



## “Storybook”

Text by [Anti Saar](#)

Illustrated by [Jüri Mildeberg](#)

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Storybook, fiction

Age: 10+

A chapter from the Storybook, “The Story of an Invention” is translated into Italian.

Young and talented Estonian writer Anti Saar’s Storybook contains ten philosophical tales of bizarre adults. Among these are Hillar, who takes a long time to work up momentum for everything he does; Vahur, who is practicing for a complete change of scenery; Jaanus, who is enthralled by water toys; Asko, who wishes to be average at everything; Timmy, who has lost his shadow; and others. The author smoothly and spiritedly mixes fantasy with reality, resulting in an exciting read and recognition for both children and adults.

The book is illustrated by one of Estonia’s most unique artists, Jüri Mildeberg.

Awards:

2016 5 Best-Designed Estonian Children’s Books

2016 25 Best-Designed Estonian Books

## Reading sample

Esko and Asko

Now, I want to tell you a story about two brothers. But first, I must make a short introduction about how one same habit or lesson can lead to very different outcomes.

Let's imagine, for instance, that you were given a bowl of porridge for breakfast every day since your first teeth poked out. But now, you've grown up, moved out of your mom and dad's house, and are starting a life of your own. What do you think you might have for breakfast from this point forward?

The thing is, scientists have determined that more likely than not, you'll hold onto your habits and chew on porridge every morning for the rest of your days. What's more—you'll get your own children used to eating it, too. You'll want nothing else, nor will you even know to want anything else. But pay close attention: scientists say it's almost just as probable that by that time, you'll have had porridge poured up to your ears and will never want to see it again, much less eat it. You might not even have anything to eat on the first few mornings of your independent life, until you discover that for breakfast, you can also make a cheese sandwich, fry eggs, have toast and jam, or... cereal. Yes, for heaven's sake—why not cereal? As long as it isn't that awful porridge.

But now, I'll tell you a story about two brothers—Esko and Asko. These two boys were forced to be the best at everything. Or, well—I don't know if forced is the right word; but they were certainly coaxed and cajoled into being the best. When they were still just tiny boys playing at the playground, their father would always say to them: "Well, boys—are you brave enough to climb way up there?" Or: "Let's see who can swing the very highest on the swing set!" Or even: "Do you call that a sandcastle? Make a bigger one!" And sometimes: "Should we race? Oh, come on, now—that little girl can't be faster than you two, can she?!"

When Asko and Esko started attending school, they were put in different classes so that each could be the best in his own.

"You'd better memorize those multiplication tables," their father told them—no matter that it wouldn't be taught until the next grade. "Otherwise, you can't go outside to play!" And their mother would say: "If you give your report tomorrow without making a single mistake, you'll get the first pancake for yourself." Or even: "Don't go to Mattias' house to play—he has bad grades, and it could have a negative effect on you!" And it wasn't even uncommon for their parents to say: "You got two whole Bs this year. You're certainly not allowed to use the tablet with grades like that!"

And so on and so forth.

Esko and Asko's parents had convinced themselves that their sons had to become government ministers, famous athletes, or the CEOs of big companies—and if possible, then all those things at once.

The boys did the best they could, but alas, neither of them became superstars or big businessmen.

Esko, who had never stopped to wonder why a certain piece of knowledge was good, or where a particular skill should be applied, forgot everything he had learned in school—everything except for knowing that he had to be first.

And so, he grew up to become the kind of person who always pushes and shoves in line for the bus, and who pokes and prods all the peaches in the fruit section of the grocery store before he picks out the softest of them all. Poor Esko didn't have very many friends. He only wanted to talk to the richest, most famous, and smartest people there were. However, those people found that Esko was somehow... boring.

"I don't really need them, anyway," Esko finally reckoned, and decided to at least clear out his own home of everything average. He moved all his possessions into the living room, because it was the biggest. The only piece of furniture he kept was the wardrobe, because it was the tallest; the only home appliance he kept was the television, because it was the most expensive; and the only book he kept was a lexicon of Spanish church history, because it was the thickest. He sent every pot and pan he had



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off to the landfill, except for his saucepan, which could hold the most; and the only utensil he left in the house was a three-pronged fork, which was the oldest. Esko's big closet was almost emptied out entirely: he only held onto his longest pants, his warmest socks, and his most colorful shirt. If only Esko had realized how badly that shirt matched with his only pants and only socks! But unfortunately, there was no one to point that out to him, and he would hardly have cared about it himself.

It's a sad story, and it gets only sadder. The last I heard, Esko was giving serious thought to cutting off all his fingers except for the middle ones, which are the longest. And to tell the truth, I have no idea where it all might end if things keep going in that direction. If you happen to be the most patient and the most well-meaning person in the world, then perhaps you could have a word with Esko and try to talk some sense into him?

Yet, now I must also tell you about his other brother—Asko. He, just like Esko, had grown up believing that he had to be the very best, the fastest, the most talented, and that he also had to become something great.

Do you remember what I said about breakfast habits? It turned out that after Asko graduated and left home, he felt tired to the bone from all his parents' hounding, coaxing, and threats. At long last, I can live the way my heart desires, Asko thought in relief. And what Asko's heart desired was the most average life you could have. Well, not the "most"—simply average. He became an electrician, because he knew that would pay him an average salary. He married a young woman of average beauty and intelligence, and they had two children—the average family size in their country. He was worried when his children were given any Ds at school, but he was also worried when they received any As. In Asko's opinion, B- was the most suitable grade. And when the school held an athletics day, Asko instructed his children to make sure they finished in the middle of every race, and that they always landed in the middle of the sand pit during the long jump competition.

Asko's family watched four hours of television a day, they washed their hair three times a week, and spent twelve days a year on holiday—Asko had care-

fully looked up all the average figures online.

Only Asko's dreams were below average, and the only part of him that was above average was the dedication he gave to making himself and his family average.

When Asko turned seventy-two years old, he called all his children to him (as you remember, there were only two of them, but I'd like this story to sound a little like a fairy tale at this point), and he said: "My children, I am old and going to die soon. The average Estonian male lives to the age of seventy-two. Mourn me mediocresly, keep your desires in check, and live your lives without standing out."

By all assumptions, Asko should have breathed his last breath right there, but what do you know—he didn't die at all! To the astonishment of himself and everyone else, he lived in rather good health for another thirty-five years.

When Asko became the oldest man in the town, the local newspaper wanted to write an article about him. Yet, Asko turned the journalists away. He wanted to be ordinary, and was ashamed of his outstanding age.

The poor man could never have expected the exceptional fate that still lay ahead: modest old Asko would have to die a most unusual death. One day when old Asko was shuffling around his front yard, a crocodile appeared and gobbled him up. It was absolutely baffling how such a warm-climate creature could end up in Asko's yard, but so it happened. What's more, the story was discussed for a long time and in many places near and far—Asko's death was even on the national news.

Translated by Adam Cullen

