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Snouki & Couscous



Deutsch & English

Illustration: Carsten Sorger
Translation: Freya Ritts-Kirby

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Sprachauswahl:

Deutsch

English

Zwei Sprachen in einem Buch

Two languages in one book

Bad Homburg, 2012

Text Copyright Andrea Becker

ISBN 978-3-00-038173-7

<http://www.becker-books.com>

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King Cat

In a big city, a man dragged an old armchair to the side of the road. It was the perfect throne for a cat, with the softest cushions and a good high back to sharpen claws on. The People walking grumbled about the junk blocking their way. The tomcat, however, couldn't have cared less. Purring, he settled down on the old chair and watched the busy traffic and the shop window opposite through half-closed eyes. He was happy with the reflection that looked back at him: a big, strong stray tomcat, muscular and in his prime. Another cat approached, a delicate Siamese. Growling discontentedly, she arched her back and rubbed herself against the chair leg. In her opinion she was boss around here, but she was a whole span smaller than the tom.

"Well, well, well, who are you?" she asked imperiously.

"Me? I'm Couscous." The tomcat licked his paw and studied it thoroughly as if he had never seen it before. He paid the cat no further attention.

"Couscous? That's a funny name for a cat." The Siamese sat down in front of him.

"Couscous was my mother's favorite food. She wanted the two things she loved best in the world to have the same name."

"Hmph, your mother certainly had some strange ideas." The cat giggled quietly, and the bell around her neck jangled. "Where are your humans? Where do you live?"

"I don't have any humans. I had some once, but they treated me like a common cat, and then they left me in an animal home when they had a baby." Couscous sank his claws deep into the faded cushions. "That's no way to treat me. I'm a King! My family tree goes back twenty thousand years, way back to the dinosaurs."

"Oh really? How do you know that?" The Siamese was curious now.

"Just look at my ear. Do you see the zigzags at the top? Just like a crown! Only a king has that, that's what old Willy from the animal sanctuary said, he knows because he's a king too. He has zigzags in both ears. Miaow! He knew

everything about kings, and told me where they live, what they eat and what royal manners they have. They live in palaces, even though they are lazy and never work. Can you imagine? And they can be bad-tempered as much as they like. Well, now I must be on my way, I need to find a palace or a castle or something like that."

Couscous licked his paws clean, stretched himself out again and sprang down to the pavement in one elegant movement. He nudged the cat with his nose, so that she overbalanced and landed on her furry bottom. Then he marched on through the hurly-burly of the city. Where would he find a palace to live in here?

The Hero

Couscous strolled along a long hedge and savored the feel of the sun on his fur. Hmmm, from behind the hedge came the fragrance of meadows and flowers. "My palace grounds must be behind there," he thought, and slipped through a gap in the bushes. He found himself in a meadow, where a few old trees offered welcome shade. Full of curiosity, he examined the various play structures, none of which he knew. A sandpit. "How convenient" he purred contentedly, my new loo!" A large swing stood next to it. "Miaow, that's to rock me to sleep in, though it could be a little softer!" He sprang up the ladder of the climbing tower and balanced on the railings. "Cool, I can see everything from up here! Visitors, mice, the whole wide world!" He sniffed thoughtfully at the slide. "Nope, I don't need that, it can go in the rubbish. Will someone clear it away?" Slowly he crept towards the house. Inside it buzzed and hummed like a beehive. Who could be in there? He was convinced that his servants and cooks must live there. A king had servants and cooks, everyone knows that!

The windows were large and decorated with paper flowers and butterflies. Just as Couscous was about to spring onto the windowsill to look inside, the door opened and, screaming and laughing, almost a hundred children ran outside to play. A number of them saw him and wanted to stroke him. Startled, Cous Cous sprang high in the air and ran back to the road as quickly as he could, where he was nearly run over by a car. A good thing that a cat has nine lives!

Cursing, Couscous trotted along the road and angrily tried to box a passing bumblebee. "Drat and double drat, what sort of behavior is that? Is that how one treats kings? No! One asks kings what they desire, speaks quietly in their presence and offers them ham tenderloin. One certainly does not run at them, screaming! And that was MY palace garden, children have no right to be there!"

It took him a while to realize that rather than a palace garden, he'd been in a kindergarten playground. He swore loudly with the worst curses he knew. For a moment he asked himself if kings also swore like that. Yes, they did! Kings who have fought for the best bed in an animal sanc-

tuary certainly swear, instead of saying please and thank you all the time.

To avoid being trodden on by pedestrians or run over by bicycles, Couscous pressed himself up close to the walls and hedges. By now it was afternoon, his paws were sore and he thought it was about time his palace showed up. Suddenly, from the gateway next to him, he heard a hoarse voice calling for help: "Heeeeeeeelp! Help! Help me!" Quickly, Couscous ran on, muttering to himself: "It's not my problem. Someone else is bound to help him, I don't have time."

Still, his legs moved more and more slowly, and in his head a quiet voice asked him what would happen if everyone thought like that.

Couscous stopped and sighed deeply. „Miaaaaow, what shall I do? Should I really help? I'm no hero! And damn it all, that voice sounded like a dog's, and DAMN IT ALL, I DON'T LIKE DOGS!"

Couscous to the Rescue

Couscous decided to turn after all, and marched through the gateway. He found himself standing in a large yard among old cars, tyres and empty barrels. There were no humans to be seen. He heard the rustling of mice and then again the loud cries for help from the adjoining workshop.

Towards the back he saw a closed door. Aha! Someone must be shut in there. Couscous heard paws scrabbling wildly, and once more the shouting.

"Could you just shut up!" he called out, "I'll help you."

At once all was quiet.

"Woof? Who's there?" asked the dog's voice. "I am. Couscous. What's the matter? Did someone shut you in?"

"No, the door closed by itself. Can you fetch a human to open it?"

Couscous was amazed. Such a thing would never happen to him.

"Closed by itself? Well then, open it again! A dog can open doors, can't it?"

The dog snarled softly and countered: "No I can't. If I could I wouldn't have been sitting here for the last two days barking for help!"

Couscous rolled his eyes. He'd learnt to open doors while still a baby. He jumped up and hung from the handle. The door opened and a brown ball of fur shot towards him, knocked him off his feet and started licking his face.

"Thankyouthankyouthankyouthankyou!" panted the little dog, then ran outside, threw himself joyously in a puddle and drank. After two days of waiting and barking you can imagine how thirsty he was.

Horrified, Couscous shook himself and wiped the dog spit from his nose with both front paws. Slowly he followed the dog, sat down by the puddle and watched him. By now the little fellow was covered in mud.

"Good grief, what a pig you are. You'll never ge all that muck off your fur!" said Couscous.

"So what? I'm not a pig, I'm a dog and I'm called Snouki."

Snouki wagged his tail and accidentally sprayed Cous Cous with mud in the process.

"Hey! Yuk! Stop that! And take note of two things. First, don't make me dirty, and secondly - and now pay good attention you silly mutt - NEVER EVER KISS ME AGAIN!" Couscous flattened his ears and hissed and spat at the little dog so spitefully that he fell over, shocked.

"Hey, it's OK mate, I'm just happy and wanted to say thank you", said Snouki.



Dog Dreams and Cat Commands

Couscous looked at the little dog thoughtfully. "Tell me, where do you come from, and how did you get in there?"

"Oh ... I'm from the other end of town. I lived with my human in one of the blocks of flats there, but he developed an allergy to me. I thought it would be best to run away." Rather sadly, Snouki looked down at the ground.

"And after that?", asked Couscous, curiously.

"Since then I've lived here and there. I've become a stray. It was pretty comfortable here in the workshop until the wind blew the door closed. You saved me."

Wagging his tail, Snouki wanted to throw himself on Couscous once more, but the cat shrank back and hissed at him again.

"OK, OK, don't worry", said Snouki, "but when someone saves your life he's your friend for ever. You are now my friend for ever."

Couscous was speechless. He didn't want a dog for a friend. Absolutely not! And certainly not this scruffy animal looking at him, wagging its tail.

Couscous' stomach rumbled, and he realized that he hadn't yet found anything to eat that day.

"Gotta go, see you around", he said to Snouki, turned and went back to the street. Snouki followed him as quickly as he could.

"Wait, hey, don't leave me alone," he panted, "let's look for something to eat together. I'm so hungry I could eat a horse!"

Couscous sighed irritably, but then discovered a very interesting dustbin at the side of the road. No king's banquet, but better than nothing. He dug through the rubbish slowly and with concentration, every so often letting something fall for Snouki, who greedily wolfed down everything he was given.

"And afterwards?" asked Snouki, smacking his chops, "What shall we do when we've finished eating?"

"I'm going to carry on looking for my palace", retorted Couscous and burped loudly.

"I want to live in a palace and I'm going to find one. I've no idea what you want. Do you want a palace, too?"

"No, not a palace", murmured Snouki, and sighed deeply. "I want a new human all to myself, one who belongs just to me and plays just with me."

"A Human?" Shocked, Couscous stopped eating and stared at Snouki "What would you want with a human? To be dragged about on a lead? To have to beg for treats? Fetch sticks?"

"I like fetching sticks", retorted Snouki, crossly. "Don't you?"

"No, I don't," answered Couscous, decidedly. "If someone throws a stick away they obviously don't want it. Why should I bring it back?"

"Because it's fun," said Snouki, "it's a game. I know lots of games: Finding things, sit-up-and-beg, shaking paws, catching Frisbees...." Couscous made a disgusted face and dug deeper in the dustbin.

"Don't you like humans?" persisted Snouki.

"It's enough if humans like me," murmured Cous Cous. "If someone likes me they'll do what I want, and that's what matters."

The sun sank behind the houses of the city, the sky turned first orange, then red, indigo and finally black. The street lamps came on and the air turned cooler.

"Where shall we sleep? I'm tired," whined Snouki. Couscous spotted a building site. Together they ran to it and examined the machines carefully. Snouki settled on the padded seat of one of the diggers and Couscous lay down on the floor by the controls.

"Couscous," asked Snouki, "Couscoussy, will you tell me another story? One from the animal sanctuary?"

"Couscoussy?! Are you crazy? No. No story. Not even one from the animal sanctuary."

"Will you give me a goodnight kiss?"

"Yuk, no!"

"Could we have a cuddle?"

"NO, dammit! I'm not your mother! I'm a cat, and cats can't be dogs' mothers!"

"That's a pity. Good night Couscous."

Couscous tried to sleep. He turned first this way then that. The birds in the bushes were snoring too loudly. Couscous lay on his back. He heard the mice coughing. It was no use. He squinted up at Snouki, who lay quite comfortably on the seat and was breathing deeply. He was already asleep. Couscous was cold and the floor of the driver's cabin was much too hard. Softly he crept up to Snouki and lay down next to him.

"Urghhh, he reeks of dog," he thought, "but who cares? He's warm." Couscous finally fell asleep.

RRRRIIIIIIIIING DONG Ouch ...OWMIAOW ...

Couscous hit his head on the steering wheel, and a shocked Snouki fell off the seat onto the floor. An alarm clock? An alarm clock on a building site? No, it was only a bicycle bell. The first builder had arrived for work. Soon it would be loud and unpleasant. Shivering, the cat and the dog went on their way.