

The Finnish Pizza

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Keropää 2019, 150 pp

ISBN 9789949986842

Storybook, fiction

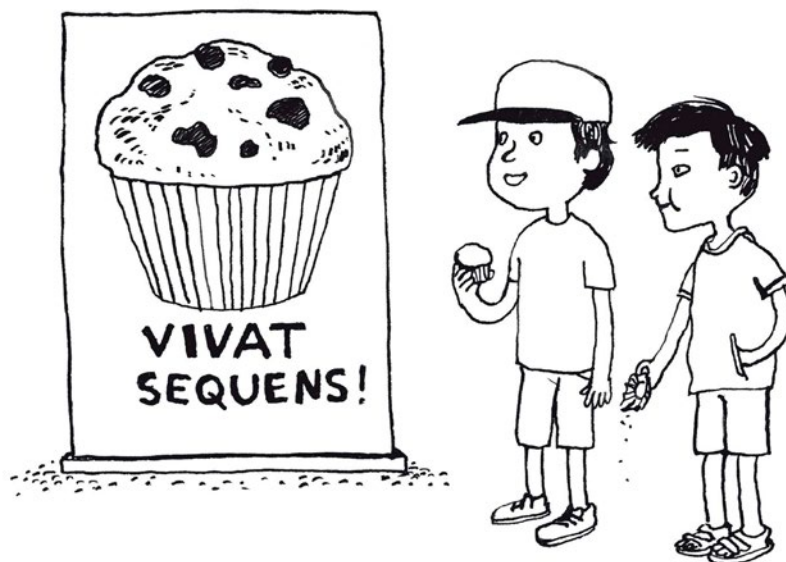
Age: 9+

Following a school visit by a Finnish author, graffiti of a pizza and four tennis balls appears on the electrical box right beneath the cafeteria window. Olav touches it and gets wet paint on his fingers – that’s how fresh it is. The school principal draws swift conclusions upon seeing the boy’s fingers and before he even has a chance to defend himself, all of Olav’s teachers and classmates think he’s guilty. Luckily, Mari, Sadu, Reilika, and Anton – all members of a secret kid’s society – aren’t convinced. Together, they resolve to find out who really did it and clear Olav’s name.

The first book in Keränen’s The Souptown Secret Society series was *The Stolen Orange Bicycle* (2008). *Finnish Pizza* is the tenth.

Award:

2020 “Järje Hoidja” Award of the Tallinn Central Library



Reading sample

pp. 7–10

1.

Why, why, Mari repeated over and over to herself on the way home from school, why play football during recess with boys who didn't even know how to play it? This time, she and Olav had bumped into each other.

Mari was exceptionally ornery. She felt like a wild animal that had escaped its cage. The girl poured her rage out onto the dandelions sprouting everywhere, kicking blossoms as hard as she could and launching them into flight. Swinging her leg around like that wasn't a very nice thing to do, of course, but punishing the dandelions had a calming effect, especially when the vivid yellow flowers soared away in a high arc. Mari imagined herself striking one magnificent goal after another for the Estonian national team at their official stadium, scoring against Germany and France and whoever else. The girl bulldozed her way through the strip of weeds running alongside the street, celebrating every successful strike by leaping into the air and cheering.

As always in the Souptown neighborhood, a

familiar face came walking past. This time, it was her dad's friend Edgar with his miniature dachshund. Mari didn't notice them until the dog yelped and the man greeted her, saying:

"Hello, Mari! Where are you off to in such a hurry?"

"I made a goal against Latvia."

He surveyed the scuffed knees of her red pants and grinned.

"Looks like the Latvians really put up a fight."

Mari grunted in reply and squatted to pet his dog. Then, she politely wished the companions a nice walk and trotted onward.

Along the way, Mari's anger turned to sadness. Olav had acted so nastily during their recess football match. The two of them collided at high speed, causing Mari to fall and tear open the knees of her pants. Olav had zero intention of apologizing, and even claimed she'd run into him on purpose. What's more, he loudly announced that Mari wouldn't be playing football anymore, but would be focusing on basketball instead. Naturally, Mari shot right



back at him, saying it'd be wise for an oaf like him to bug off if he didn't know how to get out of the way. It was a mean thing to say—Mari realized that later. The two didn't speak another word to each other.

Mari had to stop and take in the view for a moment when she reached the river, because the springtime beauty was so enchanting. Life can be strange sometimes—the very same girl who, just moments ago, had been leveling dandelions in a rage, was now admiring the blossoming daisies and carefully stepping around them. The green grass was pristine. Mari took tiny delicate steps across it and imagined if all the football stadiums in town were to have grass just like that.

She stopped one more time to appreciate the river when she arrived in front of her house. It was the only river in the world that knew how to talk. Sometimes, Mari felt like the river was communicating with her. It didn't speak in words, of course; their way of communication wasn't ordinary. It was more like a sense of belonging. The rays of sunlight made the water sparkle like a meteor shower.

Mari winked at the river and entered their yard, where spring gardening chores were in full swing. Her grandma, whom everybody called Mamma, was humming some choral piece and piling up dirt with a wheelbarrow. Mari's little sister Magda was perched on top of that heap, playing with her sandbox toys. The little girl's new yellow boots glistened in the sun. Mati's dark outline flickered through the raspberry bushes, followed by a man in a Panama hat—Grandpa, whom they called Papa.

It felt like someone wiped Mari's sour mood and the pain in her knees away clean. She walked up to the dirt pile.

Mamma asked if the schoolgirl's tummy was empty. However, Mari had no chance to reply before her sister barreled down and wrapped her little arms around her. "Oh, how strong you are!" Mari cried out to play along.

"Look, Mati's trying to go visit Lenno again!" Magda exclaimed, pointing towards the raspberry bushes.

The sisters watched Papa follow Mati around, holding a hammer and a few short lengths of wood. The black French bulldog was searching for any gap in the plank fence through which he could squeeze through to find the neighbors' brown poodle, and Papa was keeping a sharp eye in turn to see if the Frenchman actually found one. If he did, it'd just need to be nailed shut with a couple of boards. Mati was always doggedly trying to pry his way into the neighbors' yard. His persistence was amazing.

One time, he'd managed to pull it off, but it luckily turned out that Mati and Lenno got along like bread and butter. Occasionally, they were able to play together at the dog park, but no one was in favor of the two having random rendezvous. On top of that, the neighbors also had a white cat that wasn't exactly thrilled by the idea of playing with Mati and would instead flee to the top of an apple tree the first chance it got.

