

The Tale of the Mountain Goat

By Keri Wallace

One dreich summer's day in the Scottish Highlands, two goats set out in search of a new home. The two goats longed for this because their birthplace was fraught with tussocks and the drinking water was a dirty brown. With heads bowed against the elements, they ploughed through dewy blaeberry bushes, which snagged at their ragged coats. Then they trudged through the deepest and darkest dark peat bogs, which sucked at their hooves. But after several days of slogging, they found that their way was blocked by a giant mountain.

The first goat chose to travel round the mountain, following a worn trod through scratchy bracken. The way was easy and after just one day of walking the first goat reached the Glen Behind the Mountain. To his disappointment however, he found that the ground here was exactly the same as his homeland; all tussocks and brown water. The first goat had a fitful night's sleep in the lumpy ground and the water in the burn tasted bitter. Dissatisfied, he moved on the following day, continuing along the worn trod in search of better lands.

The second goat decided instead to scale the mountain. In doing so he had to climb steep jagged rocks and narrow soaring ridges. He slept in the open on the rocky ground, while cold winds whipped about him. As the days passed, his hooves began to ache from walking and he became very thirsty, having seen no water for days. At one time he became afraid for his life and cowered behind enormous boulders. But after several hard days, the second goat descended unharmed from the hillside into the Glen Behind the Mountain. Here he found a soft bed of tussocks and an endless supply of babbling cool water, full of the nutrients of the earth. He drank deeply from the burn and slept a long and peaceful sleep in a comfortable cradle of tussocks.

As the seasons passed in the mountains, the first goat continued to roam far and wide, following the same pathway as the many goats before him, endlessly searching for lush green fields and clear waters. But the first goat never found his perfect pasture, becoming exhausted and irritable along the way.

The second goat decided instead to remain in the glens around the giant mountain, exploring high into the mountains each day. As the seasons passed he noticed that his footfalls had become light on the steep rocks and his hooves were confident on the narrow ridges. Every day was challenging but rewarding, and the waters of the burn always tasted sweet.

As the years passed by, the first goat grew increasingly afraid of leaving the safety of the trod, believing that it would eventually lead him to happiness. He thought often of the second goat, assuming him to be dead. The second goat grew only more contented as the years passed by. From the top of the giant mountain he thought often of the first goat - knowing him to be lost.