

**BIG BAD WOOL**

*By Leonie Swann*

THE SHEEP DETECTIVE STORIES

Three Bags Full

Big Bad Wool

MISS SHARPE INVESTIGATES

The Sunset Years of Agnes Sharp

Agnes Sharp and the Trip of a Lifetime



# **BIG BAD WOOL**

LEONIE SWANN

Translated from the German by Amy Bojang

Allison & Busby Limited  
11 Wardour Mews  
London W1F 8AN  
allisonandbusby.com

First published in German under the title *Garou* in 2010.  
This edition published by Allison & Busby in 2025.

Published by arrangement with Soho Press, New York,  
with the assistance of Rights People, London.

Copyright © 2010 by Leonie Swann.  
English translation Copyright © 2025 by Amy Bojang.

The moral rights of Leonie Swann to be identified as the author of  
this work and of Amy Bojang to be identified as the translator of  
this work have been asserted in accordance with the Copyright,  
Designs and Patents Act 1988.

*All characters and events in this publication,  
other than those clearly in the public domain,  
are fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons,  
living or dead, is purely coincidental.*

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,  
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by  
any means without the prior written permission of the publisher,  
nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover  
other than that in which it is published and without a similar  
condition being imposed on the subsequent buyer.  
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from  
the British Library.

First Edition

ISBN 978-0-7490-3213-5

Typeset in 11/16.5pt Adobe Garamond Pro by  
Allison & Busby Ltd.

By choosing this product, you help take care of the world's forests.  
Learn more: [www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org).



Printed and bound in the UK using 100% Renewable Electricity at  
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

EU GPSR Authorised Representative  
LOGOS EUROPE, 9 rue Nicolas Poussin, 17000, LA ROCHELLE, France  
E-mail: [Contact@logoseurope.eu](mailto:Contact@logoseurope.eu)

# DRAMATIS OVES

MISS MAPLE	<i>The cleverest sheep in the flock, maybe even the world.</i>
MOPPLE	<i>The fat memory sheep.</i>
THE WHALE	
SIR RITCHFIELD	<i>The old lead ram, still has the best eyes in the flock.</i>
OTHELLO	<i>The new lead ram, black, four-horned and determined.</i>
THE WINTER LAMB	<i>A young outsider in search of his name.</i>
RAMESSES	<i>A nervous young ram full of good ideas.</i>
ZORA	<i>A Blackface sheep with a weakness for the abyss.</i>
HEATHER	<i>An outspoken young sheep.</i>
CLOUD	<i>The wooliest sheep in the flock</i>
CORDELIA	<i>An idealistic sheep.</i>
MAUDE	<i>Has the best nose in the flock.</i>
LANE	<i>The fastest sheep with the longest legs for miles.</i>

## DRAMATIS OVES

MELMOTH      *Ritchfield's twin; difficult to forget.*

WILLOW      *The second most silent sheep in the flock.*

?      *The most silent sheep in the flock.*

THE UNSHORN  
RAM      *A shaggy stranger.*

# DRAMATIS CAPRAE

AUBREY	<i>A little black goat bursting with mad ideas.</i>
MEGARA	<i>The goat with the black ear.</i>
AMALTEE	<i>A young grey goat.</i>
CIRCE	<i>A young red goat.</i>
CALLIOPE	<i>A young brown-white mottled goat.</i>
CASSANDRA	<i>An old blind nanny goat.</i>
BERNIE	<i>A legendary billy goat.</i>
CALYPSO	<i>A nanny goat, who mostly keeps to herself.</i>
THE GOAT WITH ONLY ONE HORN	<i>A sceptic.</i>

# DRAMATIS PERSONAE

REBECCA	<i>The Shepherdess.</i>
MUM	<i>Her mother.</i>
THE JACKDAW	<i>Pascal, the master of the chateau humans, has a bit of a limp</i>
HORTENSE	<i>Smells of violets and looks after the little humans.</i>
MADAME FRONSAC	<i>The housekeeper; Mum calls her the Walrus.</i>
MONSIEUR FRONSAC	<i>Is always watching.</i>
MADemoiselle PLIN	<i>Estate manager, hair always scraped back severely.</i>
PAUL THE GOATHERDER	<i>Doesn't say a word.</i>
YVES	<i>General dogsbody.</i>
THE GARDENER	<i>Guards the apple orchard.</i>
ERIC	<i>Makes goat's cheese.</i>
ZACH	<i>A top secret agent.</i>
DUPIN	<i>A policeman.</i>
THE VET	<i>Not very popular with the sheep.</i>
THE SHORT WALKER	<i>A winter visitor.</i>
THE TALL WALKER	<i>Another winter visitor.</i>



## DRAMATIS CANIDAE

TESS                      *The old sheepdog.*

VIDOCQ                *A Hungarian sheepdog.*

THE GAROU        . . .



## PROLOGUE

Over and done with it.  
It was always nice afterwards.

He liked to just stand there, leaning on a tree listening to the thrill of the chase seep into the snow. Like blood. The sky and the rush of the forest above him, the ground beneath him. Surveying the scene in front of him.

Everything was so peaceful. No fear. No hurry. He felt free. Newly born. Surprised to have hands – they were so red – and legs and a body.

During the hunt everything felt so disembodied; there was just a front and back, tracks and prey and speed. Life and death. Four legs or two? It didn't matter. And sometimes they got away. Rarely. That was a good thing. All was well.

A robin landed on a branch. So pretty, so close, so alive. He loved the forest. No matter what had happened, no matter what might happen, the forest took him in, and he became an animal

like all the other animals. If it had been nighttime, he would have howled at the moon out of sheer joy.

But it wasn't nighttime, and that was a good thing too. It was broad daylight, and the colours shone.

And time was slipping away.

He sighed. The time afterwards was always too short.

He would soon start to freeze. He had to go back. Wash his hands white in the snow. Put on some gloves. A different pair of boots. Double back. Cover his tracks. Start thinking again. About groceries and tax returns and about her, of course. Always her. About the things humans think about.

He needed to take a suit to the cleaners. He had run out of aftershave. A plant in his bedroom was looking a bit sad. Maybe it needed watering? He didn't know much about plants. He had work to do. And he needed to have lunch. Mushrooms fried in butter and fresh bread! Some crusty bread would be nice.

He took a final look at the scene in front of him – the fox again! The fox was an interesting accent – then off he went, on his two legs, changing a little with every step.

He couldn't help but smile as he stepped out of the forest. Sheep! The chateau looked so much more interesting with snow and sheep. They were so white – all except one. The black sheep put him on edge.

He carried on along the fence towards the chateau, surreptitiously seeking out her window. He couldn't help it.

Nothing.

Deep inside him the creature curled up into a sated, contented little ball and went to sleep.

# 1

## THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS

‘And then what?’ asked the winter lamb.  
‘Then the mother ewes brought them to safety, away from the man with the little dog. And they found a . . . a . . .’  
Cloud, the woolliest sheep in the flock, was at a loss.

‘A haystack!’ Cordelia suggested. Cordelia was a very idealistic sheep indeed.

‘Yes, a haystack!’ said Cloud. ‘And the mother ewes ate while the lambs rolled in the hay – and fell silent!’

The sheep bleated enthusiastically. The repeated telling of the story of *The Silence of the Lambs* had resulted in a few changes, and it had gained a little something each time.

Rebecca the shepherdess had read the book to them in the autumn when the leaves were already yellow, but the sun was still round and ripe and robust. The sheep could no longer say why the book had given them the creeps back then, during those first cold silvery autumn nights. Only Mopple the Whale, the fat memory

sheep, still remembered that hardly any lambs, and precious little hay, had featured in the book that Rebecca had read to them on the sun-warm steps of the shepherd's caravan.

The wind drove wisps of snow between their legs, the bare branches at the bottom of the meadow fence shivered and the story was over.

'Was it a big haystack?' asked Heather, who was still young and didn't like it when stories ended.

'Very big!' said Cloud confidently. 'As big as . . . as big as . . .'

She looked around for something big. Heather? No. Heather wasn't particularly big for a sheep. Mopple the Whale was bigger. And fatter. Bigger than all of the sheep was the shepherd's caravan standing in the middle of their meadow, even bigger than that was the hay barn and biggest of all was the old oak growing on the edge of the forest that had shed countless crunchy, bitter brown leaves in the autumn. It had been a devil of a job grazing around all of those leaves.

Flanking their meadow was the orchard to the right, and the goats' meadow to the left. Behind the two meadows was the forest, strange and susurrant and far too close; in front of them the yard with stables and dwellings, smoking chimneys and humans making a racket; and right next to them, close and grey and solid as a pumpkin, the chateau. The slight incline up to the forest gave the sheep an excellent view of it.

'As big as the chateau!' said Cloud triumphantly.

The sheep marvelled at the size of the chateau. It had a pointy tower and lots of windows and blocked the sun far too early each evening. A haystack would have made a welcome change.

Something made a bang. The sheep gave a start. Then they craned their necks curiously.

Something had been chucked out of the window of the shepherd's caravan. Again!

The flock launched into action. Quite a few Things had been chucked out of the shepherd's caravan just recently and sometimes they turned out to be interesting. A pan of only slightly burnt porridge for instance, a houseplant, a newspaper. The houseplant had made them feel bloated. Mopple was the only one who had enjoyed the taste of the newspaper. Today wasn't a bad day: in front of them in the snow lay a woolly jumper. Rebecca's woolly jumper. *The* woolly jumper. The sheep liked this jumper more than all the others. It was the only item of clothing they understood. Beautiful and sheep-coloured, thick and fleecy – and it smelled. Not just vaguely of sheep like most woolly jumpers, but of certain sheep. Of a flock who had lived by the sea, grazed on salty herbs, trodden sandy ground, breathed well-travelled winds. If you sniffed very carefully, you could even make out individual sheep. There was an experienced, milky mother ewe, a resinous ram and the scraggy shaggy sheep from the edge of the flock. There were dandelion and sun and seagulls calling in the wind.

The sheep drank in the jumper's woolly aroma and sighed. For their old meadow in Ireland, for the vastness and the grey thrum of the sea, for the cliffs and the beach and the gulls, and even the wind. It was quite obvious by now: the wind was supposed to travel – sheep were supposed to stay at home.

The door of the shepherd's caravan opened and Rebecca the shepherdess stomped angrily down the steps, her lips pursed. She retrieved the jumper from the snow, bringing their pleasure in the comforting aroma to an abrupt halt.

'That's it!' she muttered, frowning dangerously and brushing

snow crystals off the knitted wool. 'That's it! I'm chucking her out! This time I really am going to chuck her out!'

The sheep knew better than that. All sorts of Things were chucked out of the caravan, but not *her*. She barely moved at all, but when she did, she was surprisingly quick. The sheep doubted she would even fit through the window of the shepherd's caravan.

Rebecca seemed doubtful too. She looked down at the jumper and sighed deeply.

A familiar face appeared in the milky glass of the caravan window, strangely soft-edged and wide, staring disapprovingly down at Rebecca and the sheep. Rebecca didn't look up. The sheep stared back, fascinated. Then the face had disappeared again and the caravan door opened. But nobody came out.

'From now on, that stinking thing stays out of the house!' came a moan from the caravan.

Rebecca took a deep breath.

'It's not a house, Mum,' she said in a perilously quiet voice. 'And it's definitely not *your* house. It's a caravan. *My* caravan. And the jumper doesn't stink. It smells of sheep! That's normal when it gets wet. Sheep smell like sheep when they get wet as well! Sheep always smell like sheep!'

'Exactly!' Maude bleated.

'Exactly!' the other sheep bleated. Maude had the best nose in the whole flock. She was well-versed in smells.

An icy silence drifted out of the shepherd's caravan. 'And they don't stink!' Rebecca hissed. 'The only things that stink around here are your . . .'

She broke off, sighing again.

'Little bottles!' Heather bleated.

'And the goats!' Maude added for the sake of completeness.



The sheep could sense the silence in the caravan condensing into a little dark cloud. And the cloud was thinking.

‘Who cares?’ Mum shrieked. ‘I don’t care if they smell of sheep! They can spend all the livelong day standing around smelling of sheep out there! But not in here. Sheep have no business being in here!’ Her voice softened. ‘Really, Becky, all I’m asking for is some basic hygiene!’

Hygiene didn’t sound like a bad thing. A bit like fresh, green, gleaming grass.

‘Hygiene!’ the sheep bleated approvingly. All apart from Othello, the new jet-black lead ram. Othello had spent his younger years in a zoo, where he’d seen – and above all smelled – a few hygienas from a distance and knew that they were nothing to get excited about. Not in the slightest.

Rebecca lowered her hands, and a jumper sleeve that she’d only just lovingly cleaned landed back in the snow again. She looked lost, a bit like a young ram who didn’t know whether to run away or attack.

‘Attack!’ Ramesses bleated. Ramesses was a young ram himself, and usually plumped for running away.

Rebecca lowered her head, crumpled the jumper to her chest and puffed herself up. She wasn’t particularly big. But she could make herself very big when she wanted to.

‘This is my caravan. And they’re my sheep. And this is my jumper. And nobody here needs your permission to smell of sheep. And I don’t need your advice. Dad left me all of this because he trusted me, and d’you know what? I’m not making a bad job of it!’

The sheep could sense something in the caravan changing. The cloud expanded, getting clearer and wetter. Then it started to rain.

‘Your faaather!’ Heather whispered into Lane’s ear.

‘Your faaaaather!’ came a groan from the caravan.

‘Great. Well done, Rebecca!’ muttered Rebecca.

The shepherd’s caravan sighed deeply, then Mum appeared in the door. It didn’t look like she was just standing there. It looked like she was stuck to the doorframe like a rather elegant slug, neat and brown and gleaming. Water was running out of her eyes, blurring her face.

The sheep looked at her, unsettled.

By now the sheep were convinced that Mum had brought the rain, in her ocean-blue handbag perhaps, or maybe in her little shiny metal case, possibly even in the pockets of her immaculate coat. The rain had been her ally when she had knocked on the door of the shepherd’s caravan – the rain and homemade sloe gin.

Rebecca had opened the door, and Mum’s words had begun to patter down: longing, daughter, what sort of backwater was this, from now on I’m only flying first-class, daughter, worried, only for the holidays, you look thin, and I brought you some sloe gin.

Rebecca’s arms had drooped. ‘Mum!’

It hadn’t exactly sounded welcoming, but Mum and the rain had stayed all the same. It hadn’t rained at all before that, not for the entire autumn – at most a thundery shower that made the frogs in the chateau moat croak with delight. That was it.

From then on there was nothing but rain. It dripped in the hay barn. The ground was muddy and slippery, especially down at the feed trough. The concentrated feed tasted damp. The little stream on their meadow was now a brown torrent, and Mopple the Whale had fallen in while hunting down a riverbank herb.

‘Panta rhei,’ said the goats at the fence.

First it rained. Then it snowed. Then the sloe gin was chucked out of the window. It wasn’t particularly slow. Some other Things followed. Some of the banished items were fetched back into the caravan by Rebecca, some by Mum and some by nobody, and Mopple ate the newspaper and that night he dreamed about a human with a fox’s head.

It was all connected somehow – but the sheep didn’t know how.

‘It’s got nothing to do with Dad,’ Rebecca said, softly this time, putting on the jumper. ‘It’s about you and me. You’re a guest here, and I want you to act like a guest. That’s all. Okay?’

‘Okay,’ Mum snivelled, dabbing her eyes with a white cloth.

‘Okay!’ the sheep bleated. They knew what was coming next: cigarettes. Mum on the caravan steps, Rebecca a bit farther up the hill, leaning on the wardrobe that, for some unknown reason, resided under the old oak.

Smoke and silence.

The sheep were silent, too, scraping in the snow, grazing damp winter grass or at least acting as if they were. They were all waiting for something that was about to happen. Something you might not be able to see, but could definitely smell.

There was a strange sheep on their meadow. He had been there before them, not on the sheep’s meadow, but in the apple orchard and on the narrow strip of pasture between the meadow and the edge of the forest. Now he was in with them and spent day after day loitering about near the fence. Whenever Rebecca leaned on the wardrobe smoking, the strange ram froze. He didn’t move a muscle, not an ear, or an eyelash, not even the tip of his tail. But he smelled. Smelled of purest, blindest panic.

The whole thing made the sheep nervous.

In general, the strange ram wasn't a fearful sheep. He wasn't scared of Tess, the old sheepdog who spent most of her time sleeping on the steps of the caravan. Nor was he scared of Othello's four black horns. But he was scared of Rebecca when she leaned on the wardrobe smoking and looking out across the meadow. He was scared senseless.

Finally, Rebecca stubbed out her cigarette, carefully put it in her pocket and walked back down towards the shepherd's caravan. The strange ram relaxed and started muttering to himself. The other sheep wagged their ears and tails in an attempt to shake off the silence.

The strange ram got on their nerves. He didn't really smell like a sheep and what's more, he didn't look like a sheep either. More like a big, cumbersome moss-covered stone.

Miss Maple, the cleverest sheep in the flock and maybe even the world, claimed he was a sheep all the same. A lonely sheep that nobody had shorn for years, with a great mass of stiff, felted grey wool on his back – and a story that nobody knew. He was amongst them, but not with them, he was running with a flock, but not their flock. Sometimes they got the feeling that the strange ram couldn't see them at all. He could see other sheep though, sheep that nobody else could see.

Ghost-sheep. Spirits.

The real sheep didn't look at him. Apart from Sir Ritchfield.

'I think . . . it's a sheep!' Ritchfield bleated excitedly. The old lead ram was currently taking a keen interest in the question of who was a sheep – and who wasn't.

The others sighed.

Yet again they were wondering if the trip to Europe had really been such a good idea after all.

They had inherited the journey from George, their erstwhile shepherd. One day he had just been lying lifelessly on their pasture, pinned to the ground by a spade. The sheep themselves had had nothing to do with it – well, not that much anyway – but they had inherited a trip to Europe and the shepherd's caravan, and along with it came Rebecca, George's daughter, who had to feed them and read aloud to them. It was in the will.

But then there must have been some kind of mistake. The Europe George had told them about was full of apple blossom, with herby meadows and peculiar long bread. Nobody had said anything about honking cars, dusty country lanes and buzzing gnats, nothing of snow and ghost-sheep, let alone goats.

The sheep blamed the map. Rebecca had brought a colourful map that she spent inordinate amounts of time constantly gazing at during their travels, and the map evidently knew nothing about Europe.

Three sheep had distracted Rebecca in a meadow of sunflowers while Mopple the Whale had snatched the map from the steps of the caravan, and eaten it in its entirety, even the hard shiny bit made of card. And sure enough: a woman had turned up a few days later, her hair severely scraped back, full of flattery, offering the sheep somewhere to stay. Before long they'd said goodbye to the exhaustion of travelling life and had a meadow again, a hay barn, a feed store and this time even a wardrobe. But it wasn't their meadow.

'Remind me why we're here again.' Mum sighed, smoking her second cigarette, still stuck in the doorway like a slug. Tess had managed to squeeze past her and was greeting Rebecca on the steps of the caravan, her tail wagging. Rebecca crouched and scratched Tess behind the ears. Tess tried to stick her greying muzzle into Rebecca's armpit.

‘I’m here because the sheep need somewhere to overwinter,’ Rebecca said. She had already explained it a hundred times, first to the sheep then to Mum, sometimes to herself as well. ‘The pasture’s good; the rent’s cheap. It’s idyllic. I was asked. Why you’re here, I don’t know.’

The sheep knew why Mum was there: she was a parasite. Rebecca had secretly told them once while she was giving them their hay. ‘She acts like she’s well-to-do, but she’s broke. Hardly surprising given her job! So, she throws together some sloe gin and holes up here for weeks on end. Just for the holidays? Pah! You’ll see. I’ve got no idea how I’m going to get rid of her.’

Not through the caravan window, that was for sure. Mum blew smoke down at Rebecca and Tess, eyeing the chateau critically.

‘We should get out of here. Look around you, darling! Look at this godforsaken place – not to mention all the nutters.’

‘Hortense is all right,’ Rebecca said.

‘No style,’ said Mum with contempt. ‘I thought French women were supposed to have style. What’s the deal with the goatherder over there? He spends the whole day wandering through the forest and doesn’t say a word when he walks past. It’s just not normal! Have you noticed the way the others keep their distance from him? There must be a reason for it.’

‘They keep their distance from us too,’ Rebecca said.

Tess had rolled onto her back and was getting a belly rub from Rebecca.

‘There’s a reason for that,’ Mum said. ‘You don’t understand people, Becky. Just like your father. You’ve never been interested in people. I always have been. I’ve got the *sense*. I can *see*. Idyllic? The cards say something quite different!’

The sheep cast meaningful glances at one another. Card Things

often said something different. Like the shiny map made of card, until Mopple had eaten it. All of their problems had started with the map.

‘Do you know which card has been turning up in all of my séances for the last two weeks?’

Rebecca sighed, standing back up and stretching like a cat. ‘The Devil!’ the sheep bleated in chorus. It was always the same.

‘The Devil!’ Mum screeched triumphantly from the steps of the shepherd’s caravan.

Rebecca laughed. ‘That might be because you have three Devils in your deck, Mum. And you took out Justice and Temperance!’

Tess did a doggy stretch and slipped past Mum’s slippers, back into the caravan.

‘And? The cards just have to be adjusted a bit to suit modern life, that’s all. Since I removed Temperance, my success rate is seventy-five percent! Do you know what the others . . .’

Rebecca wagged her hand back and forth as if she were shooping away invisible – and very cold-hardy – flies, and Mum sighed.

‘Be honest, darling, do you really feel comfortable here?

When he comes tomorrow, ask the v—?’

Quicker than a fox, Rebecca darted up the caravan steps and put her hand over Mum’s mouth.

‘Are you out of your mind?’ she hissed. ‘Do you have any idea what will happen if you say that word? It’ll be like unleashing the devil!’

‘The devil!’ the sheep bleated.

If anything was going to be unleashed around here, it was usually the devil.

\* \* \*

That evening the sheep spent longer than usual standing in front of the hay barn looking out into the night. The yard buildings nestled up to the chateau, seeking refuge. The apple orchard was silent. The smell of smoke and new snow was in the air. The shadow of an owl glided soundlessly over the meadow towards the forest.

Did they feel comfortable here? Cloud maybe. Cloud was the woolliest sheep in the flock and she felt comfortable anywhere. Wool and comfort went together. Sir Ritchfield seemed to like it too because there were lots of conversation partners who didn't run away: the old oak, the wardrobe, the stream, sometimes the unshorn stranger, and if he was lucky, a goat or two. In fact, Ritchfield's loud and one-sided conversations were rather popular with the goats, and quite often a whole gang of them gathered at the fence, giggling and gambolling.

The others weren't so sure. Something wasn't right. A single forgotten apple still hung in the orchard, red as a drop of blood. You could see it, but not smell it. Maybe it was time to eat some more card, so that they could move on. But what sort of card?

'What was she about to say?' Miss Maple asked suddenly.

'Who?' Maude asked.

'Mum,' Maple said. 'Before Rebecca covered her mouth.'

The sheep didn't know and fell silent. A crescent moon hung over the meadow like a nibbled oatcake.

'Rebecca seems really panicked,' said Miss Maple. 'As if something's about to happen. Something terrible.'

'What's the worst that could happen?' said Cloud, fluffing herself up.

'What's the worst that could happen?' the other sheep bleated confidently. Every day there was concentrated feed in the trough



and they were read to on the steps of the shepherd's caravan. If the drinking pool was frozen over, Rebecca hacked through the ice with a pickaxe. If it snowed too much, they stayed in the hay barn. If they were bored, they ate or told stories. And awaiting them at the end of every story was a fragrant haystack.

The sheep looked out at the blue snow and felt like they could take on anything.

At that moment a sound cut through the silence, long and thin, distant and heart-wrenching.

A wail.

A howl.