

"The Phantom Cyclist"

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Storybook, fiction

Age: 9+

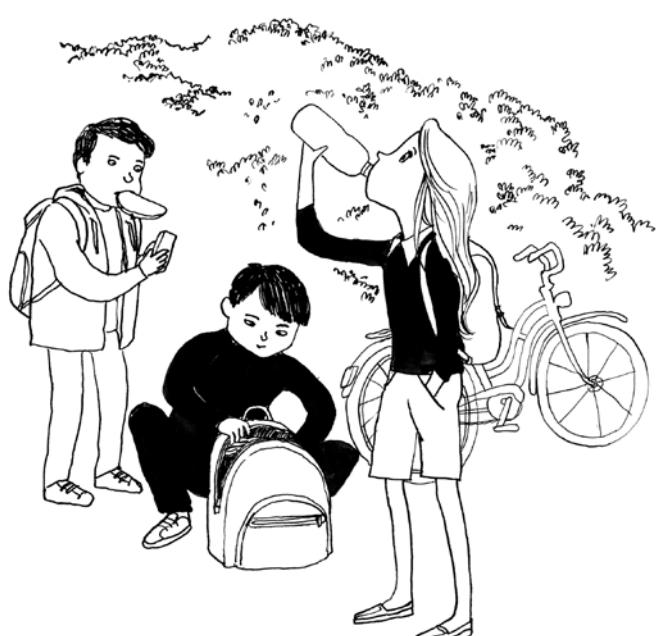
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Strange goings-on are afoot in Tartu once more. Many of the city's women have been robbed of their expensive designer handbags. When Mari's Mum is forced to surrender her own favourite bag to the expert cycling thief, the old secret club decides to reunite to put things right once more. What at first seems a simple task becomes more complicated and more dangerous than the previous incidents that Mari, Satu, Reelika, Olav and Anton have dealt with. Can the children in the secret club really come out on top this time?

Awards:

2018 Nukits Competition, 2nd place (text and illustrations)

2017 Good Children's Book



Reading sample

Not even the dinner table was a phantom-cyclist-free zone. Mari's mind was on the investigation and she was constantly glancing at the clock.

"Have you got somewhere to go?" asked Grandpa.

Magda answered for her big sister, "Mari's in a secret club and they're all going to look for a thief."

"Is this true?" asked Grandma, worried. "Are you really off out now in the evening, in the dark, to play cops and robbers?"

"I don't play cops and robbers and it's not even dark outside. It's not even five o'clock yet," replied Mari as politely as she was able in the moment. She scowled angrily at her sister who had clearly heard her and Sadu's phone call when they'd agreed to meet straight after tea at Herne Department Store on Pea Street. Mari vowed never to talk secret club business in earshot of Magda ever again.

But Magda was delighted with all the attention and continued to describe Mari and Sadu's phone call, "They'll catch him today."

"What do you mean, 'catch'!?" exclaimed Grandma. "This is no game you're playing you know. Hunting criminals is a job for the police."

"Mari's a bright girl," put in Grandpa, coming to Mari's defence.

"Mari, I think you should find something else to think about," said Mum, joining the conversation. This did nothing to calm Grandma's nerves.

"It's just not normal! Secret clubs aren't appropriate for young ladies," she said.

Mari kept calm because arguing only made things worse. "If we find something out we'll call the police. We're really careful," ventured Mari in self-defence.

Sometimes it could be dangerous, but of course that was just what she didn't want to say, not that it would have been any use: Grandma would be a

hundred times more distressed if Mari explained everything they'd been through in Ramps.

"You heard her just now ... they'll be careful and phone the police..." Grandpa told Grandma, and asked for someone to pass him the rissoles.

"Are you not going to say anything!" exclaimed Grandma, turning now to her own daughter, "you're her Mum, after all!"

Mum waded into the burglary enquiry on Grandma's side and eyed her daughter suspiciously. Once she'd passed her father, Grandad, the rissoles, she said that the police should be left to get on with their work and that children should take up sport if they wanted a hobby. Or reading!

Grandpa argued back, "Let the kids enjoy their adventure! It's only right that Mari wants to experience all the thrills and spills. And anyhow, if the police catch the thief then Grandma won't have to worry about anyone stealing her handbag."

"And who'd want to rob me..." muttered Grandma but as she did so Mari decided it was time to make a move, sharpish. It wasn't sensible to discuss the secret club's business at home in front of her family. Why did Magda have to blurt out her, Mari's stuff? She was like a walking Dictaphone that recorded everything it heard and might play it all back at any moment. But Mari couldn't be angry with her for long because she knew Magda was only a small child.



Matt didn't collect Mari. He came to her door but she told him that she'd catch up on her bike and that it didn't have a pillion place.

Then Mari put a bottle of water in her backpack and checked her mobile was in her pocket. The last thing she heard from the kitchen was Grandad telling Grandma that she should think back to when they were young and used to ride the motorbike on the collective farm.

Mari wheeled her bike across the empty yard, stopped for a moment at the barrel of peas and crammed several pods into her pockets. It was sunny outside but the air was cool. It could rain several times a day in September.

Then Mari hopped onto the saddle and pedalled to Herne. On Potato Street she passed a police car coming the other way. She looked at the driver – it was an officer she didn't know, not Kuul or Lippus.

She met Sadu at the shop. Mari glanced at her mobile. She didn't dare text Olav because he might be in the middle of something and a text might give them all away. Finally, at 17.45 a message pinged on Mari's phone: a text from Olav.

Mari read it to Sadu, "Target on move."

"Is the target Raivo?" Sadu asked.

"Must be, yeah," she replied.

"Shall we go?"

"Where to?"

"Dunno. What do you want to do?"

"Wait?"

"Where? Here?" Sadu exclaimed in surprise.

"Right here," Mari replied and stepped into Herne.

"All right," Sadu replied, following her in.

They didn't buy anything but Herne "department store" was always an interesting place for a browse.

