

# I AM "LAMB" TO HER

*by* Erika Byrne-Ludwig

My body is hollow, my mould made of concrete. There are no organs in me, no flesh or blood. I can't move. No muscles to allow motion. I look like a lamb but I'm not a real one, one that frolicks alongside its mother, suckles, enjoys freedom with its usual plaintive baaa. I'm bare. Faux curls pretend to make me look real, but I'm all fake, of course. No spark in my eyes either. I'm an object.

A very old lady sees me in a bric-a-brac shop. I seem to be lost to her there amidst vases, crockery, pots and pans and an eclectic range of figurines. I suppose they are just tiny inanimate people and animals. Silent ones. Objects like me. A large selection of them, all shapes and colours, mingling freely on the shelves where people's animated hands can constantly touch their motionless bodies.

The old lady plucks me from the shelf and looks at me closely. I can see a spark in each eye under her drooping eyelids. It looks as though she has fallen for me. For eight dollars she adopts me. I am wrapped up and put in her bag. Possibly for the first time I travel by bus. In her bag, on her lap, held tightly. The bus stops across the road from her front gate. She walks into her garden which displays many kinds of objects, mainly rocks bordering flower-beds, a gazebo and a bench. Quite a small garden really, not enough for lambs to graze on, but enough for a hollow one to simply stand.

Now the question is the location. An important matter to her. She wanders around looking for the appropriate spot. With me in her arms. That I have to be visible seems to be her priority. I also need some greenery, a natural lamb setting, even though I can't graze, not having a chewing mouth and teeth. All the same, she believes I might look miserable on the bare ground. Finally, she finds two bushes, one with pink flowers and one with white flowers. She positions me carefully underneath them with my eyes facing the middle of the garden and my mouth pretending to reach for leaves. Gives me a gentle pat on my head, more like tousling it as if it were woolly.

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She walks backwards and looks at her arrangement, comes back, swivels me around holding my hooves. I can hear her teeth clicking as she mumbles. It worries her that I might feel lonely — she reassures me that she will find other objects for me to make friends with. I don't exactly know what she calls loneliness, but *she* seems to know. She likes handling objects and wrapping them up in her own warmth.

Sure enough, she comes home by bus again and unpacks two rabbits, puts them opposite me, comforted that I am no longer alone. You never look good on your own, she says. I believe in sharing our joy. Even if, like me, the rabbits have no fur, don't move or talk. Facing me as if in deep conversation, yet, like me, with no sparks in their eyes.

I am thinking the old lady should be an object. She wouldn't have all those hassles, worries and feet pain. But then there must be some compensation being a live human. Talking could be one. Calling people by their names. Giving objects names. I am "Lamb" to her. How's Lamb today? she asks. I've never caught her name, never asked either, my tongue being too stiff. I suppose she would be a Mrs so and so. Like all the other women out there.

Objects aren't burdened the way humans are. That constant change of garments due to seasonal changes is certainly a distraction to the old lady. Just the other day, during her usual visit, she donned a new see-through hat matching her wet-weather gear. It's definitely a human trait to change looks so frequently. Her choice of clothes will always surprise me yet I know I'll never fail to recognise her white hair and her glasses.

After the rain comes a cool sunny day. She decides to wear a jumper and a scarf for her garden tour. It looks like a morning of leisure rather than one of pulling weeds. In her usual mumbling way she tells us that the best hour for picking flowers is 10am, and that she has to bring little scented people in from her garden. As she approaches her flower-bed, bends down and starts to pick some, her body suddenly spins round and collapses. Without a word. Like an object. She falls down with a big leafy noise, flat on her back. Face

up to the sky with the early sun shining in her eyes. Her glasses have fallen off during her tumble. I can see them on a rock. Small glittering objects that she likes to put on her nose. She is holding two flowers in her hand.

There hasn't been a gust of wind to make her frail body twirl like that. I have never seen her in a lying position. She could be sleeping. Yet her eyes are open. Maybe people lie on the grass to rest. Just looking at the sky. A passer-by sees her and comes in, feels her wrist, makes a call. The ambulance arrives. The men in white say it's too late, and leave with her on a stretcher, covered with a green sheet. She doesn't say goodbye. I don't cry as she often does. Having wet eyes when shedding tears is something I prefer not to experience.

I will never see her alive again. The garden seems deserted for a while. All us objects stand in our usual silence as if waiting for her return. But she must be an object too now. Just like me. And the rabbits. And the rocks. No more sparks and no more pain.

Days and weeks go by. Me and the rabbits are covered with sand and dust. I have two bird droppings on my back. New people move in. Trucks drive in. Children skip around. One of the strangers lifts me up in a rush, and I happen to land in a charity shop on a ledge amongst books and portraits. From what I hear the new owners say, the old lady's house and her garden have been emptied of their mementoes and unloaded in to the shop.

Through probably sheer coincidence, a framed photograph of her hangs on the wall opposite me. I can see her clearly as my head is naturally raised. Her eyes are looking far away with an expression inaccessible to me. The rabbits are placed among the vases and are also facing her. I certainly recognise her glasses and her white hair. White like my coat would be if I weren't fake.

Here end my silent observations as I'm quite willing to return to my lifeless concrete hollowness. For the purpose of sharing my thoughts about my encounter with the old lady and her garden, I've tried to *see*. With human eyes. I probably have failed in many areas as my eyes have no sparks, and I apologise.

On my ledge, in the charity shop, surrounded with an assortment of objects, I glance at the old lady's photograph. I can see the shiny silvery frame but my vision is getting blurred. Her face is now hardly recognisable and seems to be vanishing behind a cloud. The rabbits are also disappearing in front of my eyes. And the entire shop is now covered with a drape of nothingness. I'm now slowly returning to my lifeless concrete hollowness.

