Xèdomey, 27 March 2019

Dearest Uncle,

I am as happy as the Pacific Ocean is vast to be writing these words to you now to give you my news and to receive yours in return. How are you?

My dear uncle, I think of you as much as I worry for your health, which hasn’t had the same spring in its step since the incident with your heart last year. Do not worry, you are first in my prayers every morning. I would dare, though, to recommend you do some exercise. You should take a brisk walk for thirty to forty-five minutes, three times a week. I hope that you stay as strong as Hercules, as feisty as Samson and, finally, as quick as Lucky Luke, my favourite heroes.

My beloved uncle, I have often talked about these characters, who I think of as my role models. You have often teased me about inventing stories, often asked me with a smile why I didn’t choose a hero from our country’s or our world’s history. As I grow older, I’m beginning to think that you were right. In fact, you were completely right! To grow up, humanity needs to take the values of past heroes to heart.

Uncle of mine, I am delighted to tell you that I have another hero in my life, in my mind and in my heart. He is even in my house! You’ll never guess, even if I bet the whole of Ali Baba’s cave of treasures. His name is Xèviosso, and he is our cat. I know that it will come as a surprise to you to learn that a cat can bear the name of the god of thunder and lightning for the peoples across the south of Benin and Togo through to Ghana. But there you are! I gave this little house cat his name the moment Papa and I bought him at a fair in the suburbs of Cotonou. Mum couldn’t believe it! But once I had explained to her that every name brings with it a certain energy and that the cat needed a strong name to get rid of the mice causing us such grief, she understood… I think.

Day after day, Xèviosso shows that he is worthy of his name. Every morning for weeks, he would always leave the remains of a rat in the middle of the veranda. It often made me very happy, for I confess I’ve had a deep hatred for these little beasts ever since they ate the sleeves off my birthday dress and urinated on my birthday cake. No more rats at home for us now!

It gets better, dear uncle; one morning I found a lifeless two-metre-long snake at the foot of my bed. I cried out in fear! I was terrified! However, as if to reassure me that I had nothing to worry about, my sweet cat Xèviosso stretched out his paws and turned the snake’s head over, meowing and purring proudly. I knew that he wanted to tell me “this is my masterpiece”. When I looked at the snake more closely, I could see that it was injured in several places, especially around its head. Once again, Xèviosso proved himself to be a true champion and vigilant guard, just like Cerberus! Just imagine what could have happened if the snake had not been killed by this brave cat! I know, right!

Then just last weekend, another heroic deed: the whole family were sitting around the table together on the veranda. The blazing sun was beating down on the treetops. Xèviosso was sleeping at the edge of the veranda, basking in the sun. Two metres away from him, our chicken was digging away madly at the ground, trying to find something to feed her seven chicks. She reminded me of the “dig and delve” fable by La Fontaine. All of a sudden, the chicken let out a loud, terrified screech and flapped her wings frantically. The chicks were frozen with fear and panic. There was a hawk! But, just as the celestial beast swooped down to imprison one of the poor chicks in its claws, Xèviosso pounced, like a spring unfurling, to grab the bird by its right wing. In a tussle of beating wings, squawks and dust, the attacker was overcome! The bird squirmed, badly injured. Papa jumped up to finish off the bird with a swoop of his stick. The mother chicken, although panicked, was also happy because the cat had saved her and was now her hero. This immediately made me think that in our world, the strong must do more to protect the weak.

Uncle, do you see now why I am proud to say that my hero is our precious cat Xèviosso? This cat very much deserves all the superlatives and positive accolades afforded to him.

My uncle, my dearest uncle, if this cat could talk, I would give him a mobile phone so he could tell you himself about all of these deeds that have so impressed us. His presence assures us that our chicken is safe.

Pass on my warm wishes to all of my cousins, and do not forget to tell them this story.

See you soon!

Your loving niece