



John the Skeleton's Goings-On

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Awards:

2023 Childrens', Young Adults' and Parents' Jury (Bērnu, jauniešu un vecāku žūrija), 2th place (age 9+)

2022 Bologna Children's Book Fair Illustrators Exhibition winner

2021 Tartu Prize for Children's Literature

2020 5 Best-Designed Estonian Children's Books, Certificate of Merit

2020 5 Best-Designed Estonian Children's Books, Special Prize of the Estonian Children's Literature Centre

2020 Nominee of the Annual Children's Literature Award of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia

The skeleton model used for teaching anatomy at school is sent into retirement. Gramps reckons that every hardworking employee deserves to relax after years spent on the job, so he brings Juhani the skeleton back to his farm. Also there are Gramma, a hen and a rooster, a cat and a dog, and even the old couple's grandchildren from time to time. Gramps takes the skeleton pretty much everywhere he goes, be it to trim the apple trees, listen to a bedtime story, or hear the way the lake sings. John is unbelievably happy, and so is everyone else around him - specially the grandkids!

"Skillful balancing between black humour and nice jokes. The choice of one strong colour and black and white illustrations combined make a perfect combination that lifts the text to another level."

- Jury of the 2021 "5 Most Beautiful Children's Books"



pp. 34-37



John and a Pink Pony Help the Kids to Be Brave

Every now and then, the grandchildren get afraid of the dark. They don't dare to fall asleep because of all the boogeyes, ghouls, and demons that might be staring at them through the window. Or even worse, might wiggle their way through a crack and climb beneath the kids' beds! They know very well that you have to close your eyes if you want to go to the dreamland, but still don't feel brave enough. Gramps chuckles and explains that boogeyes, ghouls, and demons are just ordinary boogers that someone picked and flicked away, and are venturing out into the world in search of new noses. In fact, they're all very friendly and fun and no-one should be afraid of them.

Yet the kids are still afraid. Especially the girl. She hugs her pink plastic pony tight, because that gives her courage. Then, she comes up with the brilliant plan to stick the safety pony underneath her bed. She reckons that in that case not a single old booger will dare to crawl down there. At the same time, the boy realizes he's forgetfully picked another booger from his own nose. He's terrified—that means it's still close by and will no doubt try to stretch out under his bed for the night!

So, the boy asks Gramps to let John stay under his bed for the night. "Well, sure, if'n he's not against it . . ." Gramps and Gramps both drawl. John himself also agrees. And so, that's the arrangement for the night: John under the boy's bed and the pink pony underneath the girl's. By morning, the children have forgotten their fears and the next night they don't even need help from the safety pony or the safety skeleton. The pony snuggles with the girl in bed and Gramps sets John back in his usual armchair on the porch .

John Rescues Snails

After every summer downpour, the garden paths are crawling with snails. Everyone in the family tries not to step on them. "They've got their own lives to live, too, y'know," Gramps says. The boy and girl rush to the snails' rescue, carefully moving them to places where they won't be underfoot. However, the kids can't seem to decide what might be the safest place for the little creatures. One snail has found refuge all on its own: crawling up John's shinbone.

The kids set other snails on top of John, too. Afterward, the skeleton looks like he has little brown pimples crawling all over his bones! Even so, it's not a totally safe place: before long, a big jay flies out of the forest and snatches up one of the snails in its beak.



Reading sample

pp. 40–43

John Helps Make a Snow Monkey

Grams makes a different snow sculpture every winter. She used to only make snowmen, but got tired of them after a while and decided to come up with a new character every year. The last one was a dog, before that was a dragon, and this year she decides to make a monkey.

A snow monkey should have long arms and legs, but those aren't easy to make- they keep falling off the body, so Grams has to consider giving the monkey shorter limbs. Then, she spots John watching the children sledding. "John, would you help me make a snow monkey?" she asks. And of course, John gives her the most agreeing look he can muster.

So, Grams goes back to square one. She packs snow all around the skeleton, using him as a support. He turns into such an amazing snow monkey that Gramps goes to get his camera. He can't bare the thought that John might otherwise never be able to see how incredible he looks.

John stays inside the snow monkey for several days. He does get a little bored, but remains patient and proud because he alone is responsible for making such an unbelievable figure! The skeleton is also happy by knowing that Gramps will show him the photos as soon as he's out. Luckily, the weather turns warm soon, the snow slips off of John, and he sees the light of day again. The moment that Gramps notices the monkey has melted away, he trots straight over to show the skeleton his photo.



John Hears the Lake Singing

"Lakesong!" Gramps declares one morning in March after taking his walk around the lake in the woods. There has to be thin ice and a strong wind for the lake to start singing. Wind breaks up the ice and jiggles the pieces around as it pleases. Dancing in the water, the chunks of ice rub against one another and make a delicate crystal sound. That's the lake's song—beautiful, fragile, and special.

The lake rarely ever sings, according to Grams and Gramps. And as soon as the wind dies down, the singing stops. Grams's hands even start to tremble a little as she hurries to find coats and hats and mittens for the grandchildren while they eat their porridge. Before long, they're all outside and making their way towards the lake. "But what about John?" the grandchildren ask.

Gramps goes to the porch and picks John up. He realizes he's not strong enough to carry the skeleton through the damp springtime snow all the way to the lake and back. So, the boy offers to let him use his runner sled. Gramps sets John down on top of the sled and secures him with rope so he won't fall off during the ride. Now his hands are trembling as well because he's worried about whether they'll make it there or not.

The dog and cat have been ready for ages and are waiting impatiently for the group to set off. Once they get closer to the lake, Gramps and Grams ask the kids to hush their chatter. Everyone walks on in silence. Finally, they come to a halt and listen in awe for a long time. When the wind gets a little weaker and the singing ends, they go back home. The kids still don't say a word as they walk. And John, riding along on the boy's sled, is infinitely thankful for having been brought along.

A neighbor-woman had showed up to visit meanwhile. "Where're you all comin' from?" she asks as their strange procession reaches the yard.

"Church," Gramps replies.

Reading sample

pp. 50–53

John and Gramps Plan to Climb in a Coffin Together

“Dunno if we’re ever gon’ see one ‘nother again. Already got years ‘n years in me and health’s not all it used t’be, either,” Gramps sighs as he walks their guests to the door. Once they’re gone, Gramps grumbles: “What’re we to be puttin’ in the coffin with you, then? John?”

Gramps is beet-red with embarrassment when she thinks about how all their friends and relatives will see Gramps and John cuddling cozily in their coffin at the funeral. Even now, Gramps’s lips pull into a grin as he imagines how after hundreds of years, archeologists will dig up two hugging skeletons, drill and study them, and write scientific articles about their discovery. All the while, his and John’s jaws will have just the tiniest grins as they keep what’d really gone on a secret.

After a little bit of thought, Gramps decides that if drunkards are buried with a bottle of booze, then sure—why not let two best friends be closed up in a coffin together? Gramps herself, their kids, and their grandkids can’t go along if they’re still alive. But John can, because he’s a skeleton, too! John is all on board with Gramps’s plan and does his darndest to show that he plans to stay on his very best behavior while he’s in the coffin during the funeral. That way, he’ll save Gramps from at least a little bit of embarrassment.

