

Leo Tolstoy



Childhood

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goodpress@okpublishing.info

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The Tutor, Karl Ivanitch

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On the 12th of August, 18-- (just three days after my tenth birthday, when I had been given such wonderful presents), I was awakened at seven o'clock in the morning by Karl Ivanitch slapping the wall close to my head with a fly-flap made of sugar paper and a stick. He did this so roughly that he hit the image of my patron saint suspended to the oaken back of my bed, and the dead fly fell down on my curls. I peeped out from under the coverlet, steadied the still shaking image with my hand, flicked the dead fly on to the floor, and gazed at Karl Ivanitch with sleepy, wrathful eyes. He, in a parti-coloured wadded dressing-gown fastened about the waist with a wide belt of the same material, a red knitted cap adorned with a tassel, and soft slippers of goat skin, went on walking round the walls and taking aim at, and slapping, flies.

"Suppose," I thought to myself, "that I am only a small boy, yet why should he disturb me? Why does he not go killing flies around Woloda's bed? No; Woloda is older than I, and I am the youngest of the family, so he torments me. That is what he thinks of all day long--how to tease me. He knows very well that he has woken me up and frightened me, but he pretends not to notice it. Disgusting brute! And his dressing-gown and cap and tassel too--they are all of them disgusting."

While I was thus inwardly venting my wrath upon Karl Ivanitch, he had passed to his own bedstead, looked at his watch (which hung suspended in a little shoe sewn with

bugles), and deposited the fly-flap on a nail, then, evidently in the most cheerful mood possible, he turned round to us.

"Get up, children! It is quite time, and your mother is already in the drawing-room," he exclaimed in his strong German accent. Then he crossed over to me, sat down at my feet, and took his snuff-box out of his pocket. I pretended to be asleep. Karl Ivanitch sneezed, wiped his nose, flicked his fingers, and began amusing himself by teasing me and tickling my toes as he said with a smile, "Well, well, little lazy one!"

For all my dread of being tickled, I determined not to get out of bed or to answer him, but hid my head deeper in the pillow, kicked out with all my strength, and strained every nerve to keep from laughing.

"How kind he is, and how fond of us!" I thought to myself. "Yet to think that I could be hating him so just now!"

I felt angry, both with myself and with Karl Ivanitch, I wanted to laugh and to cry at the same time, for my nerves were all on edge.

"Leave me alone, Karl!" I exclaimed at length, with tears in my eyes, as I raised my head from beneath the bed-clothes.

Karl Ivanitch was taken aback, He left off tickling my feet, and asked me kindly what the matter was, Had I had a disagreeable dream? His good German face and the sympathy with which he sought to know the cause of my tears made them flow the faster. I felt conscience-stricken, and could not understand how, only a minute ago, I had been hating Karl, and thinking his dressing-gown and cap and tassel disgusting. On the contrary, they looked

eminently lovable now. Even the tassel seemed another token of his goodness. I replied that I was crying because I had had a bad dream, and had seen Mamma dead and being buried. Of course it was a mere invention, since I did not remember having dreamt anything at all that night, but the truth was that Karl's sympathy as he tried to comfort and reassure me had gradually made me believe that I HAD dreamt such a horrible dream, and so weep the more--though from a different cause to the one he imagined.

When Karl Ivanitch had left me, I sat up in bed and proceeded to draw my stockings over my little feet. The tears had quite dried now, yet the mournful thought of the invented dream was still haunting me a little. Presently Uncle [This term is often applied by children to old servants in Russia] Nicola came in--a neat little man who was always grave, methodical, and respectful, as well as a great friend of Karl's. He brought with him our clothes and boots--at least, boots for Woloda, and for myself the old detestable, be-ribanded shoes. In his presence I felt ashamed to cry, and, moreover, the morning sun was shining so gaily through the window, and Woloda, standing at the washstand as he mimicked Maria Ivanovna (my sister's governess), was laughing so loud and so long, that even the serious Nicola--a towel over his shoulder, the soap in one hand, and the basin in the other--could not help smiling as he said, "Will you please let me wash you, Vladimir Petrovitch?" I had cheered up completely.

"Are you nearly ready?" came Karl's voice from the schoolroom. The tone of that voice sounded stern now, and had nothing in it of the kindness which had just touched me

so much. In fact, in the schoolroom Karl was altogether a different man from what he was at other times. There he was the tutor. I washed and dressed myself hurriedly, and, a brush still in my hand as I smoothed my wet hair, answered to his call. Karl, with spectacles on nose and a book in his hand, was sitting, as usual, between the door and one of the windows. To the left of the door were two shelves--one of them the children's (that is to say, ours), and the other one Karl's own. Upon ours were heaped all sorts of books--lesson books and play books--some standing up and some lying down. The only two standing decorously against the wall were two large volumes of a *Histoire des Voyages*, in red binding. On that shelf could be seen books thick and thin and books large and small, as well as covers without books and books without covers, since everything got crammed up together anyhow when play time arrived and we were told to put the "library" (as Karl called these shelves) in order. The collection of books on his own shelf was, if not so numerous as ours, at least more varied. Three of them in particular I remember, namely, a German pamphlet (minus a cover) on Manuring Cabbages in Kitchen-Gardens, a History of the Seven Years' War (bound in parchment and burnt at one corner), and a Course of Hydrostatics. Though Karl passed so much of his time in reading that he had injured his sight by doing so, he never read anything beyond these books and *The Northern Bee*.

Another article on Karl's shelf I remember well. This was a round piece of cardboard fastened by a screw to a wooden stand, with a sort of comic picture of a lady and a hairdresser glued to the cardboard. Karl was very clever at

fixing pieces of cardboard together, and had devised this contrivance for shielding his weak eyes from any very strong light.

I can see him before me now--the tall figure in its wadded dressing-gown and red cap (a few grey hairs visible beneath the latter) sitting beside the table; the screen with the hairdresser shading his face; one hand holding a book, and the other one resting on the arm of the chair. Before him lie his watch, with a huntsman painted on the dial, a check cotton handkerchief, a round black snuff-box, and a green spectacle-case. The neatness and orderliness of all these articles show clearly that Karl Ivanitch has a clear conscience and a quiet mind.

Sometimes, when tired of running about the salon downstairs, I would steal on tiptoe to the schoolroom and find Karl sitting alone in his armchair as, with a grave and quiet expression on his face, he perused one of his favourite books. Yet sometimes, also, there were moments when he was not reading, and when the spectacles had slipped down his large aquiline nose, and the blue, half-closed eyes and faintly smiling lips seemed to be gazing before them with a curious expression. All would be quiet in the room--not a sound being audible save his regular breathing and the ticking of the watch with the hunter painted on the dial. He would not see me, and I would stand at the door and think: "Poor, poor old man! There are many of us, and we can play together and be happy, but he sits there all alone, and has nobody to be fond of him. Surely he speaks truth when he says that he is an orphan. And the story of his life, too--how terrible it is! I remember him telling it to Nicola, How

dreadful to be in his position!" Then I would feel so sorry for him that I would go to him, and take his hand, and say, "Dear Karl Ivanitch!" and he would be visibly delighted whenever I spoke to him like this, and would look much brighter.

On the second wall of the schoolroom hung some maps--mostly torn, but glued together again by Karl's hand. On the third wall (in the middle of which stood the door) hung, on one side of the door, a couple of rulers (one of them ours--much bescratched, and the other one his--quite a new one), with, on the further side of the door, a blackboard on which our more serious faults were marked by circles and our lesser faults by crosses. To the left of the blackboard was the corner in which we had to kneel when naughty. How well I remember that corner--the shutter on the stove, the ventilator above it, and the noise which it made when turned! Sometimes I would be made to stay in that corner till my back and knees were aching all over, and I would think to myself. "Has Karl Ivanitch forgotten me? He goes on sitting quietly in his arm-chair and reading his Hydrostatics, while I--!" Then, to remind him of my presence, I would begin gently turning the ventilator round. Or scratching some plaster off the wall; but if by chance an extra large piece fell upon the floor, the fright of it was worse than any punishment. I would glance round at Karl, but he would still be sitting there quietly, book in hand, and pretending that he had noticed nothing.

In the middle of the room stood a table, covered with a torn black oilcloth so much cut about with penknives that the edge of the table showed through. Round the table

stood unpainted chairs which, through use, had attained a high degree of polish. The fourth and last wall contained three windows, from the first of which the view was as follows, Immediately beneath it there ran a high road on which every irregularity, every pebble, every rut was known and dear to me. Beside the road stretched a row of lime-trees, through which glimpses could be caught of a wattled fence, with a meadow with farm buildings on one side of it and a wood on the other--the whole bounded by the keeper's hut at the further end of the meadow, The next window to the right overlooked the part of the terrace where the "grownups" of the family used to sit before luncheon. Sometimes, when Karl was correcting our exercises, I would look out of that window and see Mamma's dark hair and the backs of some persons with her, and hear the murmur of their talking and laughter. Then I would feel vexed that I could not be there too, and think to myself, "When am I going to be grown up, and to have no more lessons, but sit with the people whom I love instead of with these horrid dialogues in my hand?" Then my anger would change to sadness, and I would fall into such a reverie that I never heard Karl when he scolded me for my mistakes.

At last, on the morning of which I am speaking, Karl Ivanitch took off his dressing-gown, put on his blue frockcoat with its creased and crumpled shoulders, adjusted his tie before the looking-glass, and took us down to greet Mamma.

Mamma

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Mamma was sitting in the drawing-room and making tea. In one hand she was holding the tea-pot, while with the other one she was drawing water from the urn and letting it drip into the tray. Yet though she appeared to be noticing what she doing, in reality she noted neither this fact nor our entry.

However vivid be one's recollection of the past, any attempt to recall the features of a beloved being shows them to one's vision as through a mist of tears--dim and blurred. Those tears are the tears of the imagination. When I try to recall Mamma as she was then, I see, true, her brown eyes, expressive always of love and kindness, the small mole on her neck below where the small hairs grow, her white embroidered collar, and the delicate, fresh hand which so often caressed me, and which I so often kissed; but her general appearance escapes me altogether.

To the left of the sofa stood an English piano, at which my dark-haired sister Lubotshka was sitting and playing with manifest effort (for her hands were rosy from a recent washing in cold water) Clementi's "Etudes." Then eleven years old, she was dressed in a short cotton frock and white lace-frilled trousers, and could take her octaves only in arpeggio. Beside her was sitting Maria Ivanovna, in a cap adorned with pink ribbons and a blue shawl, Her face was red and cross, and it assumed an expression even more severe when Karl Ivanitch entered the room. Looking angrily at him without answering his bow, she went on beating time

with her foot and counting, "One, two, three--one, two, three," more loudly and commandingly than ever.

Karl Ivanitch paid no attention to this rudeness, but went, as usual, with German politeness to kiss Mamma's hand. She drew herself up, shook her head as though by the movement to chase away sad thoughts from her, and gave Karl her hand, kissing him on his wrinkled temple as he bent his head in salutation.

"I thank you, dear Karl Ivanitch," she said in German, and then, still using the same language asked him how we (the children) had slept. Karl Ivanitch was deaf in one ear, and the added noise of the piano now prevented him from hearing anything at all. He moved nearer to the sofa, and, leaning one hand upon the table and lifting his cap above his head, said with, a smile which in those days always seemed to me the perfection of politeness: "You, will excuse me, will you not, Natalia Nicolaevna?"

The reason for this was that, to avoid catching cold, Karl never took off his red cap, but invariably asked permission, on entering the drawing-room, to retain it on his head.

"Yes, pray replace it, Karl Ivanitch," said Mamma, bending towards him and raising her voice, "But I asked you whether the children had slept well?"

Still he did not hear, but, covering his bald head again with the red cap, went on smiling more than ever.

"Stop a moment, Mimi." said Mamma (now smiling also) to Maria Ivanovna. "It is impossible to hear anything."

How beautiful Mamma's face was when she smiled! It made her so infinitely more charming, and everything around her seemed to grow brighter! If in the more painful

moments of my life I could have seen that smile before my eyes, I should never have known what grief is. In my opinion, it is in the smile of a face that the essence of what we call beauty lies. If the smile heightens the charm of the face, then the face is a beautiful one. If the smile does not alter the face, then the face is an ordinary one. But if the smile spoils the face, then the face is an ugly one indeed.

Mamma took my head between her hands, bent it gently backwards, looked at me gravely, and said: "You have been crying this morning?"

I did not answer. She kissed my eyes, and said again in German: "Why did you cry?"

When talking to us with particular intimacy she always used this language, which she knew to perfection.

"I cried about a dream, Mamma" I replied, remembering the invented vision, and trembling involuntarily at the recollection.

Karl Ivanitch confirmed my words, but said nothing as to the subject of the dream. Then, after a little conversation on the weather, in which Mimi also took part, Mamma laid some lumps of sugar on the tray for one or two of the more privileged servants, and crossed over to her embroidery frame, which stood near one of the windows.

"Go to Papa now, children," she said, "and ask him to come to me before he goes to the home farm."

Then the music, the counting, and the wrathful looks from Mimi began again, and we went off to see Papa. Passing through the room which had been known ever since Grandpapa's time as "the pantry," we entered the study.

Papa

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He was standing near his writing-table, and pointing angrily to some envelopes, papers, and little piles of coin upon it as he addressed some observations to the bailiff, Jakoff Michaelovitch, who was standing in his usual place (that is to say, between the door and the barometer) and rapidly closing and unclosing the fingers of the hand which he held behind his back, The more angry Papa grew, the more rapidly did those fingers twirl, and when Papa ceased speaking they came to rest also. Yet, as soon as ever Jakoff himself began to talk, they flew here, there, and everywhere with lightning rapidity. These movements always appeared to me an index of Jakoff's secret thoughts, though his face was invariably placid, and expressive alike of dignity and submissiveness, as who should say, "I am right, yet let it be as you wish." On seeing us, Papa said, "Directly--wait a moment," and looked towards the door as a hint for it to be shut.

"Gracious heavens! What can be the matter with you to-day, Jakoff?" he went on with a hitch of one shoulder (a habit of his). "This envelope here with the 800 roubles enclosed,"--Jacob took out a set of tablets, put down "800" and remained looking at the figures while he waited for what was to come next--"is for expenses during my absence. Do you understand? From the mill you ought to receive 1000 roubles. Is not that so? And from the Treasury mortgage you ought to receive some 8000 roubles. From the hay--of which, according to your calculations, we shall