



Pärt and the Plums

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As Pärt is plodding home from school, a big blue plum falls on the sidewalk in front of him. Without thinking twice, the boy picks it up and sinks his teeth into it. How delicious it is! Pärt would gladly pop a few more of the sweet plums into his mouth, but the rest of them have no intention of falling – they simply swing softly on the tree in a stranger’s yard. The boy wonders: whose plums are those growing over the sidewalk, and what might he do to cause another ripe one to fall so he can snack on it guilt-free?

Award:
2019 Tartu Prize for Children’s Literature
(Childhood Prize) nominee



Reading sample

It's incredible, but true: walking home from the bus stop today, a ripe plum struck me right on the noggin. I felt a soft thump on my baseball cap, looked down at my feet, and there it was: a nice big purple plum. Good thing I didn't step on it! I brushed the fruit off with my sleeve, then stuck it in my mouth. It was delicious! Right after I spat out the pit, I regretted not thinking sooner to chew on it a little longer.

If I still had a plum like that now, I'd carefully place it in my pocket and munch on it later tonight before brushing my teeth. Or even after brushing my teeth – secretly, in bed! Then I'd stick the pit under my pillow till morning.

I craned my neck to look up and spotted a branch with dark-colored leaves above me. The plum tree itself was growing in someone else's yard – not right next to the sidewalk where I stood. There were countless purple plums hanging from the tree itself, but none on the branch stretching over the sidewalk. But wait! If I squinted my eyes, I could spot one more plum hidden behind a leaf right above me, just as big as the last one and probably just as ripe.

I'd never go into a stranger's yard to swipe plums, because swiping is almost the same as stealing and I've heard that a hand will stick up out of a thief's grave. That's what Kaisa's grandma told me after I picked a yellow tulip from her flowerbed on Mother's Day.

The plum tree's owner would probably tell me the very same thing, but the branch stretching out over my head didn't belong to whomever that might be, did it? Or was I wrong? I squatted down by the fence and began to think. Last year, my grandpa grew a whopper of a pumpkin. Or, well, the pumpkin grew itself, but it was on the end of a vine that had wound its way through the chain-link fence and into the neighbor's gooseberry bushes. Grandpa watered the pumpkin plant from his side of the fence and the neighbor protected the pumpkin from frost by covering it with an old coat in fall. In the end, they agreed to split the pumpkin evenly. From that half-a-pumpkin alone, Grandpa made so much jarred pumpkin preserves that we were still eating it the next spring. True, though, a plum isn't the same as a pumpkin – I'd gobbled up the one that fell onto my head in a single bite, and was in my right to do so! It would be pretty silly to go up to the owner of the plum tree and say: look, there's a plum that grew on a branch outside of your yard – let's go ahead and split it. On top of that, I started to wonder: who said I was the one who should get that second half?

Whom did plums hanging over a sidewalk belong to, anyway? And whom does the sidewalk itself belong to? What about the street? The parks? The river that flows through our city? Maybe they all belong to the mayor? Then, I started wondering that if all that was true, what if the mayor came looking for his plum? Would he walk by here tomorrow and say, "Uh-oh, there was a nice purple plum here that I wanted to take home to my kids once it was ripe, but now it's nowhere to be seen! I'll have to figure out which sweet-toothed little rascal ate it and issue his parents a fine."

No way, I reckoned – none of that could be true. The mayor doesn't go around shoveling snow from everyone's yards or raking leaves in all the parks. Why should he get all the plums growing outside everyone's yards, then? That wouldn't be fair!

What's more, I decided that if a second plum were to fall from the tree all on its own right now and the owner of the tree didn't hurry straight over to get it, then I could munch away without feeling a shred of guilt... or stick it in my pocket and walk away. That wouldn't be any sort of stealing. All I needed to do was keep squatting by the fence and hope the plum would fall down before six-thirty rolled around and the kid's show I wouldn't miss for the world came on TV.

But then, I remembered I wouldn't be allowed to hang around under the tree for that long, because Mom and Dad might start to worry and think I was told to stay after class again. And then Dad might call my teacher, who might forget that I had all my homework finished today, and might say to him that yes, Pärt should still be here at school but he isn't for some reason and no doubt he wandered off again or is taking a joyride on the bus. And then... and then they'll all get mad at me and start yelling before I get a chance to explain anything, just like they always do. And that was the last thing I wanted.

I stood up and stared at the plum hanging so nicely from its branch. Where had I gotten the idea that it might fall at any second?! Maybe it won't happen for another week. Or even worse – what if it happened the exact moment after I'd been waiting for several hours but then finally gave up and went home? No, something had to be done to get ahold of that plum, and fast!

Turning my gaze back up to the plum, I glared at it, clenched my fists, and thought with all my might: Fall down! Kaisa's grandma told us one time about people who are able to move things, and even break them, using nothing but their mind. Apparently, I'm not one of those kinds of people, because my mind didn't make the plum swing a single hair's-worth. Even the leaves on the tree were motionless, as the

weather was completely still. I couldn't reach the tree trunk to shake it and wasn't bold enough to climb up the fence to do so.

"Fall down already, dang it!" I shouted, stamping my foot. The plum didn't budge an inch. My patience was coming to an end, even though my appetite for the plum kept on growing. Just as I started looking around to see if I could find a stick to knock it down, I remembered my flute.

