

*...in which the outstanding cat finds himself
in an outstanding situation*

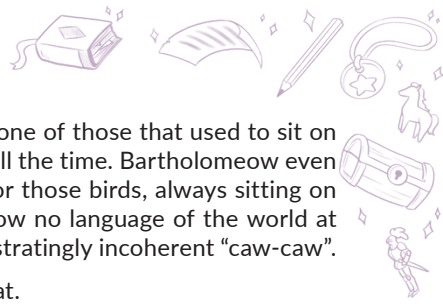
Bartholomeow opened his eyes and saw the abundant skies high above him. Since he's never been outdoors before, at first, he thought it was some strange ceiling.

The cat thought that the endless blue sky with snow white clouds looked a lot like blue bathroom floor tiles someone spilled milk on. He even tried to lick the milk from the sky but didn't quite manage.

He had to get up, shake himself up and look around. Apparently, he was in the middle of a field. There was plenty of grass billowing in the playful wind, resembling the sea with high tides. One side of the field was edged with a forest, the other one disappeared behind the horizon. Some trees and houses could be seen only at the skyline. It looked like this was a village or a settlement. That's where Bartholomeow decided to direct his steps, after grooming his fur thoroughly. "If there are people, then there's food. And where there's food, that's where I am," Bartholomeow thought and moved in the chosen direction along the dusty road crossing the field.

About ten minutes later, Bartholomeow saw a huge stone right in the middle of the field. Something was written on it, but Bartholomeow examined the letters and realized he didn't know how to read them. "No, absolutely nothing is clear," the cat decided, and wanted to move on, but then a bird suddenly popped up on the stone. It was big and black.





At first, Bartholomeow thought it was a crow—one of those that used to sit on a tree growing under the window of his apartment all the time. Bartholomeow even felt a bit disappointed, since he had little respect for those birds, always sitting on the tree and nibbling at seeds. They seemed to know no language of the world at all. The only thing he heard from them was their frustratingly incoherent “caw-caw”.

Meanwhile, the large crow was inspecting the cat.

Fluffing up his tail instinctively, the cat also stared at the crow and asked:

“Hey, Mister...or Miss? I apologize for not knowing your gender and age, but could you please tell me what is written on this giant cobblestone?”

The crow shifted from one leg to the other, looked down, at the inscription on the stone, then at the cat again.

“Useless. This bird seems as dumb as those sitting under my window,” the cat said and was already moving on, when the large crow said:

“Ca-a-a-aw... I don’t know what’s written here.”

The cat slowly turned, looked around and clarified:

“Was it you that just spoke?”

“Caw! I mean yes!” The crow replied and looked around warily. “What, is there anyone else here?”

“No. I just didn’t know that crows could speak.”

“I’m not a crow. Caw! I’m a raven.”

“Ah, that explains why you are so big, then. Tell me, raven, do you have a name?”

“A-a-a-ah... Name? My name? You want to know my name?”

“Yes, your name,” the cat said and thought to himself, *“You’ve learned how to speak, sure, but you are still no smarter than your kin from the tree.”*

“Noname”.

“A name in the magic language. Interesting,” the cat drawled thoughtfully. “So, you must know the magic language, then?”

“No,” the raven said with his head low. “There were times I tried to learn it, but eventually failed. This story is too sad. Caw, caw!” The raven concluded.

“Fine. You’ll tell me later. Enough of sad stories for now,” the cat retorted.

“What is your sad story?” The raven asked curiously.

“I found myself who knows where and have no idea when I’ll get something to eat.” Starving, the cat looked at the raven and saw fried poultry in his place: delicious fat was running down the crispy crust, and the amazing aroma of fried meat made him dizzy. The cat was almost ready to jump and catch his lunch. But then the wind from the forest died down, and there was the raven on the stone instead of the fried chicken. The cat shook his head and rubbed his eyes with his paws.



“Well, tell me, Noname, where can I find some food? As per my calculations, I haven’t eaten for several hours which threatens me with a weight loss and imminent death by starvation. And I don’t want to grow thin or die.”

“Caw! There’s a settlement ten minute’s flight from here. That’s where I eat. Come with me, I think you’ll find some table scraps as well.”

“Table scraps? Are you insane? What table scraps? I deserve the best!”

“Caw? Why?” Asked the raven, genuinely surprised.

“Because I’m a cat, and cats deserve the best!”

