

KARLSSON-ON-THE-ROOF
✿ Astrid Lindgren ✿

ILLUSTRATED BY JAN PYK

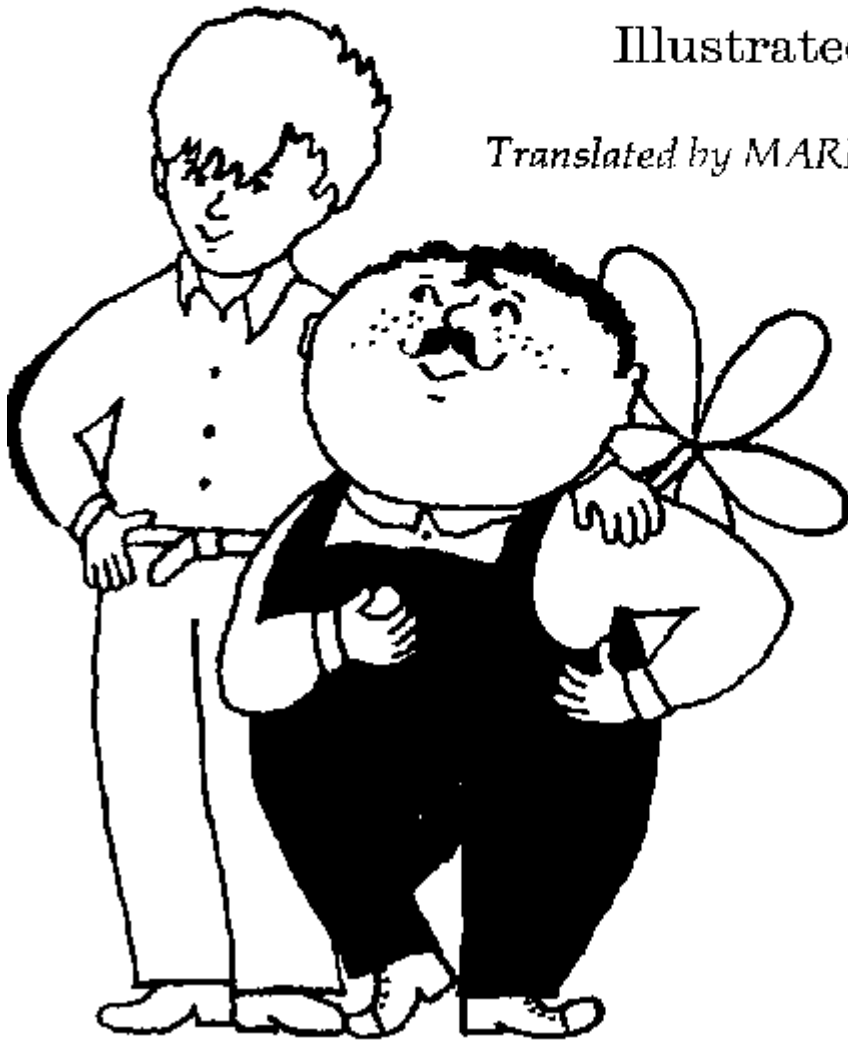


ASTRID LINDGREN

Karlsson- on-the-Roof

Illustrated by Jan Pyk

Translated by MARIANNE TURNER



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Chapter 1 - Karlsson-on-the-Roof

On a perfectly ordinary street in Stockholm, in a perfectly ordinary house, lives a perfectly ordinary family called Ericson. There is a perfectly ordinary Daddy and a perfectly ordinary Mommy and three perfectly ordinary children—Bobby, Betty, and Eric.

“I’m not at all an ordinary Eric,” says Eric. But he is wrong there. Of course he is ordinary. The world is full of boys of seven with blue eyes and pug noses—boys who have not washed behind their ears and who are forever wearing holes in their trousers. So, of course, Eric is perfectly ordinary—there can be no doubt about that.

Bobby is fifteen and is fond of football and does not do extra well at school, so he is perfectly ordinary too. Betty is fourteen and wears her hair in a long bob, exactly like other perfectly ordinary girls.

There is only one person in the entire house who is not ordinary—and that is Karlsson-on-the-Roof. He *lives* on the roof, Karlsson does. This alone is out of the ordinary. Things may be different in other parts of the world, but in Stockholm people hardly ever live in a little house of their own on top of a roof. But Karlsson does. He is a very small, very round, and very self-possessed gentleman—and he can fly! Anybody can fly by airplane or helicopter, but only Karlsson can fly all by himself. He simply turns a button in the middle of his tummy and, presto, the cunning little engine on his back starts up. Karlsson waits for a moment or two to let the engine warm up; then he accelerates, takes off, and glides on his way with all the dignity and poise of a statesman; that is, if you can picture a statesman with a motor on his back.





Karlsson is very contented in his little house on top of the roof. In the evenings he sits on his front doorstep, smoking a pipe and watching the stars. Naturally, you can see the stars much better from the roof than from anywhere else in the house, so it is really surprising that more people do not live on roofs. But the occupants of the house don't know that you *can* live on a roof; they don't even know that Karlsson has a cottage up there, it is so well hidden behind the big chimney. Besides, most people don't notice little houses like Karlsson's, not even if they trip over them.

A chimney sweep once caught sight of Karlsson's house when he was about to sweep the chimney. He was astonished. "It's odd," he said to himself. "There's a house here. It's hard to believe, but there's actually a house on the roof! How could it have got here?"

But then he began to sweep the chimney and forgot all about the house and never gave it another thought.

It was nice for Eric to become acquainted with Karlsson, because, whenever Karlsson flew past, life became adventurous and exciting. Maybe Karlsson was pleased to make the acquaintance of Eric, too, for it must be a little dull sometimes to live all alone in a house which nobody knows is there. It must be pleasant to hear somebody calling out, "Hi-ho, Karlsson!" when you fly past.

This is what happened when Karlsson and Eric first met.

It was one of those days when everything went wrong and when it was no fun at all to be Eric. As a rule, it was quite nice to be Eric. He was the darling and pet of the whole family, and they spoiled him for all they were worth. But there were days when things kept going wrong. Then you were scolded by Mommy because you had worn a hole in your trousers, and Betty would say, "Blow your nose, child," and Daddy would make a fuss because you were late coming home from school.

"Why do you hang around the street corners?" asked Daddy.

"Hang around the street corners?" Of course, Daddy didn't know that Eric had met a dog—a nice, beautiful, friendly dog, who had sniffed at Eric and wagged his tail and looked as if he would very much like to be Eric's own dog.

If Eric had had any choice, it would certainly have become his at once. But the difficulty was that Daddy and Mommy did not want a dog in the house. And also a lady had suddenly appeared, shouting, "Rickey, come here!" and then Eric knew that this dog could never belong to him.

"It doesn't look as if I'll ever have a dog as long as I live," said Eric bitterly that day when everything seemed to go wrong. "You, Mommy—you've got Daddy; and Bobby and Betty always stick together; but I—I've got nobody."

“But darling Eric, you’ve got us all,” said Mommy.

“I haven’t,” said Eric more bitterly still, feeling suddenly that he was quite alone in the world.

He had one thing, though. He had a room of his own, and that was where he went.

It was a light and beautiful spring evening, and the window was wide open. The white curtains blew gently in and out as if waving to the pale little stars in the spring sky. Eric went to the window and stood there, looking out. He thought about the friendly dog and wondered what it was doing now ... maybe lying in a dog basket in a kitchen somewhere, and maybe a boy (another boy, not Eric) was sitting on the floor beside it, patting its shaggy head, saying, “Rickey! *Good dog, Rickey!*”

Eric sighed heavily. Then he heard a little buzzing sound. The buzzing got louder and louder, and he suddenly saw a fat little man slowly flying past the window. It was Karlsson-on-the-Roof! But, of course, Eric did not know that.



Karlsson merely gave Eric a quick glance and sailed on. He circled over the rooftop of the house opposite, rounded the chimney, and then steered back toward Eric’s window. By now he had got up speed and he whizzed past Eric, almost like a jet plane. Several times he shot past. Eric stood silently watching, but he had butterflies in his tummy from the excitement. After all, it isn’t every day that a fat little man flies past your window. At last Karlsson slowed down close to the window ledge.

“Hi-ho!” he said. “May I take a seat?”

“Oh, please do,” said Eric. “Isn’t it difficult to fly like that?” he added.

“Not for me,” said Karlsson importantly. “For me it is not at all difficult, because I am the World’s Best Stunt Flyer. But I wouldn’t advise any old sack of hay to try.”

Eric felt that he was probably “any old sack of hay” and decided on the spot not to try and copy Karlsson’s flying antics.

“What’s your name?” asked Karlsson.

“Eric,” he replied. “Eric Ericson.”

“It’s queer how *different* things can be— I’m called Karlsson,” said Karlsson. “Only Karlsson, nothing else. Hi-ho, Eric!”

“Hi-ho, Karlsson,” said Eric.

“How old are you?” asked Karlsson.

“Seven,” said Eric.

“Good! Stay at seven,” said Karlsson. Quickly he swung one of his fat little legs over Eric’s window ledge and stepped into the room.

“And how old are you?” asked Eric, because he thought Karlsson had a childish appearance for a man.

“I?” said Karlsson. “I’m a Man in his Prime, that’s all I can say.”

Eric did not quite know what this meant, to be a Man in his Prime. He wondered if he himself was perhaps also a Man in his Prime without knowing it, so he asked cautiously, “Which years are one’s prime?”

“All of them,” said Karlsson in a satisfied voice. “At least as far as I’m concerned. I am handsome, remarkably wise, and just plump enough—in fact a Man in his Prime,” he said.

Then he took down Eric’s steam engine from the bookshelf.

“Shall we start it?” he suggested.

“Daddy won’t let me,” said Eric. “Either Daddy or Bobby must be here when I want to work it.”

“Daddy or Bobby or Karlsson-on-the-Roof,” said Karlsson. “The World’s Best Steam Engineer, that’s Karlsson-on-the-Roof. Tell that to your Daddy for me.”

He seized the bottle of alcohol which was standing beside the steam engine, filled the little alcohol lamp, and put a match to it. In spite of being the World’s Best Steam Engineer, he managed to spill a little lake of alcohol on the bookshelf, and lively blue flames danced around the steam engine when the lake caught fire. Eric cried out and rushed forward.

“Calm, be calm!” said Karlsson, and he put up a chubby hand to stop him.

But Eric could not be calm when he saw the fire. He caught hold of an old rag and choked the flames. Where they had danced, there were now two big ugly stains on the varnish.

“Oh, look at the bookshelf!” he said with concern. “What will Mommy say?”

“It’s a small matter,” said Karlsson-on-the-Roof. “Two tiny spots on a bookshelf—a small matter; you tell your Mommy.”

He crouched down beside the steam engine and his eyes were shining. “Now it’ll soon begin to chuff,” he said.

And it did. The steam engine began working. *Chuff-chuff-chuff*, it went. Oh, it was the most splendid steam engine you could wish for, and Karlsson looked as proud and happy as if he had made it himself.

“I must adjust the safety valve,” said Karlsson, fiddling eagerly with a little gadget. “Accidents always happen if you don’t adjust the safety valve.”

Chuff-chuff-chuff, said the steam engine. It went faster and faster and faster: *Chuff-chuff-chuff*. In the end it sounded as if in full gallop, and Karlsson’s eyes shone. Eric stopped bothering about the stains on the bookshelf, he felt so very happy about his steam engine and about Karlsson, who was the World’s Best Steam Engineer, and who had adjusted the safety valve so well.

“You see, Eric,” said Karlsson, “this is what you might call chuff-chuff-chuff! The World’s Best Steam Eng—”

He got no farther, for at that moment there was a dreadful bang, and suddenly there was no more steam engine—only pieces of steam engine, scattered all over the room.



“It’s exploded,” said Karlsson with delight, as if it was the finest performance you could possibly expect of a steam engine. “Indeed, it’s exploded! A super bang, wasn’t it?”

But Eric could not bring himself to feel quite so happy. Tears came into his eyes. “My steam engine,” he said. “It’s broken!”

“It’s a small matter,” said Karlsson, and he waved his chubby little hand in the air. “You can soon have another steam engine.”

“How?” asked Eric.

“I’ve got several thousand up at my house.”

“Where’s that?” Eric asked.

“Up at my house on the roof,” said Karlsson.

“Have you got a house on the roof?” said Eric. “With several thousand steam engines in it?”

“Yes, I should think there are about two hundred, anyway,” said Karlsson.

“Oh! I *would* like to see your house,” said Eric. It sounded like a miracle that there could be a house on top of the roof, and that Karlsson lived there.

“Think of it! A house full of steam engines,” said Eric, “several hundred steam engines!”

“Well, I haven’t actually counted how many there are left, but I think there are several dozen,” said Karlsson. “Every now and then one explodes, of course, but I am pretty sure there are two dozen left, anyway.”

“Perhaps I could have one?” said Eric.

“Of course,” said Karlsson, “of course!”

“Right away?” asked Eric.

“Well, I’ve got to look it over first,” said Karlsson. “Adjust the safety valve and things like that. Calm, be calm! You shall have it another day.”

Eric began to collect the pieces of what had once been his steam engine. “What will Daddy say?” he murmured in a worried voice.

Karlsson raised his eyebrows in surprise. “About the steam engine?” he said. “It’s a small matter. Tell him for me he needn’t worry. I would tell him myself if I had time to stop and see him. But I think I’d better go home now and attend to my house.”

“I’m glad you came,” said Eric, “even though the steam engine ... Will you come back another time?”

“Calm, be calm!” said Karlsson, and he turned the button in his middle. The engine began to cough, and Karlsson stood waiting for power to take off. Then he rose and flew twice around the room.

“The engine is coughing,” he said. “I think I will have to go to a garage for servicing. Could do it myself, of course,” he said, “because I’m the World’s Best Steam Engineer, but I haven’t time... no, I think I’ll go to a garage.”

Eric, too, thought it would be the wisest thing to do.

Karlsson steered out through the open window, and his fat little body looked beautiful against the star-spangled spring sky.

“Hi-ho, Eric!” he said, waving his chubby hand.

And Karlsson was gone.

Chapter 2 - Karlsson Builds a Tower

“I *told* you his name’s Karlsson and that he lives on the roof,” said Eric. “What’s so strange about that? People can live where they like, can’t they?”

“Now then, Eric, don’t be silly,” said Mommy. “You nearly frightened the life out of us. You might have got killed when the steam engine exploded. Don’t you realize that?”

“Yes, but all the same, Karlsson is the World’s Best Steam Engineer,” said Eric, looking solemnly at his mother. He had to make her understand that you could not say No when the World’s Best Steam Engineer offered to start your steam engine.

“You must take responsibility for your actions, Eric,” said Daddy, “and not blame someone called Karlsson-on-the-Roof, who does not exist.”

“He does exist,” said Eric.

“And he can fly, too, I suppose,” said Bobby sarcastically.

“What if he can!” said Eric. “I hope he’ll come back. Then you’ll see for yourself.”

“I sure hope he comes tomorrow,” said Betty. “I’ll give you a dime, Eric, if you let me see Karlsson-on-the-Roof.”

“I don’t think he’ll come tomorrow,” said Eric, “because he’s due to go into a garage for servicing.”

“It seems to me *you* need a good servicing, too,” said Mommy. “Just look at that bookshelf!”

“ ‘It’s a small matter,’ says Karlsson.”

Eric spread his hand in a superior manner, exactly as Karlsson had done, as though to say to his mother that talking about the bookshelf was a lot of fuss over nothing. But she was not impressed.

“So that’s what Karlsson says, is it? Well, you may tell Karlsson for me that if he puts his nose in here again I shall give him such a servicing that he won’t forget it in a hurry,” she said.

Eric did not answer. He thought it was terrible that Mommy could speak like that about the World's Best Steam Engineer. But what could you expect on a day like this when it was clear that they had all made up their minds to be as difficult as possible?

Eric suddenly longed for Karlsson: Karlsson who was merry and cheerful and who spread his fingers and said that misfortunes simply were not worth bothering about. Eric longed for Karlsson very much; and at the same time he felt rather worried. Supposing Karlsson never came back!

"Calm, be calm!" said Eric to himself, just like Karlsson. He had promised to return, hadn't he? And he was a man whom you could trust: there was no doubt about that.

Only a day or two later Karlsson turned up again. Eric was lying face down on the floor in his room, reading, when he heard the buzzing sound once more, and in through the window Karlsson buzzed like a giant bumble-bee. He hummed a happy little tune while he circled around the walls. Now and then he hovered to look at the pictures. He cocked his head to one side and his eyes narrowed.



"Fine pictures," he said. "Very fine pictures indeed! But maybe not quite so good as mine."

Eric jumped up from the floor and stood there, wildly excited. It pleased him very much that Karlsson had come back.

"Have you got a lot of pictures in your house?" he asked.

"Several thousand," said Karlsson. "Paint them myself in my spare time. Masses of little roosters and birds and other pretty things. I'm the World's Best Rooster Painter," and he landed beside Eric with an elegant, gliding turn.

"Really!" said Eric. "Couldn't I come up with you to look at your house and your steam engines and your pictures?"

"Of course," said Karlsson. "Naturally! You're most welcome to come ... another day."

"Soon, please," begged Eric.

"Calm, be calm!" said Karlsson. "I've got to tidy up a bit first, but it won't take long. The World's Fastest Tidy-upper—guess who that is," said Karlsson with a twinkle in his eye.

"Perhaps it's you," said Eric.

"Perhaps!" shouted Karlsson. "Perhaps? Don't doubt it for a moment. The World's Fastest Tidy-upper, that's Karlsson-on-the-Roof, and everyone knows it."

Eric was only too willing to believe that Karlsson was the "World's Best" everything. He was the

world's best playmate, too; you could certainly say that. Bridget and Christopher were lots of fun, but they were not exciting like Karlsson-on-the-Roof. Eric made up his mind to tell Bridget and Christopher about Karlsson next time they walked home from school together. Christopher was always talking about his dog Joffa. Eric had been jealous of Christopher for a long time because of that dog.

If he comes out with stories about his old Joffa tomorrow, I shall tell him about Karlsson, thought Eric. "What's Joffa next to Karlsson-on-the-Roof?" I'll say.

And yet—there was nothing in the world that Eric longed for so much as to have a dog of his own. Karlsson interrupted his thoughts.

"I feel like having some fun," he said, and looked around searchingly. "Have you got another steam engine?"

Eric shook his head. The steam engine ... hmm! Well, Karlsson was here; Mommy and Daddy could see that he really did exist—and Bobby and Betty, too, if they were home.

"Will you come along to meet Mommy and Daddy?" asked Eric.

"Delighted," said Karlsson. "It'll be a treat for them to meet such a wise and handsome fellow as I!"

Karlsson strutted back and forth across the floor, looking very pleased with himself.

"Not too fat and not too thin, either," he added. "A Man in his Prime. It'll be a treat for your Mommy to meet me."

At this precise moment the first faint smell of cooking reached Eric's nose from the kitchen, and he knew that very soon now it would be dinnertime. Eric decided to wait until after dinner before he introduced Karlsson to Mommy and Daddy. It is never good policy to disturb mothers when they are cooking. Besides, Mommy or Daddy might take it into their heads to talk to Karlsson about the steam engine and the stain on the bookshelf. And that must be prevented. While they were having dinner Eric could probably, in a tactful way, make his parents realize how one should behave toward the World's Best Steam Engineer. All he needed was a little time. After dinner—yes, then it would be all right; and he would take the whole family to his room.

"There you are!" he would say. "Here's Karlsson-on-the-Roof." How astonished they would be; it was going to be fun seeing their surprise!

Karlsson had stopped his pacing. He was standing motionless, sniffing like a setter.

"Meatballs!" he said. "Tasty little meatballs I like *ver-ry* much."

Eric felt rather embarrassed. There was really only one thing you could say in answer to that: Will you stay and have dinner with us? That's what he ought to say. But he dared not bring Karlsson to dinner without any warning. It was quite a different matter in the case of Bridget and Christopher. Then he could ask at the last moment (if he wanted to), even when the rest of the family had already sat down, "Could Bridget and Christopher possibly stay for dinner, Mommy?"

But a completely unknown, fat little man who had broken a steam engine and made stains on the bookshelf! No, it wouldn't do at all.

But this fat little man had just said that he liked tasty little meatballs very much. It was up to Eric to see that he got them, or else perhaps Karlsson would not come and see him again. Oh, so much depended on Mommy's meatballs!

"Wait a minute," said Eric. "I'll go out in the kitchen and fetch some."

Karlsson nodded approvingly.

"Good!" he said. "Good! But hurry! You don't get less hungry by looking at pictures—without roosters or anything in them."

Eric darted out into the kitchen. Mommy was standing by the stove in a checked apron, surrounded by the most delicious smell of fried onions. She was shaking the big frying pan over the flame, and in the pan jostled lots and lots of nicely browned, little meatballs.

“Hello, Eric,” said Mommy. “We’re going to eat in a minute.”

“Mommy, could I have some meatballs on a saucer to take to my room?” asked Eric in his most persuasive voice.

“But we’re going to have dinner in a minute or two, darling,” said Mommy.

“Oh, please!” said Eric. “After dinner I’ll tell you why.”

“Very well,” said Mommy, “just a few then.”

She placed six meatballs on a small plate. Oh, how good they smelled and they were small and brown and round, just as they should be. Eric carried the plate carefully in both hands as he hurried back to his room.

“Look, Karlsson!” he called, opening the door.

But Karlsson had disappeared. Eric stood there with the meatballs, and Karlsson was not there. Eric was terribly disappointed—everything suddenly seemed very cheerless. “He’s gone away,” he said aloud to himself. But then ...

“Squeak,” he suddenly heard a voice saying. “Squeak!”

Eric looked all around. Far down at one end of the bed—underneath the blankets—he saw a fat little lump, moving. That was where the squeak came from. Then Karlsson’s red face peeped out from between the sheets.

“Haha,” said Karlsson. “‘He’s gone,’ you said, ‘he’s gone’—haha, I haven’t gone at all. I was only pretending.”

Then he caught sight of the meatballs. Presto, he turned the button, the engine started buzzing, and Karlsson glided from the bed straight past the plate. He snatched a meatball on his way, rose rapidly up to the ceiling, and circled round the light, contentedly munching the meatball.

“Delicious! Excellent!” he said. “You’d almost think the World’s Best Meatball-Maker had cooked it, but it’s obvious he hasn’t,” said Karlsson. And he made a sudden dive toward the plate and seized another.

Mommy was calling from the kitchen, “Eric, it’s dinnertime. Hurry up and wash your hands and come along!”

“I have to go,” said Eric and put the plate down. “But I’ll soon be back. Promise you’ll wait for me!”

“All right, but what shall I do while you’re away?” said Karlsson, landing beside Eric with a reproachful little thud. “I must have some fun while you’re away. Haven’t you really got any more steam engines?”

“No,” said Eric, “but you can borrow my box of building blocks.”

“O.K.,” said Karlsson.

Eric fetched his box of building blocks from the cupboard where he kept his toys. It was indeed a fine kit of blocks, with various parts that could be screwed together to make a large number of different things.

“Here you are,” he said. “You can build cars and cranes and all sorts of things ...”

“And you don’t suppose that the World’s Best Building-Erector doesn’t know what you can build and cannot build?” said Karlsson. Rapidly he popped yet another meatball into his mouth and

proceeded to investigate the box.

“Let’s see, let’s see,” he said, emptying out all the pieces on to the floor.

Eric had to go, although he would much rather have stayed to watch the World’s Best Building-Erector at work.



The last thing he saw as he turned around in the doorway was Karlsson, sitting on the floor, singing happily to himself, “Hooray, how clever I am ... hooray, how sensible I am ... and just plump enough ... hmm!”

The last part was hummed a second after he had swallowed the fourth meatball.

Mommy and Daddy, Betty and Bobby were already sitting at the table. Eric slipped into his place and unfolded his napkin.

“Promise me something, Mommy—and you, too, Daddy,” he said.

“What do you want us to promise?” asked Mommy.

“Promise first,” said Eric.

Daddy was rather reluctant to make a vague promise. “Who knows? Perhaps you want me to give you a dog again,” he said.

“No, it isn’t a dog,” said Eric, “though I wouldn’t mind if you promised me one. No, it’s something else, and it’s easy. Promise that you promise!”

“Very well, we promise,” said Mommy.

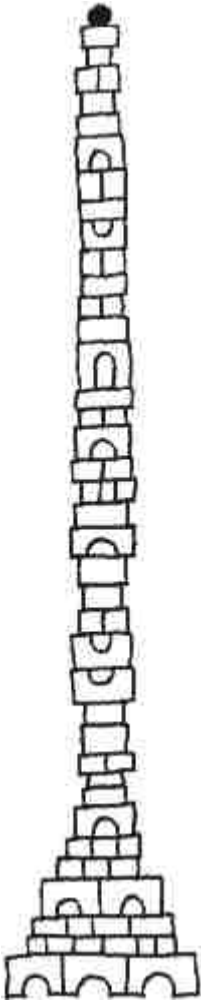
“All right. Now you’ve promised not to say anything to Karlsson-on-the-Roof about the steam engine,” said Eric, pleased.

“Ha,” said Betty. “How could they say anything to Karlsson when they never see him?”

“They will,” said Eric triumphantly. “After dinner. He’s in my room.”

“Gosh, I think a meatball got stuck in my throat,” said Bobby. “Karlsson’s in your room, did you

say?"



"He certainly is."

This was the hour of triumph for Eric. If only they would hurry up and finish eating, then they would see ...

Mommy smiled a little.

"It will be a pleasure for us to meet Karlsson," she said.

"That's what Karlsson said, too," Eric told her.

At last they had finished dessert. Mommy rose from the table. This was the great moment.

"Come along, all of you," said Eric.

"You don't have to ask us twice," said Betty. "I can't wait to see Karlsson."

Eric went on ahead.

"Remember what you promised," he said before he opened the door to his room. "Not a word about the steam engine!"

Then he turned the handle and opened the door.

Karlsson was gone. Karlsson *was* gone. There was not even a fat little lump underneath the blankets in Eric's bed.

But in the middle of the floor there rose, out of the medley of building blocks, a tower—a very tall and very thin tower. Although Karlsson could, of course, build cranes and other things, this time he had contented himself with putting one block on top of another, making this very tall and very thin tower. The top of the tower had been decorated with something which was evidently meant to look like a dome. It was a little round meatball.

Chapter 3 - Karlsson Surprises Betty and Roger

It was a difficult moment for Eric. Mommy did not like her meatballs to be used as ornaments, and she seemed to think that it was Eric who had decorated the tower.

"Karlsson-on-the-Roof ..." began Eric, but Daddy cut him short with a stern, "That's quite enough about Karlsson, Eric."

Betty and Bobby only laughed.

"Some Karlsson!" said Bobby. "So he had to go and sneak off just when we wanted to see him!"

Sadly Eric ate up the meatball and put his building blocks away. It was no use talking about Karlsson any more now. But he did miss him—he missed him very much.

"Let's have our coffee and not bother any more about Karlsson," said Daddy, stroking Eric's cheek gently.

They always drank their coffee in front of the fire in the sitting room. And so they did tonight, although it was a warm, light, spring evening and the lime trees along the street were already covered with small green leaves. Eric did not like coffee, but he liked to sit with Mommy, Daddy, Bobby, and Betty in front of the fire.

"Shut your eyes, Mommy," said Eric when his mother had put the coffee tray down on the little table beside the fireplace.

“Why do you want me to shut my eyes?”

“Because you said you didn’t want to see me eating sugar, and I think I’ll have a lump now,” said Eric.

He needed something to comfort him, he felt that quite plainly. Why had Karlsson gone? It was not a proper thing to do, to disappear and leave nothing behind except a small meatball.

Eric was sitting in his favorite place by the grate, as close to the fire as he could get. This coffee time after dinner was nearly the nicest part of the whole day. You could talk to Mommy and Daddy, and they listened to what you had to say. Otherwise they did not always have time to listen. It was fun, too, hearing Betty and Bobby teasing each other and talking importantly about school. Their school was evidently different, and a more important kind than the grade school that Eric attended. He longed to tell them all about *his* school, but no one except Mommy and Daddy was interested in what happened there. Bobby and Betty only laughed, and Eric was careful to avoid saying anything that would make Bobby and Betty laugh in that annoying way. There was not much use in their trying to tease *him*; he was an expert at teasing back—you had to be with a brother like Bobby and a sister like Betty.

“Well, Eric, was your homework done properly for today?” asked Mommy.

This was not the kind of talk that Eric liked, but since Mommy had said nothing about that lump of sugar, he had better put up with her questioning, he supposed.

“Oh, yes, my homework was all correct,” he answered glumly.

All the time he was thinking of Karlsson. How could anybody expect him to remember about his homework when he was wondering what had happened to Karlsson?

“What did you have for homework?” asked Daddy.

Eric was annoyed. Why couldn’t they stop talking about school? You did not sit cozily in front of the fire so people could talk about homework.

“The nine times-table,” said Eric briefly. “The whole of it, and I *know* it—nine times one, and then come all the rest.”

He took another lump of sugar and thought about Karlsson again. No matter how their talk buzzed around him, Eric only thought about Karlsson and wondered if he would see him again.

It was Betty who roused him out of his daydreams.

“Eric, wake up! Would you like to earn a nickel?”

Slowly it dawned on Eric what she was saying. He had no objection to earning five cents, but it all depended on what Betty wanted him to do.

“A nickel’s not enough,” he said without hesitation. “The cost of living’s gone up. What do you think a ten-cent ice cream costs, for instance?”

“Well, I’ll guess,” said Betty with a twinkle in her eye. “Ten cents, perhaps?”

“That’s just it,” said Eric. “A nickel is too little, you see.”

“But you don’t know what it’s for yet,” said Betty. “You haven’t got to do anything—it’s only a matter of *not* doing.”

“What is it I have got not to do?”

“You’ve got not to show yourself in the sitting room later tonight.”

“Roger is coming, you see,” said Bobby. “Betty’s new boy friend.”

Eric nodded his head. Aha! so that was what they had worked out. Mommy and Daddy were going to the movies, Bobby was going to a football game, and Betty was going to be a grand lady in the

sitting room while Eric was banished to his room—for the measly sum of five cents. What a family!

“What are his ears like?” asked Eric. “Do they stick out as much as the last one’s did?”

This was the way to annoy Betty.

“You see, Mommy!” she said. “Now do you understand why I want Eric to be out of the way? He frightens away every single person who comes to see me.”

“Oh, I don’t think so,” said Mommy mildly. It distressed her to hear the children quarreling.

“He *does*,” insisted Betty. “Didn’t he frighten away Claude, for one? He stood and stared at him for a long time, and then he said, ‘I don’t think Betty likes ears like that.’ No wonder Claude didn’t come back.”

“Calm, be calm!” said Eric in exactly the same tone of voice as Karlsson’s. “Calm, be calm. I *will* sit in my room, and I’ll do it for nothing. I don’t take payment for keeping out of people’s way when they don’t want to see me.”

“Good!” said Betty. “Promise? Promise you won’t show up the whole evening?”

“O.K.,” said Eric. “I’m not so interested in your boy friends as all that. I’d pay a nickel not to see them!”

Later that evening Eric sat, as promised, in his room—without payment. Mommy and Daddy had gone to the movies, Bobby had vanished, and if Eric opened his door he could hear a faint murmur from the sitting room. In there Betty sat, talking softly with her Roger. Eric opened the door twice, trying to catch what they were saying, but he could not hear. Then he went to the window and peered out into the gathering darkness. He looked up and down the street to see if Bridget and Christopher were there. But he only saw two big boys fighting. The scrap was interesting while it lasted, but unfortunately the boys soon stopped and everything was quiet and boring again.

Then he heard a heavenly sound. He heard the humming of an engine, and a second later Karlsson came sailing in through the window.

“Hi-ho, Eric!” he said airily.

“Hi-ho, Karlsson,” said Eric. “Where did you get to?”

“Why? What do you mean?” asked Karlsson.

“You disappeared,” said Eric, “just when you were going to meet Mommy and Daddy. Why didn’t you wait?”

Karlsson put his hands on his hips and looked really annoyed. “I never heard such a thing,” he said. “Shouldn’t I be allowed to attend to my house? A house-owner has to look after his property, doesn’t he? What would happen if he didn’t? I can’t help it if your mommy and daddy come to pay their respects just when I’ve gone to attend to my house, can I?”

He looked round the room.

“Talking of houses,” he said, “where is my tower? Who has spoiled my tower, and where is my meatball?”

Eric was taken back.

“I didn’t think you’d return,” he replied anxiously.

“No, that’s obvious,” said Karlsson. “The World’s Best Building-Erector builds a tower and what happens? Does anyone put up a little fence around it and make sure that the tower is preserved for posterity? Oh, no, far from it! Pull it down and destroy it, that’s what they do, and eat up other people’s meatballs!”

Karlsson went over and sat down on a stool and sulked.

“Oh, it’s a small matter, isn’t it?” said Eric, and he spread his fingers as Karlsson was in the habit of doing. “It’s not worth bothering about.”

“That’s what you think,” said Karlsson indignantly. “It’s easy enough to pull everything down and then to say it’s a small matter, and that’s all there is to it. But think of poor little me, building that tower with my own hands!”

He pushed his chubby hands right under Eric’s nose. Then he sat down again on the stool and looked more surly than ever. “If this is how it’s going to be, I’m going home,” he said.

Eric was in despair. He stood there, not knowing what to do. There was silence for a long time. In the end Karlsson said, “If someone gave me a little present, maybe I’d be happy again. It’s not certain, but *perhaps* I’d be happy if someone gave me a little present.”

Eric ran over to the table and began quickly to rummage in the drawer, because in it he had a lot of nice things. There he kept his stamps and his marbles and his crayons and his tin soldiers. It was there that he kept a small flashlight which he was very fond of.



“Would you like this?” he said, holding out the flashlight for Karlsson to see.

Karlsson snatched it from him.

“This is just the sort of thing I need to make me happy again,” he said. “It isn’t so nice as my tower, but if you give it to me I’ll try to be a little happy, anyway.”

“I’m giving it to you,” said Eric.

“It does switch on, I suppose?” said Karlsson suspiciously, pressing the knob. Yes, the flashlight lit up, and Karlsson’s eyes began to shine, too.

“Think of it! When I walk along the roof in the evenings and it’s very dark, I can switch this on and find the way to my little house and not get lost among the chimney tops,” he said, giving the light a pat.

Eric felt very content when he heard Karlsson say this. He only wished that he might be allowed to accompany Karlsson some time on one of his roof walks and watch him shine the light in the darkness.

“Hi-ho, Eric! Now I’m happy again,” said Karlsson. “Bring your mommy and daddy to see me.”

“They’ve gone to the movies,” said Eric.

“Gone to the movies! When they could have seen *me*?” said Karlsson in astonishment.

“Yes, there’s only Betty at home ... and her new boy friend. They’re in the sitting room, and I’m not allowed in there.”

“What’s this I hear?” shouted Karlsson. “Aren’t you allowed to go where you like? I don’t intend us to put up with this for one single instant. You come along ...”

“But I’ve promised,” said Eric.

“And I promise that where there’s an injustice, Karlsson is down on it like a ton of bricks,” said Karlsson.

He went over and patted Eric on the shoulder.

“What exactly did you promise?”

“I promised not to show myself in the sitting room all evening.”

“Well, then, you’re not going to show yourself either,” said Karlsson. “But you would like to see Betty’s new boy friend, wouldn’t you?”

“Oh! I would,” said Eric eagerly. “She had one before with terribly sticking-out ears. I’d like to see what sort of ears this new one’s got.”

“So would I,” said Karlsson. “You wait, and I’m sure I shall think up something. The World’s Best Thinker-upper—that’s Karlsson-on-the-Roof.”

He looked around the room.

“I’ve got it!” he said, nodding his head. “A blanket—the very thing! I knew I’d think up something.”

“What have you thought up?” asked Eric.

“You promised you wouldn’t show yourself in the sitting room all evening, is that right? Well, if you go in there underneath a blanket you’re not showing yourself.”

“No ... but ...” began Eric.

“If you go underneath a blanket you’re not showing yourself and no ‘buts,’ ” said Karlsson firmly.

“If I go under a blanket I don’t show myself either, and that’s Betty’s bad luck. As she is so silly, she won’t see me—poor, poor little Betty!”

He jerked the blanket off Eric’s bed and threw it over his head.

“Enter, enter!” he shouted. “Come into my tent!”

Eric crawled under the blanket with Karlsson, who stood giggling happily.

“Betty said nothing about not wanting to see a tent in the sitting room, did she? Everybody’s pleased to see a tent, aren’t they? Especially a tent that’s lit up inside,” said Karlsson, switching on the flashlight.

Eric was not very sure that Betty would be pleased with the tent, but he himself thought it was exciting and a little creepy to be underneath the blanket with Karlsson and to shine the light. Eric thought they might as well stay where they were, playing tents, and not bother about Betty but Karlsson wouldn’t have it.

“I can’t stand injustice,” he said. “I’m going into the sitting room, no matter what.”

And the tent began to walk toward the door. Eric was forced to go, too. A chubby little hand reached out and grasped the doorknob, opening the door very quietly and cautiously. The tent walked out into the hall, which was separated from the sitting room only by a heavy curtain.

“Calm, be calm!” whispered Karlsson. And without a single sound, the tent glided across the hall floor and stopped at the curtain. The talking could now be heard more clearly, but not so clearly that you could distinguish any words. They had not turned on the sitting-room lamp. Betty and her Roger were evidently content with the faint twilight from outside.

“Good,” whispered Karlsson. “Then our light will show up all the better.” But for the present he had the light switched off, “Because we’re going to arrive as a delightful surprise,” whispered Karlsson, smiling contentedly under the blanket.

Slowly, slowly the tent glided forward from behind the curtain. Betty and Roger were sitting on the small couch by the opposite wall. Slowly, slowly the tent moved in their direction.

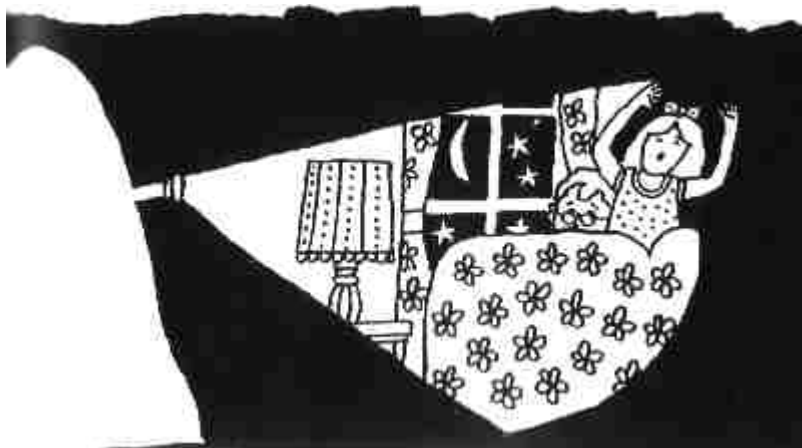
“I like you, Betty,” Eric heard a boy’s husky voice saying. What a fool he must be, that Roger!

“Do you?” said Betty, and there was silence again.

Like a dark hillock the tent glided across the floor. Slowly and surely it went toward the couch—nearer and nearer it moved; now it was only a few feet away, but the two sitting there neither heard nor saw it.

“Do you like me?” asked Betty’s Roger, shyly.

He never had an answer, for at this very moment the sharp beam from the pocket light cut across the gray shadows of the room and shone right in his face. He sprang up, and Betty gave a cry; there was a burst of giggling and the sound of hasty shuffling feet, retreating in the direction of the hall.



You cannot see anything when you have just been blinded by a light. But you can *hear*. And Betty and Roger heard the laughter—mischievous, delighted laughter that seemed to bubble from the

direction of the curtain.

“It’s my horrid little brother,” said Betty. “I’ll teach him a lesson ...”

Eric could not stop laughing.

“Of course she likes you,” he shouted. “And why shouldn’t she? Betty likes *all* boys, and that’s a fact.”

Then, in the silence that followed, there was a thud and still more laughter.

“Calm, be calm!” whispered Karlsson when the tent collapsed in their wild flight for the door.

Eric was as calm as he could be in the circumstances, although he was still bubbling with laughter, and Karlsson had fallen right across him so that he did not quite know which legs were his own and which were Karlsson’s, and he knew that Betty would catch up with them at any moment.

They scrambled to their feet as fast as they could and rushed toward Eric’s room in wild panic, because Betty was close behind.

“Calm, be calm!” whispered Karlsson, and his fat little legs beat like drumsticks under the blanket as he ran. “The World’s Best Speed Runner, that’s Karlsson-on-the Roof!” he whispered, but he sounded breathless.



Eric was not bad at running either. And they certainly were in a hurry. Only in the nick of time did they reach the safety of Eric’s room. Karlsson hastily turned the key in the lock and stood there, laughing quietly, pleased and satisfied, while Betty hammered at the door.

“You wait, Eric, till I get hold of you!” shouted Betty angrily.

“But I didn’t show myself,” Eric shouted back, and there were giggles behind the door again.

There were two of them giggling, and Betty would probably have noticed it if she had not been so angry.

Chapter 4 - Karlsson Bets

Eric came home from school one day looking angry and with a big lump on his forehead. Mommy

was in the kitchen, and she was just as upset about the lump as Eric had hoped she would be.

“Oh, darling Eric, whatever’s happened?” she exclaimed, putting her arms around him.

“Christopher threw a stone at me,” replied Eric crossly. !

“My goodness!” said Mommy. “What a horrid boy! Why didn’t you come and tell me?”

Eric shrugged his shoulders. “What’s the good of that? *You* can’t throw stones, anyway. You couldn’t hit the side of a house if you tried.”

“Now you’re being silly,” said Mommy. “You don’t think I’d throw stones at Christopher, do you?”

“Then what else would you throw?” asked Eric. “There’s nothing else *to* throw—at least, nothing so good.”

Mommy sighed. Evidently Christopher was not the only one who could be horrid. Eric was no better than Christopher at times. But how was it possible that her little boy with those big blue eyes could be such a fighter?

“Why not try to get out of the habit of fighting?” said Mommy. “Surely you could discuss things instead? You know, Eric, there really isn’t any problem that can’t be solved by talking it over.”

“There is!” said Eric. “Like yesterday. Christopher and I fought then, too.”

“Quite unnecessary,” said Mommy. “You could just as well have decided who was right by a sensible discussion.”

Eric sat down at the kitchen table and cradled his injured head in his hands. “That’s what you think,” he said, glowering at his mother. “This is what Christopher said to me: ‘I can give you a beating,’ he said. And then I said: ‘Oh, you can, can you?’ How could we have decided that by a sensible discussion? You tell me.”

Mommy could not think what to say and broke off her peace talk abruptly. Her belligerent son looked rather gloomy and she hastened to put some hot chocolate and freshly baked buns in front of him, which Eric liked very much. He had noticed the delicious smell of baking when he came up the stairs, and his mother’s tasty cinnamon buns did at least make life more bearable.

Pensive, Eric took a bite, and while he was eating Mommy stuck a Band-Aid on the lump on his forehead. Then she kissed him lightly and asked, “And what did you two disagree about today?”

“Bridget and Christopher say that Karlsson-on-the-Roof is only make-believe. They say I’ve just invented him,” said Eric.

“And isn’t he?” asked Mommy cautiously.

Eric glared at her with an indignant eye over his cup of hot chocolate.

“Won’t *you*, at least, believe what I say? I asked Karlsson himself if he was real ...” he said.

“And what did Karlsson say?” asked Mommy.

“He said that if he’s not real, then he’s the World’s Best Make-Believe. But it so happens that he is real,” said Eric, taking another bun.

“Karlsson thinks Bridget and Christopher are make-believes. ‘Specially silly make-believes,’ he says, and I think so, too.”

Mommy did not answer. She realized that it was quite useless to try to get these ideas out of Eric’s head; so all she said was, “I think you should play a little more with Bridget and Christopher and not think quite so much about Karlsson.”

“But Karlsson doesn’t throw great big stones at me,” said Eric, touching the lump on his forehead. Then he remembered, and he smiled sunnily at his mother. “Anyway, today I’m going to see where Karlsson lives,” he said. “I’d almost forgotten.”

He was sorry the moment he said it. How could he be so silly as to tell Mommy?

But to his mother it did not sound any more worrisome than other things he had told her about Karlsson, and she said without thinking, "Oh, that'll be nice for you!"

She would not have felt so happy if she had taken in fully what Eric was saying and had thought of where Karlsson was supposed to live.

Eric rose from the table, and, after the good snack, suddenly felt very pleased with his world. The lump on his forehead did not hurt any longer, he still had the delicious taste of the cinnamon buns in his mouth, the sun was shining in through the kitchen window, and Mommy looked very cozy with her round arms and her checked apron. He gave her a quick squeeze and said, "I like you, Mommy!"

"That's nice," said Mommy.

"Yes ... I like you 'cause you're such a cozy Mommy."

Then he went into his room and sat down to wait for Karlsson. He was going to be allowed up on the roof with him, so what did it matter if Christopher said Karlsson was nothing but make-believe?

Eric had a long wait.

"I'm coming about three o'clock, or four or five, but not a minute before six," Karlsson had said.

Eric still was not sure when Karlsson meant to come, and he had asked him again.

"Not later than seven, anyway," said Karlsson. "But not before eight, I think. And listen! Mind you watch out about nine o'clock, and then you'll see!"

Eric had to wait for what seemed an eternity, and in the end he almost thought himself that Karlsson was a make-believe and nothing else. Then he suddenly heard the familiar buzz, and in came Karlsson, jolly and bright.

"I thought you were never coming," said Eric. "When did you say you were going to come?"

"*About*," said Karlsson. "I said I was going to come *about*, and I did."

He went up to Eric's aquarium, plunged his whole face into the water, and drank deeply.

"Watch out for my fishes!" said Eric anxiously. He was afraid that Karlsson would drink up some of the little fishes that were swimming in the aquarium.

"When you've got a temperature, you've got to keep drinking," said Karlsson. "And if a fish or two slips down your throat, it's a small matter."

"Have you got a temperature?" asked Eric.

"I should say I have! You just feel," said Karlsson, putting Eric's hand to his forehead.

But Eric did not think that Karlsson felt particularly hot. "What's your temperature?" he asked.

"Somewhere around ninety or a hundred at least," said Karlsson.

Eric had recently had the measles and knew what it meant to have a temperature. He shook his head. "I don't think you're ill," he said.

"You're perfectly horrid," said Karlsson, stamping his foot. "Am I *never* allowed to be ill like other people?"

"Do you want to be ill?" asked Eric, astonished.

"Everyone wants to be ill, don't they?" said Karlsson. "I want to lie in bed and have lots and lots of temperature, and you must ask how I feel, and I will say that I'm the World's Illest, and you must

ask if there's anything I want, and I will say that I'm so very ill I don't want anything at all ... except a lot of cakes, and heaps of chocolates, and a pile of sweets."

Karlsson looked expectantly at Eric, who stood there helpless, not knowing where he could immediately get hold of all the things that Karlsson had mentioned.

"I want you to be like a mother to me," continued Karlsson, "and you must tell me that I *have* to take some horrid medicine ... but I must have a penny for taking it. And then you'll wrap a warm, woolly scarf around my neck, and I'll say that it tickles ... if you don't give me another penny."

Eric wanted to be like a mother to Karlsson. And this meant that he must empty the money box which held his savings. It stood on the bookshelf, heavy with coins. Eric fetched a knife from the kitchen and began to prod them out. Karlsson helped eagerly and shouted with joy every time a coin came tumbling out. There were some nickels and dimes, but Karlsson liked the pennies best.

When the box was empty, Eric ran down to the sweet shop and spent nearly all his savings on gumdrops and chocolate. When he handed it over, he thought for a moment of how he had saved up all this money to buy a dog. He sighed a little at the thought. But he realized that when you have to be like a mother to Karlsson you can't afford to keep a dog.

Eric went into the sitting room for a few minutes on his way back, with the sweets well hidden in his trousers pockets. His family were all sitting there: Mommy and Daddy and Bobby and Betty, having coffee after dinner. But today Eric had no time to linger. The idea had crossed his mind to ask them to come and meet Karlsson, but on second thought he decided not to. They would only stop him from going up on the roof with Karlsson. They had better see him another day.

Eric picked up two macaroons from the coffee tray (hadn't Karlsson said that he wanted cakes, too?) and scuttled off to his room.

"How long am I to sit and wait, ill and miserable like this?" asked Karlsson reproachfully. "My temperature's going up several degrees every minute, and soon you'll be able to fry an egg on me."

"I hurried as much as I could," said Eric. "And I bought masses ..."

"But you've got some money left, haven't you, so that I can have a penny when the scarf tickles?" asked Karlsson anxiously.

Eric reassured him. He had saved two pennies.

Karlsson's eyes shone, and he jumped around the room in delight.

"Oh, I'm the World's Illest," he said. "We've got to hurry to get me into bed."

It was not until now that Eric began to wonder how he was going to get up on the roof, not being able to fly.

"Calm, be calm!" said Karlsson. "You ride on my back and hi-ho, off we fly up to my house! But, mind you, don't get your fingers caught in the propeller!"

"But are you strong enough?" asked Eric.

"That's just what we shall have to find out," said Karlsson. "It'll be quite interesting to see if I manage more than half the distance, ill and miserable as I am. But I can always drop you if I find I can't go on any farther."

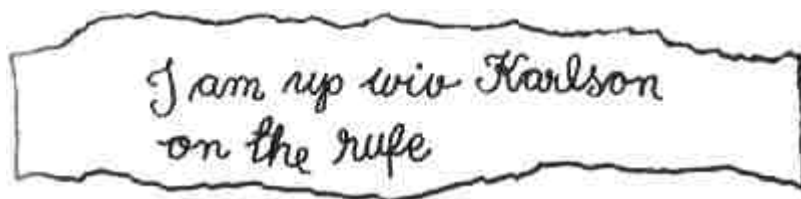
Eric did not think it was a good solution to be dropped halfway up to the roof, and he looked a little doubtful.

"But I'm sure it'll be all right," said Karlsson. "So long as the engine doesn't break down."

"Supposing it does; then we'll fall," said Eric.

"Crash! we'll go then," said Karlsson gaily. "But it's a small matter," he said and spread his fingers.

Eric decided to regard it as a small matter. He wrote a little note to Mommy and Daddy and left it on the table.



*I am up wiv Karlsson
on the rufe*

It would be best if he could get back before they spotted the note. But if by any chance they missed him, they would have to know where he was, otherwise there might be the same fuss again that there was when they were staying with Grannie and Eric had decided to take a trip by train on his own. Mommy wept afterward and said, “But, Eric, when you wanted to go on the train, why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because I wanted to go on the train,” said Eric.

That was the sort of thing that happened. He wanted to go with Karlsson up on the roof, and that was why it was best not to tell anybody. If they did discover he was gone, he could always say that, after all, he had written them that note.

Karlsson was ready to start. He turned the button in his middle and the engine began to hum.

“Jump up!” he shouted. “We’re off!”

They certainly were—out through the window and up in the air. Karlsson took a little extra flight over the nearest rooftops to make sure that the engine was working properly. It chuffed very evenly and well, and Eric was not in the least frightened. On the contrary, he thought it was fun.

At last Karlsson landed on their own roof.

“Now we’ll see if you can find my house,” said Karlsson. “I won’t tell you that it’s behind the chimney; you’ll have to find it for yourself.”



Eric had never been on a roof before. But sometimes he had seen men up there, repairing tiles, and walking about with ropes around their waists to keep them from falling off. Eric had always thought how lucky they were to be doing that. But this time he himself was just as lucky, although he did not have a rope around his waist, of course, and he had a fluttery feeling as he carefully made his way toward the chimney. Behind the chimney stood Karlsson's little house, just as he had said. How pretty it looked with its green shutters and little steps that you could sit down on if you wanted to. But at the moment Eric was chiefly intent on getting inside the house to see all the steam engines and pictures and everything else that Karlsson had there.

There was a brass plate on the door to show who lived there. It read:



Karlsson threw the door wide open and shouted, "Welcome, my dear Karlsson ... and you, too, Eric!" Then he rushed in ahead of Eric.

“I’ve got to get to bed! I’m the World’s Illest,” he shouted, taking a headlong leap onto a red couch which stood along one wall. Eric followed him in. He was dying with curiosity. It was nice at Karlsson’s—Eric could see that at once. Apart from the couch, there was a workbench which evidently doubled as a table, and there were two chairs and a cupboard and a fireplace with an iron grid above it. That was probably where Karlsson did his cooking.



But he could not discover any steam engines. Eric took a thorough look around, but he could not see a single one, and finally he asked, “Where do you keep your steam engines?”

“Hmm!” said Karlsson. “My steam engines ... they’ve all exploded. Something wrong with the safety valves, that’s all. But it’s a small matter and not worth grieving over.”

Eric looked around again.

“But your rooster pictures? ... Have they exploded, too?” he asked with some sarcasm.

“You can see they haven’t,” said Karlsson. “What do you suppose this is?” he said, pointing to a piece of cardboard which was nailed to the wall beside the cupboard. Quite right! In a corner at the bottom of the cardboard there was a rooster—a tiny little red rooster. Otherwise the cardboard was empty.

“The title of this picture is ‘A Very Lonely Little Red Rooster,’” said Karlsson.

Eric looked at the little rooster. Karlsson’s thousand rooster pictures—did they, after all, only consist of this miserable little specimen of a rooster?

“‘Very Lonely Rooster,’ painted by the World’s Best Rooster Painter,” said Karlsson, in a voice trembling with emotion. “Oh, what a beautiful and sad picture! But I mustn’t start to cry, because then my temperature will go up.”

He threw himself back against the cushions and held his forehead. “You’re to be like a mother to me. Go ahead!” he said.

Eric did not quite know how to begin. “Have you got any medicine?” he asked hesitantly.

“Yes, but not any that I’d like to take,” replied Karlsson. “Have you got a penny?”

Eric took a penny out of his pants pocket.

“Give it to me first,” said Karlsson. Eric gave him the penny. Karlsson held it tightly in his hand and looked very cunning and pleased.

“I know what medicine I can take,” he said.

“Which?” asked Eric.

“Karlsson-on-the-Roof’s Cure-All Medicine. It’s half gumdrops and half chocolates, and you stir it all up together thoroughly with some cake crumbs. Do that, and I’ll have a dose right now,” said Karlsson. “It’s good for a temperature.”

“I don’t think so,” said Eric.

“What do you bet?” said Karlsson. “I bet you a bar of chocolate that I’m right.”

Eric thought that perhaps this was what Mommy had meant when she said that you could decide who was right by a sensible discussion.

“Shall we bet?” repeated Karlsson.

“All right,” said Eric.

He took out one of the two bars of chocolate that he had bought and put it down on the workbench, so that they could see what the betting was about. Then he mixed the medicine according to Karlsson’s recipe. He took sour balls and gumdrops and toffee and stirred them together in a cup with an equal number of pieces of chocolate, and then he broke the macaroons into little pieces and sprinkled them on top. Eric had never seen a medicine like that in all his life, but it looked good, and he almost wished that he had a little temperature himself so that he could try it out.

Karlsson sat in bed, with his mouth wide open like a baby bird, and Eric hurried to find a spoon.

“Pour a large dose into me,” said Karlsson.

Eric did so. Then they both sat still and waited for Karlsson’s temperature to go down.

After half a minute Karlsson said, “You were right. It isn’t any good for a temperature. Give me the bar of chocolate!”

“Are *you* going to have the bar of chocolate?” said Eric in surprise. “It was *I* who won the bet.”

“If you won, then it’s only right that I should have the bar,” said Karlsson. “There must be some justice in the world. Besides, you’re a cheeky little boy to sit there and want chocolate simply because *I* have a temperature.”

Reluctantly Eric handed the bar of chocolate to Karlsson. Karlsson promptly got his teeth into it and said while chewing, “No sour looks, if you please. Next time it’ll be *my* turn to win and *yours* to have the bar of chocolate.”

He chewed eagerly, and when he had eaten every bit of the bar he lay back against the pillows and sighed heavily. “I pity all sick people,” he said. “I pity me! Of course, I could try taking a double dose of Cure-All Medicine, but I don’t suppose for a moment that it would help.”

“Oh, yes, I think a double would help,” said Eric quickly. “Shall we bet?”

Eric could be cunning, too. He did not at all think that Karlsson’s temperature would be cured even by a triple dose of Cure-All Medicine, but he wanted to lose a bet so that he might have the last bar of chocolate if Karlsson won.

“I don’t mind betting,” said Karlsson. “You mix a double dose! When it’s a matter of temperature you shouldn’t leave a stone unturned. We can try!”

Eric mixed a double dose of the medicine and ladled it into Karlsson, who willingly gaped and swallowed all of it.

Then they sat still and waited. After half a minute Karlsson leaped out of bed, beaming with joy. “A

miracle has happened!” he shouted. “My temperature’s gone! You’ve won again. Hand me the bar of chocolate!”

Eric sighed and handed over the last bar. Karlsson looked at him disapprovingly.

“Sourpusses like you should never bet,” he said, “but only people like me who walk around like little rays of sunshine whether we win or lose.”

There was silence for a time, except for the noise of Karlsson munching chocolate. Then he said, “But since you’re such a greedy little boy, I suppose we’d better share the rest like brothers. Have you got any candies left?”

Eric felt in his pocket. “Three,” he said and took out two toffees and a gumdrop.

“Three?” said Karlsson. “You can’t halve three, even a two-year-old knows that.”

He took the gumdrop from Eric’s outstretched hand and quickly devoured it.

“But *now* we can,” he said.

Then he looked at the two toffees with hungry eyes. One of them was a fraction bigger than the other.

“Kind and considerate as I am, I will give you first choice,” said Karlsson. “But you do know, don’t you, that when you’re allowed to choose first, you must take the smaller,” he continued, looking sternly at Eric.

Eric thought for a moment.

“I want *you* to choose first,” he said cleverly.

“Well, since you insist,” said Karlsson, grabbing the bigger toffee, which he quickly put into his mouth.

Eric looked at the small toffee which was left in his hand.

“Look here, I thought you said that the first to choose should take the smaller ...”

“Listen to me, you little pig,” said Karlsson. “If you had been the first to choose, which would you have taken?”

“I would have taken the smaller, I really would,” said Eric seriously.

“What’s all the fuss about, then?” said Karlsson. “That’s the one you’ve got, isn’t it?”

Eric wondered once more if this was what Mommy meant by a “sensible discussion.”

But Eric never stayed in a huff for long. Anyway, it was a good thing that Karlsson no longer had a temperature. Karlsson thought so, too.

“I shall write and tell all the doctors what’s good for a temperature. ‘Try Karlsson-on-the-Roof’s Cure-All Medicine,’ I’ll write. ‘The World’s Best Medicine for a temperature.’”

Eric had not eaten his toffee yet. It looked so tasty and chewy that he wanted to take a good look at it first. Once you started to eat it, it was soon gone.

Karlsson looked at Eric’s toffee, too. He looked at it for a long time; then he put his head to one side and said, “I bet you I can make your toffee vanish without your seeing how I do it.”

“ ’Course you can’t,” said Eric. “Not if I stand here with it in my hand, looking at it all the time.”

“Shall we bet?” said Karlsson.

“No,” said Eric. “I know I shall win, and then you’ll want the toffee....” Eric felt in his bones that this was the wrong way to do it. This was not how he and Betty and Bobby betted.

“But we can bet the ordinary, proper way, so that the one who *wins* gets the toffee,” said Eric.

“Just as you like, you greedy little boy,” said Karlsson. “I bet that I can make your toffee disappear without your noticing it.”

“All right,” said Eric.

“Hokus pokus filiokus,” said Karlsson, seizing the toffee. “Hokus pokus filiokus,” he said, putting it into his mouth.

“Stop!” cried Eric. “I *did* see you making it disappear....”

“Did you?” said Karlsson, swallowing quickly. “Then you’ve won *again*. I never saw such a boy for winning all the bets.”

“Yes ... but ... the toffee,” said Eric, quite confused. “The winner was to get the toffee.”

“Yes, true enough,” said Karlsson. “But I’ve made the toffee disappear, and I bet I can’t make it appear again.”

Eric said nothing. But he thought that as soon as he saw Mommy he would tell her that sensible discussions were not a bit of good when you wanted to decide who was right.

He put his hands into his empty pockets. Oh, good! He felt there another toffee which he had overlooked before. A large chewy, scrumptious toffee. Eric laughed.

“I bet you I’ve got another toffee,” he said. “And I bet I shall eat it up in no time,” he said, quickly popping the toffee into his mouth.

Karlsson sat down on the bed, looking offended.

“You were to be like a mother to me,” he said. “And all you do is push all the things you can into yourself. I never saw such a greedy little boy.”

He sat silent for a time, looking more annoyed than ever. “Besides, you haven’t given me the penny because my scarf tickles,” he said.

“But you’re not wearing a scarf,” said Eric.

“There isn’t a scarf in the whole house,” said Karlsson, grumpily. “But if there had been one, I’d have been wearing it, and it would have tickled, and then I would have had a penny.”

He looked pleadingly at Eric, and his eyes filled with tears. “Should I have to suffer only because there’s no scarf in the house?”

Eric did not think that he should. So he gave Karlsson-on-the-Roof his very last penny.



Chapter 5 - Karlsson Plays Tricks

“I feel like having fun now,” said Karlsson a little later. “Let’s go for a walk on the roofs around here; then we’re bound to think of something fun to do.”

Eric wanted to do that very much. He took Karlsson’s hand, and together they marched through the door and out onto the roof. It was beginning to grow dark, and everything looked very beautiful. The air had the bluish tint which it has in the spring; all the houses looked mysterious and exciting, as houses do in the twilight; the park where Eric often played seemed to glimmer strangely green far below; and from the great balsam poplar in Eric’s courtyard a wonderful scent rose all the way up to the roof.

It was a perfect evening for roof walking. Every window was open, and you could hear all sorts of sounds: people talking, children laughing, and babies crying. There was a clatter of china from a neighboring kitchen where someone was doing dishes, a dog whined, and a piano was being played somewhere. From the street below came the *pop-pop-pop* of a motorbike, and when that noise died away, a horse clattered past with a cart behind it, and every clop of the horse’s hoofs could be heard on the roof.

“If people only knew what fun it is to walk on the roof, there wouldn’t be a single person left in the street,” said Eric. “Oh, this is super fun!”

“Yes, and it’s exciting, too,” said Karlsson. “Because you can very easily fall down. I’ll show you a few places where you *nearly* fall every time.”

The houses were built so close together that you could walk from one roof to the next. There were

many queer little projections, and attics, and chimneys, and nooks and crannies, so it was never boring. And it certainly was exciting, as Karlsson had said, because now and then you very nearly did fall down. In one place there was quite a wide gap between two houses, and it was in just such a place that Eric almost fell. But Karlsson caught hold of him at the last moment when one of his legs had already begun to slide over the edge of the roof.

“Good fun, isn’t it?” said Karlsson as he hauled Eric up again. “That’s just what I meant. Do it again!”

But Eric said he would rather not do it again. It was a little too close for him. There were several places where you had to cling with arms and legs to avoid falling, and Karlsson wanted Eric to have as much fun as possible, so he did not always take him by the easiest route.

“I think we ought to play some tricks,” said Karlsson. “I generally stroll around on the roofs in the evening, playing little tricks on the people who live in all these attic rooms.”

“What do you do?” asked Eric.

“I play different tricks on different people, of course. Never the same trick twice. The World’s Best Tricker—guess who that is!”

At that instant a little child began to cry nearby. Eric had heard the crying before, but then it had stopped. The child had taken a rest, he supposed. Now it started again, and the crying came from the nearest attic. It was such a sad and forlorn sound.

“Poor thing!” said Eric. “Perhaps it’s got a tummy-ache.”

“We shall soon see,” said Karlsson. “Come with me!”

They edged along the gutter until they found themselves immediately below the attic window. Then Karlsson cautiously raised his head and peeped in.

“Very lonely little child,” he said. “Mommy and Daddy are out gallivanting, I see.”

The child wept more bitterly than ever.

“Calm, be calm!” said Karlsson, heaving himself over the window ledge. “Here comes Karlsson-on-the-Roof, the World’s Best Nursemaid.”

Eric did not want to be left alone outside. He climbed in the window after Karlsson, although he wondered anxiously what would happen if the child’s mother and father came home suddenly.

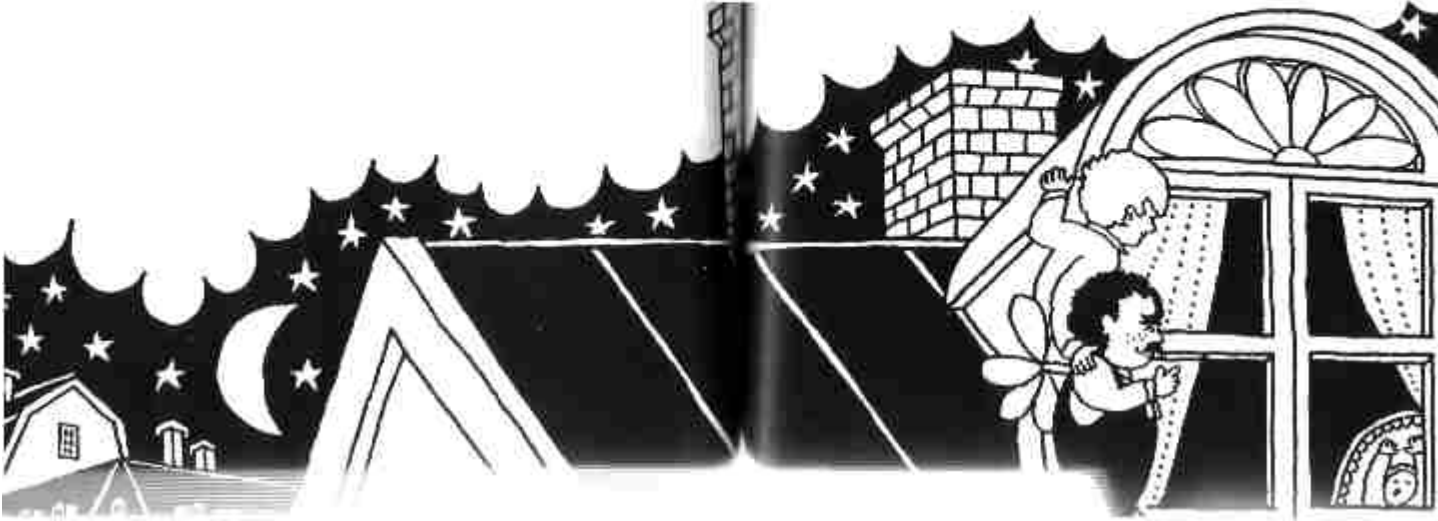
But Karlsson was not in the least worried. He walked up to where the baby was lying and put a chubby finger under its chin.

“Coo-oo,” he crowed playfully, and turned to Eric. “That’s the way to talk to babies to make them happy.”

The baby stopped crying from sheer astonishment, but as soon as she had recovered from her surprise, she started off again.

“Coo-oo . . . and then this is what you do,” said Karlsson, lifting the baby out of her crib and throwing her up to the ceiling, time and time again. Maybe the baby enjoyed it, because suddenly she gave a toothless little grin.

“It’s as easy as pie to amuse children,” he said. “The World’s Best Nursemaid—”



He got no farther when the baby started crying again.

“COO-OO-OO,” roared Karlsson angrily, heaving the baby more violently than ever toward the ceiling. “Coo-oo, I said, and I mean it, too!”

The baby was screaming its head off, and Eric put out his arms to take her from Karlsson.

“Let me have her,” he said. He was very, very fond of tiny babies, and he had been asking Mommy and Daddy to give him a little sister, since they were so determined not to let him have a dog.

He took the small bundle from Karlsson and held her tenderly in his arms.

“Don’t cry, there’s a good baby,” he said. The baby watched him silently with a pair of big, solemn eyes. Then her face broke again into a toothless smile, and she gurgled contentedly.

“It’s my coo-ing working,” said Karlsson. “It always works, I’ve tried it out thousands of times.”

“I wonder what her name is,” said Eric, stroking the soft little cheek with his finger.

“Curliwig,” said Karlsson. “That’s what most of them are called.”

Eric had never heard of a child being called Curliwig before, but he thought the World’s Best Nursemaid would be sure to know more than he did about children’s names.

“Little Curliwig,” said Eric, “I think you’re surely hungry,” because Curliwig had gripped his finger and wanted to suck it.

“So Curliwig’s hungry! Well, there are sausages and potatoes here,” said Karlsson, glancing in at the kitchen. “No child need starve to death while Karlsson has the strength to drag out sausages and potatoes.”

Eric did not think that Curliwig could eat sausages and potatoes.

“Young babies should have milk, shouldn’t they?” he queried.

“Don’t you think the World’s Best Nursemaid knows what children should have and shouldn’t have?” said Karlsson. “But just as you like! I can fly and fetch a cow.” He frowned at the window.

“But it’ll be rather difficult to bring an old cow in through this measly window.”

Curliwig searched eagerly for Eric’s finger, whimpering pitifully. She really did sound hungry.

Eric looked in the kitchen, but he could not find any milk. There was nothing but three cold sausages on a plate.

“Calm, be calm!” said Karlsson. “I’ve just remembered where there’s some milk. I have a drink there myself sometimes. Hi-ho! I won’t be long.”

Karlsson turned the button on his tummy and buzzed off through the window before Eric had time to wink twice.

Eric was dreadfully worried. Supposing Karlsson stayed away for hours, as he often did! And supposing the baby’s mommy and daddy came home and found Eric with their Curliwig in his arms!

But Eric did not have to worry for long. This time Karlsson was quick. Proud as a peacock he came buzzing in through the window, and in his hand he held one of those bottles that babies drink from.

“Where did you get that?” asked Eric, very much surprised.

“From my usual dairy,” said Karlsson. “A balcony a few streets away!”

“Have you *pinched* it?” said Eric in alarm.

“I have borrowed it,” said Karlsson.

“Borrowed! When are you going to take it back, then?” asked Eric.

“Never,” said Karlsson.

Eric looked at him sternly, but Karlsson spread his fingers and said, “A bottle of milk—it’s a small matter! The people I borrowed it from have triplets, and they put out masses and masses of bottles in buckets of ice on the balcony, and they *like* me to borrow their milk for Curliwig.”

Curliwig stretched out her little hands for the bottle and squeaked hungrily.

“I’ll warm it a bit,” said Eric briskly, and handed Curliwig over to Karlsson. Karlsson shouted, “Coo-oo,” and heaved Curliwig up to the ceiling while Eric went into the kitchen to warm the milk.

A little later Curliwig lay sleeping in her crib like a little angel. She was full and contented after Eric had tucked her in. Karlsson had prodded her with his finger and shouted, “Coo-oo,” and in spite of it Curliwig had gone to sleep because she was tired and full of milk.

“Now we’ll play some jokes before we go off,” said Karlsson.

He went into the kitchen and fetched the cold sausages. Eric looked at him, wide-eyed.

“Watch these tricks!” said Karlsson, balancing a sausage on the kitchen door handle.

“Number one,” he said, and nodded, pleased with himself. Then he went with quick steps to the chest of drawers. There stood a beautiful, white china dove, and, before Eric knew what was happening, the white dove had a sausage in its beak.

“Number two!” said Karlsson. “And number three is for Curliwig.”

He stabbed the sausage on a little stick and put the stick into the hand of the sleeping Curliwig. It looked comical, rather as if Curliwig herself had gone to fetch a sausage and fallen asleep before she had had time to eat it. But Eric said, “I wish you wouldn’t do that!”

“Calm, be calm!” said Karlsson. “This is to stop her mommy and daddy from going gadding about in the evenings.”

“But how?” asked Eric.

“A baby who can get up and fetch herself a sausage can’t be left alone, that’s obvious. Who knows what she will think of next ... her daddy’s beer, perhaps.”

He settled the sausage stick more firmly in Curliwig’s tiny hand.

“Calm, be calm!” he said. “I know what I’m doing because I’m the World’s Best Nursemaid.”

At that moment Eric heard footsteps on the stairs outside; it nearly made him jump with fright.

“They’re coming!” he whispered.

“Calm, be calm!” said Karlsson, and they both rushed to the window. Eric heard a key being put in the lock, and he felt desperate, but somehow he managed to heave himself over the window ledge, and a second later he heard the door open and a voice said, “Mommy’s little Susie, fast asleep!”

“Yes, she does nothing but sleep,” said another voice. Then a scream was heard, and Eric guessed that Curliwig’s mommy and daddy had now spotted the sausage.

He did not wait to hear the rest but caught up with the World’s Best Nursemaid, who was just about to hide behind a chimney.

“Would you like to see two scoundrels?” asked Karlsson, when they had had a rest. “I’ve got two first-rate scoundrels in another attic over here.”

It almost sounded as if they were Karlsson’s own scoundrels; they couldn’t very well be that, but, all the same, Eric certainly wanted to see them.

There were sounds of noisy talking and laughing coming from the scoundrels’ attic. “Mirth and joy!” said Karlsson. “Come along, let’s see what’s so funny.”

They crept along the gutter pipe. Karlsson raised his head and peeped in. The curtains were drawn, but there was a gap that you could see through.

“The scoundrels have a visitor,” whispered Karlsson.

Eric also had a peep at them. There were two men sitting there who had the appearance of tough characters, and a meek-looking little man who might have come from the country town where Grannie lived.

“Do you know what I think?” whispered Karlsson. “I think these scoundrels are playing tricks as well as me. But they’d better not!”

He took another peep.

“I’m jolly sure they’re playing tricks on that poor fellow in the red tie,” he whispered to Eric.

The scoundrels and the man in the red tie were sitting at a small table near the window. They were eating and drinking, and the scoundrels were patting the one in the red tie cordially on the shoulder, saying, “We’re very glad we met you, Oscar!”

“I’m very glad, too,” said Oscar. “When you come to a town like this, it’s really most important to find good friends that you can rely on. Otherwise no one knows *what* might happen. You might easily fall into the hands of rogues.”

The scoundrels nodded.

“Yes, indeed, you might have come up against rogues,” said one. “Wasn’t it lucky you met Cosh and me!”

“Yes, if you hadn’t found Ruffy and me, anything might have happened to you,” said the other. “But now let’s eat, drink, and be merry,” said the one whose name was Cosh, patting Oscar again on the shoulder. Then he did something which surprised Eric very much. As if by accident, he put his hand into the hip pocket of Oscar’s trousers, pulled out a wallet, and put it stealthily into the hip pocket

of his own trousers. And Oscar noticed nothing. Maybe it was because Ruffy, at the same time, was patting him busily. But when Ruffy had finished his patting and withdrew his hand, Oscar's watch chanced to be in it. Ruffy popped it into his own hip pocket. And Oscar noticed nothing.

But Karlsson-on-the-Roof carefully stretched a chubby hand through the chink in the curtains and took the wallet out of the hip pocket of Cosh's trousers, and Cosh noticed nothing. Then Karlsson stretched out a chubby hand and took the watch out of the hip pocket of Ruffy's trousers, and Ruffy noticed nothing.

Some time after, when Ruffy and Cosh and Oscar had eaten and drunk still more, Cosh put his hand in his pocket and found that the wallet was gone. He glowered angrily at Ruffy and said, "Look here, Ruffy, you come along out on the landing. I want a word with you."

At that moment Ruffy felt in his pocket and discovered that the watch was gone. He scowled angrily at Cosh and said, "That's O.K. with me. I want a word with you too."

Cosh and Ruffy then went out onto the landing, and poor Oscar sat there alone. He must have thought it was dull, because soon he got up and went out to see what had become of Cosh and Ruffy. Karlsson quickly climbed over the window ledge and put Oscar's wallet into the empty soup tureen. And the watch Karlsson fixed to the light on the ceiling, where it hung swaying, and it was the first thing that Oscar, Ruffy, and Cosh saw when they came back from the landing. But they did not see Karlsson, because he had crawled underneath the table, concealed by the cloth, which nearly reached the floor. By this time, Eric was also sitting under the table, because he wanted to be with Karlsson even in such a doubtful situation.

"Look at my watch!" said Oscar. "How on earth did it get up there?"

He went and took down the watch and put it back in his waistcoat pocket.

"And if this isn't my wallet!" he said, looking into the soup tureen. "How very strange!"

Ruffy and Cosh looked at Oscar with admiration, and Cosh said, "Even country bumpkins know a thing or two, it seems."

Ruffy, Cosh, and Oscar sat down at the table once more.

"Oscar, old buddy, you must have some more to eat and drink," said Cosh.

So Oscar, Ruffy, and Cosh ate, drank, and patted each other on the back. After a short time Cosh's hand appeared under the table, carefully placing Oscar's wallet on the floor. He must have thought it was a safer place than his trousers pocket—but it wasn't, because Karlsson immediately seized the wallet and passed it up to Ruffy. Ruffy took the wallet and said, "Cosh, I misjudged you, you're a gentleman, after all."

Soon Ruffy's hand appeared under the table, carefully placing Oscar's watch on the floor. Karlsson took the watch, nudged Cosh's leg gently, and handed him Oscar's watch. Cosh said, "There's not a better pal than you, Ruffy!"

But presently Oscar said, "Where's my wallet? And where's my watch?"

Then, quick as lightning, both the wallet and the watch reappeared under the table because Cosh dared not keep the watch, and Ruffy dared not keep the wallet on him in case Oscar began to make a disturbance. And sure enough Oscar did begin to make quite a considerable amount of disturbance, shouting that he wanted his watch and his wallet. Cosh said, "How are we to know what you've done with your old wallet?"

And Ruffy said, "We haven't seen your old watch; you should be more careful with your things!"

Karlsson picked up the wallet and the watch and handed them up to Oscar. Oscar put them away in his pockets and said, "Thank you, Cosh; thank you, Ruffy. You mustn't play tricks like that again."

Karlsson gave Cosh's leg a hard kick, and Cosh shouted, "You'll pay for this, Ruffy!"

Then Karlsson gave Ruffy's leg a hard kick, and Ruffy shouted, "You're off your head, Cosh; what're you kicking me for?"

Ruffy and Cosh leaped up and began to fight, so that all the plates crashed to the floor and broke, and Oscar was so frightened that he hurried off with his wallet and watch and was never seen again.



Eric was frightened too, but he could not run away; he had to sit quietly under the table.

Cosh was stronger than Ruffy, and he chased Ruffy out onto the landing where he continued the beating. Karlsson and Eric came out from under the table and looked at all the plates lying in pieces on the floor. Karlsson said, "Why should the soup tureen be left when all the plates are broken? It'll be lonely by itself, the poor soup tureen!"

He smashed the tureen, and he and Eric rushed to the window and climbed out as fast as they could. They had just done so when Eric heard Cosh and Ruffy come back into the room, and Cosh was saying, "Why, for Pete's sake, did you give him back the watch and the wallet, you stupid idiot?"

"You must be crazy," said Ruffy. "It was *you* that did it."

This made Karlsson shake with laughter, and he said, "We've played enough tricks for one day."

Eric too felt that he had had enough of tricks.

It was now quite dark, and Eric and Karlsson walked back, hand in hand, across the roofs to Karlsson's dwelling, which stood on top of Eric's house. When they arrived they heard a fire engine coming along the street with a tremendous noise of hooting.

"There's a fire somewhere; you'll see," said Eric. "The fire engines are coming."

"Perhaps it's in this very house," said Karlsson hopefully. "They've only got to ask me and I'll help them because I'm the World's Best Fire-putter-outer."

They saw that the fire engine had stopped just below them in the street, and a whole crowd of people was gathering around it. But they could not discover any fire. On the other hand, they suddenly saw a ladder shooting up toward the roof—one of those tall, extending ladders that the firemen use.

Eric began to wonder.

"Supposing ... supposing ... they're coming to fetch me," he said, because he suddenly remembered the note which he had left in his room. And it was getting late.

"But why?" said Karlsson. "Surely nobody could possibly mind your being up here on the roof for a short time?"

"Yes, my mommy would," said Eric. "She worries a lot."

He felt very sorry for Mommy when he thought about it, and longed for her.

"We could play some tricks on the firemen, couldn't we?" suggested Karlsson.

But Eric was unwilling to play any more tricks. He stood still and waited for the fireman who came climbing up the ladder.

"Well," said Karlsson, "it's really about time I got ready for bed. Of course, we've taken things pretty quietly and not played a lot of tricks, but I did, after all, have at least ninety or a hundred degrees of temperature this morning, we mustn't forget that."

And he scuttled off across the roof.

"Hi-ho, Eric!" he shouted.

"Hi-ho, Karlsson!" said Eric. But all the time he was watching the fireman, coming closer and closer.

"Eric," called Karlsson before he disappeared behind the chimney, "don't tell the firemen that I'm here ... because I'm the World's Best Fire-putter-outer, and I would never get a moment's peace whenever a fire broke out anywhere."

The fireman was quite close now. "Stay where you are," he shouted to Eric. "Don't move an inch! I'm coming for you."

It was kind of him, thought Eric, but how unnecessary! Eric, who had wandered round the roofs all the afternoon, was perfectly able to walk another two steps.

"Did my mother send you?" he asked when, in the arms of the fireman, he was coming down the ladder.

"What do you think?" said the fireman. "But look here ... it seemed to me for a moment that there were *two* little boys up there on the roof ..."

Eric remembered what Karlsson had said and he answered solemnly, "No, there wasn't any *boy* except me."

Mommy certainly was worried. She and Daddy, Betty, and Bobby, and a crowd of other people were down below in the street to receive Eric. Mommy flung her arms around him and squeezed

him, and laughed and wept alternately. And Daddy carried him up to the flat, holding him tight all the time. Bobby said, “You sure can frighten the life out of us, Eric!”

Betty, too, was weeping, and said, “You must never do a thing like that again, remember!”

When Eric was lying in bed a little later, they all gathered around him, exactly as if it had been his birthday. But Daddy spoke very seriously, saying, “Didn’t you realize that we’d be worried? Didn’t you realize that Mommy would cry and be upset?”

Eric fidgeted in his bed.

“Not as worried as that,” he muttered.

Mommy hugged him very hard and said, “Supposing you’d fallen down! Supposing we’d lost you!”

“Would you have been sad?” said Eric hopefully.

“Why, what do you think?” said Mommy. “We wouldn’t be without you for anything in the world; surely you know that?”

“Not for a hundred thousand million dollars even?”

“No, not for a hundred thousand million dollars.”

“Am I worth as much as that?” asked Eric in astonishment.

“You are,” said Mommy, giving him another hug.

Eric thought: A hundred thousand million dollars—what a terrible lot of money! Was it possible that he could be worth so much? Why, you could get a puppy, a really good puppy, for just ten or twelve dollars.

“Daddy!” said Eric, when he had finished thinking. “If I’m worth a hundred thousand million dollars, couldn’t I have ten of it to buy a little dog?”

Chapter 6 - Karlsson Plays Ghost

It was not until the following day at the dinner table that they asked Eric how he had managed to get up on the roof.

“Did you climb through the skylight in the attic?” asked Mommy.

“No, I *flew* up with Karlsson-on-the-Roof” said Eric.

Mommy and Daddy looked at each other.

“No, it can’t go on any longer,” said Mommy. “That Karlsson-on-the-Roof is driving me crazy.”

“Eric, there *is* no Karlsson-on-the-Roof,” said Daddy.

“Isn’t there?” said Eric. “He was there yesterday.”

Mommy shook her head.

“It’s a good thing this term’s nearly finished so that you can go and stay with your Grannie,” she said. “I hope Karlsson-on-the-Roof won’t be going there with you, at any rate.”

This was a problem that Eric had overlooked. He was going to Grannie’s for the summer vacation, and he would not see Karlsson for two months. It wasn’t that he didn’t like it at Grannie’s (he always had a good time there), but, oh, how he would miss Karlsson! And supposing Karlsson was not living on the roof any more when Eric came home again!

With his elbows on the table and his head resting on his hands, he sat there and tried to imagine what life would be like without Karlsson.

“Take your elbows off the table; you should know better,” said Betty.

“Mind your own business,” said Eric.

“Take your elbows off the table, Eric,” said Mommy. “Will you have some more cauliflower?”

“No, I’d rather be dead.”

“Eric, that’s no way to speak,” said Daddy. “You should say, ‘No, thank you.’”

What a way to order a hundred-thousand-million-dollar child about, thought Eric, but he did not say so. Instead he said, “Don’t you know that when I say, ‘I’d rather be dead,’ I mean ‘No, thank you’?”

“But that’s not the way a gentleman would speak,” Daddy said firmly. “And you want to be a gentleman, don’t you, Eric?”

“No, I’d rather be like you, Daddy,” said Eric.

Mommy and Betty and Bobby laughed; Eric could not understand why, but he felt that they were laughing at Daddy, and he did not like it.

“I want to be like you, Daddy, because you’re always nice,” he said, looking affectionately at his father.

“Thank you, son,” said Daddy. “Now, what about it, don’t you want some cauliflower after all?”

“No, I’d rather be dead,” said Eric.

“But it’s good for you,” said Mommy.

“Just what I thought,” said Eric. “Because the nastier the food tastes, the better it is for you. Why do they have to stuff all the vitamins into things you can’t eat? That’s what I want to know.”

“Yes, isn’t it queer?” said Bobby. “I suppose you think they should be put in toffees and chewing gum instead!”

“That’s the sensiblest thing you’ve said for a long time,” said Eric.

After dinner he went to his room. He wished with all his heart that Karlsson would come. Soon he would be going away, and he wanted to see as much of Karlsson as possible before then.

Maybe Karlsson felt this unconsciously because he came flying by as soon as Eric put his nose outside the window.

“Haven’t you got a temperature today?” asked Eric.

“Temperature! Me?” said Karlsson. “I’ve never had a temperature in my life! It was make-believe.”

“Did you imagine that you had a temperature?” said Eric, surprised.

“No, but I made *you* believe that I had,” said Karlsson with a delighted laugh. “The World’s Best Tricker—guess who that is?”

Karlsson was not still for a moment. All the time he was talking he scampered around the room, fingering everything inquisitively, opening as many cupboards and drawers as he could, and examining their contents with the greatest interest.

“No, I haven’t got any temperature today,” he said. “Today I’m tremendously well and feel like having some fun.”

Eric felt like some fun, too. But first of all he wanted Mommy and Daddy and Bobby and Betty to see Karlsson, so that he wouldn’t have to listen to their nagging about Karlsson’s not existing.

“Wait a minute,” he said quickly. “I won’t be long.”

He rushed into the sitting room. Betty and Bobby had just gone out (which was too bad), but his

mother and father were sitting there, and Eric said eagerly, "Mommy and Daddy, please come to my room right away?"

He dared not say anything about Karlsson; it would be better if they saw him unexpectedly.

"Won't you come and sit with us instead?" said Mommy. But Eric tugged at her arm.

"No, *please* come! I want to show you something."

After some persuasion he managed to get them both to come, and joyfully he opened the door to his room. Now at last they'd see ...

He could have wept with disappointment: the room was empty—just like the other time when he was going to show them Karlsson.

"What did you want to show us?" asked Daddy.

"Nothing special," mumbled Eric.

Luckily, the telephone rang just then, so Eric did not have to explain. Daddy went to answer it. And Mommy had a sponge cake in the oven that she had to watch. Eric found himself alone. He sat down by the window; he was quite angry with Karlsson and made up his mind to tell him off if he came flying in.

But no one came flying. Instead the closet door opened, and Karlsson's cheery face appeared.

Eric was very surprised. "What on earth are you doing in my closet?" he asked.

"Hatching eggs ... no! Contemplating my sins ... no! Lying on the shelf and resting ... yes," said Karlsson.

Eric forgot to be angry. He could not help but feel happy because Karlsson had turned up again.

"This is a marvelous closet for playing hide-and-seek in," said Karlsson. "Let's do that! I'll lie down on the shelf again, and you guess where I am."

Before Eric had time to answer, Karlsson had disappeared into the closet, and Eric could hear him struggling to get up to the shelf.

"Coo-ee," shouted Karlsson.

Eric opened the closet door wide and, without much difficulty, found Karlsson on the shelf.

"You horrid boy!" shouted Karlsson. "You should have looked under the bed and behind the table and in other places *first*. I'm going home if that's the way you're going to play. You're being beastly!"

The front doorbell rang, and a moment later Mommy called from the hall, "Eric! Bridget and Christopher are here."

This immediately put Karlsson in a good mood again. "We'll play some tricks on them," he whispered to Eric. "Shut the door on me!"

Eric shut the closet door. He had no sooner done this than Bridget and Christopher came in. They lived on the same street and were in the same class at school as Eric. Eric liked Bridget very much; he would often tell Mommy how sweet-natured she was. He liked Christopher, too, and had already forgiven him for the bruise on his forehead. It often happened that he fought with Christopher, but afterward they were as good friends as ever. As a matter of fact, it was not only with Christopher that Eric got into fights: he had had fierce battles with almost all the children on the street. But he was always on good terms with Bridget.

"How is it that you never fight with Bridget?" his mother once asked him.

"'Cause she's so sweet, I never need to," said Eric.

But even Bridget could be maddening sometimes. Yesterday, when they were walking home from school, Eric had talked about Karlsson-on-the-Roof. Bridget laughed and said that Karlsson was just imagination and make-believe. Christopher agreed with her, so that Eric had been obliged to punch him. That was when Christopher had thrown the stone at Eric's head.

But now they were here, and Christopher had Joffa with him. Because of Joffa, Eric even forgot Karlsson, who was lying on the shelf in the closet. Dogs are the nicest creatures on earth, thought Eric. Joffa jumped and barked, and Eric clung to his neck, petting him. Christopher stood, calmly watching. He knew, of course, that Joffa was his dog and nobody else's, so he might as well let Eric pet him as much as he liked.

While Eric was busy petting Joffa, Bridget stood looking around. "Where have you got your old Karlsson-on-the-Roof?" she said, teasing him. "We thought he'd be here!"

It was not until then that Eric remembered that Karlsson was lying on the shelf in the closet. But since he did not know what tricks Karlsson had decided to play this time, he could not tell Bridget and Christopher. So he only said, "Shut up! You said Karlsson-on-the-Roof was make-believe. You told me yesterday that he's only an invention."

"And he is, isn't he?" said Bridget, laughing, and as she laughed the dimples appeared in her cheeks.

"As it happens, he isn't," Eric replied.

"Of course he is," said Christopher.

"Of course he isn't," said Eric.

He wondered if it was any use going on with this "sensible discussion," or if it wouldn't be better to give Christopher a black eye right then. But before he had time to decide, a loud and clear "Cock-a-doodle-do" was heard from the depths of the closet.

"What was that?" said Bridget, and her mouth, which was small and red like a cherry, opened in astonishment.

"Cock-a-doodle-do," they heard once more, and it sounded exactly like a real rooster.

"Have you got a *rooster* in the closet?" asked Christopher, surprised. Joffa growled. But Eric laughed; he could not explain, so he just laughed.

"Cock-a-doodle-do," came from the closet.

"I'm going to open the door and have a look," said Bridget.

She opened it and peeped in. Christopher joined her and he looked, too. At first they could see nothing but a lot of clothes hanging there. But then they heard a tittering from above, and when they looked up they saw a fat little man on the shelf. He was lying down comfortably, leaning on one elbow, and dangling a chubby leg, which swung slowly to and fro. He had shining, happy blue eyes.



Both Bridget and Christopher were speechless. Joffa uttered a growl.

But when Bridget found her tongue she said, “Who’s that?”

“Only a little Make-Believe,” said the strange figure on the shelf, waggling his chubby leg more rapidly. “A small Make-Believe taking a rest. In short ... an Invention!”

“Is it ... is it ... ?” stuttered Christopher.

“A small Invention is lying here, just crouching, that’s all,” said the little man.

“Is it Karlsson-on-the-Roof?” whispered Bridget.

“What do you think?” said Karlsson. “Did you think it was old Mrs. Peabody from Number 92 who’s crept in here for a nap?”

Eric was unable to stop laughing, because Bridget and Christopher stood there with their mouths wide open, looking very silly.

“You haven’t got much to say now, have you?” said Eric at last.

Karlsson leaped down from the shelf. He went up to Bridget and pinched her cheek roguishly.

“And what little Childish Invention might this be, then?” he asked.

“We ...” began Christopher.

“What’s your name besides Augustus?” asked Karlsson.

“My name’s *not* Augustus,” said Christopher.

“And a good thing, too.”

“They’re called Bridget and Christopher,” said Eric.

“Yes, it’s unbelievable the things that happen to people,” said Karlsson. “But don’t let it worry you too much ... we can’t all be called Karlsson, unfortunately.” He took a good look around and continued in the same breath, “I feel like having some fun. Couldn’t we throw the chairs out of the window or something?”

Eric did not think that this would be a good idea, and he was sure that Mommy and Daddy wouldn’t think so.

“No, when they’re old-fashioned, there’s not much you can do about it,” said Karlsson. “We’ll just have to think of something else; we must have some fun. Otherwise I’m going home,” he said, and he pouted.

“Well, we can think of something else, surely,” said Eric pleadingly. But Karlsson seemed determined to sulk.

“You’d better watch out, or I might fly away and leave you,” he said.

Eric, Bridget, and Christopher all realized what a misfortune that would be, and they begged Karlsson to stay with them.

Karlsson sat for a time, still looking rather put out. “I’m not sure,” he said, “but *maybe* I’ll stay if she pats me and says ‘Good Karlsson,’” he said, pointing at Bridget with his fat little finger. Bridget hastened to pat him.

“Good Karlsson, you will stay, won’t you, so that we can have some fun?” she said.

“Very well, then, I suppose I’d better,” said Karlsson. The children heaved a sigh of relief, but too soon.

Eric’s mother and father sometimes went for a walk in the evenings; Mommy called from the hall, “Good-bye for now! Bridget and Christopher can stay until eight o’clock, and then you’re to go straight to bed, Eric. I’ll come and say good night later.”

They heard the hall door slam.

“She didn’t say how long *I* could stay,” said Karlsson, pouting. “It’s not fair, and I’m going home now.”

“You can stay as long as you like,” said Eric.

Karlsson pouted more than ever. “Why shouldn’t I be turned out at eight o’clock like other people?” said Karlsson. “I’m going ...”

“I’ll ask Mommy to turn you out at eight o’clock,” said Eric quickly. “What game shall we play?”

Suddenly Karlsson’s bad temper was gone. “Let’s play ghost and frighten the life out of people,” he said. “You’ve no idea what I can do with only a small sheet. If they’d given me a penny for everyone that I’ve frightened to death, I could have bought a vast amount of toffee. I’m the World’s Best Ghost,” said Karlsson, his eyes shining with fun.

Eric, Bridget, and Christopher wanted very much to play ghost, but Eric said, “We don’t have to be too *terribly* frightening, do we?”

“Calm, be calm!” said Karlsson. “You don’t have to teach the World’s Best Ghost anything about ghostliness. I shall only frighten them to death a *little*. They’ll hardly notice it.” Karlsson went over to Eric’s bed and pulled away the top sheet. “This’ll do fine for a smart little ghost-suit,” he said.

In the drawer of Eric’s writing desk he found a piece of charcoal and with it he sketched a ghastly ghost face on the sheet. Then he took Eric’s scissors and, before Eric could stop him, cut two holes for eyes.

“A sheet ... it’s a small matter,” said Karlsson. “A ghost has got to see; otherwise it could flutter off and land in Burma or *anywhere*.”

He threw the sheet over his head like a monk’s robe; his chubby little hands stuck out at the sides. Although the children knew that it was only Karlsson under the sheet, they were still frightened, and Joffa started barking fiercely. It was no better when the ghost switched on his engine and began to fly around the ceiling light, the sheet swirling with the speed. It looked really frightening.

“I’m a little motorized ghost—savage, but beautiful,” said Karlsson.

The children stood still, staring at him in terror. Joffa barked.

“I must say I rather like the *chuff-chuff* I make when I fly about,” he said. “But as I am a ghost, it might be a good idea to use the silencer. Ha! That’s better!”

He floated around with hardly a sound and seemed even more ghostly than before.

The thing now was to find someone to haunt.

“I can haunt the stairs—someone is bound to come and get the shock of his life,” said Karlsson.

The telephone rang, but Eric did not feel inclined to answer it. He let it go on ringing.

Karlsson practiced a few suitable sighs and groans. A ghost who could not sigh and groan was useless, Karlsson declared—it was the first thing a little ghost learned at ghost school.

It all took time. When at last they were standing in the hall, ready to go out on the landing to begin the haunting, they heard an odd scratching sound at the front door. At first Eric thought it must be Mommy and Daddy coming home early, but then he caught sight of a long piece of wire which was being pushed through the letter box. Eric remembered something he had heard his father reading aloud to his mother from the newspaper only a few days earlier. It said in the paper that there were many thieves about at present and that they broke into homes. The thieves were very cunning: first they telephoned to find out if there was anyone at home. If there was no reply they hurried to the house they had phoned, and then all they had to do was to pick the lock, walk in, and steal everything of value.

Eric was terribly frightened when he realized that thieves were about to break in, and so were Bridget and Christopher. Christopher had shut Joffa up in Eric’s room to prevent him from barking during the haunting. Now he was sorry he had done so.

But Karlsson was not frightened—far from it.

“Calm, be calm!” he whispered. “On occasions such as this you can’t do better than to have a ghost around. Come on! We’ll creep into the sitting room—I suppose that’s where your father keeps his chunks of gold and his diamonds,” he said to Eric.

Karlsson, Eric, Bridget, and Christopher crept into the sitting room as quietly, cautiously, and quickly as they could. They crouched and hid behind the furniture while Karlsson dashed into the beautiful old cupboard where Mommy kept her linen and shut the door behind him as best he could. No sooner was he hidden than the thieves came padding in. Eric, who was lying behind the couch next to the fireplace, peeped out. Two really ugly and dreadful-looking thieves were standing in the middle of the room. And (would you believe it?) they were none other than Cosh and Ruffy!

“Well, now, where do they keep the crown jewels, I wonder,” said Cosh in a low, hoarse voice.

“Here, of course,” said Ruffy, pointing at the antique bureau which had a large number of little drawers. Eric knew that Mommy kept her housekeeping money in one of the drawers, and in another there was the valuable ring and brooch that Grannie had given her. Daddy kept his gold medal there, too—the one he had received as a shooting prize. How terrible to think of the thieves taking it all, thought Eric, and he could hardly refrain from bursting into tears as he lay behind the couch.

“You have a look at it,” said Cosh. “I’m going out into the kitchen to see if they’ve got any silver spoons.”

Cosh disappeared, and Ruffy began to pull out the drawers. He gave a satisfied whistle. He had probably found the housekeeping money, thought Eric, getting sadder and sadder.

Ruffy pulled out the next drawer and whistled again. No doubt he had now found the ring and the brooch.

But there was no more whistling, for out of the cupboard burst a ghost with a threatening little groan. As Ruffy turned around and saw the ghost a rattle came from his throat, and he dropped the

housekeeping money, the ring, the brooch, and everything. The ghost fluttered about him, groaning and sighing, and suddenly it flew off into the kitchen. A second later Cosh came rushing in, his face white. “Guffy, a rhost!” he shouted in his fright, instead of, “Ruffy, a ghost.”



No wonder he was frightened—the ghost followed close behind him with dreadful sighs and groans. Ruffy and Cosh made for the door, followed by the ghost flapping around their ears while they rushed into the hall and out through the front door. But they could not escape: it chased them down the stairs, crying after them in a hollow, terrible ghost voice, “Calm, be calm! I’ll soon catch up with you and then the fun will start.”

But the ghost tired of the chase and came back to the sitting room. Eric picked up the housekeeping money, the ring, and the brooch and put them back in the bureau. Bridget and Christopher gathered up all the silver spoons that Cosh had dropped when he raced from the kitchen into the sitting room.

“The World’s Best Ghost, that’s Karlsson-on-the-Roof,” said the ghost, taking off his ghost suit.

The children laughed and were very happy, and Karlsson said, “There’s nothing to equal a ghost when it comes to frightening thieves. If people only knew how effective it is, they’d tie a fierce little ghost to every safe in the whole town.”

Eric jumped for joy because Mommy’s housekeeping money and ring and brooch, and Daddy’s gold medal, and all the silver spoons were safe, and he said, “Fancy people being so silly as to believe in ghosts! There aren’t any such things—Daddy says so.” He nodded wisely. “Silly thieves, they thought it was a ghost coming out of the cupboard, and really it wasn’t anything spooky at all — only Karlsson-on-the-Roof.”

Chapter 7 - Karlsson and Dog Nicholson

Next morning a sleepy, tousled little figure dressed in blue-striped pajamas came pattering on bare feet to Mommy in the kitchen. Betty and Bobby had gone to school and Daddy to the office. But Eric did not have to leave until later, and he was glad of that, because it was nice having Mommy to himself for a short time in the mornings. Although he regarded himself as a big boy who went to

school already, he still liked to sit on Mommy's lap when there was no one there to see. It was easy to talk then; and if they were not in a hurry, Mommy and Eric would sing and tell each other stories. Mommy was sitting by the kitchen table, reading the newspaper and drinking her morning coffee. Without a word, Eric climbed on to her lap and curled up in her arms. She held him silently until he had waked up properly.

Last night Mommy and Daddy had walked farther than they intended, and when they came home, Eric was already in bed, fast asleep. He had kicked off his bed-clothes, and when Mommy went to tuck him in she found two ugly holes in the sheet. It was very dirty, too; someone had been drawing on it with charcoal. No wonder Eric went to sleep early, thought Mommy. But now the culprit was here on her lap, and she was definitely not going to let him escape without an explanation.

"Now, Eric," she said, "I certainly would like to know who made those holes in your sheet—and you're not going to tell me it was Karlsson-on-the-Roof."

Eric was silent, thinking hard. But it *was* Karlsson-on-the-Roof who had made the holes, and he was not allowed to say so! And it was probably best not to say anything about the thieves, either—Mommy would not believe him.

"Well?" said Mommy when there was no reply.

"Couldn't you ask Bridget instead?" said Eric artfully. He would let Bridget tell Mommy what had happened—Mommy was bound to believe *her*.

Oh, so it was Bridget who cut up the sheet, thought Mommy. Eric was a splendid boy not to tattle but to let Bridget herself say what she had done. Mommy gave Eric a hug. She decided not to question him any more about the sheet just now, but she would certainly tackle Bridget about it at the earliest opportunity.

"You like Bridget quite a lot, don't you?" said Mommy.

"Yes, I ..." said Eric.

Mommy took a sidelong glance at the newspaper again, and Eric sat quietly on her lap, thinking. Who did he like, really? Mommy best of all ... and then Daddy. Sometimes he liked Bobby and Betty (well, he liked them most of the time ... especially Bobby) ... but now and then he was so cross with them that he saw red! He liked Karlsson-on-the-Roof. And he liked Bridget. Perhaps he would marry her when he was big: he had to have a wife, he supposed, whether he wanted to or not. He would much rather marry Mommy, though ... but maybe it was not possible.

He thought again and felt it would not be at all nice to live with Bridget. She could probably be pretty difficult sometimes. Besides, he wanted to go on living with Mommy and Daddy, and Bobby and Betty. He did not particularly want a wife at all.

"I'd much rather have a dog than a wife," he said. "Mommy, *couldn't* I have a dog?"

Mommy sighed. Oh, dear! Eric was starting up about that blessed dog again! It was nearly as troublesome as Karlsson-on-the-Roof.

"I'm afraid you'll have to hurry and get dressed," said Mommy, "or you'll be late for school."

"You would say that," said Eric crossly. "When I talk about my dog, you start talking about school!"

But it was a pleasure to go to school today, because he had a lot to talk about with Bridget and Christopher. They walked home together as usual, and it was more pleasant than it had been for a long time, thought Eric, now that Bridget and Christopher also knew Karlsson.

"He's such fun!" said Bridget. "D'you think he'll come again today?"

"I don't know," said Eric. "He only says he's coming *about*, and that can be any time."

"I hope he'll come about today," said Christopher. "Can Bridget and I go home with you?"

“I don’t mind,” said Eric.

There was someone else who wanted to come. As the children were starting to cross the street, a little white poodle came running up to Eric. He sniffed at his leg and yapped in a friendly fashion.

“What a dear little dog!” said Eric, blissfully happy. “Look, he’s probably afraid of the traffic and wants to cross over with us.”

Eric would have been delighted to help him across any number of streets. Perhaps the puppy knew this, because it walked between the crossing lines, pressed close to Eric’s leg.

“Isn’t he sweet!” said Bridget. “Come along, little dog!”

“No, he wants to come with me,” said Eric, taking a firm hold of the puppy. “He likes me.”

“He likes me as well, so pooh to you,” said Bridget.

The little puppy looked as if he would like everybody in the whole world, if only they liked him. And Eric liked him; oh, how he liked him! He stooped and stroked the puppy and made a lot of tender little sounds which were all meant to say that this puppy was the nicest dog ever. The puppy wagged his tail and looked as if he thought the same of Eric. He yapped and leaped about happily when the children turned into their own street.

Eric was seized with a wild hope.

“Perhaps he hasn’t got anywhere to live!” he said. “Perhaps he doesn’t belong to anyone!”

“Ha, ’course he does,” said Christopher.

“Shut up!” said Eric, annoyed. “You don’t know anything about it.”

Christopher, who had Joffa—what could he know about being without a dog?—not a single dog at all?

“Come along, dog,” Eric called, feeling more and more sure that the puppy had nowhere to live.

“Make sure he doesn’t follow you home,” said Christopher.



“But he can,” said Eric. “I want him to come.”

And the puppy followed. He followed him all the way to Eric’s door. Then Eric picked him up and carried him up the stairs.

"I'm going to ask Mommy if I can keep him," said Eric eagerly. But Mommy was not in sight; he found a note lying on the kitchen table saying that she was in the basement doing the wash, and that Eric should look for her there if he wanted anything.

The puppy made a beeline for Eric's room, and Eric, Bridget, and Christopher followed him at a run. Eric was wild with joy.

"He wants to live with me, I know," he said.

At the same moment Karlsson came chuffing in through the window.

"Hi-ho!" he shouted. "Have you *washed* the dog? He seems to have shrunk!"

"This isn't Joffa; you didn't think it was, did you?" said Eric. "This is my dog."

"You can hardly say that," said Christopher.

"You haven't got a dog, I bet," said Bridget, looking at Karlsson.

"Me! I've got a thousand dogs in my house," said Karlsson. "The World's Best Dog-keeper ..."

"I didn't see any dogs when I visited," said Eric.

"They were out flying," said Karlsson. "Mine are Flying Dogs."

Eric took no notice of Karlsson. A thousand flying dogs were not nearly as interesting as this sweet little puppy.

"I don't think he belongs to anybody," he said again.

Bridget stooped down over the dog.

"But it says Nicholson on his collar," she said.

"You see! That's the people he belongs to," said Christopher.

"Perhaps Nicholson is dead," said Eric.

Whoever this Nicholson might be, he disliked him. But then he had a bright idea.

"Maybe it's the *puppy* that's called Nicholson," he said, with a pleading look toward Christopher and Bridget. They laughed teasingly.

"I've got several dogs that are called Nicholson," said Karlsson. "Hello, Nicholson!"

The puppy took a little leap toward Karlsson, barking playfully.

"See that!" shouted Eric. "He knows his name is Nicholson. Come along, little Nicholson!"

Bridget grabbed the puppy. "There's a telephone number on his collar, as well," she said, without considering Eric's feelings.

"The dog's got his own telephone," said Karlsson. "Tell him to call up his master to say that he's run away. My dogs always do that when they've run away. One of my dogs, called Nicholson, lost his way the other day, so he phoned to let me know. But he had some trouble with the dial, and an old lady at the other end of the town answered instead. When she found that it was a dog on the telephone, she said, 'Wrong number.' 'Why did you answer, then?' asked Nicholson, because he's a very sensible dog."

Eric was not listening to Karlsson. At present his whole attention was on the puppy, and he took no notice even when Karlsson said that he felt like a little fun. But Karlsson pouted and said, "I'm leaving, if you're going to play with that dog all the time. I think *I* ought to have some fun, too."

Bridget and Christopher agreed with him.

"We could have a magic show," said Karlsson, having soon got over his sulks. "The World's Best Magician—guess who that is?"

Eric, Bridget, and Christopher guessed at once that it must be Karlsson.

“Then we’ll decide to have a magic show,” said Karlsson.

“All right,” said the children.

“And we’ll decide to have a toffee entrance fee.”

“All right,” said the children.

“And we’ll decide that all the toffees are to go to a deserving charity,” said Karlsson.

“Well—all right, then,” said the children doubtfully.

“And there’s only *one* really deserving charity and that is Karlsson-on-the-Roof,” said Karlsson.

The children looked at each other.

“Oh, I don’t know ...” began Christopher.

“We’ll decide,” shouted Karlsson, “or else I’m going home.”

So it was decided that all the toffees should go to Karlsson-on-the-Roof.

Bridget and Christopher went out into the street and told all the children that there was going to be a big magic show up at Eric’s. And those who still had at least a penny of their pocket money ran off to the sweet shop to buy toffee.

Bridget stood by the door of Eric’s room to collect the toffees, which she put into a box bearing the inscription, “For a Deserving Charity.”

Christopher had arranged chairs for the audience in a row across the floor. In a corner of the room a blanket had been hung, and behind it you could hear a good deal of activity going on, and a dog yapping.

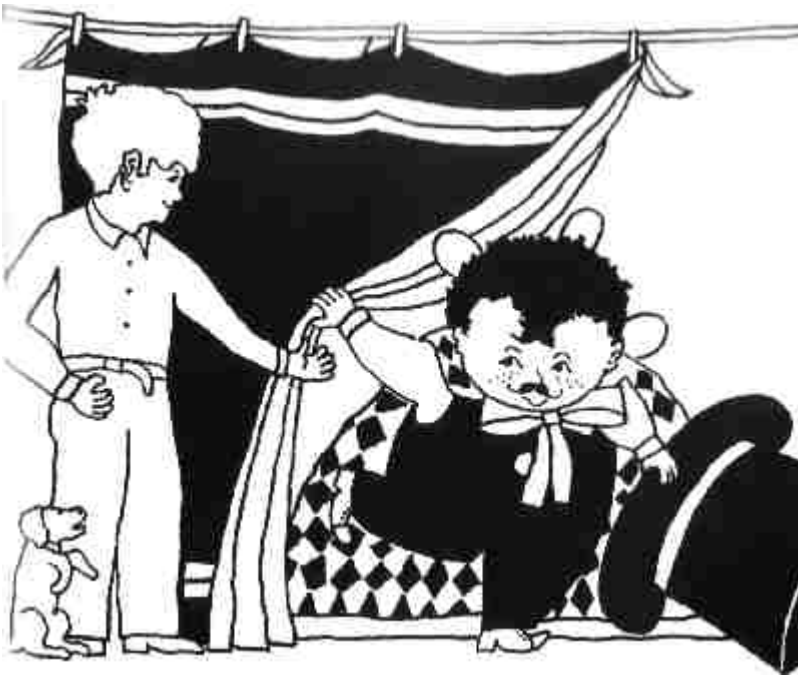
“What are we going to see?” asked a boy called Jack. “A lot of nonsense, probably, and if so I’m going to have my toffee back.”

Neither Eric, Bridget, nor Christopher thought much of Jack; he was always bragging.

Eric, who until now had been standing behind the blanket, came out. He was carrying the little puppy in his arms.

“You are about to see the World’s Best Magician and the clever dog Nicholson,” he said.

“As we were saying ... the World’s Best Magician,” said a voice behind the blanket, and Karlsson stepped forward. He was wearing Eric’s father’s top hat, and from his shoulders hung Mommy’s checked apron, the strings tied under his chin in a neat bow. The apron was intended to be one of those black cloaks that magicians wear.



All clapped their hands except Jack. Karlsson bowed, looking very pleased with himself. Then he raised his top hat, as magicians do, to show that it was empty.

“Take a look, ladies and gentlemen,” he said. “There’s nothing in it, not a thing.”

I expect he’ll make a rabbit come out of the hat, thought Eric. He had once seen a magician do this. It will be funny to see Karlsson make a rabbit appear, he thought.

“As I was saying ... there’s nothing in it,” said Karlsson in a gloomy voice. “And there isn’t going to be anything in it, either, if you don’t put something in,” he continued. “I can see a lot of greedy little children in front of me, eating toffees. We are now going to pass the hat around for everyone to put another toffee in it. It’s for a Very Deserving Charity.”

Eric passed the hat, and soon there was quite a pile of toffees in it. He handed the hat to Karlsson. “It rattles suspiciously,” said Karlsson, giving the hat a shake. “If it was *full* of toffees, it wouldn’t rattle at all.”

He stuffed one of the toffees into his mouth and began to chew. “It certainly tastes good,” he said, munching contentedly.

Jack had not put a single toffee into the hat, although he had a whole bag full.

“Well, my dear young friends ... and Jack,” said Karlsson. “You see before you the Clever Dog Nicholson—the dog who can do anything: telephone, fly, bake cakes, talk, scratch his ears ... anything!”

At that moment the little poodle actually sat down beside Jack’s chair and started to scratch his ear.

“You see! I’m not exaggerating,” said Karlsson. “This dog can really do anything.”

“Rot!” said Jack. “Any dog can do that. But make him talk; not quite so easy, eh? Haha!”

Karlsson turned toward the puppy. “D’you find it difficult to talk, Nicholson?”

“Not at all,” said Nicholson. “Only when I’m smoking a cigar.”

Eric, Bridget, and Christopher nearly jumped. It sounded exactly as if the puppy was talking. But Eric imagined it must be Karlsson who was up to some trick. He was glad of that because he wanted an ordinary dog and not one that could talk.

“Please, Nicholson,” said Karlsson, “won’t you tell all our friends—and Jack—a little about a dog’s life?”

“Certainly,” said Nicholson.

And he began to tell a story.

“I was at the movies the other night,” he said, jumping playfully around Karlsson’s legs.

“Oh, so you went to the movies?” said Karlsson.

“Yes, and there were two dog fleas sitting next to me,” said Nicholson.

“There were, were there?” said Karlsson.

“Yes, and when we got out into the street afterward I heard one of the fleas saying to the other, ‘Shall we *walk* home, or shall we go by dog?’ ”

The children all thought it was a good performance, even though there had not been much magic. Only Jack sat there, looking superior.

“Tell him to bake some cakes!” he said scornfully.

“Would you like to bake some cakes, Nicholson?” said Karlsson.

Nicholson yawned and lay down on the floor. “I can’t,” he said.

“Haha, just what I thought,” said Jack.

“I haven’t got any baking powder at home,” said Nicholson.

All the children liked Nicholson very much. But Jack foolishly went on, “Let him fly, then, instead. You don’t need any baking powder for that.”

“Would you like to fly, Nicholson?” asked Karlsson.

Nicholson seemed to be asleep, but he did answer when Karlsson spoke to him. “Oh, I wouldn’t mind flying,” he said, “but you’ll have to come with me, because I’ve promised my mother not to take off alone.”

“Come along then, little Nicholson,” said Karlsson, lifting the puppy in his arms.

A second later they were flying, Karlsson and Nicholson. First they rose toward the ceiling and circled around the light twice, then they shot straight out of the window. At this even Jack went pale with astonishment.

The children all rushed to the window and stood there watching Karlsson and Nicholson float over the rooftops. But Eric called desperately, “Karlsson, Karlsson, bring back my dog!”

Karlsson soon returned and put Nicholson on the floor. Nicholson shook himself and looked so surprised one might have thought it was the first flight of his life.

“Well, that’s all for today. We’ve nothing else to offer,” said Karlsson. “But *you* have,” he said, giving Jack a little nudge.

Jack did not take the hint.

“Toffee,” said Karlsson.

Jack brought out his bag and gave Karlsson the whole lot, but first he took out a toffee for himself.



“Some people are greedy,” said Karlsson. Then he looked around eagerly.

“Where’s the box for a Deserving Charity?” he asked.

Bridget went to fetch it. She thought, Now that Karlsson’s got so many he’s sure to offer us a toffee. But Karlsson didn’t. He took the box and counted the toffees.

“Fifteen,” he said. “That’ll just do for supper. Hi-ho, I’ve got to go home and have my supper.” And Karlsson disappeared through the window.

It was time for the children to go home, including Bridget and Christopher. Eric and Nicholson were left alone, and Eric was glad. He picked the puppy up in his arms and sat whispering to him. The puppy licked his face and went to sleep. He could hear gentle sounds of breathing from the sleeping puppy.

But Mommy came up from the basement, and then everything suddenly went wrong. Mommy did not believe that Nicholson had nowhere to live. She dialed the telephone number on his collar and said that her son had found a small, white poodle.

Eric was standing beside the telephone with Nicholson in his arms, whispering the whole time, “Please, dear God, let it not be their puppy!”

But it *was* their puppy.

“Darling,” said Mommy, when she had put the receiver down, “Toby belongs to a boy called Stephen Nicholson.”

“Toby?” queried Eric.

“Yes, it’s the name of the puppy. Stephen has been crying all afternoon. He’s coming to pick up Toby at seven o’clock.”

Eric said nothing, but his face went white, and his eyes grew large and shiny. He squeezed the puppy and whispered in his ear when Mommy was not listening, “Little Nicholson, I want you to be my dog.”

But at seven o’clock Stephen Nicholson came to take away his puppy. Eric was then lying on his bed, crying as if his heart would break.

It was summertime. School was over, and Eric would soon be going to his Grannie's. But first a very important event was due to take place. Eric would be eight years old. Oh, what a long time he had waited for this day to come ... ever since his seventh birthday! Strange that it should be so long between birthdays—almost as long as between Christmases.

On the eve of his birthday Eric had a little talk with Karlsson.

"I'm going to have a birthday party," said Eric. "Bridget and Christopher are coming, and we can have tea in my room ..."

Eric paused and looked gloomy. "I'd like very much to ask you, too," he said, "but—"

Mommy got so angry at any mention of Karlsson-on-the-Roof. It did not seem much use asking her to let Karlsson come to his birthday party.

But Karlsson pouted, with his lower lip stuck out more than ever.

"I'm going home if I can't come," he said. "Why shouldn't *I* have some fun?"

"Yes, all right! You *can* come," said Eric hastily. He would talk to Mommy, come what may. It was impossible to have a birthday party without Karlsson.

"What will there be to eat?" asked Karlsson, now restored to good humor.

"Birthday cake, of course," said Eric. "I will have a cake with eight candles on it."

"Oh!" said Karlsson. "Look, I've got an idea."

"What?" asked Eric.

"Couldn't you ask your Mommy for *eight* birthday cakes and *one* candle instead?"

Eric did not think his Mommy would agree to that.

"Will you get some nice presents, then?" asked Karlsson.

"I don't know," said Eric.

He sighed. He certainly knew what he wanted—more than anything else in the world. But he would not get it.

"I don't think I'll have a dog as long as I live," he said. "But there'll be a lot of other presents, of course. So I must be contented and not think of a dog all day; I've made up my mind about that."

"Yes, and you've got me, haven't you?" said Karlsson. "I should imagine that's one up on a dog!"

He tilted his head and looked at Eric. "I wonder what sort of presents you'll get," he said. "I wonder if you'll get any toffee. If you do, I think it ought to go straight to a Deserving Charity."

"Oh, yes! If I get a bag of toffee I'll give it to you," said Eric. There was nothing he would not do for Karlsson, and besides, they would soon have to part.

"Karlsson! The day after tomorrow I'm going away to stay with Grannie, and I will be there all summer," said Eric.

Karlsson looked a little sulky at first, but then he said importantly, "*I'm* going to *my* grannie's, too. And she's much grannier than yours!"

"Where does your grannie live?" asked Eric.

"In a house," Karlsson replied. "What did you think? She wouldn't be out running around all night, would she?"

After that not much more was said about Karlsson's grannie, or about Eric's birthday presents, or anything, because it was getting late, and Eric wanted to go to bed to make sure that he would wake

up early on his birthday.

The minutes when he was lying in bed, waiting for the door to open and for the family to troop in—with presents and everything—were almost too exciting. Eric felt tense with eager expectation.

But at last they came. Now they started singing “Happy birthday to you.” Now the door opened, and there they were, all of them, Mommy and Daddy and Bobby and Betty.

Eric sat up in his bed, straight as a ramrod, and his eyes sparkled.

“Happy birthday, darling!” said Mommy.

They all wished him happy birthday. The cake with eight candles was there on a tray with some of the presents—several presents, but perhaps not quite so many as he usually had on his birthday. But Daddy said, “There may be more presents later in the day. They don’t all necessarily come in the morning.”



Eric was very pleased with all of his presents. There were a box of paints, a toy pistol, a book, and a pair of blue jeans, and he liked everything. How kind they were —Mommy and Daddy and Bobby and Betty! No one could have a kinder family than he had, he thought.

He took a couple of shots with his pistol, and it made a fine noise. The whole family sat on his bed and listened. Oh, how he loved them all!

“To think that eight years have gone by since this little boy came into the world!” said Daddy.

“Yes,” said Mommy, “how time flies! Do you remember how it poured in Stockholm that day?”

“Mommy! I was born in Stockholm, wasn’t I?” said Eric.

“Yes, of course you were,” said Mommy.

“But Bobby and Betty—they were born in Malmö?”

“Yes, they were.”

“And you, Daddy, you were born in Gothenburg, you said.”

“Yes, I’m a Gothenburger,” said Daddy.

“And where were you born, Mommy?”

“In Eskilstuna,” said Mommy.

Eric threw his arms around her neck.

“Wasn’t it terrifically lucky that we all met!”

They all thought it was. And then they sang “Happy Birthday” again, and he fired his pistol and it made a splendid noise.

He had plenty of time to shoot with his pistol during the day while he waited for the hour of the birthday party. He also had ample time to think over what Daddy had said ... that there might be more presents later. For a brief, happy moment he wondered if, after all, perhaps a miracle might happen and he would have a dog—but then he came to the conclusion that it was impossible. He was cross with himself for having such an idea. He remembered he had decided not to think of a dog at all on his birthday and to be happy all the same.

Eric *was* happy. Later in the afternoon Mommy began to set the table in his room very festively. She put a big vase of flowers on it and her best pink cups and saucers—three of them.

“Mommy, we want four cups,” said Eric.

“Why?” asked Mommy, surprised.

Eric swallowed. He must tell Mommy that he had invited Karlsson-on-the-Roof, although she would not like it.

“Karlsson-on-the-Roof is coming as well,” said Eric, looking his mommy steadily in the eye.

“Ooh!” said Mommy. “Well, I suppose it’s all right. It is your birthday, after all.”

She patted Eric’s fair head.

“What a baby you are, Eric, imagining things. Who would think you’re eight years old! How old are you really?”

“I’m a Man in his Prime,” said Eric with dignity. “And so is Karlsson.”

The day seemed to pass at a snail’s pace. Now it was quite “later,” but he still saw no sign of any more presents.

At last he did have another. Bobby and Betty came home from school. They shut themselves in Bobby’s room and would not let Eric in. He heard them giggling and paper rustling. Eric was bursting with curiosity.

After a long time they came out, and Betty laughingly handed him a package. Eric was thrilled and wanted to tear the paper off at once. But Bobby said, “You’ve got to read the verse on it first.”

They had used large capital letters to make it easy for Eric to read, and it said:

Big sister, big brother, kinder than you thought,
For little brother’s birthday, an animal have bought.

This little velvet poodle dog is good and soft and round,
He does not jump up high and bark; he never makes a sound.

Eric stood absolutely still.

“Open it, then!” said Bobby. But Eric threw the package on the floor, and tears gushed from his eyes.

“But Eric! Whatever’s the matter?” cried Betty.

“Are you upset?” asked Bobby unhappily.

Betty threw her arms around Eric.

“Oh, please forgive us—it was only a joke.”

Eric broke away sharply. Tears were streaming down his cheeks.

“But you knew,” he sobbed, “but you knew I wanted a *real* dog. It wasn’t a bit funny.”

He rushed away from them to his own room and threw himself on the bed. Bobby and Betty followed him and Mommy came running. But Eric took no notice of them. He wept so that his whole body shook. His birthday was entirely spoiled. He was determined to be happy, although he was not going to have a dog; but when they came and gave him a *velvet* dog ... His weeping rose to pitiful sobs when he thought of it, and he burrowed his face as far into the pillow as he could. Mommy, Bobby, and Betty stood by the bed, and they too were unhappy.

“I must call up Daddy and ask him to come home from the office a little earlier,” said Mommy.

Eric was crying ... what good would it do if Daddy came home? Everything was sad now, and the birthday was spoiled. Nothing would make any difference.

A little later he heard Daddy come home ... but he cried. He would never be happy again. It would be better to die, and then Bobby and Betty could keep their velvet dog and never, never forget how horrid they had been to their little brother when he was alive and had his birthday.

Suddenly they were all standing by his bed, Daddy and Mommy and Bobby and Betty. He buried his face even deeper in the pillow.

“Eric! There’s someone waiting for you out in the hall,” said Daddy.

Eric did not answer. Daddy shook him by the shoulder.

“There’s a little friend of yours in the hall; listen to me!”

“Is it Bridget or Christopher?” muttered Eric crossly.

“No, it’s somebody called Bimbo,” said Mommy.

“I don’t know anyone called Bimbo,” mumbled Eric, even more crossly.

“Perhaps not,” said Mommy. “But he very much wants to get to know you.” As she spoke a short little yapping bark was heard from the hall.

Eric’s muscles all went tense and he gripped the pillow hard ... No! he really must stop imagining things.

But once more he heard the little yapping sound. Eric bolted upright in bed.

“Is it a dog?” he said. “Is it a *real* dog?”

“Yes, it’s *your* dog,” said Daddy.

Then Bobby rushed out into the hall, and a second later he returned, and in his arms he was carrying—oh, it couldn’t be true! In his arms he was carrying a small, wire-haired dachshund puppy.

“Is it *my* real dog?” whispered Eric.

There were tears still in his eyes when he stretched out his arms for Bimbo. He looked as if he thought the puppy would at any moment go up in smoke and disappear.



But Bimbo did not disappear. Bimbo was in his arms, and Bimbo licked his face and whined and barked and snapped at Eric's ears. Bimbo was really real.

“Are you happy now, Eric?” asked Daddy.

Eric sighed. How could Daddy ask such a question? He was so happy that it hurt—somewhere in his soul, or in his tummy, or wherever it does hurt when you are perfectly happy.

“You see, Eric, that velvet dog was meant to be a toy for Bimbo,” said Betty. “We didn't mean to be horrid ... not very, anyway,” she added.

Eric forgave everyone. Besides, he was hardly listening. He was talking to Bimbo.

“Bimbo, little Bimbo, you're *my* dog!”

Then he said to Mommy, “I think Bimbo is cuter than Nicholson. Because wire-haired dachshunds are the cutest, I think.”

Then he remembered that Bridget and Christopher would arrive any minute. Oh, dear, he could not understand how so many lovely things could happen in one single day. Think of it! Now they would see that he had a dog, and one that was really his own, and the nicest, nicest, nicest dog on the whole earth.

“Mommy! Can I take Bimbo with me when I go to Grannie's?” he asked anxiously.

“Of course! You can carry him in this little basket when you go on the train,” said Mommy, pointing at a dog basket which Bobby had fetched from the hall.

“Oh!” said Eric. “Oh!”

Then the doorbell rang. It was Bridget and Christopher.

Eric rushed to meet them, shouting, "I've got a dog! It's my own dog!"

"Oh, isn't he sweet!" said Bridget. Then she remembered herself and said, "Happy birthday! This is from Christopher and me."

She held out a bag of toffee, then she eagerly turned back to Bimbo and exclaimed, "Oh! isn't he cute!" which pleased Eric very much.

"Almost as cute as Joffa," said Christopher.

"Almost cuter," said Bridget. "Even cuter than Nicholson."

"Yes, much cuter than Nicholson," exclaimed Christopher.

Eric thought that Bridget and Christopher were really nice, both of them, and he asked them to come and sit down to the birthday party.

Mommy had just put out piles of tasty ham-and-cheese sandwiches, and platefuls of pastries. And in the middle of the table stood the birthday cake with eight candles on it.

Now Mommy brought a large jug of chocolate from the kitchen and poured it into the cups.

"Shouldn't we wait for Karlsson?" suggested Eric.

Mommy shook her head.

"I don't think we'll bother about Karlsson. You see, I'm almost sure he's not going to come. From now on we won't bother about him at all. Because now you've got Bimbo."

Yes, of course, now he had Bimbo ... but that did not make Eric want Karlsson any the less at his party.

Bridget and Christopher sat down at the table, and Mommy handed out the sandwiches. Eric put Bimbo in the little dog basket and sat down himself. Then Mommy went away and left the children to themselves.

Bobby put his nose through the door and shouted, "You'll save some cake, won't you, so that Betty and I can each have a slice?"

"I suppose so," said Eric, "though it doesn't seem quite fair. After all, you'd been wolfing cake for seven or eight years before I was born."

"Don't be an idiot! I want a big piece," said Bobby, shutting the door.

As soon as he had gone the familiar buzzing sound was heard and in came Karlsson.

"Have you started already?" he shouted. "How much have you eaten?"

Eric reassured him. They had not had time to start yet.

"Good!" said Karlsson.

"Aren't you going to say happy birthday to Eric?" asked Bridget.

"Oh, yes, happy birthday," said Karlsson. "Where shall *I* sit?"

There was no cup for Karlsson, and when he noticed this, he stuck out his lower lip and looked cross.

"I'm going home if it's not fair shares. Why isn't there a cup for *me*?"

Eric hastily gave him his own. Then he slipped out into the kitchen and fetched another cup for himself.

"Karlsson! I've got a dog," he said when he returned. "He's over there, and he's called Bimbo."

Eric pointed at Bimbo, who was lying in his basket fast asleep.

“Oh, good,” said Karlsson. “I’ll take *that* sandwich ... and *that* one ... and *that* one! Oh, I’ve just remembered,” he added. “I brought a birthday present for you. I’m the kindest person in the world.”

He took a whistle from his trousers pocket and gave it to Eric. “You can use it when you want to whistle for Bimbo. I whistle for *my* dogs, too, though they’re called Nicholson and can fly.”

“Are they *all* called Nicholson?” asked Christopher.

“Yes, all thousand of them,” said Karlsson. “When are we going to cut the cake?”

“Thank you, dear, dear Karlsson, for the whistle,” said Eric. “It’ll be wonderful to have it for Bimbo.”

“Perhaps I’ll borrow it sometimes,” said Karlsson. “Perhaps I’ll borrow it quite often,” he said, and added anxiously, “Did you receive any toffee?”

“Oh, yes,” said Eric. “From Bridget and Christopher.”

“It’ll go straight to a Deserving Charity,” said Karlsson, seizing the bag. He put it in his pocket and started on the sandwiches.

Bridget, Christopher, and Eric had to be quick to get their share. But fortunately Mommy had provided plenty.

Mommy, Daddy, Bobby, and Betty were in the sitting room.

“Do you hear them?” said Mommy. “They’re having a good time in there. I *am* glad Eric got his dog. It’s going to be a nuisance, of course, but that can’t be helped.”

“Yes, now he’ll forget his silly ideas about Karlsson-on-the-Roof. I’m sure of that,” said Daddy.

Sounds of laughter and talking came from Eric’s room, and Mommy said, “Let’s go and have a look at the children—they’re so funny!”

“Yes, let’s!” said Betty.

They all went in—Mommy and Daddy and Bobby and Betty—to look at Eric’s birthday party.

It was Daddy who opened the door. But it was Mommy who called out first, for it was she who first caught sight of the fat little man sitting beside Eric: a fat little man with whipped cream up to his eyes.

“I feel faint,” said Mommy.

Daddy, Bobby, and Betty stood rooted to the floor and stared.



“You see, Mommy! Karlsson did come after all,” said Eric happily. “What a wonderful birthday I’m having!”

The fat little man swept away some of the cream from his mouth and with a chubby hand he waved to Daddy, Mommy, Bobby, and Betty, spraying the cream around him like a cloud.

“Hi-ho!” he shouted. “You haven’t had the pleasure yet, have you? My name’s Karlsson-on-the-Roof ... ah, ah, Bridget, not so greedy! *I’m* supposed to have some cake too, aren’t I?”

He took hold of Bridget’s hand as she held a piece of cake and made her let it go. “Never saw such a greedy little girl!” he said.

Then he helped himself to another large slice. “The World’s Biggest Cake-Eater, that’s Karlsson-on-the-Roof,” he said with a sunny smile.

“Come, let’s go,” said Mommy.

“Don’t let me stop you,” said Karlsson.

“Promise me one thing,” said Daddy to Mommy when they had shut the door behind them.

“Promise me one thing, all of you—you too Bobby and Betty! Don’t tell *anybody* about this—not *anybody*!”

“Why not?” asked Bobby.

“No one would believe us,” said Daddy. “And if they did believe us we wouldn’t have a moment’s peace for the rest of our lives.”

Daddy, Mommy, Bobby, and Betty promised each other not to tell a single person about the strange

playmate Eric had found.

And they kept their word. No one has ever heard them so much as mention Karlsson. That is why Karlsson can go on living in his little house that no one knows anything about, although it stands on an ordinary roof of an ordinary house on a perfectly ordinary street in Stockholm. Karlsson can walk about and play tricks undisturbed, and this is exactly what he does. Because he's the World's Best Tricker.

All the sandwiches, all the cakes, and the whole of the birthday cake were finished, and Bridget and Christopher had gone home; Bimbo slept, and Eric was saying good-bye to Karlsson. Karlsson was sitting on the window ledge, ready to fly off. The curtains fluttered to and fro, the air was soft, for it was summertime.

"Dear Karlsson, you'll still be living on the roof when I come back from Grannie's, won't you?" said Eric.

"Calm, be calm!" said Karlsson. "So long as my grannie lets me go. But you never can tell, because she thinks I'm the World's Best Grandchild."

"Are you?" asked Eric.

"Of course! Who else? Can *you* think of anybody better?" asked Karlsson.

Then he turned the button in the middle of his tummy and the engine began to buzz.

"When I come back, we shall have lots of cake," he shouted, "because this wasn't enough to fatten anybody. Hi-ho, Eric!"



"Hi-ho, Karlsson!" shouted Eric.

And Karlsson was gone.

But by the side of Eric's bed lay Bimbo in the little dog basket, fast asleep. Eric bent over him, and put his face in Bimbo's fur. With a rough little hand he gently stroked the puppy's head.

"Bimbo, tomorrow we're off to Grannie's," he said. "Good night, Bimbo! Sweet dreams, Bimbo!"

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