

Plumface

I remember the trees. Those huge, full-grown Victoria plum trees. I lived in them when I was growing up. They weren't mine, of course, they didn't belong to me...but it felt like that. As it happens, those trees were my grandparents' trees. My Nan and Granddad lived in a huge, old country house, called Haditha Cottage, right next to a farm. They had a huge garden; it was 3 acres long and 2 acres across, and I loved it. But the best part of those gardens wasn't the big newly-planted forest with silver birches and all the wildlife, and it wasn't the little tree which I made into my own little house (with chairs and a table and portable radio, of course) because it had a big gap between the branches, and it wasn't even the fact that I could feed the donkeys and sheep through the fence just stepping out of the kitchen door. It was the plum trees. They were where I spent most of my time in the summer, when the plums were big, ripe, squishy and juicy. They were an amazing deep purple colour, and my Granddad and I would spend hours in the little grove, picking plums. He would climb the huge ladder up the tree, and I would stand below with a bucket, ready for the great game of trying to catch all the plums in it without dropping them, and then changing buckets quickly before the next lot of plums fell from my Granddad's hands. Sometimes, if I was good and didn't drop many plums, I would be allowed the secret sweet treat of a ripe plum. My Granddad would come down off the ladder and hand me one, saying I had been a good girl with the buckets and I was allowed a treat, as long as my Nan didn't find out of course. The juice of that one magnificent plum (I always got the best one, of course) was the best thing I ever tasted. It was sweet yet tangy, with a tiny hint of sourness. The taste exploded on my tongue as I bit into it, and the juice dribbled down my fingers into the grass, where the ants and beetles would also indulge in this sweet feast. The happiness ended all too soon, and we would haul the buckets of plums back up to the house. My Nan would make succulent plum puddings and pies, some to eat now, some to take back with us, and some to freeze. We wouldn't be out of dessert for months after this.

Another memory relating to the plums we picked is a not so happy one. My Nan and Granddad's house had the kitchen, from which a door led into the sitting room. That door was always closed so that the cats, Smudgy and Tom, could not get in and ruin the furniture. Now, my family left me alone in the kitchen, washing my hands after the plum-picking, and naturally, the door to the sitting room they were all in was closed. The plums screamed out at me to taste them, and, being only 4, I did. I sat there for what must have been a good hour and a half gobbling these tasty, squashy, deep purple jewels as fast as I could...and then my mom came back into the room and found me, with purple juice all round my mouth and cramp in my stomach. 'I didn't eat those plums, mommy' came the immediate response of a guilty child's conscience. Obviously, my 'mommy' was not fooled by my lie (I wonder why..?) and I was hauled off to the toilet where I sat for hours on end. Eventually, the purple in my body was gone by the time we went home, and I swore to myself and my family I wouldn't ever eat 24 plums in an hour and a half again.

I have other memories of my childhood, of course. Not all involving plums, I wasn't that boring as a child! Memories of my siblings, mainly, although I must say my earliest memory is of my father changing my nappy. I was on my alphabet mat. The second earliest memory is of my brother chasing me, crawling, across a carpet and pretending he was going to steal my pink drinking bottle and eat my feet. I laughed so hard that day, and I loved my brother a lot for making it a fun day.