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The Case of the Missing Book

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Hugo couldn't believe it had happened to him. He, who was always so careful and took good care of the library books he borrowed! So why did the precious book about computer games have to vanish from his desk during recess? Hugo knew he should have left it at home and not tried to impress his classmates.

When Lilianna, Amanda-Riin, and Robert hear about the boy's problem, they decide to help him get the lost book back, no matter what it takes.



Reading sample

[pp. 5–14]

Lilianna

Lilianna strolled towards the library, clutching her list of required summer reading. Their teacher had handed it out on the last day before break and recommended that the students start casually reading right away—that way, they wouldn't have to cram everything in at the last minute. Lilianna had to admit she'd read most of the books on the list a long time ago; some were even on her bookshelf at home. But the others were yet to be read and piqued her interest. She'd decided to see which titles were available at the local library. And maybe she'd come across something else that'd make for great summer reading.

A group of kids around her age, three girls and two boys, were running down the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street. The girls were laughing and squealing—the boys appeared to be chasing them. Lilianna sighed. Although she loved to read, she would've gladly done other summer activities as well—such as running around with friends just like those kids across the street, and just like others in her class. The problem was that she didn't have any good friends like those. Lilianna still felt like the new girl at school, even though she'd been going there for an entire year. Somehow, she hadn't managed to make a single close friend in class—everybody had already formed their own gangs long ago. She'd hoped that maybe there'd be another newer girl, or at least a slight introvert who otherwise sat alone and could be good friend material. Lilianna had had two whole friends in the last city they lived in: Eva-Maria and Kristina. She'd tried to keep up with them over email and Skype and Messenger, but both turned out to be bad at writing back and now, a year later, there unfortunately wasn't very much left of their friendship.

Here, Lilianna hadn't clicked with anybody right off the bat. She wasn't very talkative or good at conversation, either; someone who could blend into a crowd of new people like a fish in water. She'd been left pretty much on her own and spent most passing periods reading. This distanced her even further from her classmates, of course,

and she'd heard some meanly call her a bookworm behind her back several times. Not many other kids at school liked to read much, as far as Lilianna knew. She, on the other hand, could remember reading avidly from the moment she mastered the skill; probably at around the age of four or five.

Lilianna hoped another new kid might join next year at the beginning of fifth grade. Somebody even just a little like her. Would she then, finally, get at least one good friend? But she needed to survive the summer first. She liked having a break from school but otherwise wasn't particularly excited. It would be her first summer in the capital and she had no idea how to spend her time in such a big city. Her mom was supposed to take time off work starting in July and had promised they'd do something together, maybe travel somewhere for a few days. Finland, for instance. It sounded nice, but Lilianna wasn't entirely sure she could count on it happening. Mom was so busy with her new job and had that new boyfriend. Ralf. Lilianna had the feeling her mom enjoyed spending time with Ralf much more than she did with her daughter. She couldn't even remember when they last did something or went somewhere as just the two of them. Whenever they did go anywhere, Ralf came along, too, and Lilianna always felt like a third wheel. When Mom and Ralf were laughing and playfully teasing each other, she constantly felt as if she were a little old lady hanging out with a bunch of teens. It wasn't a good feeling, so when Mom invited her to go out and Ralf was tagging along, she'd usually make up a reason for why she had to miss out. Ralf was young and upbeat, and Lilianna could totally understand why her mom liked him... but she also felt like he'd much rather just spend time alone as a couple and appeared to sigh in relief when she said she couldn't accompany them out to a café or for a walk, or just didn't feel like going. Lilianna would gladly dive into a good book instead, where a totally different world into which she could sweetly disappear awaited. She read more or less everything that she could that got her hands on and seemed interesting: comics, fantasy books about witches and fairies, detective stories for kids and young adults, classic old children's books her

mom recommended, modern young-adult novels... So, it came as no surprise that their local library was one of the very first places she explored after moving to the capital. It was a nice place to sit silently and flip through books. There usually weren't many other kids her age; only a few who showed up to borrow required reading. Most often, she'd see a boy and a girl, probably brother and sister, who were one grade ahead of her. But they always sat and read apart from everyone else. Lilianna didn't want to bother them.

Today, the library was quiet and quite empty, just as she'd expected. There was one older woman standing by the adult check-out counter on the first floor and upstairs, the kids' section appeared totally deserted... until Lilianna spotted the brother and sister sitting in the back corner, their noses buried in books. She strolled through the bookshelves, list still in hand. Okay. She hadn't read Oskar Luts's *Cabbagehead* yet—that one had to be found. And Katrin Reimus's *The Fairy Dance*, and Jaan Kross's *March Bread*. Lilianna liked looking for library books on her own: she'd learned how they were organized and where to find them a long time ago already. So, she was lost deep in concentration when she suddenly heard a boy complaining miserably by the counter.

"I just can't find it anywhere! I've no idea where I put it. So, what's going to happen?"

"I'll extend the book's due date for now," replied the librarian, a plump and friendly gray-haired older woman. "You can take another look around at home; maybe you'll find it. But if the book still doesn't turn up, then I'll have to ask you to replace it. It was just published recently; you can find another copy at a bookstore."

Lilianna heard the boy sigh in defeat and ask how much a book like that might cost. Hearing it'd be around twenty euros, he sighed again. Then, the phone rang, and the librarian went back downstairs, her shoes clacking on the steps. Lilianna had located all three required books and sat down at a table to flip through them a little. She'd just opened the first—*Cabbagehead*—when she noticed that the boy was still standing by the counter. He was tall, skinny, and maybe twelve or thirteen. His chestnut-

colored hair was thick and curly, and he wore round glasses that looked a little like Harry Potter's. Lilianna blushed when she realized he was staring back at her. And then, out of nowhere, the boy came and sat down in the chair directly across from her.

"I didn't actually lose the book," he whispered softly. "I'm not the type of sloppy person who loses library books. It was stolen from me!"

Hugo

He had no idea what to do. It was a terrible feeling—as if he, sloppy and stupid, really was the one to blame. The fact was that Hugo really did take great care of every book he had, especially ones borrowed from the library, and always wrapped them up in a plastic bag before sticking them into his backpack. You never know how they might end up getting smudged or dirty! But now he, Hugo, had lost a library book, and in the nastiest way possible—someone stole it from him at school. To be fair, bringing the book to school in the first place had been a big mistake and he only had himself to blame. But he'd wanted so badly to just... well, not show it off, exactly, but show it to the other kids. Okay, not to every other kid, but certainly to Sebastian, Remo, Torm, and Albert. They were the wildest and craziest guys in class who almost every teacher was forced to scold constantly. They couldn't stand Hugo and made fun of him every day for always reading and knowing all the answers in every single lesson. Hugo had secretly hoped that if he brought the cool book on computer games to school, then they'd develop a friendly interest in him and quit their teasing. Hugo's benchmate in class was Ron: a scrawny, freckled boy who was so quiet he almost never uttered a word. But Hugo knew that Ron liked computer games. And the gang of bullies liked them, too—Hugo overheard the boys discussing them often. He himself wasn't a big gamer, only playing a little *Minecraft* every now and then. It was fun, but hadn't he also heard other kids call it kind of babyish? There were other, supposedly cooler games, too, but Hugo didn't know anything about them and wasn't really interested, either. Honestly, he enjoyed reading a lot more than games.

But when he spotted a book titled *Exciting Computer Games* at the library, he decided to check it out at once, the idea being to educate himself and use the knowledge to maybe even slide into the other boys' conversation and impress them.

"But how did somebody manage to steal it from you?" asked the blond-haired girl to whom Hugo had, to his own surprise, unexpectedly opened up. "Was it in your backpack and was taken, or did you leave it on a desk somewhere...?"

Hugo noticed that the kids reading in the corner, a boy and a girl who were both dark-haired, wearing red shirts, and looked like identical twins in every other respect, were now also attentively listening in on their conversation. He enjoyed the attention. At school, other kids usually just rolled their eyes or snickered whenever he said something or gave their teacher a longer answer. It made him feel discouraged and like it'd be better to say nothing at all. But these three kids seemed genuinely interested in what he was saying.

"Yeah, I left the book on my desk in the classroom," he admitted, a little embarrassed to realize that he really shouldn't have left something valuable lying around like that. "It never even crossed my mind that somebody might want to steal it! We had two math lessons in a row, and I used the passing period to go to the bathroom... When I came back, it was gone. At first, I thought that maybe I'd just slid it into my backpack and forgotten... but it wasn't there, either. The room was completely empty when I came back, too, so there wasn't anybody to ask right away, either."

"But did you ask your classmates about it later?" asked the boy sitting with his sister.

"Sure I did! I even told our math teacher, even though I heard some of the kids call me a snitch for doing so. But it's still such a serious thing. No one knew anything; they all claimed to have been away from the classroom the whole passing period. The door was open the whole time, so one boy suggested that maybe somebody from another class walked in and took it."

"What did your teacher say? Did they help you look for it?" the blond-haired girl asked. "Did you tell your homeroom teacher, too?"

"I did. But she wasn't at school that day, so I could only tell her the day after. And there wasn't much she could do either, of course. She just kind of interviewed everybody for a minute or two, but nobody'd seen anything... and now I've lost my book and might have to spend twenty euros on a new one."

Hugo's voice quivered a little as he finished, because he didn't want to even think about what his mom might say when she heard about such a big unexpected expense. She was raising him alone—Hugo had never heard anything about his father. He had asked this and that when he was littler, but his mom never wanted to talk about it. All she said was that the two of them were better off alone. That might have been true, but it was also a fact that the two of them had a pretty hard time making ends meet. His mom worked as a primary school English teacher, but she also gave private lessons to several students and cleaned an office a couple times a week, which meant she was hardly ever home. And even despite working three jobs, it was ordinary for them to not have much money.

"Maybe you'll still get it back somehow," the boy in the red shirt said comfortingly.

Hugo shrugged sadly.

"I wouldn't bet on it. I didn't even dare to tell the librarian that it was stolen. I just said I'd misplaced it."

"What's your name?" the blond-haired girl asked. "I'm Lilianna."

"I'm Hugo."

"And I'm Robert," the boy in the red shirt said.

"My name's Amanda-Riin," his sister mumbled. "I know it sounds like 'a mandarin'; please don't laugh."

"I don't think it sounds like that at all. It's a very pretty name," Lilianna said.

"Hey, it's total crap that your book was stolen," Robert said. "But I really do think you can maybe get it back somehow. Somebody's got to have it. We could help you figure out who the thief is."

Hugo's eyebrows rose.

"How's that? You don't even know my classmates. What school do you go to?"

It turned out that Lilianna, Robert, and Amanda-Riin all studied at the same school; Lilianna was just one grade behind the twins. Hugo knew exactly where their

school was—just two train stops down the line from his. Robert had set his mind on doing whatever they could to help.

“I’ve read a lot of detective stories where a group of kids starts investigating some crime and solve it by the end,” he said. “Why shouldn’t we give it a go? Because it really is a dumb thing to happen to you, you know. If there’s any chance of getting that book back, then we might as well do something about it.”

“I’ll definitely help out!” Lilianna chimed in.

Amanda-Riin nodded as well.

“Me, too.”

Hugo didn’t know what to say. He wasn’t the kind of boy who had an easy time finding friends. At school, he basically only talked to his benchmate Ron, but that boy spoke so little anyway and preferred playing on his phone during passing periods. Now, he was being offered help by three kids he’d just met a few minutes ago. He didn’t believe they’d ever find the book, but the offer was amazing and made him feel warm inside. So, Hugo nodded enthusiastically.

“Thanks, guys!” he exclaimed. To his embarrassment, he felt tears almost prick his eyes. “Let’s give it a try. Where do you reckon we should begin?”