

## Ulrich Hub: THE LAST SHEEP

Illustrations by Jörg Mühle

### Das letzte Schaf

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### ENGLISH SAMPLE TRANSLATION

Our story takes place in the dreary winter of year one or four during the reign of a wicked king who never shows up in this book. Because he's hiding in the palace attic, scared that another king might come and swipe his crown. Instead, this story has sheep. Lots of them: a sheep with its hair parted on the side; a sheep with a cast on its leg; a sheep with braces, and many, many more. Only the shepherds know how many there are. Every day, they count the sheep in their flock several times. It takes steady nerves to be a shepherd. Because not a single sheep can go missing.

Not even the last sheep.

People always picture sheep standing peacefully out in the field, contentedly munching grass, but in reality they're constantly frisking around and making a lot of noise. As soon as one of them runs off somewhere, the next one runs after it, because the first one might have found something exciting to eat. Each sheep is envious of what the other sheep has, and it's always the same ones who kick and shove the others, or just run over the top of the bunch.

But as soon as night falls, they all suddenly become very still. No sheep would admit to being afraid of the dark, but to be on the safe side, they cuddle up close together

and try to fall asleep as soon as possible. Normally, they sleep through the night.

But in this night, everything is different.

## Chapter 1

As if illuminated by a gigantic floodlight, the whole field is filled with blazing light. Every boulder, every thistle, and even every chewed-off blade of grass is clearly visible.

All the sheep are wide awake, looking goggle-eyed into the night sky. There's a new star up there, shining as beautifully as the morning light. That can't be a good sign. Maybe someone should go and ask the shepherds.

“Our shepherds are gone!” The cry comes from far away. From the sheep with the runny nose. He always has to sleep apart from the flock. After all, none of the other sheep feel like getting sick, too. “Vanished into thin air!”

Nothing like that has ever happened before. Shepherds have to stay with their flocks at night. If a sheep suddenly wakes up because it had a bad dream – maybe about the big bad wolf – it only needs to run to the campfire, where the shepherds always sit. Then they take the frightened sheep into their arms, soothe it, and carefully carry it back to the flock. But not until it's gone back to sleep.

Quick as a flash, the sheep race to the fireside. A scene of horror greets them: the coals are cold, a thin stream of smoke hangs in the air, and it's as if the earth has swallowed the shepherds up.

Only their rucksacks are still lying in the grass.

“Oh, that's just great,” says the last sheep to arrive. “Now we're all alone. This is gonna be bad. Really bad!”

The sheep with the side part immediately starts to cry. “Our shepherds went away because they don't love us anymore! They always said it'd be easier to herd a bag of fleas than sheep like us!” Fat tears start falling from his eyes. “Now they've gone to look for something else to herd – better-behaved animals. Cows, goats, maybe even

geese.”

The sheep exchange nervous glances. You don't start blubbering in front of the whole flock! But the one with the side part is embarrassing anyway. He's the only one who still gets combed by the shepherds every morning. The others stopped taking grooming advice from the shepherds a long time ago.

Something's rustling and crackling! The sheep bunch up. But it's only the sheep with the cast on his leg. He limps spryly from one rucksack to the other, sticking his nose into each one.

“Only a change of socks and toothbrushes in here,” he mutters. “And I know the shepherds always hid a few treats in one of these.”

All sheep eat greedily – eating is actually their favorite hobby – but still, that's going a little too far for the others. “Cut it out!” they yell, outraged. “That's stealing! When our shepherds come back, we'll be in big trouble.”

“Don't worry, our shepherds aren't coming back.” The sheep with the stocking cap laughs hoarsely. “You were all sound asleep, but I saw everything. Down to the last detail.”

The others groan in annoyance.

Of all the sheep in the flock, the one with the stocking cap claims to have seen something! The nutty one. The one who's always seeing things that aren't there – or are supposedly yet to come. Just the other day he said that in the future there would be telephones and TVs. Things no sheep has ever heard of and that sound extremely unlikely.

“I woke up in the middle of the night,” the sheep in the stocking cap begins in his croaky voice. “At first I felt a strange prickling and tingling all over my body. Then an enormous, fluorescent apparition came floating down out of the sky – made no noise at all. Suddenly a high voice started singing –” the sheep rolls his eyes back so that only the whites are visible – “Fear not. I bring you good tidings of great joy!”

When the sheep hear these words, an icy shiver runs down their spines.

“But our shepherds were very afraid,” the sheep in the stocking cap continues in his croaky voice. “Suddenly there were lots of luminous figures hovering over our field. There was singing and rejoicing. I think I even heard the sound of trumpets coming from somewhere – ”

“And the good tidings?” the others ask eagerly, pushing closer. “What are the good tidings?”

The sheep with the stocking cap thinks for a minute. “I forget.”

“Concentrate! Tidings are always important!”

“Something about ... swaddling clothes.”

The other sheep sigh loudly. “What?! You really are hopeless! And what happened to the shepherds?”

“They've been kidnapped.”

“Kidnapped?”

“By the UFOs.”

“UFOs?” The sheep have no idea what he's talking about.

“Unidentified flying objects carrying aliens from outer space,” whispers the sheep with the stocking cap. “We are not alone.”

UFOs – that actually sounds plausible. Anyway, much more believable than the television and telephones. Suddenly, all the sheep sense a strange prickling and tingling.

Are the UFOs about to show up again?

And the sheep go haywire. They run aimlessly around the whole field, trying to hide behind some rock or other, but then they remember what the shepherds always said:

“Always stay together. We don't want even one sheep to get lost.”

As if following orders, they all run back together, quickly forming a pack. Because that's what they've learned to do. Each sheep pushes the other one roughly aside, trying to get the best place – in the middle of the flock, where it's safest.

Only the sheep with the runny nose was so afraid of the UFOs he dashed off and didn't stop until he reached the edge of the field. Curious, he looks at the pebbles lined up neatly on the ground.

Don't cross this line! That's what the shepherds always used to say. But what weren't the shepherds always saying –

The sheep bravely steps over the line and holds his breath.

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