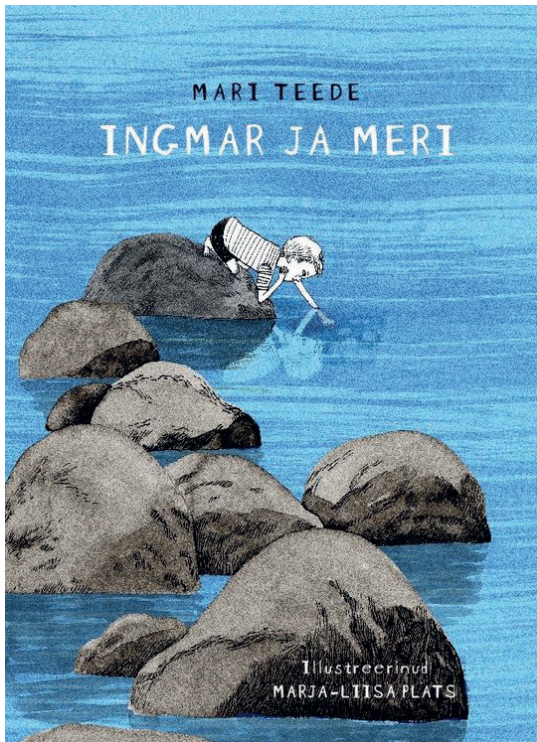


For more information or copyrights, please
contact: ulla.saar@elk.ee



Ingmar and the Sea

Text by Mari Teede

Illustrated by Marja-Liisa Plats

Tänapäev 2023, 128 pp, hardcover

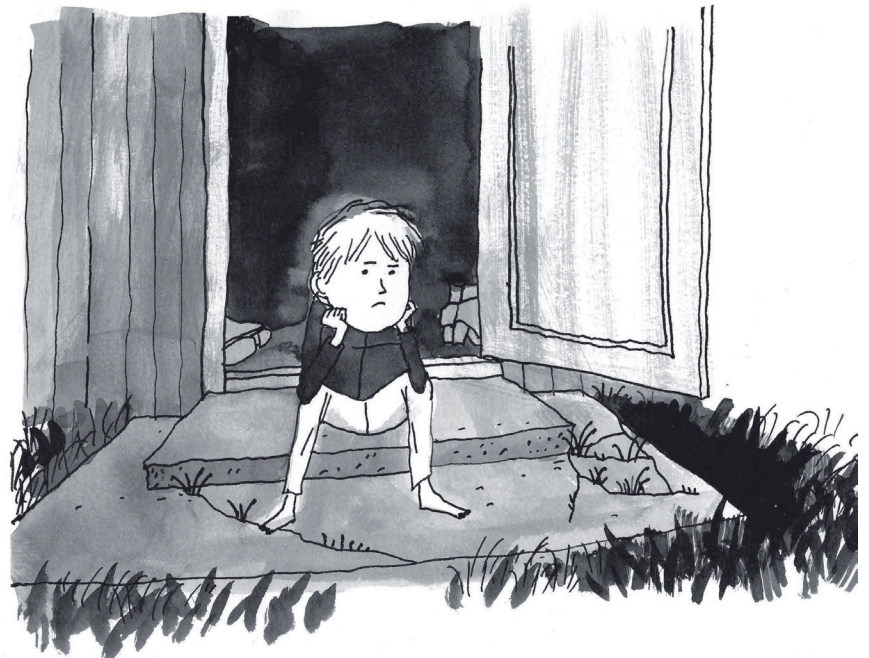
ISBN 9789916173954

Storybook, fiction,

Topics: broken families, bullying, children's
rights, friendship, nature

Age: 8+

How can your whole life already be decided for you, leaving no option but to come to terms with it? When your parents get divorced, then they're the ones who decide that you're going to live with your mom, not your dad. They decide you're going to move from your wonderful apartment to a beat-up old house by the sea where your grandpa used to live. They decide you're going to go to a totally new school where you don't know anyone. Ingmar finds consolation on the shore, where the softly lapping waves, sea birds, polished bits of glass lying in the sand, and paths winding through the reeds look different every day. Alas, he thinks, it's all still not enough to feel safe and happy once again.



Reading sample

Grandpa's House

Ingmar sat on the steps and stared grouchy ahead. How on Earth, how on God's green Earth could his parents decide to get a divorce?! His mom and dad had simply informed him one day that they'd no longer be living together. That they'd grown apart, in their own words. Ingmar's parents decided that he'd live with his mom and that the two of them would move to his late grandpa's house on the Kopli Peninsula. Nobody asked him whether he wanted to live with his mom or his dad. He did want to live with her, of course, but they still could've asked! Ingmar grumbled every time he thought about it.

"Ingmar, please come and help me!" his mom called from downstairs.

Let her keep yelling. Why does she think I should jump up and run the moment she calls me? the boy thought irritably.

The old stairs creaked with every step when he finally went downstairs. Everything in his grandpa's house was so dumb and old-fashioned. The doors squealed on their hinges, the windows were hard to open, and the wallpaper was all ugly. Not to mention that the weird old-person stench refused to go away, no matter how much they aired the place out.

The first floor was a total mess. His mom's flushed face popped out from between stacks of boxes and big black trash bags.

"Be a darling and help me push this cupboard over by the wall," she asked. They strained for a long while before finally getting it into place.

"Thanks, now I can start filling it up. You can go be outside for a bit until it gets dark."

Ingmar pulled on his sneakers, went outside, and stood in the middle of the yard. He'd been there many a time before, back when his grandpa was still alive, but now, everything felt different. The faded woodsheds and pitiful dump of a house with peeling yellow paint just didn't fit with him and his mom. And the yard! That was a real joke. Every picket of the fence was painted a different color, all beiges and yellows. Some were shorter, others longer, and in their midst was a single sun-bleached plank of driftwood that looked especially silly. Dad should've been the one to move here and

leave them their nice apartment back in Mustamäe, he thought.

Ingmar looked around glumly and then went out the gate. Their new home was the last in a row of other little yellow houses on a street that dead-ended at the sea. He took a couple steps and then felt as if the wind had been knocked out of him. Straight ahead was a vast expanse of water that glittered, shifted, and frothed. It was as if he could hold the whole bay in the palm of his hand. On his right was a faded pink lighthouse followed by an identical one a short distance away. Towering behind them both were cranes in the harbor. To his left stretched the long, sandy Stroomi Beach, the far end of which was out of sight.

Ingmar heard footsteps approach from behind him and felt his mom wrap her arms around his shoulders a second later.

"Beautiful, isn't it? I think we're going to like it here," she said softly. "You see those buildings across the bay? A little to the right of them is a big fancy school. That's where you're going to start going."

"What!?"

"Oh, don't look so dismayed. It's one of the best schools in the city. Dad already enrolled you and paid the tuition, too."

"But what about my friends!? I don't want to!" Ingmar protested.

"You'll still have all your friends, don't worry. You know there's no point arguing with Dad."



[pp. 22–32]

The First Day of School

August passed and Ingmar's first day at his new school came before he knew it. It stood directly across the bay from the end of his street and if he looked through binoculars, he could've even counted all the windows. But as it soon turned out, the way there was exhaustingly long and difficult. His mom went with him on the first day of class. First, they walked to the bus stop, waited a while, and then rode for a few stops before getting off and waiting for another bus. That one took them to Rocca al Mare, where they had to climb up a hill on foot again.

Mom checked the time.

"Oh, wow. That took nearly an hour. I bet you can get here just as quickly walking. Look, there's a nice path that runs through the reeds and down along the shore. You can definitely walk to school when the weather's nice," she said encouragingly, wrapping an arm around him.

Ingmar quickly shrugged it off. Nothing good would come of any of his new classmates seeing his mom hugging him right outside of school.

The school itself was a sprawling building right on top of the hill, complete with a tower. Glittering right behind it was the bay. Somewhere far across the water was their tired old house. But there was no time to squint at it now, because they were already climbing the steps and going inside. The first bell rang the second they were inside. Ingmar watched the stragglers dashing off to class.

"Can I help you with anything?"

a young woman who was slightly out of breath asked. "Are you our new student? Ingmar? Come with me!"

They stepped into his classroom a moment later.

The buzz of conversation stopped immediately. Every eye locked onto him. Ingmar stared back and, as if through a fog, heard his teacher introduce him to the class.

"...so just go ahead and pick an open seat. Look, there's one next to Rainer," his teacher was saying kindly. Every head in the room swiveled to look at a hulking blond boy at a table in the very back. Ingmar could immediately tell it wasn't a good option. He walked up to Rainer but just as he was about to sit down, the boy tossed one of his legs over the empty seat and scowled menacingly. Ingmar took a step back. The whole class was staring at them. Ingmar noticed another empty seat in front of Rainer and sat there.

All the while, his teacher had been shuffling through papers on her desk. She glanced up.

"Okay, that seat's fine, too," she said.

Ingmar gave a sigh of relief and looked around.

"Think you're in the wrong class, buddy. Baby classes are on the second floor," a voice softly hissed from behind him. Someone snorted.

And that was how the first day at Ingmar's new school began.

An Incident on the Shore

One day, Ingmar was walking home along the shore. The sea was calm. Greenish water rocked gently through the boulders and stroked the land. The beach was almost completely empty except for a man walking back and forth over the sandy vanishing islands. Ingmar stopped to watch the birds wading through the shallows, their beaks comically long and hooked at the end. It looked as if they were just about to lose their balance and splash face-first into the water. But no, they were called curlews and had such long beaks to get food from the seabed more easily.

Ingmar grinned, then looked up. The man was gone. How could he have left the beach so quickly? He'd been there just a second ago. A sense of unease came over the boy. He scanned the shore and was shocked to spot the man lying face-down on the edge of the water, his back hunched up and his arms bent unnaturally beneath him. Ingmar looked around for help, but the two of them were totally alone on the beach. He sprinted over to the man, whose shallow breath was whistling through his gaping mouth. The waves were splashing right up by his face. Ingmar could tell that man was unconscious. He was staring straight at Ingmar with wide-open eyes but didn't appear to notice the boy—it was like he was gazing inside himself. Stunned, in pain, helpless. In a panic, Ingmar's mind raced as he wondered what to do. He wrestled off his backpack and carefully slid it beneath the man's head to keep water from flowing into his mouth. Then, he pulled his phone out of his pocket and called the emergency number, his hands trembling.

Someone picked up almost immediately. A woman, her voice steady and direct, asked him where he was and to describe the man's condition. Ingmar stuttered and tried to fight back tears. He couldn't say where he was, exactly. Well, Stroomi Beach, kind of near the windsurfers' hut. And what state was the man in? That was even harder to describe.

"Well, he's breathing, and his eyes are open. There's no water going into his mouth because I stuck my backpack under his head."

The woman told Ingmar to stay with the man and to wave his arms high above his head as soon as he saw the ambulance. If any adult should come onto the beach, then he should ask them for help, too. And

it was very important to keep his phone handy in case they needed more details. The woman spoke in a clear and soothing way, making Ingmar feel a little more confident.

The man didn't move a muscle and his breath was coming out in short huffs. His cheek was pressed heavily into the backpack. Ingmar sat down next to him and rested a hand on his shoulder. Hold on a little longer, the thought. Hold on. He suddenly felt very close to the unconscious man, as if they'd known each other for a very long time. If he survived, then, then, then... Ingmar had no idea what he'd do then, but sensed that everything would change.

The minutes seemed to crawl as water the color of seaweed lapped the backpack lazily. Seagulls continued crying as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening. How could the sea stay so calm when something like this was going on? It felt so unfair. The man's eyelids had slid shut and Ingmar couldn't hear his breath anymore. Ingmar's knee started to tremble; he had to push it down hard against the sand before it stopped.

Finally, he spotted an ambulance turning onto the beach. Ingmar leapt to his feet and ran towards it, waving his arms.

"Here! Here!" he cried hoarsely, shouting so loud that his throat hurt. At first the ambulance veered aimlessly this way and that, but then the driver noticed Ingmar and it jerked to a halt. Two men jumped out and jogged in his direction. Panting, Ingmar stopped and pointed both hands towards the man lying on the sand. He tried to speak but could only force out a miserable squeak. Even so, the medics understood and ran over to the collapsed man. Still out of breath, Ingmar watched them crouch down and inspect him. Soon after, they deftly lifted him onto a stretcher.

"You did well, kid!" one of them said while they ran past, carrying the stretcher. "We got here in the nick of time. He'll survive!"

Relieved, Ingmar fell to his knees and started to cry. Luckily there was no one around to see it. The mild sea still lapped softly nearby, comforting him.

Suddenly, he remembered his backpack. Where had it gone?! He got up and ran to the spot where the man had been lying. It wasn't there! Ingmar scanned the shore desperately. The tide

had risen and swept their footprints from the sand. That meant his backpack must be underwater somewhere. Oh, no! And I've got a math test tomorrow! Ingmar groaned. He sloshed back and forth through the shallow water and finally spotted a strap floating on the surface. He grabbed it and lifted the dripping backpack from the sea. Opening it up, he stared mournfully at his sopping notebooks and textbooks. Between them was the tablet his dad had given him. Of course, the screen no longer lit up.

At home, Ingmar laid his workbooks out on his desk and tried drying them with paper towels. Then he crept downstairs, fetched his mom's hairdryer from the entryway, and tried using it on the books. He held the hairdryer in one hand and turned pages with the other. The paper dried quickly but remained wavy and ugly.

