



Four Kids and Murka

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Age: 6+

Mum always says that Märta and Grandma are like two peas in a pod, but Märta could never understand how two people could ever fit into something so small. Then, Mum explained that it doesn't mean Märta and her grandmother had ever been in a pea pod together – it simply means that they're very similar, like two of a kind. That's definitely a big load of baloney, because how can a very old person and a kid that's already kind of big be so very much alike? Like a big pea and a little pea?

The story, inspired by a childhood in Soviet Estonia, tells of four children's adventures at their grandmother's house in the country. A little spice is added by Murka, who is the world's biggest, bravest, and most courageous dog, because it fights the wolves.

Reading sample

Murka

Murka is huge. Murka is scary when his tall figure appears by the roadside and Murka is very dignified, when he, with a barely noticeable limp, runs after a car that slowly twirls the cloud of dust. Murka looks as much as a wolf as one non-wolf can. Murka's ears are torn and his fur is tousled. Sometimes, Murka's feet are scratched. Murka's tail is turned up into a curl, not hanging behind his back as a wolfs' tails would. Murka fights the wolves protecting grandmas' sheep and cows. Because wicked wolves come out of the woods and want to kill the sheep, but Murka guards them carefully and fights bloody battles with wolves, standing up to the pack of them alone and makes all of them run away. Murka works all the time, because there are many wolves, and they never rest. When people sleep, Murka fights. Murka is very brave. Murka is a wolfhound. Wolfhounds are born to fight wolves and that makes them extra special.

Murka is a very kind dog and does not mind at all when all four of the children come to hug him or ride on him at once. Murka gives the children a tour of his kingdom, with a very important face. Murka's kingdom is the pasture. Children are very scared of the wolves but they also know that Murka protects them, and with trembling hearts they walk past one wolf-filled bush to the next. Wolves are

afraid of Murka and sit quietly behind the bush.

They dare not even move a muscle in their tail.

Murka lives in a little gray house next to the wheat field. With Murka there lives the tiny grandmother. The tiny granny's name is Murka-granny.

Children

There are four children.

The biggest child is Maarit. She is so big already that she is almost as tall as Granny and she goes to school. Sometimes she is five years older than the next oldest, sometimes only four years older. Then the next oldest child feels that she is already awfully big. Maarit is the oldest, the big sister. That sometimes makes her very annoying because she thinks that big sisters should talk smart all the time and teach the little ones, as if she knew everything and they knew nothing at all. Maarit has short hair and dimples. The other children do not have dimples and are envious sometimes. But then they start playing their own games and forget about it. Maarit is clever too. When Mum tells her to do something and goes out, she always gets the little ones to do it. And she had an awfully nice pink pleated skirt that the little ones are not allowed to touch.

The second child and the middle girl is Märta. She has long hair that reaches down to her

waist and two white strands of hair at the temples that are not bleached, honestly. She often has pneumonia and once, when she was at the hospital, the needle got stuck in her arm, and then the nurses were running around and pulling at the syringe and nobody could get the needle out and Märta did not cry at all and then the ambulance driver came and told a funny story and the syringe came off just like that. The middle girl does not remember the story of the ambulance driver any more.

Märta does not go to school yet, but she has been reading for a while now, and at home she plays school with her younger children. At that school, "Winnie the Pooh" is their first reader. She's got her very own Lion King. There is one more thing. Märta is very flexible and guests come, she has to always show them, how she can reach her toes to her head. She can put her foot behind her head, too.

The youngest girl and the third child is Miia. The most interesting thing about her is that she has a squint and one eye sees differently. She has already been to the hospital twice for operations and then people could go and visit her in Tartu. And she has glasses and sometimes she has to put a plaster (me utleme patch?) on one of the lenses. The children do not understand why, but the doctor in the big grey building says so and doctors know everything. Miia adores tomatoes, especially Mum's pickled tomatoes. Miia is very brave and very strong as well. If some other child is not able to lift some

stone or log, Miia can. Even though they are not twins and there is exactly a year-and-a-half between them, Miia and Märta often wear almost the same kind of clothes. It is always so that Märta has a blue dress and Miia a red one, and Märta would like a red dress sometimes, but then Mum says that you are older so you get the blue dress. The children just do not see any logic in that.

The youngest child and the biggest boy is Oskar. He is the last, and the fourth, and therefore the baby of the family, and when he was born, the father could not believe that he finally had a son, so he asked the neighbor to call the hospital as well, and the woman at the hospital said: "Yes, it's a boy, I've told you twice already!" Oskar is very sweet and he is nothing like girls. Boys don't have to be like girls, how else can he be a boy, but he is also different in the way that he has light hair. Actually, his hair is completely white. Grown-ups say that Auntie Ilma also had completely white hair but who can believe that, since now she has completely black hair, blacker than anybody else. Even blacker than Daddy's, and Auntie Ilma is Daddy's sister. Therefore, Oskar is the baby with white hair and a whole year younger than Miia. Oskar always gets cars as presents and as soon as he gets one, he dismantles it and then Mommy gets angry, because putting them together again, there will always be an extra part or two, and then the car does not work properly any more. He even took apart that

really beautiful big crane he got for his birthday last year. When Mom told him to be a good boy and not dismantle the crane, he said he wouldn't, and then took the crane to the rock garden, and unscrewed everything swiftly. He has very small fingers, with which he can. Oskar is a little too small, so all the big girls have to look after him all the time. Especially now that the children will stay at Grandma's, because Grandma has a lot of work without their foolishness.

Fireball

Märta had already seen it the day before, when the lightnings of drought were scintillating over the sky. It stood above the red currant bush and moved around the corner of the house, strangely hovering. Nothing can actually stand in the air without making any noise. Let alone – move. Still, with no sound.

On the next day it's back. Big sister had not come home from her wanderings yet, Grandma had already gone to work, and two younger girls and the brother were outside by the house. The middle girl noticed it from the corner of her eye and stopped. Where are the little ones? Where is Miia and where is Oskar? She could not move but had to find the little ones, quickly. One eye on the flickering sphere, she stepped, as slow as she could, one tiny step backwards to see around the corner. Another step.

The third step. No Oscar, only Miia on the other side of the house.

Märta did not dare to lose the sight of the sphere or turn her head. „Come here, very slowly,” she said to Miia. „Very, very slowly.” Miia stood up from the sandpit and started walking slowly. That took the whole of eternity. Märta lifted the palm of her hand, so that Miia would understand that she has to walk really slowly. Miia understood. She came and came and came. At last, she arrived. Märta put her hand on her sister's shoulder and gestured with her eyes toward the garden. It took Miia's breath away but she did not move. Only looked, with her eyes enormous.

„Where's Oskar?” asked Märta in a whisper. „I don't know,” said Miia, „perhaps inside.” „Darn it,” said Märta. „What do we do?” asked Miia. „I don't know. We can't move.” At these words, the sphere started rolling. It was as if time stood still, everything around them got quiet, and only the quivering sphere rolled in slow motion.

Märta said so quietly that it was almost like breathing: „Breathe very quietly, do not move and stay with me.” Miia did not even breath. The sphere moved, time stood still. The sphere moved over the red currant bushes to the flowerbed, from the flowerbed straight in front of the girls, and begun, still on the same level, to move toward the door of the house. There was a draft. The door was open. And the sphere slid soundlessly through the door.

Girls, strangely attached to each other, strangely moved towards the door, and ve-ry care-ful-ly in through the door. The sphere was in the kitchen. Oskar was playing on the floor with the car, making rumbling sounds with his mouth. He heard moving and raised his head.

„Don't move and don't breathe!" squeaked the middle girl urgently, breathed the air out of her lungs, and held her breath again. She had heard grown-ups say that you cannot move and cannot breathe, because then the fireball will begin to move toward the person who made the air move, and it is very hot and would burn a hole through the person, so that afterwards one can look through the human being. Märta did not want to look through her brother. She liked her holeless brother better.

Her brother was squatting on the floor, his little hand on the car, as if turned into a stone statue while playing. The sphere flickered, flickered, brother squatted, Märta stood, hand on Miia's shoulder, Miia stood, head tilted, hand on her mouth, the sphere flickered, quivered, flickered, quivered, brother squatted, Märta stood, Miia, hand on her mouth, sphere flickered, quivered, flickered, quivered, and begun ssssssssssssslllllllllllllllllllllllooooooo moving owwwwwwwwwwlllllllllllllllllllllllyyyyyyy moving toward the TV. Miia gasped, sphere stopped, brother squatted, Märta stood, Miia, hand on her mouth, sphere begun moving, begun moving, begun

moving, rolled soundlessly, rolled unhissing, rolled miraculously to the wall, to the socket of TV – how good that Grandma always pulled the plug out of the socket –, rolled to the wall, the wall did not burst into flames, rolled to the socket, the socket did not burst into flames, and suddenly, as if in quick motion, was gone through the two little holes.