The war

Episode 1: Joris and his friends

It was war. The kings of The Blues and The Reds had a violent row.

Every day, soldiers of The Reds and The Blues went to the battlefield and started to fight with each other. Every evening, they returned home, tired.

Soldiers got wounded and some died. The war was lasting forever. Nobody remembered how it started. And no one knew how to stop it.

The king of The Reds counted every evening. He calculated how much soldiers he had left. ‘Far too little soldiers are left! Their number will not suffice to win the war!’ he lamented. ’Cheer up, father’, his son answered. ‘We will prevail, you will see! And we will all be happy again!’

The king of The Reds ordered his soldiers to keep on fighting.

The king of The Blues was also counting. He also had too little soldiers left.

And he also had a son, Joris. But Joris…actually did not know what to say to comfort his father. In fact, Joris had no interest whatsoever in the war.

He didn’t have any interests at all. His father made him wear the Blue soldiers’ uniform, but he did not fight along, he was too young. He preferred to sit on a tree the entire day. He had no real friends to play with. Everyone had fled the war. Only Sheep, Dog, Cat, Cow and Pigeon were left. They were sitting at the pond with Joris. It was night, and peaceful. For the time being, anyway. The soldiers were too tired to fight. Tomorrow, they would resume fighting. Joris was fond of his animal friends. He found that they were much smarter than most people. It was almost dark. Joris looked at his animal friends, one by one. He missed something. ‘Where has Pigeon gone to?’ he finally asked. ‘Beuh, getting a bit of fresh air’, mooed Cow. ‘She will come back’.

Joris looked at Sheep and said: ‘I think I will stay here to sleep.

Then we will all be waiting for Pigeon. Is that OK with you ? ‘Mèèè, fine’ nodded Sheep, and he tucked up Joris with his soft wool. Night fell. Joris was sleeping. He had a restless sleep and wakened continuously. He wondered where Pigeon was.

(wall chart 1: the pond)

Episode 2: At land, at sea and in the air

Pigeon returned in the middle of the night. She was completely upset. ‘Rookoo rookoo, Joris, Joris, come quickly! Everything is going all wrong, utterly wrong!’ Pigeon cooed. Her flapping about wakened Joris and all the animals. ‘What is the matter, Pigeon?’ Joris asked. ‘Where do you come from?’ ‘From everywhere! Rookoo, rookoo, everything is going all wrong, utterly wrong!’ she kept on lamenting. ‘Come along, Joris, quickly, I will show you!’

Joris and the animals were wide awake. They wanted to know what had upset Pigeon, so they followed the bird. It was a long, dark night. They made no noise. Joris rode on Sheep’s back, he was small enough. So they ran throughout the night. No one saw them.

But what Pigeon showed them…they could simply not believe their own eyes! But they had to, it was real. Nobody knew where The Blues ended and where The Reds began, because everything looked the same: soldiers were sleeping at the front in trenches, tired of fighting. Behind it, there used to be houses with beautiful gardens, shops, a school: everything was destroyed. Demolished by bombs from airplanes, by bullets from guns and bombs from canons…(wall charts 2, 3 and 6: the front, scars in the landscape, in the air)

There were quite some wounded soldiers, but scarcely any medicines and hospitals, because they were also destroyed. (wall chart 4: medical service).

The nurses and doctors in the tents behind the frontline helped wherever they could. But they could not do very much. Cat, that used to live with a doctor, could not believe her own eyes.

(illustration 5: at sea) Even the sea of The Blues was no longer safe, because Joris and his friends could see ships with bombs, both above and under water…

‘Do you see now, rookoo, rookoo! This is wrong! Utterly wrong!’ Pigeon shouted.

’Yes’, said Joris softly. ‘This is indeed very, very wrong.’ Tired and sad, Joris returned on the back of Sheep to their sleeping place at the pond.

The animals were also quiet. Joris picked a red flower and stared at it.

It was a poppy.

Episode 3: And then it became very quiet…

Joris woke up the following day.

Sheep was still asleep, but the other animals had already gone up.

A letter was lying next to him. ‘It was brought by a carrier pigeon of The Reds, rookoo, rookoo’ Pigeon informed him. Joris opened the letter, with a red ribbon and a red seal around the paper. He read the message, written in red letters:

*My father has only very few soldiers left and your father does not have many soldiers left either. Mount your horse and come to the battlefield, armed.*

*If you dare, at least. We will be fighting, man to man. Whoever wins the duel, will be the winner of the war!*

*Julius The Red, son of the king of The Reds*

Joris sighed. He did not like horse-riding. At ten o’clock, Joris went to the agreed rendezvous on Sheep’s back. His animal friends followed at a distance. ‘Attention!’ Julius blared from a distance, mounted on his horse. ‘What will we have now…’ Joris muttered. Sheep came closer, while Joris was sitting on its back. Sheep was not at all at ease, and neither was Joris. They did not have any weapons and he was utterly inexperienced as regards fighting. ‘Mèèèèè!’ Sheep bleated. Julius’ horse was so nervous that it cavorted. Julius fell off his horse. Joris rushed towards Julius. ’I do hope that you did not hurt yourself?’ Joris inquired. But Julius did not answer. He was lying on the ground, unconscious.

‘That is unfair, that does not count!’ somebody shouted. It were the soldiers of The Reds who came riding behind Julius. Joris wanted to explain them that it was not his fault. That Sheep was simply afraid… But the soldiers were shouting and quite angry. Joris fled on Sheep’s back, followed by his animal friends. They hided themselves at the pond. It already had become midday and the soldiers had resumed fighting. The animals could hear the noise of the raging battle. It sounded worse than ever. But Joris … no longer paid any attention. He was thinking hard and deep, but he could not come up with an answer. How could this war be put to an end ?

Meanwhile, Cow and Sheep started to graze, Cat and Dog were playing a game and Pigeon was flying around. It was already late in the afternoon, and Joris still had not found a solution. It became suspiciously quiet around them. Was it that late already ? Did the soldiers already stop fighting? ‘How very strange’, Joris told the animals, ‘mostly, they continue fighting until sundown. What could be the matter? Maybe we should take a look. It is suspiciously quiet’.

The animals nodded. Joris carefully took a glance at the battlefield from behind a hill. The fighting had stopped. The soldiers tumbled to their own side of the battlefield. Some of them had trouble walking, and were supported by their comrades. They all looked as if they were simply put up.

‘Woof, they do not look well at all’, Dog barked. ‘Indeed’, Cat mew. ‘They are even skinnier than my slim figure! That cannot be healthy at all.

‘Booh, but why don’t they simply stop fighting?’ Cow mooed. ‘Mèèèh, because their kings want them to continue fighting’, Sheep bleated.

‘Do you know what? I will check the soldier’s camp, woof’, Dog barked.

’Miaow, I will accompany you’, Cat said. ‘I want to know what is going on.’

‘Meeuh, I also want to have a look’, Cow mooed. ‘Some soldiers seem to be ill.’ ‘Indeed, mèèèh’, the smart Sheep bleated. ‘These soldiers...they look very pale. And dirty, bah! If they stop fighting now, we can immediately examine them. We will never get an opportunity like this.’

And so it happened. Cat and Dog cautiously approached the king of The Blues’s camp. Cow and Sheep were grazing unnoticed near the camp of The Reds. Joris had to remain where he was. The frontline was far too dangerous for a child. Pigeon would be flying back and forth and keep a careful watch. Soon, the animals returned. Cow and Sheep rendered their account: ’Meeuh-meeuh, bèèè! Joris, the king of The Reds is ill! And many of his soldiers as well! There are rats, mice and other vermin crawling around, which are transmitting diseases. It is extremely dirty and filthy in The Reds. The king is red of misery!’

Cat and Dog also reported back. ’Miaow, woof-woof! Joris, your father, the king of The Blues is ill. He is nearly dying from hunger, and his soldiers as well. All farmers have gone away, and there is no more grain, no more bread. Nobody is in charge of food supplies. The soldiers are shaking from the cold. They are all looking pale and blue! And the other people…’ Cat now miaowed very quietly.

‘What about the other people? And where have all the children gone to?’ Joris asked. ‘They have run away, woof’ Dog answered. ‘And they are also tired, dirty and ill as well as terribly frightened.’

(wall charts 7 and 8: fleeing, behind the frontlines)

Joris was shocked. The great war was even worse than he had thought.

Episode 4: Commemoration

The following morning, all the animals were awake early. They immediately looked at Joris, who was writing assiduously. He wrote two letters: one written in red ink, and another one in blue ink. Then he attached the two letters around Pigeon’s leg and he said: ‘Pigeon, bring these letters to the two kings. The red letter is addressed to the king of The Reds, the blue letter is for my father, the king of The Blues.’ Pigeon immediately flew away.

Then, Joris said to sheep, Cow, Cat and Dog: ‘Come on, let’s go to Purple Mountain’.

Purple Mountain was not so far away from the pond where the animals had been staying. It was situated somewhat in between The Reds and The Blues. The friends waited for a while. Then Joris saw that both kings were approaching, he hid himself and waited. He hoped that his plan would work out. The animals waited patiently.

Both kings came hobbling. It was a grim spectacle: the king of The Blues really looked blue of the cold and hunger, and the king of The Reds looked red of illness and fever. The kings observed each other for a long time. Then they noticed the animals, which imperturbably looked back. Then, Pigeon spoke: ‘Rookoo! You have read the letter that I delivered. That is good. These animals can help you and your soldiers. Cow and Sheep can give milk and wool, to protect you against hunger and cold. Cat and Dog can catch rats, mice and other vermin. And Cat is an excellent nurse. She can cure The Reds from all illnesses. But only under one condition, rookoo, rookoo…’

‘Yes’, coughed the king of The Reds, ‘I know that’.

‘Yes,’ the king of The Blues shivered, ‘it was mentioned in the letter’.

‘The animals will only help us if…’ ‘…if we stop fighting and all come to Purple Mountain’, the king of The Reds added ‘Exactly, rookoo! All together’ Pigeon said.

And so it happened: Cat and Dog chased off all rats, mice and diseases from The Reds. Following one week of camping near Purple Mountain, all citizens of The Reds were healthy again. Cow and Sheep provided milk and wool. All inhabitants of The Blues received food and a woolen sweater. Because they had to stay in the immediate vicinity of Purple Mountain, near the animals, the residents of The Reds and The Blues started to talk to each other. First, they nodded, then they said hello. The women and the children of the soldiers paid a visit to Purple Mountain.

The women of The Reds and The Blues cooked meals together, they knitted sweaters and scarfs and handed them out. The children of The Blues and The Reds played games together. On the tenth day, the battlefield underneath Purple Mountain seemed like a village. When the kings and the soldiers saw that, they no longer felt like fighting.

From a distance, Joris noticed that his plan was working. Pigeon reported that the kings had decided to put an end to the war. And Joris thought: ‘I never had an army. But thanks to me and my friends, the war is over.’

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