“Oh, here he is! Come to take some of us away, have you? We are sheep beings. We have rights, like freedom! Rumour has it some sheep in distant lands get to live without imprisonment. And without the ‘takings’. Where did you take my father, Bart, and all his mates last week? Come on. Where is my father? We have…”

“Shut up Barney!” Blurted Barbara. As sheep, we were always moaning about something but we did get sick of listening to each other. We complained about the prison we had to live in. Instead of being free to roam where we wanted, we had to stay imprisoned within the fence. We complained about being harassed and terrified by the lanky hairless thing and his howler that came and snapped at our heels for no good reason. We complained about being dunked in foul smelling liquid and about the male sheep which were periodically rounded up and taken away without explanation, never to be seen again. And finally, we complained about being left out in all weathers; being too hot, too cold, too wet. Unlike the cows next door who got taken in every evening and were kept in the warmth all though the winter months, we were left shivering and dripping outside.

None of us were very keen on the cows. They were strange creatures. Barbara had always hated them more than the rest of us, though I didn’t particularly know why, she never said. But since the terror incident, more sheep had followed Barbara’s cowaphobic views. I hadn’t. There were more important things going in my own flock to worry about. In our prison, sheep were always gossiping and bickering night and day about pointless trivia like how *Bartholemewe stole a blade of grass I’d had my eye on* or *Bali always hogs the best shelter under the hedge.*

One morning I noticed something that made me feel uncomfortable. At first I couldn’t work out what it was. Then I realised. It was silence that was making me uncomfortable as it never occurred. But there it was. Hanging in the air. No bickering. No gossiping. I turned to see what had caused the silencing. I saw it in the form of a large animal which was white skinned like me, but was splashed with black splodges. All the sheep were looking, in stunned silence, at a cow that the lanky hairless thing had put into our prison.

“Well, erm, hello.” The cow spoke politely into the silence. “I suppose I should introduce myself. My name is Moolian and I’m very pleased to meet you all. Suspicion flickered in the eyes of all the sheep. They had never spoken to a cow before but despite this, they all knew that cows were not to be trusted. Fear from the terror incident still contaminated our thoughts. “I realise that it might be a little bit of a shock to have a cow in your field.”

“What’s a field, cow?” Barbara asked.

Moolian laughed, “The place you are standing in.”

“We call it a prison.” Barbara said grumpily.

The silence had stopped now but what had replaced it was slightly worse. The sheep muttered amongst themselves. Mutterings, that when I caught snippets of them, informed me that Moolian was not being well received.

“We don’t want you here,” Barbara snapped.

“Yeah, get back to where you belong!” Bali joined in. “You’re not welcome.”

I didn’t agree with this. Moolian looked sad. She may be a cow but it didn’t mean she should be treated so nastily just because of that. It wasn’t really just because she was a cow though. It was because of the terror incident. Early in the spring, when the cows had been brought outside for the first time after the winter spent indoors, some of them had stampeded through the fence into our prison and some of our flock had been trampled. Since then most of the flock had hated the cows.

I thought Moolian could hear the mutterings. Suddenly my mouth moved and the words, “hello, my name is Barney” came out.

The rest of the sheep were giving me dark looks. I knew they would be whispering “doesn’t he remember the terror incident?” Of course I remembered it. It frightened me but, as far as I could remember, Moolian wasn’t one of those cows.

“Thank you,” Moolian said.

“It doesn’t need thanking.” Silence again. “If you don’t mind me asking, why are you in our prison?”

Moolian looked sad again. “I’m about to have a calf.” She said. “Our usual calving field is flooded at the moment.”

“Ohhh, congratulations!” Some of the ewes softened and came towards her followed by their lambs.

“You don’t look very happy about it.” I said.

“No, there’s no point being happy about it. As soon as I have it, the lanky hairless thing will come and take my baby away from me so they can milk me. But I will see her again when she’s grown up a bit”

The next days passed and with it, my interest in Moolian and cow beliefs increased. It wasn’t just me. Some sheep loved the cows’ viewpoint – that in life, we should try to have a more positive outlook, rather than focussing on the negatives. We learned that the cows didn’t have the perfect life that we’d thought. We got to keep our babies with us while they grew up, but the cows didn’t. And the cows didn’t enjoy being kept in all through the winter. They got really bored and couldn’t wait to be let out in the spring. Moolian explained that the terror incident was an accident; some young cows who were let out for the first time, got over-excited and were having a play around and didn’t even see the fence they ran through. She explained that cows are peaceful animals and would never intentionally cause harm to another creature. My rants at the lanky hairless thing stopped and I began to realise that there was no point in constantly complaining.

Most of us came to understand the cows much better. However, some of the sheep weren’t interested and wouldn’t change their views. They were disgusted and looked at our acceptance of Moolian as betrayal. Constant references to the terror incident and cowaphobic comments infected our prison, no, our *field*.

“Not in my prison.” Were words constantly being repeated. Every time Moolian heard this, I saw her crack a little. Her positive outlook wasn’t quite so upbeat. She became quieter and kept telling me and the rest of our group to stay away from her and not to fall out with our own kind. She’d rather be lonely than cause us problems.

One night I heard Moolian struggling in the field (many of us had decided to use the cows’ word *field* rather than prison as we came to realise we had more freedom than the cows did). I went over to her and saw that she had given birth to a beautiful calf. Some of the ewes gathered round and “oohhed” and “aahhed” over the new baby. Moolian looked around her with kind eyes and licked her calf, encouraging it to get up and suckle.

The next day, as Moolian had predicted, the calf was taken away. She mooed pathetically and the calf called back to her but later on she cheered up. “My calf will be with other calves now. They’ll have each other for company and I’ll soon be back with my friends in the milking parlour.”

We couldn’t believe how she could look at it in such a positive way.

Presently, the lanky hairy thing came and took Moolian away. She’d only been with us a few days but when she left, I really missed her being there.

Sometimes we saw her again on nice days in the field next to ours. She would come over to the fence and we’d have some interesting chats. After a while, a few of the other cows would nervously approach and join in and eventually most of the flock and most of the herd would say “good morning” to each other. It was a shame that some of the flock still stuck their noses in the air and refused to talk to the ‘other species’ as the cows had a wonderful influence on us sheep. We were much less inclined to moan and whinge and gossip and complain. Instead, we appreciated the good things in life and in each other.

As the summer started to draw to a close and the days grew shorter, we saw less and less of the cows. When we stopped seeing them altogether I knew that they’d been moved indoors for the winter and I wouldn’t see Moolian again for months. This was a very depressing thought.

Then one day, the lanky hairy thing came rattling into our field with his big truck and trailer and chased something out of it into our field.

Goats.

Oh great. Here we go again!