

How I Didn't Become a Writer

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Kolm Elu 2020, 112 pp
ISBN 9789916404737
storybook, fiction
Age 7+

11 year old Juhan, nicknamed Juks loves to write more than anything. Whether it's a haiku or an adventure story, a travelogue or a newspaper article, an apothegm or a sports story, they all sound equally interesting. Despite the interest Juks never manages to finish a single story, no matter how he tries. Is it possible to become a writer if the only things you write are never ending stories?



Third story

How I didn't write a detective story

I can't draw. And I'm really sad about it. We've got a great art teacher and I always spend hours over stuff, but it's just no use.

Maybe I just have no talent for drawing? Miss sometimes says I have a talent for writing. But I think you don't need talent to write. Let's say like, there's this dog we want to write about. We can just write "A friendly looking Labrador with big paws and a shaggy coat was walking along the street." Easy-peasy, right? But when I try to say the same in a picture my labrador looks like it's just been flattened by a lorry. I'd be pleased if anyone realised it was a labrador. Lol! I'd be pleased if anyone realised it was a dog, not a lamp or an armchair!

People say a picture can tell you more than a thousand words. And it's true; it's just that my pictures tell you something entirely different from what I want to say. The stupidest thing is that I know exactly what's wrong with them. Sometimes it makes me laugh and sometimes it makes me swear, but I just can't do any better. I can only do it with words – and using words is how I have to keep explaining to my art teacher what's happening in my pictures. It's a real pain!

I'd really like to be able to draw. I'd like to write a book that has my own drawings in it, exactly how I imagine them to be. Have I ever tried? Yes, of course I have!

I came up with a super exciting story about a New York Police Captain who catches a mob of gangsters thanks to enlisting the help of a courageous, sharp-witted boy the same age as me.

The story was coming on nicely but as soon as I wanted to bring it to life in pictures I had to start explaining and fixing them using the story. It came out something like this:

Captain John Blacksmith of the New York Police Service Juvenile Crime Department banged his coffee cup down on the table and scowled nervously: the White Water Rat Gang had outsmarted him yet again. They were still at large, in spite of all that tailing, all the raids and secret operations. For the whole of the last year the criminals had emptied jewellery and fashion stores all over Long Island and getting away with it. Always the same handwriting, always the same security video footage of sneering

burglars who didn't even go to the bother of disguising themselves. And they were always in the same white Pontiac with no registration plates, tearing past the security cameras. What a downer!



Captain John Blacksmith made his hands into fists and gnashed his teeth. His arms began at his shoulders but didn't broaden out from that point down, quite the opposite in fact. The Captain's ears were a normal size and his teeth were healthy. His desk was neat and tidy: the vase hadn't toppled over and the biscuit bowl was the right way up. The Captain's office was not about to fall down. Its walls were straight and clouds could be seen through the windows, not bushes. The weather on that dismal day was beautiful and spring-like.

The Captain went outside to clear his head and buy some refreshments from the baker's on the corner. It was already 3 o'clock but he hadn't had a bite to eat since breakfast. He waited his turn and said to the assistant: "Two meat pies and one fruit pie, please."

But the assistant exclaimed, "Oh no, they just brought a fresh batch of pies through but I just can't be sure which of them are in which basket. I'm new here and I don't know how they're usually displayed on the counter.

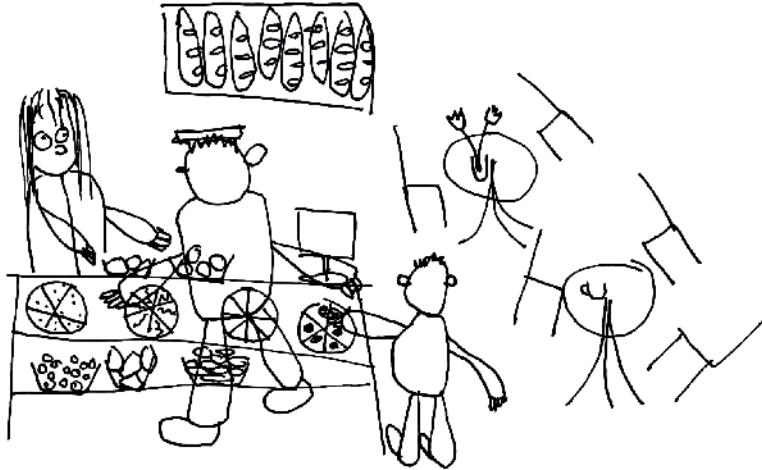
"Hmm," murmured John Blacksmith, displeased. "Never mind, just give me two of each, then it won't matter."

The assistant began to fill the order, but suddenly the Captain felt a tap on his shoulder,

"Excuse me, sir..."

Captain John Blacksmith glanced over his shoulder and saw a boy about 11 years old behind him.

The boy wasn't see-through, and the inspector hadn't gone see-through in the meantime.



"Excuse me, but how would it not matter?" asked the boy. "You won't know which pie to eat first. What if the first one turns out to be a fruit pie? You'll spoil your appetite."

"Yes, that's true..." pondered the Captain. "But what can I do?"

"I think I have an idea," replied the boy, whose legs were both the same length, and who was standing not on his heels but with his feet flat on the floor.

"And what's your idea?" asked the Captain with much curiosity.

"You see," the boy explained matter-of-factly, "jam is more gloopy than mince and has a greater heat capacity. That means that meat pies cool down more quickly."

"Of course!" exclaimed John Blacksmith, squeezing the pies in his paper bag. "Two of them are cooler than the others. So I should start with them. Consider yourself thanked, young man!"

"You're welcome, sir," said the boy generously.

"Hey! What about me?" the sales assistant butted into the conversation. "I don't know which of my baskets is which. And I'm not allowed to touch the pies with my fingers. I can

only pick them up using tongs, my boss told me so!"

"You got any ideas?" the boy turned to the Captain.

John Blacksmith shrugged his shoulders, "You?"

"Maybe," the boy nodded thoughtfully, feeling his stomach rumbling. He was from a poor family and had only come to the shop today to buy bread with the 50¢ his mother had given him.

"In exchange for good advice I'd like a piece of that cake with the sprinkles from the tray that's tipped up," said the boy first.

The assistant apologetically managed to say only that the tray wasn't really tipped up. Then Captain Blacksmith announced,

"I'll pay for your piece of cake. Tell me, young man, how you can tell without touching, which pies are the warm ones and which are the cooler ones, which ones have jam and which have meat."

"Why, it's as easy as pie," said the boy turning again to the sales assistant. "Do you have a mirror?"

"Of course," the assistant took a small oval mirror out of her pocket and handed it over the counter to the boy.

"Mr Inspector..." said the boy.

"Captain...", John Blacksmith corrected him.

"Excuse me, Mr Captain, sir. You must have had the opportunity to check whether a victim of a crime is breathing or not. How do you know?"

"You use a mirror, of course," replied the Captain. "But what's that got to do with pies?"

"A whole lot", said the boy. "A warm pie is like a living person. When you hold the mirror close to it, the mirror steams up. A cool pie doesn't give off steam and so stuff like that doesn't happen."

"You don't say," said John Blacksmith in bewilderment when the boy proved what he'd said with the help of the mirror.

*He put his hand on the boy's shoulder
"Young man, I'm going to make you an
offer you can't refuse." He showed the boy to
a chair in the coffee shop that had not recently
been hit by a hurricane and ordered him a
mug of cocoa as well as the cake. His hopes of
catching the White Water Rat Gang had not
faded completely after all.*

See how the story ended up? Weird,
isn't it? Feel free carry it on if you're better at
drawing than me. I don't feel like fiddling with it
any more.



Seventh Story

How I didn't write a sports story

I like sports stories and am myself a great sportsman. As soon as the snow melted and the land had dried a bit, me and the local kids would begin having a kick about. The really old houses had all been knocked down but before they began building the new ones, we used the site as our playground. We means me and Robbie and Harv and Alex and a few other boys who lived round and about. We had our very own club that we named after our street: Trepimäe United.

I thought our nightly games would give me invaluable material for an exciting sports story: the poor suburban boys from Trepimäe Street train all summer like madmen. They want to take part in the Estonian Championships, but the football league won't hear of it: you need a proper ground for that, and sponsors, buses and the rest. But Trepimäe United did not despair. They carried on training and in autumn entered the masters' championships, an unofficial friendly held in Tallinn's Lillekula stadium. Our boys were trailing but battled on, and scored in injury time, 3:2. The fans were jubilant. Everywhere there were shouts of "Trepimäe United for ever!" And even the President of the Football League in his furry waistcoat came to shake our hands after the match, "Great work, boys, incredible stuff..."

I'd thought everything through carefully. All I needed was an opening line. The first line is really important! A good start grasps the reader like a pair of pliers and doesn't let him go. So yeah, my story had to start with a real belter. The very thing flashed into my mind as I was on my way home from school. I sat on some steps in front of some flats, took a notepad out of my trousers and wrote, "The Rowan family were sat at the dinner table: Mum, Dad and little May. Only John was missing. Situation normal. He never came in from football before he'd been called for the third time. "I'll go to the veranda and call him again," sighed mum as she got up from the table. At that very moment there was a loud smash and something crashed through the window pane straight into the pan of steaming chicken soup on the table. It was a football. The kitchen fell instantly silent. Then Dad stood up gasping for breath, wiped his soup-covered glasses on his shirt sleeve and stretched his fist through the broken kitchen window. And over the yard, where the silence had also spread, he could be heard yelling ..."

That's where I was stuck. It needed something juicy, something disgusting, something really shocking. Something that would come naturally. How would grown-ups swear in that kind of situation? I pondered the options while chewing the end of my pencil.

Suddenly Robbie, my best mate, appeared in front of me.

"What are you doing sat here? Let's get everyone together and have a kick-about! Come on let's go!"

"Yeh, course," I emerged from my thoughts and we began to wander home. On the way I read Robbie my story from the start. Robbie had cool ideas sometimes. And he knew loads more swear words than me. Perhaps he could recommend something?

"Wicked," said Robbie admiringly when I reached the bit with the Dad swearing. "But instead of chicken soup they should be eating pea soup. Chicken soup just looks like splatters, but pea soup looks like someone's gobbed everywhere."

"Good idea," I smiled, "but that's not the main thing. The main thing is what the dad shouts out the window."

“Yeah, what swear words he might yell...” Robbie too was lost in thought. “Well, how about ‘What the hell?’”

“You’re kidding!” I replied, “no way’s that strong enough. Think about it: you’ve just smashed a window, there’s splinters of glass all over the kitchen and your glasses are covered in chicken soup...”

“Pea soup,” Robbie corrected.

“Yeah, ok, pea soup – whatever! I need a bit of real swearing!”

“I know,” yelled Robbie. “We just need to play the situation through. What time is the soup usually ready at yours?”

“Are you for real...?”

“Definitely!” there was a devilish spark in Robbie’s eyes. I had to calm him down.

“Bro, what are you on? Dad’ll ground me if I deliberately kick a football through a window. And knocking a soup pan over as well... we’d need fabulous skill to do that. And where are we gonna find a Messi of our very own?” Scowling bitterly I added, “It’s even more complicated than hitting a penalty past a goalie.” (We’d lost the previous evening’s game on penalties because of a mistake by Robbie.)

As we chatted we found we’d reached my house. And excuse me but who do you think we met there? My very own Dad.

Robbie nudged me and I knew immediately what to do.

“Dad,” I asked, “how would you react if, when we were having a kick-about, the ball smashed through the kitchen window?”

“What kind of question is that?” Dad inquired. “Has something happened?”

“No, no,” I hurried to reassure him, “everything’s fine. We’d just like to know what you’d say if something like that happened.”

“Listen now, boys,” Dad laughed, “how should I know how I’d tell you off when I’m not angry?”

He went indoors and left me and Robbie at the gate.

“You dipstick!” Robbie scolded. “Why did you tell him everything was fine? If you hadn’t let on you’d know what swear words to use by now!”

Robbie was right and that fact did nothing at all to cheer me up.

“Too late,” I said. “That ship’s sailed. But... I’ve got it! To find out the right words we don’t really have to break anything at all. All we need to do is get someone worried. Not necessarily my Dad, any adult will do.”

“What do you mean?” Robbie asked.

“Just that when we’re playing footie tonight we watch out for when a car’s about to turn into the yard. And then kick the ball – thwack! – into the bodywork or a door window. They’re made of tough stuff so won’t break easily. The driver’ll get out, say whatever and we just apologise politely. Simple!”

So that was the plan. As only five of us could play that evening we didn’t bother to split into teams, and we played “one-touch passing” - where you control the ball with your first touch, then pass it on or get a kick in the butt - in the only gateway. This gave us a good view of everyone arriving by car.

The first person to arrive home was Thomas, who lived in the basement but was always out fishing. He was clearly in a good mood and was waving to us from behind his windscreen as he manoeuvred his car into its parking space.

Robbie, who had the ball, took aim and smashed it into the ageing Opel’s rear passenger window.

“Straight into the woodwork!” thundered Uncle Thomas, roaring with laughter as he climbed out of the car. “Boys, come and see what I rescued from a rag-box: a proper waterproof fisherman’s jacket. How much do you think it cost me?”

“A tenner,” I suggested in a huff.

“Seven euros! Imagine that, what a steal!” Yeah, great, Uncle Thomas had done well, but there was nothing in his reaction that was of any use to me. We carried on with our passing game.

Shortly Dad came out.

“I’m off to get some pizzas. Mum called and said she’s going to be late. She had to go to a parents’ evening and I can’t be bothered to start cooking.”

“Yesss!” I cheered because how could I object to pizza?

Next to drive into the yard was the car belonging to our other neighbour, Aunt Julia. She was an elegant lady who took her bright red Fiat to the car wash every other day. And my hopes were high because only a moment previously our ball had splashed through a muddy puddle.

Thrrump! it flew into the Fiat’s rear window as Julia was reversing carefully into her spot.

“Saints preserve us!” wailed Aunt Julia as she jumped out of the driver’s seat. “Have I hit Thomas’s car?”

“No, no,” I reassured her as she was in a tizzy, “it was just our ball.”

“Thank the Lord for that,” Julia sighed with relief. “I always have a job reversing...”

“So, what did she say?” asked Robbie when Julia had disappeared.

“Saints preserve us? Be sensible, man! My Dad would never say anything so idiotic.”

We had to carry on waiting. Darkness was falling. Harv had already had three kicks to his butt when Felix the builder drove into the yard from the building opposite.

“Shoot!” I yelled to Alex, who was the tallest. And Alex took a frenzied shot. The ball took off, drew a broad arc in the air and landed ...smack bang in the middle of our first floor kitchen window.

I felt my legs go weak. Alex seemed to be in two minds whether to run away or stay and face his fate. He could see that my Dad was already at the gate with the pizzas.

“Dad, Dad!” I ran up to him. “We’ve had a little mishap. It was a complete accident, I promise...”

“On yes?” Dad asked. “What mishap would that be?”

“The ball went through the window,” said Alex being strong, taking responsibility. “I promise I didn’t mean to...”

“Ha ha ha, I’ve heard that one already,” Dad laughed. “You’ll have to come up with something else!”

We went round the side of the building and Alex pointed silently to our kitchen window, which sported a large, star-shaped hole. “I promise I didn’t mean to,” he said again.

Dad glanced up, shook his head, sighed and then looked and me and Alex in turn. Then he calmly and only slightly anxiously said, “Honestly, lads, you’ve not got an ounce of sense between you.”

My stories often stop half way through and don’t have endings. This is the first one that’s not been finished because it hasn’t got a start. All because what Dad said was a fat lot of use .

