

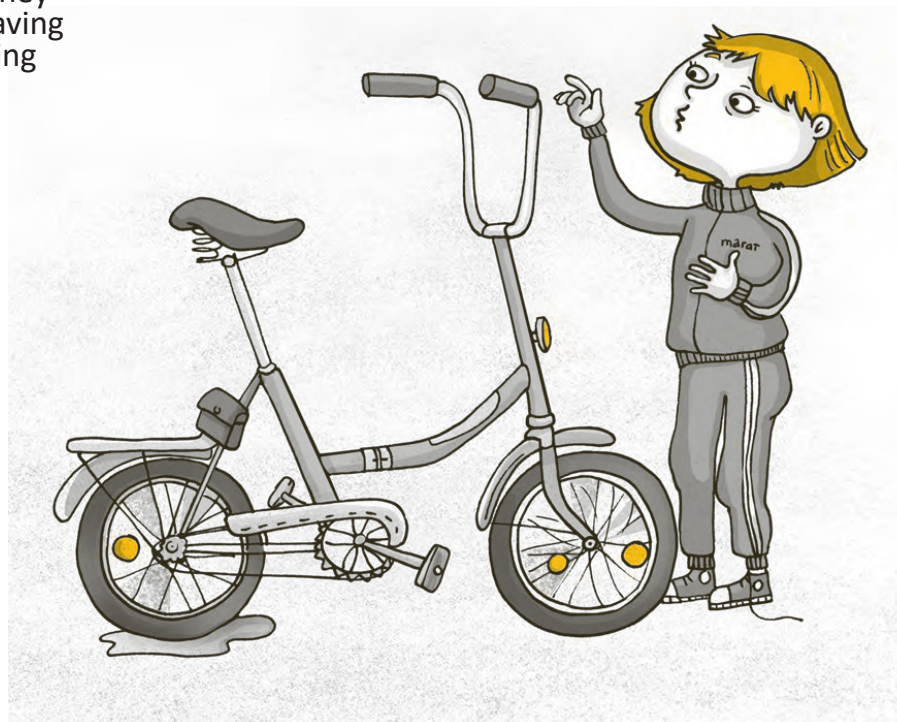
Pille Kannisto



BRITAGA JUHTUB

Brita's Always the One
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7+

Brita lives with her mom and grandparents in a big apartment building surrounded by lots of others. Her dad lives somewhere else and that makes the girl a little sad, though the presents he brings do cheer her up a bit. Luckily, Brita's friends Elli, Anna, and Paul are also nearby. Although the girl's mom does her very best to keep things under control and her grandparents also try to keep an even keel, the kids always find a way to embark on some adventure. They end up riding bikes on a busy road, having an epic snowball fight, and even leaping over a flooded ditch in spring.



Reading sample

2 Mum and Grandma infuriate the lady caretaker with mice. Apparently, there are no decent people in Brita's family.

One fine day, Grandma went into the kitchen to see what she could cook. She opened the door to the bin cupboard and to her horror discovered a number of small pellets. She closed the cupboard, looked around nervously and shrieked in an accusing tone, "Mice! We've got mice! Who brought them in?" If ever there was anything that Brita's highly strung Grandma could not abide and was even a teensy bit afraid of, it was mice.

Brita dashed into the kitchen excitedly as if Christmas had been announced unexpectedly. "What? Where? Show me, Grandma!"

"The only thing to see is mouse poo," Grandma said. She continued crossly, looking from Mum to Brita. "Did either of you know we had mice?"

Mum pretended to be looking for something on a shelf. Brita stared at the floor. For several evenings she'd heard scabbling in the kitchen. And the cupboard under the sink had started to smell really weird. But Brita had hoped until the last minute that Grandma wouldn't notice anything. Because then she would... But there was never any way of keeping anything from Grandma.

"Get yourself down to the shops this minute and buy some mouse traps!" commanded Grandma, pointing at Mum. "Right now! If we leave it everything will soon be all chewed up and full of mouse droppings."

Brita looked at Grandma questioningly, "But Grandma, why can't we have mice in the house? They're soooo cute!"

Grandma thrust her chin forward in soldierly fashion, "There'll be no mice in our house! Mice spread disease. And they can carry parasites - we don't want any parasites coming in here. Do you want parasites biting you in the night, Brita? And mice would eat our food and leave a horrible mousey stench!"

Brita's Mum looked miserable. She reluctantly pulled on her jumper, snatched up her bag and announced she was off to buy some traps.

She was soon back and after great excitement and a number of failed attempts they set the first trap, almost catching mum's finger in it. Grandma laughed with malicious glee, making Mum's mood even worse. But Brita was super excited and watched the trap for a good half hour before she tired of it and Grandma sent her to bed – after all, no child grows up big and strong without sleep.

In the morning Brita really did feel like she'd grown a bit and woke up stretching pleasantly. But at almost that very moment Mum screamed in the kitchen, "Ugh, a mouse!"

"What? where?" Grandma went storming in and scolded mum in disappointment, "What are you yelling about, it's in the trap!" And indeed it was. A fairly large male that had ventured into the trap to nibble on the small crumb of cheese.

Grandma thought Mum should take the mouse out of the trap and chuck it in the bin. Mum looked Grandma in the eye and told her in no uncertain terms that there was no way she was going to touch a dead mouse. Grandma, who was otherwise generally fearless, was nothing of the sort in matters of this kind, and tried to persuade Mum to do the dreadful deed.

"No," said mum, her mind made up, "I feel sick. I feel faint. Let's throw it out in the trap!"

Grandma was completely against the idea at first, and argued that it would make life incredibly expensive if they threw out the trap just because of some lousy mouse. It would be tantamount to pouring money down the drain as if it grew on trees. But Mum stood firm and Grandma clearly was not brave enough to throw the mouse away herself. So in the end Mum gingerly picked up the trap at one corner and held it over the bin. Suddenly she stopped. "It'll make it smell in here. Better to throw it out into the yard where the cats will eat it," she said. Grandma immediately agreed. Mum drew the curtain back from the cacti occupying the windowsill, approached the window and whoosh! – the mouse and trap flew through the air in a beautiful arc and landed below the window. Everyone breathed sighs of relief.

In the evening they set the next trap and the next morning the same thing happened: Mum screamed, fought with Grandma over the mouse and the trap and the mouse and trap flew into the yard together. It looked like the previous trap, complete with mouse, had disappeared from under the window.

When Brita went into the yard at lunchtime she looked for the trap in the grass but couldn't find it. That's so cool, she thought, at least the mouse hadn't gone to waste. Brita was delighted for the dear little kittens in the basement because they'd been able to have some nourishing mouse-meat for a second day. Fresh meat too. Just like a warm lunch.

On the third morning Mum and Grandma didn't bother fighting, and in solidarity grabbed the mouse and trap and sent them flying through the window into the yard – where there was suddenly a storm of shouting and abuse.

The cleaning lady for the block of flats jumped out into the open from behind a Virginia creeper, where she must have been hiding in her grey overalls, clutching a bucket, a brush and a spade.

"Hey, you!" she shouted over the yard. "You throw mice out! I every day clean up your mice from here! What kind of people do like this?! Who behave like this! They all grown up and everything. Decent people do they do like this? Eh? Kakyeljudi! Now you clean up yourself this mouse! Do you want I bring other two mice back, eh?" Her gaze was unexpectedly boring through Brita's kitchen window, her eyes bulging and her face purpley-red with fury.

Grandma, Mum and Brita were thunderstruck. Grandma no doubt at the idea she might not be regarded as a decent person and more generally because of what people might think of her now. Mum was frankly horrified that the other mice might be brought back, in the clear knowledge that she would in the end be the one to have to touch a dead mouse. Brita was confused that the cats hadn't eaten the mice. Why not? Now was her chance to explain to everyone how vital it was to have their very own cat.

But the caretaker had not yet calmed down one little bit, "And why you waste stuff like this, eh? you are bourgeois are you, eh? You take mouse out of trap, you don't throw trap away.

Look, like this! Posmotrite, lyudi!"

Suddenly the trap was open and the caretaker stood, triumphant, under the window, arms aloft with a mouse in one hand and the trap in the other.

Now Mum, resigned, went out, taking the rubbish bin and some tissues with her to pick up the mouse. While the caretaker continued with her string of reproaches, Mum delivered the mouse into the bin under the disapproving gaze of residents who had appeared at the windows. But when the caretaker wasn't looking, she managed to put the trap in there as well.

There was no way of knowing whether they'd got rid of the last mouse that morning or whether they'd run away from the ugly shouting, in any event, everything was peaceful in the house for a while. And that was something that Brita was really sorry about because she lost the chance to suggest they should get a cat.



20 Grandma ruins Brita's birthday party

Finally Brita's long-awaited birthday came round and Mum, Grandma and Grandad woke her up with cake and flowers. "Happy birthday to youuuuuuu!" they sang in raucous three-part harmony. Presents were waiting on the table for Brita: her favourite sweets and a thick story book with lovely, lively pictures. Brita was delighted and gave everyone a hug.

Guests were invited for the evening and the family happily bustled about in excited anticipation. Mum made her famous apple cake of course, and sardine and egg sandwiches. Grandma had prepared mountains of food herself the day before. She disappeared into her own room and said she needed to make some preparations. She reappeared soon after, rollers in her hair, and began tidying up the hall. The shoes formed a great long line that was difficult to navigate. Grandma approached it in her usual fashion and put each person's shoes behind their bedroom doors. "Check what you'll be wearing and put anything you're not wearing somewhere else!" she told everyone grumpily. "There are enough shoes here for a shop!"

Brita watched Grandma hesitatingly. The hall could really do with a shoe cupboard like the ones she'd seen in other children's houses. But for some reason her family didn't have one and a single layer of shoes covered the entire hall. Brita popped the shoes she didn't need under her bed.

In the evening the guests arrived; Anna, Elli and Paul. Grandma had decided that as there wasn't much room they would have the family party at the weekend. The only food she'd made for today was brawn.

The children gave Brita her presents. She decided not to open them straight away because it was so much better to do it when she was by herself. That way she could try and work out what was in each parcel calmly and there was no danger that the excited guests themselves would start playing with them. She still remembered a family birthday when a little boy was given a car that an over-enthusiastic guest had broken on the day. Brita had felt so sorry for the little birthday boy.

"What's there to eat?" asked Paul,

who hadn't had any lunch because of the birthday.

"First you must try my home-made brawn. Here's the vinegar and there's some horseradish in the little jug," Grandma said.

Brawn! Vinegar! Horseradish! How disgusting! The children looked on in horror as Grandma presented each of them with a huge portion. "help yourselves to potatoes and salad and marinated beetroot. The herring is here on the plate." Grandma was most obliging.

Brita tried the brawn. It tasted like jelly, but unfortunately, this kind of jelly was salty. The first mouthful wasn't a problem, but while she was eating the second one she bit on a suspicious lump. Brita munched and munched but couldn't chew it up. She thought she'd try and swallow it but it felt too big and Brita was afraid it would get stuck in her throat. In the end she pretended to cough and dropped the lump under the table from its hiding place in her hand. With a great effort she managed to share out her portion of brawn, even sneaking some onto Mum's plate. The other girls looked anxious too, only Paul was chomping away contentedly.

"More seconds please! And can I get a bit more horse radish?" Paul was already asking for his fourth helping of brawn. Grandma was as pleased as punch but also slightly nervous – what a lot one boy could put away! Would there be enough brawn to go round?

That evening Grandma was in her element. To start with she fetched a pile of balloons from her room, directed the guests to blow them up and then pat them to each other at the table. She was as happy as can be!

After that, she wanted to teach the birthday guests the polka, but the lack of space made it impossible. Then she asked every child in detail how they were, what they did with their parents and whether their grandmas made jam as she did. Next she took two jars of her best strawberry jam from her secret store and offered everyone some jam and bread.

Everyone had eaten so much before the time came to tuck into the cake that they couldn't even clean their plates. Brita couldn't wait until grandma left them alone but it looked as though she would be disappointed. She would have

so liked just to play with her friends and chat. A new girl had recently moved into their building. Everyone wanted to know if anyone knew her name. Finally grandma went into the other room.

"What's that new girl called?" Brita asked Elli. Elli hadn't had time to reply before the door opened and grandma came back in. "Tan-tan-taraa, tan-tan-taraa! Now a birthday poem for our dear Brita!" she announced loudly and read out a long, pointless poem in which Brita only picked out the rhyming words "sunny" and "funny", and "Brita". Brita's friends giggled and Elli yawned. Brita looked at her mum pleadingly but mum clearly thought that everything was fine and smiled back at her happily.

Paul was sat on his chair, with a full tummy and a glazed look in his eyes. He clearly was unable to manage a single mouthful more. Anna picked her nose and Brita's Mum disappeared into the kitchen to do the dishes.

"And now a round of applause, please!" Everyone clapped noisily. "I have some more poems that I'll read for you as well," grandma told them, spiritedly. Finally she had found an audience.

"I have to go home!" Elli declared hurriedly, standing up abruptly.

"My stomach hurts, I'm going home too," Paul slowly stretched himself onto his feet.

Brita was furious with her grandma. Why, oh why did she have to be such a livewire today of all days?

Anna was a little more polite; she said thank you to everyone for everything and declared that Brita's grandma could yet become a famous poet. Grandma was delighted and positively beamed.

"Oh, didn't I give you a wonderful birthday party? It would have been so dull for you otherwise," Grandma said.

Brita nodded in reply. Perhaps next year Grandma would have something else to do and Brita could have a good time with her friends. Then she remembered that her family party was still to come, and if Grandma was still in this form it would be even livelier.

Grandma's voice interrupted Brita's thoughts, "Look what I've found!" Grandma had collected at least ten lumps of chewed brawn that she'd found under the table. Evidently the others had deposited their own gristly mouthfuls under there too.

"Honestly, who behaves like that? Who wastes food! The best bit's not been eaten!" scolded Grandma. "Perhaps it was Paul?" suggested Brita happily.

"Yes, the boy, it probably was him, that's why he kept on asking for seconds and was never full up - he was secretly leaving half of it!" Shaking her head she disappeared into the kitchen.

