

Smilla Blau: Konrad – Koala At Full Pelt

Sample Translation by Linda Gauss

[p. 18-21]

Konrad gets caught...

At night, when everyone else was asleep, Yuri crept into the bathroom. He had spent the whole day planning exactly how he would catch the thief. That's why he had gathered his thief-catching equipment: a few Lego bricks of different sizes, which Yuri scattered on the floor. According to Mama and Papa, there was nothing worse than stepping on Legos at night, especially with bare feet. Since burglars had to be quiet, Yuri was sure they didn't wear any shoes. In addition, he had rummaged around in the basement and found the fishing dip net from last year's summer vacation. He would throw it over the thief and then he'd tie him up with Lucy's jump rope. If the burglar struck back, Yuri also had his water pistol. He'd stuck it in the waistband of his pajamas, just like a real policeman. So Yuri was well prepared.

Carefully, he climbed into the bathtub and lay down, as flat as he could, on the bottom. The bathtub was nice and cool, but unfortunately it wasn't very long. And it was also very hard. But that was OK, because Yuri absolutely couldn't fall asleep! He listened to the night sounds intensely. Through the open window, he could hear the rustling of the leaves in the tree. A little owl called softly: WHOOOOOOO. Otherwise, nothing happened for a very long time. Yuri started to get pins and needles in his arm. He sighed and turned carefully onto his stomach. Staking out a crime scene was really boring! But just at that moment, something went: SQUEEEEEEEAAAAAAAK! A shadow appeared.

The burglar! Yuri could see his head. And his extra-large ears. Something sharp scratched its way over the windowsill. Yuri's heart was bumping and thumping. Holding his breath, he made sure that he had his equipment ready, and at that very moment, a hunched figure jumped into the bathroom.

WHAM! Quick as a wink, Yuri sat up and swung his net downward. BULLSEYE!

“SQUEEEEEEEEEAAAAAK!” cried the burglar and tried to free himself from the net with both hands.

Now Yuri had to be quick. With the jump rope in his hand, he sprang out of the bathtub and landed directly on a Lego! OUCH! That really did hurt. But there was no time to complain. Yuri tossed the jump rope into the air, threw it over the invader, and drew it tight like a lasso. Done! The burglar sat on the floor and cried like a baby. It didn't really sound like Yuri needed to be afraid of him. And he wasn't big either. Still, Yuri reached for his water pistol.

“Hands up or I'll shoot!” he cried, and his voice sounded just as cool as the cowboys in the Westerns that Mama loved to watch. Then he flicked the light switch on: CLICK.

The light turned on with a soft buzz. Flabbergasted, Yuri looked at the fuzzy creature sitting in right in front of him with its large, knobby nose. It gazed at him innocently with caramel-colored eyes and tried to stretch its bound arms out toward him. The burglar that Yuri had caught was an animal. And not just an animal--it was a super-cute koala!

[...]

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What do koalas eat?

“He definitely needs a real meal, because he’s weak.” Lucy had carried Konrad back into their bedroom. Now she was sitting on the bed with him. “He can’t just eat toothpaste and cough drops all day.” She nuzzled her face against the koala’s fuzzy head.

“We have to find something that koalas eat in the wild,” Yuri said, “but what *do* they eat?”

Konrad didn’t like scrambled eggs, cereal, bread, or milk. They’d just tried those things. And he didn’t like spinach or peas either. In the end, they found a few more cough drops way in the back corner of the candy drawer. Konrad spit out the red and brown ones; the only one he liked was the last green one. Konrad was the pickiest creature Yuri had ever met.

“We have to ask someone very smart,” mumbled Lucy into Konrad’s fur.

That was a good idea. But who? Papa could play the most difficult pieces on his viola, cook spaghetti with marinara sauce, and go down the water slide backwards. When it came to everything else though, he was pretty *meh*. Mama was good at almost everything. She was especially good at figuring out things that you want to hide from her. And that’s precisely why they couldn’t ask her.

“We’ll ask Chloe and Zoe’s papas,” cried Lucy, interrupting Yuri’s train of thought.

“No way!” Yuri crossed his arms across his chest. He would never voluntarily ring the Piepenbrocks’ doorbell. Every day he didn’t have to see the twins was a good day.

“But one papa is a chef. And they always save bread to feed the ducks in the park. I’m sure they’ll have a super koala recipe!” Lucy said this confidently, as if she knew it for sure.

Yuri thought for a moment. Who else could they ask? They had to stay out of old man Thunderson’s way because of the break-in thing. Ms. Kussarova talked a whole lot, but only about other people. And he didn’t think she’d know something like that. Then there was the airline pilot on the fourth floor. She flew giant airplanes around the world. Maybe she’d even been to Australia. But she was almost never home, and when she was, she had jetlag and didn’t want to be disturbed. So the Piepenbrocks seemed to be their only option.

“Okayyyy,” said Yuri, although he didn’t really want to, “but we’re taking Konrad with us so that he doesn’t escape again!”

Together, they put the koala on Yuri’s back, and Yuri put Papa’s jacket on. It covered the sleeping marsupial completely. Carefully, Yuri climbed the stairs behind his sister. At the top, Lucy put her finger right on the doorbell.

BRINGGGGGGG, it echoed. Soon, one of the papas opened the door.

“Hello, you two,” he greeted them cheerfully. “Zoe and Chloe aren’t home right now, but they’ll be back soon. Would you like to come in and wait for them?”

“Ummmm, thank you, no,” said Yuri quickly, “actually we’re not here for Zoe and Chloe.”

“We wanted to talk to you,” chirped Lucy. “We have an important question.” She was hopping back and forth with excitement.

“It won’t take long,” added Yuri, shifting his weight to the other foot. Konrad was heavier than he’d thought.

“Oh!” said Mr. Piepenbrock. “Sure, shoot.”

“We want to know what koalas eat.” Yuri looked at Zoe and Chloe’s Papa anxiously.

“Oh boy!” Mr. Piepenbrock rubbed his bald head. “That’s a hard one.” He turned around and called into the apartment, “Tarek, what do koalas eat?”

There was a rumble from within the apartment. “Are those the black and white ones or the gray ones?” asked a deep voice.

“Konrad is gray with brown and white on his belly,” said Lucy. Yuri wished she’d keep her mouth shut.

“Ah, Konrad.” Tarek Piepenbrock came running. His big toe poked out of a hole in his sock. “A nice name! Are you writing a story about a panda bear?”

“The gray ones are the koalas, not the pandas,” said the bald papa.

“But the black and white ones come from China, don’t they?” answered the hole-in-the-sock papa, scratching his beard. “Or was it Australia?”

“I have no idea, but I believe only one of them is actually a bear,” mused the bald-headed papa.

Ohhhhh, if things went on like this, Konrad would fall to the floor from weakness. Right here in the hall.

“We just need to know what a koala eats,” said Yuri again. “As fast as possible!”

“Come on in and we’ll have a look on the internet.” The bald-headed papa and Lucy marched into the apartment.

But Yuri hesitated. Was it a good idea to take Konrad into the Piepenbrocks’ apartment? What if the papas noticed something? Just as Yuri was going to say that he’d rather wait outside, Ms. Kussarova’s cat came parading up the stairs.

“Pavarotti!” cried the hole-in-the-sock papa happily, reaching out his hand.

The cat stopped about an arm’s length away. He swiveled his ears toward Yuri and sniffed. Suddenly, his dishwater-gray fur stood on end.

“GRRRRRRRR!” he growled in warning.

“What’s up? What’s the matter with him?” Mr. Piepenbrock looked puzzled. “Normally he comes to me and lets me pet him.”

Yuri could imagine why Pavarotti was growling. The cat had clearly noticed that there was an animal under Yuri’s jacket. Now Konrad was awake! His hair tickled Yuri’s neck. He rumbled. Luckily, very quietly. But Pavarotti had heard him. His tail whipped through the air. He arched his back and growled like the tiger at the zoo, just in miniature. And then Konrad started to grumble. It sounded like he was hooting through a rusty watering can.

“HMMMM, is there a donkey hidden somewhere around here?” called the Piepenbrock papa, looking around.

“That was definitely just the cat,” said Yuri, swallowing hard.

[...]

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Konrad creates chaos...

Yuri and Lucy scampered up the stairs. The door to their apartment was propped open. As soon as they reached the hall, Yuri smelled something burning. He threw his schoolbag and gym clothes down in the corner and peered into the kitchen. Papa was leaning on the kitchen table, humming, chewing on a pencil and scribbling on a piece of paper. Then he waved his arms around like he was conducting an orchestra. Something very black that looked very much like it was once a casserole sizzled in the oven.

“Papa, the lasagna is burning!” cried Yuri, and he ran on. “He’s composing his kitchen symphony again,” he told Lucy, who had run farther and was waiting for him by the door to their room. Yuri flung the door open. It looked like a tornado had touched down there. There were socks, underwear, and t-shirts strewn across the floor, between them hangers and a sticky jar: the missing honey! There was a squeak-squeaking from inside the wardrobe.

A shaggy green creature was swinging from the clothes rail. When it saw Yuri, it squeaked loudly for joy and pushed off the side of the wardrobe with its back paws, swinging forward and flying full speed into Yuri’s arms.

“SQUUEEEEEEEEEAAAAAAKKKKKKKKK!” giggled Konrad.

“He’s laughing!” cried Lucy. “But why is he green?”

“He’s smeared honey all over himself.” Yuri tried to set Konrad down on the floor, but the koala clung to him. And not just that, he was leaving big greenish-yellow spots on Yuri’s t-shirt. “There’s green powder all over him. It’s probably that matcha stuff.”

“SQUEAEAEAEAEAEAK!” squeaked Konrad, pressing his nose into Yuri’s face. His nose felt like a piece of gravel that had been in the water for a long time, slimy and damp. And his breath no longer smelled like eucalyptus, but bitter and sweet at the same time.

“Ugh, Konrad!” Yuri pushed the sticky marsupial away. “You really need a bath. You’re getting everything dirty!”

The koala looked at Yuri attentively. Then he tilted his head one way and then the other, as if he needed to think about something.

“But we can’t take him into the bathroom, Mama will notice that right away,” said Lucy thoughtfully. “We’ll have to wait until tonight, when everyone’s asleep.”

“No, that’ll take too long. Konrad will have gotten everything sticky,” mumbled Yuri, while he tried to pluck a greenish clump of fur off his t-shirt.

“But now he’s finally awake and we can play with him.” Lucy was dancing with anticipation.

SQUEEEEEEEEEEEAAAAAK!” Konrad opened his mouth. Then he clapped – CLAP, CLAP, CLAP – his sticky paws together. He thought THAT was great!

Yuri shook his head. And then the koala leapt like a master gymnast from Yuri’s arms, doing a backwards somersault onto the floor. WHUMP!

“Did you see that?” Lucy hopped up and down with joy.

Fascinated, they watched Konrad pull himself up on the bed and use the frame of the upper bunk bed as a jungle gym. First, he swung back and forth, hooked his feet in and let his upper body drop before hurtling full tilt upward. Yuri’s mouth hung wide open.

“Is that really Konrad?” Lucy’s eyes were wide.

“I think he’s on a sugar high!” said Yuri. “All that honey is definitely not good for a koala. And who knows what that matcha tea does.”

Konrad squeaked and kept climbing, onto Yuri’s bed. From there, he dove with his front paws out onto the curtain rod and then scampered in a handstand back to the wardrobe.

“Maybe he’s a circus koala.” Lucy clapped her hands enthusiastically. “In any case, he needs to teach me EVERYTHING!”

“But before that, we’ll give him a bath, that’s for sure.” Yuri took a step towards the koala.

“Come on, Konrad!” He held his arms out to him. Jumping into someone’s arms from up high was fun for everyone – why not for a koala gone berserk?

But Konrad only looked down briefly, sniffled, and rubbed his nose with his front paw. And then he grunted like a little piggy. When Yuri took another step toward him, Konrad slipped onto the ride-on car, which was jammed between the wardrobe and the curtain rod. He sat on his bottom, balanced expertly, and raised a back paw. He dragged it like a comb through his shaggy fur. Fine green dust and sticky mustard-colored clumps rained down on Yuri. EWWWWWW!

Just as Yuri was contemplating climbing up on the wardrobe shelves, the koala’s claws got tangled up in his fur. Konrad pulled and pulled, but he was stuck in the goop. Finally, he lost his balance and plopped downward like a gigantic kiwi, right into Yuri’s arms.

[...]

[p. 97-100]

Konrad goes to the dentist...

“So who do we have here?” The receptionist behind the white desk bent forward. “Well, well. If it isn’t the Michalsky kids. And who’s this?” She opened her black-rimmed eyes wide and stared at the creature on Yuri’s arm.

She’d certainly never seen anyone like this before! Yuri took his time considering his response.

“This is...” he began slowly while he was thinking: Newborn babies didn’t have any teeth and didn’t have to go to the dentist. That’s why the little brother story wasn’t an option. He needed another idea. “This is our cousin,” he said finally.

“He’s from Australia,” squawked Lucy, “and he’s got a piece of candy stuck between his teeth.”

As if on command, Konrad whimpered.

“Aha,” said the woman unsympathetically, tapping her extra-long fingernails on the computer keyboard.

“I see that you don’t have an appointment.” Her long black eyelashes fluttered like an excited butterfly. “Unfortunately, the doctor doesn’t have time for anything like this today.” She smiled tightly.

“I always have time for Yuri and Lucy,” growled a deep voice. Dr. White stood at the open door of the examination room. “And for your cousin too, of course!” Merrily, he waved them in.

Yuri took a deep breath. Hopefully, everything would go well! Fortunately, the doctor looked kindly at Konrad. He sent his assistant out of the room. “I’ve got Lucy,” he explained. “She can help me with the patient!”

Lucy beamed.

“I think it’s best if you sit down on the chair and hold your cousin on your lap,” said the doctor, fastening a bib around Konrad’s neck.

“SQUEEEEEAAAAK!” cried Konrad with dismay, trying to tear the bib off.

Yuri had to hold Konrad’s front paws tightly.

“Maybe he’s excited because he’s never been to a European dentist before.” The doctor winked at Yuri.

Yuri nodded and heaved himself and the koala up into the dentist’s chair. Of course, Konrad didn’t want to open his mouth even though Lucy was being silly for him, making the suction device fly around like a hummingbird.

Konrad clenched his teeth firmly and snarled.

Luckily, the doctor was very patient. Especially with children. Even with those who weren’t actually children.

“Do you have something with eucalyptus?” asked Yuri. “Toothpaste, maybe?”

Dr. White shook his head sadly.

“Unfortunately not, but...” He turned around, filled a syringe with no needle in it with a liquid, and dribbled it carefully on Konrad’s lips. “I have delicious organic mouthwash with eucalyptus. Made by your mama.”

And then Konrad finally opened his mouth.

“Very good!” Dr. White bent forward and murmured: “Number one left, OK. Numbers two and three are missing, four occlusal is circular, five – aha!” Quick as a wink, he pushed Konrad’s tongue to the side with his mirror and slid his dentist’s tweezers in behind it.

“WAAAAAAHHHHH” bellowed Konrad.

“There’s the offender!” said the doctor over the noise. Two deep dimples appeared on his cheeks as he lifted a brown cough drop into the light of his dentist’s lamp and then set it down on a tray.

And then Konrad calmed down again. Only his ears flickered with excitement, as if they were trying to shoo off a whole swarm of flies.

“I will clean his teeth a bit and polish them while I’m at it,” said Dr. White, “so that your cousin doesn’t have any more problems. He absolutely must brush his teeth better!” To distract Konrad, he gave him the little hand mirror. Konrad really liked that. He held the mirror in his hand and looked at himself while Mama’s boss cleaned and polished the koala’s teeth. Yuri took care that Konrad didn’t shove the mirror into the doctor’s face, and Lucy suctioned up the koala spit. They were a perfect team! In no time at all, the treatment was finished.

“Done,” said the doctor, removing Konrad’s bib.

“QUIEKQUAK!” Konrad cried, and jumped out of Yuri’s arms, across the tray with the instruments, landing with a big THUD on the floor.

Everyone laughed, and the dentist laughed the loudest.

[...]

[p. 105-109]

A visit from the police...

“Konrad, you have to run away, the police are looking for you!”

The koala cringed and started to hiccup, as he always did when he was alarmed. Lucy’s eyes widened.

“Will he have to go to jail?” She ran to Konrad and hugged him. “If you have to go to jail, I’m going with you.” A tear rolled down her cheek.

Yuri shook his head.

“Children don’t go to jail.” At least he hoped that was true. “Go, Konrad,” he said again, pulling Lucy away from the koala.

The koala stared at Yuri excitedly with his caramel-colored stuffed animal eyes. He hiccuped and twitched his ears nervously. Yuri had to pull him out of the little chair. But instead of climbing to the window and hopping from there to the walnut tree, Konrad leapt into Yuri’s arms and held tight to him. Yuri would like to have held him that way forever, but then he heard footsteps and voices.

“Our children are in the kitchen.” That was Papa. “But perhaps you’d like to take a look at the bathroom first? Someone stole our toothpaste!”

Yuri knew that Papa was only telling them that to kill some time. Nevertheless, it was another theft on Konrad’s criminal record. Would the koala be punished more severely now? He had to disappear – and quickly.

“Hide in the walnut tree!” whispered Yuri into Konrad’s ear as he was trying to set him down on the windowsill. But the koala only held onto Yuri even tighter.

Fortunately, the voices were fading. The officers went into the bathroom. But definitely not for long. Yuri had to convince Konrad to climb out the window even though he really didn’t want to do that. Suddenly, he spotted Papa’s honey. That was the answer! Yuri shoveled a big glob out of the jar with a spoon and held it out in front of the koala’s snout.

“SQUEAKSQUAWK!” Konrad stopped hiccupping for a moment and his ears stopped trembling. Instead, he licked his lips and started to reach for the spoon.

Yuri raised his hand and flung the honey spoon into the walnut tree. Finally, the koala leapt after it. Yuri closed the window at the exact moment the kitchen door opened. And then Lucy began to howl. As loud as a siren. Or two.

After the officers explained that children never have to go to jail even if they’ve been mischievous, Lucy calmed down a bit. Her eyes red, she watched as the officers took her fingerprints and compared them to the ones on their phone. They did the same for Yuri, Mama, and Papa. The officers apologized over and over that they were taking the children’s fingerprints. They explained that this was necessary because the tracks that Mr. Thunderson found couldn’t be an adult’s.

They’re a koala’s, thought Yuri, a koala with fingers. Fingers that look like human fingers. Almost exactly. But did the officers know this?

“Could the fingerprints be from an animal?” It was a little risky to ask this, but the words just fell from his lips. When he saw Mama’s shocked expression, Yuri said quickly: “It could have been a cat or a racoon.”

“We don’t take the fingerprints of animals.” The officer laughed. “I also don’t think that they have any.”

Finally, Yuri could relax a little. The officers had no clue about animals. Especially not koalas.

“OK, now we want to question your neighbors.” The policeman stood up with a groan and ran out of the kitchen.

His colleague followed him with her cap under her arm. Her ponytail swished with every step she took.

“Oh!” Just before she reached the front door, she turned around. “I wanted to show you something.” She pulled a small clear plastic bag out of her jacket pocket. “Have you ever seen anything like this?” She pointed to something round in the bag. “Mr. Gunderson¹ found it on his sofa. It looks like a big raisin, but it smells like a cough drop.”

Papa shook his head without missing a beat.

“No, never,” he said. But Yuri noticed that Papa’s ears reddened. He cleared his throat. And then he looked a little green in the face.

Finally, the officers left. As soon as they were out of sight, Papa ran into the bathroom and Yuri ran back into the kitchen. He had to call Konrad back in. And as quickly as possible!

[...]

¹ In this chapter, the police officers keep getting Mr. Thunderson’s name wrong, hence Gunderson (and later Blunderson)!

[p. 122-125]

A garden party

Yuri looked at the old man's face. He looked happier than before. Even his eyebrows didn't seem to be that threatening thunderstorm gray anymore. Now they were koala gray!

Yuri swallowed hard and picked up another invitation.

“Dear Piepenbrock Family,” he wrote and sighed. That was the farthest he was willing to go. To write a card to the whole family. Hopefully he wouldn't regret it!

Dear Piepenbrock Family,
We would like to invite you to a party in the courtyard,
tomorrow at 3:00. There will be delicious food and
a surprise.
His name is Konrad, and he comes from Australia.
Sincerely yours,
Kira, Constantine, Yuri, and Lucy Michalsky
& Walter and Edith Thunderson

They spent the whole next morning decorating the courtyard and preparing food. There were salads and sausages, pizza and muffins, chocolate pudding, fruit skewers, and lots of eucalyptus for Konrad. Everything was ready by early afternoon. Excitedly, they waited for the guests. The airline pilot came first. She was carrying a giant bowl of jello.

“Thank you very much for the invitation,” she said to Yuri, and: “I'm Nadine.”

“Squeaksquawk!” Konrad rushed over and climbed up her long legs, as if she were a eucalyptus tree. Yuri was startled but Nadine laughed loudly and let Konrad climb up to her shoulders.

“There's my little friend,” she cried.

Konrad bent over forward and lapped the dessert right from the bowl. “I made the jello with eucalyptus, especially for Konrad,” she explained, scratching the koala behind the ears.

“Since he’s been coming to visit me at night, I’ve been able to sleep again! How nice that this doesn’t have to be a secret anymore. Thank you, Yuri.”

She sat down with Mrs. Thunderson and together, they fed Konrad the jello. Konrad squeaksquawked and Edith Thunderson giggled happily. Her husband was standing with Lucy under the walnut tree. They were planning a treehouse. Yuri looked around. Had somebody else arrived? Ms. Kussarova was talking to Papa. Yuri approached them slowly. Pavarotti was crouched a few steps behind his mistress in the doorway. His tail whipped nervously back and forth. When he saw Konrad, all of his fur stood on end, and he hurtled away.

“Pavarotti has been acting strange for a few days now,” said Ms. Kussarova to Papa. “Maybe we should make some music together. Music really relaxes him.”

Papa nodded. But Yuri could see that he was a little afraid. Especially when Ms. Kussarova took out her flute.

Dr. White was sitting at the table with Mama. He was eating one huge portion of chocolate pudding after another. Yuri went over to them.

“If I could just find a eucalyptus supplier, we could produce large quantities of mouthwash together,” said Mama’s boss, talking shop.

“And toothpaste!” cried Mama. “One that even children will like. And my husband!” Her cheeks were very red. Her inventor’s brain must be turning a trillion somersaults. At least!

Mama and Dr. White drank a toast to their plans.

Only the Piepenbrocks were missing because Chloe was participating in a speech contest. Of course she was! Yuri circled nervously. They would arrive soon. Yuri’s stomach started to rumble. He kept pacing, stopping here and there, not feeling exactly right anywhere. He couldn’t even enjoy his own party! And then the Piepenbrocks arrived.