



# Liisi's Farm

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**Liisi** is a five year old farmer's daughter, with fair hair in cheerful little plaits. She lives in the large yellow farmhouse of Mäe farm, together with her mother and father, her older sister Krõõt and older brother Tõnu. Behind the house is an apple orchard and fruit bushes. Opposite the farmhouse is a cattleshed with a small dairy and a large haystack as well as a barn for farm machinery, in which stand a tractor and other bits of equipment.







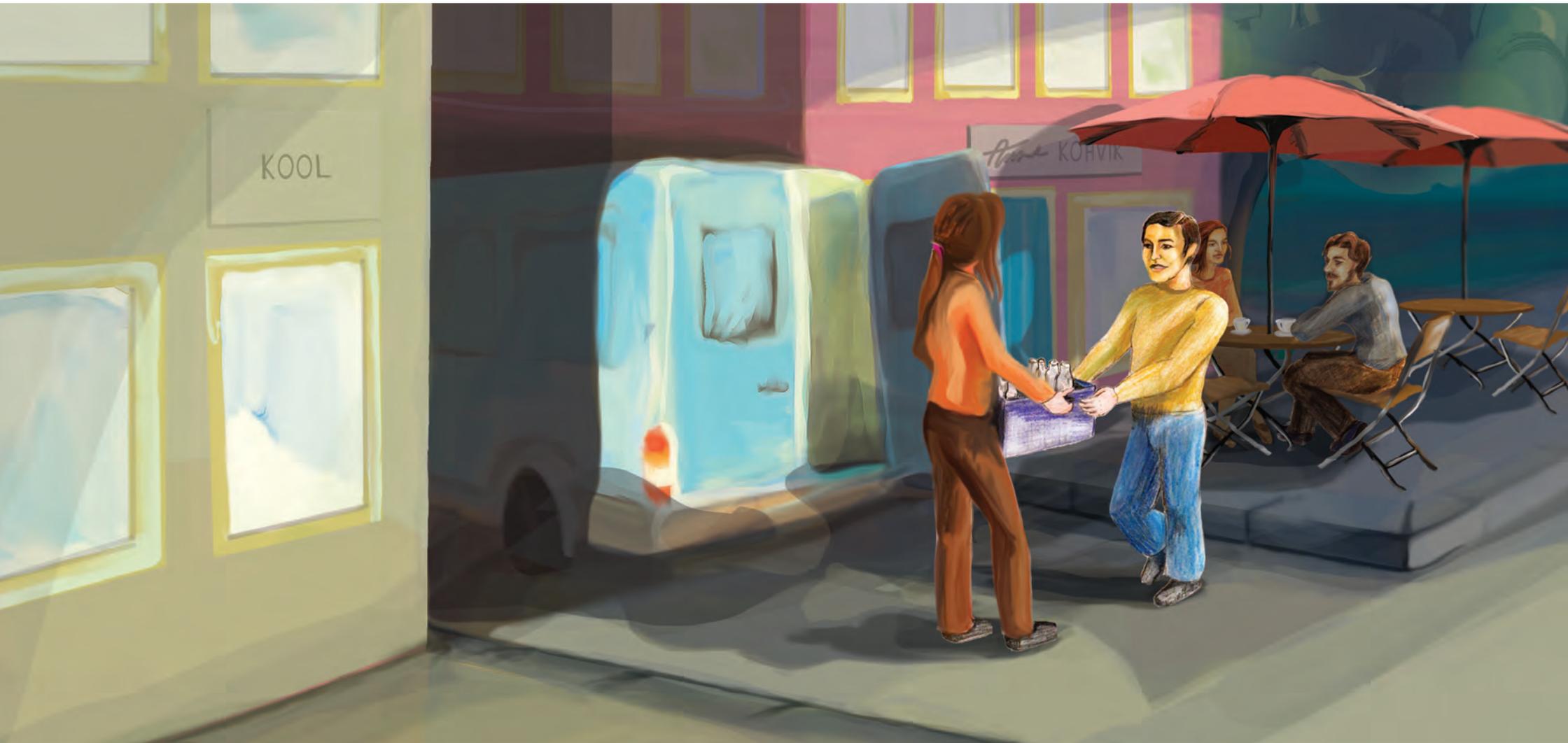
Liisi loves very much the red native breed of cows. Throughout the summer, the cows are out in the pastures grazing the grass. Liisi often goes to visit them and pat them.



The cows come home to their milking parlour to be milked each morning and evening to give up their milk.



The milk goes straight from the milking parlour to the small dairy, where aunty Miia and Tiina from the village, work. Soured cream, milk curds and yoghurt are made from the milk. But some of the milk is bottled.



Aunty Miia comes to work from the village in a small van. She drives around in her van distributing the milk bottles and the soured cream and yoghurt cartons to families in the village, the cafes and the school.

In the winter, the cows are in the cowshed, but they can still walk outside to eat from the haybale there. Along the cowshed is a manger, where food is placed for them and where they can also drink. The cows can wander freely inside the cowshed and can rest there where they please. The calves are born in the cowshed and at first are with their mothers, so that they can suckle them for as much milk as they need. Later when they are already bigger they can run free with others in the pasture or, in the winter, in part of the cowshed.



Both cows and calves deposit their cowpats wherever they please. To stop them soiling themselves more straw is placed on the floor. In this way the layer of straw becomes quite high by spring. When the cows go to pasture in the spring, father pushes all the straw out from the cowshed onto the muckheap. This has by now already turned into good manure. Father says it will be good fertiliser – this means food for the plants which grow in the fields and the farmyard. If the manure stays longer outside, then soon it will be dark, friable, sweet-smelling compost in which earthworms gladly wriggle. The earthworm is the farmer's helper, as bits of plant that pass through its body change into very good soil. Thanks to the work of earthworms the soil becomes richer and more full of air, so that plants can grow in it happily.

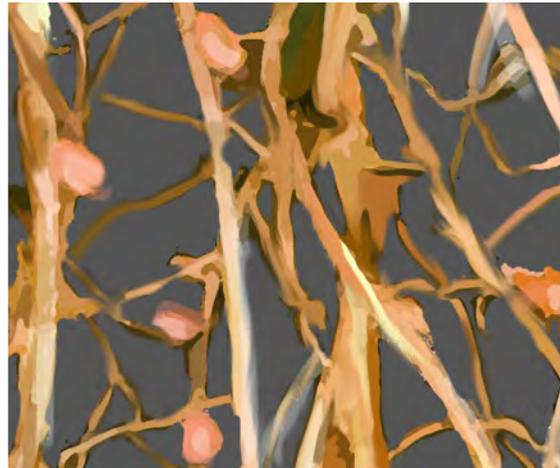




Food for the cows is all grown in the farm in the pastures, hay meadows and fields. On the forest edge side of Mäe farm are fields, at the edges of which grow many different kinds of plants such as yellow chamomile, vetch, Cambridge milk parsley, timothy and so on. Father thinks these flowering margins are very important. Birds can nest there as well as many other animals that help to keep the fields in order. From there dark-legged and dark-bodied ground beetles run onto the fields. They are truly the wolves of the insect world. They eat plant-eating insects and even small snails. Butterflies, honeybees and parasitic wasps feed on nectar from the flowers. We need to have honeybees and butterflies, for who else would pollinate our apple trees and fruit bushes, so that apples and berries would start to grow. When the parasitic wasps have filled their stomachs with nectar they start to look for larvae on plants in the fields, into which they lay their eggs. These hatch into young wasp larvae which eat away the inside of their host. Ladybirds destroy greenfly. In this way, ground beetles, parasitic wasps and ladybirds save crops from damaging insects.



On the fields grow oilseed rape, wheat, potato together with vegetables, oats, rye and clover. Liisi's mother always says that clover feeds the earth. Liisi didn't understand this at first. When together with her mother they dug up some clover plants they saw small nodules on the roots. Her mother explained that when the nodules are pink, then they feed the soil providing food for plants. Now she understood clearly, that these nodules were small fertiliser factories in the fields.





Many different types of clover grow on the farm. On the pastures there is a lot of white clover, which the cows love to eat. The honeybees also love it.



On the fields, however, more red clover is grown. Next year after red clover, winter rape is grown on Mäe farm, as it needs more food, which is now available in the soil. Father ploughs the clover into the soil in the summer and then in August sows the winter rape. In the winter this remains under the snow already greenish-grey. Father always wants his fields to have a covering of green in the winter. So that plant food in the soil is not washed away by snow and rain water. Black ploughed soil is not favoured on Mäe farm.



A strict order of crops is grown on the fields. Father calls this crop rotation and says, that only then will the plants be healthy and give a good yield. As so the fields grow in order:

winter rape,  
wheat,  
potatoes and vegetables,  
oats,  
rye with undersown clover,  
clover.



Liisis big brother Tõnu helps his father with ploughing and harvesting. At harvest the combine cuts the crop and collects the seeds. The stems are rolled together into straw bales, which are taken to the cowshed. In the winter the straw is placed under the cows, so that their bed is dry, warm and soft.



The seeds from the crops are used to make animal feeds as well as products needed for our food. Oil is pressed from the rape, flour is made from the rye, groats from the barley and oat flakes from the oats. For this father and Tõnu take the harvested seeds to the edge of the village to uncle Peter, who has a mill and oil press. After pressing the oil out, a dark dense seedcake is left, which is given to the cows, so that they are stronger and give more milk. The cows are also fed crushed cereal seed. Their main food however is still hay, in both summer and winter. In the summer, father and Tõnu together make hay with many different machines. Greenish, sweet-smelling hay ends up on the haystack next to the cowshed.



Liisi together with sister Krööt and mother often work on the field of vegetables. Firstly, sowing and planting is interesting work. Caring for carrots, beetroot, onions, peas, beans and lettuces means that weeds must be collected from around the plants. In the summer, the neighbouring village folk expect fresh vegetables every week, which mother together with Liisi and Krööda put into boxes and then father takes them in his small van to the village, where he distributes his boxes to families and the coffee bar. In the winter all the village schoolchildren eat Mäe farm vegetables.



The village centre is not far from the farm. There is a coffee bar, schoolhouse, post office and quite a lot of houses. In the coffee bar, they bake bread from Mäe farm rye and make oatcakes. There is enough of both for all the village folk.

When strawberries and raspberries ripen on the farm, then the village folk come to help pick them and pick some for themselves too. The berries are collected into boxes and it is Liisi who takes the empty boxes out to the pickers. Liisi's mother also makes jam from the berries. Liisi helps to stick labels on the jam jars. There is enough jam for the family as well as for the coffee bar and the school.



In the autumn, when the apples are ripe, then the village folk come again to help with the apple picking. These are also put into boxes and father takes some of them to those from the village who helped with the harvest. Most are taken to the cellar below the machinery barn.



The cellar has various rooms, one for keeping apples, a second for vegetables and a third for preserves made on the farm. As well as from berries, jam and juice are also made from apples. Mushrooms collected from the forest are marinated or salted into jars. So the cellar contains a variety of different stored items. Apples, vegetables and preserves are taken each week during the winter to the village coffee bar and school.



The villagers are happy that food for their tables comes from a farm near their homes and that they can help in producing it. From the village something also goes back to the farm. Namely, uncle Peter goes to each house as well as to the coffee bar and school in his waste-lorry collecting together kitchen and food waste, as well as leaves and plant material no longer needed and takes it to the manure heap at Mäe farm. Here it turns into a lovely dark compost, which can be used in the fields of Mäe farm as well as in village gardens to stimulate plant growth.



Liisi's grandmother, who lives in the village, mentions frequently that the best and freshest food grows near home on farms in harmony with nature. So eat food yourself, that has been produced near your home and if possible, grow your own vegetables and make your own compost for them. As grandmother says, the compost heap is a heap of gold, because it provides strength for the growth of plants for our food as well as that of animals.





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