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Fletcher - What a Stinker!
by Antje Szillat

Sample translation by Rachel Hildebrandt

1

It was a rainy morning, as I scrambled out of bed with a yawn. After a lot of stretching and straining, eleven knee bends, and seven and three-quarter sit-ups, my stomach began to growl mightily.

HUNGER!

“Wild Elk, I’m coming!” I called, primed for action, as I left my stylish home.

It was only a few steps to the breakfast bar at the Wild Elk restaurant.

I pulled my extremely broad shoulders up high and marched through the irritating drizzle. A couple of seconds later, I was opening the first lid - and almost toppled over backwards.

“Ewww, what in the world is that???”

It smelled strange and looked even stranger... but there it was in my favorite trash can, in the bread dumpling-and-other-potato-like- tidbit-can!

At this point, perhaps I should mention that I loove bread dumplings! There’s nothing that can calm my constantly growling stomach more than these clumpy round things.

“There has to be a mistake here,” I conjectured. “And a big one at that!”

I had to figure this out since there was no way I wanted to eat something like that.

However, before lodging a complaint with top chef Bode, I was going to give him one last chance. I mean, after all, to err is human - I had heard that somewhere. And I was definitely no beast.

So I trotted over to the next can. But just as I was about to open it, something else opened, specifically the back door to the Wild Elk.

“Darned compote! That’s the last straw!”

Oh dear, I knew that voice. Although it had never clattered so dangerously close in my ear drum as now. I whirled around lickety-split, crouched, slipped elegantly away, sprinted to the side, leaped up high, darted in a circle - and failed miserably. Which was obviously due to the flagging emptiness in my stomach.

That’s logicolo!

The nasty - albeit very talented - top chef Bode had caught me.

“I’ll show you, you rascal!”

Rascal? There’s no way I’ll put up with such name-calling - this thought shot indignantly through my mind. And then it grew dark around me.

Dark as night-pitch black-forlorn- macabre-opaque darkness!

“Papaaa,” a shrill squawk interrupted my lonely darkness a few seconds later. “Will there be bread dumplings for lunch?”

“Theo, not now. I just caught that blasted cat!”

CAT??? Come again????

“Where?”

“Right here in the potato sack!”

Drizzle! I was stuck in a cheap sack. How humiliating. How embarrassing. How mean. And that horrible thing

scratched like crazy.

“I don’t see anything. And what’s up with the bread dumplings? There weren’t any yesterday either.”

Aha, so that was it. My favorite dish hadn’t even been on the menu. And something else was whirring in my head - despite my pathetic imprisonment - this Theo, whom I’d only caught a fleeting glance of before now, was clearly just as crazy about bread dumplings as I was.

That had to be a sign!

I scurried around the sack with all my strength. Passionately determined to show this Bode that I was definitely no stupid cat.

“Theo, come help me,” the top chef grumbled.

“Are you sure, Papa,” Theo squeaked, “that you’ve caught a cat? And what do you plan to do with it? You won’t roast it, right?!”

“Nonsense, of course not. After all, I’m a top chef. The creature will go to the animal shelter. Or the zoo. Or I’ll take it over to the traveling circus, which is currently camped on the edge of town. First and foremost, away, far away from our courtyard!”

My mouth was dry as I swallowed. I was going to be banned from the courtyard? Away from my beloved home? From my even more beloved dumplings?

NEVER!

My outrage swelled, imbuing me with new, unforeseen powers, and escaped in one powerful HIIIIIISSS.

“Oh my God, what is it that stinks so bad around here?” top chef Bode wheezed.

The next moment, I saw the light at the end of the tunnel... um, of the sack and shot out.

I didn’t spend much time thinking where I should go. There weren’t all that many possibilities. To be precise, only ONE!!!

“Urk,” something said quietly, as I slipped into Theo’s pant leg. I clutched his leg and thought: How dumb are you really? The boy will holler any minute, and then you’re done for.

Bye, bye, coolest courtyard of all time, adieu, tastiest favorite food in the universe.

But Theo was frozen like a pillar of salt and didn’t make even the slightest peep. Not even a little one.

And then he took off - stiff step for stiff step.

Whoa, whoa ...

Somewhere in a distance, I could hear top chef Bode swearing miserably. “For heaven’s sake, what was that? I think it was an apparition. A stink-emitting apparition. I’m going to definitely smell for the next two weeks...

Jesus, Jesus ...”

By the way, I’m Fletcher, the cleverest skunk in the big city, and if I had guessed that Theo...

Stop! No! Cease and desist! Everything in order.

It’s logicolo!

2

“How-who-what are-are y-you?

Oh goodness, this Theo was a st-stut-ter-er.

“Fletcher, nice to meet you, my name is Fletcher!” I said by way of introduction.

Theo’s eyes became bowling balls. For real!

“You-you... uh... you-you can sp-speak?”

Unfortunately not the good Theo. At least not fluently. But I didn’t say that out loud. Didn’t want to insult the urchin. After all, he had just rescued me from a furious top chef.



And now just between you and me, I was every bit as flabbergasted. But I wasn't going to let on to this. The fact that I, the coolest and most intelligent skunk in the courtyard, alright, in the city, the world, the universe - haaaands down - could understand human speech was absolutely nothing new for me. But the fact that a person, this Theo, could also understand me, drizzle, drizzle, that was sensational. And had neeeeeever happened before.

In any case, I didn't care in the least for the place that Theo and I now found ourselves, absolutely not. It was much too shadowy for me. And it reeked disgustingly of marten droppings. And dust covered everything. Grr... My nostrils were beginning to itch something horrible. Ewww! I couldn't take it anymore.

"This storage room, Theo, is actually not a place I care to spend any time in."

"Um, how do you know my name?"

Whoa, this Theo could speak fluently after all. Nonetheless, I wrinkled my nose. Once because of the dust, then another time because of the stupid question.

Hello! It is logicolo that I know about everything and everyone in my courtyard.

"I live here, you live here!" I explained. "Capeesh?"

"No, not really," Theo replied.

I sighed deeply. "People usually know their neighbors." Eventually the other shoe would finally drop for him.

"NEIGHBORS???"

Good grief, so I'd finally met a person who was so advanced that he could understand the exalted language of animals - in other words, mine. And what happened? He was proving to be extremely challenged in the comprehension end of the spectrum.

Claro, it was also unusual for me to be able to converse with a human. But was I staring at this Theo the whole time with saucer eyes and asking him stupid questions?

NO!

"Well then, thank you anyway, Theo, for not ratting me out. I'm now going to go back to my significantly more stylish home, where I will eventually taking a nap. I hope you have an amazeballs day. Ciao - Adieu - Auf Wiedersehen!"

I positioned myself for an elegant leap and then to comfortably trot over to the storage room door. But Theo held me back. And - outrageously - by the tip of my very bushy tail. Which, by the way, I'm especially proud of.

"Ow, owwww, let go!" I cried excitedly.

Because Theo refused to let go, I loaded my stink pistol and promptly ran into another jamming complication. Drizzle, drizzle. Good thing that I had developed my first fully mechanical stink pistol the day before yesterday - how sad that I didn't have it on me, of course.

"Please, Fletcher, stay here," Theo implored. "I have never met a talking marten before, you know?!"

M.A.R.T.E.N.

"Where do you see a marten?" I called in alarm, ready to fight. Oh man, I absoluuutely can't stand martens. Tootally not!

Theo rubbed his chin. "Uh, well, I thought you were a marten."

"WHAT DID YOU SAY? I? I'M SUPPOSED TO BE A MARTEN? For real? Have you ever met a marten who can talk? Who looks even half as attractive as I do? Who is as elegant, cunning, brave, and exceedingly urbane?"

"No," mumbled Theo under his breath.

"There you go!" I crowed. "How did you hit on the dumb idea that I'm an ew-sickening, ew-dumb marten?"

Theo shrugged cluelessly. Then he opened his mouth. But before anything could cross his thin, relatively pale lips, top cook Bode's caustic voice rang out, fairly close by.

“Theo? Theeeooo?”

“Drizzle, not him again already,” I groaned.

“My father’s calling me,” Theo said.

Jesus, I never would’ve thought of that.

“I have to hurry to see what he wants,” Theo continued, unperturbed by my unmistakable eye rolls.

“Otherwise he’ll come in here. And then he’ll find you. And well, he’d be really surprised if he discovered me with a... uh, with a... ?”

“Skunk! I’m a skunk, in case you really haven’t figured it out yet,” I growled. “And definitely not a MARTEN and most definitely not a CAT!”

“Oh yeah, that’s obvious,” Theo was quick to act as if he had long been aware of this.

“Either way, my father would be shocked if he realized that I’m here in the storage room talking to a skunk. That doesn’t happen just any old day.”

Okay, in this case, Theo was right, of course. And I certainly had no desire to be ambushed again in such an underhanded manner and to be stuffed in yet another scratchy potato sack - despite the fact that I find potato products extremely yummy.

“Can you wait for me here for a few minutes?!” Theo asked. He rolled his pale blue eyes to such an extent that I promptly became somewhat woozy. That’s the only reason I agreed. And because Theo was somehow fairly... well, totally alright. And besides that, my stomach was growling quite loudly. And Theo surely knew where top chef Bode was hiding the bread dumplings.

“Okay,” I said. “But I won’t just sit around here forever. And bring me some bread dumplings, do you hear me, Theo?!”

Theo looked extremely incredulous, but he nodded before he dashed over to the door.

3

“What are up to here again in front of the storage room, you rascal?”

I was crouching behind the door. I strained to peek through the little crack into the patio area. This was where the ancient, hunchbacked and extremely unfriendly Frau Knesemeier had just materialized in front of Theo. Rrrasbo, her ugly cat, was prowling around her scrawny legs in their brown knitted tights.

“Since when is that off limits?” Theo responded innocently. However, his voice sounded slightly frightened. No wonder, Knesemeier was by far the meanest and ugliest old woman in the neighborhood.

“Outrageous - besides being impertinent, you’re now talking back. You’re becoming insufferable”

Whoa, old Knesemeier was in a particularly foul mood today. Under her malevolent gaze, Theo was growing increasingly smaller and punier. I had to do something. For whatever reason, I felt responsible for Theo - besides he had rescued me earlier.

So I shoved my way through the crack and hit the ground running all out.

“Arrrrriba!” I bellowed resolutely at everyone.

“Rrrrasbo, you dolt,” the horrid Knesemeier cursed.

The brown cat had immediately registered my taunting invitation to play chase - and had promptly clawed his way up his mistress’s bony calves. Ha, with Rrrasbo, stupidity was always a given. I sped around the trash cans, Rrrasbo at my heels.

In the meantime, Knesemeier had realized why her cat was acting so crazy.

“Go on, Rrrasbo, get him!” she scolded.

She couldn’t have been serious. As if that fat, brown cat had even the slightest chance of grabbing me. Even

Knesemeier had to know that. She turned away from Theo and joined in the chase.

And that was exactly what I had intended!

“Run, Theo, head to the right, over toward the wall! We’ll meet up there in just a minute.”

Rrrasbo was hissing furiously behind me. But I first doubled back nimbly, darted to the left, and then immediately back toward the right. A glance over my shoulder - as planned, Rrrasbo had lost all sense of direction as a result of my clever zigzag path. Old Knesemeier was sticking dangerously close to my swift paws.

“I almost have you, you rat!” she scolded derisively.

Cat, marten, and now rat as well – did they all have a kink in their pupils today or somethin’?

„Ziiisch!“ I released, and this time I had no jamming difficulties - yep, there had to be repercussions.

“Ewwww, yuck, gurgle,” old Knesemeier wheezed. “What was that? I-I can’t seem to breathe right. Oooo, I suddenly feel pretty woozy.”

So, I got rid of her. And Rrrasbo as well. He padded over to his befuddled mistress like a momma’s boy and stared at her in pity.

I uttered my most triumphant skunk laugh. Then I scampered nonchalantly over to the wall.

His face blanched, Theo stood with his back against the wall and waited for me, impressed.

“Man oh man, Fletcher, you really showed them.”

I shrugged airily. “That was a piece of cake. One of my simplest maneuvers. After all, I’m not just any normal urban courtyard skunk.”

“Um... you’re not?” Theo asked.

I drew myself up to my full impressive size and beauty in front of Theo and announced: “Of course not!” This Theo and his weird questions. Nevertheless, I liked him - somehow. No idea why. He was ultimately the absolute opposite of me: pale, dreamy, minimally adept, hardly agile, fairly sluggish. Yet probably because of my unbelievable intelligence, I sensed that Theo needed somebody who could haul him up a little under his thin arms. And obviously that someone was me.

“Do you have the bread dumplings with you?” I asked Theo.

Theo nodded. “Fished straight out of the pot in the Wild Elk.”

This thought alone of the yummy-yummy dumplings made me salivate. I glanced quickly all around.

Knesemeier was just staggering back to her front door. Rrrasbo was creeping behind her, wearing his dumb cat expression. So, I indicated to Theo that he should follow me.

“Excuse me, Fletcher, but we can’t go any further. That wall over there has been here forever.”

I wrinkled my black skunk nose patronizingly. “Just come along, Theo, and I’ll teach you a thing or two.”

A few seconds later, Theo was looking around my magnificent home, mouth agape.

“Wow, that-that is-is... wow... And that car over there, is that a Rolls Royce?”

I nodded casually. “My villa. Suitable. After all, I come from blueblooded skunk nobility.”

Okay, okay, that was perhaps slightly exaggerated. Shortly before Mommy turned her back on the big city, because it was simply too stuffy, stressful and hectic for her here, she told me that my father had been a member of an exceedingly honorable family. And to my ears, “honorable” came awfully close to blueblooded. **BASTA!**

“I didn’t know that there was a garage behind the wall.” Theo was incapable of shaking himself out his state of amazement. “And who, I mean, whom does all this belong to?”

“Me, naturally!” I made myself comfortable on the terrace. “It’s logicolo!”

“Wow,” Theo repeated. Did he think he was a dog or something?

“Alright, alright,” I now got around to the actual reason why Theo now found himself in the extraordinarily



fortunate situation of being a guest in my first-class home. “Would you be so kind as to serve me my favorite dish?!”

“Huh?” Whoa, whoa, Theo didn’t get it.

I was going to need to be more straightforward.

“I’m hungry, Theo. My stomach is growling like seven bloodthirsty attack dogs that have just caught sight of Rrrasbo.”

“Oh yes, of course,” Theo exclaimed and climbed down to where I was on the terrace. He sat himself down and rummaged around in his bulging pocket. In the blink of an eye, a small, transparent bag appeared in which were located three representatives of my all-time favorite dish: dumplings.

“Hmmm... delicious.” Quick as a wink, I vanished behind the steering wheel and returned with a napkin. After all, I know my proper manners. While I enjoyed my well-earned breakfast, Theo stared as if hypnotized at the iron lady in front of us on the terrace.

“I’ve always wanted to see a Rolls Royce in person,” he murmured reverently. “That there, the figure on the hood, that’s Emily?”

“As far as I’m concerned,” I mumbled, my mouth full. “I haven’t named her.”

Hello? Why would I go to the trouble of naming a metal figure???

Theo grinned. “No, no, you misunderstood me. Emily is famous. She’s the most famous hood ornament in the world and sits up front on every Rolls Royce. Unless she’s stolen, which sadly happens quite often.”

Aha, aha - of course, I knew that.

I just wanted to test Theo. That’s logicolo.

“Smart boy, you really know what’s what,” I murmured patronizingly and then focused on polishing off the third dumpling.

“You know, Fletcher,” he hemmed and hawed a little, “I-I actually know quite a lot of things. And I’m honestly very good at deduction. That’s how I know about stolen hood ornaments and such. And well, because that’s the case, I’m... uh, I’d really like to be a detective. A great detective, of course.”

As Theo’s otherwise pale cheeks suddenly began to glow the wildest shade of lighthouse red, I almost choked on a piece of bread dumpling. This Theo, to be honest, this connection between Theo and me was becoming more and more... uh, uncanny. Not only had he mastered my language (or I his, whichever was the case), he adored bread dumplings passionately and fervently, and secretly dreamed of having a stellar career as a super detective.

Just like me!