

2. THE SHEPHERD

I keep an eye on my flock. I don't let the sheep stray off. I care for them. I know the mischief that they can get into. I know there are wolves hiding at every corner. They can devour the sheep before I can rescue them. I am there to look after my sheep.

You have nothing to be afraid of. I am here for you. I have learned to know the night so you don't have to fear the darkness. You will learn to accept what is necessary. Time has its inexorable movement. I play along with time. I am the perfect Shepherd.

When my flock gets too thick, I know that I will have to thin the numbers. That is part of my vocation. It is the hardest thing to admit the sacrifices to which a Shepherd submits. But that is my affection. I am clean. I do all that I can to prepare my little lambs. We often do not see the end coming. Gather around me, my little ones.

When the night does its work, it is precise. It is razor sharp. The day is random. It hides our faults. The night is merciless. It sharpens our fear. That is why I am here, to cut close, to cut dear!

The sheep wander off in the hope of discovering a more beneficent light. I have offered them my blessing. For them it is not enough. They want so much more from me. I have many sheep but one flock. I cannot risk the flock for one miscreant. I have to anticipate the strays. I have to catch them before they wander off. That is why I am such a caring Shepherd. I do not allow my sheep to upset me. I am ready. I know what they have in mind. I catch them before they escape. My eye is sure. They are warmed by its gaze. They are reassured by my presence. Even when they go off on their own, they realize that they will have to return to my care. That is why they are not afraid. That is why they don't go far. They are always within reach. I do not have to go far to find the sheep. They are in a resting-place waiting for my arrival. I will come for you, my sheep.

Run, my little one. Try as you may. Run, Run. This is how you feel free. No one is holding you back. You let yourself go. You are my favorite. All of you. When you run. You try to escape. For the moment, you can escape my grasp. But you cannot escape my watch. I can see all of you. Even when I sleep, you play on my inner eye. I love you all.

I cannot sleep. I know that you have strayed far off. I will not rest until I find you. Until I get you back. That is why I am the Shepherd. I accept my work. It is eternal. I try to rest. You disturb my peace. It is not restful. I have to rescue my sheep. You have wandered, and I have to bring you back to the righteous path. I reach out for you. I come to get you. Let me touch you. Let me hold you. Let me pet your luxurious coat. My wondrous sheep.

You frolic in my mind. In the meadow you gambol. Too many to count. Too many to keep track of. All of you. I want to know you. I want to love you.

I need to count the sheep. I need to bring order to this disorder. You have assembled randomly. You have escaped my notice. I need to bring you under my watch. That is why I am the Shepherd. You have forgotten me. You have forgotten why I am here. I am here for all of you. I am here to protect my sheep.

I adore you. That is why I am your Shepherd. For the least of you, I am here. In your moment of weakness and abandon, I am here to take you back. In your most extreme prodigality, I am the one who can strike away your unease. My staff is sure. My reign is unbroken. My

calling is unambiguous. I welcome all of you. All of my sheep. Even as you tumble in the rugged country, I am there to catch your fall.

“Do you have trouble sleeping?”

She answers his question with one of her own, “What are you talking about?”

“You don’t have nightmares, do you?”

“Why do you ask?”

“I’m just curious. You seem unsettled.”

“Life is enough of a nightmare. I reserve sleep for pleasant dreams.”

“That is good. I would hate to hear if you had nightmares.”

“We all have had nightmares. What can you do about it anyway?” she asks.

“I could end your nightmares.”

“How could you do that?”

“I have a treatment.”

“That seems like a miracle.”

“We all can work miracles if we try.”

She wonders what he is talking about. “Tell me about your miracles.”

He knows how to get inside her head. How to tinker with things.

She wants to contradict him, “It’s a lot easier to create nightmares than to end them.”

He knows that he has some work to do. “It’s pretty much the same thing. You just have to be open to suggestion.”

He doesn’t want to ruin her life. He is there to improve her lot. He knows how to combine cruelty and kindness. He knows how to dish it out in perfect little doses. That way she will welcome the sting of pain. She will only react when it is too late, when she has bargained for more than she can take.

“We need to be alone if I am really going to help you.”

She is not sure if she wants to take him back to her his place. But he has such sad eyes.

He reassures you, “I don’t want to hurt you. I won’t do anything that you don’t want to do.”

He may need to close the door of her bedroom to finish the treatment. He doesn’t want the screams to wake up anyone else in the building.

It has been a very long night. He has used every technique that he knows to lull her into submission. She is still hypnotized by those sad eyes.

“You have such lovely features,” she tells him. “I want to know who you really are behind that mask.”

She is a little afraid. But love can sometimes be a very frightening thing. She is ready to surrender herself to something greater than she has ever known. Her body trembles. The world shakes in sympathy.

She wants to drop to her knees. She wants to thank the heavens for her blessings. And up to this point she has been blessed. That is why he picked her out. She is truly a glorious soul. And he wants to share his magnificence with her.

He is her angel. She is ready to submit to his will. He does not speak for himself. He speaks for a higher power. She will do anything that she can to gratify that power. This is not a simple occasion. It is an event of majesty and wonder.

He wants to offer her the miraculous touch. But he has to search deep in her soul to see if she is truly the one. Such an investigation cannot proceed by telepathy. Even words are insufficient to reveal what is at the heart of her desire. He has to strip off the veils and stare at the naked truth.

It makes me sad to think what I go through to protect my little sheep. All of them are so vulnerable to the appeals of the world. And the world is full of earthly delights. The kisses of heaven are made manifest in the flesh. And I must do everything that I can to make sure that my little ones resist these temptations.

It is so easy for this fire to burn deep in their breasts. And that is only the beginning of them lapsing into complete servitude to these dark masters. I am the only hope. I am the only one who can ease the pain of sin. I am the only one who can put to an end the suffering that these little ones endure. On my knees.

I entreat the powers that be to give me the strength to do my work. This is a thankless task. There are so many brambles where the sheep can wander and lose their way. I am always vigilant. My eyes see all. But there is so much that goes under my gaze. I need to open my eyes and catch up to the true discomfort that surrounds me. I need to care for my sheep.

When a little one is lost, my heart breaks. I can feel my heart break again and again. These poor creatures will not abide by my teachings. They are so innocent. They want to do right. But it is so difficult for them to stay on the right path. Their bodies are created for sin. And sin they must in the hope of discovering their true nature.

I am there to take them back to their original intent. I am there to convince them that greater good lies in submitting to the law. I am there to help them in their moments of doubt and unease. I am the savior, and they are the lost sheep. They need to be saved!

Little lambs, wander as you may. That is your true nature. You cannot help what you do. You do not seek evil. You are just unaware of the traps that await you.

I give you the freedom that you need. I do not want to stand in the way of your desires. I will do everything that I can to let you discover the world on your own. It is your world. But there are times where you need to be protected. And there are demons out there who want to ensnare.

Run fast, run as far as you can. Feel the ground beneath your feet. Let your heart take you where you may. And in your wandering you will escape the limits of this world. You will embrace a world beyond the one that you know. You will find paradise.

Little lambs, I am watching over you. My eyes see things that yours do not. I observe long and wide. I can peer into the hearts of your enemies. My seeing has a knowledge of their intentions. I know about the history of their mischief. And I have done what I can to make this world safe for you.

Little lambs, I hear your cries. I will come for you. Do not be afraid. You have wandered off too far on your own. And it is up to me to provide the rescue that you need. Enemies hide in dark corners ready to pounce on you. Enemies float around in the sky in the hopes that they can swoop down and take you. I have your interest at heart. I will bring down your enemies.

Little lambs, you love to roam. You love the meadow. You love the brook. You do not realize what dangers await you by the babbling brook. That is why I am here. I will rescue you

in your time of distress.

You are born to delight. You do not understand that this is a world full of dark places. You accidentally stray into one of these places of woe, and you are unprepared for what lies in wait. That is why I circle these fields and anticipate the calamities that might befall you.

I am your Shepherd. I am your rock. The ground may be uneasy under your feet. I will make sure that you stay upright. I am the only one who can see. I am the only run who can rescue. Do not turn your back on me, little lamb!

The skies threaten. And the storm clouds will rain down on you. The torrents will wash you away. I am coming, my children. I have your best interests at heart, my little lambs. I must keep you all near me. Even when you try to get away, I am watching you.

I am the eyes in the night. I see deep in the darkness. I know the intentions of these moving shadows. They cannot escape my vigilance. I will still these intruders. I will again make your passage safe.

"Do you like me looking at you?"

She blushes, "I don't know. It sort of gives me the creeps."

"You are very lovely."

"Thank you."

"You don't feel afraid?"

"Not really."

"Just a little."

Maybe a little."

"You have no reason to be. It's just that I'm afraid of strangers."

"We all start off as strangers. It's how things are."

"You know what I mean. I just get afraid of people who I don't know. People who seem to pay me too close attention. Like they want to something badly to me."

"Look at my face," he smiles. Do I look like I could do anything bad to you.

"I don't really know you. You seem so charming now. But things could turn really ugly mighty quickly. I don't know. I don't know how you would react under stress."

"I would be the perfect gentleman, I have your best interests at heart."

"I suppose that you do."

She isn't sure if she can trust him. But just being with him makes her feel that spark. She is coming alive. It is like swimming in pleasant waters. She isn't sure how to handle this. She is moving out of her depth.

As she goes under, she hardly realizes how deep she is. No one can rescue her. She is on her own. Her body burns with excitement. She can't stop herself.

A kiss would bring her alive. It would tingle all over her body. She would become someone.

"I've been watching you for a while. I see that you're alone."

"I'm actually waiting for someone. Someone who really loves me.""

"He's obviously not here."

"He's not, but that doesn't mean that I want you hassling me."

"I'm not hassling you. I just want to be your friend."

She can feel that he is already too close to her. She can feel his heat. She is shaking.

She can barely stand up.

“Do you want a drink?” he asks. “It would make you feel better.”

She feels that he is taking advantage of her weakness.

The Shepherd knows when you are most vulnerable. He is there to rescue his sheep. He can see them faltering in the rough. He appears out of nowhere to take care of his flock. He is always there. He is always ready to intervene.

The sheep venture out on their own. They do not know what lies awaiting for them in the wilderness. The Shepherd is attuned to the snares that are set for the sheep. That is why he is always ready.

Audrey works at the fragrance counter of a large department store.

“What kind of fragrance does your man wear?”

She loves his raw appeal. She can feel their contact flesh to flesh. It is almost as if he has spent time in prison, and he knows what are his limits.

She is getting warm just looking at him. He looks back at her. He looks right through her. She can feel him inside her.

“I used to work cleaning a place like this.”

He rests his hand on the glass counter. She reaches underneath the counter as if she is trying to make contact. Her hand is safe behind the glass.

“Have you ever dropped a glass bottle on the counter?”

She nods her head.

“Did anything break?”

“No, there was just a big crash.”

Her lipstick is thick and dark, crimson. He is looking at her blouse. It is open and highlights her figure. She notices what he is looking up and perks up. She gets a charge looking into his eyes.

“You didn’t tell me about your man.”

“I didn’t think that you really wanted to know.”

“I want to know how he makes love to you.” He intentionally embarrasses her. She does not crack.

“He is hot and deep. He is so unlike any other man that I have known. He almost satisfies me just by looking at him.”

She hates talking about him when he is not here. Audrey is staring at Robert.

“Are you afraid that I’m going to steal something?”

“The only thing that you want to take is me.” She laughs.

He opens his hand on the glass. Hers is right below his. They touch between glass.

She has to get back to work. He doesn’t want to leave. She doesn’t want him to go. After this, it will all be so complicated. Now there is a simplicity that she adores. She can taste it sweet in her mouth.

“Life has a way of making something of us. We do everything that we can do resist that energy. But it catches up inside us and just blows us away.”

There is a real fear in his face. She wants to hold him. She wants to dispel the fear.

“I have to get back to work.”

He says, “I could watch.”

She stares at him and tells him to go, "I really have to get back to work."

He doesn't want to go. He moves off slightly and looks back at her. He waves. "I love being with you."

She can hardly hear what he is saying. She has her back to him and is putting things on the shelves. When she turns back, he is gone. She really did want to say something back to him. But she didn't want him to think that he was that special.

She is looking out in the crowd. She is trying to catch the eye of any man. She needs a customer. She loves that thrill.

The traffic from the mall is slow today. Everywhere else it is crowded. Here there is barely a soul to disturb her boredom.

Another man approaches the counter. He seems gruff. He takes out a picture and puts it on the bar.

"Do you recognize this man?"

Audrey faces him down, "Am I supposed to know him?"

He runs his hands along the counter and makes streaks. "I used to shoplift from a place like this."

She gives him a bemused look.

"Of course, that was before I became honest and became a cop."

"Of course."

He pushes the photograph towards her. She barely looks down. "Do you recognize him?"

"I don't even see him." She turns back to do her work.

"I need to find him before he does more damage." The cop hesitates over the word *damage*.

"Give me your card. I will call you if you see him."

"You just do that. You can call me if you just want to talk. I'm good at talking."

"Of course. I'm sure that you are."

She can tell that he is interested in her. She does not want to give him the time of day. She has gone off with men like this before. She feels that part of her has never returned. That only seems logical.

"I am good at asking questions. I can get inside people. I can show them what they need to see."

"I only see what I like to look at."

He is looking down at her hose. They make her legs look shiny. She hates the fact that he is looking. He really is taking something that she doesn't want to give.

She turns back to face him, "May I help you?" She really does want to help.

"I'm not in to fragrances. I like things *au naturel* if you know what I mean."

She gives him the look, "I know what you mean. I do. Do you want to wait until I get off. Or are you going to come back?"

He is not used to being refused. He slides the picture up from the counter and puts it in his jacket pocket.

"Maybe tonight."

"Maybe, honey. See you around."

She can feel herself being devoured by this man. He is so rude. She finds herself going along. It really does disturb her. She hates what she is becoming. She is so much a slave to her desires. She accepts it for what it is.

She wishes that someone was looking for her. She wants to do something bad enough to get the cop riled up. She sees that it doesn't take much to get him going. Men are weak. There's not much that she can do about it. She's not going to run to their rescue.

Audrey looks at herself in the mirror. There is so much chrome around here that it is almost impossible to escape from herself. She does what she can.

It is still a couple of hours before she gets off. She is going home to an empty house. She is a little afraid. She wants a man's touch. She just realizes what she has to give up for a little comfort.

Audrey sprays some window cleaner to get up the streaks left by the cop. The alcohol makes her want a drink. She can hardly take the next few hours.

The cop shows up the next day. He feels as if he owns her. He walks around the corner as if he is marking his territory. She will not escape.

"Has my little friend been back?"

"Not at all."

You seem like the kind of girl who likes to do bad things."

"And what kind of girl is that?"

"Just the nasty kind."

She smiles. Today her lipstick is a lighter shade. "Oh really. You seem like such a great judge of human nature.

"I try. Just like you try. I bet that you dreamed about me when you fell asleep last night."

"I dreamed that I was tied up in your bed. Only the police came in and rescued me."

"Very funny."

"It is a little early for a shadow."

"I just have to pursue all the leads. I thought that our friend might come back."

"He's not even a friend. I don't even know the man."

"Things have changed a lot since the old days. Wherever I look there's a closed-circuit camera. It's as hard to get out a rag of fabric out of this place as it is to steal gold from Fort Knox."

"We're just keeping our eyes on weird types like yourself."

The Shepherd knows that the sheep are being pursued by their enemies. He does all that he can to keep them hidden. But the enemies still know where to look. And they will find what they are looking for unless he finds them first.

Seek and you will find, unless I find you first. I have my eyes on you. And I know what you are plotting. Nothing that you do will allow you to evade my surveillance. There is no darkness that will not allow my light. There is no hidden place that will not allow my eventual observance.

I will attend your demise.

Audrey wonders why the cop has returned. He continues to give her the creeps. He is not letting up.

You can push a man again and again until he snaps.

Audrey feels that her life is changing. There is a part of her that is no longer her own. She has been working this counter for a long time. She has been in the public eye. Over time, people have come to know who she is. It is as if there is a whole personality that is separate from her. This is the person that everyone knows. But it is not the self that she is. And these two personalities are entirely separate and independent. They now live as two different people.

Audrey lets the public self go. She is by herself tonight, and she wants nothing from that public world to penetrate her privacy.

She wants to see Robert again. She wants to bring him into her private world. But there is something about him that she finds very frightening. He is two people. And they exist in the same body. But he has not made peace with his other self.

Perhaps that is why Audrey likes Robert. She loves his turmoil. She wants that same force to rip at her. She wants to feel that energy. She lies in bed and imagines his warm body next to hers. She has a man. She should be thinking about him. But he is not with her tonight. And she wants Robert.

The police officer seemed to be staking out her work. He arrives the next day as well.

“Are you developing a crush on me? You visit my work three days in a row.”

“I’m just doing my job. I’m trying to help.”

Audrey looks busy. “This is where I work. It is a bit of an interference.”

“I have to admit that I am getting a little fond of seeing you. That may be a bit of an excuse of my part.”

“I really like having you around. It makes me feel safe,” she gives him an ironic smile.

“I can take care of you.”

“I believe you can. Maybe we can zip into the washroom when I get a break. I hear that you’re in to quickies.”

He looks surprised, “What are you saying?”

“Why don’t you go in there first and start getting ready? By the time I get inside, you’ll have everything that you need for me.”

“I suspect that the lady does protest too much.”

“What do you want? I can pull you behind the counter and give you a hand job. Is that the sort of thing that turns you on when you make your rounds on the street.”

“I don’t do rounds. I’m an investigative officer.”

“You are insulting me. I am truly sorry.”

She gives him a sad face. That is the best that she can do under the circumstances. She wants to get back to work.

“I hope that it’s been as good for me as it has been for you.”

He plays along with her, “Maybe you could give me your home address, and I could come by later for a visit.”

“Is this official? Or are you just hitting on me?”

He tells her, “I’m just doing what I can.”

Things are getting a little too complex. She is just playing a game. She wants to throw him off the scent. It only makes him more interested.

She could play along more. Invite him back to her place. But there would be no end to

this. He would want to keep coming back again and again. Then he would be just a pest. Even if she wanted him for a fling, this wouldn't be enough.

For all her joking about the quickie in the toilet, she sometimes would like a little jolt in her day. She has never masturbated in the toilet at work. But she wishes that she could relieve her stress that easily. She just feels so tense at work. Even her clothes are like a strait-jacket pulling at her. She wants things to be a little looser in her life.

This man that she is seeing hardly helps. This is what she thinks that she should be doing. He is so eager about love-making. But she finds him to be a chore. It seems as if he is reading from a book. And he follows each move in order.

She wants to follow along. But each action is timed so slowly. It only freaks her out more. The past nights by herself have been a blessing. She knows that it isn't going anywhere. She is not going to marry this man. She really can't enjoy him accompanying her on their little jaunts. She remains as philosophical as she can about life. It doesn't hurt to playing a little cat and mouse with this cop.

This is why she likes Robert. He is doing what he can to shake her life up. Even if she finds him a little threatening, she accepts that fact. She wants some risk in her life.

I know what excites my sheep. They are turned on by danger. It is my role to stop this from escalating out of control. I don't mind the sheep hopping around in the meadow. But when they venture out on their own, I need to be extra cautious. There is no telling what they might get into.

"You don't know what you're dealing with. This man likes to hurt woman."

"My heart has been broken many times, lieutenant."

"That is not what I am talking about. He is a psycho. And it often takes a while before his aggression comes out."

"I'll take my chances. For all I know, you may be making this up."

"I have a case file that is the size of a book."

"Have you definitely tied all this to our boy?"

Audrey is not convinced by the police officer. This is the fourth time that he has come by to visit her. She is starting to find his visits harassing.

"I may have to report you to your supervisor if you keep showing up like this."

"Maybe you'll have to invite me out."

"I'm not going to date you if that is your hope."

He looks a little forlorn. "You could take care of me here and now. Quickie was your word."

"I can joke about things like that with you. But it doesn't mean that it's an closer to happening. You're an embarrassment. You are an example of what happens when desire outbalances physical appeal. Have you looked at yourself recently? You are some kind of monster."

He adjusts his jacket and tries to look sexy. "Do you want to take me on a shopping spree?"

"What's wrong with you can only be helped by a killing spree."

"You're not respecting an officer of the law."

"You keep showing up at my work. I wonder where respect starts and ends."

Audrey is losing her fascination for Officer Friendly. He is out of bounds. No longer just doing his job, he has let his extra-curricular interests dominate his present pursuit.

“Maybe if I can just see you naked once.”

“Your imagination is rich enough for that. I should report you for this kind of shit.”

“I’d only say that you encouraged me.”

She scowls at him, “Who is going to believe a pervert like you.”

She hates to admit it, but if he wasn’t a cop, she might go for him. Under the circumstances, the game of cat and mouse is intriguing. Audrey hates how far things have come. She doesn’t want to think about herself as desperate. But just the whiff of desire gets her going. She needs to take a step back.

She wonders why she hasn’t seen Robert again. That might make the cop’s pursuit have more reason. As it is now, he truly seems to be harassing her. There is little that she can do to avoid his interference.

When her day is finished, she again returns to an empty apartment. She is tired from a long day at the office. How long will this last for her? When she was younger, she saw this job as a stepping stone to something more. She thought about becoming a designer. As long as her work kept body and soul together, she could give free rein to her dreams. But now this situation seems permanent. She hates the pale reflection that looks back at her from the counter. Sure it’s a distorted view, but it seems to capture her reality.

When my lambs become weak, they are the most vulnerable. They have tried to do too much. They have wasted all their energies in venturing out and now find it difficult to make it back.

Down deep Audrey senses that she is being tortured by her present lifestyle. She often has difficulty sleeping at night. The recent visits of the police lieutenant have only underlined how uneasy she is feeling about her life. She even finds his abusive taunting as somehow a turn on. She wonders what has pushed her to this point.

For a few days, the cop doesn’t show up. She actually feels that she is missing him. This gives her the creeps. She really has enjoyed it on her own until now. But she wants some kind of rescue. She wants to be pursued. She wants to be challenged. She wants to be questioned.

A few days off hardly adjust Audrey’s attitude. She has been resisting her man. He can feel an imminent breakup.

“Maybe I’m too serious for you,” he suggests.

He only sees her life as spinning out of control. She had plans and now all she does is go to work. Even on her days off, she sits at home and watches movies. There is no ambition in her life whatsoever.

“What do you want me to do? I’m not going to get an office job. Retail is fine for me. I still like the glamor.”

She realizes that she has been cornered into a wall. She hardly saw her life as a badge of honor. But now she feels that she has to defend it. All this effort makes her just want to be by herself.

The next day at work, she takes extra effort in polishing the counters. This is why she was hired. She takes pride in her work space. Even this is a little frightening. She sees successful men come in all the time to buy cologne. She still imagines that one will make the

offer.

Her recent lover was just that sort. They stayed together for two years. She hates the fact that she thinks about it as past when they have not officially broken up. But she is feeling put upon. She can no longer deal with his criticism of her.

He has told her, "Your life is never going to be perfect. You need to learn how to deal with people."

"I see people everyday at work. My customers love me. If you can't see what I have to offer, then you can go on your way."

My sheep think that they can dispense with my protection. They believe that there are others out there who will care for them as well as I do. But there is no one else who can do what I can for them.

I offer them permanence. With those others, they are only being led to certain death. Lambs, heed my pleas!

When Audrey turns off the light, there is a profound sense of emptiness. She has not felt like this all day. But now it hits her deep. What is happening to her?

She realizes that it might get rocky when she thought about breaking up. But now the full effects are being felt. She told herself that she would never break up with one man before she had another waiting. Such heartache that put her through. She can hardly admit to her pain.

Now she embraces her solitude. For this brief moment, she wants to scream out into the night.

My sheep, when you call out in the night, I will be there.