



**King Toti and the Flaming City of Dorpat**

Text by Kristin Kongi

Illustrated by Sirly Oder

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Just when the summer vacation is about to start, the parents need to go to a work trip and leave the kids, Lukas and Thor with their grandma. This upsets the children at first but when grandma Aada starts to take the kids around their hometown, Tartu, while telling them exciting stories about its history, the previously boring place opens up and the boys start to see it in a completely different light. One morning the brothers want to surprise their granny with some freshly baked pastry. On their way to the bakery they decide to take another look at the tunnel they saw the day earlier. While investigating the entrance to the tunnel, they suddenly find themselves in the historic Tartu, when it was still called Dorpat. Lukas and Thor are going to have to fight the malevolent dragon and save Dorpat to find their way back home.



## Reading sample

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Expectantly, the boys dashed down the winding street that led to a door. But it was nothing like the one they'd tumbled through just moments earlier. Instead, the astonished brothers found themselves facing a towering golden door in a spacious entryway. It was taller than any tree on Toome Hill! Wider than any doorway in all of Tartu! What's more, drifting from the door, which was covered in a rough and scaly pattern, were teensy sparks that resembled gold dust.

Now, they could clearly hear a crackling like logs in a fire, which seemed to be coming from the other side of the mysterious entrance. There was no sign of the bat whose shadow they'd thought they saw.

"What's this?" Thor gasped.

"Check out those scales!" Lukas exclaimed. "I think I know what's behind the door."

But the word he wished to speak didn't make it past his lips. Instead, Lukas took a deep breath, squeezed his eyes shut, and pushed a hand through the saffron-colored veil of sparks. Strangely, it didn't even burn.

His fingers barely brushed the door when it yanked them through in a flash. Still, everything that goes in must also come out. The boys flew through the door and into an all-too-familiar ditch.

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"Where are we?" Thor asked, literally gasping in fear.

"I don't know" Lukas whispered in a quivering voice.

They felt as if their feet were locked to the ground by magnets, and might have even begun to spread roots if the spell weren't broken by high-pitched giggling.

Startled, the brothers stared down into the valley.

"Look! There's a girl down there," Thor said, pointing.

And so there was: a girl with braided flame-red hair who, judging by her clothes, might have jumped straight out of the past. She was holding a butterfly net high and running through

the tall grass, swinging at the colorful insects and laughing brightly.

Unlike them, she didn't appear confused in the very least; nor did she seem bothered by the mysterious disappearance of the tennis courts. Lukas took his little brother by the hand as they began carefully picking their way down the hillside. The sight of the girl filled them with relief and gave Lukas hope that he might soon have a sensible answer to Thor's question.

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"Are you children of the tsar?" the girl asked politely, trying to make up for her insult while actually thinking that no heir to the Russian throne could be dressed as bizarrely as these two.

"No."

The boys both shook their heads.

"Where are you from, then? I haven't seen you in town before."

"We're from right here," Lukas said, stamping his foot against the ground.

"You live underground?" she asked mockingly.

Lukas shot her a glare and decided not to show another pinch of friendliness from that point forward.

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Although the girl had just been full of vim and vigor, she was now as delicate as a snowflake. Thor approached her and gently took her hand.

"What's your name?" he asked, cocking his head to the side.

"Iris," she replied, wiping her eyes. "So, who are you if you're not heirs to the Russian throne or demons from Hell?"

"He's Thor."

Iris was taken aback and a million questions flooded her mind all at once. She knew the ancient tales of the lightning god, but who could have guessed that they were based on fact?

"Thor the Lightning God?!"

She gaped at Lukas's little brother as if he were a golden egg.

"No, not even close," Lukas replied.

He'd never seen someone so flustered, so he decided to play a little trick on their uppity new acquaintance. Putting his incredible imagination to

work, he whipped up an unbelievable fairy tale on the fly.

“Standing before you are Toti, king of the polar bears’ realm, and Thor, the fire-tamer.”

“A fire-tamer and a king of the bears?” Iiris echoed. “Now I understand! You two are from a traveling circus!”

This made her ecstatic, because she loved the circus more than anything else in the world. She would never forget the last time a traveling circus troupe passed through Tartu and offered the locals a mind-boggling performance. Six three-horse teams crossed the Stone Bridge to Market Square, surrounded by cheering children. She’d never seen something so beautiful. Flying acrobats, fire jugglers, tightrope dancers, illusionists, a mustachioed woman, and rare animals gave a tremendous show beneath the big top for a twenty-koopek ticket.

“That’s silly,” Lukas scoffed. “We come from the realm of the polar bears, not a circus.”

Thor, who was biting his bottom lip to keep from laughing, arced his head back and was watching his brother with glittering eyes. Lukas winked, signaling to his little brother that a fun game was just beginning.

“Huh. Haven’t heard of it,” the girl said with a shrug.

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The children’s path continued in a direction the boys found quite familiar. They could swear the house they were getting closer to with every step was home. Iiris, who was totally unaware of the boys’ true connection to the city, bounded across the intersection and pushed two loose fence planks apart.

“We’re here!” she announced while stepping through. Lukas’s heart pounded in anticipation and his eyes drilled into the windows of Peeter’s house across the way, as if hoping to spot a familiar figure who’d open one and relieve him by calling out: “That was all just a silly game. Now, come home!” Still, the thought was followed by a clear invitation.

“Well, are you coming or not?” Iiris asked the boys frozen like statues in the middle of the street.

They hesitantly followed her

down a well-trodden footpath, which led through knee-high grass and weeds into the inner courtyard. Two outdoor chairs were nestled among phlox and peonies beneath the curling branches of apple trees. One chair was occupied by a wicker basket full of empty glass bottles. Through the open window, they could hear rhythmic thumping and glimpse pale light.

“Papa! We have guests,” Iiris called inside as she leaned against the window frame.

“Goodness gracious! Guests?” a jolly voice answered.

Iiris beckoned to the quietly lingering boys and led the way inside.

“But now, you’re going to have to sit down, or you’ll fall over in amazement,” she warned the man inside.

“Such important visitors, hm!?”

Lukas was in a bind. He hadn’t considered that Iiris might introduce them to her father as a king and a fire-tamer. He also didn’t want to lie to any adults, so he gestured furiously for her to come back so he could get the truth off his chest.

“What are you waiting for? Come in already!” she commanded, ignoring his flailing hands.

The room was dim but still lit well enough to see into every corner. Sitting at a table was before them was an elderly man. With his index finger, he pushed a pair of round glasses onto the bridge of his nose to get a better look at the guests.

The room felt very cozy to Lukas, even though it contained nothing aside of two narrow beds, a dresser with a washing bin and a tin pitcher, a small table, two chairs, and a woodworking bench covered in sawdust. All kinds of tools hung on the walls – the only ones he could recognize were a wood file and a hand plane.

The boys said hello and crossed the high doorstep. Although they felt shy in the stranger’s company, they were also greatly relieved when he grinned at them with kindness in his eyes.

“You have a very nice home.”

The old man was impressed with the boys’ polite entrance, though their clothing did add a note of curiosity to his expression. They appeared to have come from afar. He wiped his sawdust-powdered spectacles in a rag and rested them back on his nose.

Iiris eagerly made the introductions.

"This here is the fire-tamer Thor and that one's Toti, King of the Polar Bears."

The old man chuckled and stroked his beard between calloused fingers. At first, he could only guess that the children had invented a nice little game, but taking in the boys' clothes and the serious look on Iiris's face, he quickly had his doubts. Lukas felt deeply ashamed and merely stared at the ground.

"That's quite the fine jest!"

Iiris climbed into her father's lap and wrapped her arms around his neck.

"I thought the same thing, but it's true."

"Oh, come now! What are you playing at? I've heard all kinds of stories and legends about gods and generals alike, but this is the first time a 'land of the polar bears' has reached my ears," he said, searching their faces for confirmation that it was all just a ruse.

Iiris put her lips right next to the old carpenter's ear and whispered: "They came to save our city!"

The old man stared at her while the boys stood silently in the doorway, pale from fear and empty stomachs. It was one thing to play tricks on a little girl, but they couldn't fool an old man. Lukas could feel his hands tremble as he clasped them behind his back.

"Well . . . alright, but . . . what are you doing here?"

Words that Lukas could never have imagined himself saying a moment earlier suddenly escaped his lips.

"It must have something to do with an enchantment."

The suggestion flashed through the old man like lightning. His thin lips formed a single soundless word:

"Dragon!"

His glassy gaze turned to the fiery sun setting outside the window. The sky was glazed in gold, reminding him of the day the dragon god last flew over their city.

