



“The Story of Sander, Muri, the Eensy Mum, and the Invisible Aksel ”

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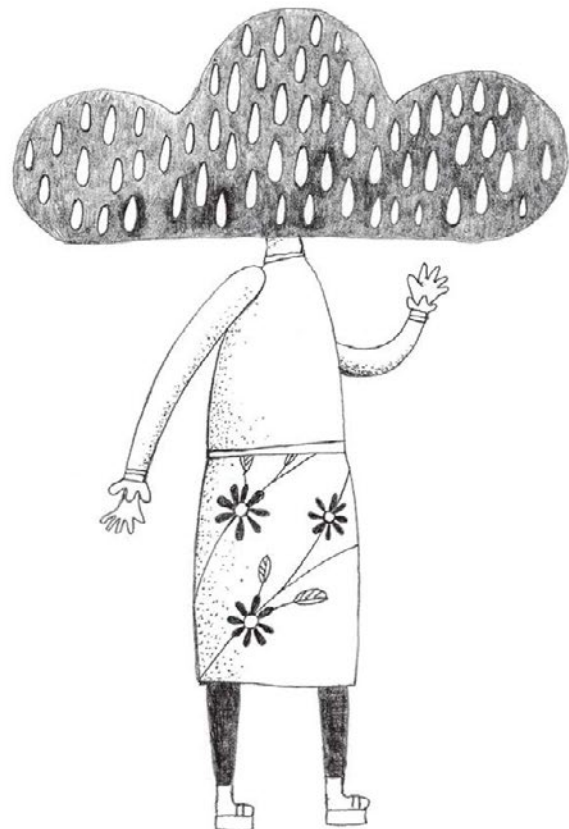
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Sander is an ordinary boy who lives with his mother on the first storey of an apartment building near a big park. Like most other boys his age, Sander loves football, chocolate ice cream, and sleeping in on Sundays. Sander’s mum is also as normal as can be – at least up until the day she shrinks to the size of a little Lego-man. From then onward, incredible things start happening to Sander and his mother, as well as to the stray dog Muri, the invisible boy Aksel, the colourful Uncle Allan, and a society of ladies who are obsessed with their teddy bears.

Awards:

2015 Annual Children’s Literature Award of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia

2015 Good Children’s Book



Reading sample

CHAPTER ONE

Sander / Strange Happenings

In truth, odd things started happening with Mum a little earlier. But even so, I didn't know back then to pay closer attention when the dishes she set out to dry constantly fell to the floor and shattered, or when she stuck the sugar bowl in the freezer instead of putting it on a shelf in the kitchen, or when she forgot to put on her scarf and gloves when she went outside on a blizzard day, or when she gave me an allowance three times bigger than usual. Still, when Mum started to shrink every day, then we couldn't overlook the strange situation anymore.

My mum has never really been gigantic—she's always been rather short, but just in comparison with other mothers. Now, even the smallest-sized women's clothing hung on her like big potato sacks, and her foot only filled her regular walking shoes halfway.

One day when I came home from school, I found that Mum had shrunken to the size of a kindergartener and was sitting in the living room with our good friend, Uncle Allan. And that's when she told us:

"I'm sick.

"Everything will be just fine, and I'll get better again soon," she said, wiping away tears and smiling bravely,

"but to do that, a month from now, I'll have to go to the hospital, where I'm going to have an operation."

After saying this, she shrank another ten centimeters or so.

"Actually, I'm afraid," she whispered, wringing a handkerchief in her lap.

Uncle Allan, who was sitting in our old armchair and eating leftover blueberry pie, stared at Mum in astonishment, and seemed like he was taken aback. No, he looked downright horrified! He was staring at

Mum like she was a nasty, fire-breathing dragon!

Uncle Allan set his pie-plate on the coffee table and shook his head slowly.

"You know..." he said, "this is all too much for me."

He stood up and walked to the foyer.

"I feel awfully bad that you're sick, Meeli," he mumbled as he put on his coat, "but I've got a lot of other problems at the moment, and I simply don't have it in me to get into all of this. I hope your recovery goes well, from the bottom of my heart!"

He picked up his accordion with one hand, waved goodbye with the other, and trotted out the door.

Mum apparently hadn't expected Uncle Allan's fast exit. I'm absolutely sure that she would have liked him to stay with us and tell her "Don't be afraid!" or "Chin up!" or something else encouraging. But he didn't.

Mum stood in the foyer, staring at the door as it fell shut, and shrunk smaller and smaller. You could see it happening with your own eyes. I'd say that she was getting a centimeter shorter with every second. Before long, she only came up to my waist; a few seconds later, she was as high as my knees; and then, her head barely came above my socks. I was totally shocked to see it happening. I was at a dreadful loss for what to do, so at last resort, I picked her up carefully from the floor like a teensy-tiny kitten, and blew on her gently—just like Mummy had blown on my stubbed toes or scraped-up knees hundreds of times before.

"Candle burn and magic mend, make our mummy better again!" I recited, casting a magic spell.

Strangely, it did have a little bit of an effect—Mum stopped shrinking. She stood there on the palm of my hand, about as big as a Lego-person, and smiled sadly. She wrapped herself up in the handkerchief that she was still holding on to (but which was now, compared to her, as enormous as a bedsheet), and said:

"Of course I'll get better, Sander! I just have to!"

CHAPTER TWO

Sander / Why?

Now that Mum had stopped shrinking, I asked her what kind of sickness it was that makes a person so small, and whether we could still hug and kiss each other on the cheek (as much as hugging and kissing such an eensy mum was even imaginable), or whether the disease was infectious. Mum explained that it certainly wasn't infectious.

"My illness is actually connected to something that's inside of me and is growing, not shrinking. They're going to cut that little thing out of me at the hospital, and afterwards everything will be fine and dandy again. Me turning small, though, doesn't have all that much to do with what's making me sick. Or if it does, then only a tiny bit."

"What made you turn so small, then?" I asked her.

"I don't really know for sure," Mum said. "But I think it's because most of the time, I feel kind of like I can't manage things. I don't believe in myself enough."

That could certainly have been the case, because when I thought about it, all of Mum's dramatic shrinking episodes had happened when something went wrong—when oatmeal burned to the bottom of a pot when she was cooking, or when she hurt her finger while hammering a nail into the wall, or when Mrs. Klaarika wasn't satisfied with her work at the confectionary—and especially the time, when a spectacular wedding cake Mum had just made slid off a table and onto the floor. And, of course, a few months later, when Mrs. Klaarika recommended that Mum take some time off of work and rest up at home. Now, to top it all off, there was the news about the hospital and Uncle Allan leaving—things like that don't exactly boost self-esteem, now do they?

I felt more and more anxious as I looked at Mum. She was tiny and sick. I had to get her back to her proper size somehow, because there's not one doctor who can operate on such a little-bitty person! Doctors don't even have such teensy instruments!

I would gladly have asked for advice from one of our adult friends, because Mum was obviously unable to help herself. However, Mum told me that was out of the question—I wasn't allowed to tell a single soul about her illness.

"Not even Grandma," she said sternly. "Not even Aunt Ellen! At least not right now. If even Uncle Allan, who's a big strong man, walked out as scared as he was just now, then what're the others going to do? No one has to know that I'm as small, as worn-out, and as tired as I am!"

I definitely got Mum's point. Grandma tended to fuss and worry herself sick about even the most trivial things, and it always took a good deal of effort to calm her down. Neither was Aunt Ellen all that brave. Even so, I had to make a firm decision about what to do to get Mum's self-esteem back. She had to understand that regardless of the fact that she's sick, and that she sometimes messes up when she's cooking, and that she's afraid of dogs, and that she always shows up late to parents' meetings at school—in spite of all that, she had to know she was the world's greatest and loveliest Mum. But how on Earth could I make that clear to her?

I stared at the sad, tiny creature on my palm, and hadn't a single idea of what I could do.

Translated by Adam Cullen

