



On the count of three – in the trees!

By Saskia Hula & illustrated by Ulrike Möltgen

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It was just a normal day in the jungle.
The monkeys were picking lice from each other's fur.
The parrots were screeching like crazy.
The capybara was wallowing in the mud.
The elephant was day-dreaming.
The peacock was trying out a new wheel.
The hippopotamus stood in the water munching eelgrass.
And the leopard was counting his spots.

Until the tiger came.
The tiger makes his rounds at seven every day.
Once in the morning and once in the evening.
After all, he was the king of the jungle.
And that was how things were going to stay.

Before the tiger made his rounds, he sharpened his claws.
He made his striped fur stand on end, until he became almost twice the size he had been.
He hissed and rumbled, until the earth shook.
And then he roared with a voice like thunder:
'ANIMALS OF THE JUNGLE, I'M GOING TO COUNT TO THREE! ON THE COUNT OF THREE I
WANT EVERYONE IN THE TREES! OR ELSE!'

In an instant, there was silence in the jungle. Even the parrots shut their beaks.
But the tiger took a giant step forwards, threw back his head, and began to count: 'ONE!'

On the count of 'One' the parrots flew up a level.
The monkeys let go of the lice, stretched out their long arms and drew themselves up onto the next
branch up.

Even the lice crept a little higher up in the monkeys' fur.

You never know.

The tiger's eyes flashed.

He bared his teeth, swiped his front paw through the air with a whoosh, and roared: 'TWO!'

On the count of 'Two!' the peacock hurriedly folded up his tail and flapped up onto the nearest branch.

The leopard stopped counting. 'Show-off,' he snarled scornfully.

Then he jumped with a mighty leap into the nearest tree.

Even his spots all moved upwards.

You never know.

The tiger grinned, pleased with himself. Then he whipped his tail through the air, let out his feared roar and shouted: 'AND ONE MAKES . . . THREE!'

On 'AND ONE' the elephant hung his trunk over a branch and did a pull-up.

On 'MAKES' the capybara jumped on a tree trunk and stood on his tiptoes.

On the count of 'THREE' the hippopotamus took a deep breath and dived under the water.

However much it might want to, it couldn't fly, climb or jump.

It just had to pretend not to be there.

The tiger stamped with his head high through the jungle.

It was as if everything had died out. You couldn't hear the slightest peep.

Not the smallest tip of a tail could be seen.

Just how things should be.

The tiger didn't notice that the leopard had spat and just missed his head by a whisker.

He was about to finish his rounds, when he came across something black and white, sitting on the ground contentedly grooming itself.

It was a porcupine, a foreign porcupine.

The tiger frowned. He didn't like porcupines, and foreign porcupines even less. And foreign porcupines that aren't up in a tree at the count of three he liked least of all.

Angrily, he leapt in front of the porcupine and roared with his voice like thunder: 'SO, SOMEONE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND ME?'

The porcupine looked at him in astonishment and asked, 'Yiis, pleeeese?'

'I said, on the count of three everyone is to be in the trees,' he snarled. 'Or else!' His sharp teeth glinted in the sun.

The porcupine smiled in a friendly way. 'Yiis, pleeeese,' it said. 'Yiis, pleeeese!'

The tiger swished his tail through the air with a whip-crack.

'That goes for all the jungle animals,' he hissed. 'And particularly for ugly, little porcupines!' Then he made his fur stand on end again, so that it towered up.

The porcupine nodded, impressed.

'Veeery nice, yiis, pleeeese,' it said. 'Veeery big, veeery nice!'

The tiger drew a deep breath. Then he roared as loudly as he could:

'OR ELSE!'

The ground around the porcupine shook.

All the other animals held their breath.

Even the air stood still.

The porcupine just wrinkled up his nose, looked offended and said, 'Yiis, pleeeese!'

Then he turned around and took himself off a few paces to one side.

Then he sat down again on his prickly bottom and carried on grooming himself.

He shook his head disapprovingly as he did.

The tiger felt his throat itch.

'I'll tell you just one more time,' he croaked. 'On the count of three everyone is to be . . .'

And that is when his voice gave out.

Just a hoarse rattling sound came out of his mouth.

'Ts, ts, ts,' tutted the porcupine.

The tiger gulped. He cleared his throat and swallowed again.

But his voice was gone. He looked around uneasily.

Not a peep could be heard. Not the tip of a tail could be seen.

The tiger didn't notice that the leopard was laughing so hard he almost fell out of his tree.

So he decided just to pretend that he hadn't seen the porcupine.

That could happen, after all. So he turned around and went off as if everything was just as it should be.

'On the count of three everyone is to be in the trees,' he whispered hoarsely. 'Or else!'

No sooner had the tiger disappeared, then the elephant tumbled to the ground.

The hippopotamus surfaced, puffing, and the capybara fell off his tree trunk.

'Well, look at that!' called out the monkeys and jumped down from the trees.

'Well, look at that!' screeched the parrots and flew down a level.

'Well, look at that!' grinned the leopard and looked spitefully at the disappearing tiger. Then he jumped to the ground with one leap, landing right by the porcupine.

The porcupine smiled at the animals in a friendly way.

'Not a bad show,' said the leopard, impressed. 'The tiger might not be as young as he once was, but you were still very brave, at least for a porcupine. Isn't that so, friends?'

'Yes!' shouted the monkeys.

'Absolutely!' screeched the parrots.

'No question about it!' trumpeted the elephant.

'Yiis, pleeeese,' said the porcupine, modestly, 'Yiis, pleeeese!'

And no matter what the other animals said, that was all they could get out of him.

From that day on, the tiger did without his rounds.

Now and then he still roared: 'I'M GOING TO COUNT TO THREE! ON THE COUNT OF THREE I WANT EVERYONE IN THE TREES!'

But he preferred not to go and check.

It was good like that.

(Translated by Stefan Tobler)