



Piia Biscuit Moves In

Written by Kairi Look

Illustrator: Ulla Saar

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Piia Biscuit is a happy-go-lucky six-year-old girl who is not afraid of much. On January 1st, she and her family move to a cosy wooden building on Poplar Alley, where she plans to make many new friends. Luckily, the place is packed with colourful characters: a sweet-loving St. Bernard, a clever moth in the wardrobe and a Canadian called Jack, who loves bears more than anything. Not to mention the World's Best Uncle, Rasmus, who is fond of punk and petunias and knows how to fit hundreds of meatballs in his tummy at the speed of light.



Reading sample

[pp 15–20]

Piia and the Bubble Animals

Piia was enjoying a bubble bath in her new home. She stuck her nose into the foam, peeked up in the mirror, and sneezed. At-choo! A shimmering bubble took flight from the tip of her nose, hovered over the bathtub, and landed on the cap of the shampoo bottle. Plips! The bubble popped. And to Piia's great surprise, standing where the bubble had just been was a little giraffe, who waved to her.

"Good evening," the giraffe said politely, hopping onto the edge of the bathtub. "I didn't frighten you, did I? My name is Kaarel. Can we be friends?"

Piia inspected the giraffe, picked him up, and placed him on the tip of her thumb. "Of course we can! Are there any more of you?"

"Sure there are," Kaarel said, beaming. "All you have to do is blow us out of the foam! We've never been here on Poplar Boulevard before."

Piia didn't have to be told twice. She set the giraffe on top of a rubber frog and scooped up a new clump of foam. It glistened like a rainbow and crackled excitedly.

"Blow hard!" Kaarel told her. "There are a lot of us in the bubbles—someone is certain to come out."

Piia blew. The bubble soared and glittered, came to rest on the sink, and popped. And what do you know—a chubby little raccoon was suddenly sprawled out there, scratching its behind.

"Hooray!" the raccoon cheered. "It worked! I haven't set foot out of the bubble in a long time." He leapt to his paws, skated along the slippery sink to the mirror, and pulled Dad's toothbrush out of the toothbrush holder. "My name's Victor. 'Vic' to friends," the raccoon said, scratching his back with the toothbrush. "It sure is great to finally get clean again. The bubble is nice and soapy inside, but back-scrubbers are hard to come by."

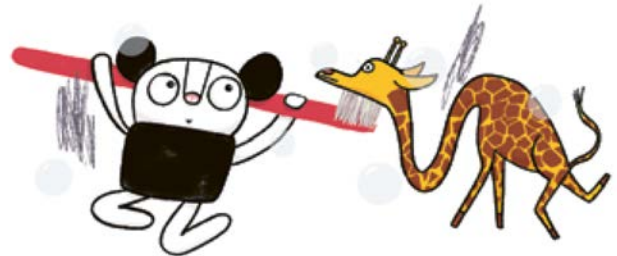
The helpful Volts scrubbed Kaarel and Piia clean, too—even the insides and behinds of their ears. Piia's bath was an especially fun one today, and water splashed onto the rug and all the way up to the ceiling.

When Mom came in to dry Piia off, she clapped her hands in surprise. "You've really gotten squeaky clean today!" she praised as she bundled Piia in a soft towel. "Even your ears are clean!"

When Piia and Mom were leaving the bathroom, her kitty Loofah slipped in through

the doorway. She leapt onto the edge of the bathtub and stared at the water spiraling down the drain, narrowing her eyes. Cats' instincts never lie. Something had happened here.

"They came out of the foam," Piia whispered, and hung her towel up to dry. Loofah nodded. You can't keep secrets from cats.



Piia Babysits Uncle Rasmus

Piia woke up on Sunday with a rumbling tummy. Her parents had left in the morning and her Uncle Rasmus was supposed to come and visit. That wasn't something that happened just any day because Uncle Rasmus was no ordinary uncle. Uncle Rasmus was the world's best uncle and Piia always kept a close eye on him.

Uncle Rasmus had curls growing on his head, a goatee on his chin, and tomatoes on his windowsill. He loved punk and petunias and studied biology at university. He said he was both into wild animals and party animals, which sounded similar but apparently weren't the same thing at all.

Piia climbed out of bed and dashed to the kitchen. Uncle Rasmus was already there—or, rather, his rear end was, since his top half was deep in the refrigerator.

"Good morning!" Piia called out. "What are we doing today?"

Uncle Rasmus backed out of the fridge, his arms heaped with hot dogs. "Good morning to you, too!" The strong scent of cutlets hung around him.

"I bet you're awfully hungry," Piia said, looking him up and down. "There are more cutlets in the freezer, you know—Mom made a whole stack of them."

"Already out, thawing," Uncle nodded brightly. "It's been months since I last saw a fridge this full! There are only dry noodles back at the dorm." And he swallowed a hot dog whole.

Piia frowned. Uncle Rasmus was looking a little thin—even noodle-shaped, himself. And he was scarfing down hot dogs so fast... Even Piia's father, who was the world's fastest hot-dog eater, would have lost to Uncle Rasmus today.

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“Hey—let’s play restaurant! Take a seat at the table, and I’ll be the waitress.” Piia grabbed a tray and stuck it under her uncle’s nose. “What would you like to have, sir? Today’s specials are hot dogs and cutlets.”

Uncle Rasmus’ eyes sparkled and he bolted to the table. “Good day! Hot dogs are just fine and dandy, but you wouldn’t happen to have any pancakes, would you...?” He shot a glance towards the stove and licked his lips.

Piia placed some pancakes on the tray and added a jar of jelly to help fatten him up.

“What wonderful service!” Uncle Rasmus said, packing pancakes into his mouth. He stuck a hand into his pocket and pulled out a little object. It was a matchbox. “Here’s your tip!

Meet Boris the Beetle!” he exclaimed, opening the matchbox just a crack. Two glinting eyes and whiskers peeked out.

Piia let Boris crawl onto her finger and smiled in content. She had no problem with games like that—as long as her uncle didn’t go hungry or sad.

When parents returned home later, they found Rasmus snoring on the sofa. Piia had tucked him in nice and snug, and was watching Boris sleep in the matchbox. Nothing to worry about there—Piia’s parents could feel at peace whenever they left her to babysit her uncle in the future, too.



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The Big Pet Day

Pet day was coming up at summer city camp, and Piia was worried. Liisa said she was going to bring her puppy, and Mihkel had two gerbils. Martin had an African turtle living at home, and Anna had a beautiful silky-smooth rat. Piia was the only camper without a pet, because her cat Loofah never went outside. She was shuffling glumly around the yard when suddenly, a loud snore betrayed someone's presence. A pair of hairy calves with big, scratched-up toes attached to them were hanging out of the hammock.

Moments later, the hammock swayed and flipped over. A sleepy Jack was flung onto the grass. He smiled up at Piia, squinting.

"Heywhat'sup! Sorry, I dozed off."

"I can see," Piia said. "It's two in the afternoon!"

"Ex-actly," Jack replied, resting against the trunk of the tree. "What's up? Why are you looking all sad?"

Piia sighed. "Tomorrow's pet day at camp and I don't have anybody to take with me. Even Tristan's got new cockroaches in his kitchen... He promised everyone he'd bring some in a matchbox."

"Hmm..." Jack hummed, thinking. "But why don't you take a not-visible animal?"

"A what?" Piia asked, confused.

"An invisible animal!" Dad called out from the back steps, and walked over. "I had a whole herd of them when I was your age—invisible giraffes and a tiger, and sometimes bears, too. And if my eyes aren't playing tricks on me right now... Jack, do you see it?" he peered up into the tree.

"I do," Jack said, nodding and craning his neck to see. "At least thirty of them. Owls. The best kind of all."

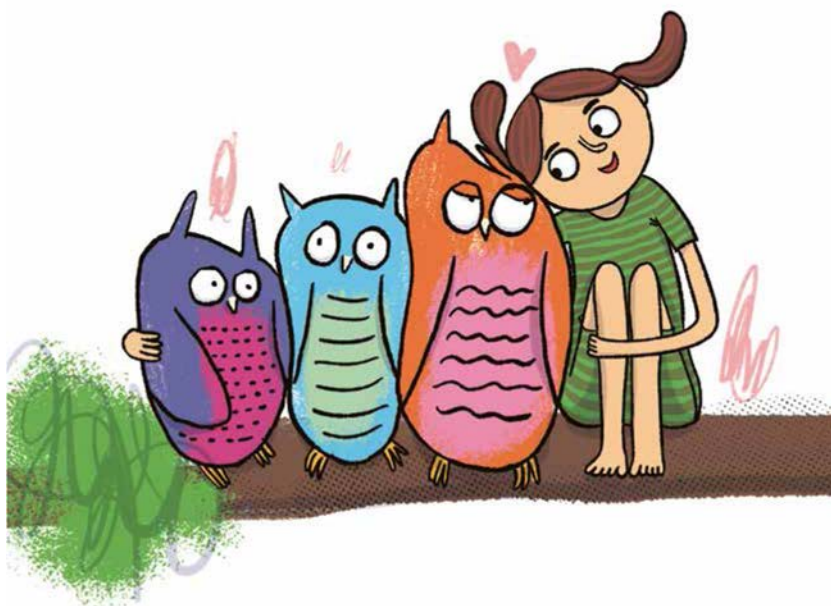
Piia stared up, too. Her eyes were peeled for any sign of the owls, but she couldn't spot a single one. "Where are they, exactly?"

"Up at the very top and to the left," Dad said, pointing. "A whole congress of them! And what do you know—right over there in the pea patch is a..."

"...a crocodile! So nice and green!" Jack whispered. "That's a really rare animal."

Piia stared at Jack doubtfully. "Crocodiles don't live in Estonia," she whispered.

"Yes, they do," Jack said. "Invisible crocodiles—there's a whole big bask of them right here. And behind that rock... there's a... it's a striped lamer!"



"A striped lemur," Dad corrected.

"Don't lie to me, I'm not a baby!" Piia cried out, offended. "Crocodiles and lemurs don't live in Estonia. And there's no such thing as invisible animals!" She was just about to go inside when she heard a sad snuffling sound from behind her, and spun around. Dad and Jack were slouched side by side under the tree, staring at the grass.

Piia sighed and plodded back to them. "Thirty owls?" she asked softly. "You really saw them, honest?"

"Honest," Dad said, sniffing. "There was a whole congress of them! A flock of owls is called a congress. It's awfully rare."

"The best kind of all," Jack added. "It's really lucky! I don't have one, nor two, nor even three invisible owls. I've got nobody."

"Don't get down in the dumps because of that," Piia comforted Jack. "You can have a few of mine. Thirty is too many, anyway."

"Nice!" Jack said, cheering up and squinting at the crown of the tree. "I'd like two owls, please: one brown, and one black."

Piia nodded in relief—what was important was that Jack wasn't sad. Dad looked happy again, too.

The invisible owls were a big hit at camp. Everyone wanted to pet them, and Piia wasn't jealous at all. Owls aren't like puppies, which nip your fingers and make puddles on the floor! Invisible owls are a real rarity, and Piia was very lucky to have them.

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[pp 53–58]

A Gift for the World's Best Grandpa

Grandpa was having a birthday today called his “big seven-oh”, and the Biscuits were getting ready for a special visit. Dad was looking around all morning for a brush he had lost last year, and Mom was slicing up a huge pile of potatoes, which was everyone’s favorite.

“Your potato salad is the best in the whole world!” Grandpa liked to praise as he devoured his helping in no time at all. When the bowl was empty, the celebrations would continue and other things would be eaten, too.

Today was no exception—everyone wolfed down Mom’s potato salad, and only then did the party get underway. Grandpa unpacked presents and exclaimed at least ten times: “Now that definitely wasn’t necessary!” His eyes shone like fireflies as he ripped open tons of wrapping paper.

Grandpa received a fish encyclopedia from Rasmus, a tie clip from Mom and Dad, and warm pajamas from Grandma. He was also given a motorbike helmet, fishing tackle, and expensive brandy. Grandpa stared at all the gifts blissfully, sitting on the mountain of wrapping paper like a birthday king. Then came Piia’s turn. She picked up her kitty Loofah and walked over to Grandpa.

“Well, and what have we got here?” Grandpa asked with a warm smile. “Or are you going to sing me a nice little song?”

“This is no school play!” Piia exclaimed, and set Loofah on Grandpa’s lap. “I’m giving you five minutes of cat-hugs. Happy birthday!”

Grandpa stared deep into Loofah’s eyes and sighed happily. “What a wonderful present! The best I’ve ever gotten, that’s for sure!”

Piia eyed the cat and shifted him deeper into Grandpa’s lap. “Go-go,” she ordered. “The clock’s ticking.” But Loofah leapt off of Grandpa’s lap and vanished without a trace.

When the birthday party was over, Piia was tucked in on the couch to sleep. They placed some soft blankets in a basket near the door for Loofah.

Piia was just about to fall asleep when she heard a creaking noise. She peeked over the couch. The bedroom door had opened— and there stood Grandpa, peering into the living room. He crept over to the cat’s basket, looked back and forth, picked up Loofah, and held him for fifteen whole minutes.

Piia snuggled back under her blanket and smiled softly. It sure was good that Grandpa finally got his present.



Jack's Lessons

Summer was in full swing and everything was growing wildly. The strawberries ripened in early July, followed by the raspberries and currants. Today, Piia scampered into the pea patch and nearly stumbled over Jack. He was lying in the tall grass, chewing on a stalk and watching the clouds go by.

"Heywhat'sup!" Jack exclaimed.
"Where are you off to?"

"To eat peas," Piia replied. "Come with me!"

"Sure," Jack nodded. He stood up and they strolled over to the garden, which was overflowing with peas. Piia picked a pod, pressed it open from the middle, and dumped the peas into her mouth.

"What are you doing?" Jack asked, his eyes wide. "How'd you do that?"

"It's easy," Piia told him. "Look—you press your thumbs down here in the middle where there's a crease, and the pod pops open."

Jack did as Piia had shown him, and the pod opened. "Wow!" he said admiringly, and carefully picked one pea out of the pod.

"Why're you eating them one by one?" Piia asked, laughing.

"How should I, then?" Jack replied, wrinkling his brow.

"Just watch!" Piia said, opening a new pod and pouring all the peas into her mouth at once.

"Oh-ho!" Jack exclaimed, studying his own pod. "So that's how you eat peas?!"

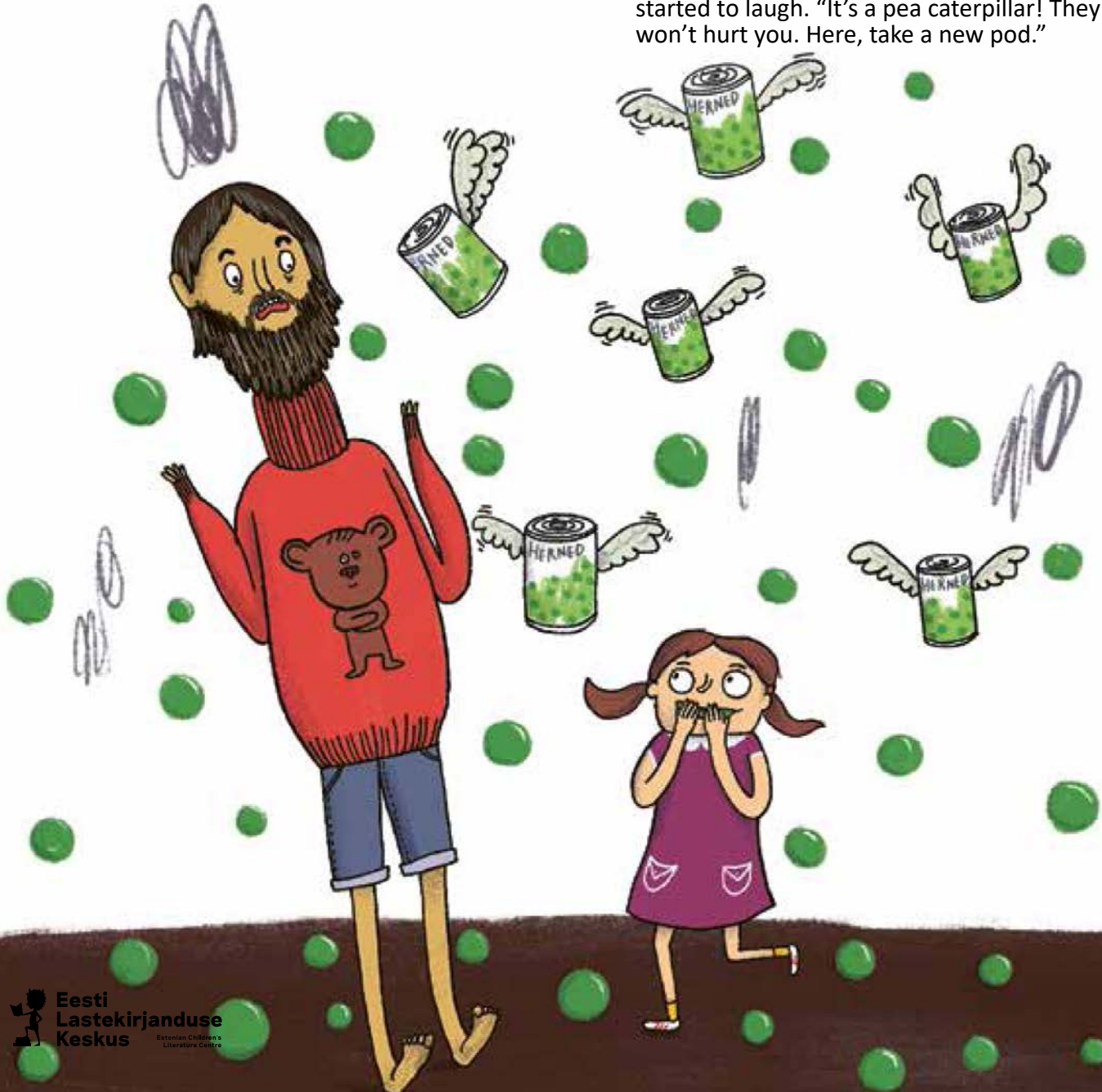
"Yep," Piia said, nodding. "Well, give it a try!"

Jack raised the pod to his open mouth, but then suddenly threw it onto ground.

"What's wrong?" Piia asked, her jaw hanging open. "Why'd you do that?"

"Th-there's someone in-inside," Jack whispered. "There's a snake in the pea pod!"

Piia bent down to look. A curious head poked out of the leftmost pea, and Piia started to laugh. "It's a pea caterpillar! They won't hurt you. Here, take a new pod."



Jack stared suspiciously at the pod, and then pried it open cautiously. "No snakes!" he exclaimed, and a wide smile cracked across his face.

"Of course not—there's not a caterpillar in every pod. Try it!" Pia encouraged.

Jack squeezed his eyes shut and chewed slowly. "Oh, green peas!" he sighed in relief, and squatted down among the plants. "Do Estonian peas always grow this way? Inside a pod, with a snake in them, above-ground?"

And so, Piia had to explain to Jack how peas grow. It was a huge surprise for him to learn that peas come from a pod and don't all grow separately underground. Jack had certainly encountered peas in cans and soups before, but had never seen a raw pea in real life! This seemed very strange to Piia, and that evening she told her parents about it, too.

"No wonder—that's how it is with some foreigners," Dad reckoned. "Mirjam said that last week at the market, Jack found out for the very first time that pickles are cucumbers, too. His whole life, he'd thought that pickles were a vegetable in their own right... Imagine that—Jack had never, ever seen fresh garden cucumbers before!"

"Well, they are similar words in Estonian, but not in English," Mom chuckled. "It's not like we Estonians know just how life is in Canada, either."

"Jack knows all the different bears of the world!" Piia announced. "We read about them in a book today. He knew all the names by heart."

"That's right," Mom said, nodding and tousling Dad's hair. "We all have our own skills."

[pp 62–64]

Dad Celebrates Sleep-In Day

"Do you know what day today is?" Dad asked in the morning with a big yawn.

"Of course we do!" Mom replied.

"Saturday and June 27th—the first day of our camping trip to the bog! Are all your bags packed?"

"I packed a long time ago already!" Piia shouted, munching on breakfast.

"Packed, packed..." Dad rumbled. "In case you didn't know, it's an ancient folk holiday today. Sleep-In Day! Instead of working, you're supposed to get as nice and rested as you possibly can."

"Camping is the best kind of holiday," Mom said dreamily. "Three days out in pristine nature with only birdsong and bog lakes ...!"

"And squelching boots," Dad said gloomily.

"Canned food, a damp tent, and mosquitoes. And bears! I've heard that a whole pack of bears moved into the bog lately."

"There's not a single bear in the bog," Mom said, laughing. "There aren't any big animals living there at all, much less bears."

"It's egg-laying season for mosquitoes right now, too..." Dad whispered to Piia. "And if it rains, then we certainly won't get a campfire going..." He stood up quickly. "I'm going to go take a nap."

Piia sensed danger and grabbed her father's arm. "Our teacher told us that on Sleep-In Day, you're actually supposed to predict the weather! So, I forecast seven straight weeks of sun and warmth!"

Dad stared glumly out the window. "You can never believe weather reports like that. The sun... it'll disappear in a flash. And there will definitely be fir-tree roots poking up under the tent... no to mention the biting ants."

"Listen, you old-fashioned guy," Mom said. "Get rid of your little lazy-bug and pack up. We're leaving at 11 o'clock sharp, no matter what your ancestors might think of it."

And by that afternoon, all three of them were in the bog. The sun was shining, the flies were buzzing, and when they took a dip in a bog pool, Dad forgot all about ancient customs. He splashed Mom, who was standing on shore, and presented her with a water lily when he climbed out. "To the lady of my dreams," he said, sticking the flower into her hair. "When will the sandwiches be ready?"

"As soon as you make them!" Mom laughed, and made such a big cannonball as she dove into the water that it arced up and over Dad's head.

"Clever as a cabbage worm, she is," Dad smirked, jumping in, too. And so, Sleep-In Day was left entirely unmarked on that occasion and no one suffered a single ant-bite, either. And what's more: the weather was gorgeous for two whole weeks.

