

The Lonely Shepherd with Golden Wings
A Folktale

A young shepherd spent his days and nights on the sides of rugged mountains, tending his flock of sheep. To pass the time he played his flute and sang to his sheep as they grazed. But each day, as he watched over them, his eyes would follow the sun as it set behind the distant peaks and he could not stop thinking of the world that lay beyond the mountains.

The young shepherd tried to keep his mind focused on his flock, but every tree and rock he passed seemed to whisper, "What's on the other side?" One night, he sat next to his fire and started singing an old ballad that all his sheep seemed to like, for they all gathered closely together around him. Soon he fell asleep. When the morning dew washed his face with its pure touch, he woke up and heard the bleating of a lamb. He searched for it high and low, but there was no sign of the lamb. After some time, he decided to simply listen and let the sound of the lamb's cry guide him.

As he got closer to the origin of the sound, the shepherd noticed a strange sight. Right in the middle of a pasture, there was a single yew tree with its branches stretched out to the sky. The tree's needles were golden and sparkled with the sun's first rays. Underneath the tree was a lamb, its wool a rich golden hue. The lamb had stopped crying as soon as the shepherd came near and, to the boy's amazement, it started to speak.

"I have been waiting to see your face for so long, young shepherd! I am here to tell you how to reach beyond the mountains."

Dumbfounded and unable to reply, the shepherd listened as the lamb told him to make wings of the branches of the golden yew and to tie them to his back with strands of golden wool sheared from the lamb head. He did as he was told and by sunset that day he had made two large wings.

"Now," said the golden lamb, "you must tie the wings to your back and wait." And as he said this, he disappeared and the yew became just another tree like the thousands that covered the mountainside. The shepherd waited all evening and all night and when the morning sun threw the first finger of golden light over the highest peak in the east, the wings came alive and lifted the young shepherd into the waiting sky. Soaring over the pastures of his ancestral lands, the young shepherd shuddered with anticipation, dreaming of the adventures and mysteries that lay ahead of him.

The golden wings carried him so high that soon he found himself alone in the vastness of the sky. Finally, the shepherd flew over his tiny mountains into the land beyond. He looked down and, to his amazement, saw a flock of sheep just like his own. Surprised, he kept flying until he soared over another mountain. He looked down—another shepherd tending his flock. Over the next mountain, another shepherd, and so on until the boy turned back.

To this day, it is said that the young shepherd is still trying to find some magical realm beyond the mountains. His sheep wait for him every evening and he comes to them and sings his ballads. But every morning, he takes flight with the first light to continue his quest.