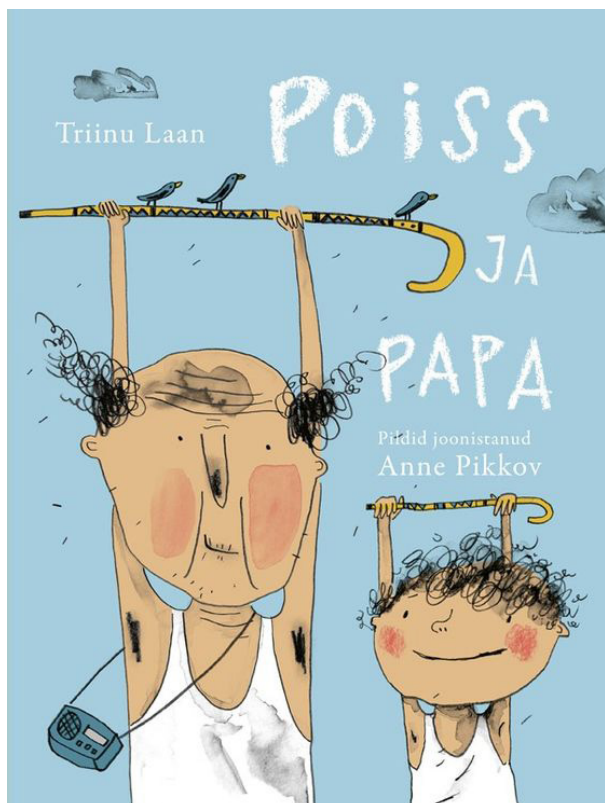


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The Boy and the Papa

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Päike ja Pilv 2024, 64 pp, hard cover

ISBN: 9789916630594

storybook, fiction

topics: grandparents/life philosophy/
humour

Age: 8+

In the beginning, there were three – the boy, Mama, and Papa. Since the boy is the youngest child in the family, with all the others already at work or school, he spends his time with Mama and Papa instead of going to kindergarten. After all, neither Mama nor Papa go to work or school, so the boy fits with them perfectly, like jam with pancakes.

But then Mama falls ill and passes away. Now it's just the boy and Papa, and they must learn to manage on their own. Together, they exercise with such vigour that their joints creak, learn to make the world's best sauce, listen to the symphony of falling leaves in the autumn wind, and collect all sorts of other memories.

There's no doubt that together, they'll overcome even the toughest moments. So much so that Papa can rightfully be called a connoisseur of joy in life. The boy hopes that one day, he'll be just as skilled in the art of enjoying life as Papa is.



Reading sample

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Pappa's Creaky Bones

The boy wakes up to the rattling of creaking bones. That means Pappa is already on his feet and exercising in the living room. It's his morning routine. Sometimes, the boy manages to wake up when Pappa is just starting to slowly stretch his spindly legs over the edge of the bed, slip his feet into his slippers, and get up to go exercise in the living room.

Pappa stretches, smiles as he rolls his head in circles atop his long neck, bends this way and that, windmills his arms, and finally does a couple of squats. His bones creak the best when squatting! But squats are also the hardest exercise for Pappa, especially the very first one. He lowers very slowly, sometimes using his cane or the couch for support. It also takes him a rather long time to stand back up.

And that's when the real fun starts: Pappa hangs from a bar installed in the doorway and lets his tall body stretch even longer. Then, he does one-and-a-half pushups. That's all he can manage. Pappa's proud of himself, regardless. He says that other people his age are already in the grave and doing zero pullups. Whenever he talks about it, Pappa always emphasizes: "ZERO pullups to my one-'n-a-half!" By the time he's doing morning pullups at the very latest, the boy comes and stands in the doorway, still wearing his locomotive-print pajamas, and Pappa lifts him up to grab the bar, too. The boy does two-and-a-half pullups and then keeps hanging there, using his legs to swing back and forth in glee.



The Boy, Pappa, and Mamma



The boy stayed alone with Pappa and Mamma at first. It was much more fun to be with them than at preschool. Mamma had a sewing machine run by a pedal called a treadle – he liked to sit on her lap and rock up and down to the rhythm as she sewed. Together, they mended Pa's work clothes and made stylish items for his older brothers and sisters, because even though Mamma was old, she knew exactly what was in style.

Mamma would clap in delight whenever Ma, Pa, and all the boy's older siblings came to visit her and Pappa. She'd probably have even jumped up and down like the boy did when he was especially excited, but her aching knees kept her from doing so. When Mamma finished clapping, she'd sigh contentedly that today was another one of the very best days of her life because the whole herd was together again. Then, she'd start mixing batter in a gigantic bowl. Mamma never tired of making pancakes when the whole pancake-hungry herd was there, and she needed to make a whole mountain of them.

The boy was the youngest in his family – all his brothers and sisters had long since been going to work or school. That meant he fit with Pappa and Mamma like pancakes and jam, because neither of them went to work or school, either. He helped out a lot, too. When Mamma forgot to add baking soda to the pancake batter, the boy reminded her. And the boy always fetched the newspapers from the mailbox. White bread, dark bread, and milk made it home thanks to the three of them living together: Pappa, Mamma, and the boy. Pappa's bag carried the milk, Mamma's the dark bread, and the boy's the white bread. None of them were quite strong enough

to carry more on their own, but sharing that way was perfect. Not to mention that the boy was the world champion in finding Mamma's glasses.

The Boy and Mamma's Predictions

But then, Mamma got sick and passed away. What happened next was exactly what Mamma had told the boy long ago. Mamma was dressed in pretty clothes and laid out in a coffin that was driven to the cemetery at the head of a long procession of cars. On the way, they stopped to carve a cross into a tree trunk, because that's what people in those parts had always done – the soul was to enter a tree for its eternal rest. At the cemetery, instruments were played and people talked. The boy's Ma, Pa, and older siblings all cried. Papa leaned on his cane, gripping it so tightly that his knuckles were white. The lid was placed on Mamma's coffin, and it was lowered into the ground. Everyone threw three fistfuls of dirt onto the coffin and the hole was filled in.

Everyone then left to eat together. Although Mamma was already in the ground, there was a place set for her at the table, too. The guests all ate and talked about Mamma and cried a little more. A few men interrupted the meal and the weeping with oompah-oompah music played from twisted horns.

Still, everyone was quite cheerful as they munched on a big Danish made with lots of raisins and thick chocolate coating.

Even the musicians scarfed down platefuls while the men discussed what used kind of used car was worth buying and the women talked about the terrible chemistry teacher who had been ruining the lives of the town's schoolchildren for fifty years already.

"How could Mamma have known beforehand what people would do and talk about at the table during her funeral?" the boy wondered. He came to the conclusion that she must have been a witch or something like it.



Triinu Laan. The Boy and The Papa. Translated by Adam Cullen