



The Elephant

Text by [Kadri Hinrikus](#)

Illustrated by [Kadi Kurema](#)

Tammerraamat 2021, 72 pp

ISBN: 9789949690749

Storybook, fiction

Age: 9+

Kärt feels that she doesn't really belong anywhere. Her relationship with her classmates is not a happy one- either she is being bullied for the way she looks or taunted because she knows the answers to teacher's questions. It's not going much better at home either- her father is not exactly happy about Kärt preferring books and reading to maths and computers. Her support from her mum is nonexistent as well as she just starts to cry and despair hearing about Kärt's problems.

Alas, after a particularly bad day at school, Kärt meets a spunky Croatian girl Lucija who slowly helps Kärt to realise that exactly her kind of girl is needed and cherished in different situations.



pp. 5–6

My name is Kärt and when I grow up, I want to be a writer. That's the complete opposite of what my dad wants, because he thinks a businesswoman would be the best career for me. As if! I'll be a writer, or I'll be nobody at all.

The kids at school sometimes call me Fart. It happens on the worst days of all, like when we have two gym classes in a row and I can't run as fast as we're told to. Or when I show up late in the morning because the bus wasn't on time. Or when Sten, Markus, Oliver, Marii, Krete, and Veronica are in one of their most awful 'we're-the-coolest-ever' moods. All they do then is show off. The girls compare their fingernail polish, and the boys pick on anybody who isn't a part of their little group. I certainly don't fit in with them.

I guess I don't really fit in anywhere. Not even in my own family! It's impossible to live up to Dad's expectations. He thinks that reading books is a waste of time and only ruins your vision. In his opinion, me being short-sighted and having to wear glasses is a total catastrophe. He's irked whenever I fry an egg too long or make porridge turns out bland. Then, he'll moan about how he lives in a house full of women but still can't get a proper meal.

Actually, the only women at home are me and my mom, but her cooking usually doesn't meet his standards, either. I kind of suspect that Dad doesn't really like me or my mom.

The couple of times I've asked Mom why Dad doesn't love us, she just waves her hands and says you shouldn't think that way.

"Don't you forget that Dad works a lot and earns money so you can have everything you need for school, and we can have a nice home to live in!"

Well, I don't know about that! When I get older, I want to write books where families live lives that are completely different from ours.



pp. 11–13

"I can't understand what good it is writing essays," Dad grumbled three days later when I was sitting at my desk to finish a creative writing project titled "My Favorite Animal". I was writing about an elephant.

"As if all that reading and poetry-writing will ever put bread on the table!" he scoffed. "Let me tell you: it won't. It's a total waste of time when you could be learning something useful instead."

"Like what?"

"You've got to learn all the ins and outs of computers. How to do business. How to work on international relations. How to do make calculations in your head. You can't just be some softie!" Dad ranted. He then flipped on the TV and dozed off.

Dad's lineup of critical skills repeated the exact same instructions as always, but the interruption had derailed my train of thought. I scribbled a poem on the margin of my paper instead:

*"If you ever see an elephant
strolling down the streets,
then shake his trunk in greeting
and ask him in for sweets."*

I spent the rest of the evening wracking my brain over my future.

The next day of school would've been as normal as any other if the teacher of our last class, which was grammar, hadn't asked us who wrote the first book of ABCs for Estonian peasants, and in what century.

Oliver was the first to be grilled.

"Ben Gottlieb Forssütius," he said slowly while picking at his pen.

The teacher's glare pierced straight through him.

"And in what century?"

"I can't remember," Oliver mumbled.

"You can't remember because you were a teensy little baby when it was published, or because you forgot to learn that fact?"

Our grammar teacher loves to make sarcastic jokes like that sometimes. All in all, she's pretty OK.

Oliver thought it best to just keep picking at his pen in silence.

"Marii, same question: who wrote the first Estonian alphabet book, and in what century?"

"Jakobson, 19th century."

Marii is the most pretentious girl in class.

Every time she answers a question, she fluffs her hair and pulls at her newest pair of slim-fit jeans. Marii spends most of her time watching YouTube videos.

"Judging by your homework and your answers, I might well believe that the alphabet book has yet to be written and this is the very first week grade school has ever been taught in this country! Kärt, same question!"

The teacher spun to face me.

I knew the cursed answer all too well, but unfortunately, I was also well aware of what would happen once I gave it.

"Kärt! I'm talking to you! Who wrote the first Estonian book of ABCs?!" she demanded.

"Bengt Gottfried Forselius," I said through gritted teeth. "Seventeenth century."

"Thank heavens," our teacher sighed. "Tomorrow, we'll start working on the play I assigned you. See that it's read from start to finish! You are excused."

"Idiot!" Marii spat at me before I could scurry out the door.

"You really are the worst ev-verr," Veronica chimed in.

"Kärt's a fart!" Krete jeered from behind me. Then, I finally escaped.

I turned off my phone to avoid the girls' nasty texts.



pp. 14–18

They'd ruined my day and I had no desire to go home. If I were to tell Mom that the girls at school had called me stupid, it'd only make her cry and wring her hands. If Dad were to catch wind of it, then he'd just go on about his softie theory again.

I'm no softie, but neither am I dumb enough to suggest that writers like Jakobson or Koidula wrote the first Estonian book of ABCs.

I wandered aimlessly to a park and sat down on a bench. It's incredible how adults are silly enough to think that childhood is wonderful and carefree. I can't wait until I grow up and am free to choose what I do, where I go, and whom I talk to, all on my own.

"Caramel is the best ice cream flavor in the whole world."

That yanked me out of my thoughts. A girl about my age had sat down on the other end of the bench: she was tanned and had jet-black hair and dark brown eyes. She swung her legs back and forth as she licked an ice-cream cone.

"Way better than chocolate or vanilla," she added without looking over at me.

I wasn't in the mood to talk and didn't share my own opinion. What did I care what some girl thinks about different flavors of ice cream? I'm not a big fan of small talk with strangers in general.

"Though have you tried rozhata before? That's crazy good, too," she carried on, ignoring my silence.

No, I hadn't tried rozhata. I didn't even know what rozhata was. I grabbed my backpack to stand up and get away from the girl.

"My name's Lucija."

Just as I was about to leave, Oliver appeared in the clearing behind the bench.

"Hey!" Lucija called out, waving to him. Oliver was surprised to see me.

"Huh! I didn't know you two knew each other. You guys go way back?"

"Not long," Lucija said with a shrug.

That was too much for me to handle.

"We don't know each other," I said forcefully.

"Really? I just told you my name's Lucija. And you're Kärt."

I was thunderstruck.

"How'd you know who I am?"

"Because your keys are hanging out of your jacket pocket and there's a keychain with the name Kärt on it," the girl explained, rolling her eyes. "That's why I figured your name is Kärt and not Kai, Mai, or Tui."

Lucija burst out laughing. Oliver smirked, too. I stuffed the keys deeper into my pocket.

"And how do you two know each other?" I asked to be polite.

"He's my brother," Lucija explained once she stopped giggling.

"Half-brother," Oliver specified.

"Whatever. Oliver's favorite is extra-creamy soft perv."

"Soft serve!"

"Whatever. The one swirled with cloudberry jam."

Lucija had finished her ice cream cone. Her legs hadn't stopped swinging for a second. On the contrary: they went back and forth, back and forth, and she appeared to have added a weird little dance move at some point. She stared at me with cheery curiosity.

"I can see that you two know each other, too."

"We're in the same class," I said curtly.

"Cool! Oliver's told me that the girls in his class are A-OK."

I shot him a sour look.

"All except for that one who totally sucks, I suppose."

"I don't know anything about that. Doesn't matter."

Lucija jumped to her feet. She was as skinny as a pole and barely reached Oliver's shoulders.

"Hey, we've got to get going. Mom promised to bake almond pie today. I could eat a horse right now."

"You just finished your ice cream," Oliver noted.

"So? I'd still like some almond pie."

Lucija swung her backpack over her shoulders and turned to me.

"Come, too! Mom's always glad to have visitors."

"No, hard pass," I said, taking a couple of steps back. "I've got to go home now, too."

"Okay, no worries. Come around some other time."

Oliver waved goodbye. I couldn't remember him ever giving me such a friendly look before. The two started walking away.

"Hey, Kärt—you wouldn't have an extra chicken, would you?" Lucija spun around and asked.

"An extra what?!"

"A chicken. Just a regular chicken."

"No, I definitely do not have a chicken."

Lucija was so unique and unpredictable that I couldn't help but giggle.

"Whatever. Bye!"

