Goat Song

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ACT 1
SCENE 1

(The main room of a small, two-room dwelling on the outskirts of Puerto Ayora on the island of Santa Cruz in the Galapagos. The house was built by Norwegian settlers in the 1920s, and was simply, but well constructed with few modifications since. Recently the house has been used by a series of visiting international scientists, some of whom have left their mark on this place. There is a detailed map of the Galapagos Islands on one wall into which someone has carefully stuck a number of color-coded pins. There is a small Czech flag on another wall, and a collection of exotic, dried plants hanging from the ceiling. There is an empty birdcage.

There is a small sofa, a large table, and some simple wooden chairs. Propped up on the table, rather than hanging on the wall like it is meant to, is a framed print of a portrait of a middle-aged Charles Darwin.

Stage right is the front door of the house. Stage left is the door to the bedroom.

At rise Dr. Alonso is assembling a large reptile tank. In need of something, he goes offstage, into the other room.

Enter Guillermo, Robert and Gretchen. Guillermo is a 20-year-old Ecuadorian biology student. Robert is a 61-year-old American biologist. Gretchen is 25, Robert’s daughter.

Guillermo and Gretchen are dragging in two large suitcases and a collection of smaller bags. Robert is carrying a small lizard in his hat.

English is Guillermo’s second language and Dr. Alonso’s third. Dr. Alonso, who learned English in an academic and professional context, speaks it fluidly, but his accent is strong. Guillermo, who learned English watching American movies, has less of an accent, but his English is not as good. Robert can’t understand a word either of them says.)

Guillermo

I have never stayed here, but I hear it is OK. There is running water outside. In the outside toilet, and the shower. There is electricity, but only one . . .

(He doesn’t know the word for outlet. He motions towards it.)

Also, fridge.

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(He opens and closes the door of a small fridge. He smiles. Robert appears confused.)

Gretchen
Fridge. There’s a fridge. And a shower outside –

(She cuts off as Dr. Alonso reenters with a screwdriver.)

Dr. Alonso
I thought I heard someone! Welcome! I’m Dr. Alonso.

Eh?

Dr. Alonso
We corresponded by email.

Gretchen
(discretely, to Robert)
This is Dr. Alonso.

Robert
Ah! Robert Tilman.

Dr. Alonso
Yes, I know.

(They shake hands a little awkwardly; Robert is still holding his hat with the lizard in it.)

Dr. Alonso
I was just setting up a tank for you. You have lots of room for specimens at the lab, but I thought you might want to have some close to home.

(Dr. Alonso looks at Robert, who doesn’t say anything because he hasn’t understood.)

Gretchen
(covering for her father)
Thank you.

(Dr. Alonso looks at her, confused that she answered.)

Dr. Alonso
Also, I brought you a present.
(Dr. Alonso turns to get something from one of the chairs. While he is turned away Robert looks helplessly at Gretchen.)

Gretchen
He’s setting up the tank for you in case you want to have lizards here. And he’s got a –

(She stops short as Dr. Alonso comes back with a small plastic cage containing a lizard. Robert’s face lights up. He loses all his pitiful befuddlement. He stares admiringly at the lizard in the cage.)

Robert
She’s beautiful. Look at those lamellae at work. *Phylodactylus galapagoensis*.

Dr. Alonso
Yes.

Robert
Where is she from?

Dr. Alonso
The Research Station. But her mother was collected on Floreana.

Robert
(grasping at the word he understood)
Floreana?

Gretchen
Her mother was from Floreana. She was born –

Dr. Alonso
Hatched.

Gretchen
- hatched. She was hatched in the lab.

Robert
Ah! I also have a *P. galapagoensis*!
(He carefully takes the lizard out of his hat.)
A juvenile male. Collected off the side of a café on the Avenue Charles Darwin in Puerto Ayora.

Guillermo
Not a café, a restaurant. La Guerrapata.

Dr. Alonso
And you’re not even meant to start until tomorrow. Such dedication to your work.

(Robert doesn’t understand, but smiles back dumbly.)

Gretchen

My father is always working.

Dr. Alonso

Yes.

(to Robert)

I hope you will not be working tonight. There is a little get-together at the Station. Everyone on the island comes. It would be a shame not to be able to introduce you.

(Robert smiles dumbly.)

Dr. Alonso

(to Gretchen)

Go ahead and tell him.

Gretchen

I’m sorry.

Dr. Alonso

Not at all.

Gretchen

He has a hard time with accents.

Dr. Alonso

Please. Don’t worry.

Gretchen

(to Robert)

There is a get-together at the Station tonight, if you want to go.

Robert

Oh.

Gretchen

To meet everyone.

Robert

(uncertain)

We should go.

Dr. Alonso

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I certainly hope you do. Now. About these geckos. I think maybe we don’t put my female in the tank with your juvenile male unless you want more specimens than you bargained for.

Robert

What’s that?

Gretchen

Dr. Alonso thinks that you shouldn’t put the male and the female geckos together.

Robert

Why not?

Dr. Alonso

You want lots of little Puerto Ayora – Floreana hybrid geckos?

Eh?

Gretchen

Dad, they’ll have babies.

Robert

But your female isn’t sexually mature.

Dr. Alonso

She isn’t?

Robert

She is at least half an inch too short yet, and I bet, if you look at her cloacal opening . . .

(He studies the lizard)

Yes. As I suspected.

(He studies the lizard.)

Dr. Alonso

You are right. So much the better.

(He puts both lizards in the tank.)

Come, let’s go get some leaves to furnish their new home.

(He starts to exit out the front door. Robert looks at Gretchen.)

Gretchen

Leaves for the tank.
Robert

Ah!

(Robert follows Dr. Alonso towards the door.)

Gretchen

Should I come with you?

(But Robert doesn’t acknowledge her question and exits. Gretchen and Guillermo are left alone. It is awkward. After a silence . . . )

Guillermo

Do you like it here?

Gretchen

It’s very strange.

Strange?

Guillermo

The rocks are strange.

(Pause.)

Guillermo

Is your first trip to the Galapagos?

Gretchen

Yes.

Guillermo

Oh, you will love it! It is my second time here. The first time I stayed only three weeks. This time I am here for four months, and I wish I never had to leave.

(Pause.)

Guillermo

Are you a biologist, like your father?

Gretchen

No.

Guillermo

Oh.

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(Pause.)

Guillermo

What do you do?

Gretchen

I’m a graduate student. In philosophy. I’m writing my dissertation.

Guillermo

What is it on?

Gretchen

John Stuart Mill.

Guillermo

I don’t know anything of philosophy.

Gretchen

He’s a utilitarian.

(This stymies Guillermo. After a moment of silence Dr. Alonso and Robert reenter with some vegetation. Dr. Alonso has apparently been speaking for some time. Robert trails along trying to listen.)

Dr. Alonso

… and he recently got an article published in Science. You will meet him tonight. He’s changed species, though. Now he’s working with *Spheniscus mendiculus*.

Robert

Penguins!

Dr. Alonso

What?

Robert

The Galapagos Penguin.

Dr. Alonso

(to Gretchen)

He doesn’t understand a single word I say and then he recognizes the Latin nomenclature?

Gretchen

(to Dr. Alonso)

There are penguins on the Galapagos?
Guillermo

Yes!

(Dr. Alonso starts working on the tank again. He is screwing the lid together. Robert is arranging the vegetation in the tank for the lizards. Robert is preoccupied with his work and only looks up when he hears a Latin name.)

Dr. Alonso

How about *Geochelone elephantopus*?

Robert

The giant tortoise!

Guillermo

What about the iguanas?

Dr. Alonso

*Amblyrhynchus cristatus* . . .

Robert

The marine iguana!

Dr. Alonso

*Conolophus subcristatus*

Robert

The land iguana!

Gretchen

What about those odd, stubby birds we saw from the jeep?

Guillermo

(to Dr. Alonso)

Los cormoránes.

Dr. Alonso

*Nannopterum harrisi.*

Robert

The flightless cormorant!

Gretchen

What about the goats?
The goats?

Gretchen

Yes, the goats. I saw one on the way here.

Guillermo

The goats are just goats.

Gretchen

They don’t have a scientific name?

Guillermo

Yes, certainly . . . Um . . Ca . . Ci . .

Dr. Alonso

Capra hircus.

(Robert stops fussing over his lizard.)

Robert

Goats?

Gretchen

Yes, I saw one on the way here.

Robert

They’re not native to the islands.

(Robert goes back to fixing up the lizard tank.)

Gretchen

Oh. Penguins are, but goats aren’t?

(Dr. Alonso finishes putting together the lid of the reptile tank and puts it in place.)

Dr. Alonso

That is correct. The goats are actually a pest. Now, I should get back to the Station unless you have any questions?

(Nobody answers him. Dr. Alonso starts heading to the door.)

Dr. Alonso

Then I will see you tonight, I hope.
(Robert notices that Dr. Alonso is leaving.)

Robert

Oh, are you leaving?

Dr. Alonso

Yes, I thought I’d go talk to some people who can hear me.

Robert

Eh?

Dr. Alonso

(very slowly and distinctly)

Robert

Ah! See you tonight, Doctor.

(Dr. Alonso is almost out the door when Gretchen speaks.)

Gretchen

What do you mean, a pest?

Dr. Alonso

I’m sorry?

Gretchen

What do you mean the goats are a pest?

Dr. Alonso

Pest. It’s an English word, isn’t it? They are a pest.

(Dr. Alonso exits. Robert starts looking through one of the bags.)