other time he had done that trick, everyone had laughed and cheered. Maybe they didn't see? At twice the speed he rolled back the other way. He sprung to his feet and smiled with wide eyes at every face in the grandstand. But even the crickets had stopped chirping. For just a moment time seemed to stand still. There was nothing.

Shane could not believe. Why would the human's not support him? He felt frustrated. He hammered his hoof on the earth like an angry stallion.

Thwack, thwack, thwack! The synchronised jumps of shock from those in the grandstand nearly bounced it to the ground. What was this lamb doing?

To break the awkward silence was a solitary laugh – the greatest laugh of all, the laugh of the kookaburra. From the wrought-iron cornice on the front of the grandstand the kookaburra looked down and laughed. It was infectious. Soon, the crowd also roared with laughter at the lamb’s antics. Shane was thankful his friend had found the courage to fly. The kookaburra was thankful to Shane for the inspiration.

Now Shane had them on side, he could put on a show. He ran in a circle and bucked like the stallion would do. He bounded high into the air, contorted his body, and landed gracefully each time before launching again. He was wild! He reared in front of the crowd and thrashed his feet in the air. He jumped like a pogo stick trying to climb higher. He bleated what was on his mind. “I, Shane Sheep, Really don’t like dogs!”

They had no idea what he said, but they continued to laugh and cheer all the same. They had been held speechless for so long that when they realised the absurdity of a lamb bucking like a bronco, their laughter was continuous. They laughed when their breaths went both in and out. Shane continued to rear and buck wildly.

He felt connected to the energy from those in the grandstand who were wishing him well. He felt invincible. He felt like he was the mightiest animal of them all.

He turned to look at the dogs. They were all cowering behind their masters. Shane ran to the dogs on the very left. He reared and bleated. Those dogs looked to the rest – wondering what to do. They sulked over to the next group. Shane ran all the way to the right. Again he reared and drove those dogs closer to the middle. The dogs whimpered in one big group. The farmers stepped to one side. They had never seen such behaviour; neither had the crowd.

The sound of the applause and laughter was deafening. Some of the crowd were doubled in laughter while others wiped tears from their eyes. Shane ran circles around the pack while bleating wickedly. He stopped at the front and reared. He hopped towards the closest dog, thrashing his front legs at him. That dog cowered back. Shane looked to his left and right, and those two dogs shuffled back in retreat. The dogs had never felt a greater fear. The lamb controlled the crowd as though he could wield thunder. They shuffled back as a pack. Slowly, slowly, Shane guided them backwards. They didn’t even realise they had walked right into a holding pen. Shane ran to one side and nudged the gate with his nose. It was loose. He pushed it with his chest and the gate swung shut. The clicking of the latch ended his performance. The dogs were locked away.

Shane ran towards Bethany and bleated along with the applause and continued cheers from the crowd. The family hugged him, and he hugged his family.

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That was a special day. The photographers who'd been ready to snap the winner of the dog trials had all taken photos of Shane instead. He made the front page of newspapers all across the land. He was the excited talk of pubs, and radio stations, and dinner tables, and schools. Everyone wanted to know more about him. They wanted to know the story of how a sheep was able to govern his own fate. Everyone wanted to share in his discoveries. They wanted to know his mind.

If he could achieve so much as a lamb, fuelled only by his own belief, what would they be able to achieve in their lives?

And that's what Shane became: a symbol of belief, a symbol of faith. He taught the world that nothing was impossible.

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Many people came to the farm. It started with television crews, radio presenters, and writers for magazines and newspapers. They wanted to know Shane's secret - and Shane was happy to show them. He rolled, and bucked, and reared like a stallion. And he told them to follow their heart and believe in their dreams. And then he would just smile.

All of the local children begged their parents to visit Shane on his farm. Most parents were also intrigued and excited to see. And then people came from towns far away - all sorts of people from all sorts of places.

Shane was so excited by it all. He loved when people came to visit - for it was just another opportunity for him to learn more, and to teach.

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"We have been here a long time, my old friend," said Shane.

"And seen many changes," replied the stallion.

They looked down over the paddock. And how the flock had grown! Young lambs scurried this way and that as their mothers all yelled encouraging words. Some worked for speed, some for agility, while others measured how far they could leap in a single bound. Shane smiled at his

life and then to the heavens. Grey clouds were gathering at the horizon, and he knew it would be a cold night for autumn.

Shane walked proudly through his flock. He recalled a feeling from a time long before: the hollowness of seeking encouragement and receiving none – the wavering belief in one’s own heart. He did not wish that for any lamb. All of the lambs in Shane’s flock were encouraged to try new things and to think of new ways. They were taught to place no limits on what they could achieve. They were encouraged to dream wildly, and then follow their dreams with action.

The young male lambs of today were horrified at the stories they were told. They could hardly believe there was a time when they were eaten! Now, the males of Shane’s flock were prized for their admirable qualities and sold to stud as young rams – a far better result for them, indeed. The flock had been living well from the day Shane returned from the dog trials.

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Shane had passed on all that he had learned during his long and amazing life. Those students had become teachers themselves. They taught their young, who had also grown to teach. Shane had stepped back, pleased his discoveries would live forever, and be bettered by those who followed.

Those sheep sold by the farmer took their knowledge with them. Shane’s ways of thinking were spreading throughout the sheep of the world. His ideas and discoveries were keenly appreciated. All those to leave the farm wore their association proudly.

Shane had achieved more than he ever dreamed possible. He thought of his life and smiled. He thought of his death. He walked to a quiet spot at the top of the paddock. He crouched down and rolled onto his back to look at the stars above. They were so bright he wanted to reach out to them. The clouds gathered overhead and he thought that he was finally ready to learn more of death. Shane smiled, and let out his last breath.

When he jumped to his feet he was full of the spritely energy he felt as a lamb. He ran as fast as he could. He burst through the dark clouds and flew effortlessly towards the stars.

He was ready for his next adventure. He knew there was much to learn.

The End