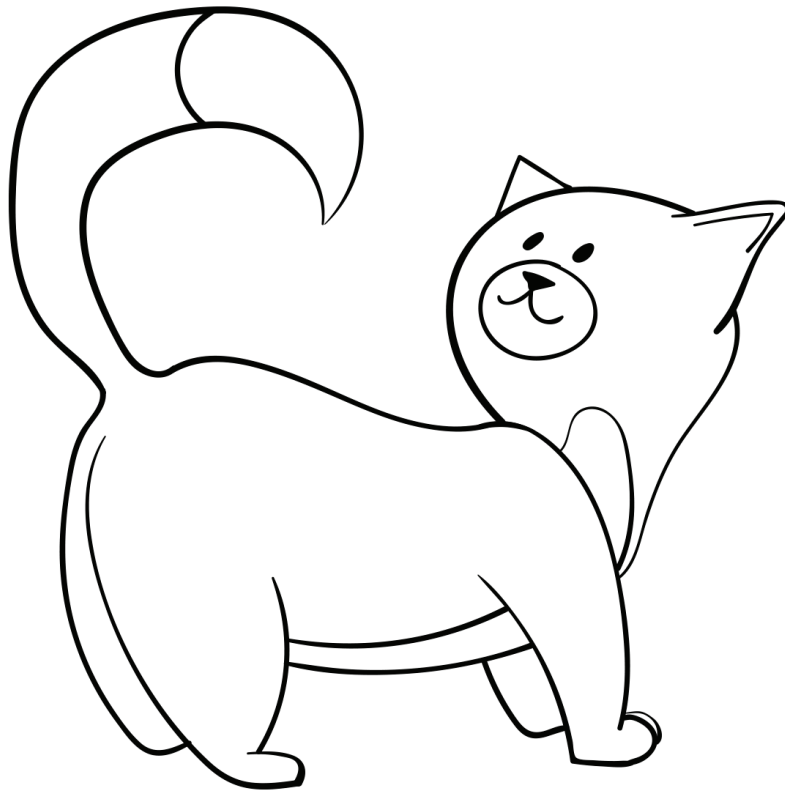


MUSALENKO

CELEBRATES HIS BIRTHDAY



Musalenko Celebrates His Birthday

© Musala Soft

Yoana Ivanova, author, 2021

Velyana Yurukova, Gabriela, Andonova, Nikoleta Petrova, Gabriela
Taneva, Book Design and Illustration, 2021

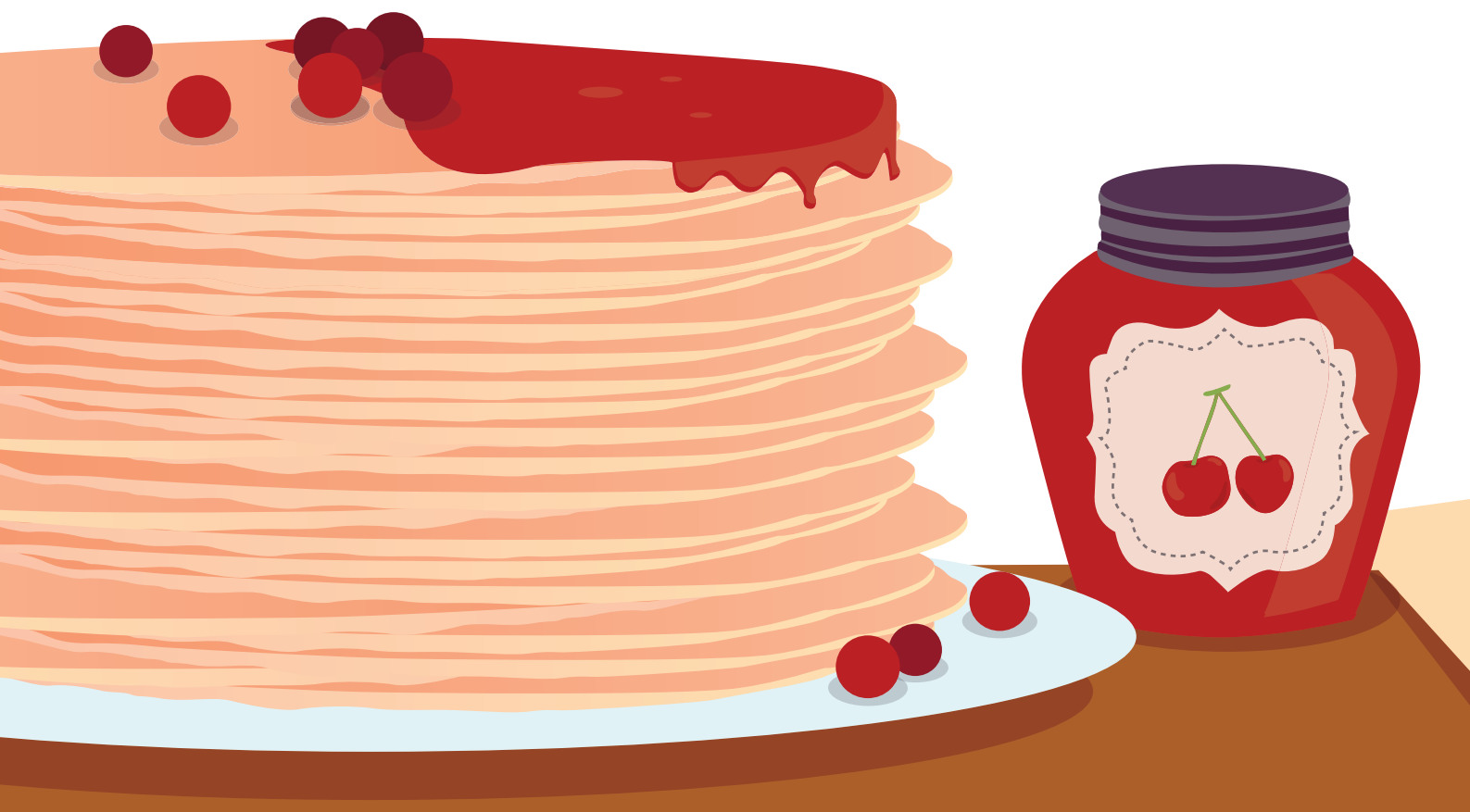
- 'Birthday! Biiirthdaaay!!! Today is my birthday!' Musalenko jumped happily out of bed. He was so excited that last night he had a hard time falling asleep, and today he woke up before the first cock-crow. As it has become clear, he loved his birthdays very much – literally all year he marked how many days remained until the next one.

'Oh, I'm so eager for festivities! Hummm Let's see,' Musalenko was absorbed in happy thoughts and started planning his birthday celebration.

First, he decided to pamper himself and make some pancakes for breakfast. Oh, and he would open that jar of sour cherry jam which his grandmother had made and which he had been guarding as the apple of his eye for a whole year for just that particular moment. More than once he'd seen Mur licking his chops and making plans how to get hold of the priceless jar. And there, the day had finally come! He stirred the mixture, took out the new frying pan, turned on the radio and tuned to his favourite station, and immediately began to masterfully toss the favourite pancakes.

One, two, three...9...10 pancakes were stacked on top of each other in the plate, before he could realise it.

Musalenko set the table, took out the precious jar of cherry jam, poured himself a glass of freshly-squeezed orange juice, placed a festive napkin, spread some jam on one pancake for himself and one for Mur (he even put one sour cherry more on Mur's!!!) and



shouted at the top of his voice:

'Muuuur! Good morning, my frieeeeend! Get up! Today is my birthday! You haven't forgotten, have you? I have prepared a festive breakfast! There is a surpriiise!'

Mur, however, did not show up from anywhere. Musalenko, feeling slightly offended, made for the room where his friend was still sleeping - after all Musalenko was the one having a BIRTHDAY! He solemnly opened the door to the cat's bedroom and was just about to playfully pull his friend's tail, when he realised that there was no sign of his furry tom-cat.

'Hummm,' Musalenko thought, 'he must have gone to the playground in front of the residential block for his morning exercises. Or to buy me a present!!!' The birthday boy got excited and cheerfully returned to his festive breakfast.

After having eaten as many as 5 pancakes, Musalenko set about planning the big celebration. He called his best friends - Mrcon the Dragon, who had promised to make the best cake in the world for him, and King Musalen, who was worried that a strange rash had just appeared on his elbow.

'Perhaps because I did gymnastics on the lawn outside the castle and probably the nettles stung me,' explained the King.

Musalenko did not miss calling also the monster Sharptooth, who, to everyone's amazement, had a loose tooth. Anyhow, everyone confirmed that they would come to his birthday party, 'today', at 4:00pm, 15 Musalenski vrah Street, floor 5, apt. 14.



Having invited his friends, Musalenko set about squeezing lemons to make lemonade and spreading delicious Russian salad on slices of bread to make sandwiches as in one old family recipe. Of course, he couldn't help it but prepare his friend Sharptooth's favourite dish – meat-balls soup. Musalenko, too, loved meat-balls soup, but could not fathom out how the monster was capable of eating it at any time of the day.

Then the birthday boy cleaned with the vacuum cleaner, treated the neighbours to candy, went out for a walk in the park to listen to the spring songs of the birds, and to enjoy the beautiful sun shining.

He read a few pages from his favourite book and happily returned home, where everything was ready for the big party.

All Mur had to do was to select music for the party. He was known for his good taste for music.

And in that line of thought, where was Mur? It was almost 4:00pm and there was no sign of the fluffy cat. Any moment now the guests would start coming!

'Where has he gone?' Musalenko worried.

He arranged the plates with the sandwiches - they looked so beautiful and delicious! He put some ice cubes in the jug of lemonade and added a sprig of aromatic mint. He inflated several colourful balloons for decoration and hung up a gigantic HAPPY BIRTHDAY! sign on the door. Then he sat down and started waiting for the guests.

At 4:30 pm, there was no one yet, and Musalenko began to worry. 'It's impossible they have forgotten that I have a birthday, isn't it?' wondered our friend. 'Or they have all decided that it is not today, but tomorrow? Let me call them!' and Musalenko began to dial each of his friends' phone numbers. The strange thing was that none of them answered the call. And Mur was still missing!!! How could he be gone all day?! After all, his best friend had a birthday!!!

It was 5:00pm already and Musalenko had the fidgets. Saddened by the fact that his friends had not come yet and had probably forgotten or got the day wrong, he decided to go to each friend's home and find out what had happened.





First, he stopped by Sharptooth's cave. He knocked, but all he heard was one 'Aaaahuu ... aaaahuu ... huuu.' Musalenko got very worried and immediately rushed into the cave to see what was happening to his dear friend.

He saw Sharptooth's favorite photo album, he also saw the little coconut milk remaining at the bottom of the mug! So the monster had to be out there somewhere. He never went anywhere without taking the photo album and without drinking up his favorite coconut milk. And just while he was thinking all this to himself, Musalenko turned round the corner towards the kitchen.

And all of sudden ... an interesting scene was revealed before his eyes - he saw the monster Sharptooth with a tooth tied to the door-handle. He had got himself well entangled and the poor guy obviously could not say anything but 'uuuhhhhhuuumuuu ... uuuuu!' Musalenko first disentangled his friend and then began to untie the knot on the tooth, but no matter how hard he tried, the knot would not yield.

Then he found a pair of scissors and applied all the force he was capable of, but alas!, obviously that thread was unusual. He also tried with pliers, but it did not work either. Finally, he sat on the ground in exhaustion and sighed.

'Oh, I just wish this thread got untied!!!' And, in an instant, the thread got loose and Sharptooth was free again.



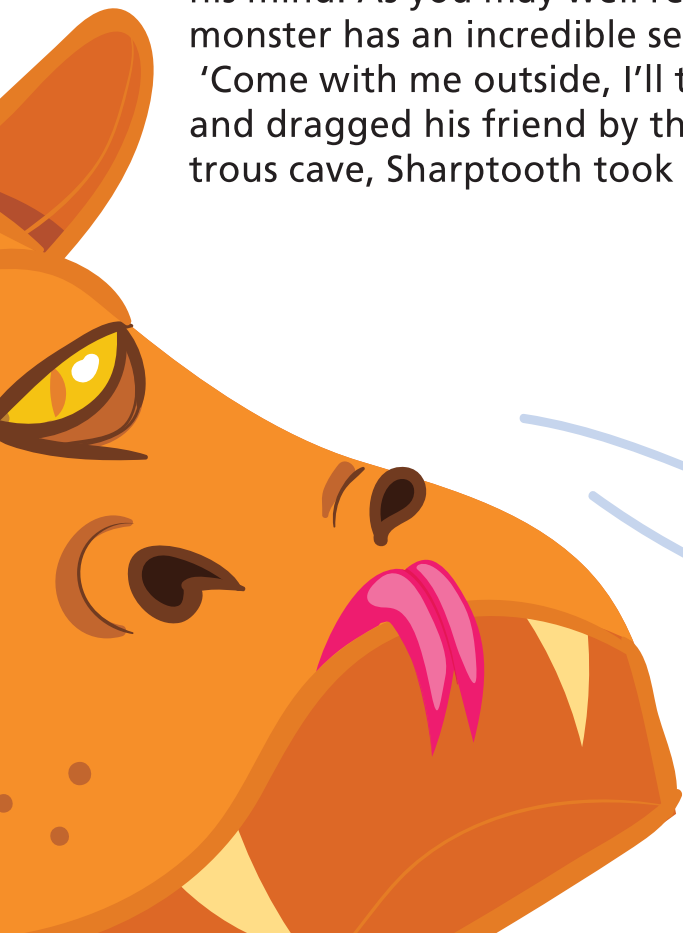
After the two friends had pulled themselves together, one after the amazement, another after the exhaustion for having hung tied to the door all day, they poured some coconut milk in the mugs to refresh themselves and the monster explained to his friend that the thread was really a no ordinary one. A magical one!

'You know how it is when you've got a loose tooth and you desire to remove it, put it under the pillow as a gift for the Tooth Fairy and then wait for a new one to grow. However, I am a monster and I have got monstrously healthy teeth. So, when a tooth is loose, a simple thread doesn't do the job for me, it snaps. That's why I use a magical one. When you tie it, it doesn't loosen until you tell it to, but how you tell it to if it turns out that your tooth isn't ready to fall at all? That's what happened to me. Apparently my monstrous tooth needed more time, and no matter how hard I tried, it didn't fall, so I remained tied to the door. Thank you, my friend, for rescuing me... who knows how much longer I would have had to wait tied to the doorhandle!'

'It's going to be an interesting birthday,' cheerfully said Musalenko and went to call home to see if the cat had returned. He waited for a few ring tones, but no one picked up the phone. 'Very strange, today Mur has gone for the day. I have no idea where he may have disappeared. This is quite unusual for him, I am starting to worry a lot.'

Sharptooth also got worried, but an idea immediately came to his mind. As you may well remember from the previous story, the monster has an incredible sense of smell.

'Come with me outside, I'll try to nose him out,' said the monster and dragged his friend by the arm. After coming outside the monstrous cave, Sharptooth took a deep breath, closed his eyes, rubbed



his nose without letting out the air, then bunged his right nostril up and suddenly hopped. He grabbed Musalenko by the arm and without saying anything, dragged him along an unfamiliar route. They passed through a forest, then through the valley of the laughing roses, then hurried across the city market, and even managed to buy a box of delicious Turkish delight. And thus they went all the way down to Mount Heartthrob, where they finally found the wandering Mur.

'Muuuurrrrr!' shouted Sharptooth, finally releasing the air from his right nostril. 'Mur, hello, Mur!' Oddly enough, Mur looked up and headed in the exact opposite direction. Musalenko and the monster managed to catch up with him after some chasing.

'Mur, why are you running away from us?' Musalenko asked anxiously.

'I'm not running away from you; I'm running towards you!' said the stunned cat. 'The whole thing is that in the morning I woke up very early and started grooming myself. I brushed my teeth, smartened myself up and started trimming my whiskers, but to my misfortune, I was in such a hurry to finish so that I could pick Musalenko's gift before his waking up, that I unwittingly cut off my whole whisker instead of only trimming it. And you know that for us cats it is our whiskers that tell us where left and where right is ... so, when you cut one whisker off, you completely get lost with no idea of your



location. I rushed to get the new gramophone record I had ordered at the store, but I found myself in a completely different place. Then I decided to go home when I saw that it was late, but again I must have unwillingly headed in another direction ... now, I will have to wait for at least two days until my mustache grows enough,' the poor cat moaned.

Musalenko and Sharptooth calmed him, took his... paw, and headed for the lair of the dragon Mercon.

Even before they arrived, they smelled the aroma of burnt caramel with apples and cinnamon. They burst quickly into the cave and what they did see - Mercon was buried under large baking tins full of something black and smoking.

'Mercon, mate, what's going on?' asked Sharptooth, who, as we know, has a great sense of smell and could hardly stand the weird odour of something scorched.

'Ah, my friends, what are you doing here? Musalenko, doooooon't look, for you I'm making the promised most delicious cake in the world!!!' the dragon jumped in surprise. 'Is it time already? What time is it, isn't it only 12:00 at noon?'

'No, Mercon, it's 6:30pm,' the birthday boy replied.

'Oh, nooooo ... How come it is so late? Forgive me, buddy! Indeed, I wanted so much to make for you the best birthday cake. I did promise you. Unfortunately, however, every time I bake it into moderate dragon fire...' Now is the time to bring to notice the fact that Mercon is an absolute opponent to ordinary ovens. He himself was after all a wonderful source of fire. There was nothing tastier than a dish roasted into dragon fire. 'Every time I bake the sponge layers into moderate dragon fire,' Mercon continued, 'right at the end I feel like I'm about to sneeze... and I sneeze, and the cake is scorched into char,' the dragon shrugged his shoulders guiltily.

'Hahaha, Mercon,' laughed Sharptooth, 'don't you know that you dragons can only eat cinnamon, but not smell it as it makes you sneeze? There's cinnamon in the cake, isn't there? I've nosed out rightly.'

'Ah, so thaaat's what it waaas,' the surprised Mercon burst into laughter, 'well, Musalenko, beloved friend of mine, unfortunately I couldn't make for you the best cake in the world.'

'Oh, Mercon, thank you for your diligence. The important thing is





that we have found out why you sneeze. Next year you will make the best cinnamon-free cake for me!' Musalenko hastened to reassure his friend.

All they had to do now was to find out where King Musalen had disappeared. And off went the four friends to the Musalen Castle. There they found King Musalen turning in all directions and trying to scratch the rash which he had mentioned to Musalenko in the morning, and which had settled in the most difficult place to scratch - on his back.

After calming down for about a minute, the King noticed that he was not alone in the room.

'Ah, my friends, what a misfortune has befallen me! I don't know where it came from, but this rash gives me no peace, it itches so badly and I've been trying all day to scratch it...'

Sharptooth approached the poor king and sniffed at him.

'Hummm, yes,' said the monster wisely. 'I thought so! Apparently our mischievous acquaintances Baddy and Evilla have played a trick on you again. This is a rash caused by the magic plant Scratchme-here. The more you scratch, the itchier it is. Take it easy, we will rid you of the suffering now! Mur, we shall have to cut your other whisker, too!

'The other one, too????' the poor cat was startled. 'But if we cut it off too, I will absolutely not know where to go at least until tomorrow night.'

'Don't worry, Mur, I promise I won't leave you alone for a single moment,' Musalenko made a promise.

Mur knew well he could count on his good friend and came round to having his other whisker cut off.

'Now, I'll need a monstrous milk-tooth. Good thing is that mine is loose anyway,' continued Sharptooth and took out the magic thread.

He tied one end to the doorhandle and the other to the loose milk-tooth. Then he asked his friends to slam the door with all their might. However, just before they slammed it, the tooth fell out by itself - perhaps out of sheer fright at the company's resolve to extract it.

'Mercon, it's your turn!' went on Sharptooth. 'Some things really turn out best when prepared into dragon fire. I will mix the oint-

ment, and on three you have to spit fire 384 degrees hot.
'One... two... three!' And Mercon breathed out dragon fire, exactly 384 degrees hot!

Afterwards, King Musalen applied the ointment on his skin and in half a jiff the terrible rash disappeared.

'Ah, my friends, thank you!' rejoiced the King. 'Musalenko, happy birthday to you! I've been waiting all day to greet you, but damn Baddy and Evilla for playing a trick on me again and I couldn't give you a present.'

'Oh dear,' they all said in unison and started fretting about no one having been able to surprise Musalenko.

'Friends, don't grow sad! You are indeed my best birthday present. I am so happy that we are finally together and feel fine. Let's go to my home as I have made wonderful lemonade for you.'

'And, is there any meat-balls soup?' Sharptooth asked out of curiosity.

'Yes, there is, of course, there is!' Musalenko replied with a smile.



And so, the five joyful friends at last made for Musalenko's house to wildly celebrate the long-awaited birthday! Mur immediately chose some wonderful music pieces. Sharptooth and Mercon were fast to mix a multi-colour cake, and King Musalen told some of his incredible stories, which everyone adored to listen to - after all, the most incredible things always happen to kings.

'My friends, I'm going to the kitchen to get some more lemonade, ' said Mur and headed for... the bathroom. Of course, as he had promised, Musalenko immediately pointed him in the right direction.



