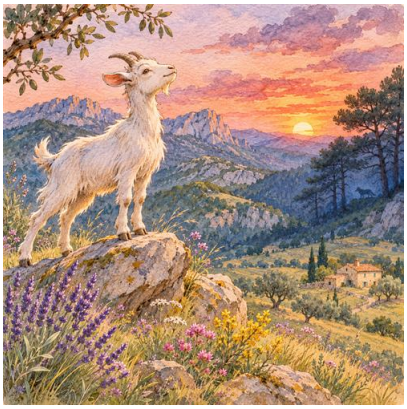

# Mr Seguin’s Goat

Mr Seguin had never had any luck with his goats.

He cared for them well, gave them a warm stable and brought them the tenderest grass. Yet every one of them gazed at the mountains until, sooner or later, it broke its rope and escaped.

A wolf lived on the mountain.

After losing six goats, Mr Seguin bought a very young one. She was white, with gentle eyes, a short beard and shiny black hooves.

He called her Blanchette.

“This one will be happy with me,” he thought. “She is too young to want to leave.”

Mr Seguin tethered Blanchette in a meadow surrounded by hawthorn. He visited often, brought oats and scratched her forehead.

For a while, the little goat seemed content.

But whenever she raised her head, she saw peaks, pine trees and meadows filled with flowers. Birds came down from the mountain and told her what it was like to run without a rope.

The grass inside the fence began to taste dull.

One morning she said:

“Mr Seguin, let me go to the mountain.”

The man dropped the bowl of oats.

“Do not say that! My other goats wanted to leave too, and the wolf took them.”

“But I shall be careful.”

“Rena was careful. Brownie was strong. Long-Horn fought all night. None came home.”

Blanchette lowered her head, but did not change her mind.

“I am safe here, but I am not free.”

Frightened, Mr Seguin locked her in the stable. He forgot one small window.

At daybreak, Blanchette slipped through it and ran towards the mountain.

What a glorious day!

The little goat leapt over rocks, crossed streams and tasted plants she had never seen. Broom flowers brushed her horns and lavender scented the air.

The flowers bent as she passed. A chamois showed her a narrow path. An eagle told her where the coolest water rose.

From the summit, Mr Seguin’s house looked like a tiny box.

“How big the world is!” Blanchette cried.

In the evening, the sun turned the mountains pink. Then a horn sounded from the valley.

Mr Seguin was calling her.

“Come back, Blanchette! The wolf will come out after dark!”

The little goat looked down the homeward path. There was still time. She took a few steps towards the valley, then turned to the immense meadows.

She had known freedom for one day and did not want to live on a rope again.

When the last light faded, she heard a sound among the pines.

Two pointed ears, two shining eyes and a grey shadow.

It was the wolf.

Blanchette stood before a rock so he could not attack from behind. She lowered her horns.

The wolf advanced. The goat knocked him backwards. They fought beneath the stars.

Whenever Blanchette heard the distant horn, she found the strength to resist a little longer.

The moon crossed the sky. The stars slowly faded. Blanchette was hurt and weary, but she still stood.

At dawn, a cock crowed in the valley.

The little goat looked one last time at the landscape she had chosen. Then her bell fell silent.

Mr Seguin understood from his home.

For a long time he remembered Blanchette. He learnt that loving someone does not mean only protecting them, nor does it mean leaving them alone before every danger.

When he next cared for a goat, he built a much larger meadow, strengthened the fences and walked with her each day along the first mountain paths.