

Chapter 2

Kalle – One, Two, Three – and Kralle!

Kalle falls into a seat in the first row in front of the orchestra shell and takes a few deep breaths. The orchestra shell is the crowning glory of the city park in Pitzelberg on the Pitzel. It consists of a bowl-shaped structure, open in front, that surrounds half of a small stage. In front of the shell are benches and seats placed among flower beds, providing places for the public to enjoy outdoor concert performances in the summertime. Behind it tower the city park's trees, where the squirrels and crows can listen, too.

"Well, grandson?" calls Kalle's grandpa, generally called 'Kalle One' – or just 'One' – because he is the first of the three Kalles so far. "You look like you got into a scuffle with a bad-tempered rhino!" Grandpa One hops down from the stage, where he had been setting up technical equipment, and sits down next to his grandson.

"No rhino, just Zorro," Kalle groans.

"What? That Zarathustra?" Grandpa One cries. "The son of the factory owner Senft?"

On the stage, Kalle's father, known as 'Kalle Two' or simply 'K2', pulls the guitar strap over his head and carefully places the guitar in its stand. "It was a close call, was it?"

Kalle the Third nods wearily. "Very," he mutters, and spits out a bit of gravel. "Too close..."

The three Kalles live together in a well-kept country house on the outskirts of Pitzelberg. Kalle One is an inventor and tinkerer. A long time ago he was a radio mechanic, with his own shop on the main square. He ran the small but wonderful store together with Kalle's grandma, Carlotta, for many years. But then Grandma Carlotta died suddenly. Grandpa One gave up his business, retired, and withdrew completely to his house.

He was very sad and very lonely there until one day a small tom cat with a powerful voice showed up, and One named him Kralle. Over time, the young cat grew into an enormous reddish-brown creature with a tendency towards arrogance and overweight.

The two of them made a cozy life for themselves. In his workshop, Kalle One invented all kinds of impractical things that had never been seen before, while the tom cat Kralle snored away the days and hunted mice by night. They read the newspaper together, Kalle One cleaned out the litterbox by himself, and they shared tins of fish and containers of cream like brothers.

The coziness soon came to an end, however, because one morning, Kalle Two stood on the doormat holding Kalle Three by the hand and ceremoniously announced that "from now on, our dear Grandpa would never be lonely again." Life in the big city wasn't as exciting as Kalle Two had imagined it would be ten years ago, and now he wanted to live with his son and successor in Pitzelberg, with Grandpa and his enormous cat, and start a new life. A slower paced, frugal, sustainable, and all around completely chill life.

Kalle the Third had pushed back his hat with the bear ears, looked up at his grandpa, and then pointed to Kralle the tom cat. He had raised his nose and said, "The cat's coming to preschool with me." Horrified, Kralle let a few cat hairs fly and then turned around on the spot and rolled up in a ball on the tile stove, which he didn't leave again for three days.

That was just about seven and a half years ago now. Number One and his tom cat were not thrilled about the additions to the family at first, because they had gotten so used to their life as a twosome, but it wasn't long before the three Kalles and the tom cat were thick as thieves. Cream continues to be shared equally, canned fish is no longer on the menu ('not environmentally sustainable,' says Kalle Two). The newspaper is still shared, at least by three of them (Kalle Three would rather play games on Dad's smartphone). One still cleans the litterbox by himself, but he doesn't mind. Kalle Two has to clean the

toilet instead, and Kalle Three is only allowed to make the bare minimum of messes. That works quite well for everyone.

Kalle Two is a music teacher. Shortly after the move he started teaching at Gutenberg High School in Pitzelberg, and he is quite popular there. He enjoys being a teacher, but when he is not working he lives for his calling: composing and writing sentimental songs that he performs on the guitar. He's even had some success for a time now. He is a sensitive singer-songwriter basically on the verge of an enormous breakthrough and is almost world famous. In Pitzelberg on the Pitzel.

Grandpa and grandson Kalle are happy for him, of course. What annoys the two of them sometimes, though, is when Kalle Two is writing a song and gets stuck. Because then he repeats a single line of a song over and over and over again until he finally figures out how it should continue. But you get used to it. Eventually. Besides, K2 is in the process of building a sound studio in the basement that won't let any sound escape its walls.

Kalle One is a great help to his son, because of course he knows his way around acoustics and sound technology. So he is allowed to accompany him to performances and set up the microphones, amplifiers, and various guitars. When the sound system is completely set up and K2 has tuned all the guitars and professionally warmed up his harmonica, he and Kalle One run through what's called a soundcheck. Most of the time a loud whine comes from some box somewhere, and the two of them fuss at each other a little. But as soon as the whining has stopped, they are the best of friends again.

The two elder Kalles had just finished such a soundcheck in the orchestra shell in the park today, because the June concert of the men's choir was coming up soon, and Kalle Two was going to introduce his first CD on that occasion. "Don't Dream in the Dark, Cherie" is its title. Kalle the Third thinks a CD like that is for old people, and K2 should offer his songs to stream instead. But K2 things that's totally fishy and antisocial. And so he needs a soundcheck for his CD presentation, so that everyone can hear his music clearly, with no whining.

"Who were the three other goofballs on those weird rolling things that whizzed by so fast? As if the devil were after them," Kalle One wants to know.

"Zorro's gang," is Kalle's short answer.

"Whatever you do, don't let them push you around!" cries Grandpa One.

"Violence isn't a solution!" chimes in K2.

"But letting yourself get beat up isn't the answer, either," Grandpa grumbles.

Suddenly a raindrop falls on Kalle's nose. Dark storm clouds are gathering in the sky.

"Uh oh, we have to pack up quickly now," declares Grandpa One. "Unfortunately, there isn't any room for you in the car, it's all filled with the sound system and guitars."

"And the harmonica," adds K2.

"It's okay, I have my skateboard," says Kalle. "Those guys have moved on anyway. We'll see each other at home."

"I'll warm up some pea soup! With sausages. The best food in this weather!" Grandpa One yells after him. "See you soon, little man!"

"Make it tofu sausage for me, with the soup," K2 calls from the stage. "And remember, son, give peace a chance!"

Kalle sighs and gets moving. When he turns the corner by the big elm tree, he feels something big, fat, and furry brush against his left calf. The tom cat Kralle! What's he doing here?

"Hey, Kralle, you old stray. Wasn't expecting to see you here!"

Kalle notices with astonishment that the cat winks at him with one eye, and shakes his head in confusion. A winking Kralle the cat?

"Come on, my tubby buddy!" says Kalle, looking at the dark clouds with concern.

"Raindrops keep falling on my head..." hums the tom cat grumpily. "If there's one thing I hate, it's wet fur!"

It takes a full three minutes before Kalle closes his mouth again. Only a sudden downpour of rain jolts him out of his stupor. “You, you... you can t-t-t-talk?” he stutters.

Kralle gives Kalle a penetrating look and asks completely innocently, “Can’t you?” The cat shakes the raindrops from his fur with a disgusted look and continues waddling towards their cozy little house, with the utterly confused Kalle trailing behind him.

Chapter 3

A Clear Threat

Kalle scratches his head thoughtfully and wonders if he is actually losing his marbles. Talking cats? Who’s ever heard of such a thing? “I’m probably just dreaming this,” Kalle mutters, more or less to himself.

“Should I pinch you? So that you wake up?” the cat asks in an exaggeratedly friendly way.

Kalle stops in his tracks. “So you can really talk,” he confirms.

“I thought we had established that.”

“But why?”

Kralle tilts his head and makes the biggest, most adorable eyes at Kalle. “Pick me up,” he meows.

“And how should I do that? I have this skateboard under my arm!”

“Oh, for heaven’s sake, do I have to explain everything to you? Put the skateboard under your feet and me under your jacket. And then we’ll roll home together, but a little bit quickly, so I don’t get completely soaked.”

Kalle sighs. Then he bends over and bravely heaves the 15-pound cat off the ground.

“Step on it, I need to get out of the rain,” Kralle complains. Kalle gets moving again, while the cat navigates. “You have to turn left into the next alley,” he informs Kalle, as if he didn’t know the way home. “Straight ahead through the intersection.” Kalle comes to a stop at the corner of Melissa Way and puts the tom cat down. The rain has stopped, and a light fog is rolling in.

“What is it now?” the cat huffs, annoyed. “Can’t you keep carrying me down the street and into the house?”

“I can’t, if I go any farther my arms will fall off.” Kalle scratches his head. Then he asks, “For real, Kralle. How are you able to talk?”

The tom cat stares Kalle right in the eyes. “Because of this.” His front right paw gestures towards his collar, which glows green in the center. “Grandpa made it.” Pssssh! Whoosh! Phwwwwht! The collar begins frantically blinking red, and the cat coughs deeply. Then the collar glows green again, and the whistling and hissing noises stop. “Sometimes the thing malfunctions,” Kralle apologizes. “But now it’s working again. Pick me up, my feet are getting all wet.”

“What kind of a collar is that?” Kalle wants to know. He hoists Kralle up again and rolls down the street.

The cat squints his eyes together and tries to explain. “It’s a model... a speech... a... a modulator ... a talking thingie! Extremely complicated. It’s hard to explain it to you, since you’re a newcomer to the field. It’s, uh, very complicated, technically speaking.” Kalle wonders what his friend Hotte would have to say about the talking device. Quite a lot, no doubt.

“But why is One building something like that?” Kalle prods further.

“What do you mean? Just look at me, the cleverest cat in the world! He wanted to tap into my intelligence potential and hear my opinion on the great themes of the universe! Who am I – man or mouse? Where do I come from, where am I going? Why are cats so amazing? Things like that.”

Kalle grins skeptically, and the cat adds with a little pout, “Well, and besides he spends a lot of time alone in his workshop. You two, you and K2, are in school or out and about all day. He’s always chatted with me, and I even answered him, but he couldn’t understand me. Now he can, and you, too. This invention is called the KBC, by the way, a Kitty Babble Collar. But One just calls it Gab-Gab.”

“Gob gob?” Kalle asks.

“Gab-gab, you deaf bird! Because I can jabber and gab with it. Got it?”

“Cool!” Kalle exclaims. “I have to call Lotte and Hotte right away. They won’t believe it!”

The tom cat cries out, “Oh no! It’s a secret. If it gets out, then I’ll have to go on daytime television and America’s Got Talent, because I can sing so well. And then I’d probably have to go to some jungle camp, too! But I don’t want to go there. Eating grubs, disgusting, that’s for dogs. And everywhere I went the pop... you know, the parazzi would follow me around and ask stupid questions, how does it feel to be a talking cat, and whether I’m pregnant with twins, and such. So keep your mouth shut, got it?”

“I can’t even tell Dad?”

“Definitely not him, the old motormouth! And you can’t tell One that you know now. He already thinks I’m a chatterbox.”

Kalle rubs the cat between his ears and swears up and down not to tell anyone.

The tom cat begins to purr. Sounds come from the Gab-Gab that sound like a coffee machine.

“Shnurrkoppling!” declares the cat with comfortably closed eyes. Then he jumps out of Kalle’s arms.

“Thanks for the lift!” he calls and is about to head into the garden, when he suddenly stops. He flattens his ears, his fur stands on end, and his tail, usually so elegant, looks like a chimneysweep’s broom. Kralle hisses angrily.

“What is it, big boy?” Kalle asks. But then he discovers it for himself: A letter is attached to the mailbox with red tape. On the rather wet envelope is a picture of a red cat head. The red cat head is crossed out with two thick black marks.

Kalle carefully opens the letter and reads out loud: “*To the filthy red beast!*”

The cat arches its back and puffs itself up even further. “*You overinflated, rusty ball of fur!*” Kalle continues.

The cat extends his claws, and his eyes are enormous and as round as saucers. Kalle continues to read, and inwardly he has to giggle a little bit. “*Enough is enough, the game is over. You have taken a dump in my roses for the last time! Don’t you dare leave your house anymore, or I will skin you, pulling your ugly pelt over your ugly ears! Respectfully, An Enemy. P.S. This is your last warning!*”

The tom cat seems on the verge of exploding with rage. “Enemies and haters! I’m surrounded by enemies and haters!”

“You poop in roses? Where?”

“What? The impertinence! Lies, stinking lies! I don’t do my business in roses, at most in the dirt under them. And I always dig a hole and bury everything.”

“And whose roses are you digging around in?”

“How should I know?” The cat is beside himself. “There are rose beds in every garden around here! Accidents can happen every now and then when I’m out on patrol. But I’m telling you, it was definitely the Guinea pig from across the street who sent the letter. It always calls out insults when it’s outside on the lawn in its cage.”

Kalle is skeptical. “But the Guinea pig can’t write.”

“Then it was the Goiginger’s bantam chickens.”

“They can’t write, either.”

“True. All they do is peck. Always with the beak between the ears. Damn chickens!” Kralle complains. He briefly interrupts his latest fit of rage to catch and clean his tail. Then he calls out triumphantly, “Now I’ve got it! It was the Kraus’s parrot.”

“Does it know how to write?” Kalle asks with curiosity.

Kalle & Kralle, Band 1: Ein Kater gibt Gas

Kalle & Kralle (Vol. 1): A Tom Cat Gets Moving

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The tom cat shakes its head. "No, but it can dictate, the chattering bag of feathers!"
Kalle is not convinced. He puts the letter away and says, "Come on, Kralle, let's go inside.
Grandpa and Dad will be here any minute, and then there will be dinner."

The cat looks back, indignantly, and then follows Kalle into the house, meowing quietly. Neither he nor Kalle notice the shadow that plunges downward, headfirst and at breakneck speed, from the façade of a neighboring house.