

What Grows From a Tooth?

(Kaj zraste iz zobka?)

Author: Emanuela Malačič Kladnik

(sample translation)

Amid all the chattering and jabbering at the nursery school during lunch hour Matthew noticed something weird. It was actually extremely unusual. This is how it all started...

Jayne the tutor was cutting apples into slices and distributing them to the children. »Eat your apples, they are healthy for your teeth, cleaning them just as well as a toothbrush!« Eddie tried to figure out how his apple slice was supposed to turn into a toothbrush. He rubbed his teeth thoroughly with the apple. Honey was pulling faces. She disliked apples; she found them sour. She preferred plain bread and yoghurt. Where can she hide her slice? First she put it in her pocket but then she had a better idea.

»Do you want it?« she asked her friend Tina.

Tina who was munching on her apple slice shook her head and looked at Matthew who was still waiting for his. Cunningly she took Honey's slice and handed it to Matthew.

»Have I given you a slice already?« the tutor asked with surprise as it was not yet Matthew's turn.

»Yes, you have,« said Matthew and gave Honey a furtive glance. Honey was looking down, pretending she didn't know what it was all about.

But that was not what troubled Matthew that day. No, it was something completely different. He was paying attention to the apple slice in his hand. Since Honey first put it in her pocket there was a red thread hanging from it. He removed it and bit into the apple. »This is healthy for your teeth.« Then he stopped munching in surprise. Something was happening in his mouth. He swallowed the morsel and felt his teeth with his tongue. Something had definitely changed. His teeth were as smooth and jagged as before, and yet – when his tongue touched them one of them wobbled.

»Jayne,« he called out to the tutor, »one of my teeth is loose!«

Honey and Tina came over from the other side of the table and tried to look into Matthew's mouth. »Show us!« they urged. But he shook his head. He kept pushing at the tooth with his tongue, trying to figure out how far he could push it before it began to hurt.

»Well, let me see,« said the tutor. Matthew opened his mouth and showed her the loose tooth. The fact that he had a loose tooth was so surprising that he completely forgot about his lunch.

»Yes, you're right,« the tutor agreed with him. »Leave it be and it'll fall out when it's good and ready. Then you can put it under your pillow in the evening and the Tooth Fairy will fetch it.«

In the evening, Matthew was only half listening to the daily fairy tale. He kept pushing at the tooth with his tongue. He was fidgeting in bed until his mother put down the book.

»Hey, is this little tooth of yours such a nuisance?«

Matthew shook his head.

»What's the matter then?« she asked.

Matthew gave it a thought and then said. »Mother, if the Tooth Fairy takes away my tooth I won't be able to keep it as a souvenir.«

»I see,« said his mother. »Would you like to keep it?«

Matthew nodded.

»You can ask the Tooth Fairy to let you keep the tooth. But then perhaps she won't leave you any money.«

Matthew frowned. It would be very nice if the Tooth Fairy brought him some money and left him the tooth as well. She probably has no shortage of teeth. Only last week they counted three loose teeth that came out at the nursery school. What will the Tooth Fairy do with so many teeth?

»I won't let the Tooth Fairy take it,« was Matthew's decision.

»Oh my,« he surprised his mother. »What will you do with it?«

»I shall plant it and a little girl will grow from it!«

In a couple of days Matthew said good-bye to his tooth. In the morning he managed to loosen it so much that the tooth finally fell out and Matthew was proud when he showed it to his mother and father. Since it was Saturday they all went to visit grandmother in order to plant the tooth in her garden. She let them plant it in a very special place so a little girl would be sure to grow from it. The very special place was under a young date shrub with a bed of irises, lettuce and chicory close by. Matthew thought it was just the right place, especially since the date shrub bore a lot of fruit that year. It meant that the earth around it was fertile. Father dug a hole and Matthew put his tooth in it.

»Won't you put it in a box?« grandmother asked him, smiling.

»Then how will the little girl grow from it,« was Matthew's reply.

»Oh, yes,« she said quite seriously. »You're right.«

Father helped him bury the tooth. They made a small heap.

»Well, shall we put up a sign above it saying the tooth is buried here?« mother asked.

»It's not a funeral,« father protested, laughing.

»No,« Matthew shook his head. »I wouldn't want the little girl to bump her head against the sign when she comes out.« Besides, he would never forget where he had planted the tooth. Right here, under the date shrub.

In the evening father resumed reading the daily fairy tale. Once again, Matthew was only half listening. He kept thinking about the tooth, asking himself whether they had watered it well enough. What if the earth is too dry? Flowers don't bloom unless we water them; that was what grandmother said. How will the little girl grow unless grandmother waters the tooth every day?

»Are you thinking about the tooth, Matthew?« asked father who realized the boy was not listening at all and that he was rubbing his eyes.

Matthew nodded. »I'm not sure we watered it well enough.«

Father patted Matthew's hand. »Don't worry. I'm sure we poured enough water over it. We did everything right. Listen, Matthew,« father said, hesitating. »How do you think the girl will grow? Will she be a big girl right away or a little baby like you used to be when you were born?«

Matthew hadn't thought about that. He imagined the girl would be as big as him.

»I don't know, daddy. She'll probably be a baby first,« he said when he thought it over. Father nodded. That's how children grow: from little babies.

»What would you like the girl to look like?« father asked him.

»The girl will be...« Matthew thought about it a moment. »Very pretty. She'll be small and kind. Mother will dress her in a cute pink sweater and we shall all together go to visit grandmother. Perhaps later, when the girl is all grown up, we'll plant another tooth.«

Father agreed. It would be very nice to have another little girl.

»It means she'll be your sister, you know,« father added just to check whether Matthew knew it.

Matthew knew. It would be nice to have a little sister.

»Matthew,« said father. »What if a boy grows from the tooth instead?«

At the nursery school, Matthew played with Honey and Tina, but after lunch all the children joined forces to build a cardboard train. The tutors drew it with bold felt-tip markers and the children painted it. How big the engine is going to be! Where shall they put the train? It will take up the whole room! Matthew kept colouring, wondering what would grow from the planted tooth. Will it be a boy or a girl?

»What would you prefer, a brother or a sister?« he asked Honey.

»I'd like to have a little sister so that I could hold her hand and help her choose girl toys at the toy shop,« she answered.

It made Matthew think. It would be nice to be able to choose toys for a little sister.

»How about a brother?« he asked.

»I'd take my little brother to an aquarium and show him an octopus,« Honey said firmly, smearing her apron.

That would be nice, too. Going to an aquarium and showing fish to the little brother. They could laugh at the puffer fish and watch crabs.

Matthew couldn't decide what he would prefer.

Mother bought little overalls for the baby girl. Matthew liked them because they were decorated with sleeping foxes wearing soft hats. He pressed the overalls to his chest and smiled. His mother was beaming.

»This is for the baby girl, Matthew,« mother said.

Matthew gave her a solemn look.

»Mother, I'm not sure it will be a girl. It may just as well be a boy.«

»I see,« mother said, smiling. »What would you prefer?«

»I'm not sure what I'd prefer. It's all the same to me,« he replied. He looked at the overalls with the little foxes. »Still, perhaps I'd still prefer a little girl.«

His mother stroked his hair and kissed him on the forehead.

»I'm glad you're wishing for a little sister. Mother and father would like one as well.«

That evening Matthew listened to the fairy tale like a good little boy that he was and then he fell sleep.

Grandmother swore to Matthew that she watered the tooth regularly.

»But nothing has come of it yet; you have to wait a little longer, Matthew. Soon there'll be spring and something is sure to spring up, you'll see.«

Matthew often came to visit the date shrub and tapped the earth covering the tooth.

»Grow, little girl, grow,« he kept encouraging the little patch of wet earth.

Grandmother just smiled.

»Matthew, do you realize that the girl will first be just a little baby?« she asked him.

»I know, I know,« he said. »First she'll be small just like I used to be. Later on we'll go to the store and choose toys together.«

Grandmother agreed. »Do you also know that she won't be waiting for you outside, in the garden? She'd be too cold, you know.«

Matthew nodded. He'd already thought about that. He decided it would be best if mother immediately wrapped the girl in a warm blanket and fed her. That's how mothers care for babies.

»Mother will bring the little girl home and we shall all watch over her together,« he said.

Mother put Matthew's hand on her bulging tummy. »Can you feel it?«

Matthew didn't feel a thing, but still he put his ear to her tummy.

»Mother, the little girl is saying something!« he said.
»Is she? What is she saying?« mother wanted to know.
»She's saying she likes being with you,« Matthew said.
Mother blinked her eyes. Matthew went on: »She's also saying that children cannot grow out of the ground.«
»Is she really saying that?« mother asked.
»Yes, she is,« said Matthew without raising his ear from her tummy. »Jayne says that children much prefer a mother's tummy, leaving room underground for cabbages, salad, trees and flowers instead,« he repeated what his tutor at the nursery school explained to him.
»Well, I do believe Jayne is right,« mother said.
Matthew sat up and looked at his mother. He softly stroked her belly. »Yes, she's right.«

At the nursery school, Honey approached Matthew and took his hand. »Look,« she said to him and opened her mouth. She wobbled one of her teeth. »It's loose.«
Matthew looked at her loose tooth with great interest. »What are you going to do?«
»I'll give it to the Tooth Fairy.«
Matthew said: »Why don't you bury it? My tooth will soon bring me a little sister!«
She shook her head. »I already have a brother and a sister. They go to school.«
»Wouldn't you like to have another little brother?« Matthew asked.
»No,« she replied. »I prefer having a friend.«
Matthew was happy for he knew she was talking about him.
»Then you'd better stick the tooth under your pillow. The Tooth Fairy will bring you some money.«
»Maybe she'll bring me a new cartoon!« Honey said.
Matthew threw up his arms and shouted out: »Hurrah! Just don't forget to tell mother and father about it before you go to sleep!«