



René Berends – In the zoo

King Lion is sitting on his throne. With a sad face, he gazes blankly to the horizon. Dave, the eagle, is flying in circles high above him. “You look sad, Leo,” Dave says. “What is it?” “Let me be,” King Lion says with sigh. But Dave doesn’t like it one bit that his friend is sad, and he flies down. When he lands next to the throne, he says: “Tell me, what is happening! Maybe I can help.” “It’s no fun at all to be king of all the animals,” King Lion says. “All the animals are arguing and they are hungry and thirsty and there is nothing I can do.” Dave takes a look. Leo is right! All the animals on the savannah are grumpy. It is too hot and they have nothing to eat or drink. Hippo already got sunburned and he can’t find any fresh grass anymore. The savannah is bare and dry. This morning Parrot and Fish even got in a fight. Parrot found some water in a small pool and wanted to drink some. Then Fish got angry. He put his head above the water and said: “Hey, you! Go drink somewhere else. This is my water. I’m just about able to swim in it!” And Tiger? Tiger sleeps all day long on a big branch in a tree.

Dave pats King Lion on the back. “I understand you, Leo,” Dave says, “but it’s not your fault!” But King Lion shakes his head. “A king should be able to help, when it’s needed,” he says. “But I don’t know what I should do! I think and I think but... I am just a big bungler of a king!” “Let’s ask all the other animals for advice”, Dave

suggests. “Together we might know more than when it is just you!” King Lion lifts his head. That is not a bad idea at all, he thinks. “Let’s do that,” he says. “Maybe someone has a good idea!” That night there is an animal gathering on the savannah. All animals are around the throne. King Lion puts his crown straight on and explains the problem. When he is finished, it is quiet. All animals look grave. Then Hippo starts mumbling. “Excuse me, King Lion, for speaking up,” he carefully says, “but maybe I know a solution. I have a cousin in a zoo in the Netherlands and he told me that it is never this hot over there. What’s more, there is always water and the animals always get enough food.” It is quiet for a bit, when Hippo is done talking. “A zoo?” says King Lion, “in the Netherlands? That might not be a bad idea!” And whenever King Lion thinks something is not a bad idea, nobody dares to say otherwise. Because King Lion is King Lion for a reason. That night all the animals made plans to leave for the Netherlands. Hippo got the assignment to start writing to his cousin.

A week later King Lion, Dave the eagle, Hippo, Parrot and Fish are at the gates of the Zoo in the Netherlands, and they ring the doorbell. When the fat zoo manager opens the gates, he is very surprised. “What are you doing here?” he asks. The manager never had animals just showing up at his gates. “We decided to come and live

here,” King Lion replies. The manager falls silent, but then says: “Welcome, welcome! Please come in!” With all the new animals he could get a lot more visitors in the zoo, he hopes. And more visitors buy more tickets, and that means he will make more money. When the animals enter the zoo, the manager jumps into the air out of joy. After a while the manager gives all the animals some proper food. Everyone eats till they are completely full. When they are done, the manager brings all animals to their own cages. Hippo shares his cage with his cousin. They have not seen each other for a long time and so they hug. That is a funny sight! All animals start laughing. Tiger gets his own cage. Fish introduces himself to the other fish in the big pond. Parrot and Eagle get a very big cage and last but not least the manager brings King Lion to a big field full of green grass, surrounded by a big, heavy fence. When the manager opens the door, King Lion steps inside. Then the door falls shut behind King Lion.

The animals get good food, and there is always water. But the first few nights they cannot sleep well. They hear weird sounds everywhere in the zoo. They can hear each other, but they can't visit each other anymore.

And they meet some new animals, like Frog and Owl. Frog lives in the zoo too, but he is free. He is so little that he can come and go in every cage he wants. Sometimes he visits his friends, who live outside the zoo in a small ditch. Sometimes at night owl visits too. He flies around in the

zoo, and sometimes even in the forest and beyond.

A lot of people come to look at the animals. But after a few days they start to feel weird. “I can't just swim to my friends,” Fish says. “We have food now,” Parrot adds, “but in my cage I can barely fly in small circles.” “At least you can fly,” Dave the Eagle complains. “When I flap my wings in this cage only once, I am on the other side already!” Tiger sighs deeply. “My cage is so small, I walk the same circles all day!” Even Hippo complains: “You know what my cousin does!” he says, “he is shitting in the water!” “How would it be back on the Savannah?” King Lion asks one evening. All animals are quiet. “I would like to be back on my big branch in the shadow,” Tiger then says. “And I would like to have a lovely chat with Parrot on the side of my pool,” Fish adds. “I want to fly so high, that I can gaze at the horizon again,” Dave the Eagle says. “We need to go back,” King Lion concludes. “We are all homesick!” “But our cages are all locked,” Hippo says. “We may have got food and enough to drink, but we have also become prisoners! That fat manager of this zoo will never let us go. There are a lot of people that come to see us, and he makes a lot of money with that!”

“We need to steal his key chain,” Tiger says. And while he is saying it, he tries to force his way out of his cage. But his cage is made of iron and steel and it is way too strong for him. “I am going to ask Owl and Frog if they want to help

us," Dave says. "They are free and Frog can get in and out of any place." Then King Lion calls Owl and Frog to him. They talk long and think hard. "I am a wise owl after all," says Owl. "I will make a plan to escape."

When it gets dark the next day, Owl and Frog go to the fat manager's house. It is a nice, warm night and the window of the kitchen is left open. Frog hops in. Pretty soon he can see the bunch of keys on the kitchen table. The keys are almost too heavy for Frog. But in the end he manages to push them to the window. Owl is waiting there. Frog passes the keys to him through the open window and then hops outside himself. "Hey, what is going on here!" they hear.

The minute the fat zoo manager walks into the kitchen, he can only just see that Frog has taken the bunch of keys. But he is too late. With a few big flaps of his wings Owl flies high into the sky, with the bunch of keys in his beak. Owl can fly much faster than the fat manager can run. Quickly Owl opens Tiger's cage and then those of Parrot and Dave the Eagle. Fish and Hippo get freed too. Finally Owl arrives at the cage of King Lion, but that one is already open. King Lion is so strong, that he forced his way out himself. When everyone has gathered, King Lion says:

"Come on, let's go." In the distance they can hear the fat zoo manager approaching. "Owl and Frog, thank you so much for helping us! Without you, we would never have made it! Will you come with us?" Owl looks at Frog and Frog looks at Owl. Then they firmly shake their heads. "No," says Frog. "We live here and we are not prisoners in a cage. Here we are free to do whatever we want." "I understand," King Lion says gravely. "We have that same freedom on the savannah!"

A few days later the animals are back home. Tiger lies on his big branch in the tree. Fish and Parrot are cheerfully chatting away at the pool and Dave the Eagle has flown up into the clouds for at least four times. It was raining on the savannah. The grass is green again and there is water running through the rivers and in the pools.

When the animals visit King Lion that night, Tiger asks Hippo: "What about your cousin? Did he not want to come along with us to the savannah?" "I asked him," Hippo answered, "but I told him he was not allowed to be shitting in the water here! When hearing that he said he preferred to stay in the zoo." And while Hippo was saying that, all the other animals started laughing heartily.