

## The Stolen Orange Bicycle

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Illustrated by [Marja-Liisa Plats](#)

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Storybook, fiction

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The Stolen Orange Bicycle is the first in an eight-part series of crime novels for children. Each volume tells a story about the adventures had by a group of child-detectives in Supilinn (Souptown) – a district of old wooden houses and lush yards in Estonia’s second-largest city, Tartu.

In the first book, a bicycle owned by a Belgian professor on his way to a folk-music festival is stolen in broad daylight. As the children start investigating, they quickly locate their first clue, and even an early spat between the club’s boys and girls doesn’t throw them off track. Over the course of their escapades, the children’s friendship solidifies as they go up against both delinquent boozehounds and neighbourhood troublemakers.

Award:

2012 Children and Young Adult Jury (Bērnu un jauniešu žūrija), Latvia, 1st place (Grades 3–4)



## Reading sample

### 1. The Theft

“Where should I start?” Ira asked PC Kuul, trying to hide the blush rising in her neck to her cheeks with her hands. Mari observed Ira, astonished to see that merely thinking about the professor was enough to make Mrs... oops, beg your pardon! Miss Ira, blush. But Professor Angelo radiated such delight that he managed to tell the story of the theft in his own language, with Ira’s help.

“Start at the very beginning,” PC Kuul replied.

“Well, I was reading the paper in the garden. Then I heard someone shouting for help in a foreign language. My first thought was to dash back into the house to avoid any trouble but then the professor came running over.”

“Is yours that red house over there on Bean Street, the one with the beautiful lawn?” interrupted PC Lippus.

“Yes, that’s the one. And then the professor asked if I spoke French. ‘Oui, oui’ I replied. That means ‘yes, I do’. And then he said that his bicycle had been stolen while he’d been asleep in his tent,” Ira gabbled.

“What on earth is he doing clambering around in the copse... I mean, what brought him to Estonia?” asked Kuul with interest, resting his hand on his belly.

“He’s come for the Viljandi folk music festival, it starts tomorrow. It’s a big event you know, it’s famous the world over!” she explained.

“Is that so?” asked Lippus and looked at Kuul, who with a flick of his pencil indicated that the woman should go on with her account.

“And then some kind of crook must have come along, and just picked up his bike and walked off with it, well forgive me for asking, but what kind of a welcome do you call that? How can that kind of thing just happen, you tell me!” Ira

complained to the constable although she was smiling when she turned to face the professor again.

Kuul was silent. It looked like the investigation would be fairly time-consuming. With a sigh he said, “Please can you interpret for the Professor again – he arrived in Tartu yesterday, travelled here in the afternoon and put his tent up in this copse, is that right?”

Ira interpreted and the professor nodded in confirmation several times as she spoke.

“He could have gone a bit further on, perhaps another 500 metres. Then none of this would have happened,” remarked Lippus.

The boys didn’t feel like following the conversation anymore, and started chatting among themselves. Mari, on the other hand, tried to catch every word.

“Did he have his bike locked up?” Kuul asked in a tone that implied his know-how gained from dozens of years of investigating thefts. /—/

“Yes, it was locked... Of course it was. How many times do I have to tell you these things?” Ira snapped irritably. “With one of those... O-locks.”



“Easy, there,” Kuul said. “Easy... Right now, what’s most important is for us to determine how the theft happened, exactly.”

“An O-lock? Then it was easy to steal—you just grab it and go. Bikes should always be chained to something,” Lippus chipped in.

Miss Ira made an expression that read: Well, and what are we going to do about it now?

“Does the professor have any idea what time the theft might’ve happened?” Kuul continued.

“About an hour or an hour-and-a-half ago,” Ira said, staring up thoughtfully at the poplar leaves. “He came here at about eight-thirty. And he said he woke up to the sound of rustling, but by the time he got out of his sleeping bag, the thief had already made off with the bike.”

“So, the crime took place a little before seven-thirty. Got-cha,” Kuul drawled, and said to Lippus more as an order than a question: “Should we get going, then?”

“What brand of bicycle was it?” Lippus asked.

“A bright-orange woman’s-style bike, sort of an older style,” Ira replied without asking the professor himself.

“Uh-huh. But what brand?” Kuul repeated his colleague’s question. Miss Ira wasn’t able to fish an answer to that out of her pool of knowledge.

“A Peugeot,” the Belgian replied once the question was repeated in French.

“A P-mobile! That must be quite the impressive bike,” Anton exclaimed.

“But it will be good to look for one like that. I can’t expect there to be many of its kind rolling around Tartu,” Olav added encouragingly.

PC Kuul thanked PC Lippus with an appreciative nod, since the latter’s question had been right on the mark, and then addressed the group as a

whole: “That’ll do. The primary witnesses and I will go by headquarters now.”

He shook the boys’ hands and urged them to call him immediately if they saw the bike. To seal the agreement, he even gave the boys his personal mobile number, which made them very proud. Mari walked away. She strolled along the riverbank, staring at the towering trees and the slowly flowing Emajõgi River. If only the trees and the river could speak, then we’d have all the answers we need, Mari thought as she speed-dialled Reilika’s number. Mari’s friend answered immediately, as if she’d been holding her phone and expecting the call.

“Hey! Listen, let’s meet up at the bend. And come quick!”

*Translated by Adam Cullen*

#### **4. Under the maple tree**

At four o’clock Sadu’s Mum phoned to say it was time to go home for tea. The children set off home. At Olav’s suggestion they decided to stroll past the yard on Pea Street once more where a shady gaggle of people had congregated a short time before.

“Let’s be quiet,” said Olav as they reached the spot and voices could be heard coming from the garden; he made a gesture as if to say that the midges hadn’t found anything better to do than bother him. “Let’s play scouting.”

“How?” Reilika wanted more instructions.

“The usual way – we’ll go as quietly as we can and get as close as we can. Then we’ll observe everything as carefully as we can,” Olav replied.

The children found a good scouting area in the street itself; it gave them an excellent view of what was under the maple tree but a thick lilac bush obscured their inquiring gaze from the people there. The same four men were sitting at the table. Almost everything was as before. With one important difference. Mari made that



her point one. She gestured to the others to move away sharpish. Bursting with excitement she said not a word as they hurried past the next building.

Then she exclaimed: "Did you see?!"

"I did," replied Olav.

"Yep," agreed Reilika as Mari and Olav exchanged glances.

"What did you see?" asked Anton, the only one who hadn't noticed anything odd.

"That man! The one who was wearing glasses earlier! He's taken them off!" Mari explained in a whisper.

"Exactly!" smiled Olav.

"What?" Anton still didn't understand. Olav bent down and said to his brother, "It means that the man with the glasses is probably the thief. See!"

Olav's train of thought was the same as Mari's. It wasn't every day that you got to do this type of amazing detective work! "The little grey cells!" – that's what Professor Angelo's fellow Belgian Hercule Poirot would have said. "Children have such sharp eyes!" is how Mari's Mum would have put it.

"I didn't see anything..." began Anton, but then the penny dropped. "Ah!" he said. "Yes! When he took the glasses off he... he gave himself away!"

"Precisely!" said Olav. "It was us who told him they were looking for a man with glasses and he took them off after he met us so as to dispose of the evidence. That's not something an honest man would have done."

"How can he be so stupid as to give himself away so easily?" pondered Reilika. "I for one would never have suspected him."

"Me neither," said Mari. "Although if you think it through then he would have had to. It would be typical of a man like the one that woman described to us."

"Ah, in the garden I was thinking more that those horrid people might be making a get-away..." confessed Reilika.

"Yeah," noted Olav. "But now we've got them in the palm of our hand."

"Are you sure he's the thief?" asked Anton, getting things straight. He wasn't as quick on the uptake on these things as the others.

"Sure as can be," confirmed Olav. "If he hadn't had a scare he wouldn't have taken his glasses off."

“But we can’t be one hundred per cent sure,” Sadu added, joining in. “Perhaps they were just getting uncomfortable.”

The possibility that Sadu might be right left the others so quiet and deflated that they couldn’t even contemplate it. Their hunch, their intuition was that they were right, dead right. And the fact that hunches are hugely important, definite things in detective work was something they all knew from books and films.

“So he bought it,” said Mari, giving Olav an admiring nod of the head. “You were very brave in the garden. You said we’d show them. It really spooked them.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” murmured Olav, shyly.

“No, no... You’re stout-hearted like Jack Sparrow!” said Mari.

“Ha! Jack Sparrow eh?...” mumbled Olav, feeling quietly proud.

“Hey, Pirate of the Caribbean, what do we do now?” Anton asked, beaming.

“We wait. We just wait until he brings the bicycle out of the yard,” Olav replied.

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## **5. On the tail**

The girls didn’t have much appetite but they ate up everything their mothers put in front of them. And every day a jugful of milk disappeared without any encouragement or threats. Quickest off the mark was Mari who downed a bowlful of chicken soup in record time. Then she put her trainers on instead of her sandals and took Matt out on the lead for another walk. Her Mum looked happily at her daughter’s freckled face and rosy cheeks. She was very pleased that Mari was spending so much time outside in the fresh air rather than welded to a computer gathering dust.

One thing made her wonder though, “Why are

you putting trainers on? It’s summer, they’ll make you too hot. Get your sandals on instead.”

“I can’t, we’re going to play volleyball on the beach,” said Mari, forced to come up with a white lie quickly. She obviously couldn’t say that sandals are rubbish for tailing people, which is what she’d have to do to the baddies in Soup City, either that or they’d be chasing her...

Mum fell for the volleyball fib. If white lies had been a subject at school then Mari, like many other kids, would have been let off lessons altogether.

At about the very same time the bicycle began to move again. The door of the building that the boys were keeping watch over opened and a bicycle emerged, followed by the man. He propped the bike against the wall and shut the door behind him. The man had put his glasses on again.

“Yess!” whispered Olav. Their suspicions were correct, their hunch was gloriously correct. It was definitely the bike they were looking for – an old-style, bright orange woman’s bike bearing the word “Peugeot” in black. The lock was still attached.

“And he’s holding the bike!” Anton was delighted too. “Call Mari right now!”

Olav frowned. Then he pouted sullenly.

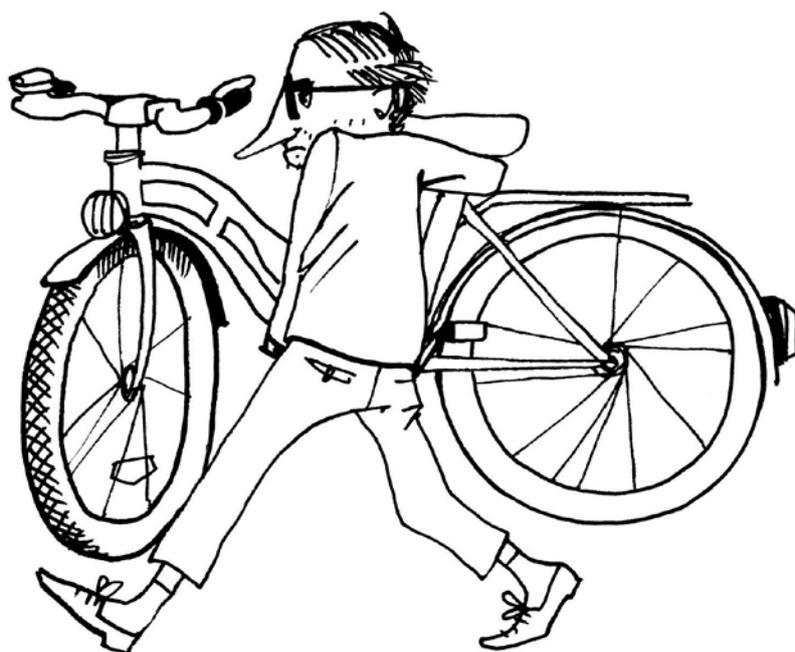
“After all that cowboy stuff?” he said bitterly. “Hmm. I won’t call her. We’ll sort this out ourselves.”

“Yeah,” Anton agreed. “We don’t need girls. But what about Kuul? We should definitely call him.”

But Olav shook his head again.

“No. He’s unlikely to believe us again. Let’s watch and see where the man takes the bike.” Again Anton had to agree.

Carrying the bike under his arm, the man in the



glasses came through the gate and disappeared into Berry Street. The boys clambered down from their hideout, ran round the corner and continued to follow the thief carefully. Fortunately the man was fully occupied with the bike itself and didn't waste too much time looking out for unwanted onlookers. What he was carrying was heavy and unpleasant to carry. Each time the man stopped to change arms or get a better grip on the bike, the boys quickly shrank into the shadows left by fences, litterbins and other nearby cover.

The criminal knew nothing of the boys, and like him, the boys had no idea that they themselves were being tailed. The girls and Matt had caught sight of them just as the bike had turned into Tähtvere Road with the boys in pursuit still taking their last steps on Berry Street.

"Traitors!" gasped Mari.

"Look, Reilika was right!" added Sadu.

Reilika herself couldn't speak.

"Huh," she responded. "Well, let's see what happens."

The girls ran after the boys. Mari, who had eaten her tea faster than the others, had also gobbled down the most. As she ran, she began

to get a stomach-ache. "Wait," she panted as she fell behind.

"There's nothing else for it, come on," replied Reilika and all three of them forged ahead as best they could. Fortunately, they did not need to run much further because the bicycle was climbing up Berry Street Steps towards Tähtvere district, the boys shadowing it, to all appearances playing a game of scouting. The man was standing in the middle of the steps and suddenly put his burden down so he could have a little rest. Fortunately the boys realised and quickly melted into the background. The girls in turn stuck to the boys like glue. Mari kept Matt close to her on a short lead, so that he wouldn't do anything awkward like make a sudden dash forward.

Apart from barking there was no fear of Matt giving them away because one of the characteristics of his breed was that they generally didn't make a fuss – as long as Mari's little sister didn't tease him or someone wasn't annoying him.

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*Translated by Susan Wilson*