

# The Goat & The Rook

There was an old goat that lived in a small pen. Sometimes the pen was locked, other times unlocked. It was always locked at night. The pen was just inside the entrance of an old barn, part of a farm.

Regardless of whether the pen was open or not, the goat seldom ventured outside and he either stood, sat or lay depending on how he felt, mostly sitting though. His health was generally poor, made far worse by his almost total lack of activity. Mostly no one really cared.

He tended to feel sorry for himself most of the time and thought a lot about his youth and his past. The future meant nothing at all to him. What distinguished him, apart from his unkempt and sorry appearance, was that around his neck on a heavy chain, was an extremely large clock, the type that was once seen in railway stations.

The clock was extremely heavy and cumbersome and no longer worked, its mechanism had seized, the hands stopped at one minute to twelve. There was no indication as to whether it had stopped during the night or in the daytime, not that it mattered one way or another.

Sometimes the other farmyard animals would visit the Goat but most of them found him dull and depressing and few stayed longer than possible. The stories he told were extremely boring and he retold them over and over again. He didn't have any real friends although some of the dullest animals would sometimes linger to tell him their equally uninteresting tales.

Food and water was provided for him at the entrance to the small pen and very rarely when the feeling took him he would go to the trough a short distance away. As he never ventured outside the barn his coat was matted and dirty. He was an especially smelly goat and hated the very notion of cleanliness. It wasn't surprising that his body was covered in open sores

The goat always blamed himself, rather than the stopped clock, for all his woes. He had become so accustomed to its burden he didn't even notice its weight or its awkwardness or how it severely restricted every thing he did.

One beautiful spring morning a young rook strolled into the barn on the lookout, as ever, for any tasty snacks. He was new to the area and wanted to check out a rookery in a nearby spinney, which he planned to do later on once he had something to eat.

He jumped up onto the tubular metal railings that made up the goat's pen. He didn't at first notice the goat that was lying, half buried, in the straw bedding until it stirred itself and sat up.

'Good Morning Goat, why are you shaking so?'

‘Because I’m cold and my nerves are shot to pieces, that’s why!’

‘Tell me why are you wearing that huge clock around your neck?’

‘It’s been there since I can remember. It’s part of me. I like it. It makes me feel safe’

The rook could not understand why the goat should be wearing such a huge and obviously broken clock so decided to try and find out more. It didn’t make any sense at all.

“So what’s it like around here?”

“I’ve no idea, I don’t get out much and time weighs heavily around here.”

Very funny thought the Rook, thinking that maybe if the goat had any kind of brain he might realise that if he got rid of the clock his life might change.

“Perhaps if you took that clock from around your neck things would change. Have you thought about that?”

“It’s always been there since I came here years ago. I don’t remember it not being there”

In the past sometimes other animals had suggested getting rid of the clock but none of them had done anything about it and the goat certainly couldn’t be bothered. The rook didn’t know any of this and decided to do something about it.

He took a really good look at the goat, the chain and the clock and realised that the goat could easily get free of his burden but seemed to be using the entire situation as a kind of stupid excuse to do nothing.

He flew out of the barn and up into the sky checking out the farm from the air. In a corner of the yard someone had started a bonfire. It was then the idea came to him. He flew down near the fire, making sure there was no one about; he walked over to its edge and carefully grabbed a smouldering twig and flew back to the barn.

Perching in the rafters he spotted an old pile of straw near the back of the goat’s pen so he flew down, his flight making the embers of the stick glow red and carefully placed it in the heap nearest the railings. Soon enough the pile began to smoke nicely.

In the rook’s absence the Goat had fallen asleep so the Rook quickly walked around and croaked loudly enough to wake him.

“Goat, Goat wake up! If you don’t move you’ll soon be burnt alive and become a Roast Goat”.....

Dear Reader I shall offer you not a single ending to this tale but three. I also offer you the opportunity to add your own as we all perceive life differently and uniquely.

The first ending is that the Goat endured what he saw as his destiny, did nothing and died.

The second is that he managed to haul himself, chain and clock clear and when the fire was out returned to his pen and things stayed as they ever were.

The third was that with all his strength he freed himself from his shackles and walked away to his future. He really was out for good, as was the fire. The strange thing is that in this ending the clock mysteriously started working again.