



Aesop's Fables

29. THE GOATHERD AND THE WILD GOATS

By Tracey Hammett

Wild goats live in wild, rocky places where it is hot during the day and cold during the night. They eat dry leaves and thistles and bits of twig. Sometimes they go hungry.

Sherpa, the leader of the wild goats was a magnificent creature. He had a noble head, a long beard and two extraordinary horns. The horns were so unusual they curled upwards and then downwards and ended up pointing in different directions from each other.

Sherpa wasn't only magnificent, he was also wise.

'I've had a brilliant idea,' he said to the rest of the herd one day.

He pointed to some other goats, in a field further down the valley, eating a big pile of fragrant hay.

'They are tame goats,' said Sherpa, 'and they are looked after by a man called a Goatherd. They have plenty to eat and a warm place to sleep. Not like us! We are often hungry and cold.'

The wild goats stopped clambering over rocks to listen.

'My idea,' Sherpa went on, 'is to hop over the fence and join them. Then we would be looked after too!'

The other goats liked the sound of this.

So, later that day, when the goatherd was changing his socks, the wild goats hopped into the field with the tame goats and pretended they had been there all the time.

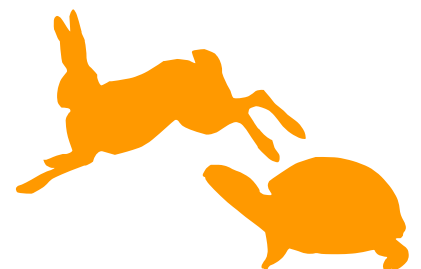
That night it started to snow. The goatherd rounded up his goats and counted them.

'That's funny,' he said. 'There are twice as many now than there were before.'

He was pleased. More goats meant more milk and cheese to sell in the market.

The goatherd looked after his new goats well. He gave them the best food and the warmest beds. He brushed their coats and polished their hooves and combed their beards. He spoiled them.

'If they are happy they'll stay with me,' he said to himself.





But the goatherd didn't look after his own goats. He turned them out in the snow and gave them less to eat. He no longer brushed and polished and combed them. He treated them unfairly.

But, the wild goats couldn't believe their luck. 'This is the life,' they said to each other.

Their leader, Sherpa, wasn't so sure. He was beginning to have doubts.

'I'm not happy about this,' he said. 'Why is the goatherd treating his own goats so badly?'

'Who cares about them,' said one goat, unkindly.

'As long as we are alright,' said another.

Sherpa told them off. 'Think carefully,' he said. 'What happens if some newer goats come along? Will the goatherd start treating *us* badly?'

The more Sherpa thought about it, the more certain he was he was right. 'We have to leave at the first opportunity,' he told his herd.

Spring came and the snow disappeared. The wild goats went back into the field. But Sherpa hadn't forgotten what he had said.

One afternoon, when the goatherd was dozing in the sun, Sherpa ordered the

wild goats to play leap-frog. They made a lot of noise, running and jumping and getting in each other's way. And by the time the goatherd could work out what was happening, the wild goats had not only leap-frogged over each other they had also leap-frogged over the fence.

The goatherd was furious. 'Rascals!' he yelled. 'Is this how you repay my kindness?'

Sherpa's answer came from half way down the valley: 'You should have treated all your goats the same,' he called back. 'That would have been real kindness.'

The tame goats, left behind in the field, nodded their heads sadly. They had to agree.