

Andrus KIVIRÄHK

Hans Christian Andersen Award 2026 for a Writer
Candidate for the Estonian Section of IBBY



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Statement on the Candidate's Contribution to Literature for Young People

Andrus Kivirähk – Children's Author with an Unstoppable Flights of Fancy

Andrus Kivirähk (17th August, 1970) is a novelist, playwright, and feuilleton. Among his sizable body of work (around 40 books and about as many plays) you can find a baker's dozen of children's books – collections of stories, plays, and longer story-driven tales. He has also been a co-writer on many popular animated films: “*Tom and Fluffy*” (1997), “*Lotte's Journey to South*” (2000), “*Ladybugs' Christmas*” (2001), and “*Lotte from Gadgetville*” (2006).

Kivirähk was born in Tallin, where he lives to this day. He graduated from Tallinn 32nd Highschool in 1988 and with a journalism degree from Tartu University in 1993. After university, Kivirähk worked in *Päevaleht's* culture section, later at *Pühapäevaleht*, and then as the editor for the humor page at *Päevaleht*. He is currently the editor of the op-ed section of that newspaper. He has been a member of the Writer's Guild since 1996.

Kivirähk made his publishing debut in the humor magazine *Pikker* 37 years ago, in 1984, when he was in his final year of high school. His first children's book *Giraffe* was published in 1995, the same year as his first book for adults. The author does not himself make the distinction based on audience. He has said in an interview: “For me, writing for children does not differ in any way from writing for adults, just as I equally enjoy reading both good children's book and good books for adults. It is kind of like with eating: meat cutlets are good, but that doesn't make pancakes bad. What's important is that both are properly cooked!”

Kivirähk knows how to properly ‘cook’. His unique humor is based on hyperbole and unexpected, boundless fantasy. You can find word play, absurdity, and intertextuality. Nothing is impossible. For example, father's socks lay eggs and out hatch tiny stockings. The writer is very familiar with folklore and incorporates it into modern stories with playful ease. He surprises his readers with unexpected situations and characters (personalities, dreams, and purposeful action are not just qualities of people, but

also the qualities of objects), and dialogue soaked in wit. The joke is, among others, that the ordinary act in unusual ways – a laptop goes wild in the woods or Karoliina’s grandmother keeps ghosts the same way some people keep sheep. At the same time, something unusual is behaving completely normally – a ghost opens a Facebook account or a robot works in a daycare center.

However, entertaining the reader isn’t Kivirähk’s only goal. Beneath the layer of irritating, and at times over the top and mischievous jokes is a wonderful and, as unexpected as it may be, an educational core. Kivirähk is a moralist in his own way. He places a high importance on friendliness, helpfulness, understanding, playfulness, caring, and tolerance. There was backlash against a title *Poo and Spring* when the book came out. If the people up in arms would have just made an effort to read the book, they would have discovered a tender love story. Yes, a gentle story of untraditional characters for sure. Kivirähk’s Pegasus doesn’t flutter around for its own sake, but leads you somewhere, to great heights with a broader perspective. Each of his books has a distinct warmth, friendly spirit, some thrills and laughs, and all neatly tied up at the end like a bow.

Kivirähk’s writings and short stories are usually about a child who feels lonely, but is able to deal with it with his or her imagination. Kai, the main character in *Griaffe*, has parents who take care of her – making sure she has food to eat, clothes to wear and toys to play with – but they don’t talk with her, don’t play with her, or do anything together. So, the girl finds herself a friend, her tummyworm Tönis. Together they imagine a crane to be a giraffe and canned fish in tomato sauce acquires a quite grisly meaning. In *Oskar and the Things*, Oskar has to live with his grandmother for the summer. He is reluctant in making new friends and has a hard time adjusting to life in the country side. With the help of a mobile phone made of wooden block, he is able to communicate with things. That’s not all. These things need his help and Oskar, being a good boy, helps them with their wishes. In *Tilda and the Dust Angel*, the titular Tilda also feels lonely because her father has passed away and her mother works all the time, not sharing any memories with her daughter.

Flights of fancy and dreams are considered to be a vital part of life in *Sirli*, *Siim*, and *the Secrets*. Those who don’t dream or fantasize will become mean and bitter adults. *Limpa*

and the Pirates reveals to the reader the criminal life of bedsheets. In Lotte the dog’s world, in Gadgetville, anything is possible. Inventing is its own sort of dreaming and fantasizing and making those dreams come true. The past and memories, connection to time, are also important to Kivirähk. Oskar’s relationship with his grandmother starts to grow when he suddenly realizes that she too used to be a little girl. Remembering the past is also important in *Tilda and the Dust Angel*. When characters recall important moments, they immediately start to feel better, as if they are finding themselves. Generally, children are great at adapting in Kivirähk’s stories. When asked what things the author doesn’t like in children’s books, it turns out it was when children and their parents are in opposition, when parents are mean and children live in an entirely different world. “I think, in my books, parents and children are always on the same side,” says the author.

“I believe everything I have written makes up a whole; when writing for children or adults, I am always getting at the same thing. Sometimes, ideas just come into my head that are best told through children’s books or plays.”

Written by Krista Kumberg

Translated by Chris Reintal

Interview

Andrus Kivirähk Hopes to Change Our Attitude towards Dust

Sigrid Kõiv

Postimees, April 28, 2018

I suggested to Andrus Kivirähk that perhaps he could be called a writer of memories and found out that he already has been.

Kivirähk admits that it is definitely possible to live without memories, but remembering gives people something to lean on. “People don’t just come into being like in a video game. In video games, characters really do just come into existence, vanish, and are reborn again. But these aren’t actually real people,” says Kivirähk.

Your most recent children’s books, including the very soon to be released *Tilda and the Dust Angel* as well as your previous book *Oskar and the Things* have a somber tone. What has brought about this change? Is it a sad time for modern children?

Is *Tilda and the Dust Angel* sad? I would say it’s moving. In the end, everything works out for all the characters. Maybe, yes, it starts in the minor key, but by the end, it’s smooth sailing.

After all, I have written stories for *Täheke* (Estonian children’s magazine - ed.) every month, and these are funny stories. And already next year, they will be published in a collection, which will definitely be fun.

I suppose when writing *Tilda* and *Oskar*’s stories, my thoughts went down a sadder path. In the case of *Tilda*, I have to talk a bit about how the book came to be. Irina Šabarova, aka Takinada, the eventual illustrator of the book called me and told me about how she had drawn these creatures and made dolls. They were dust angels, though she did not yet know they were dust angels. She just made these funny dolls with big eyes and small wings and drew pictures of them. She offered me to maybe come up with who these creatures are and what happens to them.

These pictures had some kind of effect on me that made me say: yes, gladly. I could already tell by images' atmosphere that it couldn't be a comedic book. It needed to be a more mystical, poetic story. I, myself, don't sing in a choir, but it's like when the conductor uses a tuning fork to give the choir the right pitch. The dolls gave me my pitch.

When asked who I would recommend the book to, I say to those who already enjoy Hans Christian Andersen's or Oscar Wilde's fairy tales. It isn't really for toddlers.

Do you know that some work of yours is part of the required readings at all levels in school?

Of course, I know. I often go to schools to meet readers.

I tried to think like a literature teacher when reading *Tilda and the Dust Angel*. The book has an insane number of layers: man vs machine, son vs father, fatherless families, refugees, who don't belong anywhere. Do you think that there are too many layers for a children's book?

I wouldn't use the term 'children's book'. It's just a book. Each of the characters have the same problem: they have forgotten something important. Who's forgotten their father, who can't remember their heritage, etc. Remembering is very important and when they all remember what they need to, they feel much better and life gets back on track. I think it is important to know who you are and where you came from.

Then, do you feel, that we tend to lose that? Everything can be written down, of course, like in your phone.

I suppose. I don't think memory is in any real danger nowadays. Some lose their memory, others don't. It is important to know what came before us. Of course, it is possible to live without it, but remembering gives something to lean on. You are a part of something and all of it influences you. People don't just come into being like in a video game. In video games, characters really do just come into existence, vanish, and are reborn again. But these aren't actually real people.

Can you be called a writer of memories?

In the most recent *Looming* (Estonian literary magazine - ed.), Toomas Haug wrote about Ene Mihkelson. He compared Mihkelson and Jaan Kross; he threw out the idea that the third important writer of memories is Andrus Kivirähk, but that he wouldn't deal with him in that article. I now wait for when Toomas will deal with me, that there is a triangle Mihkelson-Kross-Kivirähk.

My understanding is that writers, if they aren't sci-fi writers, aren't huge fans of technology. In your book, characters find peace once the pre-machine era is restored. In Terry Pratchett's *Going Postal*, people stand in the way of progress in order to find happiness, but in real life we see that Luddites aren't successful. Machines will outlive us and are getting ever smarter.

My book isn't about Luddites. The big white factory symbolizes the lack of memory. But I don't want to tell you what every detail means. I want people to approach my book with a clean slate, not after reading an interview where they learn all the morals and how to interpret everything.

As a children's author, do people often ask you for tips on how to explain something or other to children?

Not really. I feel that you can't explain the gold nugget at the center of children's literature in a couple of sentences. What is the positive takeaway that Pippi Longstocking or Karlsson provide?

Independence?

If it is as you say it is, then it is so banal and insipid, that I don't know what to say. The message of *Pippi Longstocking* is precisely as long as the book itself. Like all good books, it will positively affect you once you've read the whole thing, it is not possible to condense it into a couple of thesis statements or slogans. When reading it you encounter tenderness and friendliness, though just moralizing about it is pointless.

Why doesn't Tilda get a step-father in the book? To be honest, I was expecting it.

I don't know: She just doesn't.

In your works, men are comedic characters, women tragic characters, and children are adaptive. Do you use this template knowingly?

I haven't thought of it that way, but it is an old adage, that in children's books men are comedians. Dad is always the one you can joke around with. It is the same with Astrid Lindgren. In *Emil of Lönneberga*, for example, the father is the one who Emil teases, who trips and gets stuck. Nothing as demeaning as that happens to the mother. I can't imagine that a mother would fall into a mud puddle or gets her butt stuck on a nail. No. Mothers will always remain dignified.

As a mother, I can verify that all sorts of things happen to us...

I'm talking about books! Things happen in real life, of course. But it is tradition to write positively about mothers. Take *Seacrow Island* for example. Father Melker is the person things happen to. Sure, there is no mother in the family, but nothing embarrassing happens to the older sister Malin.

Men are somehow more comedic. Starting with Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, all sorts of things happen to men. Comedians are often men; woman comedians are rare.

What don't you like about children's literature?

I have never liked it when, in children's books, children are put in opposition with their parents. Like how often it is in Roald Dahl's books. Parents are mean and children live in entirely different worlds. I don't like that and I don't have those kinds of experiences from my childhood. I prefer Lindgren and Tove Jansson's worlds, where family sticks together. No one can imagine Moomintroll fighting with Moominpappa. Or that Moominpappa and Moominmamma don't understand Moomintroll. Of course, they understand him, because who else if not their parents can understand a child.

I think, in my books, parents and children are always on the same side.

Let's talk about women in your works. You are like Martin Scorsese; in your books, women fill specific rolls for men – mothers, wives, adult daughters who are difficult to find husbands for. But unlike Scorsese, your depictions of women don't include hussies. Why is that?

I am not aware of that. I believe that this is perhaps one reason why women should write as much as possible. Male authors inevitably place women in relation to men, look at them from a male perspective. In my plays I have more prominently featured women. VAT Theater is performing one of plays *Alias* which is actually about two women, two schoolmates. *Housewife from Ravenstone*, my piece for EV100 at Endla and Kuresaare theaters, is about a girl.

I actually like writing for women. Especially in theater. I like female actresses. Mati Unt has also said that they are very exciting on stage and interesting to watch. A musical – in collaboration with Nargen Opera, once again for EV100 – is coming to Draamateater: *Sparrows of the Fatherland*. The plot revolves around a village acting troupe who decides to put on a performance about the Estonian War of Independence, but they of course can't find male actors and then the women, middle aged ladies, play out the war on stage. Just like how boys went to war for independence, because adult men didn't want to, now women have to go through war themselves. That's how it is in the rural areas of Estonia: women do all the cultural and patriotic work themselves because the men sit at home and watch tv.

So, to the best of my abilities, I try. I am aware that there should more women, but I don't want to start filling quotas. In the end, it is important to write what feels important. Tilda and the Dust Angel is also a girl's story.

It is a child's story. In your approach, children and women are separate and women and girls don't mix.

True, they don't. Do you think that it wouldn't have made a difference if Tilda has been a boy?

Yes.

But maybe it doesn't matter? A child is a child. Be it a man or woman, people's problems aren't fundamentally different. If you miss your late father, then it doesn't matter if you are a boy or a girl. What would even a girly or boyish thing be? On the other hand, I immediately felt like the character should be a girl, but she would have a friend that's a boy.

You yourself have three daughters, the youngest is eleven. What kind of parent are you? How old were you when your children got their own phone for example.

When they went to school, I suppose. In general, there is the rule, that when a kid goes to school, they get a phone. They will be wandering around alone. Who would be calling a preschool kid anyway? Everyone has one anyway. It would be weird to leave a child without one. Why punish them like that?

But have you imposed time limits on the computer?

No. And I don't think I've had problems with my children either. And what can you really impose. Eventually, school work nowadays is done on computers too. It is how it is and it would be pointless to fight against it.

I, myself, am very traditional. I check my inbox daily, but I still have a Nokia with buttons, so I can't read them on my phone. I don't have Facebook. I have a tablet for taking on trips.

But how do you keep up with the news? Suppose some veteran politician has died, but we are sitting here completely clueless!

At the same time, it would be very strange, if I were giving an interview and at the same time surfing the web on my phone. It's not like you need to know everything every second, right? I will finish the interview, walk the dog, open my inbox, read through *Postimees* and *Delfi*, so I won't miss out on anything. I look at the news several times a day, so I am aware. But you don't need a phone in your pocket for that. Do we even have to be aware of things as they are happening? I don't think so.

Do you base your writings on your own children? You have children of different ages, but I haven't noticed you writing about teenagers.

My writing isn't based on my children.

I am a bit alienated from literature aimed at teenagers. I don't quite understand what it is. I remember I started immediately reading adult books when I was a teenager. I didn't need any young adult books. Usually, what is meant by young adult novels, is dirty backyards and kids who've run away from home skulk around, injecting themselves and doing all sorts of crime. I wouldn't have seen myself as teenager in that world.

I haven't felt any growing pains becoming an adult and I don't think my daughters have either. It's somehow gone smoothly.

When will you write something for adults, that taps into the national identity again?

Adults can also read Tilda's story. I sincerely recommend it.

A dust angel is made of dust. Dust is eternal and nothing can happen to it. We all, who fight with dust in our homes daily, are well aware of that fact. I'm actually waiting to see how this book will influence people's approach to dusting: will they have a respectful attitude towards dust and let it gather.

Look, novels aren't actually desperately vital. If a firefighter or EMT say that they don't feel like working for a while, then it's bad, people suffer. But if I say it...

There are so many novels in the world, most of which people haven't read. Go to a library and look. There is only a need to write more of them, when a writer feels like there is no other way. It shouldn't be done with the attitude, that I will write a new book every few years. There is no point to that.

Bakers have to constantly bake more bread, otherwise people will starve.

Our spirits will starve.

No, they won't! Go and ask people on the street who has read all five parts of *Truth and Justice*. I guess that very few. So, there is plenty to read. But of course, sooner or later I will write. I have had a six-seven-year cycle with novels. *November* was in 2000, *The Man Who Spoke Snakeish* 2007, 2014 was *At World's End*. It logically follows that the next one might come 2019 or 2000. And maybe it will.

November become the movie, a week ago Vanamuine premiered *The Man Who Spoke Snakeish* play. What do you feel when giving your book to someone else to work on? Do you sometimes want to say “no-no-no you’re doing it all wrong; embarrassing and terrible”?

That’s how culture is. It’s natural that theater and film use books to find stories. I highly recommend it for Estonian cinema. If your base is a solid book, then the film is often good. Think of Leida Laius’ films for example. And the opposite as well – if the director throws something haphazardly together, then the script is often weak.

I really liked *November*. I would have also liked it if I wasn’t Andrus Kivirähk. It is such a cool movie visually. But I also was satisfied as the author – they had found the gold nugget. The main criticism of the film I’ve heard is that the book was a lot funnier.

I don’t take pleasure in that kind of compliment. If I write about how the Devil snaps the overseer’s neck, then it is funny to read and imagine. If you are to show it on film, then it is murder and ugly. Same with the weather. If you write about how the ground is covered in slush and mud, especially if you emphasize it at the beginning of every chapter, then it’s funny. If you see how everything is so disgusting and dirty and grimy and people live in, it isn’t funny. But I suppose that’s how they lived.

You have written a lot of plays – why aren’t you an actor, or why haven’t you participated in any of them?

No, I definitely don’t plan on climbing on stage. I have directed some pieces. That kind of work I can imagine for myself and maybe even thought about doing long ago.

But I never tried to get into acting school. Maybe some thought crossed my mind when I graduated, they were accepting student that year. But I didn’t go and I didn’t want to become an actor. It is incredibly difficult. After all, I see it. Long nights and day after day doing the same thing on stage. They say that they find something new, and they probably do, but I am the kind of person who would rather finish one thing and then do something completely different.

It is fun to write. Place a period at the end, the book is published, and you are done with it. Then you take on the next thing.

Do you sometimes think that if there is Oskar Luts and Juhan Liiv, that you are the third man whose plaster bust will be in every college society dorm?

(Speaking like a teacher:) And what about Tammsaare?

Yes, apologies, of course Tammsaare as well. So four.

I don’t think about it. I like getting the appreciation while I’m alive. I really like it when people come up to me and thank me. Or in schools, when a child wants a selfie and hugs me and says that I am their favorite author. It’s great. What good does a posthumous statue give me?

Your books have been translated quite a lot. Do the readers in these other languages also give you some feedback?

Not really, but I also don’t really go anywhere. Back when *Snakish* was published, I did a little tour in France. I’ve also gone to Finland. I like to meet with readers in Estonia, it’s somehow closer to my heart.

But I have gone to a lot of Estonian centers and Estonian schools in other countries. It’s worth it to go, if people want to show their children an Estonian author and give them the impulse that Estonian is good to learn and remember.

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Translated by Chris Reintal

Andrus Kivirähk's 10 Most Notable Children's Books

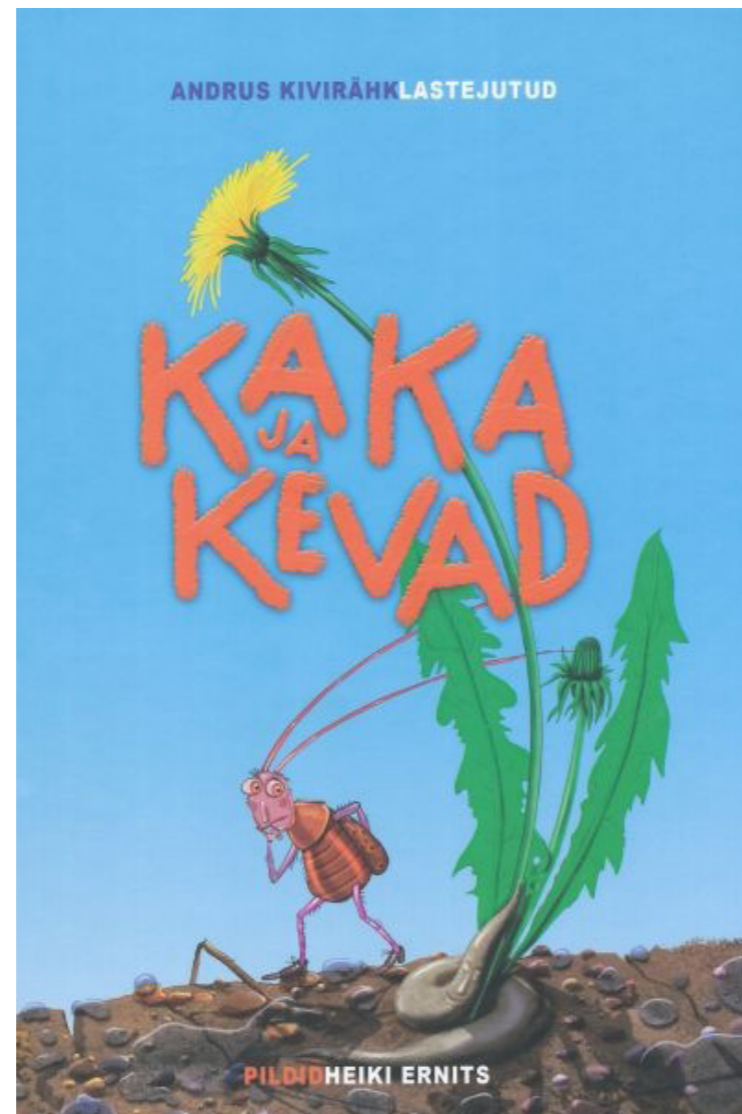
1. The Ghost and Facebook
2. Tilda and the Dust Angel
3. Oskar and the Things
4. A Frog Kiss
5. Poo and Spring
6. Limpa and the Pirates
7. Lotte's Journey South
8. Onions and Chocolate
9. Sirli, Siim and the Secrets
10. Giraffe



Andrus
Kivirähk's

5 Most Notable
Books Presented
to the Jury

Poo and Spring



Poo and Spring

Text: Andrus Kivirähk

Illustrations: Heiki Ernits

Varrak 2009, 2016, 95 pp

ISBN 978-9985-319-72-7

Poo and Spring is one of the most popular children's books published in Estonia over the last ten years. It consists of short stories, in which characters from the everyday world suddenly find new ways to interact. What happens when a dog turns yellow in autumn and sheds its fur? It will grow new, green fur in the spring, naturally! Or what about when poop and a dandelion meet in springtime? Everything that can happen in a kindergarten classroom can happen in this book, too!

Excerpt

Poo and Spring

A dog squatted on the park trail and then ran away. He left a small nugget of poo laying on the trail.

“Wow, it’s beautiful here!” the poo marveled and looked around. “The sky is so blue! The trees are so green! And there is so much open space all around!”

“Hey you there, be careful!” called the sparrow. “Come off the path before somebody steps on you!”

Indeed, he could hear someone’s footsteps on the trail! Poo dragged himself off the trail and onto the grass as fast as he could.

“Oh, it’s even more beautiful here!” he said happily, “so soft and comfortable. The small blades of grass tickle under the chin and the bees are buzzing. I’m going to find some leaves and build myself a house. Then I’ll sit by the window and admire the view!”

“You know little poo, you shouldn’t build a house in the middle of the grass,” the sparrow said. “Sometimes the lawnmower comes by here. It makes loud noise and cuts everything to pieces. Dangerous thing! You should go under the lilac bush, there you’ll be safe and the lawnmower won’t reach you.”

“Thank you, wise bird!” said poo and walked toward the bush. He looked for leaves and twigs and built himself a tiny hut. There it was nice to sit and breathe the fresh air.

Poo loved living in the park: children were running and playing ball, old ladies were feeding sparrows and doves, dogs were sniffing the trees and lifting their legs. It was an exciting view from the window of the hut. But poo never had any guests and that made him a little sad.

“It would be so nice to talk to a friend and look out the window together,” he thought. “It’s a pity I’m so lonely. At least the sparrow should visit every now and then. It’s not polite to forget a friend!”

Poo looked around and spotted the sparrow. He was sitting on the branch, next to his wife, and feeding his chirping offsprings in the nest. The poo waived to his old friend and the sparrow nodded his head in greeting, but he did not fly closer. He didn’t have time for some dog poop right now. Instead, he hugged his wife and flew off to find more food for the baby sparrows.

“Wouldn’t it be wonderful if I had someone to hug, too?” poo thought with a sigh.

Slowly the autumn approached and then the winter. The little hut was covered with snow. It was warm and cozy in there. That made the poo sleepy, and he slept a lot.

Spring melted the poo out from under the snow. He stretched and exercised under the sun. He had gone all white over the winter, but he was in a great mood. The air was so fresh and the first flowers were blooming everywhere. And – what a miracle – one dandelion pushed its head out right next to his hut!

“Hello!” the dandelion said with a small voice. “May I bloom here? I am not bothering you, am I?”

“Absolutely not!” answered the smitten poo. “You are so beautiful!”

“Oh, please!” the dandelion blushed. “I am very ordinary.”

“Not at all!” said the poo. “Believe me – I’ve been here for a whole year, but I’ve never seen a dandelion so yellow and ruffled! Do you know what – would you be my wife?”

Dandelion blushed again, and agreed. They got married right away and started their life

together. They loved each other very much and hugged many times every day, much more often than the sparrow couple.

Translated by Merike Safka

Dad's Socks

It was Saturday. Mum was mopping the floor when she found a pair of Dad's socks under the bed.

"Hey!" she called. "What are your socks doing here? Come and put them in the dirty laundry!"

Dad came out of the kitchen, knelt down and tried to fish the socks out from under the bed. But they were so far under that he couldn't get at them.

"I'll have to get a brush," he said, but quick as a flash, Pille was there.

"Wait, Dad, I'll crawl under the bed and get them for you!"

She lay down on her stomach and wriggled under the bed.

"Can you reach them?" Dad asked. "Don't hit your head!"

"Come out of there!" said Mum. "You're not stuck, are you?"

"Dad," came Pille's voice from under the bed. "The socks have got an egg!"

"What do you mean an egg?" asked Dad in surprise. "There's an egg in the socks?"

"No, not in the socks, tucked up with them!" said Pille. "A tiny speckled egg. And they peck me if I try to touch it. I think they've laid an egg, and now they're hatching it."

"What nonsense is this now!" spluttered Dad as he struggled in under the bed. Two socks were lying right up against the wall in a tight ball. And between them, as even Dad could see, lay an egg covered in tiny brown dots.

"How did that get here?" muttered Dad as he reached for the egg. But as soon as he moved his hand, one of the socks bit him on the thumb.

"Don't touch it, let them hatch it!" said Pille. "Such a sweet little egg, I wonder what'll come out of it?"

"That's what happens, when you leave socks lying around!" said Mum, who had also squeezed in under the bed. "They start laying eggs! Now we'll just have to wait. We shouldn't disturb their nest!"

And so it was. With night-time rustlings, the socks hatched their egg under the bed. Pille crawled in to look at them every day. The socks got used to her and let her stroke them. And Dad often visited them too.

"Well, they are my socks," he explained as he offered them some biscuits. But the socks didn't want anything to eat; they just curled round the egg even more tightly and hissed at him. They were probably scared that he wanted to put them on.

One evening, when Mum and Dad were getting ready for bed, they heard a cracking sound coming from under the bed.

"Pille!" shouted Dad. "Come quick, they're hatching!"

Pille came running in in her nightdress. In no time they were all under the bed.

There were huge cracks in the egg already and peeping out of one of them was a tiny striped sock.

“It’s so cute!” cried Pille in delight. “Too bad it hasn’t got a brother! You can’t wear one sock on its own.”

Just then the egg split open. The little striped sock teetered out – and guess what! It wasn’t a sock at all but a pair of tights!

“Brilliant!” shouted Pille ecstatically. “Oh Mum, can I keep them?”

“But they’re too small,” said Mum.

“Yes, but they’ll grow!” said Dad, patting his socks. They were absolutely tame again and didn’t even try to bite.

“Well done!” said Dad. “Good socks! What a lovely daughter you’ve got!”

Translated by Miriam McIlfatrick-Ksenofontov

The Pirate Spoon

One day, a spoon decided to become a pirate.

“Enough of this boring life!” he declared. “I’m tired of lying around in this drawer! I’m going to become a terrifying one-legged pirate. Ahoi! Is that a bowl I spy over yonder? I’m going to go right over and steal it!”

A big, white bowl had indeed appeared on the table, filled to the brim with soup. Floating peacefully in the soup were meatballs, potatoes, and peas. None of them could ever have imagined what dreadful danger they were in!

The spoon quietly crept up to the edge of the bowl, and peered over it. At that moment, two potatoes were floating by and chatting.

“What a nice, warm soup!” one said. “How wonderful it is for swimming!”

“You’re absolutely right!” the other replied. “And how still it is here! There aren’t even any waves. It sure is nice and peaceful!”

“Arrr!” roared the spoon, and dove head first into the soup. “You’re mistaken, my dear potatoes! There’s nothing peaceful here! Can’t you see I’m a dreadful pirate?! You won’t get away from me!”

Panic broke out: the potatoes, meatballs, and peas all tried to get away from the spoon, swimming around in circles and squealing. The spoon chased them, howling. A couple of chubby meatballs tried to resist, but the spoon was cleverer and caught them before long.

“Resistance is futile!” he yelled. “I’m a fearsome pirate and I’ll get you, no matter what!”

In the end, the spoon triumphed. Only one pea was still trying to climb its way out of the bowl, but the spoon swept over and caught it, too. The soup was left empty, with only a few waves rippling across the surface.

The spoon started wondering what he should do with all his booty.

“Should I take it all to a pirate’s cave? That means I’ll have to find one, first! Maybe this sugar bowl will do?”

“You know what?” said a fork who had waddled up. “You’d be better off as a noble pirate—the kind who gives out all his stolen booty to the poor!”

The spoon liked this idea.

“Where can I find the poor, though?” he asked, peering around. Sitting on the floor was a shaggy dog, who was staring at the spoon with her tongue hanging out.

“Are you poor?” the spoon asked.

“Very poor!” the dog declared, panting hungrily.

“Great, then I’ll give all the plunder from my sea battles to you!” the spoon said. He poured all the potatoes, meatballs, and peas straight into the dog’s mouth. The dog swallowed – gulp! – and started wagging her tail in joy.

“Long live the noble pirate spoon!” she barked in admiration. The spoon was as glad as could be.

“Come again tomorrow!” he called out. “Then, I’ll steal a bowl of porridge!”

The dog howled happily, sat up on her hind legs, and ran outside, her claws scratching on the kitchen floor.

Translated by Adam Cullen

Review

Kaka Organizes a Carnival

Arno Oja

Postimees, April 11, 2015

Kaka (Estonian word for ‘poo’ - ed.) is a peculiar character. In Brazil, he plays football at the top level, plays for Madrid Real too, but since Estonian football players didn’t know what to do with the celebrity, writer Kivirähk turned him into the harbinger of spring for Estonian children. /.../ To make spring more fun for the little ones, our national author started gathering a bunch of other furry and feathery characters from *Täheke*, bundled them together between two hard covers and called it *Children’s Stories*. And uncle Heiki Ernits put some nice colorful pictures in there too.

In between those covers, a glove is president, a ghost lives in a toiletbowl, socks lay eggs, and a spoon becomes a pirate. By the end, a cat has taken the mantle of Santa Clause, gifting a herring head to a crow. On the inside cover, uncle Heiki has drawn the grey-haired writer himself – barefoot and turned back into a child – as he sits, as an observer, under a tree plucking a kannel. That’s probably where he dreamt up the age-old proverb that wisdom comes from sucking on heads of herrings and crows are smart birds... Nevertheless, Kaka started a new life and even found himself a partner here, Dandelion.

They say children really liked *Poo and Spring* and daycare workers and awards committees like it too. The stories within gave Andrus Kivirähk

his third Nukits (children's book award - ed.), after Lotte and Limpa. But many respectable ladies stirred up a fuss! Whether they disliked Kaka the poo or the real Kaka, they probably don't know themselves... In their day, women didn't even play football, and therefore Kaka is the devil and needs to be thrown out of the country?! After more than five years and maybe the harbinger of spring did visit his homeland and tried to make Estonian-style potato salad with a lone potato left behind in his book. Perhaps. What is certain is that illustrator, Heiki Ernits, who is also the film animator who brought Lotte the dog to the big screen, saved Kaka and Dandelion from even worse! He helped them into the Klaus the Dog Wanderer's suitcase and brought them to Lotteland. In the meantime, Kivirähk, to the delight of his princesses at home (the oldest, Kaarin, already a keen writer herself) and their mother, Ilona, went and kissed a frog. (Reference to *A Frog Kiss* - ed.) And then had to write the text accompanying Jüri Arraks's pictures of *Toell the Great*. But now Andrus and Heiki have finished a new book along with Lottemaa, a "good book", as a boy says on the title page. A book for the whole family. (Reference to *Carnival and Potato Salad* - ed.)

Kaka organized a family carnival, but prefers to keep to the side with his ball, waiting for the perfect moment to send his honorable penalty shot playfully into the mean ladies' net. For that, he did not resist teaching Estonian children Rio carnival games. The very same ones that you can see in action in uncle Heiki pictures. In the pictures, Kivirähk's hair is back to its everyday color and has sandals on his feet. He sits by the fire, in the enchanting light and beats the constellation drums with a soup ladle. A witch's drum which endlessly bellows: "Carnival and potato salad, car-nival,

potato salad." Like an ode to Kaka! The stories themselves end up between book covers via Mrs. Ilona's *Täheke*. There are only enough potatoes and salad for the first tale, because Oskar (who doesn't know how to invent flying machines) has become a bullfinch and ate them all. No worries! The carnival is shifting into the next gear and how sweet or how adorable don't find their way into this cup of human soul. There a button loses a boy, a soup ladle goes to preschool, kids use Barbies as monsters, and a dragon goes to the dentist. A lazy backpack and fat eraser go to school and a poem is a green crocodile. Even Christmas is special for the children. Blood sausage lends gingerbread a hand, Santa Clause and the Sandman switch jobs. By the end, a chestnut and acorn grow into a goat, who Santa calls "sukku". This is the author referencing the eastern New Years where the year of horse ended and the sheep or goat one began. But Kaka is forever!

And yes, it is spring again here. Who knows, maybe if Heiki Ernits and his old friend Janno Pöldma put their heads together, then the poo, spring and the carnival will make their way to the big screen just like Lotte. They are totally deserving and the script could be put together by Kaarin Kivirähk for example, instead of her father Andrus...

Translated by Chris Reintal

Sirli, Siim, and the Secrets



Sirli, Siim, and the Secrets

Text Andrus Kivirähk

Illustrations: Ilmar Trull

Varrak, 1999, 191p

ISBN 998-5302-53-2

Sirli, Siim, and the Secrets is an enchanting tale about ordinary city-dwellers whose everyday lives are brightened and enriched by dreams. Residing in a humdrum little apartment house in a quiet neighbourhood is a small family: the daughter Sirli, who voyages to visit a sky dancer; the son Siim, who is a wizard in a miniature world beneath his desk...

Excerpt

1

Summer was already over and in a few days school and kindergarten would begin again, but Dad had still not taken Siim fishing. Siim was not happy about this and sneaked up on him, fork in hand, and gently prodded him in the behind with it.

“Ow!” said Dad. “What do you think you’re doing? Why are you poking me with a fork? Do you think I’m some kind of hot-dog sausage?”

“You’re no-one’s hot-dog,” replied Siim angrily. “You’re my Dad and you have to take me fishing.”

“Yes, we’ll go,” said Dad, but Siim had heard enough of this kind of promise and remarked, crossly, “ ‘We’ll go, we’ll go,’ that’s what you always say. When are we going? I’m back at kindergarten the day after tomorrow!”

“Well, we shouldn’t go on a school day, so let’s go on Saturday,” remarked Dad. “What are you so keen to go fishing for! You won’t even eat fish.”

But Siim did not allow himself to be distracted by Dad’s crafty chit-chat; instead he pestered him until he made a definite promise – that Saturday they would catch a train and go fishing. Only then did Siim take the fork back to the kitchen and carry on eating his potatoes.

The fishing idea had been put into Siim’s head by his friend from kindergarten, a Russian boy named Styopa. Styopa often went with his father and had once even come to kindergarten carrying an ornate tin bucket in which a tiny fish, reputedly caught by Styopa himself, was swimming. Closer inspection revealed that the creature had died, and the children buried it in the sandpit. But what did that matter? Siim was very envious of Styopa. Ever since the spring end-of-term party he had been nagging Dad to take him, but Dad had always managed to put it off.

The fact was that Dad himself had never gone fishing before, but was embarrassed about saying so to his son. The fact was that he knew not the slightest thing about fishing. He had heard somewhere that you needed a rod tipped with a hook which in turn was tipped with an earthworm. But that was all. This made Dad very anxious and he awaited Saturday nervously.

2

Mum and Sirli were eating in the kitchen. Sirli was six years older than Siim and in a few days would be starting Year Four. She had a ponytail and wore a blue ring with a space where a glass heart had accidentally fallen out.

“Why are you wearing a ring at the table?” asked Siim, taking his place. “That’s not allowed.”

“Why not? It is,” replied Sirli.

“It’s not. You should have clean hands when you’re eating. You shouldn’t come to the table with dirty hands.”

“My ring isn’t dirty,” Sirli informed him, offended. “My ring is quite the opposite – it’s beautiful!”

“I’m wearing a ring too,” said Mum. Siim looked at Mum’s hand – it was true, she was! Mum had also come to the table wearing a ring.

“Dear oh dear, if only my kindergarten teacher could see you now,” said Siim earnestly. Mum and Sirli should be relieved that it was just Siim who was here to tell them off. His kindergarten teacher would have been so much sterner with them, Siim didn’t punish Mum and his sister, they were after all, family, and very dear to him, even though their hands weren’t clean.

“My hands are clean anyway,” he remarked loftily.

“You don’t understand women’s things,” said Sirli, a little haughtily. Siim wanted to counter with a clever remark but before he could, Mum asked, “What’s Dad up to that’s stopping him coming to the table?”

“He’s watching the telly. There are some men running round.”

“The high jump’s on,” said Sirli.

“Then I’ll take his meal to him in the other room,” Mum decided. “Otherwise it’ll get cold.”

Mum started to pile the dishes onto a tray; Sirli and Siim ate up their potatoes.

“I’m going into the yard,” said Sirli.

“I’m going to my room,” said Siim.

“What happened with the fishing thing?” Sirli asked. “Have you managed to pester Dad into it?”

Siim’s face had a knowing look.

“We’re going on Saturday.”

“Bet you don’t catch a single fish,” said Sirli.

“We’ll catch loads,” promised Siim.

“Yeah, right!”

“You’re stupid, Sirli.” Siim said it almost pityingly. “And you don’t understand men’s things.”

“Stop arguing,” said Mum. “And don’t call each other ‘stupid.’”

She took Dad’s food to him in the other room and asked, “Is it true you’re going fishing on Saturday?”

Dad gave his wife an unhappy look and she was suddenly very sorry for him. But what can you do? He’d made a promise to his son so he would have to go.

“Not to worry,” whispered Mum into Dad’s ear. “I went on a carousel with Sirli once, I was so nervous I was hanging onto the post for dear life. Think you might catch a fish or two?”

“A crocodile perhaps,” muttered Dad, shaking his head.

14

But the first day back at school brought Sirli no joy.

“We’ve got a new maths teacher,” she complained at home. “A lady. She worships her maths and makes us do sums all the time. For tomorrow I have to add together all the numbers from one to a hundred.”

“We’ll help you,” Mum promised. You can do from one to ten, I’ll do ten to thirty and Dad can do the rest.”

“Why is it me who has to do the most, and they’re the most difficult ones!” grumbled Dad and shouted, “You donkey! What are you thinking of? There’s no-one there!”

“What donkey?” asked Siim.

“That man there,” explained Dad, who was watching the basketball on TV. “He should have thrown the ball to the guy under the basket but instead he’s chucked it goodness knows where! What an ape!”

“Yeah, he looks more like an ape than a donkey,” agreed Siim, peering at the tall player. “He’s got a stupid look on his face like an ape’s and long arms.”

“Eh, heh-heeh!” laughed Dad. “You’re dead right. Son, you really understand basketball.”

His Dad’s praise delighted Siim, but not before Styopa the Russian had managed to thoroughly upset him at kindergarten. What had annoyed Siim was Styopa telling him that he and his Dad had been fishing a hundred times in the summer if they’d been at all, at least once in the daytime and sometimes at night too, when they’d fished by torchlight. Hearing this had made Siim jealous and he was now pulling on his father’s shirt-tails, telling him what Styopa had said.

Dad’s face dropped.

“You’re not on about fishing again?” he snapped. “I’ve already told you we’ll go one Saturday.”

“So now it’s ‘one’ Saturday is it!” Siim flung back. “We have to go this Saturday!”

“Have to, do we?” mumbled Dad sullenly. “Well, since we have to, then let’s do it.”

“Way to go!” shouted Siim. Dad glowered angrily at the TV. The basket-ball player with the ape-like expression finally, after a long pause, slammed the ball into the basket, but it did nothing to cheer Dad up. He was worrying about fishing. Where could he get hold of some earthworms? He took the encyclopaedia down from the shelf and leafed through it. Earthworm... Where was it? This was definitely an emergency, a disaster even!

All of them were a little unhappy today, and that’s not good for the first day back at school. Sirli was worried about her new teacher, Siim was jealous that Styopa had done so much fishing when he had never been. Dad was afraid of the coming Saturday and Mum couldn’t bring herself to be the only happy one when the rest of the family was out of sorts.

And through the wall of their apartment there was Mr Lamb, a writer, and he too was in a bad mood. As usual. He was writing a scary book.

“Peeter was lying in a ditch, groaning. He was running a fever, his arms and legs were shivering, but there was no doctor on the way. Instead, a reindeer ran over him, trod on Peeter’s face and caused the ill man more pain. Then...”

Mr Lamb pondered what terrible things might still befall Peeter.

“Then a snake came by!” he wrote happily. “The snake bit Peeter on his nose and his belly and his back!”

Mr Lamb smiled cruelly and carried on writing.

The only person who wasn’t in a sulk was the concierge. He floated around the sunken ship in the broom cupboard in a good mood.

15

The next day they all felt in need of cheering up. Mum went to work and came home via her own secret castle where the servants were waiting for her expectantly.

“How are the Prince and Princess?” asked the butler as he took her briefcase and set it down on a golden cushion.

“The Prince is fine,” she replied, “but Sirli has some problems. She’s got a new teacher who’s very picky. She wants Sirli to spend every day doing nothing but sums.”

“Heavens above!” exclaimed the butler. “Do such dreadful people really exist? Your Highness should have the nasty brute locked up!”

Mum was torn.

“Your Highness!” the butler went on. “Our jails are currently completely empty, one dreadful teacher could come in useful! Picking on the Princess is a serious crime! Your Highness, do you remember when you were a princess yourself? Remember that gym teacher who used to torment you?”

Mum remembered only too well. Her gym teacher had been a tiny vicious old bat who thought that young girls should spend their whole lives vaulting over gym horses. Mum simply couldn't get the hang of it and the gym teacher kept her behind in the gym for ages after lessons to practise vaulting like a mad thing. It had worn Mum out completely and in the evening she had been too tired even to eat properly, much less pop into her castle.

“There were several weeks when you didn't visit us at all and our castle nearly crumbled away,” mused the butler. “Rats ate the crown and the royal toys drowned in dust. It was a dreadful time. But finally Your Highness vaulted over the horse and came back to us and our castle began to flourish once more. The toys dug themselves out of the dust with spades, the rats made a new crown and that dreadful gym teacher...”

“Was locked up!” interrupted Mum. “Yes, she was thrown into the deepest dungeon, I was delighted to hear! Served her right! But afterwards she left our school and began working as a dog-trainer and I forgot about her completely. What happened to her here in the castle? Did she escape from the dungeon?”

“Oh no,” said the butler, shaking his head. “Our dungeon is secure. There's no escape for anyone whom Your Highness does not deign to pardon. Come with me, Your Highness, if you please!”

They went down the narrow, winding steps together, down and down, until they reached the cellars. In amongst the jars of jam and bottles of juice there was a door marked “Dungeon”. Mum and the butler stepped inside.

There was the tiny, horrible gym teacher, wearing a blue tracksuit. She scowled at her visitors and shouted, “Go and start vaulting over that horse! Get a move on! Start

vaulting! And then climb onto the beam and walk along it until your feet are two big blisters. Get that back straight! Tummy in! Get going!”

“Be quiet!” said the butler, telling her off. “Otherwise I shall give the order to have your stopwatch and whistle removed!”

“You mustn't do that!” cried the gym teacher. “I can't live without my whistle and my stopwatch!”

“Then hush!” ordered the butler. “Stand in the corner and let's sort this out.”

The gym teacher took herself off to the corner of the dungeon cell, grumbling under her breath, and began to play with the sports ball there.

Mum watched her, an expression of triumph mingled with compassion on her face.

“I don't know, perhaps we should let her go,” she said after a while. “I think it's childish for me to still be so angry. It's a long time since I left school and I'd completely forgotten about vaulting over that horse.”

“If Your Highness so wishes the gym teacher shall be released immediately and be gone from the castle,” the butler suggested. “But what shall we do with the Princess's teacher? Should we lock her up?”

“No,” Mum replied. “This is my castle and I can't help my daughter here. She has to come to some arrangement with her teacher herself. Perhaps she has some daydreams of her own already.”

Mum thought for a bit longer and then whispered into the butler's ear,

“Going back to my gym teacher... keep her in the dungeon for a bit longer. She was really horrible – once she even hit me with a skipping rope!”

Siim put the wizard's cloak on, and was again in the secret world that belonged only to him. Roosa the pig trotted over to him and shook her head sadly.

"There's been a big disaster!" she snorted. "Distress and calamity are upon us."

"What's happened, pig?" asked Siim.

"I'm not a pig, I'm a ladybird," said the pig. "I was transformed into a pig! A witch flew here on a broom and she's been casting spells and now everything is all topsy-turvy!"

This made Siim angry. In his magic world no witch or wizard had the right to perform their own tricks – only one person was allowed to perform magic – Siim himself. On the other hand though, he was in a good mood again as a fight with the witch promised to be exciting.

"Let's go to the witch's right now and I'll show her!" said Siim. "Show me the way!"

"But will I be turned back into a ladybird?" whimpered the pig. "I really don't want to be a pig because pigs can't fly and they don't have beautiful spotted backs."

Siim promised to turn him straight back into a ladybird after the battle with the witch. They set off together and on the way Siim came across plenty of evidence of the witch's mischief. Large numbers of animals had been enchanted: dogs turned into cats, horses into cows, wolves into donkeys and bears into rats. All of them were very annoyed, they were calling the witch names and asked Siim for help while stretching out their strange coats to try and make them fit.

"That won't help," said Siim to one of the wolves who, thanks to the witch had to tramp about as a donkey and was pulling on his tail with his own teeth. "You won't get rid of the donkey skin that way. Hang on a bit and I'll change you back into a wolf."

"Please do," grumbled the wolf. "As soon as I look back and see donkey legs my mouth starts watering and I think – wey hey! there's a donkey over there! Let me get stuck in to that! And then I remember that the donkey legs belong to me! Good wizard, please change me back into a wolf soon!"

"First I have some business to conduct with the witch," said Siim sternly in a manner befitting a dignified wizard and left the wolf-donkey where he was. He realised that he was getting very near the witch's den because the enchanted animals were growing in number and even a granddad shambled out from behind a bush, barking earnestly. Siim realised that the man wasn't really anyone's granddad but a dog in the grip of an enchantment and suddenly even he began to feel afraid, then remembered he was a powerful wizard and didn't mind about the yelping granddad, he merely conjured up a muzzle for it and went on. And then – he saw the witch! She was leaning on her broom and working with such intensity that her brow was damp. The poor animals were squealing and mewling in terrible distress but the witch showed mercy to none of them and bewitched them all.

"What do you think you're doing, witch!" shouted Siim bravely. "This is my forest and I will not let anyone do bad magic here!"

"How can you stop me?" asked the witch insolently. "Now better be quiet, else I'll turn you into a shoe brush!"

Siim was not afraid of the witch's threats, however, because he knew that no-one could cast a spell on him as he was a powerful wizard. So he merely laughed at the witch's words and said, "If you continue with your horrible mischief then I shall bewitch you as a punishment. Behold you are a zebra!"

Instantly the witch became a zebra but she still had the powers she had had before. She kicked out and neighed, "Well, a zebra I may be, makes no difference to me! My sorcery won't stop!"

And as proof she transformed a rabbit into an elephant, which hopped off dolefully into the bushes making the earth clamour.

Siim frowned and began to transform the witch into all sorts of things – the zebra became a mouse, the mouse a cow, the cow a rhinoceros. But the change to the witch's appearance had no effect, she continued with her own trickery. Once Siim changed the witch into a lamb but something must have gone wrong because suddenly Mr Lamb was standing in the clearing, not the white, woolly lambkin Siim had intended, and he cried out in a loud voice, "Why is it so dark in the corridor?"

"Better if you're a witch again," decided Siim in fright and changed Mr Lamb back into the witch. She cackled and shouted, "Aha, you cannot overcome me! Turn me into whoever you like, my magic will never stop, not so long as I have the strength for my magic words!"

Siim was already in real trouble and bewildered, but the witch's words gave him a good idea. He had to change her into something that couldn't talk. Like a duster or a pine cone... Just let her try casting magic spells then!

Siim moved his hand and the witch changed into a tiny mushroom.

"Umm-mmm-puck," mumbled the witch – as she no longer had a mouth, she could no longer speak intelligibly. What she wanted to say was, "Horse, be transformed into a fly!" but instead she could only mumble, "Oss-orm-my!"

The horse spat in contempt and replied, "Can't understand a word!" And was not transformed into anything.

The witch was filled with anger and tried to enchant another animal.

"Snail!, Be transformed into a frog!" she meant to shout, but all that anyone heard was, "Eyy-ugg!"

"I don't understand, sir!" said the snail and crept on, unperturbed.

The witch panted and puffed but was no longer able to enchant a single animal because no one could make out any of the things the mushroom was saying. So the witch had no option but to remain silent and stop her mischief.

The animals cheered and a squirrel banged on a tree-stump as if it were a drum.

"Hey, squirrel!" shouted Siim. "You can have that mushroom for your dray."

"I'm not a squirrel, I'm a tiger!" replied the squirrel on the stump, offended, but a giraffe wandered over and said in a melancholy voice, "I am actually a squirrel but there's no room for me in my dray anymore, my neck is too long."

"Sorry, I completely forgot that the witch had turned everything topsy-turvy," said Siim. He spent a long time restoring the animals back to their original forms – the pig into a ladybird, the granddad into a dog, the giraffe into a squirrel. Only the mushroom was left as a mushroom.

Translated by Susan Wilson

Review

Dreams That Shatter Concrete

Priit-Kalev Parts

Lääne elu, April 29, 2000

What you get and what you wish for are awfully different things. Fixing this problem is a thankless job resulting in gastric ulcers and it ruins your skin. Yet this is exactly what Kivirähk's book deals with and with outstanding ease!

Still, this is serious. Imagine if you wanted to be an incredible athlete, but instead, were short, fat, and bald. Or if, above all else, you love the water and the cool expanse of the ocean, but instead you are a homeless-looking street sweeper working in front of a filthy concrete apartment building. Isn't it just tragic?

But it isn't! You can actually make a wish and – 'Snap!' – be whomever you want. Sometimes, of course, darned society tends to stomp all over you, but you can manage. Kivirähk's book reminds us of a simple, yet oft forgotten truth. Just like there is no hard line between day and night, dreams and reality, there is no line between childhood and adulthood. Adults fundamentally do not differ from children in Kivirähk's book; they aren't smarter nor are their actions any more reasonable.

Adults are usually unable to keep a sensible balance between dreams and reality. They don't understand that one requires the other. Those who forget one completely, will be unable to manage the other. The street sweeper

who dreams of becoming a Prince of the Sea obviously can't be cleaning up cigarette butts in a stairwell. Their place in society is an insane asylum and that is exactly where he ends up.

But the insane asylum isn't really filled with crazy people, but rather the same types of unlucky folks who couldn't strike a balance between two things. There is a man who was so madly in love with money, that he now secretly bathes in gold in the asylum's bathroom. And there is a frail old man, who claims to actually be a bear, just lacking fur or any other piece of brown clothing.

Turns out, even he is not insane; he has the strength of a bear and is able to free the Prince of the Sea. He busts down the asylum wall, "in half like a cracker", and escapes to wrestle in the wilderness. And once the freed street sweeper reaches water, he becomes a true Prince of the Sea, not just an apartment-building-dreamer in a stuffy broom closet. Nature breaks free of the tight grip of concrete. What a beautiful dream!

It reminded me of another powerful image. In cult-classic *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, a child of nature, a giant Native American, also busted through the asylum windows, escaping and bringing his friend with him. Though not his physical body, but his spirit at least.

Other adults, on the other hand, have made a clear decision between dreams and reality. They have denied any dreams and now represent some ugly Order. These types of people are dangerous. They embody fears from which dreams are the only escape.

The angry writer, Mr. Sheep, and the cruel math teacher who even wants to give moms and dads assignments, are two examples. The teacher

becomes so dangerous that the otherwise gentle-souled fathers are forced to gather up all their courage and revolt. The teacher is wrapped in a curtain and shipped off to Africa to tame monkeys.

Even the writer, Mr. Sheep's forgotten dream transforms from a tiny baby hedgehog into a monstrous spiny giant whom the whole town fears. Fortunately, it and Sheep find each other before anything horrible happens.

I didn't get around to talk about Sirli's and Siim's dreams. But they were small, after all, just like Sirli and Siim themselves. There hasn't been time for tragic, gaping abyss to grow between their dreams and reality. Hopefully, it never does. Because then horrible things would happen...

Translated by Chris Reintal

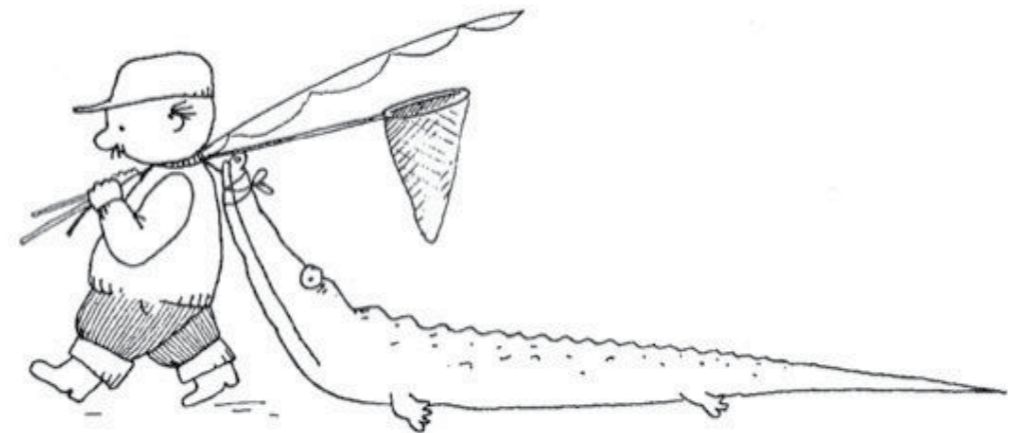


Illustration by Ilmar Trull

Lotte's Journey South



Lottes Journey South

Text: Andrus Kivirähk

Illustrations: Regina Lukk-Toompere

Varrak, 2002. 128p

ISBN 998-5306-21X

Illustrations: Heiki Ernits

Eesti Joonisfilm, 2012. 152 p.

ISBN 9789949937707

One day, Lotte the dog girl finds a tired little chick who has been left behind by the other migrating birds. Since the little birdie dearly longs to find her way to her grandmother in southern lands, the big-hearted Lotte decides to extend a helping paw. Luckily, the dog-girl of Gadgetville has a score of things they'll need for their voyage, such as a flying machine! Lotte's father Oskar is the best inventor in town! The globetrotting Klaus joins them with his map of the world, and the travelers set off. A wide range of challenges await the adventurers. They encounter prehistoric rabbits and fever-stricken polar bears, cross deserts, and are shipwrecked, but finally, the southern lands are in sight!

Excerpt

Little Pipo [pp 11-17]

Actually, our whole village loves Migratory Bird Day. Take Uuno the Cat for example: a few months before, he starts saying that this year he'd fly south with the birds, solemnly saying his good-byes to everyone, boarding up the doors and windows of his house, building wings out of old strips of wallpaper and practising flying by jumping off tree-tops. So far he's not managed to stay in the air for long and every year he has to use pliers to prise off the boards that he'd nailed to the windows, but Uuno the Cat is as stubborn as they come. This year he and his wings once again graced the top of a birch tree, and when the migratory birds arrived he called like a crane and threw himself, headfirst, from the treetop. Usually he would plummet down and land with a thump, but this time Uuno's braces caught on a branch and he felt like he was finally flying! Then of course he swished his wings and called like a bird but didn't move forward, instead dangling over the same spot, like an apple.

As always, my family and I were in the tower watching the birds, but there were plenty of other interesting things to see up there. At the Pigs' – they're our neighbours – they'd all rushed to the window but hadn't noticed that the porridge was bubbling on the stove and beginning to boil over. In the end the whole kitchen was full of porridge and began to drip onto the backs of the Pigs at the window. But the Pigs paid no attention, just staring, their eyes bulging, at the birds and brushing off the porridge creeping down their backs – as if telling it to stop pushing in!

Finally all the migratory birds had gone, Uuno the Cat's braces snapped and he plummeted down from the treetop, and the porridge pushed the Pigs out of the window, taking the frame with them. And just as we were about to go down the tower, another bird flew over our house – a teeny-tiny one. She was obviously dead tired because she was panting as she flew and had tears in her eyes as the other birds were already out of sight and she could not catch them up. And then suddenly she just dropped out of the sky. Right into my lap!

We hurriedly brought her indoors and Mum gave her some warm milk and broke a sandwich into teeny-tiny pieces so that the chick, whose name was Pipo, could peck at them. But she had no appetite at all. All she did was cry and say that her Grandma was waiting for her in the south. Then she picked herself up to continue flying after the other birds, but she was too tired and collapsed again. She was so pitiful to see that I found myself wondering whether we could take the chick south ourselves. On an aeroplane! Because we have an aeroplane you know. I know I've told you before that my Dad's an inventor. We've all sorts of amazing things in our shed, not just an aeroplane – we've got a submarine that Dad sometimes drives into the well, or the carrot-harvesting crane that's so big that there isn't enough room in the garden for it and lifts a carrot so high after pulling it out of the ground that you have to climb a ladder to reach it. So I told Pipo to wait – she would get to the southern lands, I'd make sure of it myself! I ran to Mum and Dad and said that Dad had promised to take me on a plane trip one day, and now would be the best time, because in the first place it was the school holidays, and in the second place it would be great to help Pipo and take her to the southern lands in the plane, seeing as she was in no fit state to fly there by herself.

And what do you think? Dad agreed! Amazing! We began packing straight away, Dad picked up his telescope and compass and hunted for the box where he kept his maps so that we'd always know which direction we would need to fly to reach the southern lands. Without them we might dash off in the wrong direction and end up on an iceberg somewhere! Why would we go there! Then we had a slight setback, because it emerged that the box where Dad stored his maps was home to a kind of beetle whose favourite food was maps. And all that was left of the maps was an itty-bitsy scrap that the beetle was planning to have for his birthday cake!

Dad was indignant.

“Who's ever heard of a cake made of maps!” he shouted.

“But maps are so delicious!” the beetle said. “Have you ever had them? Try some! They taste extra good with globes! Maps have a tartness about them but globes are sweet as sugar – they make your mouth water!”

He was in fact a very kindly creature and agreed to forego his own birthday cake there and then if we needed it. But such an itchy-bitsy scrap was not worth arguing over and it suddenly seemed that the journey to the south may come to nothing because we didn't have a decent map.

But fortunately Dad has an old friend, Klaus the Dog Wanderer, who has travelled all over the world during his life and now in his old age is living in the cabbage patch behind our house in his own travelling trunk. The trunk was his hiding place for all kinds of useful travel objects, including a wonderful map that would make it very easy to find the southern lands. I had seen it and immediately hurried over to Uncle Klaus' house. Uncle Klaus agreed straight away to lend us the map, but when he heard about the wonderful adventure awaiting us, he asked if he could join us. He said he'd been pining to set off on his travels as living in one place had lost its shine, and that one day to his surprise he had discovered that his travel trunk had begun to gather moss and was already home to bilberries and a mushroom. It was then that it dawned on him that it was high time for a change of scenery! We happily agreed because Klaus has done a great deal of travelling around the world and having him as a travel companion would always come in useful. Klaus carried his trunk into the aeroplane and then we were ready to set off.

Pipo was as happy as could be when she realised that we were planning to take her to the other birds in the southern lands. She stopped crying completely, cheered up hugely and hopped around the aeroplane, unable to contain her excitement about us finally taking to the air. But first we had to say goodbye to Mum! And then Uncle Klaus made the fire in the grate under the aeroplane and the hot air filled the sails and we took off! We waved to everyone on the ground below and they waved to us and the Pig family squeezed together at the window again and I could see the milk bubbling up the pan and boiling over onto the stove behind them. And in another moment we were too high to see anyone and were flying towards unknown lands and great adventures.

Translated by Susan Wilson



Illustration by Heiki Ernits

Review

A Special Travelogue

Krista Kumberg

Arter, October 29, 2002

Lotte was first published two years ago. Then an animated film of the same name premiered, which immediately endeared fans among both young and old viewers.

For children, it was just fun. Adults remarked approvingly that it is indeed possible to have an animated film where no one gets hit in the face with a frying pan and still it is full of unexpected moments and entertaining events. The tale and its emphasized lack of violence championed the best traditions of Estonian animated film and Sojuzmultfilm.

Text like chickenpox. There is a hesitation here when it comes to novelizations of films. Rows of Disney-fied fairytales line store shelves, with their awkwardly translated, helpless text accompanied by lifeless images.

In print, there is seemingly an endless series of books about Sabrina the teenage witch. The film version may be watchable, but unfortunately as a book it is utterly inadequate.

Lotte's Journey South subverts all preconceptions. It is a standalone work of art. Though yes, the events that transpire are exactly the same as in the film. Seeing the images are like meeting an old friend. The film told Lotte's story in an inventive visual language. In the book, the text does the

bulk of the work. And Kivirähk knows how to play with around with words. “Chanterelles can never be blue, it would confuse all the mushrooms,” says the mole and mushroom expert. And as such, Andrus Kivirähk can never write boring, simple text. It would perplex readers.

Both children and adults will find something that speaks to them in Lotte's travelogue. Children will gladly identify with the cheerful Lotte and will have fun with the main character, exploring places, where “suddenly, something amazing happens”.

Adults will enjoy the masterfully crafted text, which is stuffed with great imagery (Klaus the Dog Wanderer's suitcase tends to get covered in moss with a stationary lifestyle and “and was already home to some blueberries and a mushroom”), proverbs, references and hints to other literature, like dinosaur called Krisostomus, which apparently is a “very strange and ancient name” (reminding readers of *Kevade*; Klaus using his belt on the map to determine bearings invokes Kihnu Jõnn).

Just as much fun is derived from the words as from the events. There is an undeniable joy in the fact that children have such rich and inventive words to read. It's contagious like chicken pox for the troupe of actors-cats at the clocktower.

Safe thrills. The book is, after all, Lotte the dog's travelogue which has a conversational style which inevitably will call to mind Postipapa and a well-known old smith. The journey is embarked on because a tiny bird Pipo falls behind his flock and is unable to join them on their flight South.

Lotte, her inventor father Oskar, and Klaus the Dog Wanderer generously help.

In every chapter, Lotte tells us another tale on her unusual journey, as take many stops, both for pleasure as well as out of need. Like the experienced Klaus says: “A journey isn’t when you rigidly run from one point to another. No, a journey means making stops, eating local food, and feeling the joys of life.”

Two overarching themes emerge from Lotte’s adventure, both well-known sayings. They are: if you see something wrong, come and help; and where the problem is the biggest, help is the closest. The group of travelers never refuse to help and they themselves are helped when they get into trouble.

That is how they bring civilization into a prehistoric cave of rabbits in the form of home appliances; save a polar bear stranded at sea on a cracker-sized iceberg; clean an old swamp creature’s sky of old boots; fill in for sick actors; and so on.

The journey that young readers embark on with these characters is thrilling, but completely safe. The thrills come from the unexpected, at times, absurd situations, not from battles against opponents. Lotte even laments “Our journey is more like a class trip rather than an exciting adventure where you have to battle hunger and thirst for months.” But when distressed at sea, she remarks instead: “What could be better than being distressed at sea on such a beautiful and sunny day.”

There are no bad guys in this story. Strange, yes, as well as one grumpy fish who berates a mischievous child for interrupting his sleep.

Lotte can, with full honesty, say that everyone she met were “actually very generous creatures”. If a child learns that there are no inescapable problems and with a friendly attitude everything will be resolved, then they have found the story’s gold nugget.

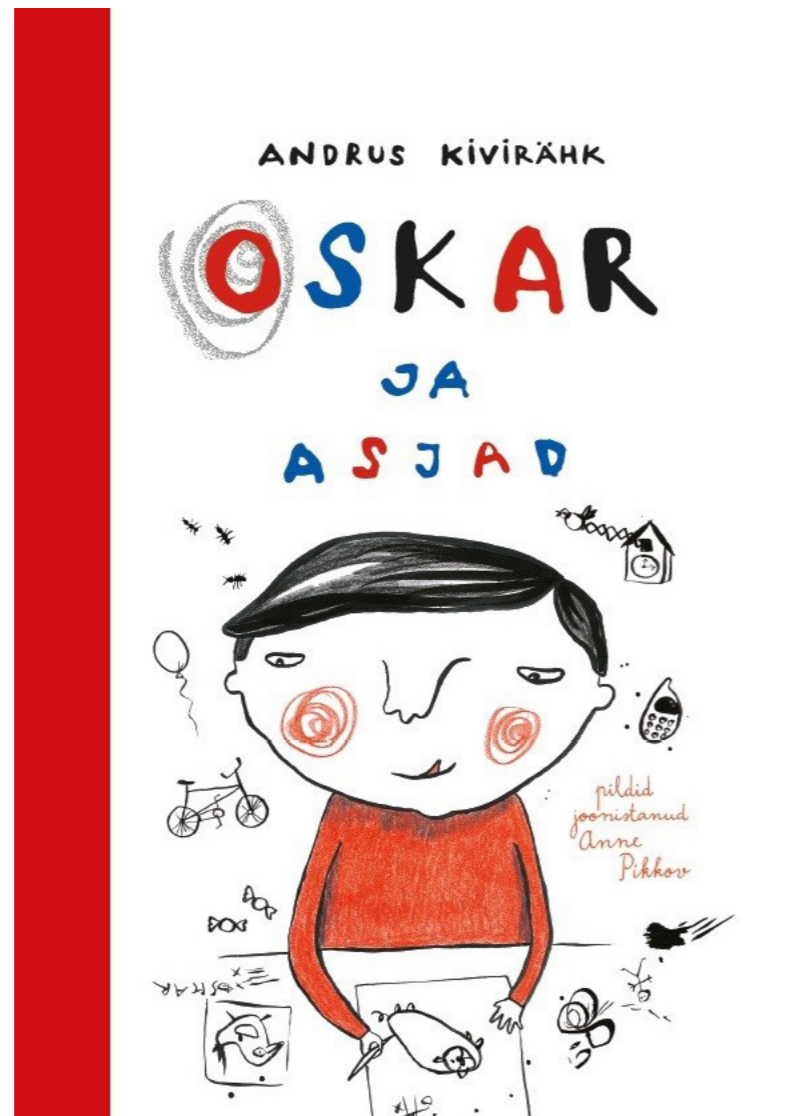
Lotte’s Journey South is not something to endlessly analyze, it is to be read and read aloud. Like Lotte says at the end of her journey: “You know, doing it yourself is more fun.”

Translated by Chris Reintal



Illustration by Heiki Ernits

Oskar and the Things



Oskar and the Things

Text: Andrus Kivirähk

Illustrations: Anne Pikkov

Film Distribution, 2015, 300 p.

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When Oskar's mother flies away to take classes in America and his father has to go to work every day, the boy is sent to live with his grandmother in the countryside for the summer. Oskar doesn't feel all that close to his grandma, who has lived so far away, and this makes him lonely and unhappy. His sense of abandonment worsens when he realizes he left his mobile phone at home.

Excerpt

Chapter 1

Grandma was sitting at one end of the table, Dad at the other. Oscar sat between them. They were all eating meatball soup.

Oscar had always enjoyed eating meatball soup, and not only because he liked the taste. It was also amusing to eat! Pea soup, for instance, was nothing more than bland green guck, and you had to force it to be fun. So, whenever there was a bowl of pea soup in front of Oscar, he imagined it was a deep, bubbling swamp, and he had to empty it out to reach the treasure lying at the bottom. What's more, eating away the soup would expose sunken skeletons and ticked-off swamp monsters whose muddy green home had suddenly disappeared from around them.

There weren't really any treasures, skeletons, or monsters lying at the bottom of Oscar's pea soup, of course. He knew this, but meals were much more fun when he thought about things like that.

Meatball soup was far more entertaining to eat because you could clearly see the meatballs, potatoes, and carrots floating in it. The plump chunks of meat stood out best of all, of course. Oscar pretended they were fat sea lions swimming among white and orange icebergs, which were the potatoes and carrots. True, there was no such thing as orange icebergs in real life, but so what! Oscar's sea could have them for pretend, anyway. Oscar imagined he was a polar explorer flying above the ice soup. The sea lions would try to hide behind the icebergs, but they couldn't escape the boy's sharp eyesight. One by one, he scooped the icebergs up onto his spoon, and in the end, the startled sea lions were bobbing in empty waters. There was nowhere for them to hide! Oscar then nimbly caught each one, and brought it to the zoo. Well, actually, he just ate his meatballs.

However, Oscar wasn't hungry today. The sea lions could feel safe and secure among their icebergs. He had plopped his spoon into the soup but wasn't eating anything, and just kept pushing all the meatballs towards one end of the bowl.

"Eat, Oscar—don't poke at your food," Dad said.

"Mm-hmm," Oscar murmured, and started making rows in the soup.

"How could that mom of yours have gone to America for two whole months?" Grandma asked. "Dearie me, that's almost the entire summer!"

"She's taking classes there," Dad replied, "and that's how long they last. What can we do? America is far away, you know—you can't just fly home for the weekend."

"Well, but why did she need to go there in the first place?" Grandmother argued further.

"She just did, that's all," Dad said a little irritatedly. "She's studying there."

"All people do these days is study," Grandma sighed. "Back in my time, children would study and adults went to work."

"Yes, well, look: I go to work," Dad said. "And that's why I brought Oscar here to be with you."

"That's nice," Grandma said. "I'm glad to have Oscar here. It's just a shame that you can't stay, too, and take a vacation with your son."

"I can't right now. My vacation's not until August," Dad said. "You know that. We've gone over this several times already. Siri will be back home by then, too, and then we're all going to go on vacation together. But until then, Oscar will be spending the summer with you. Isn't that right, Oscar? It's fun being out in the countryside."

Oscar didn't say anything, just stirred his soup. He wasn't convinced at all that being in the country would be much fun, especially without his mom and dad. He had stayed at his grandma's house before, of course—though not all that often, since she lived at the other end of the country and it was a very long drive to get there. Even so, Oscar and his parents visited every summer and always stayed overnight. It was just that his mother and father had always been there, too. Now, he had to stay at his grandma's house all by himself. It felt a little scary. What was there to do here?

"We left my phone at home," Oscar said softly.

"Yes, you already said that," Dad replied. "Why didn't you bring it along, then? I did ask you if you'd packed everything you needed."

"I forgot," Oscar mumbled.

"Not to worry. I've got a telephone here, too," Grandma reassured him. "You can use it to call your dad if you start missing him."

Oscar didn't say anything. Grandma wouldn't understand that his phone wasn't meant for calling as much it was for playing. He had a lot of fun games on his phone, and was already missing them right now. Dad would be driving home before long, leaving him alone with his grandmother—and for two whole months! If Oscar at least had his phone with him, then he could curl up in a corner somewhere and tap away to pass the time. That way, he'd have some form of entertainment. But now... Oscar felt his nose droop and the muscles between his eyes start to squeeze, the way they did before crying.

Dad looked at him sympathetically.

"Come on, now," he said, tousling Oscar's hair. "It won't be so bad. I spent my whole childhood living in this house. I didn't have a cell phone, either—nobody did back then. Nor did I have any brothers or sisters to play with. But I had a ton of friends, all the

same! There are other houses not far from here, and kids live in them these days, too. I bet you'll make friends in no time, and will all be so busy running around together that when Mom and I come to get you in August, you won't even want to hear about driving back to the city. Back in the day, I didn't even have time to come inside and eat. We roamed around the woods and fields, built forts and kicked a ball around, went fishing and came up with all kinds of other fun things to do. Believe me—you're going to have a wonderful time!"

"The country is just the place for kids in summer," Grandma affirmed.

Oscar just glared at his soup. His dad's words hadn't cheered him up—quite the opposite. Oscar's grandma did have her quirks, but he knew her well all the same, and since he'd been to her little house many times before, it even felt a little cozy and familiar. But complete strangers from some nearby farms, unfamiliar fields and forests—those were downright terrifying! It was just like when he had to go to the doctor to get a shot—there was an awful feeling in the pit of his stomach the very same morning at home. On top of that, it was terrible knowing there was nothing you could do about it; that there was no escape; that you had to yield to fate, get dressed, and climb into the car to go to the clinic, even though it was the very last thing you wanted to do. For some reason, Oscar felt something similar now: as if his dad's car would barely manage to zoom out of the driveway before those neighboring kids would crawl up through the ground and haul him off to their fort, in spite of his struggling. And then they'd drag him into the woods and to go fishing and to who-knows-what other frightful places. And Grandma wouldn't protect him at all—she'd just stand on the front steps, holding a bucket, and nodding in satisfaction: ah, yes—the country's the place for kids in summer!

Oscar stared at his dad pitifully. Dad tugged on Oscar's ear.

"Don't look so unhappy!" he said. "I'll call you. And Mom will definitely be calling from America, too. It's not like she's somewhere underground or up in space, you know—it's entirely possible to talk to her as well."

“Though it is expensive to call from America,” Grandma reckoned. “Don’t you worry—Oscar and I will have a great time!”

Oscar was sure it’d be the opposite, but he didn’t say anything. The meatball soup had gotten cold and was cloudy from poking at it with the spoon. Oscar stared at the bowl. He didn’t like the soup at all anymore. He didn’t like the kitchen table, either; not to mention the kitchen itself. Everything looked so grim and gloomy. A fat housefly buzzed around the ceiling light, and there was a dark stain on the wall next to the stove that Oscar had never noticed before, but which looked extraordinarily ugly now. And they’re leaving me here for two months! Oscar thought. He felt a massive wave of sadness crash over him and nearly smooch him flat.

“Would you like some candy for dessert?” Grandma asked. She placed a couple pieces of caramel on the table—precisely the kind of treat that Oscar refused to put in his mouth.

“I’m not hungry,” he mumbled. What else could he expect! His whole summer was going to drag by, surrounded by those flavorless caramels.

Chapter 5

Oskar looked around the kitchen in boredom. Grandma had forgotten her iron on the table after doing the morning ironing. It seemed out of place somehow; like it was too new and modern. Otherwise, all of Grandma’s things – her furniture and other stuff – were always old. They’d been lying around here since back when Oskar’s father was a boy; maybe even longer. But the iron was new – it was a Christmas present from Oskar’s mother and father.

And so, the iron somehow made Oskar feel more at home than his grandmother’s other things did. The iron had also come from the city, and looked like it was just a little boy next to all the other ancient odds and ends. Oskar wondered – does the iron feel lonely here, like I do?

Just for fun, Oskar put his toy telephone up next to his ear and said:

“Hello, there, iron! How’s it going?”

It was good thing none of his friends were there to see him doing those little-kid things!

But at that very moment, the wooden telephone made a soft click and someone’s voice replied:

“Hey, it’s going just great! Are you that boy with the arms and legs? What’s your name?”

Oskar dropped the wooden mobile phone in his lap in shock. He stared at it. The chunk of wood was exactly the same as it was before. Had a voice really come from it? That was impossible! But no – he was almost certain that some noise was blaring from the toy phone. Someone called out: “Cuckoo! Where’d you go?” Oskar cautiously lifted the telephone back up to his ear.

“Hello...” he said.

“Hello, hello!” the voice perkily replied. “What happened, buddy? I asked what your name is!”

“Oskar.”

“That’s great. And do you have arms and legs?”

“I do,” Oskar replied.

“Yippide-doo! How many?”

“I have two legs and two arms,” Oskar said.

“Well, that’s just enough!” the voice complemented. “You can do great things with those!”

“But who are you?” Oskar now asked.

“Well, who do you think! You yourself just gave me a ring and now you’re asking me who I am? Are you having a brain fart? You said: “Hello, there, iron! How’s it going?” Did you forget already, huh?”

“So, you’re the iron?”

“Who else, then! No, I’m gingerbread dough! Make little stars and sheep out of me – baa!”

Oskar stared unblinkingly at the iron resting on the table. There wasn’t the slightest sign that the appliance was alive. It was an iron just like any other, made to stand up straight on its behind, its silvery belly flashing in the sunshine that spilled into the room. Was it really speaking to him?

“Listen, could you be a pal? If you truly do have two arms, then I’ve got a favor to ask,” the voice on the telephone continued while Oskar was pondering. “If you wouldn’t mind, then please lay me on my belly. It’s dumb standing around on my butt like a dog begging for a treat. Would you be a pal?”

Oskar picked up the iron and laid it flat on the table.

“Oh, super!” the voice praised. “My heiny was already getting stiff. Your grandma always loves to keep me up on my tush like that and, well, she doesn’t have a telephone, does she, so I can’t call and say – hey, granny, quit it! It’s just marvelous that you and I can talk! I’ve wanted to have a friend with arms and legs for so long.”

“But how...” Oskar stammered. “Why... I don’t understand... This is just a block of wood... How was I able to call you on it?”

“How should I know? You think that since I’ve got a cord in my bottom and some electronic gadgets stuck in me that I’m some kind of an electrician? Forget it, buddy! I don’t know the first thing about stuff like that. I’m an iron, not a scientist. You called, I picked up – everything works! What are you poking and prying for?”

“Can I call other... things... too?” Oskar asked.

“Well, why not? If they can be bothered to pick up the phone, then of course you can.”

“But how? I don’t know their telephone numbers!”

“Hello, Sun; hello, Moon! What silly numbers do you need, anyway? Wake up, buddy! Are all creatures with arms and legs this blockheaded?”

Chapter 27

Oskar sighed and took out his telephone. He wanted to chat with someone to lighten his gloomy mood. Grandma’s big watering can was standing right next to the stairs, and that’s exactly who Oskar called now.

“Hello, watering can!” he said. “I’m Oskar. What are you doing?”

“Hello, Oskar!” the watering can replied. “I’m watching the sky.”

“Why?” Oskar asked.

“I’m waiting for my parents.”

“Your parents?” Oskar asked in astonishment. “Does that mean your parents live in the sky?”

“Of course they do,” the watering can said. “They’re oh-so-big and carry lots and lots of water. A ton of it. Far more than I can hold. They swim leisurely across the sky and water the ground. Big, grey watering cans – those are my mother and father.”

“You mean the clouds, then?” Oskar asked. “Rainclouds?”

“What do you mean, ‘clouds?’” the watering can asked, confused. “I’m a watering can. That means my mother and father must be watering cans, too. A child looks just like its mother and father; now, doesn’t it?”

Oskar was just about to start explaining that actually, those really are clouds carrying the rain, and that they have no connection at all to the watering can – that it was made by humans and bought at the store – but then, he stopped to think. The watering can’s story seemed much nicer. Indeed – why can’t you just call rainclouds “big watering cans” if you want to? It’s not that big of a difference – both clouds and watering cans alike sprinkle water over the ground. If the watering can wanted to believe that clouds are its mother and father, then why not? Oskar had no reason to interfere.

“But then how did you end up down here on the ground, if your parents live in the sky?” he asked instead.

“I don’t know for sure,” the watering can replied. “I can’t remember. But I guess they must have laid me in an egg. The egg tumbled down from up there, and I hatched out of it.”

“So, you’ve never actually seen your parents?” Oskar asked.

“Of course I have! They come to see me often,” the watering can exclaimed. “They love me, you know. They fly around my head and gently pour water over me. Oh, they sure are good at watering! So good that the whole ground is wet, the trees are soaked, and there are puddles left everywhere. I still have much more to learn before I can be just as good as they are and go flying with them.”

“Do you know how to fly, then?” Oskar asked. The watering can’s story seemed more and more outlandish and exciting to him.

“No, not yet,” the watering can said. “I’m not a grown-up watering can yet, you know; I’m just a chick. That’s why my mother and father don’t take me along with them—I wouldn’t be able to stay up in the air. I have to wait and grow.”

“For how long?”

“I don’t know,” the watering can said with a hint of regret. “But it’ll probably take a while longer, since I’m still very tiny compared with my mother and father. They’re so big that they cover the whole sky! The day that I finally grow up to be like them – well, I’m afraid that’ll take years and years.”

Oskar was reminded of the dinosaurs for some reason. They had also been gigantic, just like clouds. They had also laid eggs, and the teensy dinosaurs that hatched from those eggs might have been about the same size as that watering can. No doubt in those prehistoric times, they would also lay on their bellies in the tall grass and watch, wide-eyed, how the massive stomachs of their mothers and fathers swayed above them as they walked through the jungle.

“Are those your parents way up there, then?” Oskar asked, craning his neck to stare at the sky, which was turning cloudy.

“Oh, no,” the watering can said. “Those aren’t watering cans. They don’t have water in them. They’re white and lazy – all they do is fly around and don’t do anyone any good. But I have the feeling that my mother and father aren’t too far away. I believe they’ll get here before long. And then, I’ll be able to see them again. I think they’ll be proud of me, because I’ve watered so much land since I last saw them! My Mom and Dad can’t always make it everywhere, you know – a flowerbed or the back corner of a garden might start to get a little dry every once in a while, and that’s when I help out.”

While he was listening to the watering can, Oskar suddenly started to miss his own parents, too. They were far away as well; even farther away than the watering can’s mother and father. Clouds at least fly over the rooftops sometimes, but his mother was in America and his father in the city. And then there was that thing that happened to the balloon... Oskar started feeling gloomy.

“Come and sit next to me,” he said to the watering can, which he picked up and set down beside him on the steps. “Can I do something nice for you? I’ve got arms and legs, you see. I can take you somewhere or, vice-versa – maybe I can bring you something? Just say the word!”

“I don’t need anything,” the watering can reckoned. “I’ve just got to wait here patiently and grow until I’m big enough to soar through the sky with my mom and dad and water the ground.”

The watering can pondered for a moment.

“But maybe there is one thing you could do,” it spoke. “You could fill me up with water. I don’t like being empty, especially when my mom and dad are coming to visit. Being an empty watering can makes me look lazy and careless. Mom and Dad are never empty – they’re always chock-full of water.”

“I can do that,” Oskar promised. He knew very well where the spigot and hose were that his grandmother used to fill the watering can in the evenings. When he had filled the watering can up to the brim, he called it again on his wooden phone.

“Is that good?” he asked.

“Yes,” the watering can replied, sounding a little bubbly, as if water was sloshing up around its mouth. “Now, I’m ready. Now, they’ll be glad to see me.”

Oskar eyed the watering can, and he had a vision – he saw a little boy standing in front of him, wearing a white button-up shirt and a bow-tie, and who was waiting impatiently for his parents to come to the preschool Christmas party so that he could perform his songs and recite his freshly-memorized poems for them. All the boy did was constantly peek over at the door and chew his fingernails in excitement.

“I know they’ll come soon,” Oskar said. “And they’ll douse you with a downpour.”

Translated by Adam Cullen

Review

Kivirähk's Book is Like an Onion – New Layers Being Exposed as You Keep Reading

Jaanika Palm

Postimees, November 28, 2015

The most influential collections of Estonian children's stories over the past few years have been of very high quality. However, once in a while, instead of something short, choppy, and punchy, I want to read something longer, thoroughly worked through, and poetic. Desires for something deeper, thought-provoking, and longer will be satisfied when you pick up Andrus Kivirähk's fresh children's book *Oskar and the Things*.

The main character is Oskar, who has left preschool behind and is soon heading to school. Since his mom is going to America and his dad needs to work, the boy has to go live with his grandmother in the countryside. Since she lives far and the family rarely visits, Oskar doesn't have much of a relationship with his grandmother. He forgets to bring his mobile phone, which, like with many of his peers, is like a safety net and its absence further deepens his feeling of isolation. Fortunately, the boy is able to escape from his tragic situation. A phone that can talk to things enriches the boy's life and helps find a connection to his grandmother.

Based on the book's description and interviews, it may seem that this is an incredibly funny book, something cheerful and fun, but this notion starts to slowly erode as you read it. Of course, there are a bunch of odd and

colorful characters. That's how we meet a nail turned thief, who becomes the most famous actor in the shed thanks to the boy's suggestion; the explorative chair, who initially thinks life outside the house is impossible, but after stepping outside realizing it's just dirty; the police officer broom who finds every last speck of dust from every corner and beneath the bed; and others. Still, the more poetic parts of the book are what carries the story.

The beginning of the book, when the dad leaves his son with a grandmother, who is essentially a stranger, is heart wrenching. It is compelling how the author describes the child's almost existential loneliness in the world, where everything is strange and unfamiliar. Engrossing are the scenes describing Oskar's longing for something yet unknown. This restless longing is depicted both literally and figuratively by a red balloon, which is caught in the canopy of a birch tree. Clearly visible, but can't be reached or helped.

Besides the topics of loneliness and isolation, there is also the sharp topic of being forced to socialize. His father and grandmother both agree that the only way the boy would be happy, was if he could find someone to play with. The adults insist he play with the other boys in town: play football, wrestle, run around. But for Oskar, it is pure torture; he doesn't connect with the other children.

He remarks that no one expects adults to start socializing with others just because they are the same age. He creates his own world where he is needed. Then he is comfortable, safe, and secure.

Oskar and the Things is an open-ended story and open to all sorts of

interpretations. It is like an onion; new layers being exposed as you read it bit by bit. Oskar's fantasy plane exists on top of the plane of reality. There are recollections of the past and parallels to other works, especially fairy tales.

Even the ending is appealingly open ended. Oskar stays in the countryside, he still has his phone with which to talk to things, as well as his hope to meet the red balloon that escaped from the birch tree canopy. There is a foundation for a new, more profound relationship with his grandmother. This is helped by the story of her lost engagement ring and the ice cream loving girl, not the onion and meat pie devouring grandma.

Anne Pikkov was probably the best choice to illustrate this book. Her minimalist pictures, which use only three modest colors, bring the objects to life and complement Kivirähk's fantasy-rich text. Though it is annoying when the pictures and text contradict each other. For example, there is talk of an old bicycle with no seat, but in the illustrations, Oskar is walking with a bicycle which has one.

Also, the milk jug who is infatuated with a sugar bowl is describes as white with small pink butterflies on its belly, but the dish that the illustrator has depicted is dark grey with blue flowers. Who knows, maybe it is just a clever trick by the author and illustrator to keep children on their toes.

In the past few years, an important topic in translated children's literature is relationships between children and elderly people. Norwegian author Maria Parr's *Vaffelhjarte* and *Tonje Glimmerdal*, British author David Walliams' *Gangsta Granny* and American author Jennifer L. Holm's *The Fourteenth Goldfish* are just a few examples of works that delve into this topic.

Estonian authors have yet to show interest in this field. Now, Kivirähk

approaches the topic in *Oskar and the Things* in unique way without any template. He mixes magical fantasy with reality, humor and sadness, exciting and lyrical moments. He has created a delightfully broad and fantasy-provoking work which plays with the full range of reader's emotions. It is an alluring and thought-provoking story, which is worth reading for children, and a bit older people too.

Translated by Chris Reintal



Illustration by Anne Pikkov

Tilda and the Dust Angel



Tilda and the Dust Angel

Text: Andrus Kivirähk

Illustrations: Takinada

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Tilda lives alone with her mother. Her father died when she was still quite small, and the girl can't remember a single thing about him. Tilda's mom refuses to talk about the girl's late dad, which makes her extremely sad. Yet one day, after Tilda has forgotten to clean her room for a long while, the Dust Angel arrives: a nifty little creature who can only be seen by those who are born in the sunshine.

Excerpt

pp. 8–11

There was lots of dust. It covered the whole attic: the cardboard boxes, baskets, broken chairs, and the old desk that no one had sat at for many, many years. Everything was an identical shade of gray in the dim light that filtered through the tiny skylight—dust had devoured all the other colors. It wasn't unlike the green you see in every direction in woods where a thick carpet of moss has coated the tree trunks, boulders, and forest floor alike. Yet here in the attic, dust had taken the place of moss—dust that was just as soft and just as fluffy.

The whole room was silent. Dust had wrapped itself around the attic like a warm down blanket and inside of it, there was only peace. The attic slept beneath a gray quilt.

Then, something started to happen. Something strange. The dust began to move. It wasn't an unexpected gust that wandered into the attic and sent the dust whirling—no, all the windows were shut tight and there was no draft to disturb the dust's slumber. The whirlwind came from within the dust itself. The teensy-tiny motes that had been lying alongside one another for years started moving all on their own, spun into the air, bumped into one another, and rolled across the gray dust-blanket gathering up others of their kind like a snowball in damp snow. Cascading, rolling in waves, and occasionally rising up in dust spouts, the ever-swelling gray cloud finally began to take a clear form.

It thickened and grew limbs and a head. The dust motes massed together, something like how members of a marching band will form different patterns on a field. This, by the way, all happened in total silence.

And suddenly, it was all over. Someone had been made. And this someone was now crouching in the middle of the dusty attic.

He had pointy mouse-ears and tiny wings. Big, dark-colored eyes glinted in his round face.

The creature was gray from head to toe, which was natural given that he was made of dust—millions of motes that had, for some bizarre reason, now joined together.

He was as light as dust, as fast-moving as dust, and as invisible as dust. And he could get into any nook or cranny just like dust always can. For a while, he did somersaults and skipped around the dusty attic floor, though he didn't leave a single footprint. He flew to the closed door and sniffed at it. A moment later, he appeared to completely dissolve and stream through the keyhole.

The creature assumed his previous shape the instant he appeared on the other side of the door. He listened alertly with his pointy ears, having an incredible sense of hearing so fine-tuned that he could hear not only all kinds of sounds, but even soundlessness. Yes, the dust-creature was even capable of hearing silence! And at that very moment, his highly delicate and nearly transparent earlobes had picked up a very important kind of quiet.

Somewhere very close by was a silent, lone button.

There was nothing strange about this in and of itself—buttons have been silent since the beginning of time. Buttons aren't capable of making sounds in the first place, just like a whole range of other manmade objects: combs, plates, needles, spoons, mirrors, and what all else. What was unusual was that the dust-being was able to tell the difference—without ever making a mistake—between the silence of a button and that of any other object.

The creature flew down the attic stairs, through a number of rooms, and darted between a cupboard and the wall. There, he found the button whose silence he'd heard—a little blue button that had fallen off someone's blouse and rolled behind the piece of furniture.

Seizing the button in his little paws, the pointy-eared creature stroked his find with a look of happiness.

Even though he had only been born out of dust a short while earlier, he knew without a doubt that he was very fond of buttons and would start collecting them wherever they could be found. This little blue one was his very first, though he would definitely come across more of them in time because that was what every one of his kind did—those who had been born out of dust before him.

For there were others like him. Many others. An incredible amount.

How did he know?

He knew quite a lot, on the whole, if not everything, for he was made up of millions of tiny motes of dust. And every mote has a history. Every mote has its own past. Its own experiences. And all that knowledge and experience had now joined together into a little gray animal.

The only thing he didn't know was why he was so very fond of buttons. Perhaps there wasn't one single reason for it. That's the way it usually is with liking things. You might be totally nuts about someone or something, but can't seem to explain why. You simply like them and that's that.

And so it was with buttons! The pointy-eared creature admired his newfound treasure, then moved his paw through the air and was suddenly holding a fine thread woven from dust. The gray little animal tied the button to the thread, almost like someone putting a leash on their dog before taking it for a walk.

For that's precisely what the creature intended to do with his button. He was ready to go.

The dust-being had taken shape and had a button. Everything was just the way it should be—he didn't have to travel alone. Now, he could set off.

The creature rose into flight with the button trailing behind him like a loyal companion, floated to the window, slipped through a tiny crack, and headed in what was, without a doubt, the right direction. He hadn't materialized just for fun—he had a certain duty to

fulfill. He had to find a particular human; a girl.

He flew swiftly, soundlessly, and invisibly. He needed to fly a rather long distance, but his sharp-tipped ears could already hear the girl's voice. As I've said, there was nothing he couldn't hear.

pp. 36–38

Tilda lounged in bed, staring at the ceiling. The dream she'd had was very strange. A tall man with green eyes and a red beard had come to the girl, leaned over her, stroked her head, and then pulled a handful of buttons of different sizes and shades of color from his pocket. He extended the strange present to Tilda and smiled cheerfully.

And Tilda knew without a doubt it had been her father, even though she hadn't the slightest recollection of him. She'd never even seen a single picture of her dad; nor had anyone ever told her what he looked like.

What's more, it turned out that Tilda hadn't been wrong. Mom had confirmed her dad did indeed have a red beard and green eyes. Her dream-dad had been real.

How could that be possible?

Tilda rolled onto her side to enjoy snuggling under her blanket and think about the strange dream for a little while longer.

Staring back at her were two big, dark eyes that glistened like the night sky. Someone was sitting on the pillow right next to her. Someone gray with pointed ears, holding a little red button.

Tilda gaped at the being in shock. That's right – she gaped. Because she could see it.

Let's not forget that the being was actually invisible.

Still, this didn't appear to surprise the little gray creature.

"You can see me," it said calmly. "Well, that's just natural. You were born in the sunshine."

Tilda jumped out of bed.

"Who are you?" she exclaimed.

"Who do you think I am, Tilda?" the unfamiliar guest asked.

Tilda didn't speak a word, even though the answer that had popped into her head at the very same moment was spinning around her mouth. She simply didn't dare to say it aloud. Everything in her head was spinning right then, because what was happening was just so unbelievable – so unexpected and strange.

"Oh, yes, you actually know very well who I am," the being said. The voice was so familiar, even though Tilda hadn't heard it in years or could have ever guessed that she still remembered it. No, she almost certainly hadn't remembered it before, just yesterday... But today...

Dozens of memories flashed through Tilda's mind. She was lying in a stroller and a man with green eyes was leaning over her, handing her a tiny camel that rattled. She was right under the ceiling, held up in the air by a man with a red beard, while a woman with dimples – was that really Mom? – shouted: "Are you crazy? Watch out for the lamp!" Then, she was on the floor, crawling across a checkered blanket, and that very same man was crawling next to her: the man she'd seen in her dream. And then, she was sitting in a little highchair and the man with the red beard was sticking a spoonful of porridge into her mouth, and when Tilda spat it out, the man licked her face clean. His bristly red beard poked Tilda and the woman with the dimples said:

"Ew, Samuel – you're not a dog!"

All of these memories swept over Tilda in the blink of an eye. She couldn't understand

how it could be possible she hadn't remembered all those little flickering images before! How could she have thought she didn't remember her own dad?! She remembered him very well!

"Are you my dad?" she whispered.

"IAT," the gray being replied.

"IAT? What does that mean?" Tilda asked.

"I Am Dust," said the little creature. "Which means I'm also your dad. I am everything that has ever been, because nothing disappears without a trace. Everything remains. Everything turns to dust."

It spoke in Tilda's father's voice, and even though it looked more like a mouse than a person, Tilda had the feeling the being wasn't lying. It really was her father. Her father and a million things more, of course, but those weren't important right then. For Tilda, all that mattered was that she was talking to her father. It was completely unlikely, absolutely ridiculous—but even so, it was as true as could be.

pp. 43–45

They were at the zoo the whole day long, even though the other visitors thought Tilda had gone to see the animals all alone. No one else could see the dust angel – no one else had been born in the sunshine, but instead under the lights of a hospital room. Everyone only saw a little girl with a wonderfully-woven braid that looked like a bale of hay wound around her head.

The dust angel would occasionally sit on Tilda's shoulder, then twirl around her. Sometimes, it would even dart into a cage, and then, a lion would start roaring because he remembered the open savannah where his ancestors had once hunted, and the antelope would prance back and forth across their pen restlessly – just like they would

out in the wild long ago, where there was no beginning or end to the limitless grasslands and, at any moment, a predator might attack instead of the zookeeper delivering a clump of fresh hay.

“Is it wise to remind them of that?” Tilda asked. For some reason, she was uncomfortable seeing the way an anxious glint would spark in the animals’ eyes and their nostrils would flare, as if they’d caught a whiff of the distant past. “Maybe they’re happier when they can’t remember their freedom at all. Maybe it’s easier for them to manage here in the zoo that way?”

“They themselves have never lived out in the wild,” the dust angel replied. “They were born right here in the zoo and grew up here, too. But they do still remember long-ago times and their ancestors’ freedom; it’s inevitable. For it all still exists – it’s simply turned to dust. And dust is everywhere. There’s no getting around it.”

“But you’re the one reminding them of the past,” Tilda argued.

“Exactly, Tilda. I remind them of it,” the dust angel said. “But a person or an animal can only be reminded of things that they know already. That, which is in their memory; their blood; their heart. I merely help release that knowledge from deep inside. For if you no longer remember how to hunt, then you’re no longer a lion. And if you no longer remember how you’re hunted, then you’re no longer an antelope.”

“I suppose that’s true,” Tilda acknowledged.

“You actually remembered me, too, squirt,” her dad continued. “You simply needed to be reminded of everything, too.”

“Yes, thank you. Although I really didn’t remember my dad looking like a tiny gray monkey who’s head-over-heels in love with buttons,” Tilda teased.

Dad laughed.

“This isn’t me,” he said. “This is just IAD. Or a dust angel, if that’s what you prefer calling me. I’m merely a teensy-tiny part of him. In addition to me, there are millions more flecks of dust that come from a whole spectrum of places and different centuries. Some of them carry memories of the cavemen, others of colossal dinosaurs, while some are from even more ancient times – from when there was no life on Earth, only dust. Some come from completely different stars. We remember everything.”

Tilda stared at the dust angel. The gray creature resembled her precious teddy bear at first glance, but an endless, chilling universe glistened in the depths of its eyes. They were hard to look into; it seemed as if they were bottomless.

Tilda noticed that the button dangling from a string the dust angel was carrying was no longer red, but golden.

“What’s that button of yours?” she asked. “Where’d you pinch it from?”

The dust angel looked embarrassed. It drew its big ears in front of its eyes like cabbage leaves.

“I saw it on a woman’s jacket,” it whispered. “And I just liked it so much!”

“But what happened to the red button from my dress? Where’d you put it?”

“I don’t know,” the dust angel lamented. “I lost it.”

“Oh, you!” Tilda sighed. “Who does that? You’ve got to hang on to your things, not throw them away as soon as you see something pretty and new.”

“You’re right,” the dust angel agreed, tugging its ears even lower in shame.

“If you spot another pretty button, then are you going to throw the golden one away, too?”

“Yes,” the dust angel sighed pitifully.

“But that’s not a nice way to behave!”

“I know,” the dust angel agreed even more pitifully.

“So, don’t do it!” Tilda suggested.

“I’m still going to,” the dust angel whispered, standing with its head hung low.

“You’re foolish,” Tilda sighed. “And silly. Inside of you are stars and dinosaurs and all the ancient countries and nations and my dad, but at the same time, you chase colorful buttons around like a kitten.”

“What can I do? That’s the way we are,” the dust angel shrugged apologetically. But then, it appeared to have had enough of its shame. It leapt into flight and called out to Tilda with her father’s voice:

“Let’s go check out the penguins now. Penguins were always my favorite. I could watch them for hours on end. Your mom knew that, too, and when we came to the zoo together, she’d always bring a sweater and a stocking cap along because it’s pretty chilly in the penguin house. You’re not going to get cold, are you?”

“I don’t think so. I’ve got a jacket, and I can pull my hood on, too,” Tilda reckoned. She had a curious feeling: sometimes, she spoke to the dust angel like a child does to her father, but other times, she had to scold it just like a puppy that’s been up to no good.

pp. 85–88

The door to the tailor’s workshop flew open and Master Perk marched out combatively, a sewing tape hung around his neck and scissors sticking out of his breast pocket.

“Tired?!” he echoed. “What could he be tired from? Doing nothing? Yes, that will sure wear you out! I’ve got a wonderful remedy, though—doing work!”

“He’s just a child, my dear,” Mrs. Perk murmured. “And he’s on school break right now . . . He needs to rest from his studies . . .”

“Rest from his studies? You must be joking!” Master Perk moaned. “He doesn’t study! He can’t even be bothered to go to class! He can’t be bothered to do anything—he doesn’t want to be anything when he’s older!”

“I do, too,” Lucas protested. “I want to be an actor.”

That was what he had discovered the moment he’d met Tilda in the park and sneezed several times in a row—the moment the dust went up his nose. The moment he remembered . . . he couldn’t even figure out what, exactly. For Lucas had never been to a theater before. There wasn’t one in town. Even so, he could now imagine a spacious room with large, brightly shining lights on the ceiling. They were called spotlights—he could remember that word, too. It surfaced from somewhere deep in his brain, even though he’d never used the word “spotlight” before and had no idea what it meant just minutes earlier. There were other words, too: backdrop, flats, props, grand drape. They had all entered Lucas’s head, jumbled together and accompanied by strange smells, sounds, and colors. He envisioned an empty auditorium, felt an empty stage behind him, and knew that put together, it was a theater and he was an actor.

It had been such an astonishing revelation that Lucas was unable to tell Tilda about it. In fact, he couldn’t have found the right words to describe the chaos going on in his mind—there were just hazy emotions and images that flashed before his eyes. It was only now, at home, that Lucas found he could suddenly put a finger on it. Without the shadow of a doubt, he now knew what he would be when he grew up.

“An actor?!” Master Perk repeated in surprise. “You want to be an actor?”

It appeared he was amazed not so much by the profession Lucas had stated as by the fact that his lazy son suddenly wanted to be anything at all.

“Yes,” Lucas replied. “I really do.”

“Where’d you come up with that peculiar idea?” asked Master Perk. “You’ve never seen an actor in your life. You’ve never even been to a theater! You’ve got no idea what a theater is!”

“That’s true, I don’t know completely,” Lucas said. “But . . . I still feel as if I’ve been there a long, long time ago. I can almost remember . . . a big, pale blue building with long white steps leading up to it. And there are statues on either side. One is smiling and sticking his tongue out at people who climb the stairs, and the other one is very sad and holding a violin with his head hanging low.”

“Harlequin and Pierrot,” Master Perk said, nodding. “Those statues were in front of the theater . . . before it burned down. But there’s no way you could remember that—it happened a long time ago, back when I was your age! The ruins stood there for a couple years after the fire, but they were bulldozed just like so many other buildings for Mr. Abel Ragnarson’s factory. Our city hasn’t had a theater since. Is it possible you saw some old photos of it?”

Lucas shook his head

“I just remember it,” he said.

“But that’s impossible!” Master Perk exclaimed. “You weren’t even born yet! Even I had nearly forgotten it by now, although I once attended a performance there with my parents. We went to see Puss in Boots. I can remember it’s the only thing Dad talked about when we got home: ‘Oh, what grand costumes! The cannibal’s fox-fur coat and the silver embroidering on the king’s jacket. I wonder who does the tailoring there? It’d be fascinating to work on something like that myself.’ I enjoyed the costumes, too, but the puss in boots was my absolute favorite.”

“You liked the puss in boots?” asked Mrs. Perk, who had been sitting quietly in the corner.

“Yes, I adored it!” Master Perk crowed. “The actor was rather tiny—about my size. I suppose a child acted the part. They were certainly talented! The actor climbed the walls and juggled plastic mice.”

“That was me,” Mrs. Perk said.

Master Perk stared at his wife with his mouth hanging agape.

“What? You? You were the puss in boots?”

“Yes,” she replied, standing up and walking to the center of the room. Mrs. Perk was a short, slim woman who was quiet most of the time and never argued with her husband. But now, she had straightened her back and was staring right into Master Perk’s eyes. “I played the puss in boots. My parents owned the theater—they were actors.”

“But . . . you always told me they were bakers,” Master Perk murmured in astonishment.

“I lied,” Mrs. Perk admitted. “I didn’t dare to tell you the truth because you always said that one must do something useful; that a person must work. And I wasn’t sure you thought acting is useful work. Still, I loved you and wanted to marry you, so I fibbed and told you I was a baker’s daughter. My parents had passed away by then, the theater had long since burned down and been demolished, I had grown up, and no one would ever have recognized me as the puss in boots. You didn’t, either.”

“I certainly did not!” Master Perk exclaimed. “And thank heavens that was the case!”

Mrs. Perk’s face turned slightly red.

“You wouldn’t have married me otherwise?” she asked.

“I don’t know!” Master Perk sighed, taking his wife by the hands. “It would have been much harder, in any case. I might not have had the courage to propose because I was just a simple tailor, but you were an incredible puss in boots!”

pp. 111–113

Now, she and Lucas stood behind a towering metal door that was white as the whole wall and firmly shut. Lucas pressed a button next to the door and a moment later, a tinny robot voice spoke:

“State your name.”

Lucas leaned in close to the microphone.

“Master Perk. I’m here about the new suits,” he said in his father’s voice.

There was a soft buzz and the lock clicked open. Lucas grabbed Tilda’s hand and pulled her in behind him.

“Look, we’re inside!” he whispered victoriously. “Dad told me before about how he gets into Ragnarson’s place. They have a recording of his voice and when the robot hears it, the door opens. Presto! Machines are so dumb and easy to fool.”

They crept along long white corridors that lacked a single rug, a single painting, a single little knickknack that cozies up a hope. There were only empty white walls, a white ceiling, and a white floor—all immaculately clean and unbelievably bare.

“I sure wouldn’t want to live in a place like this,” Tilda said timidly. “It’s so awful! Like a spaceship, not someone’s home.”

“It’s not a home,” Lucas corrected. “It’s a factory. People don’t live here—machines do.”

“But Abel Ragnarson is a person!” Tilda argued.

“Maybe we just haven’t gotten to the part where he lives yet,” Lucas reckoned.

“And we don’t have to, either! We didn’t come here on a tour—we have to save the dust angels!” Tilda declared.

The kids heard someone coming. Startled, they pressed themselves against the wall, as there was nowhere to hide in the hallway. To their relief, it was just another robot. And since the robot wasn’t programmed to catch intruders, only to cook for Abel Ragnarson, it ignored Tilda and Lucas entirely.

“Look, it’s holding a plate,” Tilda whispered. “It’s bringing Ragnarson a meal.”

“What’s that weird junk?” Lucas asked, wrinkling his nose. “It’s just a pile of little white chunks.”

Abel Ragnarson lived on a strict diet of robot-made vitamins—he never ate any ordinary foods. He found them to be filthy. Milk came from cows, eggs were laid by chickens, and meat was made from a pig or a sheep, all of which were unimaginably dirty. Plants weren’t any better: the grain used to make bread grew on a field under the open sky; fruits and berries hung from bushes and trees—they could get dirty from the rain, the wind, and the birds that perched on the branches. They could have soil or pollen on them. Abel Ragnarson refused to stick any such foul thing into his mouth. Everything he ate was made in a laboratory and wasn’t allowed to have any taste or smell.

It had to be pure, just like everything else in the genius inventor’s vicinity. He was only able to work in a state of total cleanliness.

“If that robot is going towards Ragnarson, then we’d better head the opposite way,” Lucas reckoned. “I don’t want to run into him and it’s unlikely that the big vacuum cleaner is in his living room. Let’s look somewhere else.”

The pair walked on. A few more robots wheeled past them, but the children weren't afraid of them anymore because they knew the machines were just carrying out their duties and uninterested in anything else.

Finally, they came to the end of the corridor, where they found a door. Lucas opened it cautiously.

"Holy moly!" he murmured in amazement. What a sight!

The door opened to a narrow platform. Peering out, they saw an enormous space bigger than a city square—bigger than ten city squares! The massive room was filled with robots. Thousands of robots. And those robots were working on building Abel Ragnarson's famous machines.

Being made right there were all those snow-white washing machines, refrigerators, TVs, and computers that were known and prized around the whole world. But right in the middle of all the machines was also one special appliance. The biggest of all. A gigantic vacuum cleaner.

If an ordinary vacuum cleaner were a mouse, then this would be an elephant. If an ordinary vacuum cleaner were an acorn, then this would be an oak.

"That's the one!" said Tilda. "That's the thing that sucked up all the dust angels. We've got to let them loose."

"Uh-huh . . ." Lucas said, eyeing the monstrosity in thought. "But . . . how?"

"We'll crack the huge sucker open just like you usually open a vacuum cleaner."

"The only problem with that is that this is no ordinary vacuum cleaner—it's more like a mountain," Lucas noted. "But we've got to try, naturally. I suppose mountains do open up sometimes. You've just got to know what button to push. How will we get down there?"

"You won't," someone said behind them. Tilda and Lucas spun around and found themselves face to face with someone in a white suit. That "someone" grabbed them painfully by the hair and shoved their heads under his arms, then dragged them back into the hallway.

"Who are you and what are you looking for here?"

Translated by Adam Cullen

Review

Memories Found in Kivirähk's Dust

Neeme Korv

Postimees, May 11, 2018

Andrus Kivirähk's book *Tilda and the Dust Angel* would likely be considered to be a "children's book" and that's just the section you will find it in bookstores. Still, I fully support the author's suggestion, in an interview given to *Postimees Arter* (28.04), that adults should also read this book. No reason to worry about being disappointed.

It is difficult to think of something more ordinary than dust. However, it is in its ordinariness that dust is exceptionally meaningful and inspiring. *Tilda and the Dust Angel* is full of colorful characters whose paths all cross thanks to one animal (or, to be more precise, phenomenon), the dust angel. The book is about a lot of important things, though first and foremost about memory, which is basically what connects everything in our lives. "IAD. I Am Dust. /.../ The world is filled with so many memories after all. There is so much that doesn't exist anymore. So much dust. And so many people who tend to forget. Without us. We will help you remember," explains the memory carrier, the "grey, pointy-eared creature with two tiny wings" (pg 47).

Kivirähk is not the first and definitely not the last author to open this dusty treasure chest. In children's literature, one can recall the dust wisps (most importantly the Dust Wisp who Has Seen Much) among the characters of Jaanus Vaiksoo's and Wimberg's television series *Let's Meet Up*

at *Tom's Place*; the angry dust ghost in Markus Sakstamm's humorous tale; and the plot of Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy revolves around the secrets of Dust.

In Kivirähk's gentle and exceptionally empathetic book, characters, with the help of the dust angel, find their memories that are lost, yet still in their "memory, blood, and heart" (p 51) and as a result, their lives become happier. They discover their true selves and gain self-confidence.

Several tales are intertwined in the book, a technique Kivirähk has used before. The titular Tilda puts together a collection of memories of her deceased father and this gives a somewhat somber shade to the events, since even though the girl can grow close with her lost father thanks to these memories, she can never truly get her father back.

At the same time, the book's overall tone is colored by an Astrid Lindgren-like warmth and tenderness, your home is your castle, and all-powerful friendship and love. I am not claiming (and neither is Kivirähk) that children nowadays lack these things, but no child ever has had an excess of these things.

Semiotician Umberto Eco might have very much enjoyed Kivirähk's newest book, as well as the rest of his works. After all, Eco was concerned with mankind losing its memory, if books were to be forgotten. This is precisely why we need authors who can speak to and touch modern audiences with such simple yet deep texts. Authors such as Kivirähk who can fill books with stories comprehensible for both young and old.

Let us recall his previous masterpiece *Oskar and the Things* which also addressed these questions which every child will eventually have as they

come to understand the temporal nature of life. That everyone carries with them something from their parents and grandparents: traditions, customs, culture, and all sorts of stories.

Kivirähk is able to communicate the complicated process of self-awareness through reference points that modern children are accustomed to and therefore can understand. While in *Oskar and the Things*, there is a boy at his grandmother's home in the countryside who speaks to objects using a mobile phone made out of wood, in *Tilda and the Dust Angel* thinking machines (artificial intelligence!) are in play, as well as everyday things such as street food and school break.

About a year and a half ago, children's literature researcher Krista Kumberg stated, that the field has plateaued – plateaued at a very high level. Kivirähk does not only hold to the high standard, but also pushes it even higher.

In one sense *Tilda and the Dust Angel* follows Estonian children's literatures best traditions. Namely, the book is strikingly beautiful.

Tilda and the Dust Angel is illustrated by the young artist Takinada (Irina Šabarova) who is making a powerful move towards the upper echelon of contemporary artists such as Urmas Viik, Heiki Ernist, Piret Raud, and others.

Truly, the watercolors in *Tilda and the Dust Angel* could be displayed in their own exhibit. After all, these very same grey, pointy-eared creatures existed before the author recognized them as dust angels.

So, I will boldly say the same to the artist as I do the author: I can't wait to see you again!

Translated by Chris Reintal



Illustration by Takinada

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2018 Good Children's Book

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2010 Nukits Competition, 1st place

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2008 Nukits Competition, 1st place

2007 Republic of Estonia State Culture Award for 2006 Creative Achievements

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2006 Nukits Competition, 1st place

2005 “Järje Hoidja” Award of the Tallinn Central Library

Russian: Лимпа и пираты / Андрус Кивиряхк ; перевод с эстонского Елены
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Honors and Awards

- 2024 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, nominee
- 2022 Hans Christian Andersen Award, nominee
- 2021 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, nominee
- 2021 Latvian Children's Young Adult's and Parent's Jury
(Bērnu, jauniešu un vecāku v žūrija), 4th place (age 15+),
(Tilda and the Dust Angel) 2020
Nukits Competition, 1st place (The Ghost and Facebook)
- 2019 Good Children's Book (The Ghost and Facebook)
"Järje Hoidja" Award of the Tallinn Central Library
(Tilda and the Dust Angel)
- 2018 Annual Children's Literature Award of the Cultural Endowment
of Estonia (Tilda and the Dust Angel)
Good Children's Book (Tilda and the Dust Angel)
- 2016 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award candidate
Tartu Prize for Children's Literature (Childhood Prize)
(Oskar and the Things)
Eduard Vilde Literary Award (Oskar and the Things)
Nukits Competition, 2nd place (Carnival and Potato Salad)
- 2015 Nominee of the Annual Children's Literature Award of the Cultural
Endowment of Estonia (Oskar and the Things)
Good Children's Book (Oskar and the Things)
The White Ravens (Big Toell)

- 2013 Jānis Baltvilks Prize (Jāņa Baltvilka balva), Latvia (Poo and Spring)
Good Children's Book (A Frog Kiss)
- 2012 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award candidate
- 2011 Jānis Baltvilks Prize (Jāņa Baltvilka balva), Latvia
(Lotte from Gadgetville)
- 2010 Nukits Competition, 1st place (Poo and Spring)
Children and Young Adult Jury (Bērnu un jauniešu žūrija), Latvia,
2nd place (Grades 5–7) (Sirli, Siim and the Secrets)
- 2008 IBBY Honour List (Lotte from Gadgetville)
Nukits Competition, 1st place (Lotte from Gadgetville)
- 2007 Republic of Estonia State Culture Award for 2006 Creative
Achievements (Lotte from Gadgetville; and plays)
- 2006 Nukits Competition, 1st place (Limpa and the Pirates)
- 2005 Estonian Children's Literature Centre Raisin of the Year Award
(Bed-time stories for Estonian fathers, together with the collection's
other authors)
"Järje Hoidja" Award of the Tallinn Central Library
(Limpa and the Pirates)
- 2004 The Order of the White Star, V class
Nukits Competition, 2nd place (Lotte's Journey South)
- 2000 Annual Cultural Endowment of Estonia Award (animated feature
film Lotte, together with H. Ernits, J. Pöldma, R. Lukk-Toompere and
O. Ehala)

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