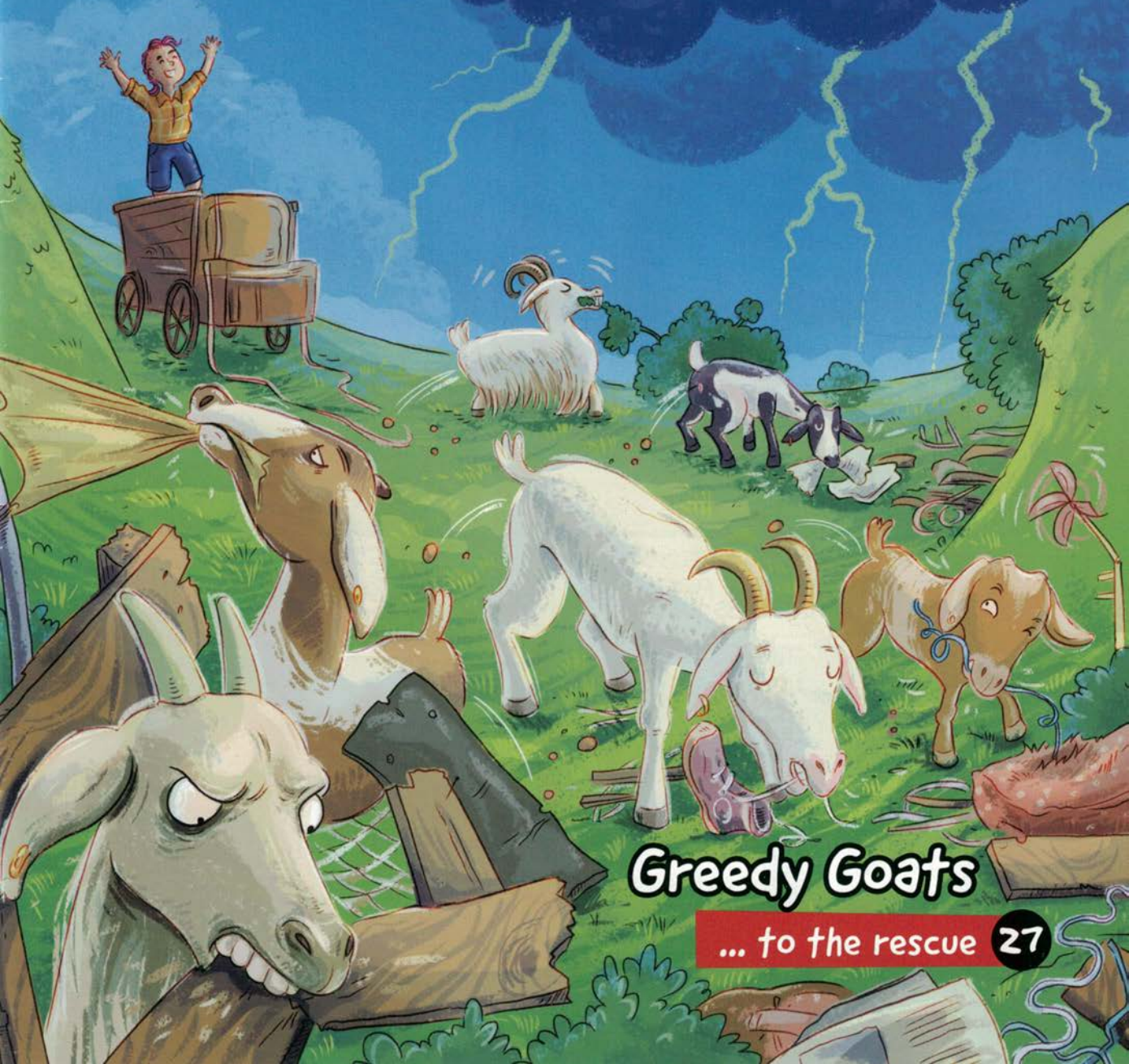


BLAST OFF



Greedy Goats

... to the rescue **27**

Hillbilly Heroes

story by Marian McGuinness | illustrated by Áska

ONCE UPON A TIME in a valley there was a town called Come-by-Chance. It was called Come-by-Chance because all those who had come by chance, had loved it so much that they stayed.

On one hill lived Farmer Jack. He lived in a magnificent house with a large verandah that overlooked his mighty Christmas tree farm.

On another hill lived Farmer Jill. She lived in a crazy three-storey tree house with rope ladders, a drawbridge and a star-gazing deck. She didn't grow Christmas trees—she grew goats. Hillbilly goats.

Every morning, as the sun rose over the mountains, Farmer Jill

called the hillbillies for goat yoga. There were Willy and Nilly, Tilly and Jilly, Lilly and Frilly, Milly and Dilly, Silly and Hilton, who she nicknamed Hilly ... and the smallest goat of all, Billy the Kid.

After doing goat yoga the hillbillies wandered off to forage. They climbed to the tops of trees and scrambled up jagged peaks like they were famous mountaineers. They *munch munch munched* the undergrowth until the ground was as clean as a swept kitchen floor. Their happy *maaa maaas* were heard all day long, and for their happiness, they left presents of chocolate-coloured poop balls, as fertiliser.





While the hillbillies were filling their four stomachs (that's why they were such greedy guts) Farmer Jill made goat yoghurt and cheese and fudge and ice cream for the festival just before Christmas on the day of the solstice—the longest day of summer.

Every evening, as the last rays of sun faded over the mountains, Farmer Jill gathered the hillbillies in their cosy shed for their bedtime stories. She told them tales about the great goat heroes like Goaty McGoatface, the Scottish nanny

who did the highland fling at the Queen's coronation, and Genghis Goat, the fearsome warrior who ruled all the lands of Asia.

She told tales of Vincent van Goat, the famous artist who cut off his ear; Elvis Goatly, the rock and roll singer, and Cleogoatra, the last nanny pharaoh of Ancient Egypt.

On the day before the solstice festival, Farmer Jill sat on her stargazing deck sewing woollen goat ears onto the beanies she'd knitted from the hillbillies' hair to sell at her stall called Maaa Goat Shop.

Bang Bang Bang ... someone knocked loudly on the door of her tree house.

She leaned over the balcony.

'Hello, Farmer Jack,' she called down. 'How are you today?'

'I'm annoyed,' he yelled up at her. 'Your goats are IDIOTS! IDIOTS, do you hear! They don't even know where they belong. They're eating everything on my farm. The grass, the weeds, the bushes, my vegetables ... even the clothes on the scarecrows! All gone. You hear me? ALL GONE! And now they're chewing the Christmas trees all higgledy-piggledy. They used to look like beautiful emerald triangles. Who wants to buy an ugly, zigzaggy Christmas tree?'

And another thing ... I'm always treading in goat poo. And it stinks! So, I'm building me a fence. That's what I've come to tell you. A fence to keep your pesky goats off my property! And I'm not ... kidding! Good day, Farmer Jill!

And off he stomped ... squish ... squish ... straight over fresh pellets of goat poo.

Farmer Jill sadly shook her head. She understood about fences, but sometimes, she thought, they keep out the good things as well.

On the day of the solstice festival, Farmer Jill packed her goat goodies into her cart. She harnessed up Willy and Nilly, but something didn't feel right as she popped their straw hats on their heads.

She heard a great rumbling noise. Farmer Jill thought it was the goats' tummies. Their four stomachs made them expert wind-makers.

As the rumbling got louder, Farmer Jill looked to the sky. Dark grey thunderheads peered over the mountain. She climbed to her star-gazing deck and swizzled her telescope towards the mountains. She squinted into the lens.

There, she saw a frightening sight. Green clouds, with lightning forking out of them.

The tree house shuddered as

thunder rumbled. Farmer Jill turned on her radio. It crackled with the blizzzz of lightning.

'High alert! This is a weather warning. A giant storm is heading towards the town of Come-by-Chance and will soon unleash its torrent of terror. Come-by-Chance could be washed away!'

Farmer Jill slid down the rope ladder.

'What about my goats?' she cried.

Then she had a brainwave. Her hillbillies would be the solution.



She yodelled, 'yo-de-lei-ee-ooo ...' and all the hillbillies came running.

Farmer Jill popped Billy the Kid into the cart, climbed in and stomped on the foot board. 'Maaa,' bleated Willy and Nilly. She flicked the reins, 'Get up! Get up, goats!'

Willy and Nilly jiggled forward and all the hillbillies followed. Farmer Jill flicked the reins again. 'Come on, goats. Get up! We've got to stop the flood!'

As the rain tumbled down, they jiggled up the track with Willy and Nilly out the front and the hillbillies trotting behind. They cut through Farmer Jack's property. Luckily, some was still unfenced. They slipped and slid along the muddy track past banksia bushes bending sideways in the howling wind.

They stopped at the end of the track. Farmer Jill remembered Tumble Down Gully that ran behind the Christmas trees on

Farmer Jack's property. It had been overgrown with weeds and clogged with rubbish for decades. If it were cleared, the rain could funnel into it, diverting the flood water from town.

She jumped off her cart and led her hillbillies to the top of the nobby peak.

'Now hillbillies, it's up to you,' she yelled, as hail pelted like icy arrows. 'Eat every weed, every bit of rubbish. I want this gully cleaned out!'

'Maaa,' the goats bleated. They knew the meaning of eat and weeds and rubbish, and in the pelting rain they scrambled into the steep, slippery gorge to find the weedy yumminess.

Farmer Jill climbed back into her cart and flicked the reins. 'Go Willy! Go Nilly! If this doesn't work, we have to warn the townsfolk.'

They galloped into the sports field at Come-by-Chance where everyone was gathered for the festival.



As the stormy darkness crept over their faces the bagpipers stopped piping, the stilt walkers jumped off their stilts, the buskers stopped busking and Countess Zelda came out of her fortune telling tent.

Boom ... Shizz ... Splizzzz ...

Thunder and lightning cracked the sky as the drumming sound of rain got closer and closer.

'My farm!' cried Farmer Jack. 'All my baby Christmas trees will be washed away!'

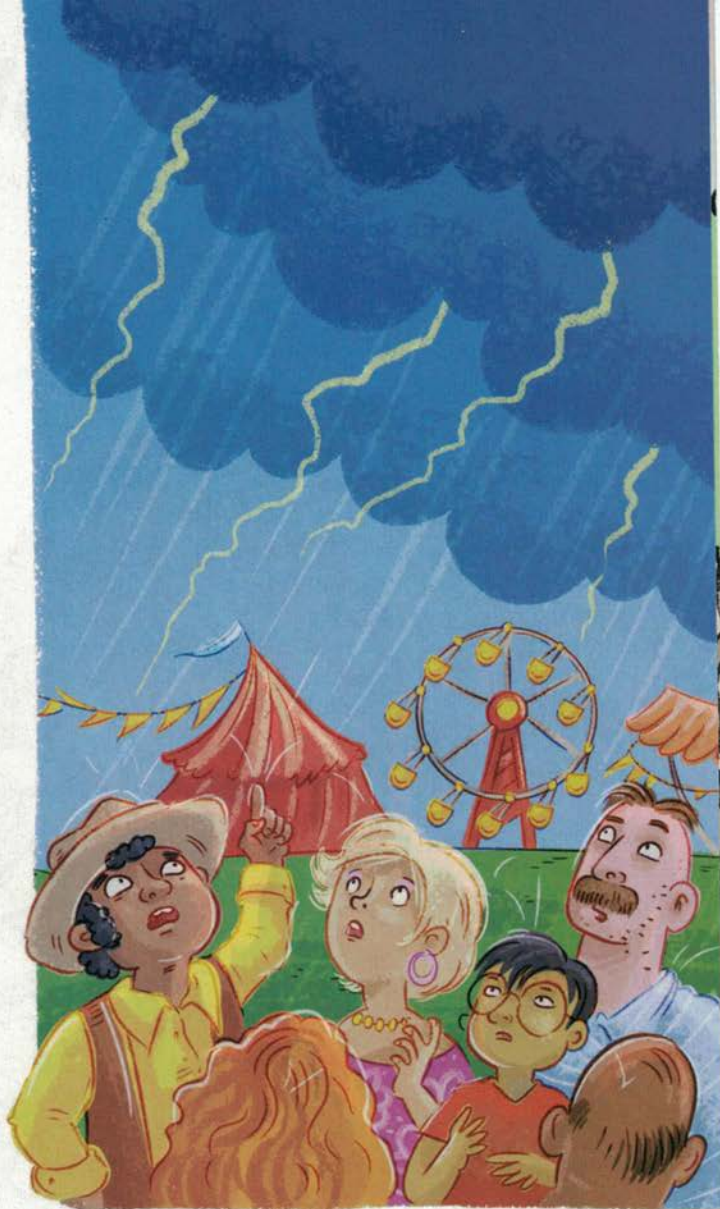
'Forget your trees. What about us?' chorused the townspeople. 'We're all doomed!'

Countess Zelda rushed to the Ferris wheel. 'Send me to the top,' she ordered the attendant. She clipped herself into the wooden seat with the safety bar.

'I will use my gift. I will foretell the flood's path!'

Up ... Up ... Up ... went the Countess; her purple-beaded headscarf flapped in the blustery wind.

'I see it! I see it!' the Countess called from the top of the Ferris wheel. 'The rain's pelted the mountains. Great torrents of water are racing this way.' Then she stopped. 'Huh?' she said, quietly. 'What are those goats doing there?'



'Tell us what you see,' called Farmer Jack. 'What's the worst? Is it my Christmas trees?'

Countess Zelda waved her arms like she was casting a spell. 'I predict the flood will not harm us. I predict these waters will ... flow along another path!'

Phum ... Phum ... Phum ...



A helicopter landed near the townsfolk. Out climbed a news reporter and a cameraman.

'This is astonishing news,' said the reporter as the cameraman filmed her. 'The town of Come-by-Chance has been saved from flooding by some brave goats. Who would have thought that wild goats

could chomp out a channel for the floodwaters to flow away from town? I'd call them heroes!'

'I told you so!' called Countess Zelda as she chugged back down to the ground. 'I predicted the flood wouldn't harm us.'

The whole town cheered. 'They're Farmer Jill's Hillbillies! Hooray! They've saved our town. They're our Hillbilly Heroes!'

That afternoon, Farmer Jill walked her goats into town. They were given a heroes' parade through the main street.

'Maaa,' bleated the goats as they were showered, not with rice or ribbons, but with broccoli and brussels sprouts.

Farmer Jack presented them with a gigantic bunch of spinach and carrots. 'I'm sorry I called your goats idiots,' he said to Farmer Jill. 'They're not idiots ... they're smart. They can climb into places we can never get to and clear the weeds like we never could. I'm going to put a goat gate in my fence, but I'm still going to shoo them back home when they've had a feed. And I'm not ... kidding!'

And all was well once again, because the happy town of Come-by-Chance had been saved by the Hillbilly Heroes. ■