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Opening extract from

The Adventures of Shola

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THE ADVENTURES OF SHOLA



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Illustrated by Mikel Valverde

Translated by Margaret Jull Costa

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SHOLA
AND
THE LIONS





One day, Señor Grogó had a visit from a friend who had been travelling round Africa and was longing to tell Grogó about everything he had seen there. Grogó's friend talked a lot; he talked about the Sudan, about Zimbabwe, Kenya and Nigeria, he talked about the Masai, the Batusi and the Zulus, and also about the chief of an Ethiopian tribe, whose name was Abebe-Aba-ba-Abebe. And after talking about all these things, he talked about the jungle and about lions.



"The lion is a magnificent beast," said the friend. "He's strong, powerful and noble. He's the King of the Jungle. There's no animal he can't vanquish. He can strike a hunter dead with the last beat of his heart."







Shola, who had been dozing in the armchair, pricked up her ears. What sort of beast was this lion, so like herself in so many ways? She too was strong, powerful and noble. Although she had never actually fought with anyone or seen a hunter, she was sure that

they would all be afraid of her; she was sure that all animals and all hunters were aware—painfully aware—that she could strike them dead with the last beat of her heart.

"So..." Shola wagged her tail doubtfully, "if I'm a lion, why does Grogó insist on calling me a mere mutt?"

Shola was in the grip of these terrible doubts when the friend brought his visit to an end.



"I'll take you home," said Señor Grogó. "I fancy a walk. Are you coming, Shola?"

"Not me," said she. "I don't feel like going out. I've got a lot of things to think about."

When she was alone, Shola noticed that Grogó's friend had left a book on the chair, and she craned her neck to read the title. Her heart turned over, and that was because of what was on the cover, and what was on the cover was this: *The Lion, King of the Jungle*.





This was just what she needed if she was to find out whether she really was just a mutt or whether she was, in fact, a lion. Shola opened the book at the first page and started reading, and what she read was this:

The lion is a strong, powerful and noble animal, feared by all. He is the undisputed king of the jungle.

"So everyone agrees, then," thought Shola, remembering what Grogó's friend had said. "I must study this book properly."

She picked up the book and carried it off to her hidey hole, the place where she kept her bones and her toys. Then she returned and lay down on the armchair, where she remained until Señor Grogó came back.

"Shola," said Grogó as soon as he came in the room, "have you seen a book lying around? My friend left it in here somewhere."





"I haven't seen anything," she said.

"Are you sure?" insisted Grogó, who knew what a liar she was.

"Powerful, noble creatures like myself never lie," declared Shola, who was already feeling a little like a lioness.

From that day on, Shola showed very little

interest in going for walks. She said she no longer wanted to do what she had always done, and that she preferred staying at home. Señor Grogó shrugged his shoulders and went out by himself.

"What are you playing at, Shola?" he asked after she had gone three whole days without once wanting to go out for a walk.



"I'm not *playing* at anything," replied Shola.

But she was playing at something. By that time, Shola was convinced, utterly convinced, that she was a lioness. It wasn't just *her* opinion, the book confirmed it:

These powerful animals are very lazy. They spend most of the day lying down, in the shade if possible, and they only get up in order to go in search of food.

"It all fits," thought Shola when she read this. "Besides, I have always been a rather unusual dog. My mother used to say as much. 'No one would think you were a daughter of mine, Shola,' she would say, 'I'm really tidy, while you, on the other hand, don't know the meaning of the word!'"

