Before You Begin:

In Ethiopian storytelling tradition, it’s customary for children to sit wide-eyed, in front of the storyteller.

The storyteller starts by saying, “Teret! Teret!” (which means: “A Story! A Story”)

The children reply, “Ye Lam Beret!” (This literally means: “A cow’s pen”, but when used in this way it means that they want as many stories told to them as could fill a cow’s pen.)

Or sometimes children reply. “Yemeseret” (This literally means: “Of the Foundation”, meaning stories that are deep in the culture or tradition.)

Only does the storyteller start telling, and telling, late into the starry night until the children are sleepy.
Fafi had two big ears, but he didn’t use them to listen to what his elders advised. “Stop misbehaving!” his mother would tell him. “Learn to obey”. He never listened to her.
One day, the whole city of Addis Ababa was about to celebrate Meskel, the celebration of when Queen Helena found the One True Cross. Fafi started bothering his father, asking to have a sheep of his own. Fafi's mother and father were very poor and did not have any money to buy him a sheep.
“I need to have one,” Fafi cried. “All of my friends do. Everyone in the neighborhood does.” “Stop this childish behavior,” his father said. Fafi just started to cry harder. Finally, Fafi’s father borrowed some money and bought the sheep. Fafi ran around the neighborhood telling all his friends to come see the new sheep.
The next day, Fafil's mother wanted to go to the market to sell some grass. There was no one to attend the house and compound except Fafil. "Watch everything carefully," she told her son. "Don't open the gate and be very watchful so that you don't lose the sheep."
As soon as his mother left the compound carrying the grass on her back, Fafi ran to the sheep and sat next to it. He petted the sheep. He fed the sheep some grass. “Dawit!” he shouted to his friend outside the gate. “Yes?” his friend called back.
“Come help me feed the sheep.”
“I have to finish washing my hair,” Dawit said.
“Will you be done soon?”
“Yes,” Dawit said. “I’m almost done.”
Fafi stared happily at his sheep. Then he started to feel impatient. He opened the gate and looked around. There was no one in sight. Fafi ran back to the sheep and untied the rope from its leg. He pushed the sheep with his forehead, asking, “Can you beat me in this game?” The sheep just stood still. Fafi sat on the sheep, holding its ears. He tried to ride it. “Go! Go!” he shouted. But the sheep did not move.
Fafi became more impatient. He bounced on the sheep’s back. The sheep stood still. Fafi slapped the sheep. This time the sheep cried out and began to run. Fafi was flung up high from the sheep’s back. He fell flat on the ground, only to see the sheep running out of the compound.
Fafi leaped up and dashed after the sheep. Before long, he found the animal standing in the middle of the road with confused look. Fafi darted toward the sheep. Startled, the sheep began to run again. It ran and ran, crossing many roads. Finally, when they were far from home, the sheep jumped the fence of a farm. Fafi climbed quietly over the fence and tiptoed toward the sheep.
The farm was full of newly planted seedlings. It was hard for Fafi to move around easily. “Oh well,” he said. “Who cares about these plants?” He trampled on them, walking closer and closer to the sheep. Suddenly, a gardener walked out of the nearby corn field.
Fafi pointed. “Look,” he called. “That sheep of mine has run away to this farm.” But the gardener was looking at the ruined plants. He grabbed Fafi by the arm.
“How dare you walk in the farm and ruin all these plants?” shouted the gardener. Fafi looked up, terrified. “My sheep ran into this farm.” The gardener lifted the stick he carried. “Do you think I care about your sheep? The tomatoes are all smashed!” The gardener began to whack Fafi. Poor Fafi started crying loudly. A passerby heard Fafi’s cry and hurried up. He grabbed the gardener’s hand, stopping him from beating Fafi.
“You should not use a stick to punish a child like this,” the passersby shouted.

“You are not right.”

“It’s none of your business,” the gardener shouted back. They began to quarrel.
"You should not use a stick to punish a child like this," the passerby shouted. 
"You are not right." "It’s none of your business," the gardener shouted back.
They began to quarrel. In the confusion, the sheep ran out of the farm. The gardener and the passerby were still arguing, so Fafi ran after the sheep. He ran and ran. After a while, he was gasping with tiredness and feeling pain in his chest. Then he saw the sheep go into a small market place. "Help me!" he called.
Some people tried to catch the sheep but none were successful. "Forget it," they said, one by one. They left him to attend their business. By now, Fafi was in the middle of the market. Here, there were so many people he could not see the sheep. Finally, he saw it near a cereal shop, eating from one of the piles of lentils for sale. Fafi hurried toward the sheep. Just before he got there, the shopkeeper turned. When she saw the sheep eating her lentils, she gave it a furious smack. The sheep ran away, ruining everything in its path.
Fafi ran after the sheep, leaping over the staffs fallen on the ground. “Go on!” people in the market began to shout. “Get out of here”. The sheep ran out of the marketplace and along the road. Finally, it came up to a group of other sheep. There, it slowed down.
Fafi looked for his sheep among the group of sheep. When he spotted it, he walked happily toward his sheep and grabbed it by the ears. “Hey you!” shouted the merchant. “Stop that.” “But it’s my sheep,” Fafi said confidently. “What? Where did a boy like you get a sheep?” “It’s mine,” Fafi protested. “It ran away from me.” “Let go of that sheep,” the merchant shouted. “Oh, no,” Fafi held the sheep tighter. “This is our sheep.” “I don’t believe you,” said the merchant. “Yes, it’s ours. See? It has black paint on the neck.” The merchant scowled. “How many sheep do you see here with black paint on the neck? How about this? And this?” Fafi stared at all the sheep with confusion. “Do you have any other signs to distinguish your sheep?” “No.” Fafi began to tremble. “But it’s mine.” ‘If it doesn’t have other sign, this sheep is not yours,” the merchant said sternly. Fafi’s eyes filled with tears.
By now a crowd had gathered, other merchants and people who had come to buy sheep. Everyone began to give different opinions. In the middle of the confusion, Fafi spotted a lentil on the sheep’s lip. “My sheep does have another sign,” he said. “What kind of sign?” the merchant asked sarcastically. “Right before my sheep got to this group of sheep, he was eating lentils in the market.” Fafi looked to the crowd. “If there are any lentils on the body of this sheep, this sheep is truly mine.” The merchant and the people around started to look at the sheep. One of them saw the lentil on the lip of the sheep. When the merchant opened the sheep’s mouth, it was full of lentils. Everybody laughed. “What a smart boy,” someone said. Fafi was very proud of himself.
The merchant joined in the laughter. “Take it,” he said. “It’s yours.” Fafi pulled the sheep out of the great gathering of other sheep. “Where is your house?” one of the people asked. The advice began to fly. “You can’t take it alone...you need to tie it with a rope.” However, Fafi was feeling happy and proud. He had two big ears, but he didn’t want to listen. “I can take it by myself,” he said. “I don’t need a rope to tie it. I will take it very easily like this.” Fafi lifted up the sheep’s back legs. Then Fafi started to push the sheep like a handcart on the asphalt road with joy.
On his journey back home, this way of holding the sheep was not too difficult. However, when they got near the marketplace, a dog dashed out of nowhere. Terrified, the sheep jumped out of Fafi’s hands. It crossed the main road with high speed. "No, not there!" Fafi yelled. Cars honked and dodged, and the sheep reached the other side without being hit.
The sheep kept running, away from the village towards the field and the trees. When they were in the middle of a big, open field, the sheep slowed down a bit. Fafi speeded toward it, but the sheep reached the forest and disappeared from sight.
Fafi was very frightened to go into the forest. But what could he do? He took a deep breath and ran in among the trees, almost falling into a hole. He shouted and jumped back. Then he saw what was in the hole. His sheep! The sheep began to struggle and bleat.
Oh no! What should he do next? How could he take the sheep out of the hole? It was deeper than he was tall, so if he climbed in, he wouldn’t be able to get out. And the sheep obviously wasn’t going to get out by itself. Sitting by the side of the hole, Fafi began to cry helplessly. It was almost time for the sun to set. Fafi regretted everything. Why hadn’t he listened to everyone’s advice? The sheep was bleating with all its might. Fafi and the sheep were both as miserable as they could be. “This is all my fault,” Fafi said. “Why am I so difficult? I myself untied the rope and started riding the sheep like a horse. I drove it crazy. Then when I had it again, I claimed I could do something I couldn’t. I wish I had listened.”
The evening got darker. Fafi stopped crying and started to feel very scared. Thump, thump. He heard footsteps in the forest. Oh no. He was horrified to also hear voices. Wildly, he looked around. Two people were rummaging toward him through the trees. Should he hop into the hole and hide?
“Fafi?” It was a woman’s voice.
“Fafi?” A man’s voice joined hers.
Fafi couldn’t believe what he was hearing.
“Mama?” he shouted. He ran toward his mother and father, full of joy.
After a huge struggle, his father got the sheep out of the hole. Before the night was completely dark, Mother, Father, the sheep, and Fafi were all back home. “Did you learn something from this?” Fafi’s mother asked. “Yes, Mama! It is all because I refused to listen to the advice you gave me. And it is also because I don’t do what people tell me to do. I am really sorry, Mama. Please forgive me. I’ll start using my two ears differently.” His mother hugged him wiping his tears. “Okay, then. Show me now that you have started to listen and stop crying.” Fafi stopped. And after that, Fafi’s two big ears became listening ears.
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