



## Homeward

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This Tuesday was a special day. Tuesday was a special day otherwise, too, since Wednesday always came after Tuesday and Wednesday was Madis' day at home. This Tuesday, though, was especially special, since Madis was to go home from day care all on his own for the first time. Completely alone!

2014 Nominee of the Tartu Prize for  
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It's fantastic that almost halfway along the road there's a little house, and that that little house is where Kalju lives. If he lives in the house at all, that is – you see, no-one has ever seen him go inside, or come out. Kalju is always in the garden. In the garden he has several large apple trees and two cherry trees and one damson tree. There are no pear trees because they are always nipped by the cold, and Kalju won't put them through pain like that. As Kalju himself said once, he loves the trees as if they were children of his own. And he loves children very much indeed. He likes to chat to them and give them apples and cherries and damsons from his trees. In the afternoons he waits for a mum or dad he knows on their way home from nursery to pause a while at his house. Sometimes he'll offer them a cupcake if there's no fruit on the trees to give them. Today he gave Madis a beautiful apple that was almost as sweet as a cupcake.

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Madis's arms had grown tired with the rocking, but his legs felt pleasantly rested and he was able to get going. But then he discovered that although his body was able to keep walking, he couldn't bring himself to carry on because Simbiino was just coming into the yard, waving to him. And Simbiino was always so much fun. He was a man with a colourful hat and a big, bushy beard who could play all kinds of musical instruments and stand on his head. You couldn't talk to him because he only spoke a foreign language, but there wasn't much need to talk because he was such great fun anyway.

Simbiino was holding an instrument, like a guitar but tiny. He sat on the porch steps and began to play, singing a song as he did so. The song was a bit sad, but very long and beautiful to listen to. Madis loved it. He wondered if perhaps it was about a hero or a powerful robot travelling to a land far away to rescue someone. Madis would have liked to be that hero.

When the song ended, they spent a while playing that game with a little ball where the ball mustn't touch the ground. Last time their record had been three, but this time the game went so well that they managed to throw the ball back and forth for much longer before it hit the ground. Five throws in a row! Then Simbiino taught Madis to toss two balls in the air at the same time and they practised standing on their heads for a bit. Simbiino put his green sweatshirt down and Madis managed to do a really good headstand while Simbiino held his legs. But then Simbiino had to get on with something else and Madis remembered that he had actually planned to go home.

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Anneli's kitchen window was open and a rumbling sound was coming through it. The noise was very suspicious and could quite easily be burglars breaking in. Anneli was Madis's almost-neighbour because her yellow house was near Madis's green one and she sometimes brought Madis cakes. Well, they weren't just for Madis – they were for his Mum and Dad and his big sister and big brother too. Anneli was really old; some of her hair was grey and her daughter Triin, who used to be in the group next to Madis's, was already at infant school. But Anneli was a lovely lady and interesting to chat to because she knew just about everything there was to know.

Madis rang the doorbell and when Anneli opened the door he said, "Hello Anneli! There's a dreadful rumbling noise coming through your window. I thought I'd just come and make sure you don't have burglars. If you like I can chase them away for you." Anneli replied that fortunately she didn't have burglars but she did have a decorator in who was making a right old din doing the bathroom. The decorator's name was Martti and he had very cool red trousers with loads and loads of pockets. In one he kept an amazing knife and in others there were pencils and nails and screws and another knife and a tape-measure and several other things that Madis couldn't remember the names of because they were so strange. Was that an angle or a mangle? he had to ask so many times that Martti ran out of the stomach to explain. Martti had a loud voice and a large appetite because Madis managed to eat only two pieces of Anneli's home-made cabbage pie but Martti ate three and, what's more, they were far bigger than the ones Madis had.