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### Katariina Takes Over the School

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Pegasus 2022, 168 pp

ISBN: 9789916162989

Storybook, fiction

Topics: school /humour/ADHD

Hardcover, size 140 x 210 mm

Age: 9+

#### Awards:

2022 Nominee of the Annual  
Children's Literature Award of the  
Cultural Endowment of Estonia

2022 Nominee of the Tartu Prize for  
Children's Literature (Childhood Prize)

„Katariina Takes Over the School“ clearly belongs to the  
creme de la creme of children's books. It's the kind of  
book that you like reading even as a grown up.

- Karl-Martin Sinijärv, literary critic

The fourth grader Katariina would love to be like all the other kids - to have friends. The kind of friends who would stay by her side even when she goes a bit over the top. It happens sometimes, you see, even if she does her best to behave well. Time and time again she gets sent out of the class to cool down and ponder about her actions. In the middle of all that there is something that makes her go down to the basement where she ends up meeting a peculiar ghost who gives her a mysterious task to save the mice but doesn't specify what mice and what to save them from. Katariina has to find out that herself, as well as does she have enough courage to become friends to those who's friend no-one else wants to be.

This book helps to understand the children with ADHD  
and shows that they are not over active because they  
want disturbance.

- Mariann Vendelin (Posimees)



## Reading sample

[pp. 21–31]

### The Fateful Jumpsuit

Things went a little sideways with my windbreaker from the very start. Totally sideways, I could probably say, even though Papa Kaarel reassured me that anything can be fixed. I don't know why he thinks that.

"Papa! Papa, come here!" I yelled to my grandpa on the morning of September 1st.

"What do you want?" he asked, poking his head out of the garage. I suspected he was smoking another secret cigarette there, as he usually does. But there was no time to investigate.

"I could use your help," I announced matter-of-factly.

"I'm... a little busy right now," he replied, ducking back behind the garage door. Smoke that probably came from a cigarette smoldering between his fingers trailed out, giving him away.

"Papa! You've got to help me!" I yelled insistently. "You can go right on smoking after!"

"Oh, but I, uh... I'm not," he stammered awkwardly.

"What've you got giving off smoke in there then, huh? An engine or something?" I teased. "Don't worry, I won't tell Mamma. But only... if you help me pick!"

"Pick what?" Papa asked, clearing his throat.

"Tell me whether I should wear the red jumpsuit or the yellow dress."

"What jumpsuit?!"

It was as if Papa was hearing the word for the very first time.

"An ordinary jumpsuit!" I snapped, already getting a little irritated.

"Oh, an ordinary one," he drawled, scratching his gray beard.

"Yeah. Dark red," I specified, in case he still didn't understand.

"In that case, I'd recommend the dress."

It was obvious that he was far more interested in smoking a secret cigarette than picking out my clothes.

"Hm, and why's that?" I pressed, as I hadn't had a chance to show him either one yet.

"Because..." he trailed off. "Because a

dress is always pretty."

"A jumpsuit can be pretty, too!" I exclaimed. He seemed to disapprove of it for some reason, even though he probably had no idea what a jumpsuit was.

I marched back inside, put on my red jumpsuit, and ordered Papa out of the garage. Hands planted on my hips, I spun around in every direction.

"Well, what do you think?" I demanded.

"Oh, uh... That's a pretty nifty suit, alright."

"It is, isn't it!" I crowed cheerfully.

"Thing is, though..."

"Thing is what?"

"How do you go to the bathroom in a suit like that? It's like a pair of overalls."

"You don't go to the bathroom in it!" I groaned, losing patience and marching away. It really ticks me off when somebody knows nothing about fashion.

"Maybe you should wear a dress, all the same," Mamma insisted, trying to change my mind. "A dress would be much more comfortable. Who knows how long this ceremony of yours might drag on. And afterward, you have a homeroom lesson and..."

"No. I'm wearing my jumpsuit or I'm not going at all," I stated firmly, because I had a feeling it would bring me luck. Kind of like a talisman or a chestnut in your pocket.

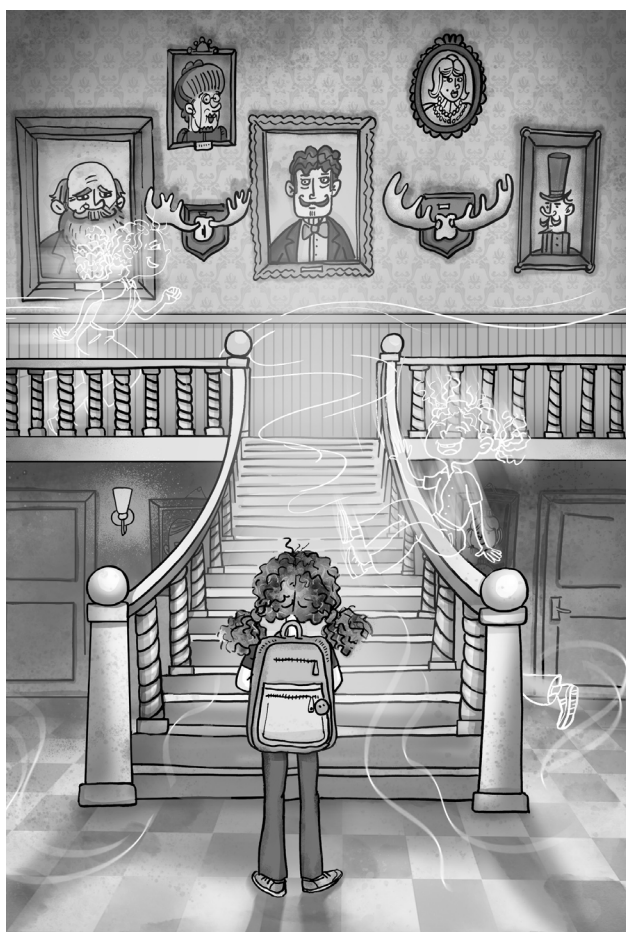
At first, everything went smoothly. I got to school on time. Mamma tried to tag along, but I sent her back home. I'm no baby who can't get to her first day of fourth grade alone! It's impossible to get lost, anyway, because our school only has one fourth-grade class with twelve students. Awfully few compared to my last school.

I knew the whole layout of the building because Papa took me on a little tour earlier. He even showed me a few secret places that not everyone knows about. He does, because he used to be the shop teacher there.

Kiigatsi School didn't look much like a school. It'd been a manor house a long time ago. Behind one tall red door was a big room they called the auditorium. Paintings hung on the walls. But the grandest part of all was the school's wooden staircase. It was as impressive as the stairs in a castle and had dozens of twisting posts. The handrail was lacquered slippery-smooth. I imagined

how fun it would be to slide down, but didn't go trying it out right away. Instead, I put on a proud face and climbed to the second floor, then walked through the high-ceilinged hallways.

The floorboards squeaked and creaked, emitting weird noises that made me feel uncomfortable. I tried not to think about it and just concentrate on walking. When I got to the classroom, I let out an eep! A sudden loud noise made my head ring. Fortunately, I realized someone was probably just tuning a piano and wasn't about to attack me with a chainsaw.



I opened the door. Everybody stared with surprised faces. I guess they weren't aware it's impolite to gape at people. Some even gasped. Still, I didn't get scared or run away like I sometimes used to. I decided to be brave, come what may.

I dropped my backpack onto an empty bench and let the teacher introduce me. My new classmates studied me curiously and asked all kinds of questions, talking over each other—where I lived

before and how long I was staying in the countryside and why I'd moved there. The questions rained away like a downpour. I felt like dashing away and hiding but sat down instead. I stuck my legs under the desk and rubbed the soles of my feet back and forth against the floor. It's something that helps me calm down, though I did it in a way that nobody else could see. Other people don't do that. It'd seem weird to them. I had a stress ball in my pocket, too, but didn't reach for it just yet.

Soon, we were led to the auditorium. I sat there like a stone statue, not even turning my head. I observed everything by moving my eyes this way and that, even though they started to ache. Still, I knew that you need to suffer a little to get a good reputation.

I stared at the haircuts of the kids in front of me, the girls' dresses, and the palm trying to grow all the way through the ceiling. The auditorium smelled like fresh paint. A new coat had been put on the walls recently and they were as white as chalk. Running along the edge of the ceiling was a strip that looked like lace, and I kept my eyes locked on it during the director's entire speech. I didn't dare to even glance in his direction.

The director's sons Mirko and Marko were sitting two rows ahead of me and scrolling on their phones as if that weren't against the rules. One of them glanced back for a second and wrinkled his nose when he saw me. It was like he thought I was a piece of rotten fruit.

I sighed and tried to think about something nice. In my head, I went through all my favorite foods: cheesy pasta, ice cream, sweet pastries, hamburgers, Mamma's strawberry cake, Papa's fried flounder. I'd just gotten to Dad's borscht when everyone started singing, accompanied by the piano. My stomach started rumbling. I hunched over to keep it from making noises, but then I had to pee. I closed my eyes. They sang on and on as if it were a song festival and not a ceremony for the first day of school.

I remembered the jumpsuit. Oh, no! I'd have to strip down in the bathroom and take the whole thing off. I hoped the pressure would go away, but no—it only got worse! Panicking, I tried to come up with a plan. Could I run home? No, it'd only get me



into trouble. What if I went to the school's bathroom after the ceremony? I was afraid of strange bathrooms, no matter whether they were at preschool, school, a mall, or a cinema. I always did my best to avoid them and hold it until I got home.

I was afraid of getting trapped, so I never dared to lock the door in a place I didn't know. That, however, meant anyone could show up and open it. How terrible! Just as terrible as getting trapped in a bathroom. I imagined sitting there while the line outside grew longer and longer. People would jiggle the handle, tug on the door, and ultimately call the fire department. I'd be rescued and everyone would applaud like in the movies, but afterward, I'd feel like dropping dead from shame.

My heart was pounding. I'd already decided to hurry back home when I suddenly remembered one of Papa's secret nooks. Down in the basement was a little toilet that no one ever used because there were much newer and better ones on the upper floors.

"Don't put yourself through something for nothing," Papa told me, and recommended that I slip down there whenever necessary.

After the ceremony ended, I pretended to follow everyone else back to the classroom but then turned onto the stairway and hurried down to the basement. I almost tripped and flew face-first when the cafeteria lady appeared out of nowhere and scolded me, saying some kids don't know how to behave on the very first day of school. There was no time to apologize or flash her a cute smile. My bladder was about to burst!

I got to the basement, ran into the toilet, and pulled the door shut behind me. There was a key in the keyhole. My hand seemed to turn it on autopilot. I couldn't risk somebody barging in. I pulled off my jumpsuit. Faster, Faster! After doing my business, I zipped it back up, washed my hands, and grabbed the key. Then, I tried to turn it. I tried again and again but the lock wouldn't open. I felt like my head was going to explode!

It happened! I knew that old locks tend to jam and break. You could never trust them or just count on nothing happening. Things can always happen! And they always do right when you let your guard down and

think the world's just a fun video game.

Jiggling the handle, I pushed against the door with all my might, hoping there was some kind of trick that would make the lock give. I banged on the doorframe, hoping someone might hear and come to my rescue. Nobody heard or came. Everyone was sitting up in the classrooms. I couldn't even call anyone because my phone was in my backpack.

I collapsed onto the floor. Tears streamed down my cheeks, and all the strength drained from my body. Why did these things always have to happen to me?! I'd have gladly been up in the classroom, trying to make new friends. It had to be right from the get-go, because if you dilly-dally, then you'll likely end up crouching in a corner alone. Just like at preschool and my last school.

I did finally make a single friend at preschool, though there were lots of kids in my group. I liked Gerda. She was always up for doing all kinds of things and was only my best friend – never Anna's one day, Marta's the next, and Doris's another. We played together every day. It lasted until our teacher said we got each other too wound up. She recommended that Gerda's mother put her in a different group and before long, she was whisked away. We only saw each other outside after that. My teacher kept a close eye on me, but I still couldn't wait to go out and somehow managed to put up with everything else.

Things didn't go much better at my last school. I made a friend named Iti at first, but she always had to go to sports practice, choir practice, or her grandma's house after school and wasn't allowed to visit anyone else. She could only come over when my mom called her mom and promised to make sure we didn't get into any trouble. That could only happen on weekends, but Iti was already busy with competitions and performances then. Or she was invited to yet another kid's birthday party.

I was never invited. Invitations came maybe once or twice a year. That became even fewer as time went on, because I didn't really have any friends. Hanna and I hung out sometimes and when her birthday was coming up, I asked if she would invite me to her party. She just shook her head and said her parents wanted to have a "low-key" celebration. The kind where nobody

yells or roughhouses or makes plates fly off the table when they grab for snacks.

That happened one time at Mark's house. We had to sit still for what felt like forever and watch him open presents. They were endless! After that came a trivia game and potato salad. I'll admit that a couple glasses did break when we were finally allowed to play more exciting games. It happens to other people, too, but they think it only happens to me.

I'd hoped that Hanna would change her mind and invite me anyway, but she also just shook her head the next day and said I wasn't a good friend. That's what her mom had told her: "Katarina isn't a good friend." It wasn't the first time someone said it. Katarina isn't a good friend, there's always trouble when she's around, she can never sit still or behave.

I was especially devastated when Iti had a pajama party. Three girls stayed the night at her house. I wasn't invited. Iti's mom was afraid that nobody would fall asleep if I was around. Once again, I was told that I wasn't a good friend.

But do you think I don't want to be a good friend!? I'd give up my laptop and even my phone if someone would just be my best friend. The kind who's always up for doing fun things and doesn't randomly tell you that you're not a good friend because you don't have the patience to assemble a thousand-piece puzzle for a whole week straight.

I constantly dreamed about having a best friend before falling asleep at night. But instead of trying to make friends in my new class, here I was sitting in a musty, stinky toilet and sobbing. The tears kept flowing as if someone had forgotten to turn off a tap.

I cried for a while before hearing a rattling in the keyhole. Wiping my nose, I stopped sobbing and listened. I couldn't tell if the key had moved or not. My vision was bleary. I could only hear the sound. Crick, crick. No footsteps or any other noises. Was I dreaming?

No, I was wide awake. I pinched my cheek just to be sure. It smarted with pain because I'd pinched really hard for some reason.

Nothing happened when the grating stopped. I waited for the door to open, but it didn't. I stood up, hesitantly reached for the handle, and cautiously pressed it down.

Although the door had been locked just a second ago, it creaked and swung open. I blinked in astonishment. What on earth was going on?! How could a lock just open all by itself?

I stood in the doorway, not daring to move. After hesitating for a while, I finally poked my head out and timidly inspected my surroundings. There was no one else in the basement. All I heard was silence.

I tiptoed out of the toilet. While creeping towards the light coming from the staircase, I noticed a bizarre sight on the wall's peeling plaster and froze. A hot current zapped through my body. There were a pair of eyes staring back at me. Big and wobbling. I wanted to scream, but my lips wouldn't move. I was as stiff as an Egyptian mummy.

A split second later, the eyes dissolved, its pieces scattering in every direction like grains of sand. They fled across the walls, the ceiling, the floor.

Papa would've said it was cockroaches. But can cockroaches transform into a pair of eyes? I'd never heard or seen anything like it before.