

Biography: Lauris Gundars (1958) is a Latvian playwright, scriptwriter, and director. Gundars has studied Law at the University of Latvia, Theatre Directing in Saint-Petersburg and Scriptwriting in Moscow. He is the author of *Dramatica or Rational Poetics*, a book on mastering tools for drama, which showcases his deep knowledge of dramatic history and theory and his wide-ranging experience in the field. He is also head of the Lauris Gundars' Writing Workshop, tutor at numerous European international writing workshops. Lauris Gundars teaches drama and communication at Latvian Academy of Arts, RISEBA University, and Riga Stradiņš University. He is the creator of MA playwriting program at the Liepāja University, and host at the "THEATRE ATTIC" radio show. He is a member of Latvia's Theatre Labour Association (since 2001) and the Latvian Writers' Union (since 1995).

Synopsis: Buzzy and her Grandpa Whale are back with a third book. The first story about their adventures was "Hello, Whale!" (2017), which was awarded the Jānis Baltvilks Prize for Children's Literature. Next came "Whale's Vote" (2018). These books have been translated into German, Russian, and Korean. Buzzy is truly a strange girl. She doesn't like the internet or screens, but Whale is lost in the internet to the point where he has simply disappeared. He's gone! He must be brought back, and it will not be possible without the help of that very same internet.

Excerpt

Valis was gone.

Mom said he was dead. But Buzzy didn't want to say that, nor think it, especially because he was alive. Whale moved like himself and even looked like himself. And still this person was only similar to her Grandpa.

They all saw Whale, but Whale no longer saw them as before. Sometimes it seemed he didn't see anything around him. Other times, Buzzy thought this person was more like a zombie in a movie, but she would never ever say such a thing about Whale. More than once Buzzy had heard stories in the park about a person being called a bad thing and they then became this bad thing. She had never actually seen this happen with her own eyes, but she also didn't want to, especially if this kind of change would happen to Whale. Whale was not a zombie. But he really was starting to resemble one. And it was Buzzy's fault. And now it was her job to figure out how to bring Whale back to life.

If that is even possible, of course.

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That morning, when things were really turning bad, Buzzy reminded Mom that all this had actually started about three months ago. It was barely noticeable, and because of her Mom, she had just laughed it off.

"A person is not a mobile telephone!", she blurted out, as she was running out the door for work. "You can't feel things like that, you just think you can. You are imagining it."

Right at that moment Buzzy understood perfectly that she actually was very much like a mobile telephone. She also feels invisible waves, which carry little bells into her and make them ring, and these are not imaginary bells. Buzzy has always felt Whale's signals particularly well. Grandpa has never cried out loud, thrown his hands and things about, or slammed the door in a fit of anger. He is a strong person, according to Mom, but Buzzy knows that Whale would have done all of those things if he were alone. Whale held it in and

was strong for her sake. He smiled, even when he wanted to cry, mourn or just quietly mope in the corner. For the past few years already, Buzzy had felt the waves inside of Whale as her own. She didn't really know what to do with them, and only realized on this day that it was possible her Grandpa wouldn't be dead and gone if she had revealed to him how much she felt his thoughts. If she had told him that she wanted to talk about sadness and sorrow. They did talk about happiness and quite often, but people were allowed to hide their waves of sadness, according to her equally strong Mom, who was actually the guilty one in the beginning.

It happened for the first time three or four months ago. Mom had laughed at Whale's confusion with internet banking. He hadn't understood all the steps for making an online payment.

"An old bookkeeper in the modern world..." she mumbled.

Buzzy wouldn't have even noticed what her Mom had said – Whale really had worked his whole life as a bookkeeper, and that little comment could hardly have been considered mocking, but a little bell sounded in Buzzy's head, she sensed Whale's internal waves. Her Grandpa suddenly became sad. Of course, he smiled anyway, because he was supposed to be strong.

A few days later, Whale again felt out of touch with the life that existed in the new tablet he had received for his birthday.

"But it's so easy..." Mom rolled her eyes the same way she had done whenever Buzzy didn't understand something simple. "It's not quantum physics..."

Mom is the only one in our house who knows what quantum physics is, because she's a math teacher who has to know that, but once again she didn't notice that with these few words she had hit her father where it hurt. Whale just doesn't want to be old and stupid, because compared to Buzzy, for whom "everything is still ahead of her", as her Mom and Dad tell her every day, Grandpas are apparently no longer able to improve or change. Buzzy has heard this more than once too.

The second time, Whale's waves of sadness were stronger and lasted longer than the first time. Buzzy was even scared that he may start to get old on the inside, as had happened twice before. Everything turned out fine the other times, but after a third unsuccessful attempt with the tablet, Whale didn't go near it. Buzzy's antennas sensed not just Whale's unhappiness, but also the start of his aging. She had to do something.

Considering this now, Buzzy should have simply talked to Whale. She would have told him she felt his sadness loud and clear, she would have reminded him that Buzzy knew that old on the outside doesn't mean old on the inside. And that they both knew that computer knowledge was nothing compared to real life knowledge. Still, Whale had started to doubt himself and Buzzy found this so silly. It was more likely that Mom should doubt whether she was as smart as her own Dad.

Buzzy only understood this much later, but at that moment, Whale was so unhappy, and Buzzy had to do something to make things better. She had to do it quietly and secretly, as it is done between strong people: they don't want anyone to notice that they are really the same as the not-so-strong people.

Buzzy's own computer was just a boring box, in which even games which were interesting in the beginning became boring in no time. Sooner or later they all started to repeat. But the most boring thing was that – unlike her and Whale's activities – they couldn't touch, smell or feel anything on the computer. Like the salt crystals she and Whale grew in a jar, like the volcano they made from stinky vinegar and soda, like the electric shocks from their homemade power generating machine. The computer didn't transmit waves that had ringing sounds inside either, and that it is why, to her Dad's great surprise, Buzzy never tried to get near the computer and its completely lifeless mouse. That is also why Buzzy wasn't very helpful to Whale in explaining the world of computers and the internet. She had to find another way to stop his sadness.

Buzzy quickly came up with the idea of pretending and she liked it – if someone less knowledgeable than Whale asked him to explain the secrets of the tablet and the internet, he would feel smart and young, as much as he actually was and is. Still, Buzzy couldn't appear to be a total dummy. Whale knew that Buzzy knew something about the box, so the person chosen to play the dummy was Buzzy's best friend Signe.

Signe is actually not a dummy at all, she is even pretty smart – sometimes Buzzy gets quite angry about the long periods of time Signe sits at the boring box instead of going for a walk in the park, but Signe does have a very useful skill: she is very good at pretending to be someone she is not. Buzzy likes to recall the time Signe played a dog at a birthday party – a real, barking dog, ready to lick you anytime. And Signe knew how to speak in the same amusing way as the lady at the flower shop, and how to jump around like a real kangaroo,

and...But at that moment, there was no time to remember these happy moments -- there was work to be done.

"No problem: my Vizma thinks that all I can do is chase colourful little balls around the screen," Signe calmed Buzzy. Whale and Signe's Grandma Vizma have been best friends since last summer, and he could ask Vizma if Signe was really such a big dummy.

"But I also know how to log in..." and Signe started throwing out words which clearly had to do with the internet, but Buzzy didn't have the slightest clue what the words meant.

For a moment, Buzzy became worried. It was hard to believe that such a smart person would be able to play a good dummy, but Signe had promised for the sake of her friend and her Grandpa's sake to be a real baby. Signe also understood something about sadness -- until the moment when Whale started to greet Vizma in the park, she had also felt it from her Grandma, but since both grandparents started spending every free moment together -- wandering around the city together, as they called it -- Vizma's waves of sadness had completely disappeared.

Buzzy's plan worked better than she could have imagined -- Signe was an excellent dummy, and Whale didn't suspect she was pretending. On the evening of that same day, Whale was once again playing on his tablet like before, but Buzzy's antennas no longer detected any sadness.

The next day, Signe arrived first thing in the morning.

"I don't understand anything again..." she pulled her pink computer out of her bag. "What is this here? And why this?"

Buzzy played the dummy too. She winked with one eye at Whale after he winked at her, secretly boasting, without Signe noticing, that he felt like a real professor. The rest of the day turned out to be the most boring day of Buzzy's life. Signe had so deeply immersed herself in the role of dummy that she wouldn't give Whale a second's rest. With their noses so deep in the tablet, the two of them hadn't even noticed they had left the house, walked down to the park and walked around it. At one point, all three of them and the tablet walked into the baby swings. Although Buzzy didn't like it at all anymore, she laughed along with the other kids in the park and their grown-ups about Whale and Signe – in a good way, not a bad way. Everyone knows how great it is to get caught up doing nice things. Of course, Buzzy didn't let on to anyone that there was nothing nice there this time, that Signe was kind of playing a trick on her Grandpa, but for a good cause.

Buzzy was happy that the inseparable trio was finally broken up by Vizma, Signe's Grandma.

"Do you darlings even know where you are?" she swiftly took the tablet away from under Whale's and Signe's noses.

At this moment, Buzzy heard completely different bells in her head – not the bells from Whale's waves, but ones which she had never heard or felt before. Buzzy was shocked that both computer friends were truly surprised. They really hadn't noticed they were sitting at Vizma's table which was laid out for lunch.

"Now there are two zombies..." thought Buzzy out of the blue, but she quickly rid these words from her mind. She couldn't take the chance that not just saying it out loud, but even just thinking the word could change a person into one.

It's possible that Buzzy shouldn't have rid these words from her mind, nor silenced the new surprising bells in her head, but she only thought of that much later -- only then, when Whale was no longer the real Whale. She thought of this when it was already too late.

But that time at the table, Whale had remained the real Whale and Signe was the same Signe. Vizma's delicious lunches are the miracle cure for forgetting about anything else in the world, besides which, on that day, she served Buzzy's favorite little hamburgers with brown gravy.

"There were a few things we had not explored," Signe pulled a long face, when after lunch Buzzy quietly said a big "Thank you!" to her for making Whale so happy. It turned out that, not only did Signe really like her role as the little dummy, but they had unexpectedly discovered things which even Signe had not known before, whose beautiful and very clever names seemed to Buzzy to still be less important than a chemistry experiment or a proper horsing around in the park.

"We just needed to chase away Whale's sadness," she reminded her friend. And we succeeded, more than adequately. Whale was no longer sad, but in the evening, with an air of arrogance and rather out of the blue, he shocked her still ever very smart Mom.

"But it's so easy," he put the tablet down in front of her, when Mom couldn't figure out how to put together the new food processor, and Dad had not yet returned home from work. Whale had quickly found a video on the internet where it was all explained in detail. He even managed to adjust something, so the smart Chinese girl started to explain about the food processor to Mom in a strange-sounding Latvian.

"It is very easy..." the beautiful girl smiled at Mom too, with a broad smile.

Mom was more surprised by Whale, not the Latvian-speaking Chinese woman, but neither he, nor Buzzy let on how satisfied they were by Mom's surprise.

Buzzy had to avoid showing her joy too loudly or noticeably, so Whale would not suspect in the least how he had actually arrived at his wisdom. Surely that's not important, if the person has become wise. Buzzy rejoiced for two reasons: because of her cleverness, no one at home was sad anymore, but she was more secretly happy that she had not joined Whale in his sadness, but rather found a way for everyone to be happy.

Everything was great, truly great – nothing, absolutely nothing could have predicted that very soon things would no longer be good, that they would even be many times worse than the night before last, when Whale was just sad. When he was still alive.