

The goat in the room

story by Tim Lehnert | illustrated by Peter Sheehan



I FED THE GOAT and chickens and went inside for a snack. Just as I was taking a carton of orange juice from the fridge, I heard a sound. I turned around. 'How'd you get in here?' I asked.

'You didn't close the door properly, so I nudged it open.'

'You have to leave; we can't have a goat in the kitchen. Dad's going to kill me.'

'I just wanted to see how the other half lives.'

'What other half?'

'You and your family. You know ... humans. I'm interested in how you spend your days.'

'We do human things, like school, work, chores ... that type of thing.'

'That doesn't sound like much.'

'Well, there's also the computer. Sometimes we use that, and we read books and watch TV. I also play football and swim. And we eat.'

'I like the *eating* one. I knew you were up to something in here.'

'You have to get out. I was supposed to give you water and hay, not have you in for tea.'

'What are we having then?'

'We are having nothing, because you are not staying. I have homework to do.'

'I can't go yet; I haven't had a proper look around.'

'There's nothing to see here,' I said.

The goat seemed unconvinced and peered about the kitchen.

'See for yourself,' I said. 'There's a counter, a sink, a kitchen table, a stove and a microwave. That's it.'

'What's that contraption over there on the shelf?'

'It's a coffee maker.'

'I'll have a cup.'

'No you won't. Goats don't drink coffee. And neither do I. I don't even know how to use a coffee maker.'

'Get out the instruction manual. It can't be that complicated.'

'I don't know where it is.'

'Go online. I bet you could find the instructions there.'

'This is ridiculous; I am not opening up the laptop so I can learn how to make a cup of coffee for a goat. Plus, when have you ever had coffee?'

'That's just the point ... this is my chance. I can't get a cup of coffee out in my pen, that's for sure. When in Rome, I say.'

'Rome?'

'When in Rome, do as the Romans do. That means if you visit somewhere, try to act like the locals and get into the spirit of things.'

'I agree with that advice, but I'm not making you coffee. It's probably not good for you, anyway.'

'Okay, skip the coffee. How about a snack? You have any alfalfa or grass?'

'No, I don't.'

'You're not much of a host, are you?'

'Well, you're not much of a guest. Wait! Hold on—I hear something.

Dad's coming!' I put my hands on my lips to signal the goat to be quiet.

'He's going to have a fit,' I whispered.

'I need you to hide. Lie down behind the table. I'll throw these tea towels on you; he won't notice.'

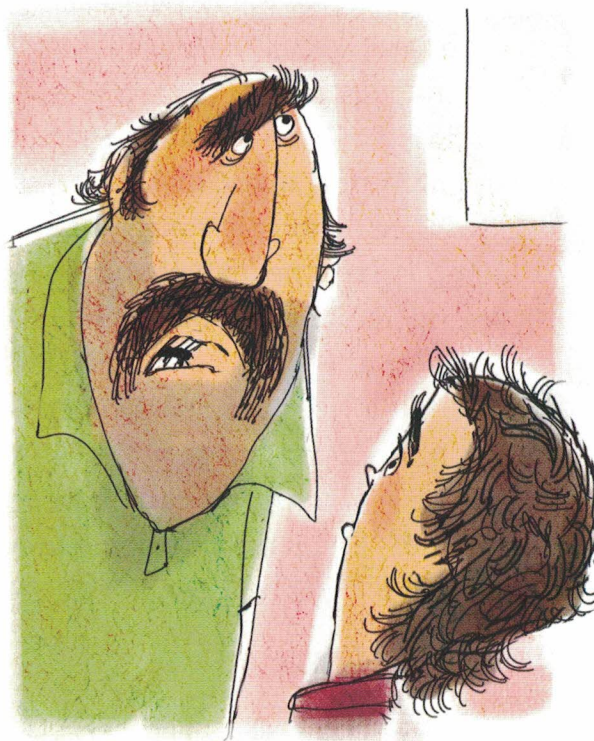
Dad walked into the kitchen and looked right at me. 'Aidan, what's going on here?' he demanded.

'Nothing. What's going on with you?'

'The goat is lying next to the breakfast table.'

'Are you sure?'

'I'm quite sure. I can see his hooves and ears poking out.' My dad gave a deep sigh and looked at the ceiling. 'Your job, Aidan, is to feed the goat and chickens when you get home from school. You know better than to bring animals into the house.'





'I didn't!' I said. 'He walked right in.'

'Well, he needs to walk right out,' said my father.

'I knew hiding wouldn't work,' said the goat, standing up. 'I have a tremendous physical presence. You'll find that all eyes are on me when I'm in a room, even when I'm camouflaged.'

'Sure; because you're a goat!' I said.

'Even among goats, I'm pretty special.'

'You're really full of yourself, aren't you?' I asked the goat.

'Stop bickering, you two,' said Dad.

'Who put you in charge?' asked the goat, looking at my father. *That*

really is cheeky, I thought, even for the goat.

'Who put me in charge? This is my house, my kitchen. You, goat, are supposed to be outside in your enclosure—not in here.'

'That's your opinion.'

'Of course it's my opinion; I just said it,' replied my dad. 'And we haven't even addressed the elephant in the room.'

'Elephant in the room! Isn't the goat enough?' I asked.

'It's an expression,' said the goat. 'It means the big, obvious thing that nobody wants to talk about, or even admit exists.'

'That's a good definition,' said Dad. 'I think you nailed it.'

The goat gave me a smug look.

'Are you on his side now?' I asked my dad.

'I'm not on his side, but I have to give credit where credit is due. He's a very clever goat. But back to the elephant in the room, which is ...'

'The fact that a goat is talking?' I asked.

'Exactly,' Dad responded.

'I could've had a cup of coffee by this time, and some jam and toast,' said the goat.

'I think it's time for you to go now,' said my dad.

'Fine. I can see when I'm not wanted,' said the goat, looking hurt. 'You've both made it clear how you feel about me.'

'Oh no, it's not that,' I said. 'You have to understand that we don't live like you do. When we eat, we sit on a chair at a table. I don't think that's your style. And we are very strict about using the toilet.'

'Toilet? I don't like the sound of that,' said the goat. 'Could we go back to the food part?'

'No. And there's also the matter of baths,' said Dad. 'We take them.'

'Clothes too,' I said. 'We wear them. Just look at me.'

'I see,' said the goat. 'Toilets, baths, clothes ... This changes everything.'

'Maybe you could go on out to your pen,' I suggested. 'I'll give you a carrot to take away.'

'I guess,' said the goat. 'But if I can't come in here, what should I do if I need to get in touch and you're not outside?' the goat asked.

'I don't know,' I said.

'I just thought of something,' said the goat. 'Maybe I could have a phone. It would be easier all around, don't you think?'

My father did not look impressed, but didn't say a word.

'It would help you a lot,' said the

goat. 'If there was ever a problem in the yard, like with the chickens, I could let you know. It's a safety issue when you get right down to it.'

'I should have known that was coming,' said Dad.

'That's right,' I said. 'If there was a problem, you could text me.'

The goat frowned and lifted a front leg to show me a hoof.

'Sorry,' I said. 'I guess that makes pressing letters difficult. But there's voice-to-text software. You say something, and it's converted to text.'

'Really?' said the goat. 'Definitely get that. And make sure the phone has a good camera; I take hilarious selfies. Really funny stuff—trust me.'





'Dad, are you getting all this?' I asked.

'Yes, don't worry,' Dad sighed. 'The goat will have the latest in phone technology.'

'Then it's agreed,' said the goat. 'I think I'll get going. I have a few things to take care of outside. Goat stuff mostly; you wouldn't understand. Plus, I need to keep an eye on those chickens. They're very careless.'

I walked the goat out to his pen. I gave him a quick hug before closing the gate. He is definitely not a big bath-taker. He started to munch on

some alfalfa and the carrot I'd given him. He seemed happy. I told him I would see him tomorrow.

I went back inside.

'Well, that was different,' said Dad.

'That's for sure,' I said. 'I've never had a conversation with a goat before.'

'That is a very crafty goat,' said my father. 'I think he was angling for a phone from the very start. He knew we wouldn't agree if he asked right away, so all this other carry-on was part of his plan.'

'Well, it worked,' I said. 'And we never even got round to discussing the elephant in the room.'

'What kind of phone should we get him?' my dad asked. 'Do you think he needs goat-to-goat and a goat-to-human plan?'

'I think, to be on the safe side, we should get both,' I said.

'Maybe you could look into it for me,' said Dad.

I decided to forget about the elephant for now. I had phone plans to research, and I still had homework to do. ■

