



Toys Telling Stories

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Designed by Tiiu Allikvee
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Storybook, non-fiction
Age: 8+

This album, complete with a rich selection of photographs, mostly tells the stories of some toys that have been donated to the Tartu Toy Museum, the Children's Museum of Tallinn, and of toys belonging to various individuals. Old dolls, teddy bears, rocking horses, and tin soldiers bear the appearance of their time, reflecting the ideals of beauty and the educational principles of their day. The 20th century was not easy on Estonia, and therefore, the toys of this period also have many grave and sad tales to tell in addition to their cheerful stories. Dolls and teddy bears have gone through air raids and fires with their little owners, and many have taken the path of a war refugee, or been to Siberia with the deported. Especially moving is a story of a father who hid in the cellar for ten years after the end of the war, and carved a miniature version of their pre-war home for his daughter, who thought him long dead.

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Reading sample

At the end of 1939, when the over-seventy-year-old Lady von Huene left Estonia with the other Baltic Germans, she left a childhood doll to a young newlywed Estonian woman who had a little daughter called Tiiu. It was a little doll with a porcelain head and body and had been made in Russia. The von Huene family owned Lehtse manor, and we can imagine that the doll's first life was spent in those parts in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. What her name was and what games were played with her will probably remain a secret for ever.

In January 1944 Tiiu's mother gave her the doll for her fifth birthday. Tiiu named her Mari and that was the beginning of the doll's second life. But quite soon there was an accident. At the time of the air-raid in March 1944, Tiiu and her mother fled to stay with friends in Nõmme and they took Mari with them. In Nõmme some boys Tiiu played with dropped the doll out of the window and the porcelain body broke. A dexterous old man they knew made Mari a new wooden body with moving hands and legs. But the old man was a bit of a character and as a joke he also carved breasts on the doll. The Barbie generation had not been born yet, and Tiiu was embarrassed by the doll and did not dare play with it until, at her mother's request, the craftsman cut Mari's breasts off.

Then the flat and wooden-chested Mari became Tiiu's favourite doll; she sewed so many clothes for her that Mari's fashion collection would have been the envy of any 1940–50s lady. The doll's dresses and blouses were decorated with embroidery and ribbons, the cardigans had knitted patterns, the black plush winter coat was finished with white edging and the hat with tassels. Mari's clothes also included underwear, stockings, slippers and a dressing gown.