

*Leslie Hyla Winton Noble*



**Baa Baa  
Black Belt**



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In Forest Lands, from days of old,  
Have many wondrous tales been told,  
Of queens and princes, knights and kings,  
Of dragon-lords, with scaly wings,  
And multitudes of marvellous things;  
But all these tales are small by far  
Compared with those of mighty Baa,  
Of fearless Baa the bold

*(From: The Epic of Baa the Bold and his Fabulous Friends,  
by The Bear-Faced Lyrebird.)*

# CHAPTER 1:

## BAA MEETS RAMBEAU

**W**ell, I'm going adventuring now. Goodbye ...' Baa said.

His family greeted this announcement with wide-open eyes and mouths. Baa wasn't the sort of creature one would expect to hear it from. It was like a mouse declaring it was off to hunt tigers.

Bartholomew Barnabas Woollen (called Baa-Baa for short or Baa for very short) was the black sheep of the family. Well, little lamb really. And even for a little lamb, he was particularly little. His snow-white (half-) brothers Sockel and Sockar Woollen and his snow-white (half-) sisters Mittenel and Mittenar Woollen were all much bigger than he was, and had bullied him without mercy from earliest lamb-hood.

His father, Jumper Woollen, the leader of their flock, found no sympathy for him. 'My boy,' he would say, 'stop shrinking in such a wet way, and stand up for yourself!'

'But,' Baa would bleat, 'every time I stand up for myself my brothers and sisters knock me down again. And if they don't, any one of the other lambs wool ... er ... will!' But his father would bounce off without listening. He was a wool-full, impatient mountain sheep who liked leaping around a lot.

His mother, Beret Woollen, didn't know what was going on more than half the time. She took great pride in being woolly-headed, which she said was the right thing for a sheep to be. She had even adopted the Mittens and Socks without really noticing.

One day, some time before Baa made his announcement, he was grazing (while lying down, so that he couldn't get flattened any further) and trying to convince all the other lambs that he wasn't there at all, when he noticed a new flock of sheep in the

next field. Through the fence he could see that their leader was a particularly small and neat hornless white ram. Well, not completely white. He had a single black band of wool around where his waist would be if sheep had waists.

‘What a feeble-looking ram!’ sniffed one of Baa’s aunts. ‘It’s a wonder some bigger ram, or any-sized one with horns, hasn’t knocked him into the middle of next month and taken over.’

‘Don’t you believe it!’ snorted Jumper. ‘That’s Rambeau, the most dangerous ...’

At that moment Rambunctious, a big trouble-making ram, normally put in a field all by himself to keep him out of mischief, managed to break through the fence at the far side and came charging at Rambeau with his head well down. His large curved horns made a fearsome sight.

‘Stop or you’ll be mutton, Rambunctious!’ yelled Jumper. ‘That’s Rambeau, the most dangerous ...’

Rambunctious ignored him and charged on.

Rambeau didn’t seem to notice the charge, but just as it appeared certain that he would be knocked flatter than a sheet of paper under a rolling elephant, there was a sudden blur of white. The next instant, Rambunctious was lying in a heap with all four legs neatly knitted together in his own wool. Rambeau looked calmly at him, and then trotted off as if nothing had happened.

‘... most dangerous ram in the world!’ finished Jumper.

Baa leapt to his feet. ‘Hooray!’ he shouted. Sockar knocked him down. He got up again, and Mittenel knocked him down. There was only one thing left to do, and he did it. He cried. He was getting very good at that, through lots of practice.

Rambeau ambled to the nearest part of the fence and looked at him. ‘What’s your name, lamb?’ he asked gently.

‘B-b-b-baa-baa-baa!’ sobbed Baa.

This didn’t seem to confuse Rambeau. ‘Well, Baa, why are you so unhappy?’

‘Because I’m so *d-different*,’ Baa confessed in a woebegone voice.

Rambeau scratched his hornless head on the fence, and then looked at him enquiringly. ‘You mean because you’re the only black sheep in the flock?’

‘It’s not only that,’ Baa responded. ‘I’m *different* because I’m always behaving in an *un-sheeplike* way.’ He hung his head in shame, but Rambeau was still looking enquiring rather than shocked, which suddenly opened a dam of words that had been pent up inside the lamb. ‘I like ‘sploring, and finding out what’s in the next field or nearby woods. From youngest lamb-hood I’ve always wanted to know about things like why Daddy lets the sheepdogs boss him around when he could easily toss them over the hedge if he wanted to. I ask why the farmer rides up and down some fields on that noisy tractor thing of his, but only on ones we don’t visit. I try to get someone to tell me what happens to the wool the men take from us sheep, and all sorts of things like that. I like chatting to other creatures and finding out things about them, and listening to humans talking to one another – and I love their moo-sick and po-tree. I hear the cats telling stories of ‘venture, an’ I dream of having ‘ventures of my own. But my parents and brothers and sisters and aunts say all of that is no business of a proper sheep.’

Rambeau didn’t seem drowned by this flood, but looked intently at him. ‘You like the sound of adventures, do you?’ he murmured almost dreamily. ‘But why does being *different* or *un-sheeplike* worry you?’

‘Being *different* is OK if one is big and strong,’ Baa said bitterly. ‘One either gets left alone, or everybody else becomes *different* in a hurry if they know what’s good for them, so everyone ends up being the same anyway. But if one is small and weak, being *different* gets one shouted at, kicked, bitten and knocked over all the time.’

‘Hmmm,’ said Rambeau. ‘I think you’d better come with me. Just crawl under the wire here. You’re quite small enough.’

Baa got up. To his surprise, his brothers and sisters hastily got out of his way, looking sheepish. Looking sheepish is pretty

normal for sheep, but they were doing it more than usual. Baa crawled clumsily under the fence, leaving a blob of black wool on some loose wire in his awkwardness, and trotted off after Rambeau who was now strolling back to his own flock.

‘Now,’ said Rambeau over his shoulder, ‘I take it you’re sick of being rolled into a ball all the time?’ Baa nodded, sniffing. ‘Well, if you have the wool to succeed we can unravel all that,’ Rambeau continued. ‘If you are to learn from me, you’ll have to work hard every hour of every day. The bargain between us will be that you do as I say without question! Any questions?’

‘No,’ said Baa.

‘You catch on fast,’ Rambeau nodded.

Baa looked back at his flock. Jumper was bounding around at the far end of the field, rounding up some of the sheep that had bolted when Rambunctious had made his charge. ‘Ewe stupid ewes!’ he was yelling. ‘Ewe bunch of fluff-headed woolgatherers! Get back!’

Beret was staring in amazement at Rambunctious, who was squirming and trying to free himself. His eyes had a glassy look, and he was bleating, ‘What happened ...? Why ...? Where ...? How ...?’

Baa’s brothers and sisters were playing ‘tag’, and already they seemed to have forgotten all about him. Sadly he turned away, and didn’t look back again.

***The pages between these two sections  
are not included in the book preview.***



Mary went bright scarlet. ‘Well, actually,’ she said, ‘it was!’

Baa shook his head to clear his ears. “What?” he bleated.

‘I got lost,’ she explained, ‘and hungry, and tired. Of course, I had an awful fright when they woke me up, and I bolted. I was lucky which way I ran, and got almost straight home. Later, I wanted to go back and apologize, but still didn’t know the way ... and, to tell the truth, I was too darned scared!’

They discussed it with Lightning after returning, and between them came up with a plan.

The next morning, while Mary went to school, Baa went back to ‘The Den’. Ignoring the letterbox, he knocked with a hoof at the door, slipped a letter under it, and returned to the edge of the woods. The letter read:

*Mary (alias Goldilocks), and Baa (Lamb), and Lightning (Pony) request the pleasure of the company of The Bear Family at a Teddy Bear Picnic at Mary’s House on Saturday at 1.00 p.m. so that Mary alias Goldilocks can say sorry. There will be honey on the porridge. Also cakes.*

*P.S. This is also a free laundry voucher for all the bedclothes you want to bring.*

*P.P.S. I have a spare chair that may suit your son.*

*Love.*

*Mary and Baa and Lightning.*

*(R.S.V.P.- Lamb waiting in woods.)*

A few minutes later, Father Bear waved from the doorway until Baa came out of hiding. ‘Thanks,’ he said gruffly. ‘We’ll be there!’

Baa gave him directions.

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## CHAPTER 13: ANOTHER RESCUE

When Mary returned from school and heard of Wizard Prang's visit, she was silent for a few minutes, thinking. Then she said suddenly, 'What about the wolf?'

Lightning looked at her sideways. 'There wasn't a wolf,' he said patiently, 'there was an albatross and a wizard ... well, I mean an albatross that was a wizard and vice versa.'

Mary looked bewildered. 'Wotsa ... You didn't say anything about vices and verses,' she protested.

'It means the other way around,' Lightning explained with his usual smugness.

'Anyway,' said Mary, 'I was trying to ask you why you didn't mention the wolf business to the wizard? There's something about that wolf that isn't ordinary, even for here.'

'I didn't think of it,' said Baa glumly, and, 'Neither did I,' said Lightning.

'Perhaps I'd better send an f-mail, then,' suggested Baa. 'Where's a frog?'

'There should be any number of them at the pond up the lane a little way, on the left' said Mary. 'You pop a message off, and I'll do tea.'

'Um ... hello, there!' Baa called when he got to the pond. A toad squeezed out from underneath a rock and stared at him. 'Er, ah ... f-mail?' asked the lamb.

The toad's tongue flicked at a fly buzzing past. The buzzing stopped abruptly. The toad swallowed. 'You need a frog,' he said, and crawled beneath his rock again.

Baa was wondering what to do next when a large green frog appeared from the direction of the pond. 'You the party for the f-

mail?’ it enquired briskly. ‘Then you need to get to the web-site; follow me.’

The frog led Baa through the trees until they came to a spiders’ web suspended between two saplings. A number of spiders were scurrying over it. ‘Who’s it to?’ asked the frog. Baa told him, and the spiders busily spun the letters ‘W.I.Z.A.R.D. P.R.A.N.G.’ near the top of the web.

‘Dictate your message,’ commanded the frog, and Baa cleared his throat and said, while the spiders spun:

WE FORGOT TO TELL YOU A STRANGE WOLF HAS  
ARRIVED FROM A LONG WAY AWAY AND DOESN’T  
WANT TO GO BACK HOME BECAUSE HE SAYS IT ISN’T  
HEALTHY. I KEEP SAVING HIS LIFE WITHOUT TRYING.  
LOVE, BAA.

‘That the lot?’ said the frog. ‘Right!’ He positioned himself beneath the web. The letters slid down it onto a sheet of paper emerging from a slot-in-nothing near the bottom. The paper went into the frog’s waiting mouth, and he hiccupped and hopped away.

Not long afterwards, while Mary, Baa and Lightning were enjoying tea in Lightning’s field, the same or another frog came up to them, spat out a piece of paper, and hopped off again. The reply read:

TO BAA,  
RECEIVED YOU LOUD AND CLEAR.  
JOLLY GOOD, SPEAK TO WOLF AND FIND OUT  
MORE.  
OVER AND OUT.  
PRANG.

‘Over what and out of what?’ asked a puzzled Mary.

‘I think it means the message is over,’ said Lightning.

‘This is just great,’ Baa bleated bitterly. ‘Now I have to look for trouble! I may have bounced that wolf off a tree once, but I don’t mind telling you I wouldn’t like to push my luck with him. He’s very nearly as fast as I am, he’s clever, and he’s a great deal

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The three made their way past the nearby pond, to a stream some way further. After leading them along the bank for a while, Prang stopped near a reed-bed. 'Reed-out for Wizard Prang!' he called.

A large trout came to the surface. 'Prang and whom?' it bubbled. 'Full names, please.'

Baa said, 'Bartholomew Barnabas Woollen,' Wolfred said, 'Wolfred Lupus,' and the wizard said, 'It won't matter; they won't have any balances...' but the fish had vanished in the direction of the reeds. There was a swirling and splashing, and then it reappeared and went 'Ptui!' Three perfectly dry pieces of paper flew through the air, one towards each of them. Baa's hit him on the nose, and he sneezed.

The wizard looked at his. It read:

Wizard Prang. Credit Limit 500 trics. Wizard's Salary 500 trics.

Consumption 997 trics. Available balance 3 trics.

He clutched his head and groaned. 'Three! What can I do with three trics!' he complained, and then picked up the paper lying at Wolfred's feet. He read this aloud:

Wolfred Lupus. Credit Limit 0 trics. Knight's salary 100 trics.

Consumption 0 trics. Available balance 100 trics.

'Knight's salary! Since when did a wolf get a knight's salary?' Prang muttered weakly, and snatched at Baa's reed-out. His eyes bulged as he read to them:

Bartholomew Barnabas Woollen. Credit Limit 500 trics. Prince's Salary 1000 trics. Transfer from account Rambeau 500 trics. Transfer from account Queen Rose 1000 trics. Consumption 0 trics. Available balance 3000 trics.

'That Automatic Salary System we put in at Magic Supply Company has gone completely potty,' Prang said, forgetting all his 'whats' in his agitation. 'Only wizards get a credit limit! And a prince's salary to a lamb! Truly crazy!' He paused and then

grumbled, 'So that's what a prince gets, is it. Most unfair. A wizard should get at least as much.'

Baa looked at the paper. 'The Rambeau part I can understand – it's just the sort of thing he would do, passing some of his magic credit on to me that he earned while adventuring,' he said, 'but whoever is this Queen Rose?'

'She was the Dowager Queen of West Forest, where they had a big spot of bother some years ago, what. She fled, you know, went into exile, and never returned even though Wizard Bang sorted out the trouble. I doubt she's still alive. Now poor old Wizbang has to rule and run the whole show on his own, as well as being Chairman of Magic Supply Company. Fortunately, he's a real firecracker at both jobs.' Prang paused to goggle at the reed-out again. 'No,' he declared, 'it's quite clear the A.S.S – that is, Automatic Salary System, has gone haywire. I always said it was an ass, what.'

'The A.S.S. is an ass!' giggled Baa. 'Anyway, things are urgent. I'm sure that the Rambeau part of my reed-out is right at least, so let's use some of my trics to get poor Wolfred fed – I don't like the way he's eyeing me at the moment. Or if he insists, he can use his own?'

The wizard got Baa to think deeply about how Shep's Dogginosh looked, and where it was kept, so that a magical transfer of a sample from the 'real' world could take place. It arrived in a large can, and Wolfred looked rather blankly at it. Prang hastily tapped the can with his wand, and it became a tin plate full of the 'Dogginosh-with-real-meat-and-added-vitamins-for-healthy-body-and-glossy-coat'.

'Grrrnfff – lick-lick-lick,' went the wolf, and in a few seconds the plate was not only emptied, but polished as well. 'More!' Wolfred snarled, yellow eyes blazing. 'Lots more! Lots and lots more!'

Two cans later, made magically this time instead of stolen magically, Wolfred seemed satisfied. 'That's better,' he said,

***~ End of Book Preview ~***