

# GOAT.



## AND THE TERROR BIRDS.

BOOK ONE IN THE GOAT SERIES  
BY PJ GILBERS  
ILLUSTRATED BY NICOLAS LONPREZ

# GOAT. AND THE TERROR BIRDS

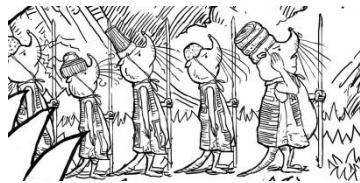
An unlikely adventure.

By PJ Gilbers

[www.PJGilbers.com](http://www.PJGilbers.com)

*Goat. And the terror birds* is the first of the Goat Adventure Series.

DEDICATED, WITH GRATITUDE, TO THE BRAVE  
SOLDIERS  
OF THE WEBSTER GROVES  
UNDERTHEPORCH  
SHREW ARMY:



GENERAL RACHEL  
COLONEL AUSTIN  
MAJOR SYDNI  
PRIVATE, FIRST CLASS MORGAN

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## CHAPTER ONE

“Momma says a goat is moving in the old Woodruff house. She said she met him. And she said he was really nice.” Suzie was walking to school with her cousin, Mac. Only Suzie never just walked. Suzie twirled. Always.

“A goat? Goats don’t live in houses or have furniture. You got it all wrong. As usual.” Mac was ten and three quarters. Suzie had just turned eight.

Suzie did a giant twirl, kicking up dust. “You’ll see, smarty pants.”

They ran into their kitchen in search of food, just like they did every day after school. Only today...was different.

Because today, standing in the kitchen, was a goat, wearing an apron while searching through their cabinets.

“Hi! I bet you’re our new neighbor. I’m Suzie and this is my cousin, Mac. He’s ten and three quarters. I’m eight. He lives with us ‘cuz his mom died and his dad is off in the jungles somewhere looking for the Terror Bird.”

Mac rolled his eyes. “Tell him our whole life story, why don’t you?”

“Good afternoon,” the goat said, handing them a plate of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies. Mac took a cautious step closer.

“My name is William. I have indeed just moved in and I sensed hungry children were in need of some cookies. Now, I thought it would be a good idea if we start dinner since your mother will be late tonight.”

Mac took a cookie while Suzie was already finishing her second and reaching for a third.

“Goats don’t talk or walk on their hind legs. This must be a joke...a trick!”

“Indeed,” William mused as he bustled around, setting bowls out and searching the cabinets, as if a goat in the kitchen was normal. Then he started throwing the contents of the cabinets and refrigerator all around the room. Cinnamon and bread crumbs, sugar and vanilla, all flew in different directions.

Mac screamed at him to stop. “What’s wrong with you? Stop it! You’re making a huge mess...!”

“Whatchya making?” Suzie asked, twirling in the flour and food coloring on the floor, making wondrous designs.

“I believe brownies should do well. Brownies and perhaps a broccoli pie.”

“Yippee, yippee, yippee!” Suzie twirled then began to paint smeared rainbows on the walls with the floury goop.



“This is insane. Goats can’t talk or cook. Now get out of here!”

William was holding a carton of eggs, holding each egg up to the light.

“Has a bump,” and he threw it over his shoulder, “too yellow.” He threw it. “Funny shape on the bottom.” He threw it.

Splat, splat, splat. They hit the wall behind the sink and slid slowly down.

“Ah, now that is a perfect egg.” He cracked the egg into the mixing bowl, then poured a mountain of flour in, turning the mixer on, and creating spectacular clouds.

“I’m not, I repeat *not*, cleaning this up!” Mac wiped flour from his face. “You deranged, insane, mammal—cut it out! Suzie stop! You’re just making it worse!”

William smiled at the mess, snapped his fingers, and froze time.

*“Perhaps, dear reader, you are wondering how we arrived at this interesting place. A little about me...You see, my father was a goat, as was his father before him. We come from a very long line of goat explorers, inventors, pilots, astronauts. I am a goat following those lines, for I am a goat on a mission.*

*“It began last week. I was planting carrots in my new garden when I overheard Suzie and Mac talking. Mac was sad, of course, because of the sudden loss of his dear mother and the absence of his father, when I was annoyed to hear a most obnoxious child named Rhett calling Mac ‘orphan boy.’ It seems that they were tormenting Mac because he couldn’t ride a bicycle.*

*“I knew immediately that I had to intervene, to step in, to empower this troubled lad! This is my mission, and its name is ‘Mac,’ and I am inviting you to come along with me.”*

He snapped his fingers and everything began flying and spilling and twirling again.

William finished baking the brownies and broccoli pie in no time.

Mac was furious. “I don’t know what you are, some mutant or alien or something but, I am NOT cleaning this up!”

William seemed to not hear him. “I suppose we should get busy cleaning, don’t you both think so?”

Suzie, now covered in flour paste of many colors, nodded happily. Mac made growling noises.

William dashed out of the kitchen and hurried back with tape, towels, and a stereo. Laughing, he turned on a Salsa station while taping towels to their heads, hands, backs, knees and feet. Then he sprayed them with water, added a little soap, and began dancing.

William and Suzie danced around the room, cleaning and polishing while Mac stood, dripping, watching, and making grrrrr noises. Although he was growling he did almost smile once and he did allow his feet to cautiously slide around, mopping up what Suzie had missed.

They heard a car pull up. William hurriedly collected the towels and slipped out the back just as Mrs. Maddy Donahue walked in.

“Look at this place! I’ve never seen it sparkle so! Do I smell something cooking?”

“Brownies and broccoli pie,” Suzie twirled with excitement.

“That’s fantastic. I haven’t had broccoli pie in I don’t know how long...”

## CHAPTER TWO

Dylan, Mac’s father, stood on the deck of the colossal, crowded, cargo ship, watching a storm rolling in from the west.

“We will be ashore soon, my friend,” said Alex, a short Egyptian man. “Are you sure you want to go into those jungles and look for this mythical bird?”

“I have heard about it for years. Larger than an ostrich. The Terror Bird. It’s a raptor, meat eater, supposed to be ten feet tall. Can you imagine?”

“Then why haven’t they found one yet? It is a legend, that’s all. Like the Big Feet creature. You risk your life going into the jungle.”

“I’ve been in jungles before, and deserts, and mountains, and oceans. They say it’s extinct but villagers keep reporting they’ve seen it, even been attacked by it. I’ve got to go. I just have to. And I need the money. If I can discover one, document it, I can make enough money to go home to my son. He and his mom need money. Even though we’re divorced... I can’t wait to get back to my son. And besides, I feel like this is what I’m supposed to do. My destiny!”

Alex laughed. “Well, if I did not have flat feet, am allergic to bee stings, and have poor night vision, I would surely go with you...”

### CHAPTER THREE

Rani, the sister of Mac’s enemy, Rhett, was walking back and forth waiting for Mac to come out of his house. She didn’t want it to look obvious that she was waiting for him but she had a new puppy and she couldn’t wait to show it to him.

Rani smiled when she saw him. “Hi!”

“Hey Rani! Cute puppy.

“I jussssst got him for my bbbbbbirthday.”

Mac sat in the dirt and played with the feisty golden puppy. Rani really liked Mac. He never made fun of her stutter and they had fun together.

Just then a group of boys, led by Rhett, rode up on their bikes.

“Where’s your bike, Mac? ‘Thought you had such a cool bike.” Rhett laughed and the boys laughed with him.

“I do, jerk. It’s in the shop. I bent the axle a little when I was jumping. Made it over three trash cans.”

“You did? That’s wonnnnderful , Mac,” Rani said.

“You are so full of crap!” Rhett said. “You don’t even know how to ride! I bet you still got training wheels, right guys?” They all laughed. Again.

“Rrrrrrhett, you shut up. You are sssssso mmmean!”

Rhett ignored her.

Mac stood a little taller. “Get lost, Rhett. I could ride circles around you with one hand tied behind my back, balancing a fish bowl on my head, and a blindfold on.”



Rani stepped closer to Mac. “Yeah!”

“Yeah.”

“Come on Rani,” Rhett said, “don’t get close to orphan boy. You might get his cooties and you’ll never get ‘em off ‘ya. Come on, guys! Nothing to see here. Nothin’ at all!”

The boys rode off spraying Mac and Rani with the loose gravel.

“I know you can ride your bike real good, Mac,” Rani said and patted his shoulder. “I know you haven’t taken it out of the ggggggarage yet bbbbecause...”

Mac sighed and kicked the dirt. “Cause my dad...I wanted to wait to do it with my dad. As soon as he gets home we’ll get it out. It’s special, you know? He promised.”

He patted the puppy then shuffled slowly back into the house.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Dylan was talking to a farmer in the beautiful rural part of Patagonia. The morning was warm, with a heaviness of rain.

“So, you’re telling me that you have seen, with your own eyes, what they call the Terror Bird?”

The farmer smiled and took his hat off. “Yes. Oh, yes. Many times. Its name...terror...is right. Listen to me; it will knock you down. It will attack. It steals children! It is taller than a man and its beak is like the condor, hooked, massive. It rips meat from the bone. We, who live here, we know. We have seen it. Many, many times. You must not go after it on your own.”

“Where do you see it? Take me. I can pay you.”

The farmer shook his head and began to walk away. Then he turned and looked at him, worried.

“Okay. I take you part way. But then, you are on your own. But, please, reconsider. Do not go after this monster. Please.”

Dylan shook his hand. “Not to worry. I’ve hunted the great white, been on the rim of volcanos, and survived in the deepest jungles of Africa. I am, you see, a photographer!”

The man looked at him and muttered, walking toward the jungle, “And a fool.”

## CHAPTER FIVE

It was time for bed. Mac found his aunt going through the bills. He knew she was worried about money.

“Any mail for me today?” he asked.

She stopped and looked up, smiling. “No, sweetheart, not today. But soon I bet. I’ve contacted everyone I can to get a message to your dad. I’m sure he’ll surface soon.”

He nodded. “Yeah. I know he will. He might be in the Antarctic or under the ocean. Never know with him.”

She smiled and took his hand.

“I know; I miss him, too. Did you know that your dad and I dated before he met your mom? A long time ago...”

“No way.”

She laughed. “I was crazy about him. We went everywhere together...had so much fun. And then he met your mom. He didn’t know she was my sister and well...the rest is history I guess. I was the flighty one. The artist. Your mom was practical, sensible. They were a good pair.” She looked away and he realized that she really liked his dad.

“Night, Mac. Sleep well.”

“Night.”

Mac’s room was a make-shift combination of his aunt’s art supplies, half-finished sculptures, and endless boxes of beads, glue, buttons and paints which had all been pushed aside to make room for him.

Mac pulled a box from under the bed and sat on the floor next to it. He found the wrinkled picture of his dad. Smoothing it over and over he stared at it for a long time.

“Think about me tonight, Dad. Remember me. Mom...she’s gone. It was so fast...pneumonia. Just...gone. I miss you, Dad. So much.”

He slid the box back under the bed, placing the picture under his pillow. But he waited to cry until he turned out the light.

William, hiding in the bushes outside Mac’s window sighed.

“I must make my calls. I must call in the troops,” he whispered to the hushed, sad night.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

The next morning Mac heard Aunt Maddy on the phone. He hid in the hallway, knowing she was trying to keep things a secret from him and Suzie.

“...of course I’m keeping him, he’s my sister’s child...no, he is not a burden!...Yes, she had a life insurance policy but what I’m trying to explain is that her ex-husband has to sign the papers, the money goes to him, and we can’t locate him now...no, he didn’t run out, he travels all around the...yes, I know, I am two months’ behind on the payments but if I just had more time I’m certain we’ll find him...please, just another couple of months...I see. Yes. Sell. I see. Well, then that’s what we will do...”

Mac's stomach hurt but he suddenly, weirdly, felt better when he saw William at the kitchen window waving at him, motioning him to come outside.

William had a safari type vest on with a carrot sticking out of one of the many pockets.

"Walk with me," he said in a hushed voice.

William led him to a back part of the yard with overgrown trees and bushes.

"Listen to me, Mac. Everything is going to be okay. In fact, better than okay. Tomorrow an unpleasant woman will show up and place a For Sale sign in the yard. Very soon after this people will begin touring through the place wanting to buy it. It is a beautiful old house, in need of a little work perhaps, but very desirable."

"How do you know...?"

"My dear boy, you are talking to a goat. And you question my information?" He winked.

"I guess you aren't the average goat."

"I should say not." He pulled a dog whistle out of one of his many pockets and blew it.

"Do not be afraid. Everything is under control."

"What do you mean...afraid of..."

Suddenly the bushes began to rustle and tiny creatures poured out, lining up in a perfect military formation. Many were wearing tiny helmets, and many had miniature spears.



“What?” Mac was stunned.

“Please, let me introduce you to the North Underwood Shrew Army.”

He clicked his back hooves together and saluted, then nudged Mac to do the same.

Mac saluted.

A larger, fatter shrew with a silvery, sniffley snout marched out and faced William and Mac, returning the salute.

“Sir William, how may we be of service? Troops have been traveling from all over the region when your call came.”

Mac stared at William. “Sir?”

“Pay attention, boy. This is important. Thank you, Colonel. This human lives in the structure behind us with his family. In the next few days his territory will be invaded by hostile humans who want his structure.”

The ranks mumbled and grumbled.

“It is your mission, Colonel, if you and your troops are willing, to create chaos...”

“We will kill the humans!” the Colonel yelled and the shrews shouted and jumped up.

“Kill the humans! Death to the humans!”

“No, Colonel. No, no. No casualties. We only want to frighten them, cause a disruption in their operations. We merely need to buy some time, you see. The bank must believe Mac’s aunt *is* selling the house. But...we do not want anyone to buy it. Understand? We just need to stall, buy some time.”

The Colonel paced back and forth.

“No casualties, eh? What a shame, what a shame. Frighten them, you say. I see, yes, I see. Yes, humans often scream and run when they see us. It is an old dwelling...I have the perfect plan! Leave it to us, Sir, we will begin scouting tonight. The human should inform his family, I suppose, so they will not be terrified. We will post lookouts to alert us when the hostile humans arrive.”

“Excellent. I am in your debt, Colonel.”

“Yeah, thanks,” Mac said.

“Human boy, we are at your service. We have heard of your father. We understand the mission...very well.”

A bugler blasted a loud buuubuubuuuu. The troops dismissed, many going in groups to Mac’s house.

“Are you sure this is a good idea?” Mac asked.

“The Colonel is a good soldier. He will deliver. You’ll see. You will have to tell Suzie and your aunt quite gently, I’m afraid.”

Mac sat down on the broken back steps.

“Who or *what* are you?”

William smiled. “I am William. A goat. My father was a goat, as was his father. But most importantly, I am your friend.”

“But, you talk and the shrews talked. Maybe I’m going crazy!”

“The world is a place of mystery and miracles. Accept that, as does your dear cousin, Suzie. Accept and allow, dear boy, and you will find what you need in life.”

William whistled as he walked back to his house.

Mac sat and watched the sunset, wondering how he was going to explain this all to Aunt Maddy.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Dylan had always been good at climbing trees and he knew, from the reports he’d gotten, that a view from above would not only be better for photographing this monster bird, but it would also be safer.

He had been snapping pictures all day of bees, beetles, butterflies, snakes, salamanders, and skunks. He knew he could sell them for a small amount, but he had also been tracking what he was convinced were the footprints of a very large, very heavy bird.

Once he was high in the tree he decided to bait the bird and opened a can of tuna, tossing it to the ground to tease it out. Then...he waited.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Mac snuck outside just as the sun was coming up. It was a Saturday so he knew Suzie and Aunt Maddy would be sleeping in. The old door creaked as he pushed into the crowded, musty garage. Most of the stuff from his mom was stacked neatly all around him, surrounding him with boxes of memories and sadness. He managed to get his bike out and took it to the driveway.

“Okay, Mac,” he told himself, “you’re ten years old. You can do this. Just get on and ride!”

He peddled slowly, then a little faster, faster until...

He hit a rock, the front wheel turned, and he crashed hard into a tree. The bike was bent and Mac was furious.

“Dad!” he whispered. “You promised!”

When he was putting his bike back he heard his aunt screaming. Running inside he knew what he was going to find.

Aunt Maddy stood far away from the open refrigerator spattering and spitting words that he couldn’t understand.

He walked up to the refrigerator and met the angry stares of five shrews.

“What’s up with you? I thought you was gonna tells your family last night!” The shortest, fattest shrew tapped his foot.

“Okay, okay.” He turned to Aunt Maddy who was now sitting on the floor babbling.

“Talking, talking mice.”

“They’re shrew’s, actually, Aunt Maddy.”



“Shrews. In my refrigerator, on the pickles, the pepperoni pizza, the pecan pie!...Talking shrews!”

He sat next to her and explained it while Suzie joined them and met the shrews. Soon the tiny soldiers were twirling with her around the kitchen. In no time there were dozens of shrews laughing and dancing with Suzie, one on her head, two on her shoulders, and three hanging tightly on her toes. Suzie acted as if she danced every morning with the shrew army. But then that was Suzie.

Mac, seeing William smiling at the window, just shrugged. And *almost* smiled.

An hour later a crabby woman did show up with a sign for their front yard, just as William had predicted. She walked through the house and made Maddy feel bad that things weren't super clean or repaired.

When she was gone Suzie, Aunt Maddy, and Mac began cleaning and painting. By the end of the day things looked better but they were super tired.

They never noticed the pigeons flying in from all directions to William's back porch.

The pigeons were quiet, that is, for pigeons. William stepped out his back French doors and greeted them.

“My friends. Thank you for coming. Major Dragoon, I assume you have informed your troops as to the danger of this mission?”

With this the pigeons fell into line and took a military stance. One had an eye patch, several had scars, all evidence of former battles.

“Danger? We do not know the meaning of danger. We don't see danger, smell danger, hear danger, taste danger...do we, men?”

“Sir, no sir.” They all said.

“It will take you a great distance, we are searching for a man, the father of a very dear friend of mine. The father is lost, but doesn’t know he is. Yet.”

“Humans!” scoffed the Major. “Patagonia. Yes, we have mapped it.”

One of the pigeons in the back pulled out a huge map with writing all over it.

The Major put a headpiece on which amplified his voice. “We fly to Toledo, pick up a ride we have arranged with a trucker named Mr. Finley Finkel, arriving Malibu, California where we will avail ourselves of a vessel docked there waiting for us. We will be, uhhmmm, borrowing it, shall we say. We then travel past the Gulf of California, past Mexico, crossing the equator, past Peru, finally working our way along the Chile border, and finally, Patagonia. Six thousand, two hundred and ninety one miles.”

William sighed. “A long journey, my dear friend. Rough waters. Many challenges.”

They were silent.

Finally William said to the pigeons. “I have a rescue team on the ground, but your help in locating the human will be critical to our success. I cannot ask you to risk your lives. If any of you would like to decline this mission it would be completely understandable. Please, just leave and no one will think the worse of you.”

They stomped their feet one time and stood tall.

The Major smiled and turned to William. “We leave immediately.”

William had tears in his eyes as he saluted them, watching them waddle bravely down the street, the Major lifting easily into the air, followed by two more, then four more, then eight...

They disappeared into the thick, darkening clouds.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

The crabby real estate lady brought over some bright red flowers suggesting that Maddy plant them alongside the front walk.

“A little color like this will distract the eye from the shabby...less attractive features of the house,” she smiled.

Maddy had thanked her and the woman said the open house would be in a few days.

“This is the big show. All the agents from the area will be here and I’ll have refreshments for them. This is the day we must make a great impression. So...a little cleaning or, should I say, a lot of cleaning will be in order. Yes?”

Maddy nodded and sighed.

Mac and Suzie offered to plant the flowers while Maddy cleaned the bathrooms. They thought that was a great trade.

Mac heard the boys before he saw them. It was Rhett and his gang, riding up on their bikes. The gang seemed to be larger this time.

“Hey, orphan boy. Now you’re planting some pretty little flowers?” Rhett was getting closer and closer.

“Get out of here, Rhett.” Mac turned back to his digging and planting, stabbing the ground with his metal trowel.

“You know what your real name is, orphan boy? Coward. You say you can jump trashcans? Well I am gonna let you show all of us how you do that. Saturday. Plunkett’s Field. The jump of death. Two steel drums. And guess what, orphan boy?”

Mac sighed and stood up.

“What, crap eater?”

“The jump of death...the barrels have oil in them. We’re gonna set them on *fire*. Wanna back out now?”

“I would love to jump but I don’t have a bike. Maybe some other day when hell freezes over.”

“Not a problem. I have an extra one. I’ll have it there for you Saturday. Now what’s your excuse?”

Mac looked over at William’s yard and realized that William was watching the whole thing.

Mac swallowed hard, working to hide his fear. “I’ll be there ten o’clock. If you can stomach it.”

Rhett laughed. “Oh, I’ll be there. And so will everyone from school. Okay, orphan boy. I’ll see you there. And I’ll see you *burn!*”

After they left Suzie stood in front of him with her hands on her hips. “No way, poop for brains...” she thunked him on the head with her fist, “too dangerous.”

“You can’t tell me what to do.” He went back to digging--stabbing the ground even harder.

“Yes, I can, moron.”

“No, you can’t, idiot...”

Mac picked up a clump of muddy dirt and ran after her.

“Don’t you dare, don’t you do it!” She laughed and ran.

But he was too fast and tackled her, mushing the dirt down the back of her shirt and smearing it around.

She got up laughing, crouching, her hands like claws. “It’s a shame you’re so ticklish...”

He giggled and wiggled. “No! Come on! No!”

She jumped on him, tickling him, knowing this was his one weakness.

Just then Maddy opened the door and looked out. She laughed.

“Gosh, I thought you two might be playing around.”

They giggled and went back to their planting.

“No, we’re almost finished,” laughed Suzie.

Mac smiled, something he didn’t do much of.

“Good. Supper in half-hour. Spaghetti.”

## **CHAPTER TEN**

It was beginning to rain in the thick jungle and Dylan was sliding a bit in the tree.

Then he saw it.

It was really just a blur, grayish with gold and black feathers, and a long lizard-like tail that whipped around, smashing small trees and bushes.

The tuna he’d used as bait was instantly gone.

Dylan tried to get pictures but it moved too fast. Luckily he had a video set up on a tree that was set off by motion. But he worried that the misty rain may have interfered with the clarity of the shot. Moving just an inch at a time he edged down the tree, realizing for the first time that the jungle had grown deadly quiet.

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

Aunt Maddy, Mac, and Suzie had worked day and night to get the house ready for the big open house. But so had the North Underwood Shrew Army. They had rehearsed, run drills, and practiced back-up plans just in case something went wrong.

The crabby real estate lady showed up early and put cookie dough in the oven to bake.

“It gives a house such a homey feeling. Now the three of you must scoot along...is that a goat I see next door?”

Suzie started to explain, “Yes, his name is William and he ...”

Mac grabbed her, hushing her, and rushed her outside. Once in their car Aunt Maddy giggled.

“I don’t know about you guys but I just can’t leave. I’ve got to see what those shrews have in mind. Let’s park down the street and sneak back.”

“Yeah!” Suzie agreed.

“I don’t know, Aunt Maddy...” Mac was trying to be practical but he knew it was wasted on his aunt and cousin. It was lassoing a cloud. “Yeah,” he said, giving up, “sounds like a great plan.”

Aunt Maddy turned and grinned at him. “I knew you’d think so,” and they both laughed.

The first agent to arrive was a handsome man in a pinstripe suit; he took lots of pictures with his phone. A man with gray in his beard came in at the same time as a blonde lady with a big notebook. Everyone heard a clunk, clunk, clunk as a young woman in a huge hat and very high heels walked slowly in, paused, and then wandered in as if she was on stage.

But then everyone seemed to freeze as an elderly woman with white hair, large rhinestone glasses, and a cane with a dragon handle, strolled in. They all took turns going up to

her, shaking her hand, and smiling. She wandered through the house, smacking walls and floors with her cane, as if to check that they were made well.

That's when the fun began.

The big hat woman was in the bathroom, adjusting her hat in the mirror. Suddenly a gruesome face, dripping with goo and mush, appeared in the mirror behind her. She screamed and turned around but nothing was there. The shrews were fast, dropping the mask on a string behind the towels where they were hidden.

Then the blonde woman screamed from Aunt Maddy's bedroom.

She ran downstairs, dropping her big notebook, and stumbling twice.

“Shoes...shoes in the closet...all dancing...dancing shoes!”

The gray bearded man tried to comfort her and the lady in the hat.

The older lady stood annoyed in the living room. She slammed her cane down hard on the old wood floor.

“Calm down everyone! When you have been in real estate as long as I have you know that old houses like this have ... there is nothing to...”

She stopped her speech and watched a large statue of a laughing man creep across the floor and laughter echoed through the house.



The chandeliers swayed, books flew off the shelves, and then the radios and televisions all turned on at once.

All the agents screamed and ran for the door, the older woman beating them with her cane so that she made it out first.

In seconds they were all gone. Aunt Maddy, Mac, and Suzie laughed so hard they fell behind the bushes, hugging each other. Mission accomplished. No one was going to buy this haunted house any time soon. They all hoped it would give them time to find Dylan and they wouldn't have to sell at all.

The evening was joyful and they celebrated with William and the entire North Underwood Shrew Army.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

It was late. Everyone was gone and Aunt Maddy and Suzie were sound asleep. The house was quiet. But Mac couldn't sleep. He got the picture of his dad out and talked to it.

"I really screwed up this time, Dad." William was crouched under Mac's window. He was on his way to bed until he noticed that Mac's lights were on again so he snuck over.

"I said I could ride a bike, jump over barrels...now what am I going to do? I'm going to make a fool of myself, Dad. And fire! It's too dangerous, too stupid, but, what am I going to do? Why aren't you here? I need your help. Soon!"

William sighed. He went back to his house and got on his CB radio.

"Silver Hoof to Winged Wonder, come in, Winged Wonder."

The radio crackled and sputtered but finally Major Dragoon came on.

"Yes, we are making good speed."

"How did you get the boat, by the way?"

"It seemed the captain sort of lost his balance and fell in. Of course we made sure he was rescued before we made our way."

William giggled. "How far out are you?"

"My navigator tells me six hours we will make landfall. Of course we will need time to find him."

"Take care, old friend."

"Not to worry. We are having a wonderful time," there was rumba music blaring in the background. "We will take care of the boy's father. Don't be concerned."

Then William made one more critical call...to his cousin, leading a troop of mountain goats to Patagonia.

“Tobias? Do you read?”

“Loud and clear, we are making good time, the weather is fairly good, we will connect with your winged friends very shortly!”

### **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

It began to rain, an unpleasant, slap-your-skin sort of a rain. This only made tracking the creature that much more difficult. As Dylan moved through the trees he noticed an odd sound. It was a clicking, almost a tapping.

He stopped, afraid to move as he realized there was not just one sound, but at least three from different directions. The sound stopped when he stopped. He moved forward and it began again.



His stomach was churning and his head hurt. His lungs had forgotten how to breathe, as he realized that he was being *hunted*. Hunted by a *group*. The rain increased and he could barely see in front of him, but there was one thing for sure, the noise seemed to be getting louder. Louder meant closer. Closer meant ...*run!*

Dylan ran, falling and slipping, until he twisted his ankle stepping into a hole. He looked around for a place to hide.

The rain stopped as suddenly as it had started and he had an idea. He took his backpack and began throwing the contents out all around him to distract them. But it only bought him a few seconds as he heard rustling and crashing.

He ran, limping badly, until he came upon a stream.

The stream was rocky, the water fast and deep. He thought he might lose them if he could just get across. Making it half-way he was tired and hurting so he sat on a rock in the middle. That was the first time he'd gotten a good look at them. They were huge, a good two feet taller than he was; half-bird, half-lizard, and they had razor-sharp beaks like a vulture. Just like the farmer had said. He was right, they didn't like getting into the water or slipping on the small stones. They screeched at him in anger as he made it across and ran, stopping briefly on the other side.

He wiggled a tiny camera out of his wet, aimed and took as many pictures as he had time for. "Got it!"

Just then a pigeon with a patch on his eye landed on a rock across from him. Then a large pigeon swooped down with...he couldn't believe it...a phone headset on. They stared at him, nodded, and then flew off.

"I must be losing it...going crazy." He rubbed his eyes and the pigeons were gone.

Suddenly he heard splashing and he froze in terror. The birds were leaping across the water. He stared and then raced through the forest, cleared a line of trees, and screeched to a stop, almost toppling over the side of a cliff.

"No!" he whispered. "No, no, no..."

Before him was a valley--a valley filled with hundreds and hundreds and HUNDREDS of Terror Birds.

And they all stopped.

And turned.

And stared right at him.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The team had been hiking for nearly a day. The leader, Toby, was on the radio constantly with William.

“Yes...yes, we have the equipment. We are on our way.”

“And you met up with the Major’s forces?”

“Yes. They’re following us. We know exactly where he is.”

William paused. “Toby, tell me the truth. What are the odds?”

Toby stopped and took a drink of water.

“Honestly, the numbers are far larger than we thought. I can only tell you that what we have planned will work. At least...long enough for a speedy getaway.”

William sighed. “How many of these dreadful birds?”

“The Major estimates...at least five hundred.”

William groaned. “God’s strength, God’s speed. And Toby, I thank you, with all my heart.”

Toby coughed, hiding his emotions. “We will succeed, my cousin. We will raise a glass together soon. You will see.”

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Suzie dragged Mac outside.

“What, what, what?” he yelled at her.

She stood with her hands on her hips. And this time she wasn’t twirling.

“Mac, I think of you as a brother. I care for you. I even love you.”

“Would you stop it!”

“All the kids are talking about this death jump with Rhett. I heard them today. All day! You are *not* going to jump. No way. No how. And if you don’t promise that you won’t I’m tellin’. Right now!” She stomped her foot.

“What do you want me to do? Look like a coward in front of the whole stupid school? I can’t...”

He turned away.

“I know, I know, you can’t ride your bike.”

He stared at her. “How...how did you know?”

“I know all kinds of things, buddy.”

“I have to do the jump. I just have to. Even if I don’t make it I have to try! I lost my mom and I couldn’t make that stop. My dad is lost somewhere and I can’t bring him back. This is the only thing, *the only thing*, I can do that I have some control over!”

Tears rolled down his face. Suzie hugged him and he cried. Hard.

“Okay,” she sniffed, because she was crying, too. “I’ll help you. At night. When no one can see. Okay?”

He wiped his nose on his sleeve. “Okay,” he whispered. “We’ll do it. We’ll do it.”

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Dylan had nowhere to go. If he went back, the three chasing him would get him. Forward and he would be tonight’s appetizer for a large, hungry crowd.

That's when he heard his name being called. "Master Dylan, we are here, fear not!" It seemed to be coming from a bull horn from the forest to his right.

Then he saw them.



Mountain goats. At least a dozen of them. Some with flashing lights and sirens strapped onto their silly heads. The one talking to him was all brown and a bit larger than the others.

"Goats?"

"How do you do, Dylan, father of Mac. I am Tobias or Toby to my friends. These are my troops. We have been traveling day and night to reach you."

"Goats...talking goats."

The bushes rattled and one of the birds jumped on Dylan, knocking him down. The goats blasted the area with a horrendous noise from sirens to bull horns.

The birds ran away.

“We must hurry. They have just been startled. They will be back.”

They ran back over the stream and up the hill. But what they heard sounded like thunder.



The entire Terror Bird nation was now chasing them.

The goats made a formation and blasted them with sounds again. The birds tumbled backward into each other.

“Run,” Toby screamed.

They ran, stopping frequently to blast them with the sirens again and again.



Finally they reached the edge of the forest where the farmer had left Dylan what seemed like a lifetime ago.

What they saw made them jump and cheer. There were all of the villagers, young and old, with fiery torches. The goats and Dylan ran to their protection and then joined their ranks. The birds dashed through the tree line and came to a dead stop.

Because the one thing that all Terror Birds feared most was...

Fire!

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

“It’s like a carnival, and a picnic, and a big party thingie,” Suzie said, too worried to twirl on the walk to Plunkett’s Field.

Kids were everywhere, sitting on blankets, doing tricks on their bikes, eating, drinking, and throwing water balloons. Dogs ran around having a great time barking out the most exciting messages they didn’t want anyone to miss.

“How are you feeling? I still think we should just turn around and go home!” Suzie asked Mac.

“I’m okay. I’ve been practicing, thanks to you.” He grinned. “I’m feeling good, really...”

His voice trailed off as he caught his first glimpse of the two barrels, with fire in them, and the rough planks that made the rickety ramps. He had never liked being around fire but there was no way he was going to show any fear.

Suzie grew pale. Rani ran over and hugged Suzie.

“No, Mac, no way. Fire!” Suzie was screeching.

“This is way too ddddddangerous. No wwwwwway are you doing that!” Rani told him.

Rhett came over. “Well, well, well. It’s orphan boy. And idiot girl. I didn’t think you’d show. I see you have your cousin’s bike. A *girl*’s bike.”

“It’ll do. She was nice enough to loan it to me.”

“My bike is expensive. Top of the line.”

“Great. We’re all happy for you. You should be able to jump no problem then.”

Rhett had a strange look on his face and Mac instantly realized that the big, bad bully was scared.

“Look, since I’m an experienced jumper, I’ll go first,” Mac offered.

“Experienced, eh? Ok. Give it a shot. Hey, everybody, orphan boy is ready to go!”

The crowd got quiet.

Mac got on the bike and rode around the barrels three times for dramatic effect. He was getting the hang of riding Suzie’s bike and he was beginning to think he could actually make the jump.

He rode far away from the planks, by the old tire and the rusty peanut oil cans. Suzie was scared and she had all of her fingers crossed. She and Rani hugged each other.

Finally, he took off. Rhett was standing behind the barrels announcing the action to the crowd. Mac peddled as fast as he could, hit the ramp, and flew into the air.

Over the barrels.

Over the fire.

But his front tire hit the down ramp and slid off.



He was thrown on his side about ten feet from the bottom of the ramp and, as if in slow motion, the ramps and then the barrels crashed over.

The fire spread so fast the terrified kids ran for the road. Mac was in the grass, watching the flames snake their way through the field in spine-chilling speed. Then he heard a voice.

“Help! Can’t...can’t breathe!”

Mac crawled toward the voice through the heavy smoke. It was Rhett.

When he reached Rhett he saw that he had his inhaler out, trying to breathe.

“Asthma...smoke...can’t breathe!”

Mac tried to drag him but Rhett was panicked and fought him. Just a few feet from them was an old quilt and a few water balloons. He ran to it, the flames coming closer and closer, the

heat burning his face. The smoke was toxic, black, and smothering and he was coughing so hard he could hardly breathe.

He broke the water balloons on the quilt getting it as wet as he could, grabbed it, and ran back to Rhett. Covering them both with the wet blanket. He was terrified as the flames grew higher. Mac knew he had to get them out of there, fast.

They crawled toward the street, wrapped up under the quilt. Within seconds a fireman was hovering over them.

“Asthma!” Mac told the man. “He’s got asthma. He can’t breathe! ‘Gotta help him!”

The fireman lifted Rhett up and rushed him to an ambulance.

Mac looked down. He was shocked to see blood. His side had a puncture wound, the blood bubbling out. He hadn’t realized he was hurt at all and he fell back suddenly struggling to breathe. Suzie reached him, screaming for help, and then Mac’s world simply went black.

## **CHAPTER EIGHTEEN**

Mac woke to pain and the sound of beeping and odd, annoying smells. When he opened his eyes he thought he was dreaming.

“Dad?” His voice was rough and hoarse. “Is it really you?”

Dylan smiled, his eyes filled with tears. He was covered in scratches and had a splint on his ankle, but he had never looked better to Mac.

Dylan held Mac’s hand. “It’s me. I’m here. I’m here. And I’m never, ever leaving...And...” he laughed, “boy, are you grounded!”

“That’s good, Dad. I know...stupid trick. Really stupid. But now...you’re home!”

“Home. For good.”

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

The moving truck was almost full. William was happily packing the last of his family albums when Dylan walked in.

“Hello. I understand I owe you my life.”

“Oh, tut, tut. Just made a few calls. You know how it is...”

William smiled. “How did it go in court? How is Mac?”

“The judge really blasted the boys, told them she could send them to juv-ie. But instead they have to clean the whole field, haul all the trash and junk out of there. It’ll take all summer. And she showed them pictures of kids who had been burned...scarred...lost their hands, one child was blind. Scared them. Nothing worse than burns. Hopefully they won’t ever play with fire again.”

Dylan stared at him, trying to put it all together.

Finally he said, “When I was six. My dad was dying. You...”

“I was wondering if you’d remember.”

“No one believed me that a talking goat was following me around, making me laugh, helping me to sleep every night.”

“Sometimes adults have to see it to believe it. Children only need to believe, and they see everything.”

“Who are you?”

“I am William, a goat. My father was a goat...”

“...as was his father,” Dylan laughed, remembering. “And you just go all over the place helping kids who are in trouble?”

“Something like that. I have a marvelous time. Marvelous adventures.”

“How...how do I thank you?”

“Ah, my dear boy, by simply finding joy and then sharing it. That’s the secret of life. Just as you have discovered with Maddy.” He grinned a knowing grin.

“I do love her,” Dylan confessed. “Always have. But I didn’t know that she always loved me.”

“Then, you *have* thanked me. More than you know.”

Dylan helped him carry the last two boxes out to the truck. William gave him a nod then climbed into the cab with the two movers.

“Turn on Willie Nelson, gentlemen...’On the road again,’” he sang out the window, waving, “just can’t wait to get on the road again...”

THE END



**Join us for our next adventure, *Goat. And the Very Bad Dragons*. We would love to read your reviews of *Goat. And the Terror Birds*.**

**Thank you,**

**Sir William**

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