



# **Andrus Kivirähk**

ESTONIA

**Andrus Kivirähk** (1970) is a playwright, topical satirist, screenwriter and author of adult and children's prose. He graduated from the University of Tartu in journalism and is the most commanding and prolific figure on Estonia's literary scene today.

Kivirähk has won many major awards, including the IBBY Honour List in 2008. His children's stories are known for their rich fantasy and unique humour. Kivirähk's style is straightforward, his stories fast-paced, and their casts of characters colourful and filled with surprises.

When I think about Andrus Kivirähk's literary works, I immediately envision magic realism - but an Estonian version, in this case. He takes the Estonian landscape, its people, even things (such as the children's novel Oscar and the Things) and puts them together with a very "Kivirähkesque" sense of humour, a touch of the unreal, animism, and an adequate dose of psychology. His style is light and simple, but it is the unexpected ideas and connections that make his pieces so unusual and loved by readers. (Anna Michalczuk, translator)



## Sirli, Siim and the Secrets

Illustrator: Ilmar Trull  
Varrak 2006, 192 pp  
ISBN: 9789985312247  
fiction, storybook  
Age: 10+  
Rights sold: French, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Slovenian

### Awards:

2010 Children and Young Adult Jury (*Bērnu un jauniešu žūrija*), Latvia,  
2nd place (Grades 5-7)  
1999 5 Best-Designed Estonian  
Children's Books

*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 building 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; the mother, who occasionally runs away to a majestic castle to be treated as royalty; and the father, who loves competing as the famous boxer "Ironfist". The eccentric building caretaker dreams of becoming the Prince of the Waters, while only the writer, Sheep, lacks any vision at all - because of which he grows bitter and callous.

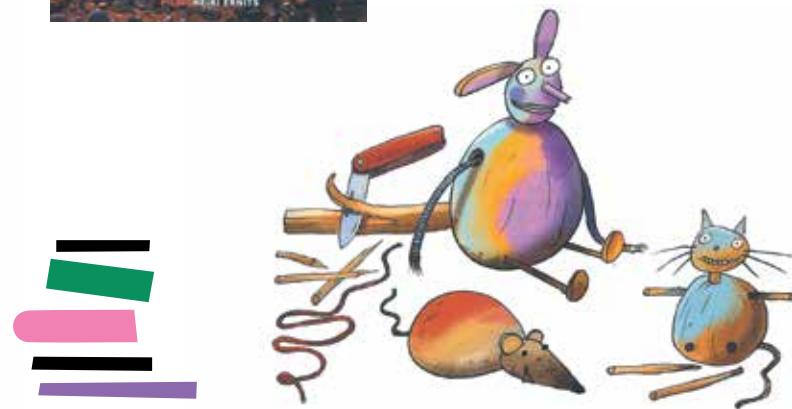


## Poo and Spring

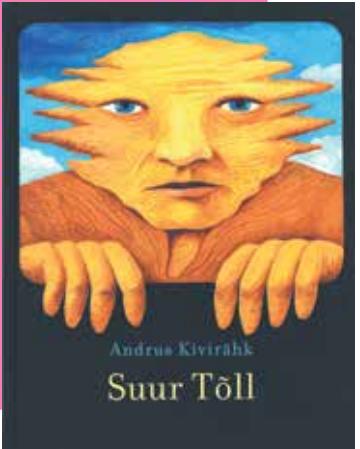
Illustrator: Heiki Ernits  
Varrak 2009, 95 pp  
ISBN: 9789985319727  
fiction, storybook  
Age: 6+  
Rights sold: Finnish, German, Low German, Latvian

### Awards:

2013 Jānis Baltsvilks Prize, Latvia  
2010 Nukits Competition, 1st place



*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 grows new green fur in the spring, naturally! Or what about when poop and a dandelion meet in the springtime? Everything that can happen in a kindergarten classroom can happen in this book, too!



## Big Toell

Illustrator: Jüri Arrak  
Varrak 2014, 51 pp  
ISBN: 9789985331040  
fiction, storybook  
Age: 10+  
Rights sold: Latvian

**Awards:**  
2015 The White Raven



*Big Toell* – an ancient Estonian hero – is a quiet and hard-working giant. He passes his days by doing chores on his island home with his wife, Piret, and their horse, living an untroubled life. Blissful days go by as they farm the land and help their fellow Estonians. Every day when Big Toell goes home, he eats his fill of Piret’s cooking and lies down to rest for the night. But one day, the devil Vanapagan, who constantly stirs trouble, shows up on the island. When foes also invade the island, Big Toell really has his work cut out for him.

The tale of Big Toell has fascinated many an Estonian writer. Andrus Kivirähk’s version of the story is the newest and the wittiest of these efforts to recount the hero’s adventures. The book’s strong and vividly colourful illustrations are based on a 1980 animated film made by the famed Estonian painter Jüri Arrak.





## Oskar and the Things

Illustrator: Anne Pikkov  
Film Distribution 2015, 296 pp  
ISBN: 9789949386451  
fiction, storybook  
Age: 7+  
Rights sold: English, Latvian, Polish,  
Slovenian

### Awards:

- 2016 Tartu Prize for Children's Literature (Childhood Prize)
- 2016 Eduard Vilde Literary Award
- 2015 Good Children's Book
- 2015 5 Best-Designed Children's Books, Special prize for perfect harmony of form and content
- 2015 25 Best-Designed Estonian Books



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

Luckily, the boy manages to find a way out of the dismal situation. He crafts a telephone out of a block of wood and uses it to call all kinds of different things: be they a bored iron, a rhyming trashcan, or a red balloon that gets tangled in the crown of a birch tree and ultimately becomes Oskar's best friend. Soon, everything around him has come to life!



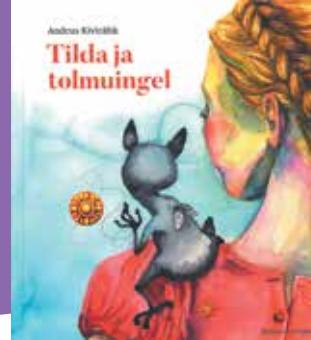
## Carnival and Potato Salad

Illustrator: Heiki Ernits  
Varrak 2015, 128 pp  
ISBN: 9789985333396  
fiction, storybook  
Age: 6+  
Rights sold: Finnish, Latvian

### Awards:

2016 Nukits Competition, 1st place for illustrations, 2nd place for text

In *Carnival and Potato Salad*, Kivirähk continues the style of storytelling he left off with in his extremely popular collection of children's tales titled *Poo and Spring*. As usual for Kivirähk's stories, familiar everyday objects often get fresh starts in life – an eraser can become a football, or a pillow can be a teacher. Readers are given a close look at the tribulations of a white dress shirt and the worries of a button that falls off a boy's trousers while he is playing. Even a vacuum who happened to read a book has no problem heading to the banks of the Limpopo River to save an elephant calf from a crocodile. Each and every thing in Kivirähk's stories has a task to fulfil, undoubtedly pointing children's fantasies in a new direction.



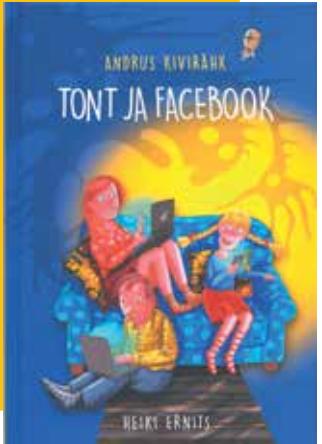
## Tilda and the Dust Angel

Illustrator: Takinada  
FD Distribution 2018, 141 pp  
ISBN: 9789949724802  
fiction, storybook  
Age: 9+  
Rights sold: Latvian, Polish

### Awards:

2019 Tartu Prize for Children's Literature (Childhood Prize), nominee  
2019 Järje Hoidja Award of the Tallinn Central Library  
2018 Annual Children's Literature Award of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia  
2018 Good Children's Book

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. Suddenly, the girl starts recalling memories about her father: his green eyes and reddish beard, their trips to the zoo, and playing gleefully. Thanks to the Dust Angel, the girl even starts to see her mother in a new light.



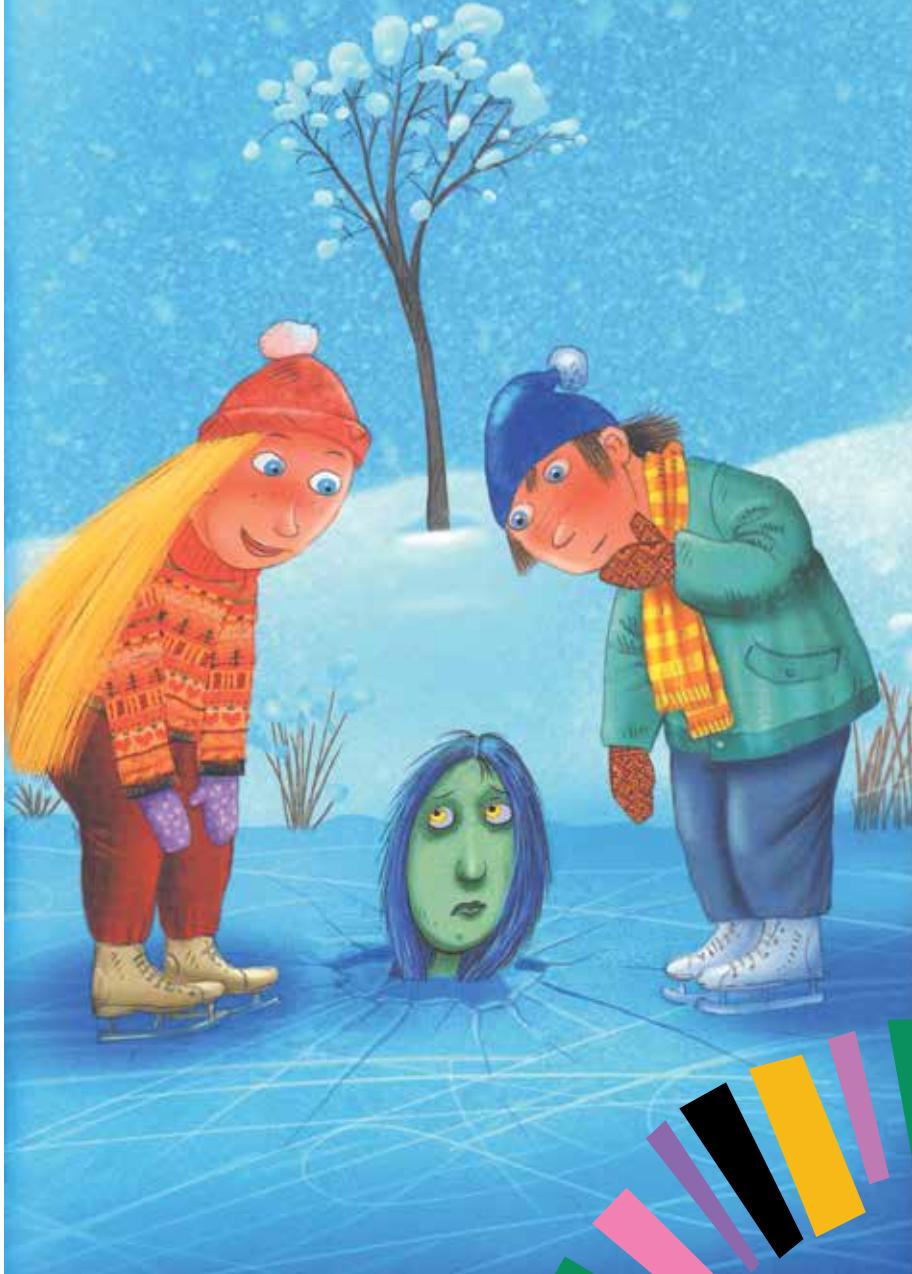
## The Ghost and Facebook

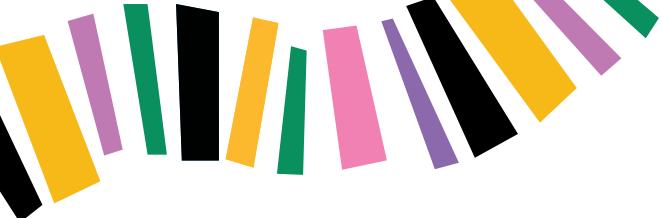
Illustrator: Heiki Ernits  
Varrak 2019, 128 pp  
ISBN: 9789985347225  
fiction, storybook  
Age: 6+  
Rights sold: Hungarian, Latvian

### Awards:

2020 Nukits Competition, 1st place for text and illustrations  
2019 Annual Children's Literature Award of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia, nominee  
2019 Good Children's Book

The cast of characters in Andrus Kivirähk's new collection of children's stories includes ghosts and laptops, dogs and cats, kids and grown-ups, sauna whisks and caterpillars. They build birdhouses, go to plays, grow nettles, and take trips to The Avocado. A year simply flies by when you are surrounded by good friends and exciting individuals. You are made stronger by your escapades and find yourself quite many an experience richer. Perhaps there are even readers with enough resolve to extract and ponder a thing or two from between the lines of Kivirähk's humorous and fantastical writing!





**Andrus Kivirähk**

## From **Big Toell**

This is the tale of Big Toell. Why was he called Toell? Who knows! Why is a lake a lake and a pine a pine? Why is dirt dirt and a rock a rock? So it has always been since long, long ago, and no one troubles themselves with wondering why.

Why was he called Big? Because he was big, that's all. Very big. There was no point inviting him to come and visit – he wouldn't have fit into a single house. He wouldn't have even fit in the yard. Not only the yard – he wouldn't have fit through the gate! He could easily step over the fence, of course, but then he would have trampled a shed or the sauna, no doubt. Not to mention the hens and roosters or a cat. And Toell did not want that; he was a good-hearted man.

What's more – why would you need to invite Toell over? You don't invite the sea to come visit now, do you? Nor a juniper tree into a pasture. They are where they are. You yourself can go and see them every now and then. People went to see Toell the same way; went to watch him ploughing and sowing his land. You would not go up very close to him, of course, otherwise you would get in his way and interrupt what he was doing. People would watch him from afar. Toell was so big anyway that you could see him from far away; even from across a forest. Just like the Sun or the Moon.

Toell had a horse, too; one even bigger than he was. It was quite the sight to see; no one knew where he got such a thing. But where does the sea get its waves and the sky its clouds? They are simply there.

And Toell had a wife as well, named Piret. She was just about the same size as Toell. Piret would do chores at home and in the garden. When she watered the cabbages at night, you could hear the thunderous splashing from the other end of the island.



I can't tell you what the horse's name was. Not that Toell ever called it by name, of course. Toell wasn't all that much of a talker. Wherever he was up to this or that, you could always hear a rustling and a rattling, as if waves were crashing on the sea or a strong wind was swooshing through the treetops. Sometimes the sound would be as gentle and sleepy as could be – almost like on a quiet summer evening; but sometimes, the thunder and roar would swell so loud. That would happen when something made Toell angry. Then, it would seem as if a gale was about to be unleashed; as if a storm was snapping age-old trees in half and lightning was striking shale.

But that would happen rarely. Toell had a friendly nature.

Excerpt translated by Adam Cullen



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Literature Centre

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Photo: Dmitri Kotjuh



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