



“Piia Biscuit and the Bandits”

Text by [Kairi Look](#)

Illustrated by [Ulla Saar](#)

Tänapäev 2019, 144 pp

ISBN 9789949856435

Storybook, fiction

Age: 7+

Piia Biscuit is happy! She lives with her parents and her cat Loofah on Poplar Boulevard. Upstairs lives her best friend Jack with his girlfriend Mirjam. Jack is from Canada and loves bears and Estonia more than anything else – well, and Piia, too, of course! What else could a child wish for? And yet... When Piia’s mother finds out she is expecting triplets, the girl feels it’s just what’s been missing from her life. Now, she finds her hands chock-full of things to do. In addition to helping her mom and dad raise the babies, Piia manages to search for a wife for the bachelor downstairs, befriend her new classmate Villem, and solve several mysteries. Truly, there’s nothing little Piia can’t handle!

Piia Biscuit and the Bandits is the sequel to Look’s Piia Biscuit Moves In.

Award:

2019 Nominee of the Annual Children’s Literature Award of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia

Reading Sample

SURPRISE

It happened in February, before Pancake Day. It was so cold that even the screech owls were snuggled down in the warmth of hollow trees. Shivering behind the building, sixty snowmen were looking forward to the thaw so that they could swim south. Just stepping into the yard was enough to freeze your eyeballs! Polar bears sent tinned food and letters of commiseration. On the radio the American President said, "See, folks, it's like I always said, climate change is fake news. Doesn't exist." Even the skiers passed up on winter training – they moped about at home instead and got on their wives' nerves. But the cold was no bother to Piia and Grandad. They were sitting in the kitchen painting eggs.

"And anyhow, who said you can only paint eggs at Easter?" said Grandad.

"The President?" Piia suggested.

"No. The President keeps an eye on the Ministers. Makes sure they don't pull any fast ones. Fifteen bad eggs, up to no good, the lot of them." Grandad stuck out his tongue and drew a frog on an egg. It bore a passing resemblance to the Prime Minister.

The Biscuits' kitchen was choc-a-bloc with eggs. They were rolling around in drawers, in flower pots, under the fridge and, of course, on the kitchen table, which was an actual Everest of Eggs. Just below the ceiling, Loofah the cat was swinging on the lamp – he was partial to sausages, not eggs. He was in the middle of an expedition to the sausage pan when the door slammed. There were whispers in the hall. Piia jumped to her feet.

"How did it go? What did they say?"

Mum and dad were as green as Grandad's frog. "What are they?" asked Dad, gawping at the eggs.

"Froggies!" shouted Piia, "Like in Mum's tummy."

Mum sank, pale-faced, into a chair and absent-mindedly stroked Loofah.

"What did the doc say? Is everything all right?" Grandad asked quietly.

Dad nodded and rested his hand on Mum's shoulder. "Well,... we have some news."

"News?" Grandad slowly sat back down. "What is it, spill the beans then...?"

"Yeah, what did they say? Is it a boy or a girl?" Piia demanded.

Mum patted her tummy in concern and smiled weakly.

"Triplets," she said at last.

"Triplets!" shrieked Piia.

"Triplets," nodded Dad. "Made 'em myself!"

There was a loud thud. Grandad had fainted. He was sprawled on the floor, as still as a statue.

THE NEWS STARTS TO SPREAD

"Ohmy golly gosh!" yelled Jack in Canada when the bombshell struck, stunning him into silence. There were beeps on the line and the disconnected tone. Then he phoned back, speaking Estonian this time. "Pardon me, I get a big shock. How do you mean, not one baby? Is Maia OK?"

Piia nodded. "Yes, she's OK. She's got just the three bumps in her tummy."

"Super news, at last for once!" exclaimed Jack, tickled pink. "Do you know if you're getting two sisters and a brother? Or three brothers? A sister and two brothers?"

"I've made a bet with Grandad," said Pia.

"It'll be three sisters, all of them bright and clever," Jack continued confidently. "Girls are my favourite."

Jack was Mirjam's boyfriend (she lived on the top floor), as well as a great friend of Piia's. He was originally from Canada, but he liked being in Estonia with Mirjam more. "I'd like to hug her all the time," he said and he visited as often as he could. Jack also had an overwhelming love of bears that had stayed with him when he had first left Canada. His plan for the future included releasing them from zoos. But the thing Jack loved most was honey. He always had a jar on him, and his jacket even had a separate honey pocket.

Jack coughed down the phone. "Hey, listen up, I too have news!"

"What is it?" Piia asked.

"I've got permission to live at Mirjam's house! I'll soon come to Estonia!"

Piia shrieked with happiness. Then Jack shrieked. "I'll be right there when there's a cheap airplane," he promised.

Jack really wasn't kidding. He arrived with the first flush of April warmth. "Like a migrating crane," was how he himself described it.

Mirjam and Piia waited for him at the airport barrier. It took ages. First the sign said "FLIGHT DELAYED", then "APPROACHING", and finally "LANDED". And then, ahead of anyone else Jack ran into view, his hair in a tangle, chased by a border guard and a dog. He leapt over the barrier and enveloped Mirjam in a hug. "Heywassup? Let me give you a hug, girls!"

"Excuse me," rang out a sudden, stern voice. Jack looked round. A guard and a dog.

"Papers, please. Where are your bags?"

"I wanted this hug first," Jack explained. "Very sorry, I missed my girlfriend ... Oooh!"

On seeing the dog, Jack's eyes filled with tears. He squatted down and gave him a good old scratch along his body. The dog turned onto his back and yapped with pleasure.

"Don't touch him, he's working," warned the guard.

"What is his work?" asked Jack, interested. "Does he have lots of work? Work is difficult? My work is very difficult, I am an IT man."

"That's enough of that," said the guard inspecting Jack's passport. "Welcome to Estonia," he said more kindly, "your bags are on the baggage carousel."

"Thank you! Nice to meet you!" Jack waved to the guard. "Give my regards to your wife too."

Bags collected, Mirjam drove Jack and Piia home. The whole town was bursting with new growth, the birds were twittering, the roads throwing up dust. Jack stuck his head out of the window, waved to the passers-by and called to everyone, "Hello, Estonians!" When Poplar Avenue came into view, he could wait no longer. Flinging the door open, he jumped out of the moving car.

"Are you mad? Where are you going?" shouted Mirjam, but Jack didn't stop. He picked up speed and disappeared around the corner. When Mirjam turned into the yard Jack was already there, hugging the chestnut tree.

"The Estonian peoples! The Estonian trees!" he shouted. "Big hellos, Jack is here!"

No-one returned his greetings, but the curtains in the basement twitched. Then the back door opened and out flopped Loofah. He rubbed up against Jack's hairy shins when there was a yelp. A St Bernard's appeared in the window of Mirjam's third floor flat and scratched excitedly at the glass.

"Baron!" yelled Jack. "I brought you some Canadian cinnamon bun! A big bag! I'll be right there!" Jack waved the bag and Baron almost squashed his nose as he rammed it into the glass. Loofah closed his eyes in shame. Cats would never stoop so low. Decorum in all things, that came first, followed by sausages – that was cats for you.

Jack picked up his bag and took Mirjam's hand. Everything was like in the old days: yellow front door and a creaky step, flies buzzing around the lamp and bugs dozing under the steps. On the second floor, at Piia's door, Jack put his case down and licked his lips anxiously.

"Right, see you," he said absentmindedly. "We will take my things up. I'll say hallo to Baron and then come down. What time are your Mum and Dad in?"

"Usually at half-past..." Piia began, but Jack and Mirjam were already dashing up the stairs, three at a time.

"...five on the dot," she finished. The door slammed. Piia let the cat in and settled down to wait.

First of all they devoured an apple and twelve meatballs. How can one cat squeeze in so much meat, wondered Piia - perhaps it was something to do with all the exercise he took. Dad also put away tons of food, Mum was always on about it. In the mornings Dad ate truckloads: porridge, tomato bread, pate and eggs. Everything vanished as if into a black hole, without even being chewed. Piia was very proud of her clever Dad. In a nutshell, he was good at everything.



"Piia Biscuit and the Bandits" by Kairi Look

After their snack, Piia read a book and Loofah stretched into a sprawl on Mum and Dad's bed. There was still no trace of Jack, even in the evening when Mum and Dad came home. Next morning, when Piia rang the doorbell, no-one came to the door. Jack and Mirjam weren't even picking up the phone. It was as if they'd vanished into thin air.

"Maybe the border guard took his permit away and sent Jack back..." Piia whispered to Dad that evening.

"Don't worry, Jack's just settling himself in." Dad cuddled Piia close and unfolded the newspaper.

"The Estonia – Finland game was an even match and ended in a satisfactory draw," he read as if telling a bedtime story. "The weather was warm, there were no goals, extra time was not played so that they'd be on their way home sooner. In the second half the goalkeepers had a nap and at half time everyone went swimming. The strikers found a patch of ground surrounded by mushrooms and made them into a delicious sauce. The next match..."

The newspaper fell to the floor. Piia and Dad were asleep.

MEETING THE BEARS

Dad was right. Jack reappeared and had time and space for Piia. Together they went for ice-cream, to the cinema and the park. And, of course, to the zoo: every Friday at 3 o'clock.

"One family ticket, please," Jack said politely.

The man in the booth picked his nose and shook his head. "Family tickets are for two adults and two children."

"Sorry?" Jack was confused. "Isn't a man and a child a family? Hang on a sec, I look and see if I can find a woman anywhere."

"Mum, Dad and two children." the man stared wearily at him.

"So please can I have a this tickets," sighed Jack. "One big, one small."

The man took his finger out of his nose and handed Jack the tickets, a sour expression on his face. Then he glanced over the counter at Piia. "We don't do a discount for foreign children, tell your friends."

Piia looked at the man and smiled kindly. The man softened and leaned toward the counter. He winked at Piia and asked, "What's your favourite animal?"

Piia didn't reply.

"Horses? or goats perhaps?"

Piia raised her hands to her head and pulled an odd face at the man. This was a trick of Dad's friend Matt, who used it to startle flashy women in bars. They would sidle up to him gradually, get chatting and dash away to dance. Matt didn't like dancing so he would pull a face; worked every time. It affected the man in the booth too. He was startled and disappeared behind the glass.

"My favourites are bears," Piia said and took Jack's hand.

The path to the bears' enclosure was not long. Jack knew exactly where they were.

First they went past the monkeys, who were fighting in front of the mirror about who had the longest tail, who had the biggest fleas and who was the smelliest.

Then they played monkey games and rested their legs until the whole routine started again. The rigmarole repeated itself twelve times each day, in between breaks for bananas.

Then came the goats: habitat - 500 m above sea level, lifespan - 15 years, worldly wisdom - zero. They spent the day making fun of the kangaroos – no normal animal had pockets! The goats were just jealous of course, the kangaroos were the last word in trendy. The goats would have to grow wings for the public to want to come and see them. Being a goat may not be anything special, but every animal needed some level of self-respect. Now the goats were making a big mess of everything, they were depressed because no-one wanted to watch them.

There was a crowd of people next to the seals' pool: a seal was swimming, the crowd was cheering. At the next enclosure a child spent the whole day watching a hare; his parents were in despair. Then came the tigers, who were doing what tigers usually do – hiding somewhere, fast asleep. After the tigers you had to turn right. And there they were – the bears.

Jack stood still, bowed towards them and looked the bears deep in the eye. "Heywassup," he whispered. "I'm back. Don't be sad for being in a cage. It just for a little while longer, I rescue you soon."

"He's going to free the bears," Piia told the reindeer who was playing in the next cage and nibbling on cones. "If you're good, then we'll take you as well." The reindeer turned round. They got acorns on Fridays.

"And now a sing!" shouted Jack to the bears and fished in his pocket for a whistle. It was a tatty thing made of wood, but the finger-holes glowed with a golden hue.

"That's so pretty! Where did you get it?" Piia asked.

"From my Grandpa. He died in the winder," Jack signed. "He used to play everywhere the whistle." Jack bowed respectfully to the bears, raised the whistle to his lips and blew.

Some people like dogs and some like cats,

Some like monkeys who live in their pantries.

But I love only bears!

The bears liked the song. They gathered by the cage, paws at shoulder height, and moved in time with the music. People came closer, someone clapped, an elderly couple started to dance.

"Mmmhmm!" Jack shouted at the end and bowed deeply to the bears. "Next week again, be smelly until then! And don't be sad! Life is beautiful!"

This was the thing Piia liked most about Jack – he put his whole heart into everything he did. If you couldn't see him, you could at least hear him. He would whistle in the shower and practise Estonian folkdances for people to dance to at festivals. On rainy evenings he would sit in the bath and wail Canadian folksongs. The remainder of his repertoire comprised songs about bears, of which he had at least a hundred.

Life with Jack was much more fun than life without him, on that point everyone in Poplar Avenue agreed. Or rather, almost everyone. But more about that later.

"Wow – they're amazing!" he glanced at the babies. "Look like little foxes, just like you, Paul."

"You're the one that looks like a fox," said Piia. "My Dad is the handsomest man in the world. When I grow up I'm going to marry him and we'll go shopping in the supermarket together."

Dad smiled in amusement. "Quite right. Well, I think it must be about time to tell you their names, don't you?"

"Yes, who are they? I can't wait!" shouted Jack.

A HUNDRED PAIRS OF ROMPERS

One rainy day Jack popped down to see the Biscuits. The windows were open and summer air was drifting into the flat along with all of Poplar Avenue's famished mosquitoes.

"Heywhassup! What are you up to?" shouted Jack and stood still in astonishment. The entire floor was covered in piles of clothes. Nestling among them were Piia and Mum.

"We're sorting. I asked at work, but it went in one ear and out the other," sighed Mum. "Now we've got a hundred pairs of rompers."

"And twenty dummies and seventeen teddies," added Piia.

Jack's eyes lit up. As he made for the bears he tripped over something. There was a blood-curdling groaning noise. Jack shrieked, sprang onto the sofa and peered in fright at the rug. It was a yellow rubber pig. The pig's bulging eyes were twinkling oddly. "Why you need a hundred rompers and spooky pig?" murmured Jack.

"They'll all come in handy with three of them," sighed Mum, and Paul is supposed to be building the cots..." In the corner there was a stack of boards, an axe, one nail and a sack of plaster.

"Don't worry! I help Paul," Jack consoled her, patting her tummy gently. "Heywhassup in there! Here's your friend Jack! Don't bother, everything be OK!"



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And everything was. Jack and Mirjam built the cots. Dad bought the fastest pram in the shop. Grandpa fixed up the changing table. Grandma crammed the cupboards with food. Last of all Uncle Rasmus arrived with a drum and the LP Punk and the hell rabbits. Mum and Dad felt dizzy from time to time and had to sit down, cross their legs and hum. Only Piia was calm. She was no scaredy-cat – not her! she was a big sister and she knew heaps of stuff.

Then, one morning, her parents went to hospital. Mum was twice as big as Dad and waddled to the car, her hands under her belly. Dad scampered around her, his face as green as a frog's. The car moved off with a squeal. Grandpa patted Pia's head with one hand and Grandma's bottom with the other.

"Right then, there'll be news soon enough," he remarked. "The little ones are on their way."

They were on edge the whole day long. They couldn't even come up with any games. Finally, in the afternoon, the telephone rang. Dad's number flickered onto the screen.

"Well?!" Piia shouted into the phone. Grandpa was standing close by.

Piia listened very carefully and then hung up. Then she raised her arms and cheered, "Three brothers! I win!"

Grandpa signed happily. Grandma jumped onto the table, dancing like a mad thing –even wagging her bottom, and that was something she only ever did at parties. Today was definitely a partying kind of day.

THE BRAND NEW BISCUITS MOVE IN

A welcoming committee was waiting excitedly in the yard – the triplets were finally allowed to come home! Piia had three posies of bluebells, Grandad three fishing rods and Jack three teddy bears. Loofah was keeping watch from the roof, with three sausages in his tummy. A car sounded its horn. "They're here!" shouted Piia.

But it wasn't Dad at all. Hurtling round the corner came Uncle Rasmus, braking so hard that mud showered over him. "Yoo-hoo, sweeties! Sorry, I ran out of time for present-shopping. In the end I picked the longest thing I could find so that there'd be enough to go round." Rasmus pulled a gigantic plush snake out of his bicycle basket. It was green and filled up the entire yard.

"Good morning, young lady, do you have any sweets?" asked the snake in Uncle Rasmus' voice and poked its head into Piia's pocket. A crunchy sweet disappeared like a flash into the snake's mouth.

"Just look at yourself – taking sweets from a little child!" scolded Grandma.

"I'm not a little child, I'm a big sister," announced Piia. And then the car pulled into the yard. Dad drove round three times in front of the house before slowly coming to a stop.

Three bundles were snuffling on the back seat. Dad gave one baby to Piia, the next to Mum and the third to Uncle Rasmus. Jack fidgeted as he held the teddies. "One, two three childrens, all there! Heywhassup! They are so red!"

"My little bandits," Dad nodded. "Come inside and have a closer look at them."

Soon they were all sitting in the living room nibbling cake. The flat was brimming with flowers, cards and toys. Loofah was guarding the babies from the edge of a cot. Suddenly there was a knock at the door.

"Hey, you rascals, what are you up to?" It was Dad's friend Matt. He gave Dad such a hearty slap on the back that Dad ended up bent double, spluttering. Then Matt gave Mum a very long, very gentle hug.

"Wow – they're amazing!" he glanced at the babies. "Look like little foxes, just like you, Paul."

"You're the one that looks like a fox," said Piia. "My Dad is the handsomest man in the world. When I grow up I'm going to marry him and we'll go shopping in the supermarket together."

Dad smiled in amusement. "Quite right. Well, I think it must be about time to tell you their names, don't you?"

"Yes, who are they? I can't wait!" shouted Jack.

Dad rose solemnly to his feet. "My sons..."

"Our sons," Mum corrected.

Dad nodded. "Our sons. Kaspar, Jesper and Joonatan!"

"Like in When the Robbers came to Cardamom Town!" smiled Mirjam.

"What do you mean, cardamom?" muttered Matt.

"What do you mean, robbers?" asked Jack.

The triplets started to cry. "What's all this about then?" asked Matt reproachfully. "The only thing you do is sleep all day. The trouble won't start until you're big boys, just you wait! Then your lives will be nothing but work and worry and more work, just to keep your girlfriend sweet."

"Their tummies are empty." Piia said.

"There's empty and there's empty!" whinged Matt. "My tummy's always empty! But I don't scream the place down because of it."

"That's because you're forty years old," replied Mum. "I'll feed Kaspar now. Can you keep an eye on the others for me?"

"Piece of cake!" yelled Matt, rubbing his hands. "Little kids all love me to bits. Especially the girls ... especially when they're grown up." He poked his finger into the cot and prodded Jesper with a long fingernail. There was a squirry sound and the air was filled with a nasty niff.

"Help! The one on the left, he's farting!" yelled Matt.

"We'll soon have you changing nappies like a pro," grinned Dad.



"Piia Biscuit and the Bandjits" by Katri-Look

you doing rolling around with the teddy bears down there? Little kids sure are crazy about you!" Matt turned pale and stepped back. "Watch out, teddies!" yelled Jack. But it was too late. Matt stumbled, went flying and landed flat on his back, waving his arms and legs in the air, just like a beetle.

"Hahahaha," Mirjam laughed. "What are you doing down there with the teds? Little children all love you to bits, you know!"

"I... I left the iron on," mumbled Matt, rushing into the hall. The door slammed.

"He left the iron on, my foot!" Dad laughed. "Matt doesn't even own an iron. When he needs to press his trousers he just goes to the shops and buys new ones, they come with the creases in the right places." He picked Jesper up and went to change some nappies.

A GIFT FROM DOWNSTAIRS

The babies behaved like real robbers and screamed the days away. They cared not one little bit that everyone else was worn out. One of them always wanted feeding, cuddling, a nappy change, or singing to sleep, and then the whole merry dance would start again. Only Loofah refused to become involved and kept to his usual schedule of six naps a day like before.

One beautiful morning at the Biscuits' flat, all was calm once more. The babies were sleeping soundly in the yard, directly underneath the window. Dad came into the kitchen clasping a carton of kefir and picked the car keys up off the table. "I'm off to the shops," he said.

"Uh-huh," murmured Piia. She was drawing fish with Loofah.

"I'm off to the shops now," dad said again, this time more loudly.

Piia turned her head. "Yeah, you just said."

Dad fidgeted but didn't move.

Piia sighed. "You're so good, going off to the shops by yourself! All alone!" she said in approval.

Dad nodded contentedly and smiled. "Yep. Right, I'll be off. Food shopping. All alone." He traipsed down the stairs. She heard the click of the car being unlocked in the yard.

Dad sipped some kefir, rested the carton on top of the car and waved to Piia. Then he started the engine and drove off with the kefir on the roof.

Loofah shook his head and rubbed his paw round his ear three times.

"He was up half the night," Piia said in Dad's defence. "He's doing well to still be eating and washing. Yesterday he spent the whole evening in the bath singing about an exhausted captain on a stormy sea. And the night before..."

The garden gate creaked. Piia glanced into the yard. It was Siim Susi, the young politician who lived downstairs. The gangling man peered to the right, then to the left, and sidled up to the door, clutching a carrier bag.

Piia spied her neighbour with interest; it was unusual to catch sight of him at all. Siim Susi moved round only in the dark and never left any traces on the path. He didn't even get wet in the rain, instead he darted about, fut-fut-fut, dodging the raindrops. He avoided the people who lived in the building, in fact Jack was the only one who had ever seen him, and even that was only once at night. "I tried to chat him," he sighed, "but this man, he not speak human language. He hiss like the snake."

This time Siim Susi didn't hiss. He spoke in Estonian. "Psst... Are you on your own?"

"That depends," Piia replied. "have you come to rob us? Robbers always ask if you're on your own."

The man fiddled with the bag. "Rubbish. I've got something for you. Come down and I'll show you."

Piia eyed him suspiciously. "And you're not trying to trick me? My teacher says that we mustn't accept things from strangers."

"Trying to trick you? I'm a politician!" Siim Susi exclaimed, offended.

"All right then." Piia went downstairs. Siim Susi was fidgeting in the main entrance, staring at the triplets in the pram.

"For your parents," he held the bag out to Piia. "A gift. The world should be full of children!"

"Will you be filling the world with children too?" Piia examined the bag. "Have you got a girlfriend at all?"

Siim Susi did not reply. "Will you?" Piia repeated her question, looked up and jumped. The man had disappeared!

There was only a damp patch on the ground that smelled faintly of bad egg. Siim Susi was nowhere to be seen – he wasn't behind the building or in the bushes, on the stairs or behind the tree trunks.

"Typical politician," said Dad that evening when they opened the parcel. Inside were sixty dummies and a book called "How to stop your baby crying". A single sentence was written on the card: "A gift from SIIM SUSI!"

Dad shook his head. "What an oddball! They say in the papers that he's an unmarried workaholic. It's a bit strange for a grown man to be living with his great uncle. Bet his uncle makes his bed for him too."

"I know quite a few grown men like that," Mum remarked wryly.

A man like that needed help, Piia decided. After supper she picked up her drawing pad and spent the whole evening painting, sticking her tongue out the whole time. At last she had twenty finished signs. They read:

SIIM SUSI IS
35!
AND LIVES WITH HIS GREAT UNCLE
PLEASE HELP HIM!

Piia admired her handiwork contentedly. She would put them up the next morning.

Once she had brushed her teeth, Piia opened her brothers' bedroom door a touch to kiss them goodnight. She slipped into the shadowy room and jumped. Six glowing eyes were glowering at her in the dark. They were nothing like human eyes, instead they shone bright green. Piia stepped back, startled. Now the eyes were changing colour, flickering like traffic lights: red, yellow, green, at first slowly then more quickly. The red light was particularly bright. It came from Kaspar's bed.

Piia stepped away and put the light on. The bright light made them all screw their eyes up. She gulped and peered at the cots again. Her brothers were lying there peacefully with their eyes shut. She cast them a suspicious glance and slipped out of the room. She could always kiss them in the morning when it was daylight.

CAKE AND LITTLE OLD LADIES

The sound of the babies crying woke Piia up. The sun was up, warming the room. She sat up and rubbed her eyes, climbed out of bed and padded into the kitchen.

Dad was sitting at the table in his pyjama trousers, prodding into a bowl with a sharp knife. He speared the largest strawberry with the tip of the knife and popped it contentedly into his mouth.

"What are you doing?" Piia inquired.

"This is the way pirates eat," Dad told her. "Makes it taste better. They eat everything this way." Next, Dad's mouth enveloped a whole egg. He chewed firmly and scratched his belly.

Piia had a go. They really did taste better from the knife. The bowl of strawberries was soon empty.

"Hey, strawberry thief, will you be taking them for a walk?!" Mum asked, coming to the door, "To a market somewhere. I'm going to get my head down."

Dad rested his head on the table and groaned reluctantly.

"I'll come with you," Piia told him.

"Don't put it off, go and get your trousers on." Dad dragged himself upright, scratched his backside and hauled himself to the bedroom.

This year, like every other, there was a huge end-of-summer market. There were loads of people. There was useless junk for sale like pots and pans, as well as things that were important in everyday life, like cats and cake. Dad skilfully wheeled the pram between the stalls and waved at all the sales girls. Now they were headed towards one of them. The counter was covered in cakes, bite-sized pasties and biscuits.

"We'll have one of each, please," said Dad and parked the pram lengthways against the stall so that no-one else could come close.

"One of each of the biscuits?" asked the sales girl.

"No, one of everything you've got, the largest pieces. And those dumplings in that jar, are they on offer to good customers?"

"They're oat biscuits," grinned the assistant, tying a yellow ribbon round the box. She glanced at the pram. "How old's the little one?"



"There's three of them in there," Piia announced.

The sales girl went white. She looked compassionately at Dad and gave him a large bag of wafers and five loaves of bread free of charge.

Dad tucked the wafers contentedly under his arm and turned towards the path to the park.

Gathering momentum, he performed figures of eight with the pram, making deep ruts in the mud. He was just in the middle of a particularly sharp curve when an obstacle blocked his way. Dad came to a standstill.

"Young man, what on earth do you think you're doing?!"

In the middle of the path stood three nose old ladies, hands on hips and legs astride.

It reminded Piia of a trip they'd taken to the countryside when some deer had appeared on the road. But the old ladies were nowhere near as sensible as the deer, which had stood still for a moment or two before moving on. Instead, the old ladies scurried closer and poked their heads into the pram, clucking and cooing over the babies.

Next they glared suspiciously at Dad. And then came a barrage of questions.

"Do you have older children too?"

"When did you last change them?"

"Isn't the sun bothering them?"

"Poor skinny little things, they look famished."

"They'll be frozen in the pram like that."

"Did you put warm vests on them?"

"Where are their dummies?"

The little old ladies interrogated Dad disbelievingly. "And where's their mother?"

"Their mother has abandoned them," Dad replied. "In cold blood, for the whole day. Any more questions?"

There were none. The little old ladies pulled faces and melted away from the path. Dad and Piia sat on a bench to have a snack.

Piia looked at Dad admiringly. How quickly he ate his cake! Just imagine – he'd been awake half the night but he was still the fastest person in the world. As well as loyal, dashing and capable. You could always rely on Dad. "Do you know what happened last night?" Piia whispered.

"What happened, what happened..." Dad replied, licking the cream from the box. "Of course I do. The bandits spent yet another night awake."

"No, that's not what I meant. When I peeped into their room... their eyes were glowing!"

"Pull the other one," chewed Dad.

"Bright green," Piia continued. "And then they did that like traffic lights thing. They flashed red, yellow and green. Kaspar's were bright red, it was spooky."

"Listen ..." Dad sighed and took Piia in his arms. "At night things get all jumbled up, you were tired. Come here, let's have a lie down."

Piia curled up on Dad's lap. Perhaps he was right, she thought. Dad knew things; he was really old - at least thirty, and he had a long life behind him.

It wasn't long before Piia heard snoring. Dad was asleep with cake crumbs on his stubble and jam on his shirt. Now and again he scratched his stomach and kept on snoring. Piia slipped off the bench and covered him with a jumper. Then she took the ribbon off the cake box and tied it onto the bench - a yellow ribbon would be sure to catch people's eyes. On the lid of the box she wrote:

BEWARE!

WORN OUT DAD

DO NOT PAT

DO NOT FEED

Piia put the sign on the ground in front of the bench and set off for the playground.

Translated by Susan Wilson