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Work Rebels

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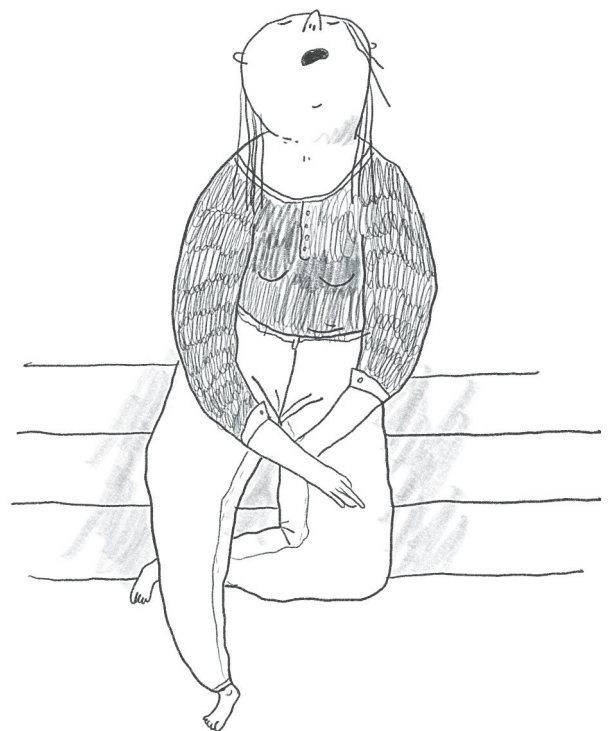
Age: 11+

It's the summer holidays, and chaos reigns among the school rebels. Their parents have escaped to an island for work and have no intention of taking responsibility for anything whatsoever.

Everything changes when a small plane drops out of the sky, along with a bunch of city authorities threatening to put a swift end to their freedom. The race against time is on. An abandoned airfield must be brought back to life, a missing friend found, and the authorities outwitted. Meanwhile, pulling the strings behind the scenes are ancient island guardians – and a penguin struggling to survive the heat.

The island has never seen a summer quite like this...

Work Rebels is the sequel to the popular children's book School Rebels.



Dad and I - excerpt

[pp 9–27]

A Terrible Morning

“Again! Repeat! Again!”

Jakob wakes up to a racket coming from outside. He’s the first one awake. The bedroom itself is completely still and silent. Sunlight tickles the school rebels’ cheeks, but the sleepyheads are unfazed. Jakob checks his watch. 5:15 a.m., the perfect time to start his morning ritual. It is summer, after all. He’s a growing boy, after all. And this kid with a good appetite needs his first ice cream of the day.

He pulls on a pair of shorts, leaving the top button unbuttoned, and creeps down the stairs.

There, a scene of chaos unfolds. Pillows and blankets are strewn everywhere. The smell of coffee drifts through the air. Dirty cups and cookie crumbs litter the windowsill.

Jakob pulls open the freezer door and bites his thumb in shock. It’s empty. Not a single ice cream cone left! No creamy ice cream with wild strawberries. No vanilla ice cream. No chocolate or condensed-milk ice cream. Nothing. There isn’t even a miserable juice popsicle to suck on for consolation.

He hears laughter out in the yard.

“Be a pal and hold this!” Through the window, Jakob sees his dad hand an ice-cream cone to someone before taking a running start and doing a lopsided cartwheel on the dewy grass. It’s met with wild applause. Jakob’s dad takes a bow and cheerfully scratches his belly, which is spotted with mosquito bites. His dad then takes the ice-cream cone back and annihilates it in a couple quick bites. The other parents finish theirs just as mercilessly.

Jakob slumps onto the floor in front of the freezer. “This isn’t normal,” he mumbles. It’s only 5:20 in the morning and he’s already been betrayed. By his own parents, no less. A tear rolls down the boy’s plump cheek.

Sugar High

Jakob angrily stamps back upstairs. Although he’s sprouted taller lately and doesn’t look as wide anymore, the steps still groan beneath him. Sume, Erik, and Simeon have woken up meanwhile. Jakob doesn’t have to say a word. Deep disappointment is already written across his friendly face. The kids shuffle downstairs. They stare through the big front window at the jamboree outside.

Jakob’s parents are sitting on the grass, their faces smeared with ice cream. Erik’s and Sume’s moms are doing headstands by the sauna. “Give it a try!” they yell, legs swaying in the breeze. “This is the best stress medicine ever!”

Someone is handing out sweets. Simeon’s dad lifts his wife above his head and spins her around like a propeller. She squeals in fright, but the big, bearded man doesn’t stop.

Sume’s dad is combing the grass for something. She gets a warm feeling – the big moneyman has finally developed an interest in plants and bugs! But no. He finds a 50-euro note,



gives it a tender kiss, and stuffs it into the pocket of his pajama pants.

"They're not like themselves at all," says tiny Simeon, whose blue veins glow beneath his skin. He pulls on a sweater. Unlike the other kids, he hasn't grown an inch. He knows that the coffee he secretly sips behind the sauna is to blame. But he just can't resist.

"It's a sugar high," Sume grumbles, smoothing her thick bangs. She, for one, tries to avoid having any sugar in the morning and completely condemns such behavior.

"And a coffee high, too," Jakob adds. "They'll be tucked out an hour from now. Let's go to the lighthouse. Maybe the Lauritsas still have their senses."

One by one, they climb out the window. No one wants to bump into the gleeful group of adults. And what would they have to say to each other, anyway? "Where's our ice cream?" The kids already know the answer.

Jakob is the last to leave. He glances around the messy kitchen. It's a dismal scene. And the clock on the wall still shows just 5:35 a.m.

How'd They End Up Here?

It feels like just yesterday when the school rebels' parents steered a sailboat towards the sandy shoreline and the grown-ups announced they were escaping to the island just like their kids. Running away from work in the city. Wanting to live happy and free at least once in their lives. Then, the school principal descended from the sky in a helicopter and confirmed that the kids would never have to go back. There was talk of every family getting its own little cottage on the island. Ahead of them stretched an endless summer and wild adventures.

Late that May, the principal shook the children's hands and congratulated them on finishing fifth grade. They received the news with suspicion. The school rebels didn't trust it, but they didn't double-check it, either. Just in case.

Gradually, it became clear that there were too many of them there. If not for the island itself, then certainly for the tiny holiday home. It would have to be made of rubber to fit the whole big group inside. The fact that the Lauritsas – 93-year-old lighthouse keepers – only allowed the principal to stay at their lighthouse didn't help, either. The twin geriatrics called dibs on the man. At last, after all those long and lonely years, they finally had a companion! No matter that they had to share.

Two of the kids and their parents left for the mainland at the start of summer. That's when the changes began.

Whereas they somehow managed to make their way through spring with a shred of decency – the kids striving to be good kids and the grown-ups striving to be grown up – it turned out by the time summer rolled around that the adults hadn't the slightest desire to lift a finger and do anything.

Nobody felt like building anything. There was no point even discussing other activities. Everyone lazed around from dawn till dusk. The kids were incredibly disappointed. In the city, grown-ups gave a busy and energetic impression, but on the island, they were less and less useful with each passing day. The parents could nap for days at a time. Then eat and sleep again.

At first, a long line wound from the door of the outhouse – the only place with internet access anywhere nearby. But before long, they lost interest in waiting and quickly forgot about the outside world entirely. And neither did the outside world want anything to do with them. Tourists showed practically zero interest in the island. Nobody came, and that was it. The parents liked the way things were. The fewer strangers, the better. And now, that odd cast of characters was having fun outside and destroying their kids' ice-cream supplies. Maybe the Lauritses Can Help?

The kids walk up to the Lauritses' home. The white lighthouse where the keepers live stands so close to the sea that it almost appears to have one leg in the water. A hearse is hunkered down a short distance away. It's a tireless helper that the Lauritsas have used for zooming around the island their whole lives – bringing back goods from the ferry, distributing the mail, and carting the dead onto their final journey. Alas, the once-grand Cadillac has lost half its esteem. Cobwebs hang from the side mirrors, and a pair of seagulls has nested on the hood.

A sweet scent drifts from the lighthouse's open window. The morning radio program announces that the time is 5:50. A stately doghouse with a high ceiling and two windows towers next to the lighthouse. Rebeka stays there with her penguin Muri. The girl is the only one who doesn't sleep in the holiday house with the others. She hasn't given up her plan to teach the penguin how to talk.

Simeon enters the doghouse without ducking. One entire wall is filled with writing. In addition to the alphabet, it reads:

**MURI
REBEKA
FISH IS LIFE!**

Rebeka is asleep with binoculars hanging around her neck and a lollipop in her mouth. Simeon pulls a downy feather from his pocket and tickles Rebeka's cheek. The sleeper opens her eyes immediately. She was hoping to see her parents, so Simeon comes as a disappointment. Rebeka gestures for the two to step outside so Muri can keep sleeping. Otherwise, he'll be grumpy the whole rest of the day.

"Eating again?" Jakob asks, glancing towards the lighthouse.

"Sure are, though they won't share with nobody. So no point hoping for that," Rebeka said, pulling the lollipop from her cheek. "Those geezers have been so ravenous that the principal can't take a step away from the stove anymore. Guy's happy, though. Constantly humming silly little ditties. Even his hair's grown back."

"Have they put on some pounds already, too?" Jakob asks worriedly. To be fair, he's more concerned about the reserves in the cellar than the Lauritsas' health.

"Oh, you bet! They're growing at a good pace! Just like you did all winter," Rebeka says, waving her lollipop around in the air and blowing out her cheeks.

"Hey, how're you doing out here, anyway?" Sume asks, redirecting the conversation. She can't bring herself to say it out loud, but she misses her friend. Especially now that she's the only girl in the holiday house. She doesn't like only being around boys.

"Fine, I guess." The lollipop gets stuck in Rebeka's hair. She spends a minute trying to free it before giving up and letting the sweet dangle from her red locks.

"And your parents?"

"Still on an expedition."

"When'd you see them last?" Sume asks. Her own parents were certainly pretty much interchangeable but at least they were around all the time.

"Real long time ago. They said it'll be a while."

"What were they like when they left?"

"Busy. Happy. They said they're in a big hurry. That it's the best time of their lives or something like that."

"Respect," Jakob murmurs, thinking about the group they'd left lollygagging around the yard. "I reckon your parents haven't gotten bitten by the work-rebel bug."



"Guess not," Rebeka says, shoving her hands into her pockets and trying to look as calm as calm can be. In reality, her stomach ached every day. She couldn't tell if it was more from missing them or disappointment. She'd like it if her parents stuck around and had fun with her at the holiday house. But what fun is there to be had when you're a workhorse and as busy as a bee?

Rebeka inhaled the sweet air through her nose. "Shall we try Muri?"

So, the five of them begin trying to wake up the penguin. They tickle him behind the ear. They scratch his belly and lift his tail. Muri sighs and opens his eyes. He knows what he has to do: waddle to the door of the lighthouse and knock. He's bait. And it's only 6:10 in the morning. These crazy animals.

A Party in the Lighthouse

Sume is tall enough to do some reconnaissance. She pushes back her straw hat and peeks through the lighthouse window.

A rusty spiral staircase rises from the middle of the room, running straight up to the glass cupola. A stack of pancakes teeters on the kitchen table. One more and it'll topple onto the floor. Black coffee drips into the coffee pot – the same tarry substance that the kids have gotten a taste for over the winter. Thick slices of bologna lie stacked on a slice of toast. Fresh homemade root beer bubbles in the glasses. Sume gulps hungrily and tugs the penguin to the front door.

A little sign hangs around Muri's neck with green twine. Burned into it is fine lettering that reads *Eudyptes chrysolophus*.

"What's that?" Sume asks.

"It means 'macaroni penguin'. In Latin. My parents made it," Rebeka explains.

"And this red dot?"

"An endangered species."

"Muri is in danger?"

"Not with us. But otherwise, yeah."

Endangered or not, Muri is put to work. The penguin stretches to warm up before slapping his wing against the heavy red door. It swings open with a loud creak. Towering in the doorway are the 93-year-old twins. Both are wearing purple velvet dresses paired with yellow Crocs. A chamomile flower, picked fresh that morning, is tucked behind their ears.

"What do you need?" they ask, eyeing the band of kids.

Jakob takes a step forward.

"Good morning, ladies," he begins charmingly. "The big dilemma is that our tummies ache. We need medicine."

"What medicine?" the Lauritsas ask, refusing to take the bait. All winter long, they'd fretted about how the group could manage on its own so they wouldn't be shipped back off to the city. But now that the kids' parents had also arrived, some peace and quiet was in order. Alas, it always seems like life has a habit of tossing a wrench into the gears. Time and again.

Erik opens his mouth for the first time that morning. He's had enough! Summer vacation is for enjoying yourself, not fighting for your place. He asks just the way a 12-year-old boy in dire straits might ask: "Just be normal for once, would you? Let us in and give us breakfast!"

The Lauritsas stare at the boy wearing a striped sailor's shirt. They're fond of their Erik, who has spent every summer of his life on the island. But now, there are four more fast-growing pipsqueaks in addition to him. And that's a few too many. The old women count to three and back away inside, shutting the lighthouse door as they go. And it stays shut.

Heads hanging low, the kids turn to leave but are stopped by a voice calling out from the window: "Psst! Come here! But one at a time."

It's the principal! Or rather it's his arm, which delivers one pancake to each child. And

hidden in each rolled-up crêpe is a scoop of ice cream. After all the portions are doled out, the lighthouse window silently closes again, and the curtain is drawn shut.

"Now, that's a proper guy," Jakob murmurs, stuffing the whole pancake into his mouth at once.

The Work Rebels

Silence reigns all around the holiday house. Three fat flies trundle across the deck. None of them can be bothered to fly in the heat. Maybe closer to evening. After the sandwiches are brought out. Those are nice to land on. But right now, there's nothing. No bread, no butter. Just cookie crumbs and dirty coffee mugs.

The early-morning mayhem has tired out all the grown-ups. Each fell asleep wherever they sat or stood.

Erik's mom is dozing in a weird posse on the sauna's stoop. It's as if someone cast a spell to turn her into a stone statue mid-step. Erik can't understand how someone can lose their shine like she did. He suspects his mom got burned out in the city. When the lightbulb in a lamp goes out, then it should be thrown away. But what do you do with people? His mom has had it with everything. She doesn't sleep and doesn't eat and doesn't want to work. She says her head hurts. That she has no strength. She's like a phone with a drained battery. And no has plugged her in to charge because Erik spent all winter on the island.

Jakob's mom and dad are asleep in each other's arms on the lawn in front of the house. They smile as they dream. The sun is working on scorching his dad's belly. It's already bright red. Jakob stares at his parents. Whenever the two aren't sleeping, they're cooking. Have they really not done a single day's work? How was his family supporting itself?

Sume's parents are spread out. Her mom is napping in front of the sauna. Her dad emerges from the woods carrying a tin pail full of money. He's on a mission to gather up all the Lauritsas' cash that's scattered around the island; cash that they've always treated so indifferently. He's built a money shed out of juniper branches, and only he is allowed to enter. At that very moment, he ducks inside. Sume's dad finds the scent of money calming.

Simeon's parents have made it the farthest: inside. Simeon's mom is curled up on the living room couch. She's the most agitated person in the whole world. Her eyes twitch nervously even when she's fast asleep. The woman sees danger everywhere. She works in risk management. And for her, life on the island is filled with red flags.

The boy's bearded dad is stretched out next to her and snoring loud enough to make the coffee mugs rattle. He's as big as a giant. Simeon's dad works in public relations. Every new day at his job brings yet another client who expects mega-results and a "wow" effect. Expectations like those make the man's stomach churn. On the island, however, every day delivers another batch of plan-free life. He never intends to go back. Simeon's dad enjoys laughing and the pristine nature.

Rebeka's parents aren't around. After arriving, they managed to stay put on the



island for a couple days before getting extremely restless. Expeditions are work. And work is life! The island that they escaped to with all the other parents is like a secret treasure chest full of new discoveries. They borrow the Lauritsas' inflatable raft, pat their daughter on the shoulder, and disappear in directions unknown.

The kids gather around the kitchen table. It's their headquarters' central meeting point.