

The Wonderful Smell of Polyglot Valley

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One day, one of those rare days when the wind was blowing from the South with a gentle, warm breeze, a young cat smelled a smell more delicious than any she had ever smelled before. She followed the smell using her nose, turning into the strong smell and changing direction every the smell weakened, looking for the strong smell direction. She eventually followed it up over a hill and into a new valley. She got into the bottom of the valley, and the smell was everywhere – she couldn't find where it was in the valley, because it was equally strong everywhere. Then she heard a voice, speaking in perfect cat, say "Hello, young meower." It was not the voice of a cat. She turned to follow the direction of the voice, and saw a donkey.

"Yes, it was I that spoke," said the donkey, in an ee-aww kind of way, but quite clearly in cat language.

It turned out that the whole valley was filled with animals that spoke each other's language. All could talk to all, in the other's natural tongue. The cat was so amazed, she almost (only almost) forgot about the wonderful smell. But she didn't forget.

"Where is that marvelous smell coming from? I followed it here from my home because I've never smelled anything so wonderful! But now it is all around and I can't figure out where it is coming from. What is it?"

"Ah, you must mean our soup. We keep a large pot boiling in the center of the valley for all to share. It is always freshly made, and yes, I believe it does smell rather nice. Come this way," said the donkey.

All the animals gathered around – rhinoceros, giraffe, baboon, tiger, donkey, parrot, hamster. They all spoke perfect cat so our heroine would understand them.

"Mmm," she purred. "Our cook would love this. Can I get the recipe to share with him?"

“I’m afraid that the vegetables and fruits we use are only found in this valley,” said the baboon.

“Well then, could I bring him some of the vegetables and fruits?”

“I’m afraid they must be used right after they are picked,” said the baboon.

“Could I bring him some soup, then?” she asked, suspecting she knew the answer.

“I’m afraid the soup is only good when very fresh,” said the baboon.

“Hmm,” she said. “Could I bring Cook here to taste it? I know he would like it very much.”

“Yes, we always welcome visitors to our valley,” said the Baboon.

So she decided to bring Cook. But it was getting to be late in the day so she raced home.

The next day on which the wind blew from the South, she meowed at the Cook quite strongly in the morning. Cook said, “What is on your mind, little one? Is anything wrong?” She purred to let Cook know that everything was okay, but she danced around until Cook was intrigued. She ran to the door and back a few times until Cook said, “Would you like me to follow you?”

She purred.

“All right,” said Cook, taking off his apron and walking to the door. “Lead the way.”

Cook followed the cat through the stone paths to the edge of the garden. Once he was past the flowers, the air became clear. Cook took a deep breath and stretched relaxedly. He took one more breath and suddenly leaned forward in the middle of his stretch, almost tipping over as he tried to get his nose into the breeze that contained a marvelous smell.

“Oh, what a wonderful smell!” he burst out. She ran back to his feet, dashing in and out as he stumbled along following his nose. “Do you smell that, dear? Where is it coming from?” He stopped and looked out in the direction it was strongest. She meowed loudly and ran ahead. “Wait, wait for me!” he called and ran after her.

She had to go around a few bushes that Cook couldn’t crawl under, and Cook crawled under quite a few, but soon they were at a hill above the valley that the cat had visited before. She led cook down to the center of the valley, to the pot of boiling soup.

“Welcome,” said the Baboon over Cook’s shoulder. Cook turned around and around, looking for another human. Then the Baboon said, “It’s me who’s talking. Please, join us for some soup.”

Cook turned around and the whole animal group was there – tiger, rhino, giraffe – all of them. The cat said a meowish hello to her tiger cousin, and the tiger answered in perfect cat, and then talked to Cook in perfect Portuguese.

“We all speak each other’s languages here,” he began. “We also think that our soup helps us to learn so many languages. Would you like to have some?” So the cat and Cook each had a bowl of soup, and suddenly the cat said to Cook, “Do you like it?” in perfect Portuguese. Cook’s eyes opened wide, and then he smiled and said to her, “I like it very much,” in perfect Cat. So The Cook and the Cat were able to talk with each other at last. They decided to make many trips to the valley so they could have conversations, and so they did for ever afterward, for many, many years.

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