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*Muffa. Story of an African the Baby white  
Rhinoceros*

### **Chapter 5 in which the friends reach Hamburg, springtime is late but they find sudden fame**

Hamburg greeted Muffa and Ibu with light drizzling rain which, although taking its time, was still steadily melting the snow and ice. Although it was still cold, there was an inkling of spring in the air. Everywhere – on the portside cranes, on rooftops and in trees – birds were sitting around, looking southward: Springtime is running late this year! How long will we have to freeze in this cold? The crows went loudly:

„How-how-how?”

The magpies were twitching their black-and-white tails and rattled:

„Springspringspring! Comeherecomeherecomehere!”

Our travellers found lodgings soon enough – in the very heart of the old town. The unusually harsh and long cold had scared away tourists; hotel and restaurant owners were fidgeting impatiently, standing in the doorways of their properties, blowing on their freezing fingers and casting looks to the sky – as if hundreds and thousands or, better still, millions of tourists could suddenly drop from above to fill the hotels, motels and hostels; order breakfasts, lunches, dinners at restaurants, bars, cafés, grocery stores and even McDonald’s joints and eat, eat, eat...

Ibu and Muffa decided to spend a few days in Hamburg – rest their feet properly and recover their breath. Their hotel room was quite small and very warm. In the morning, after a hearty breakfast, they wandered around the city; they spent their evenings in the dining-room in front of a cosily-lit fireplace, chatting with the hotel’s owner. He used to be a sailor, the man said: had travelled half the world, visiting nearly every African port; admittedly, he had seen neither deserts nor jungles because ships just did not travel there.

Before noon Ibu and Muffa visited a Hamburg café; as the friends sat there, browsing the HAMBURGER ABENDBLATT Newspaper and the SPIEGEL Magazine, they

were approached by an unfamiliar gentleman who introduced himself as a reporter and asked permission to join them at their table. According to him, he was working at the very newspaper the gentlemen were reading at the moment! Reporters are people who walk around collecting news and then write newspaper reports about all sorts of events, Ibu explained to Muffa softly. The reporter looked very excited and quite surprised; Muffa was about to ask if anything out of the ordinary had happened in Hamburg – and then it turned out that Muffa himself was the extraordinary event!

„A small bespectacled rhinoceros that talks and reads newspapers! He speaks and reads German! This is a sensation!” insisted the reporter. He asked Ibu and Muffa lots of detailed questions, rejoicing over the fact that he could understand everything Muffa was saying; then he wrote down

in his notebook all those things he had understood and finally, having taken a picture of the two friends, dashed away.

For a while Muffa sat quiet and thoughtful.

„We are now in Germany; everyone speaks German here... In Norway people speak Norwegian, in Sweden – Swedish and German – in Germany, but I understand it all?? And, as the gentleman said, everyone understands me! Now, this is something I really do not understand...”

Muffa wrinkled up his brows: a wrinkle for each question.

„Why do people speak different languages? How were the languages born?”  
Ibu turned over in his mind the things he had heard at the University of Paris.

„There are different theories – I mean, different scholars have different views... Perhaps the ancient people listened to different sounds. They heard the wind rustling trees, the water rippling in springs and rivers, the thunder rumbling, and they started to imitate these sounds. And they all did it in their different ways! Their children, the children of their children and children of their children’s children learnt these languages from them but the children of the different people could not understand each other.”

„What about me then?” Muffa insisted. „I understand you and you understand me; I understand everybody, and they understand me as well!”  
Ibu laughed.

„You know, Muffa, in fairytales all animals do talk, including rhinos. I think it’s just that you are as clever as a fairytale hero!”

Hearing that, Muffa blushed not only to the roots of his hair but also to the very tip of his tail.

Shortly before dinner, the owner of the hotel knocked on their door. He had spent several evenings quietly chatting with his guests, listening to their adventures and sharing his own; now there was no trace left of the old sailor’s former calm. Brandishing the evening newspaper, he was shouting something about a SENSATION. On the front page, two news items were reported in HUGE letters: in Japan, SAKURA – a cherry-tree whose blossoming means the arrival of the spring – was in bloom, and MUFFA the talking rhinoceros had arrived in Hamburg! Furthermore, he speaks and reads in German! The little rhino’s name was even printed in bigger letters than that of SAKURA! And half of the page was filled by a photo of Ibu and Muffa in which Muffa, raising his eyes from a newspaper, was looking straight into the camera through his spectacles. On closer look, Muffa found the picture very beautiful...

„This moment cannot be missed! SENSATION – it is an opportunity! My dear guests, I have a number of proposals for you; I hope you will not mind!” the hotelkeeper bustled around. „You will have to move to another apartment, the so-called ROYAL SUITE where the Abyssinian Emperor stayed in his time! All of that – compliments of the hotel. You will be the best advertisement for my hotel! Tomorrow after breakfast we are holding a PRESS CONFERENCE! Everyone will be there – the newspapers, television, radio, everyone – you will see for yourselves. And now – dinner is served!

This time the hotelkeeper showed them to an unusually sumptuous table: oranges and tangerines, apples and pears, plums, pineapples and kiwifruit were arranged in huge fruit bowls! Only the conversation was no longer as calm and warm as it used to be. The hotelkeeper's eyes were feverishly bright; he was unable to sit still and, it seems, was already calculating how many people would come to see the talking white rhino, how many helpings they would order for lunch and how many of them would be prepared to pay for a room at a hotel where a CELEBRITY was also staying. After eating way too many fruit, Muffa spent a restless night in the enormous bed of the royal suite; he declined breakfast, accepting only some mineral water. He would have gladly declined the PRESS CONFERENCE as well: the little rhino had no idea what one had to do in one of those, and he was a bit scared.

„What will I have to do?“ Muffa worried.

„Everyone will ask questions, and you will answer,“ Ibu explained. „Don't worry, I'll be right next to you and help you out.“

However, at the sight of countless people armed with microphones, notebooks, photographic and film cameras, Ibu lost his nerve as well. They were photographed, questioned, filmed, invited to appear on television with the German chancellor and Knut the Bear, join a film crew from a different TV channel on a trip to Japan to comment on the blooming of sakura, take part in the Eurovision Song Contest, star in a movie about dinosaurs... Questions and offers were coming like from the horn of plenty; Muffa and Ibu did their best, answering, answering and answering, until Muffa was so tired he could hardly keep his eyes open. The hotelkeeper, who had undertaken to run the PRESS CONFERENCE to repeat again and again that CELEBRITIES choose HIS HOTEL, finally announced:

„Ladies and gentlemen, unfortunately this is the last question we can take! We'll carry on tomorrow!“

„Do you intend to take up residence in Germany? Perhaps you are thinking of seeking asylum here?“ Having made it to the microphone at the last moment, a tattoo-adorned blonde rattled off not one but two questions. Ibu pulled himself up.

„We have no intention to seek any asylum. We are not running away from anything.“

Well, except maybe from the cold, thought Muffa. Ibu meanwhile took a deep breath and continued:

„We are free travellers on our way to Africa.“

„Why did you teach your rhinoceros specifically German then?“ the blonde held on to the microphone desperately, somehow managing to ask a third question.

„Muffa speaks the HUMAN language! He understands everyone and everyone understands him,“ Ibu said strictly and, accompanied by the exhausted little rhino, left the hall.