



Kalle Cool and the Thing about Friendship – Vol. 1

By Cally Stronk & Christian Friedrich,
illustrated by Constanze von Kitzing
5+ / 128 pp. / 4-colour print

English-language translation © Ruth Martin

[...]

The grey animal

Behind him, the roaring is even louder now. The sucking monster has almost reached him! “Come on Kalle, hurry up!” the little hamster thinks, desperately. He tries with all his might to free himself. He sucks in his stomach a little bit more and finally...

PLOP, he’s made it! Kalle somersaults out through the letterbox and lands in the hallway outside the apartment door. Right beside his suitcase.

He’s free at last!

Now to catch his breath. Kalle’s little hamster heart is still beating wildly.

He takes a look around. “I’ve never been here before,” he thinks.

There is a staircase over there leading down. That must be the right way! One step at a time, the little hamster struggles down the stairs. He has nearly reached the bottom when, out of the corner of his eye, he sees something sliding down the bannister. It’s a fluffy grey animal with big ears and a long tail.

“Hey, why aren’t you taking the slide?” it croaks, and starts to laugh.

“Er... I didn’t know... I mean...”

Kalle looks more closely at the furry grey creature.

“Now tell me, what kind of animal *are* you?”

“Oh, you can work **rat** out – I mean, work that out!” says the grey animal, laughing again.

“Erm, a goldfish? Or a crocodile?”

“Hey, I’m grey!”

“I’ve got it! Of course! You’re an elephant!”

Suddenly, the door opens and a gigantic two-legged animal comes in, wearing a yellow jacket, a yellow hat and carrying a yellow bag.

“Quick, let’s get out of here!” cries the grey animal, racing for the door. Kalle follows. The two of them slip out of the building unnoticed.

“By the way, I’m **Rosie**,” says the animal.

“Huh?” Kalle says in surprise. “I thought you were **grey!**”

“No, Rosie is my name! And I’m an especially fine creature: a real sewer rat.”

“Kalle,” says Kalle. “My name’s Kalle, and I’m a golden hamster.”

Rosie nods.

Kalle looks around in amazement.

There are two-leggers and four-leggers everywhere. And so many things that Kalle has never seen before.

“Wow, so this is the big, wide world!”

Grave danger

“Gosh, what’s that smell? It smells completely different out here from where I live.” There is an aroma of flowers, chewing gum and chips. “So, this is the smell of freedom. Great!”

“Well, it also smells a bit like dog poo round here!” says Rosie, giggling.

Suddenly there is a squeak right next to the little hamster. At the last second he manages to jump out of the way as a wheel rolls past, ten times bigger than his hamster wheel. Kalle shrinks back in fear. But then suddenly, a great shadow falls over him... He leaps aside again.

Right beside him, a huge shoe thunders down onto the pavement. A two-legger nearly trod on him. Kalle gasps. Quick, they have to get away from here! But where to?

He stands still for a minute to catch his breath and puts his suitcase down. But just then, he is snatched off his feet and pulled to one side. He looks into Rosie’s eyes in shock. It was a good thing the rat pulled him out of the road! Because where he was just standing, an enormous metal box is now running over his suitcase.

“Oh no, my things!” the little hamster snuffles in horror. Rosie gives Kalle a sympathetic look.

“You might easily have been flattened, too! You need to be more careful!”

When Kalle has calmed down a bit, the rat says goodbye.

“Look after yourself! It’s best to stay away from the big roads!” she tells him as she leaves, before disappearing round the nearest corner.

And then Kalle is alone. He takes a deep lungful of the good city air, and then sets off to explore the big, wide world at long last.

[...]

“They’re building a house here. But everyone has gone home now. You know, I spend a lot of time watching the two-leggers, and I know their world pretty well.” Rosie grins mischievously.

Kalle looks around. He can’t get over his amazement. “Hamsterrific, this place is huge!”

“Come with me, I want to show you something.” Rosie runs across the scaffolding and jumps onto a little box. “Right, all aboard, please! This here is a lift. The two-leggers use them because they’re too lazy to walk up steps. When I press this button, we’re going to whoosh upwards.”

Kalle leaps onto the lift just in time, as it has already begun to move.

They go higher and higher.

Kalle counts the floors:

“1, 7, 4, eleventeen, forty-twelve...”

When they reach the top, the two animals hop down from the lift.

Kalle looks around with a big smile on his face. He feels truly free with Rosie.

“What’s over there, then?” Kalle walks off across the scaffolding planks.

“Stop! Don’t go any further!” the rat shouts suddenly. “That’s the end of the scaffolding!”
But Kalle’s paws have already lost their grip.

“Aaargh... I’m falling!” he cries out – but then he feels Rosie’s paw. She holds on to him with all her strength, and pulls him back up.

“Th-th-thank you!” Kalle stammers.

“That was close!” Rosie remarks, looking at Kalle with a sigh. “You’ve definitely still got a few things to learn! Alright, sit down for a minute. We need a little snack to get over the shock.”

Rosie hands Kalle a breadcrumb.

“The two-leggers had their breakfast sandwiches here this morning, and left these tasty morsels behind. Here’s one for you, and one for me.”

“Hamsterlicious!” Kalle cries delightedly. The crumb smells of butter, cheese and a salad leaf.

[...]

Kalle and Rosie run through the tall grass for a little while.

Finally, they reach a duck pond.

“The sea!” Kalle shouts in delight. “It’s more beautiful than I ever imagined! That *is* the sea, right? I expect it’s the South Baltic Caribbean!”

Rosie is just about to reply when there is a sudden buzzing sound beside them.

“What tasty morsels do we have here? I’m going to bite you now, **mozzie-mozzie-mozzie** and suck out your blood! Hahahaha!” It’s a mosquito. With a nasty-looking sharp point instead of a nose.

It gives Kalle a terrible fright. Can’t they be left in peace anywhere?

Just as the fly is buzzing towards the little hamster, suddenly – **SPLAT** – a tongue appears out of the pond. It snaps up the fly, and disappears again. There is a **GULP**. Kalle and Rosie turn around in astonishment.

A frog is sitting on a rock in the water. He grins and licks his lips.

“Mmm... I bet that was a tasty breakfast,” Rosie mutters. “Thank you for helping us!”

“Right, it’s t-t-time to be on our way!” Kalle stutters, still feeling scared. “That thing looked pretty dangerous! So, um, who are you, then?”

“Ribbit,” says the frog.

“No, I mean, what’s your name?” Kalle tries again.

“Ribbit,” says the frog.

Kalle is a bit confused. “Erm, can’t you talk?”

The frog laughs. Then he suddenly gets to his feet and sings:

“Pleased to meet you, I’m Croakmaster **Ribbit!**

Living the pond life here in my cribbit!

I’m a real fly guy, no flibbertigibbet...”

The frog starts croaking:

Ribbity ribbit, ribbit ribbit ribbit...

“Hey, that’s a really cool rhythm! Wait a minute, let me try something,” Kalle suddenly exclaims, and then he starts to sing: “I’m on the bank,” he sings.

The frog joins in at once: “And I’m in the pond!”

“I’m on the bank!” – “And I’m in the pond!”

“I’m on the bank!” – “And I’m in the pond!”

“I’m on the bank!” – “And I’m in the pond!”

Rosie laughs: “Hey, let me join in, too!” and starts singing in her croaky voice:

“One on the bank, and one in the pond.”

One on the bank, and one in the pond.
One on the bank, and one in the pond –
And I'm in the grass here, playing this frond!"
Rosie grabs a blade of grass and begins to toot.
Then the hamster and the frog start from the beginning again.
It's great fun making music together.
The three of them sing and dance and laugh in delight.

Kalle is happy. For a moment, he thinks about the piggy bank, the teddy bear and even the cat on the poster who always listened so patiently to him. But this is much better.

"Hey, making music with you is hamsterful!" he cries enthusiastically. "You know when you feel something deep inside, and you just know it's right? That's how music is for me."

The little hamster beams.

Rosie grins: "That's how food is for me!"

Ribbit the frog nods eagerly. "That's music AND food for me! Ribbit!" he says, with a laugh.

The three of them sit there for a long time, singing, laughing and having fun.

When it gets dark, they find a comfy spot under a jetty, and eventually they fall asleep.

But then it starts to rain....

"Get up, sleepyhead!" Rosie says, giving Kalle a prod.

"Hey, why are you waking me so early in the afternoon?" the little hamster grumbles, yawning.

"If you carry on sleeping, you'll be having a bath in a minute, whether you like it or not. Look, it's been raining all night, and it still hasn't stopped. All that ground is underwater already. We should get to safety! Hey Croakmaster, you're the best swimmer, what do you suggest?"

Kalle looks around in a panic. The water really is rising. And he can't swim!

"Oh no, Rosie and I are going to drown!" he cries in horror. "And I'm such a great artist, too. What a loss to the world!"

"Rubbish!" the frog croaks, suddenly. He points to an object lying not far away. And he's right, it really is rubbish: an empty plastic tub that someone has thrown away. The Croakmaster hops happily over to it and puts it into the water like a boat. Then he grabs an old lolly stick to use as an oar and jumps aboard. Rosie giggles, and soon the three friends have all climbed into the tub.

"I'm glad you understood what I meant. I don't like to ribbit about the bush!" says the frog. And off they go.