

Translated extract from

Jutta Richter

Ich bin hier bloß der Hund

Mit Bildern von Hildegard Müller

Carl Hanser Verlag, München 2011

ISBN 978-3-446-23792-6

pp. 9-26

Jutta Richter/ Hildegard Müller (Ill.)

I am just the dog around here

Translated by Alisa Jaffa

Chapter One

Where I'm lying contented in the sun

Erstes Kapitel,

in dem ich zuerst sehr zufrieden
in der Sonne liege



What an autumn day.
What a super smashing autumn day.
One of those dog days
Sunshine warm as mother's milk.
Warm as licking your tummy.
Eaten my fill
Drunk my fill
Chased to my heart's content.
Nearly caught him this time, that hare.
Almost got him
If it hadn't been for the whistle.
Distracted me for a split second.
But that's the way they are.
Every time I'm within reach
The whistle goes.
Got themselves a dog whistle.
Terrible!
Pierces you to the marrow.
By the way, my name's Brendon, but they
call me Anton.
Changed my name, say
It's easier to shout Anton than Brendon.
They sometimes have trouble getting their words out.

Probably why they need the dog whistle.
No style, no feel for the outside world, that's them.
Maybe it's because
their tongues are shorter than mine.

Allow me to introduce myself.
My name is Brendon and I come from Hungary.
An old sheepdog breed.
My brothers are called Bela, Bratko and Bence.
I've lost touch with them.
That's what happens to us dogs:
We lose touch after just a few weeks,
We're split up, get a new home, new masters,
new surroundings, new smells.
It's not easy for us, this adjusting,
But after all we're clever, we learn to adapt and
if all goes well
We soon occupy the best places in the new house.
That's what matters. You have to take the best places
if you want a good life.

Right now the best place is the garden bench by the front door.

A soft cushion, a bit of shade, a bit of sun.

And no annoying flies around today.

Mild air, a gentle breeze,

The smell of pot roast in my nose, and I can doze
and dream.

Of Hungary, of the Puszta plain, of the animal herds.

Herds so huge, they needed six dogs
to mind them.

Grey cattle, woolly pigs and Racka sheep.

Racka sheep were my favourites.

They have corkscrew horns and solemn faces.

They look wise and clever, but that's misleading

Because they're as stupid as any other sheep
and would be lost without a dog.

My uncle Ferenc was the best.

He rescued many a racka sheep.

He even beat golden jackals

and saw off every wildcat....

Oh, isn't life great!

A soft cushion, a bit of sun, a bit of shade
that's getting longer now and ...

Ow!

She's crept up on me again!
She's always doing that.
She creeps up, she jumps
and even as she's jumping she shoots out her claws.
Needle -sharp into my nose.
So painful my eyes see red.
No best place is worth that pain.
I don't understand.
After all, I was here first,
after all they are *my* best places.
Why did they have to take this cat in?
Why?
I was being friendly, I just wanted to say hallo,
to sniff her, give her a lick.
That's what we do, back in Hungary,
we greet a new arrival.
You've got to be welcoming, haven't you.
Show interest.
And what does she do?
Small as she is, she snarls at me, she hisses,
she even spits.
Yet as she does so, she waves her tail,
quite friendly.
So what am I supposed to think?
I wag back.
She lifts her paws. I do the same.
Then she shoots out her claws
and sinks them deep into my nose.

It happened so quickly, it hurt so much,
I gave a howl and darted under the sofa.
She looked smug.
She licked my blood off her paw.
Then up she jumped on to the armchair.
On to *my* armchair, if you please,
curled up and went to sleep.
It's been war ever since.
I keep out of her way.
She creeps up behind me.
It's a war I'm never going to win.
She can climb trees, jump up on to walls.
Wherever I'm standing, she's always above me.
And when I bark loud and gruff
My people come and shout
'Stop' and 'enough' and 'no'.
Then she lowers her head, puts on an
innocent face, mews and purrs
and they stroke her and feel sorry for her.
It's enough to make you weep!
They call her Mitzi.
And she's black and has yellow eyes
that glow in the dark.
At night she sits on the wall
and yowls so loudly, you'd think
she had the devil on her back.

Yet her yowling doesn't seem to bother my people, as no one says 'stop!', 'enough!' or 'no!' to Mitzi.
Perhaps it's because she meows when she's called.
And because she rubs herself against people's legs.

My uncle Ferenc always warned us about cats.
He said they're all descended from the wildcat,
and the black ones are the worst.
They grow as big as panthers, and if they're not put
in their place from the start
they'll also snatch lambs.

Az okosabb enged is a Hungarian saying.
Az okosabb enged. It's smarter to give in.
I don't have any choice, I'm the smarter one.

Oh the pain!

Oh the injustice!

She's up there again.

I'm down below again.

She's stretched out on my garden bench.

On my best place.

She's pretending to be asleep,

One paw dangling down languidly

Just on a level with my eye

and I can see how ever so slowly

she's stretching out her claws and then

just as slowly she pulls them back in.

Back in Hungary no pet cat would dare to
do that.

In Hungary all cats know their place,

Uncle Ferenc saw to that long ago:

up in the hayloft, out in the meadows

where they had to crouch for hours on end

in the hope of getting some skinny mouse between
their paws.

Oh well, things are different here.

There's no Uncle Ferenc here.

Here I'm Anton and have to look out for myself in
this country.

Not that I'm complaining.
All in all, I've done quite well.
Emily adores dogs
and Friedbert can't see through
kitchen tables.

Chapter 2

Where I introduce you to my people

My new owners are friendly people.

The master's name is Friedbert.

We both love going for long walks.

Whatever the weather, he 'll go tramping through
the forest.

Of course he's not as fast as I am,
the reason being that he's only got two legs to carry him
and so he can't do such big leaps.

When he wants to call me, he takes out
that wretched dog whistle
and I try not to hear it.

Friedbert doesn't know much about working dogs.

We're born to guard enormous herds.

Grey cattle, woolly pigs
and last but not least Racka sheep.

Racka sheep nibble grass
they hold up the herd
and they're stupid.

They don't know north from south
they'd be lost without us.

The Puszta is the largest stretch of world
in the whole wide world.

It's the home of the golden jackal, the prairie polecat,
where the wild cat and the raccoon dog live.
It's where you can run and run for days on end.
With no fences, no borders,
no woods, no houses.
All that's there is green, juicy grass,
and there'll sometimes be a well,
and, if you're in luck, an old barn
for shelter from wind and rain.
But the sky there is high and blue
as the ocean.
We live outdoors, we point our noses into the wind
to sense any danger,
and day and night we circle the herds.
If a sheep breaks loose from the large circle,
we bring the creature back.
And there's no dog whistle to hold us back.
We call that being responsible...
But Friedbert calls it disobedient.
He'd know my worth
if he put me in charge of a herd of Racka sheep.
But he doesn't.

There aren't any Racka sheep here.
And golden jackals are unknown.
The only animals they know are hares and ducks.

The hares are too fast for me.
I'd really like to round them up,
but they dart about and hide in the grass.
Those hares simply don't know the meaning of order.
Not to mention the ducks.
They sit about in great crowds
and make a racket, and fly off
as soon as I come near.
Which is down to the dog whistle, to Friedbert,
not me.
How are you supposed to be responsible, then?
How can you show what you can do?
So, once again:
Az okosabb enged.
It's me that's smarter, that much I know.
And if it pleases Friedbert I'll even walk to heel.
That way I'll get pigs' ears as a reward.
And I'll do almost anything for pigs' ears.

Friedbert has a deep voice and
a short tongue. He's the leader of the pack.
If I don't do as he says, there'll be no pigs' ears.
He'll grab me by the ears and tug.
And that hurts almost as much
as cats' claws in the nose.

Oh, well....

But as for the others, I've got the upper hand with them.

A soft whimper, a joyful tail wag,
a nudge, and Bob's your uncle, I get my way.

The mistress is called Emily.

She's got a soft heart and a high voice.

She's the guardian of the pots in the kitchen.

She opens my tins.

She puts water out for me, and in the evening

her hands smell of chicken skin,

liver sausage and ham.

A soft whimper, a joyful tail wag,

a nudge,

and she gives me the left-overs.

Secretly, of course, as Friedbert
doesn't approve of treats that haven't been earned.
He mustn't know what Emily's up to,
or he may tug me by the ears.
I don't know.
All I know is that I have to lie quietly under the table
at Emily's feet.
We Hungarian dogs live for four things:
Racka sheep, pigs' ears
chicken skin and liver sausage.
Anyone who smells of those
we'll stick to them like glue.
Anyone who smells of those, I'll be their lifelong guard.

Not that I'm complaining.
All in all, I've struck lucky.
My bowl is always full, the water fresh,
and I get pigs' ears as rewards.
Dried, crispy, delicious.
And thank goodness, there are other
best places in this house.