

Biography: Agnese Vanaga (1985) is a Latvian author of children's literature. She worked as a journalist and a project manager of communications. Her first book *Mazo latvju pirmie vārdi* [First Words of Little Latvians] was published in 2014. Vanaga's second book *Plastmasas huligāni* [Plastic Hooligans] about environmental issues was published in 2019. It was praised by the Children and Young Adult Jury and was shortlisted for the International Jānis Baltvilks Prize in Children's Literature and Book Art. *Plastic Hooligans* was adapted into a play with the same title and the film studio "Animācijas brigāde" is currently working on the animation film "Dusmukule" [Angerbag].

Synopsis: The plastic bag confides in the brothers Klāvs and Intars, admitting that plastic bags get up to all sorts of mischief: getting tangled round tree branches, floating down rivers, blowing down streets. Then the plastic bag tells them its sad story: it was thrown away, unable to fulfil its main mission in life, namely carrying home someone's shopping. The brothers feel sorry for the plastic bag and resolve to help it. They name him Angerbag and decide not only to keep it for good but also to collect all the other discarded plastic bags they can find for recycling.

Excerpt

Yesterday had begun just like any other Monday. It had been as hard as ever to get up in the morning and he had eaten one fried egg for breakfast as usual before setting off for school, after which his mum had picked him up. Driving back home, his mum had asked him all the usual questions.

'How was school?' his mum, Aiga had asked, glancing at her son in the rear-view mirror as they waited in the traffic.

'Same as ever,' Klāvs said wearily.

'Why don't you tell me about three good things that happened to you today?'

'Mum, I really don't feel like doing that right now ...'

'Fine. I'll tell you my three good things first, then you can tell me yours. Deal?' Mum was trying really hard to keep the conversation going.

'Okayyyy.'

'The first good thing that happened to me today was that I had a six year old patient without a single filling in his teeth.'

'Well, that may be good for him, but what good does it do you? Dentists would go out of business if no one had any fillings!' an incredulous Klāvs objected.

As the car rumbled over the paving stones of the Brasa Bridge, Klāvs listened as his mum argued her case before suddenly undoing his seatbelt to lean over the driver's seat, shouting: 'Mum, watch out!' A tiny hedgehog was tiptoeing across the road. It stopped for a second as if frightened then continued trotting on its way.

'MUM! BRAKE!' Klāvs closed his eyes - the car must have already run over the hedgehog.

'Klāvs!!! What's the matter with you? You can't shout like that while I'm driving!'

'There! There was a hedgehog! You hit the poor hedgehog!' Klāvs yelled, leaping round to look out of the rear windscreen.

'A hedgehog? In the city?'

'Yes, I saw it! Mum, stop, we might have hurt it!'

Aiga slowed down but there was nowhere to pull over on the bridge and the cars behind them didn't seem to have noticed a hedgehog.

'I'll pull over when we've cleared the bridge. Do stop crying.'

As the car rolled slowly off the bridge, Mum indicated she was turning right and took the first side-street she came to, pulling over on the side of the road.

'You hit a hedgehog!'

'No, son, I can't have done, I didn't see a thing!'

'You didn't have your eyes on the road!'

'Klāvs!'

'Mum, I saw it, I saw it trying to cross the bridge. Just before that hole you swerved round with a striped hazard road sign next to it!'

'Oh my goodness, so what now? Okay, let's go back and have a look.'

Klāvs was reluctant to admit it but his nose had started itching. He had read in the encyclopaedia that it could only mean one thing – that you were upset and the tear glands were producing so many tears that they couldn't all be channelled into the nasal cavity and you were going to start crying. If he was about to come face to face with a dead hedgehog

he would probably totally lose it ...

Mum, glancing at her distraught son, took him by the hand and quickly crossed the bridge.

Blown gently along by a soft spring breeze, they approached the spot in the middle of the bridge where the unfortunate event had supposedly taken place – just by the hole and the hazard road sign warning of its existence. There was no trace of a hedgehog, just a plastic bag wrapped round the road sign, fluttering in the wind. Its ripped handle seemed to be sniggering at the way it had managed to deceive the boy.

'What a shit! What a piece of shit!'

'Klāvs, watch your language!'

'But isn't it a piece of shit? It completely took me in! It must have been that hedgehog! The wind must have blown it across the road!'

Mum didn't reply. She just gave a long sigh, although it was unclear whether it was one of relief or exhaustion. Then she turned on her heel and started walking back to the car. The wind tugged at her coat and she wondered whether she had done the right thing, giving in to Klāvs like that. Her son sometimes failed to respect boundaries nowadays, or they simply weren't there anymore, and with the determination of a child or rather a teenager-to-be, he often dictated the rules to adults.

Klāvs slouched back behind his mum, wondering whether she just thought he was being silly again. She probably blamed his much-loved nature documentaries for all this and was sure they would be off-limits from now on. It didn't matter anyway, but that shitty plastic bag

had pranked him!

A gust of wind suddenly overwhelmed Klāvs and, looking down, he discovered the same plastic bag wrapped around his leg. Blown off the road sign, it had flown straight towards the boy. Klāvs jumped in alarm, thinking someone was trying to grab his leg.

'Ah!' Klāvs cried out. Realizing it was nothing more than the plastic bag, Klāvs clamped his hand over his mouth so that his mum wouldn't notice that anything was amiss.

The wind was getting stronger and his mum was a good way ahead of him, lost in her own thoughts, and hadn't noticed her son's yelp of fear. The boy stopped and had a look at the cause of all the misunderstanding. It was just an ordinary plastic bag with a torn handle, fluttering in the wind. A useless piece of rubbish that had already managed to scare Klāvs twice. What was going on? Untangling the bag from round his foot, Klāvs stepped on it, watching as it fought the wind from beneath the sole of his shoe.

'Let me go, you idiot,' the plastic bag said quite distinctly and rather crossly, its handles fluttering.

'What?'

'Get your dirty shoe off me!' The plastic bag continued to billow, trying to free itself.

Klāvs looked around - there was no one in sight. His mum had gone on ahead and was now some distance from him.

'I must catch up with mum before she notices I've lagged behind.' Klāvs thought to himself.

Then he looked down again. The plastic bag was still wiggling under his shoe, struggling with all its might to break free. An animate plastic bag ... It was difficult coming to any sort of decision as to what to do next.

'I'll work it out at home,' Klāvs decided and, snatching up the plastic bag, stuffed it into his pocket. Before zipping it up, Klāvs could clearly hear its nagging, threatening voice saying, 'What are you doing? What are you doing, boy? Let me go! Just you wait, just you wait! I'm telling you!'

The plastic bag was light, almost unnoticeable, just a tiny screwed-up tangle in the pocket of his jacket. Klāvs broke into a run to catch up with his mum who was almost back at the car.

Klāvs face was flushed, his eyes flickered with excitement and his pursed lips were hiding a smile. Turning around, Aiga couldn't suppress the sense that she had no idea what was going on with her son. Shortly before he had been sobbing about a run-over hedgehog and now he was leaping along the street, full of the joys of spring. Did she need to be stricter with him?