

Sample Translation

*Laika in the Stars*

(Laika tussen de sterren)

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## LAIKA

Laika enjoyed pottering around the streets. She'd walk up and down the pavements in search of a crust of bread. When she wanted to sleep, she'd look for a sheltered spot. Sometimes in a park. Sometimes in an abandoned house. Sometimes she'd climb through the open basement window of a baker's shop. She'd drink water from puddles. Or she'd just pop over to the banks of the Moskva, the river that flows through the centre of Moscow.

Laika was a stray. She belonged to herself, not to anyone else. She was just like the birds in the city: free. She had no name and wore no collar. No one took her out for a walk, because she was already out. Perhaps she'd get the occasional pat from someone who saw her. A passer-by who'd say: 'Hello! Good dog.'

She wasn't big. She came no higher than your knee. Her head was brown, and her body was white with brown patches. There was a pale stripe over her nose. One ear stood up straight and the other flapped forward.

Fifty years ago, there were lots of dogs like that roaming free on the streets of Moscow. They were there for the taking. And that's precisely what happened to Laika.

At that time, humankind had discovered just about everything in the world that there was to discover. Every place on earth had been found. So instead of looking at the horizon, people now began to look upwards. They saw the moon. They saw the vast starry sky. They saw space and it issued them a challenge: 'Hey, you humans, what's keeping you?'

Then the people looked at one another again. They clenched their fists and raised them to the skies. 'Just you wait!' they shouted upwards. 'Before you know it, you won't be a mystery any longer. We're coming to discover you. We're coming to figure you out. We're coming to see what you've got to offer.'

They set to work and built all kinds of rockets. And when they had a rocket that worked, they wanted to find out if living creatures could travel in it too. But,

of course, humans didn't use themselves for test flights. No one wanted to cross their fingers and be shot into the skies like a firework. Just imagine – a one-way ticket into space. No way.

The people needed animals. Animals that were a bit like them. So no fishes, or spiders, but monkeys and dogs. Cats and rabbits.

Laika was rummaging around the streets as usual one day, when a car stopped beside her. Someone got out, grabbed her by the scruff of the neck and pulled her into the car.

The following morning, the scientists took a good look at her. She was healthy and she looked like a Russian spitz-type dog. The Russian name for that breed of dog is 'Laika'. And *layat* also means 'to bark' in Russian, and she probably did a lot of that in the beginning. So Laika became her name. It was a name that would go a long way. Because on that day Laika started training to become a space-traveller.

Before going up into the sky, Laika had to be trained. She had to learn to stay calm in a confined space. They practised on the ground with the cabin that she would later travel in. The cabin was fixed to a long arm and spun around, so that she could get used to the speed of take-off.

Laika was given a spacesuit and they also made her listen to noise, so that it wouldn't scare her too much when she was launched into space. She wouldn't be given any pills to keep her calm during the flight. It all had to be real. The researchers wanted to know precisely how she would react. And they thought it wouldn't be real enough if she was given pills to calm her down.

On 3 November 1957, the time had come. Laika was placed in the nose cone of Sputnik 2. She was given a little suit with straps. The straps tied her down, so that she'd stay in place. There was food and water and fresh air. Her pee and poo were neatly collected. And there was a camera to keep an eye on her. She also had

devices on her body that could measure her heart rate. So the people who stayed behind on earth would know how Laika was doing.

Laika got one final pat on the head. '*Schastlivogo puti!*' they said. 'Bon voyage.' And then they shut the capsule she was sitting in. Flames shot out of the rocket and Laika took off with a roaring din that made the ground shake. They had already practised the take-off with her in the laboratory, but things in a lab can never be as real as the real thing.

Laika's heart started banging away like crazy. The gauges on the screen showed that her heart rate was three times higher than normal. But once she was up in the air she calmed down. Sputnik 2 commenced its first orbit of the earth. And half an hour later, when that first orbit had been completed, the corks popped out of Russian champagne bottles. Laika was a hero. She was the first living creature to have made an orbit of the earth.

Laika stamps and badges were made. All at once she became the most famous dog in the world and far beyond. No one called their dog Fido any more, or Rover or Lassie. Laika was the name that you heard on patches of grass everywhere. Not because the dogs were barking so much, but because their owners wanted to honour the brave little stray. The stray that was sent out to explore the universe.

The triumphant news was sent all over the world: *Russians send space-dog into orbit around the earth*. The Americans were absolutely green with envy. They were also practising with rockets, but they'd never managed to do anything like this. And as the Russians celebrated, Laika flew on. Round and round and round. On 18 April 1958, Sputnik 2 stopped after over two thousand orbits. The rocket fell back to earth 165 days later and burned up in the earth's atmosphere.

Laika was already dead at that point. You could say it was a blessing in disguise. She died during only the fourth orbit of the earth, on that first triumphant day. There were problems with the temperature. It became far too hot in the cabin and Laika died from heat exhaustion.

The Russians knew beforehand that Laika would never return. They could send a rocket into orbit around the earth, but they weren't able to bring it back

safely. Only they didn't tell people about that bit of bad news. If they had done, the Russian scientists wouldn't have been quite such big heroes.

That was their goal, however: to bring a rocket back to earth in one piece. Because they wanted to be able to fly in it themselves one day. And so the Russians began to work on rockets with a shield that could withstand the incredible heat of re-entry. And indeed, not long after, the Russians succeeded in building a rocket with a heat-resistant shield.

Of course they didn't go and try it out for themselves for the time being. First they had to see whether the shield would actually work. To test it out, they plucked Belka and Strelka from the streets. Two dogs with wonderful names. *Belka* means 'squirrel' and *Strelka* is 'little arrow'. They were put into Sputnik 5 together. On 19 August 1960, everyone on the vast steppes of Kazakhstan held their breath.

Sputnik 5 shot into the air and did seventeen orbits around the earth. Twenty-four hours later, the Sputnik's capsule returned safely to earth on a parachute. Belka and Strelka leapt out, still trembling a little.

Once again Russia rejoiced and blew a big raspberry at America. The president of America congratulated the Russians. That was a big deal, because America and Russia were big enemies at the time. They weren't far off aiming a few rockets at each other instead of into space. And these rockets wouldn't have dogs sitting in them, but a big load of explosives.

**Strelka's puppies** Belka and Strelka weren't the only animals on board Sputnik 5. They were accompanied by a rabbit, forty mice, two rats, fruit flies, plants and fungi. All of the animals and plants survived the flight. When Strelka had a litter of puppies, one of them was sent to America as a present. They called her Pushinka, which is Russian for 'fluffy'. Pushinka had pups as well. Her great-great-great-grandchildren are still running around on earth.

Strelka, the little arrow, had a litter of six healthy puppies after her space flight. The Russians sent one of the puppies to the daughter of the American president. She was absolutely thrilled with it. But it meant that her father, President

Kennedy, could see the Russian success sitting on his daughter's lap every day. It was a painful sight. Because America was doing its very best as well. But the apes they sent up into the sky often didn't survive the flight. And when they did return to earth, the Americans couldn't find the capsule with the apes in. The capsule was floating around somewhere at sea. Their spaceship had become a sea-going ship bobbing about on the waves. Well, actually more like a little rowing boat lost at sea.

When people thought that it was safe enough in space, they went to take a look for themselves. This time they left the dogs and apes at home, but they did take other animals with them. Mice and fishes and spiders and flies. They did experiments with them to see what happened. One time, for example, they took Arabella along. Arabella was a garden spider. Everyone was keen to find out what her web would look like up there in space.

As soon as she was up in orbit, Arabella started her first space-web. It went a little bit higgledy-piggledy, but she calmly continued spinning and floating. She didn't know which way was up and which way was down, so her web looked as though she'd had too much whisky to drink. But it was round in shape and when she'd finished it she scuttled to its centre to lie in wait for a space-fly.

This spider experiment was thought up by a schoolgirl. They often do that, even nowadays: ask schoolchildren to come up with ideas. The Americans held a competition later to see who could invent the best experiment. One boy wanted to see how flying insects would move when they were weightless in space. So the astronauts took butterflies on their next flight, and bees and flies.

The answer came quickly. The butterflies all hid away in the darkest corner when they realised they were weightless. The bees didn't – they just kept on flying. Until they were so tired from all that flying that they died. And once they were dead, they still kept on floating in the air. And the flies? Yes, those ugly, useless little beasts that drive you crazy in the summer, they had the time of their lives. They realised immediately that they could fly without wings. They used

one leg to push themselves off from the edge of the container they were in and just floated away. For the entire journey they performed an air-ballet in slow motion and returned to earth, perfectly happy.

**Hector the space-rat** In America, the scientists knew a lot more about apes than dogs, and so they worked with different sorts of apes. In Russia, they knew much more about dogs, so they preferred to do experiments with dogs. Europe didn't want to get left behind, so in 1961 France sent Hector the space-rat into the sky, from the Sahara in north Africa. Hector wore a tiny little spacesuit. During the flight he dangled by metal hooks that were attached to the suit. On earth they could easily keep track of what was happening to his brain, his lungs and his heart. Hector came back healthy to earth and was the hero of the French.

One time the astronauts took some sticklebacks in a tank with them. Once they were in space, the fish began to do peculiar circuits of the tank. Upside down and from top to bottom, because, like Arabella the spider, they no longer knew what was up and what was down. The astronauts had expected this, but what would these sticklebacks' babies do? Babies that were born in space? Fortunately, some babies soon arrived. What do you think happened? The little ones swam normal circuits of the tank. As though being in space was the most natural thing in the world. By now their parents had also grasped how to do it. So it was something that could be learnt.

When the fish family returned to earth, the little ones had no idea what was going on. Just like their parents in space, they were completely confused. They had to learn to swim all over again, but that went fine as well after a while.

Once the starry sky asked us what was keeping us, it didn't take us long to get there. But the sky is so big that our voyage of discovery is no more than child's play. Because behind the sky that we see, there's another sky and behind that there's another one. We're surrounded by infinity. And yet, when you look upwards, at all those trillions of stars, then it seems as though one of them is twinkling most beautifully of all. A star that's giving out so much light that you'll

never forget it. It's the star of the bravest explorer ever. It's the star of Laika: a star amongst stars.

## MOBY

One day Moby was swimming in the sea. He jumped, he dived, he darted. The ocean was huge and the waves were endless.

Then came a ship and a net, and Moby was hauled in. And then he went via the Gulf of Mexico to America and on to Harderwijk in the Netherlands. In the sea he was just another dolphin. But in the new Dolfinarium he became the biggest star in the western hemisphere. A star of the water, a god of the jump, a dolphin of the air.

Nowadays dolphins aren't just plucked, whoosh, out of the sea. But they used to be. It was allowed back then. So when the Dolfinarium opened its doors in 1965, four dolphins were flown in. Fresh from the sea. And Moby was one of them.

Millions of people got to see him in the following years, because he lived to a ripe old age. In 2002, he died at the age of forty-four. One day he fell asleep and he sank to the bottom of the bay, and everyone knew: today a legend died.

All of the dolphin trainers still mention his name. Even though they really, really love Apollo, Tucker, Beachie, Roxy, Amtan and the rest, Moby remains etched into their memories. 'We really should put up a statue in his memory,' say the trainers. 'Because there'll never be another dolphin like him.'

The Dolfinarium now has the largest group of dolphins in the whole of Europe. Twenty-seven dolphins in total. Ten of them take part in the indoor show. They're the big guys. And the rest of them swim outside in a large bay. When you go up to the bay and stand close to the edge of the water, you can see their eyes. Eyes that look at you. Very quietly, very curiously. And because dolphin skin is the same grey as the water, it seems just as though the twinkling little eyes are floating. As though the bay's looking at you, as though the water itself has grown eyes. But if you say 'Hello, how are you? Are you having fun in there?', then the eyes start moving. Then the water starts moving. Then a snout appears. A laughing snout.

**The tastiest fish** Dolphins eat live fish. But in captivity they have to learn to eat dead fish. They're given herring, whiting, mackerel, sprat and squid. These fish are specially caught in the cleanest part of the ocean for all of the dolphinariums in Europe. The dolphins get the best of the best. The fish that they eat is often a good deal better than the fish from our local fishmonger's!

The dolphins in the bay swim in real seawater. The people from the Dolfinarium had research done to find out where the North Sea was at its cleanest. Once they had located that spot, they sent out a couple of ships. The ships filled their holds with fifteen million litres of the purest seawater. The ships then transferred the water into smaller boats that took it to Harderwijk, where it was used to fill the bay. As well as dolphins, there are fish swimming around in the water and small crabs scuttling along the bottom.

Large filters are used to keep the water clean. It's not a problem if the water evaporates. The rain just tops it up again. And the water always stays salty enough, because the salt doesn't evaporate with the water.

Beachie, a large male dolphin, is performing a sort of concerto for dolphin and whistle. A girl is kneeling on a raft in the water in front of him. She's cheering him on.

'Good boy, Beachie,' says the trainer, who's sitting beside them. 'Can you tell how Beachie sings?' he asks the girl.

The girl points at the dolphin's mouth, which is wide open.

'No, that's not it,' says the trainer. 'Beachie sings through the hole in his head. The air hole.'

The girl looks doubtfully at the trainer and says: 'Nooo.' And 'He doesn't!'

'He really does,' says the trainer. 'Just take a look.'

But the girl shakes her head wildly. In the meantime, Beachie just keeps on chirping away. Then the trainer says that Beachie has to stop his concerto for a

moment. He beckons him even closer. Beachie's snout is almost bobbing on top on the raft.

'Now, pay attention,' says the trainer to the girl. He gets Beachie to sing again and at the same time he clamps his hands firmly around Beachie's snout. Not a breath of air can get through. But Beachie isn't at all bothered and he just starts whistling again. The girl takes hold of his snout now as well.

It's like a magic trick. As though Beachie's some sort of ventriloquist. But then the girl sees the air hole. It's going up and down. 'Now can you see how he does it?' asks the trainer. They let Beachie go, and he takes a piece of fish. 'Can I give him the fish?' asks the girl. 'Of course you can,' says the trainer. 'Just throw it and aim well, eh?' Beachie opens his mouth and catches the fish. The trainer and the girl both give him a round of applause.

The girl on the raft isn't just sitting there for the sake of it. She's there to learn. And she's not the only one. Further along there are two other children. They both have a dolphin trainer and a therapist with them. The therapist is there to help with particular problems. Problems with your behaviour, for example, or with your speech.

There are children who have difficulty talking, like the girl on the raft. She can't say complete sentences, even though she's already seven. She points and says: 'Dolphin sing.' She can say a lot of other things, but she never uses complete sentences. She talks in disconnected words. A lot of speech teachers and brain doctors have already been involved, but they didn't get much further than her usual string of disconnected words. But her parents never gave up hope.

And today her parents have been proved right. The girl asked the trainer: 'Can I give him the fish?' And he said that she could. Everyone was cheering. The therapist because the sentence was right. The girl because she was allowed to give the fish to the dolphin. The dolphin because he got the fish. And the trainer because everyone else was cheering.

Of course you'll be thinking: what a lot of fuss about one little sentence. Does half of Harderwijk really need to get all worked up over something like that? The answer is actually a very short one. Shorter than a sentence. That answer is simply: yes.

They'd been working with that girl for years. She wouldn't make a complete sentence, not even for an ice cream. But that all changed when she saw the dolphins. The trainer would only get the dolphins to sing if she asked nicely: 'Can the dolphin sing?' And because there was nothing she wanted more than a singing dolphin, she asked properly, with a complete sentence. Her reward wasn't an ice cream or a new set of pencils, but a singing Beachie. And before long she was allowed to feed him a fish as well.

The dolphins in the bay help children to do things that they weren't able to do before, or didn't dare to do, or didn't want to do. Without realising it themselves, the dolphins are a miracle cure. They're doctor, therapist and teacher all rolled into one.

The dolphins also help children who find it difficult to be friendly with other people. These children don't really know how to play with other children, for example. Or they don't dare to look at anyone. Or they get angry really easily, and start teasing other children, because they're not happy themselves. All of their feelings are topsy-turvy, you could say. But the dolphins know what to do about that.

Paul is one of the dolphin trainers. He says: 'If you want a dolphin to do something, you have to look at the dolphin. If you don't look at the dolphin, he'll swim off. The dolphin thinks: Oh, they don't need me, byeee.' Children who have difficulty looking at people or problems having fun with other children come to the Dolfinarium to practise with dolphins. If they want the dolphin to do a beautiful jump for them (and of course they're dying to see that), then they have to look at the dolphin as they ask.

And the dolphin's eyes are as direct as can be. They look right at you. They're willing to do anything for you, but you really do have to be clear. If the children want the dolphin to jump, they first have to look at him and then make the gesture for 'jump' with their hands.

When the dolphin's done his jump, he comes straight back to the side. The children then have to look at the trainer and ask for a fish for the dolphin. It's difficult for them, but because they're so desperate to reward the dolphin themselves, they'll do it. If they won't look at the trainer, then the trainer gives the fish to the dolphin himself. If the children won't look at the dolphin, then there's no jump. It's simple. And it works.

At the end of the morning, when the exercise sessions are over, the children can play with the dolphins. They throw rings and the dolphins bring them back. They're just like dogs. With one gesture of the hand, Paul sends seven of them off to do a jump. The dolphins dive, take a run-up and a little further along they all shoot up out of the water at the same time. For a moment they stand still in the air and then they dive back in again. All of the children are jumping up and down. Even the little boy who has difficulty with making friends, with looking at other people, with being happy. Unusually for him, he sticks his arms up in the air and laughs.

The dolphins swim back to the side. They bob close together, as though they're treading water. The children, the therapists and the trainers all make the gesture for 'sing'. And the splashy choir sounds out. There's fiddling and chirping and clicking and whistling. Afterwards, they're fed fish again and then the dolphins are allowed to go off and do their own thing. The children go inside and put on dry clothes.

When they've been six times, they receive a diploma. Written on it are the words: *Dolphin trainer*. And in invisible letters it actually also says: has passed the examination in forming sentences. Or: has passed the big looking-at-people test.

During their break, the trainers drink tea together in the little hut by the bay. The children and the therapists have left. The peace and quiet has returned.

‘Moby,’ says Paul.

‘Ah, Moby,’ sigh Kim and Marco and Lauro, the other trainers. Moby had such charisma. It seemed as though as a shiver went through the water when he came swimming up. Some dolphins don’t always really feel like listening. And then they’ll just swim in the other direction when you call them. They know that you’re not going to jump in there after them. But Moby always used to come over. And whenever there was trouble within the group, Moby would immediately swim over to tell the other dolphins that they should stop mucking about. And everything would immediately calm down.

Moby was famous because he could jump so high. He could tap the ball seven metres up, with his nose almost touching the ceiling of the show dome. No other dolphin ever jumped higher. And there’s still no one who can imitate him.

Perhaps you could say that Paul, Lauro, Marco and Kim have the ideal occupation. A dream job. They receive hundreds of letters from children and adults who would also like to become dolphin trainers. When girls hear what kind of work they do, they all want to marry Paul and Lauro and Marco, and the boys all want to marry Kim.

Kim says: ‘That’s why I’m not so quick to tell people what I do for a living at a birthday party, otherwise I end up talking about it for half the evening.’ Lauro says: ‘I tell people what I do. It is my job, after all.’ Marco says: ‘My friends never ask me how I am. They always say: “Hey, how are the dolphins?”’ And Paul says: ‘I wanted to be a DJ. But when I was still at school, I used to go and work at the Dolfinarium during the holidays and at weekends. I’d empty the litter bins and sweep the park. And now, twelve years later, I’m training dolphins, and I don’t think that I’m ever going to do anything else.’

You have to train dolphins with a great deal of patience, just like any other animal. When they do something right, you reward them, and when they don't do something right, you don't get angry, but you just give it another go.

Sometimes the dolphins tease each other during training. Paul will be teaching a young dolphin to lie still on its back and then another dolphin will swim close beneath it on purpose. Or they'll have a sneaky nip of the tail of another dolphin who is just learning to sing on command.

It also sometimes happens that none of them are in the mood. And then they'll pay attention only to each other and not to the trainers. When that happens, the trainers go away for a short break. Then the dolphins are free to go and do their own thing for quarter of an hour.

'They're just like children,' say the trainers. It's a pity that teachers at school never behave in the same way. They never go out of the classroom to get things to calm down. Perhaps it would help if the class was left alone now and then.

**A good night's sleep?** Dolphins can never fall completely asleep. If they did, they might forget to breathe when they should. And so the left half of the brain sleeps first, and when it's had its rest, it's the turn of the right half of the brain. When the left half sleeps, the left eye closes. The right eye stays open. And the other way around.

Amtan is Moby's daughter. She looks like him. Her lower jaw sticks out a little too far as well. Today she has to learn to swim underneath something. Dolphins are frightened of doing that.

Paul has a pole in his hands. On the end is a bright red dot. Amtan has learnt, just like the other dolphins, that you have to follow that red dot with your snout. If you do, you get a reward.

Amtan touches the dot as soon as Paul puts it into the water. When Paul moves the dot through the water, Amtan swims after it.

'Good girl!' shouts Paul. Then he holds the dot under a barrier. The barrier is suspended in the water, but doesn't go all the way to the bottom.

Amtan dives deeper into the water and sticks her nose under the barrier. After a reward, she even plucks up enough courage to stick her whole head under the barrier. But she's not still not ready to swim all the way underneath.

'Just give it a little time,' says Paul. He flings three fish into the air, which Amtan neatly catches.

They practise somersaults and other jumps in the same way. The trainers hold the red dot above the water, so that the dolphins leap up to it. Or they draw circles with it under the water, which makes the dolphins do an automatic underwater somersault. Then later they're able to repeat the somersault in the air as well. The training continues like this for their entire lives, because the dolphins never stop learning.

At the end of the day, Paul climbs into the canoe and takes two buckets on board. One of the buckets has fish in it and the other has ice cubes. He paddles it to a jetty further along the bay, where the water's deep. The other three trainers are standing on the opposite side of the bay.

Paul calls all of the dolphins to him by banging one of the buckets on the water three times. They all come racing up like speedboats. Paul looks only at Skinny. He sends the others away.

The trainers on the other side slap their hands once on the water. That tells the dolphins where they have to go. The three trainers split the dolphins into groups and keep them busy, so that Paul has peace and quiet to practise a new jump with Skinny.

Paul looks at Skinny, who has stayed calmly in her place. Skinny is forty-four years old. She came to the Dolfinarium with Moby in 1965. Her speciality was pulling a little boat. But she hasn't done that for a long time now. None of the dolphins at Harderwijk have to do that any more. The trainers think that pulling a boat is a silly and pointless trick, just like jumping through a hoop.

**Health test** When a dolphin's ill, you can't just take him on your lap and treat him. This is why the dolphins have health training every week. The dolphins have to learn that the trainers are allowed to touch them anywhere. On their tummies, their tails, their snouts

and even their teeth.

The trainers regularly use thermometers on the dolphins. You can tell whether a dolphin's healthy from his temperature. And once every three months they even take a blood sample to check that there's nothing wrong with the dolphins.

They practise the blood tests like this: the dolphin lies on his back in the water. The trainer sits on a raft and pulls the dolphin's tail onto his lap. He takes an elastic band and pings it against the tail. The first time it happens the dolphin is startled and swims away. But once he's become used to it, they can give injections or take blood while the dolphin lies there calmly. An injection feels the same as being flicked with an elastic band. When the dolphin's really sick, he'll be easy to treat.

Skinny doesn't actually have to learn anything new at all, but she's recently discovered a new jump. After all those years she suddenly did something new, all by herself. 'Wow,' said the trainers. And now they practise Skinny's new jump every day. It really is a beautiful jump.

Paul makes the hand gesture that goes with Skinny's new jump and sends her away. Skinny dives under the water and Paul takes an ice cube. He throws the ice cube into the middle of the bay. This tells Skinny where she has to do the jump. Precisely where the ice cube lands, Skinny pops up a moment later. She rises up into the air. Nose straight up, tail pointing straight down. She shoots into the air like a rocket. There's nothing elderly, nothing shaky, nothing infirm or inflexible about this dolphin. When she's completely out of the water, she does a pirouette in the air. A circle around herself.

Paul strokes Skinny on the snout when she comes back to the jetty a little later. She feels soft and smooth and warm. She feels like a boiled egg with a bit of slobber on it.

'Good girl,' he says. And Skinny makes a high-pitched noise. She's laughing.

Maybe that's the eternal secret of the dolphins. They never grow up to become men and women. They never end up as little old ladies and gentlemen. They always stay boys and girls. Little kids forever and ever.