



“Sanna and the Poachers”

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Storybook, fiction

Age: 8+

The little elephant Sanna lives in Africa. Her father works at a car wash, and her mother in a pottery workshop, where she paints pretty elephants around the rims of plates. When she's not doing homework, Sanna goes to ballet and takes karate lessons, learns carving, and plays the trumpet. At their doctor's request, Sanna's parents send her out to the countryside to visit her grandmother, as she has been exhausted by doing too many activities. An earthquake happens while she is on her first-ever solo bus journey. Now, Sanna's trip is interrupted, and she has to make it to her grandmother's place all on her own...

Awards:

2005 Annual Children's Literature Award of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia

2005 5 Best-Designed Estonian Children's Books



Reading sample

The travelling party were indignant.

The helicopter pilot held his arms out wide.

“There’s nothing I can do,” he said in a businesslike fashion and motioned in Sanna’s direction with his thumb. “An elephant’s an elephant. It’s heavy. My helicopter’s not capable of carrying a load this big.”

Sanna was embarrassed. They were again discussing the fact that she was big and fat.

“So what do we do?” the head of the rescue party was at a loss. “She can’t go back by car either. The surrounding roads are all completely wrecked.”

“Well perhaps she’ll just have to walk it,” suggested the pilot. Sealand isn’t particularly far away.”

“We can’t just abandon her here in the savanna all by herself,” said the rescue chief with a frown. “I’ll have to leave someone from my team with her.”

“No need,” Fred Zeppelin, who had stayed close to Sanna in the helicopter too, broke into the conversation. “I’ll stay with the elephant. Her parents know me quite well and I promised them I’d look after her. I’m a perpetual wanderer and I know the roads. She knows me and trusts me.”

The rescue chief eyed Zeppelin doubtfully then turned to Sanna.

“Is this true? Do you know this man?”

“Yes. He saved my life today,” replied Sanna. Zeppelin no longer looked the least bit horrid to her; she was quite happy to wander across the savannah with him. Sanna was even mildly embarrassed that she had mistrusted him before.

“Right then,” said the rescue chief and took a wadge of paper out of his breast pocket. He gave it to Zeppelin. “Here’s a map of the local area so you can take the short cut to Sealand.”

Sanna asked the chief rescuer to phone her Mum and Dad when he got back to the town and tell

them that there was no need to worry. The chief promised he would definitely talk to them. He patted her goodbye and said:

“You were incredibly smart today! When you grow up come to work for us in the rescue business! Until then – good luck!”

Sanna climbed out of the helicopter with Bissa and Zeppelin. They closed the helicopter door behind them carefully. Then the engine roared into life again and the propeller began to whirl. There was a strong rush of wind as the helicopter rose slowly into the air and disappeared into the darkness of the night.



The real Fred Zeppelin

So now there were three of them: the man, the elephant girl and the turtle. A trio in the night-time savanna.

Zeppelin suggested they should rest for a while and gather their strength after the day’s exhausting events.

“It’s far too dark to go any further,” he explained to Sanna. “It would be better to try and get a bit more shut-eye before the morning.”

He lay down under a baobab tree and closed his eyes. Soon the man’s noisy snoring rang out across the savanna.

Sanna made a nest out of grass for Bissa next to Zeppelin. She placed Bissa gently into the grass bed and sang her a lullaby. Bissa was soon asleep. Sanna now gathered a pile of grass under her own head, lay down on her soft grass pillow and dreamt.

When she woke up in the morning Sanna did not immediately know where she was. But when she looked around at the savanna left desolate by the earthquake she remembered everything.

Zeppelin was already up. He was standing on a boulder a short distance away from Sanna, eating a sausage sandwich. Sanna also had an empty stomach. She found a bunch of bananas in her bag that her Mum had packed for her. The bananas were brown and speckled from all the jolting the previous day, but still edible. She woke Bissa so that they could eat them together.

After breakfast Fred Zeppelin announced:

“What are we waiting for. Let’s get going!”

Sanna picked up her backpack, tucked Bissa into her belt pocket and followed the man.

At first they walked for a short while on paved roads. This was no easy matter because the road had been heavily damaged in the quake. The surface was pitted and cracked, and in places the tarmac had formed large mounds that they had to clamber over.

Sanna was wearing open sandals. The sharp edges of chunks of tarmac scratched her feet painfully. And her trunk, which had been flung around during the quake, was throbbing unpleasantly.

Very soon Zeppelin moved onto dirt roads. The shortcut must go through the huge tract of grassland.

It was a joyless ramble across the devastated land. Not much remained of its previous beauty. The quake had turned the surface of the land inside out, and felled some of the trees. Here and there great chasms stretched deep into the earth like bleeding wounds. The sky was a whirl of vultures craving carrion.

In sombre mood Sanna walked across the savanna behind Fred Zeppelin. She was thinking of her Mum and Dad and her Grandma Wanda.

Sanna quickened her step. She would hurry to Grandma’s – she’d definitely be waiting. Sealand no longer seemed very far away. They’d soon be there! And when they were they’d eat delicious, crisp pancakes with melon jam, washed down with coconut milk, and be very happy. Sanna could almost hear her Grandma calling to her:

“Chin up, chicken, we’ll see each other soon!”

Suddenly Sanna felt Bissa flailing in her pocket. Her own sweet little Bissa! He must be feeling rough and in need of some encouraging words.

Sanna took Bissa out of her pocket and gently rested his shell against her cheek.

“Don’t worry, my sweet! Things aren’t so bad!” she said as she cradled him.

“Oh yes they are!” whispered Bissa anxiously.
“We’re going the wrong way!”

“What do you mean the wrong way? Zeppelin’s got a map!”

“And?” replied Bissa angrily. “I don’t need any map to know which direction the sea is in! I’m a sea turtle and I know that the sea is that way.” He pointed behind himself with a flipper. “Therefore Sealand is also that way!”

Bissa seemed in earnest.

“Hey, uncle Fred,” called Sanna to Zeppelin, who was walking ahead of her. “Bissa reckons that Sealand is in the exact opposite direction.”

“So now you believe what a stupid turtle’s saying!” grunted Zeppelin, bristling.

“Bissa’s not stupid,” said Sanna. “He’s a sea turtle. He knows where the sea is. He was born knowing where it is.”

Zeppelin came to a stop and glowered angrily at Bissa in silence.

Then something completely unexpected happened! Quick as a flash he pounced on Sanna and twisted her arm so hard that Bissa fell to the ground. A moment later Bissa was in Zeppelin’s hand.

“Now let’s make one thing clear,” he began. His voice was cold and harsh. “The person in charge of this little expedition is me. I’m the one who decides which direction we walk in and where to. And if you dare muddy things any more, then...” Zeppelin

squeezed Bissa in his hand as a portent, "...then I'll twist your sweet little neck round twice and make you into turtle soup!"

Sanna was furious. No way had she expected such vile behaviour from Zeppelin! And she, Sanna, had been really stupid and trusted the man!

All of Sanna was burning inside – she was boiling with rage. Without meaning to, her hands became fists. She was stronger than Zeppelin and could easily knock him down. But she wouldn't, couldn't, mustn't! The man's fingers were round Bissa's neck and the heartless monster was prepared at any moment to end the little turtle's life.

Sanna's hands fell weakly to her sides.

Zeppelin was standing, legs astride, in front of her.

"Get a move on!" he hissed through his teeth. "And carry my case! You are an elephant after all. That's what elephants are for – to do work for people."

"At the bus stop you told a completely different story," fumed Sanna angrily.

"For the second time, don't believe everything people tell you," sneered the man.

Translated by Susan Wilson

