



Monday 18th September 2017

Dear Customer,

Well no Indian summer this year then, just straight into autumn and the leaves fluttering down. The zip has just broken on my full-length anorak that I have been wearing for the last 10 years. I went to the wardrobe and find something else. I found a long upcycled, thick cotton canvas coat which I had bought from a fellow fashion brand at London Fashion Week many years ago. I tried that on. It was a bit tight on the arms and back but I could still wear it. It would be no good for seeing the sheep as they would chew the belt. I went downstairs, I walked past the mirror, I didn't recognise myself. Myfa didn't recognise me either. She does the same on the rare occasion when I get my hair done – she stares at me trying to work out what's happened.

It's Sunday today. The sheep are all back here in Richmond on Ernest's land, he had said they could stay there until the end of October. It's a difficult conversation to have with him but he has now as good as implied that the sheep can stay there for the winter, close to me at the end of my lane – perfect for me and for them, and I think he is appreciating having the income – indeed that's why he agreed to them coming back. It is beautiful there and the sheep love it. It's where they all came to when they were rescued and lived for the first 5 or 6 years, for them it's 'home'. It's quite wild – all undulating with stone walls, gorse, bits of woodland - and they go off in groups and make and live in settlements. There was never sufficient grazing there so I always had to supplement it with other land sourced from grazing auctions, ads in papers, knocking at farmhouse doors, and rotate them. But then Ernest kicked me off with virtually no notice 5 years ago. Luckily, I then managed to rent the farm at Hornby so the sheep were ok for the next 5 years, that is until the owner died, and it was sold in May.

The only completely secure grazing I have ever had and had control over for all my hundreds of sheep is the 4-acre paddock near my house which I rent permanently from the Zetland Estate. It's not much, lying down room only if they are all in it, but worst case it is somewhere other than a grass verge where they can be in an emergency and it's also been an essential place to put elderly and sick sheep who need special attention. So I still have this and an 8-acre field below Ernest's land which a local landowner lets me use each year from May through to 1st December.

So up at the sheep on Friday I noticed that some of the very elderly sheep seemed to have lost condition since they were sheared, the lower, lush area where they tended to graze was looking quite bare so I said I wanted to move a lot of the sheep off to graze the 2 fields which I have which were full of lush, sweet grass – it's only September and there is a long winter ahead and besides, if I don't graze those fields I will lose them. And frankly those elderly sheep needed to be on some sweet grass, they need to put some weight on. At this point Ernest completely flipped out and bellowed that if I moved any of the sheep off his land that they could never come back on it.

I was completely taken aback, in shock, the fury rose in me. I'm responsible for the welfare of my sheep and I have to do what's best for them. He sounded just like he did just before he kicked them off last time and they've only just got here. I called the elderly sheep which were hanging round the gate and I took them off his land and into the field opposite. They were so happy and later that evening I went back – their tummies were full and round.

Impossible to have a rational conversation with Ernest, I sent him a nice text and explained the reasons why I needed to move some of the sheep off for a while – to rest his land and make use of the 'food' in the other fields, getting weight on them before winter starts and which I am paying for. I thought that he might give it some thought overnight and realise it was a logical thing to do. But then through a third party the next day (yesterday), I received the message back reiterating that if I moved any sheep off his land they couldn't go back on.

I feel so angry. I couldn't sleep with sharp pains in my chest. All I want is what's best for the sheep and I'm being held to ransom. My initial reaction was that I was moving them all off and he could go and - - . My only other firm offer for winter is Devon. I had been speaking to someone with land in Scotland but who could only accommodate 100 if that. They do love it at Ernest's and it's next to me but I know this is the beginning of hell with him and his control freakery when they are on his land even when I am paying over the odds in rent.

He was never like this in the beginning, in those early days. I would of course never have rescued all these sheep if I didn't think they had somewhere secure to live. He's changed over the course of these years. But he's a different person when it doesn't involve his land – he is a kind, sensitive, modest, and rational person. It's very strange but I guess I do understand the psychology at play here....if I have to. So the sheep are very happy there, they've come home, but it will be like a minefield picking my way through winter trying to ensure the sheep's welfare without setting him off. Oh to have my own farm for them !

The last thing I need at the moment is Ernest in this explosive state. I've been working really hard these last weeks organising the manufacturing of the new Izzy Lane collection and dealing with all the mills and makers – from dog bed manufacturers to label weavers and all the permutations of sizing and care labels – operating a great feat of coordination. And walking the tightrope as ever as it is all costing a fortune. I have to sell this winter, I have to manufacture and sell my way into a better situation for both businesses and the animals and am throwing everything at it. The Izzy Lane photo shoot went well and I am getting the website ready to launch the collection on the 29th September. The secondary photo shoot, the product shots which show everything on invisible mannequins didn't go so well. I sent the collection down to Hebden Bridge – they deal with hundreds of fashion brands. The folder arrived in my inbox on Friday night. I opened them up and didn't recognise my clothes. Box sweaters had been pinned back at the waist and turned into bodycon, same with the cardis, all the slouchy jumpers given nipped in waists. I was furious. I hadn't asked them to do that. Why would they take it upon themselves to change the shape of the clothes, to redesign them. I went back through my emails.

She asked if I wanted them shot on hangers. I replied that no, I had said that I wanted them on invisible mannequins to show the shape. Meaning obviously to show the shape of the clothes, not the shape of the mannequins. So I have that argument to have in the morning now. Nothing is ever simple.

As for Farmaround, June is recovering from flipping the van over on her way to Kingston. She will be off again this week resting her arm but thankfully she will be ok and should be back the following week. The van was a write-off. Terry managed to drop his van key down the drain again but when the AA came to recover him they managed to fish it out. Phew !. They then put his key on a keyring to stop it slipping out his hand in future.

Hope you have a good week,

Kind wishes,

Isobel