



Tanya Stewner, *Liliane Susewind – Mit Elefanten spricht man nicht*

Sample Translation

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'Mrs Smythe!' Jesaiah called again, but the cat ignored him. 'I don't think she likes me very much,' he said matter-of-factly.

'You can't train cats like dogs. They never come when you call them,' Lilly replied.

The moment the cat heard Lilly's voice, her head spun round and she stopped still, as if rooted to the spot. She stared at Lilly with her big green eyes. 'Hello, Mrs Smythe!' Lilly called. The cat instantly started moving over to them.

'Wow!' Jesaiah was impressed. 'She seems to like you more than me!'

The cat headed straight for Lilly, not wasting a single glance on Jesaiah. She stroked along her arm and nestled her delicate ginger head into Lilly's hand, purring with pleasure.

'Where were you last night, Mrs Smythe?' Jesaiah asked the little lady. 'We were very worried when you didn't come home.'

Lilly grinned. 'Hasn't she got a first name?'

'Oh no. You always get the feeling you have to be very formal with her. To start with we just called her *Mrs Smith*, but that just didn't seem elegant enough after a while. She's really quite la-di-da, you know!'

Lilly giggled to herself, and two more flowers blossomed behind her back. Then suddenly, she turned serious again. 'Jesaiah?' she asked. He mumbled an absent-minded 'Mhm' as he stroked Mrs Smythe's back. 'I haven't told you all of my secret.'

'You haven't?'

'Maybe I can show you instead of explaining.'

Jesaiah frowned, confused. Lilly took a deep breath to top up her courage.

'Mrs Smythe,' Lilly turned to the cat, and the cat immediately looked up at her attentively. 'Jesaiah would like to know where you were last night. He and his parents were worried.'

The cat stared at Lilly in amazement at first, and then started to meow loudly. Jesaiah seemed to find it funny and started laughing out loud. But when Lilly spoke again his laugh faded away: 'Mrs Smythe says she was at the neighbours' house across the road again last night. They always let her sleep on a lovely soft sofa. But she's surprised you were worried. It wasn't the first time she's stayed out overnight, after all. You should be used to it by now.'

Jesaiah was so in awe he couldn't say a word. Finally, he murmured, 'That's true. She's been out all night before. But how do *you* know?'

'She just told me.'

'Ha!' Jesaiah tried to laugh but the sound stuck in his throat.

Lilly had an idea of just how confusing it must be for him. She spoke perfectly normal human language, but the cat still understood her. And Mrs Smythe answered in animal language, which no humans could understand – except for Lilly. It was just as much a mystery to her why she could understand animal sounds and calls. But she always knew right away what a bird's call, a dog's bark or a mouse's squeak meant. If she answered, the animals were often more surprised than she was,

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as they weren't used to being understood by humans. And that was how Mrs Smythe was feeling now too, but she quickly regained her composure.

'Mrs Smythe,' said Lilly, 'Jesaiah gets the feeling you don't like him very much. Is that true?'

At first, Mrs Smythe stuck her nose in the air in annoyance and pretended to be bored, but then she thought better of it and began to meow again. Jesaiah didn't laugh this time. He watched the conversation closely, perplexed.

'It's not as if she can't stand you,' Lilly translated when the cat had finished, 'but she says you once held a dead mouse in front of her nose for her to eat. She was very upset about that. It's beneath her to let someone else catch mice for her. She thinks you have no style.'

Jesaiah was speechless. He stood absolutely still, as if turned to stone.

'Jesaiah,' said Lilly, 'I can talk to animals.'

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Then they got to the llamas. They were looking very bored, standing around in their spacious enclosure, chewing on grass in slow motion and taking absolutely no notice of the four school classes now lining up along the fence. But as soon as Lilly came along, the animals seemed to wake up out of their indifference. One llama after the next raised its head and pricked up its ears. They shuffled on the spot nervously, until suddenly all the llamas started to run, as if on command. The entire herd galloped towards the fence, behind which Lilly was standing in the second row. Then they pulled to a halt, stamping their feet and craning their necks to get a better look at Lilly. She was standing rooted to the spot and wishing she could make herself invisible. At that moment, she heard a voice ahead of her: 'These fans, they never leave me in peace!'

It was Jesaiah, who was jokingly acting the big shot and pretending it was *him* the llamas were so fascinated by. Lilly stared at him, surprised. All the kids standing around him started to laugh at Jesaiah's joke. When the children standing further away wanted to know what was so funny, a murmur went through the crowd: 'He says they're his fans!' The laughter spiralled outwards, until everyone was so distracted by Jesaiah's joke that nobody even wondered why the llamas were behaving so strangely any more. The animals were still standing excitedly at the fence, apparently looking for something. But then Jesaiah called out to the llamas, 'You can have my autograph later!' Once again, he got all the laughs and turned the whole thing into a funny episode once and for all. Lilly breathed a sigh of relief.

After a while they moved on. Lilly waited for an opportunity to throw Jesaiah a grateful look, but he didn't look in her direction.

Their next stop was the monkey house. Lilly slowed down again, lengthening the distance between her and the last straggling kids. She had never seen a real monkey, but she suspected that apes would probably react most strongly to her, as they were the most similar to humans. And she wasn't wrong.

Lilly walked into the monkey house after the last person in her group had already left it. There were no other visitors there either; Lilly was all alone. Behind large panes of glass, gorillas, chimpanzees and orang-utans were climbing, squabbling and swinging, making plenty of noise. The moment Lilly stood in front of the first enclosure, silence fell over the monkey house. One orang-utan was so surprised it dropped the apple it had been gnawing on. For a few seconds, the apple rolling across the floor was the only sound to be heard. All the monkeys' eyes turned to Lilly, and the animals seemed to have frozen stiff. Lilly took a quick look around for other people. There was nobody there. She knew it was risky, but she couldn't resist. She turned to the monkeys and said loudly – so that they'd hear her through the glass – 'Hello.'

Instantly, chaos broke out. All the monkeys started screaming at an ear-splitting volume and running around, startled. A few chimpanzees nudged each other and pointed to Lilly, calling out to one another. An orang-utan jumped up and down on the spot with excitement, pulling its hair, while a female held her ears closed because she was screaming so loudly. A gorilla from the next cage jumped up to the glass and started drumming wildly on it, roaring with all his might and making the glass tremble. Any other human would have jumped with shock, but Lilly understood exactly what the gorilla was shouting: 'What on earth is that? What on earth is that?' He was just completely bewildered. But he was really incredibly noisy, and Lilly was afraid the glass would break at any moment or a couple of zookeepers would turn up. The gorilla refused to calm down and was drumming himself into a real rage. Lilly hesitated for a moment and then climbed over the safety barrier to get right up to the glass – directly in front of the crazed gorilla.

'Everything's fine,' she said in a friendly voice, but the gorilla was still shocked. He instantly fell silent and lowered his muscle-bound arms. Lilly put her hand against the glass and smiled at him. For a moment, the gorilla tilted his head in confusion, and then he held his big black hand up to the glass as well. Lilly noticed his huge hand was more than twice as big as hers.

'How are you?' she asked. 'Do you like living here?'

The gorilla gave a bewildered snort and still didn't seem to know quite what to think of the whole thing. But before he could answer, Lilly heard someone coming into the monkey house. She quickly pulled her hand away.

'My God, get out of there, girl!' A man in green dungarees came running over and dragged Lilly away from the glass. 'This isn't the petting zoo, you know!'

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'Sorry,' mumbled Lilly, trying to look as apologetic as possible.

'Are you from the school party that just came through here?'

Lilly nodded.

'Your friends are in the elephant house,' said the man, who was obviously a zookeeper. 'Come on, I'll take you there.' He took Lilly by the hand and led her out of the monkey house. As they left the building, the zookeeper shook his head in amazement – the monkeys were acting like they'd all gone mad. They were jumping up and down with agitation, slapping the glass and screaming something the zookeeper couldn't understand: 'Come back!'