



“Shoe # 39”

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Illustrated by Katrin Kaev

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Storybook, fiction

Age: 12+

Paul the fifth grader oversleeps for the first time in his life and doesn't make it to school. Yet when he goes out to get a breath of fresh air, it turns out that the day's extraordinary events aren't over yet. A series of escapades unfolds, starring the world's most beautiful saleswoman Yekaterina, the artistic Arthur, and Arthur's spunky daughter Minna. The leading role in all these events, however, belongs to a strange man who buys a brand-new pair of size-39 shoes every day without trying them on first. Why would anyone do that? Will Paul manage to figure out the shoe-man's secret?

Awards:

2019 Annual Children's Literature Award of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia

2019 Good Children's Book



Reading sample

[pp 10-12]

Little runts really are a bother! Paul Fifth was one member of this category, even though he was only two years younger than Sumo and Plum. As a result, he had to endure the geniuses' air of superiority every time they crossed paths. This happened quite often, unfortunately, because they lived in the same neighborhood. Sumo and Plum had nicknamed Paul "Kangaroo" and saw him as a useless idiot who spent his time on nothing but mental math.

On one occasion they'd stopped him in the street, pinned him against a wall and demanded, "Hey, Kangaroo, what's two hundred and thirty times fourteen?"

"Three thousand two hundred and twenty," Paul had quickly replied in a panic – these two were capable of anything.

Sumo and Plum let Paul go, glanced at each other and began to snigger.

"What an idiot!" said Sumo, summing up Paul's oddness in just three words.

"And now hop off, Kangaroo!" squawked Plum.

Paul wanted nothing to do with either of them in any case.

Translated by Susan Wilson

Just then, Sumo and Plum were lurking on the corner of the street, both buried in their mobile phones. It would only take a single glance up from their screens for them to spot Paul. Yet, the boy was in luck—there was a shoe store right ahead of him. Without taking his eyes off his adversaries, Paul darted to the door and yanked it open. He was safe. The store was dim and an unusual scent struck the boy's nostrils: the scent of new shoes. Paul had visited the store a couple times before with his mother, but had never simply walked in unaccompanied. Only one customer was milling around, inspecting winter boots. Paul warily peered out the window to see if he could still glimpse Sumo and Plum . . .

"Hi! Can I help you?"

Paul jumped. Standing next to him, smiling, was the saleswoman. He hadn't been prepared for that! All of a sudden, he found himself unable to utter a word and felt himself blush. The saleswoman was young, very pretty, and had long red hair.

"I . . . I'm just looking," he finally mumbled, and began purposefully looking at shoes.

"Well, be my guest," the saleswoman said, and smirked before leisurely walking back behind the counter.

"What's so funny?" Paul wondered. Then, he realized that in his haste, he'd been standing in front of a shelf of women's shoes. Two long steps took him the opposite side of the store and the men's selection. He felt foolish pretending to look at shoes, but he was trapped—under no circumstances could he leave the store just yet. At that moment, a man entered the store and the saleswoman's attention pivoted to the new customer.

The man greeted the saleswoman. Briskly, he walked up to the very same aisle where Paul stood. His gaze drifted over the shelves before he leaned down, picked up one dark-brown shoe, and took it straight to the counter.

"I'd like a pair of these," he said.

"Size 39, as always?" asked the saleswoman.

Translated by Adam Cullen

