



## **When Mothers Were Little**

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*Storybook, fiction*

These stories are about the childhood of two mothers. They were born in the 1930's in the Republic of Estonia, went to school during World War II, and graduated from high school when their homeland had become the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic. It was a time of upheaval. In the course of the five years of war, they saw how the communists first came to power, then the fascists, and then the communists again; and lived through horrendous air raids. However, despite everything, they were like young girls throughout – they played, studied, and joked with their teachers. There is little fantasy in these stories; the author mostly relates the childhood memories of her mother and her lifelong friend. The book's appearance reminds one of a photo album – the design draws upon contemporary photographs, postcards, notebooks, etc.

### **Awards:**

2009 Nominee of the Annual Children's Literature Award of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia

## Reading sample

Eeva's mother has reached a decision. She is taking her daughter out of the city to stay with relatives in the country at Kiisa.

They set off early in the morning. It is chilly weather. There is no alternative but to go on foot. It is a long way to walk, but staying in town during another air raid would be too risky. Oh how difficult this road will be, she thinks, gazing at Eeva, who keeps plodding on with little steps, the melting snow sticking to her boots. She feels so sorry when she sees that thin form next to her. So small, wrapped up in a thick brown coat, a bundle in her hand.

A lot of people are moving out of town. A caravan of large suitcases and bags winding like a slow snake.

Eeva is a tough walker.

"Let's go faster, let's go faster," she spurs her mother on from behind. It's a long way ahead. If only my daughter can hold out, she frets.

"That child can really walk," remarks an unknown companion. "Doesn't she get tired?"

Eeva just snuffles and scurries on staring steadily ahead, watching every step. She is impatient to get to the countryside, away from the city, away from those nasty bombs, away from the horses lying dead by the roadside, not seeing anything anymore yet seeing the travellers off with their wide-open eyes. Eeva does not dare look at them. She also wants to keep away from those weeping and exhausted refugees who are all taking this road together. She thinks about Ingi. It would be so good to have Ingi with them, to be going to the country together. There is a big yard there, great for playing, and a swing. Aunt Marta would bake bread in the kitchen and Albert, the farmhand with the big moustache, would carve them wooden dolls. Eeva raises her eyes from the ground and squints in the early spring light. „Albert," she shouts suddenly. „Look, Mum, Albert's coming!"

Eeva starts jumping for joy. Sure enough, Albert is approaching in the distance, the horse trotting quickly in front of the cart. They wave and call out to Albert. And the farmhand reins the horse up. Albert lifts the little girl up and places her carefully on the hay in the cart. Albert's moustache tickles Eeva. Albert helps her mother into the cart too, puts a thick blanket over them and says:

"Marta and Meelis sent me straight into town this morning. We wondered if you were alive. And if the house was still standing."

Mother replies and explains something to Albert. Eeva sinks into the soft hay and stares up at the blue sky.

"I'm awfully tired," she says. Then sleep comes.