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Karlson Flies Again

Written by

Astrid Lindgren

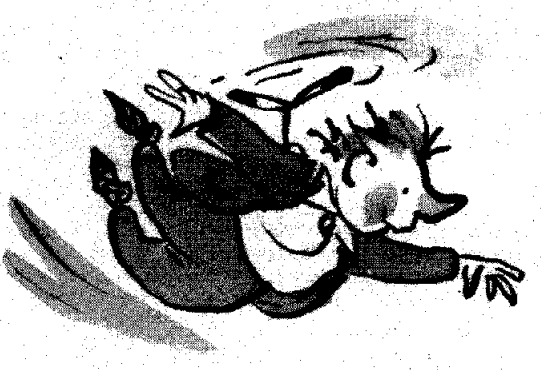
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ASTRID LINDGREN



KARLSON FLIES AGAIN

Translated by Sarah Death • Illustrated by Tony Ross

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KARLSON ON THE ROOF FLIES AGAIN

The world is big, and there are so many houses in it. Big houses and little houses, pretty houses and ugly houses, old houses and new houses. And then there's a tiny little house for Karlson on the Roof. Karlson thinks it's the world's best house and just right for the world's best Karlson. Smidge thinks so, too.

Smidge lives with Mum and Dad and Seb and Sally in a perfectly ordinary house on a perfectly ordinary street in Stockholm, but up on the roof, just behind the chimney, you'll find the little Karlson house with its sign saying:

You might think it's funny for someone to be living on the roof, but Smidge says:

'What's funny about that? People can live wherever they want, can't they?'

Mum and Dad think people can live wherever they want, as well. But to start with, they didn't think Karlson existed. Seb and Sally didn't think so either. They didn't want to believe that a fat little



man, who had a propeller on his back and could fly, could live up there.

'You're lying, Smidge,' said Seb and Sally. 'Karlson's just an invention.'

To be on the safe side, Smidge asked Karlson if he was an invention, but Karlson said:

'Invention themselves!'

Mum and Dad had the idea Karlson was one of those imaginary friends that some children make up when they feel lonely.

'Poor Smidge,' said Mum. 'Seb and Sally are much older than him, after all. He hasn't got anybody to play with. That's why he makes up stories about this Karlson.'

'Yes, we really must buy him a dog,' said Dad. 'He's been asking for one for so long. And once he's got one, he'll forget about Karlson.'

That was how Smidge came to get Bumble. He got a dog all of his own, on his eighth birthday.

And that was the very day Mum and Dad and Seb and Sally finally saw Karlson. Yes, they actually saw him! And this is how it happened:

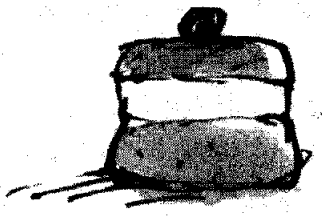
Smidge was having his birthday party in his

room. He had invited round Kris and Jemima, who were in his class at school. And when Mum and Dad and Seb and Sally heard all the chat and laughter coming from Smidge's room, Mum said:

'Come on, let's go and have a look at them! They're so cute, aren't they?'

'Yes, let's,' said Dad.

And who should they see when they peeped into Smidge's room, Mum and Dad and Seb and Sally? Who should be sitting there at the birthday tea table with cream cake all over his face, stuffing himself fit to burst, but a fat little man who yelled:



'Heysan hopsan, my name's Karlson on the Roof. I don't think you've had the pleasure of meeting me before, have you?'

Mum nearly fainted then. And Dad was extremely worried.

'Don't tell anybody about this,' he said, 'not anybody.'

'Why?' asked Seb.

And Dad explained why.

'Think what a fuss there'd be if people found out about Karlson being here. He'd be on television, you know. We'd be tripping over television cables and cameras on the stairs, and every half hour we'd have a newspaper photographer at the door, asking to take pictures of Smidge and Karlson. Poor Smidge. He'd be "The boy who found Karlson on the Roof" . . . We'd never have a moment's peace as long as we lived.'

Mum and Seb and Sally could see that, so they all promised faithfully not to tell anyone about Karlson.

Now it so happened that Smidge was going to his granny's in the country the next day, to stay for the summer holidays. He was looking forward to it, but he was worried about Karlson. How would Karlson keep himself busy in the meantime? What if he disappeared and never came back?

'Please, Karlson, you are sure you'll still be living up there on the roof when I get back from Granny's, aren't you?' Smidge asked him.

'You never know,' said Karlson. 'I'm going to my granny's too. She's much grannier than yours, and

she thinks I'm the best grandson in the world. So you never can tell . . . she'd be daft to let the best grandson in the world go, wouldn't she?'

'Where does she live, your granny?' asked Smidge.

'In a house,' said Karlson. 'Did you think she'd be running around all night without a roof over her head?'

That was all Smidge could find out. And the next day he went to his granny's. He took Bumble with him. It was fun being in the countryside, and Smidge was out playing all day. He didn't think about Karlson all that much. But when the summer holidays were over and he came back to Stockholm, he asked about Karlson the minute he got through the door.

'Mum, have you seen Karlson at all?'

Mum shook her head.

'No, I haven't. I expect he's moved house.'

'Don't say that,' said Smidge. 'I want him still to be living up on our roof. He's got to come back.'

'But you've got Bumble, anyway,' Mum said, trying to console him. She thought it was a great relief to be rid of Karlson.

Smidge patted Bumble.



'Yes, I know I have. And he's great. But he hasn't got a propeller and he can't fly, and there are more games you can play with Karlson.'

Smidge ran into his room and opened the window.

'Karlson, are you up there?' he shouted at the top of his voice. But there was no answer. The next day, Smidge went back to school. He wasn't in the infants any longer. When he got home, he sat in his room doing his homework. He kept the window open, so he would hear the droning motor sound that usually meant Karlson was on his way. But the only droning he heard was from the cars passing by in the street, and an occasional aeroplane flying over the rooftops, not a Karlson sort of drone.

'I suppose he must have moved house, after all,' said Smidge sadly to himself. 'I'm sure he won't ever come back.'

When he was lying in bed in the evenings, he

thought about Karlson, and sometimes he had a quiet little cry under the covers because Karlson was gone. The days passed, with school and homework and no Karlson.

One afternoon, Smidge was in his room sorting out his stamp collection. He already had lots of stamps in his album, but there were some others waiting to be put in. Smidge set to work, sticking them in place. Soon he had only one loose stamp left, his best one, which he had saved for last. It was a German stamp, with Red Riding Hood and the wolf on it, and Smidge really liked the picture. He put it on the table in front of him.



Just then he heard a buzz outside the window. A buzz that sounded like . . . yes, it certainly sounded like Karlson! And it *was* Karlson. He zoomed in through the open window and shouted:

'Heysan hopsan, Smidge.'

'Heysan hopsan, Karlson!' shouted Smidge. He jumped to his feet, happy as can be, and watched

Karlson fly a couple of times round the ceiling light, before landing in front of him with a little thud. As soon as Karlson had switched off his motor—which he did by turning a little winder on his tummy—Smidge tried to rush over and give him a hug, but Karlson pushed him away with his podgy little hand and said:

'Easy now, take it easy! Is there anything to eat? Any meatballs or anything? Or perhaps a bit of cream cake?'

Smidge shook his head.

'No, Mum hasn't made any meatballs today. And cream cake is only for birthdays.'

Karlson snorted.

'What sort of family do you call this? "Only for birthdays" . . . but what about when a dear old friend you haven't seen for months turns up? Might have expected that to spur your mum into action.'

'Yes, but we didn't know . . . ' began Smidge.

'Didn't know,' said Karlson. 'You could have hoped! You could have hoped I'd come today, and that should've been enough to get your mum

making meatballs with one hand and whipping cream with the other.'

'We only had sausage for lunch,' said Smidge, shamefaced. 'But if you'd like . . . '

'Boring old sausage, when a dear friend you haven't seen for months is coming?'

Karlson gave another snort.

'I suppose if you want to be a regular visitor in this house, you have to learn to put up with anything . . . bring me some of that sausage,' he said.

Smidge dashed to the kitchen as fast as he could. Mum wasn't in; she'd gone to the doctor's, so he couldn't ask her. But he knew it would be all right to offer Karlson some sausage. There were five leftover slices on a plate, so he took them in to Karlson. And Karlson pounced on them like a hawk. He stuffed his mouth full of sausage and looked very pleased.

'Well,' he said, 'as sausage goes, it doesn't taste too bad. Not like meatballs, of course, but you can't expect much of some people.'

Smidge realized who Karlson meant when he said 'some people', so he quickly changed the subject.

'Did you have a good time at your granny's?' he asked.

'I had such a good time, I can't tell you,' said Karlson. 'So I'm not going to tell you,' he said, and took another hungry bite of sausage.

'I had a good time, too,' said Smidge. He started telling Karlson all the things he had done at granny's.

'She's so very, very nice, my granny,' said Smidge. 'And you wouldn't believe how glad she was to see me. She gave me the hardest hug she could.'

'Why?' asked Karlson.

'Because she likes me, of course,' said Smidge. Karlson stopped chewing.

'And I suppose you think *my* granny doesn't like me all that much, eh? You don't believe she threw herself on me and hugged me until I went blue in the face, just because she liked me so much, do you, eh? But let me tell you, my granny's little fists are as hard as iron, and if she'd liked me just an ounce more, I wouldn't have been sitting here now, because she'd have crushed me to death.'

'Really?' said Smidge. 'She must be a champion at hugging, your granny.'

His granny hadn't hugged him that hard, but there was no doubt that she liked him, and was always nice to him, as he explained to Karlson.

'Though she is the world's worst nagger,' said Smidge after he'd thought for a bit. 'She nags on about changing my socks and not fighting with Lars Janson and stuff like that.'



Karlson discarded the plate, which was now empty.

'And I suppose you think my granny isn't much good at nagging, eh? You don't believe she set the alarm clock to ring its head off at five every morning, just so she'd have enough time to nag me about changing my socks and not fighting Lars Janson?'

'Do you know Lars Janson?' asked Smidge in surprise.

'No, thank goodness,' said Karlson.

'So why did your granny say . . . ' asked Smidge.

'Because she's the world's naggiest nagger,' said Karlson. 'Maybe you can see that now. You actually know Lars Janson, so how can you have the cheek

to claim your granny's the naggiest nagger? No, give me my granny any day. She can spend a whole day nagging me not to fight Lars Janson, even though I've never seen the boy and hope I'll never have to, either.'

Smidge thought about this. It certainly was strange . . . he hadn't liked it at all when Granny nagged him, but all of a sudden he felt he had to try to outdo Karlson by making Granny a worse nagger than she was.

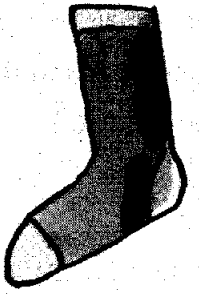
'As soon as I got my feet the tiniest bit wet, she started nagging me to change my socks,' he told Karlson.

Karlson nodded.

'And I suppose you think my granny didn't want me to change my socks, eh? You don't believe she came rushing after me through the village when I was out and happened to step in a puddle, and nagged on and on: "Change your socks, Karlson dear, change your socks" . . . you don't believe me, do you?'

Smidge squirmed.

'Well, maybe . . . '



Karlson pushed Smidge down onto a chair and planted himself in front of him, hands on hips.

'Nope, you don't believe me. But just you listen and I'll tell you what happened. I was out, and stepped in a puddle, see? I was having a great time. But in the middle of it all, up sprints Granny, hollering so loud the whole village can hear: "Change your socks, Karlson dear, change your socks".'

'And what did you say?' asked Smidge.

'"Not likely," I said, "because I'm the world's most disobedient Karlson",' declared Karlson. 'So I ran away from Granny and climbed up a tree for a bit of peace and quiet.'

'I expect she felt let down,' said Smidge.

'I can tell you don't know my granny,' said Karlson. 'She followed me.'

'Up the tree?' asked Smidge in astonishment.

Karlson nodded.

'But of course, you don't believe my granny can climb trees, do you? Oh yes, if there's nagging to

be done, she can clamber up to any height. "Change your socks, Karlson dear, change your socks," she said, and crawled out along the branch I was sitting on.'

'So what did you do next?' asked Smidge.

'Well, what could I do?' said Karlson. 'I changed my socks, she wouldn't settle for anything less. High up in a tree, on a shaky little branch, risking my life, I sat there and changed my socks.'



'Hah, I know you're lying now,' said Smidge. 'You couldn't possibly have had any socks up in the tree to change into.'

'How stupid can you get?' said Karlson. 'What do you mean, I didn't have any socks to change into?'

He hauled up his trouser legs and pointed to his little fat legs in their saggy, stripy socks.

'What are these, then?' he said. 'Socks, wouldn't you say? Two of them, if I'm not mistaken. So didn't I sit there on my branch and change them, put the left sock on my right foot and the right sock on my

left foot, didn't I, eh? Just to keep my old granny happy?'

'Yes, but that couldn't have helped get your feet any drier,' said Smidge.

'Have I ever claimed it did?' asked Karlson. 'Have I?'

'But then . . . ' stammered Smidge, 'then there was no point you changing your socks!'

Karlson nodded.

'So you see now who's actually got the world's naggiest nagger for a granny? Your granny nags because she has to, with a grandson as stubborn as you. But mine's the world's naggiest, because she nags me for no reason at all; have you finally got that into your poor skull, eh?'

Then Karlson let out a guffaw of laughter and gave Smidge a little shove.

'Heysan hopsan, Smidge,' he said. 'Now let's both forget our grannies; I think it's time to have some fun.'

'Heysan hopsan, Karlson. I think so too.'

'Have you got a new steam engine?' asked Karlson. 'Remember what fun we had blowing up

the last one? Have you got a new one, so we can do it again?'

But Smidge hadn't got a new steam engine, and Karlson didn't look at all happy about that. Just then, luckily, he caught sight of the vacuum cleaner Mum had accidentally left in Smidge's room after she'd finished vacuuming in there earlier. With a little shriek of delight, Karlson rushed over and turned it on.

'The world's best vacuumer-upper, guess who that is?'

And he started vacuuming for all he was worth.

'If I can't have things all nice and tidy around me, then you can count me out,' he said. 'This filthy place needs a good going over. What luck for you and your family that the world's best vacuumer-upper happens to be here.'

Smidge knew Mum had given the whole room a very thorough vacuuming, and he said so, but Karlson gave a scornful laugh.

'Women can't handle this sort of equipment; everybody knows that. No, this is the way to do it,' said Karlson, and started vacuuming one of the

thin, white curtains, which got sucked halfway into the cleaner with a little hiss.

'No, stop,' shouted Smidge. 'The curtain's too thin, can't you see it's stuck in the nozzle . . . Stop!'

Karlson shrugged.

'Well, if you want to live in filth and squalor, who am I to complain?' he said.

With the vacuum cleaner still switched on, he started pulling and tugging at the curtain. But it was stuck fast, and the vacuum cleaner wouldn't let go.

'None of your tricks,' said Karlson to the cleaner. 'Because what you've got here is Karlson on the Roof, the world's best tug-of-war champion.'

He gave a mighty tug and out came the curtain. But it was rather black, and a bit tattered as well.

'Oh no, look at the curtain,' said Smidge unhappily. 'Look, it's all black!'

'What did I say? But you, you little pig, you tell me a curtain like this doesn't need vacuuming,' said Karlson.

He patted Smidge on the head.

'But don't get upset, you might turn out all right in the end, in spite of your grubby habits. Come to

think of it, I'd better vacuum you a bit . . . or has your mum already done you?'

'No, she definitely hasn't,' said Smidge.

Karlson came hurrying over, brandishing the nozzle.

'There, that's women for you,' he said. 'Vacuum the whole room and forget the dirtiest bit! Come on, we'll start with your ears!'

Smidge had never been vacuumed before, but now he found out how it felt, and it tickled so much that he hooted with laughter.

Karlson made a proper job of it. He vacuumed Smidge's ears and hair and neck and armpits and back and tummy, and right down to his feet.

'This is what they call a good autumn cleaning,' said Karlson.

'If you knew how much it tickles,' said Smidge.

'Yes, you really ought to pay extra for that,' said Karlson.

Then Smidge wanted to give Karlson a good autumn cleaning.

'It's my turn now. Come on, I'll vacuum your ears!'

'No need,' said Karlson, 'because I washed them

last September. There are much more urgent things round here.'

He looked about the room and noticed Smidge's stamp lying on the table.

'Horrid little bits of litter everywhere, messing the place up,' he said. And before Smidge could stop him, he had sucked Red Riding Hood into the vacuum cleaner.

Smidge was appalled.

'My stamp,' he shouted. 'Now you've sucked up Red Riding Hood and I'll never forgive you.'

Karlson turned off the vacuum cleaner and folded his arms.

'Pardon *me*,' he said. 'Pardon me for being a kind and helpful and hygienic little Karlson just trying to do his best here in life; pardon me for that!'

He sounded as if he might be about to cry.

'It's no use,' he said, his voice quavering. 'I never get any thanks . . . just more and more tellings off!'

'Oh,' said Smidge, 'please don't be sad, but you see Red Riding Hood . . . '

'What's this old red riding hood you're so worked

up about?' asked Karlson, who by now had decided not to cry.

'She's on the stamp,' said Smidge. 'My best stamp.'

Karlson just stood there, pondering. Then his eyes began to gleam and he smiled a knowing smile.

'The world's best pretend game player, guess who that is? And guess what we're going to play? Red Riding Hood and the wolf! We'll pretend the vacuum cleaner's the wolf and I'm the hunter who comes and slits open the wolf's belly, and hey presto, out comes Red Riding Hood!'

He looked round eagerly.

'Have you got an axe anywhere? Vacuum cleaners like this are as hard as iron.'

Smidge hadn't got an axe, and he was glad he hadn't.

'But you can always open the vacuum cleaner and pretend you're slitting open the wolf's belly.'

'If you want to cheat, yes,' said Karlson. 'That's not what I *usually* do when I slit wolves open, but since there's no stuff in this useless house, I suppose we'll just have to pretend!'

He threw himself tummy first on top of the vacuum cleaner and bit the handle.

'You stupid thing!' he shouted. 'Why did you suck up Red Riding Hood?'

Smidge thought Karlson was very childish, playing such babyish games, but it was still fun to watch.

'Easy now, take it easy, Little Red Riding Hood,' shouted Karlson. 'Get your hat and galoshes on, because you're coming out right now!'

So Karlson opened the vacuum cleaner, and emptied everything inside it onto the rug. It made a horrible big, grey pile.

'Oh dear, you should have emptied it into a paper bag,' said Smidge.

'Paper bag . . . is that what it says in the fairytale, eh?' said Karlson. 'Does it say the hunter slit open the wolf's belly and emptied Red Riding Hood into a paper bag, eh?'

'Well, no,' said Smidge, 'of course not . . . '

'Right, so keep quiet then,' said Karlson. 'Try not to invent bits that aren't in it, or you can count me out!'

Then he had to stop, because a gust of wind blew

in through the window and lots of dust flew up his nose. It made him sneeze. He sneezed right into the pile of dust and fluff. That blew a scrap of paper across the floor to land at Smidge's feet.

'Look, there's Red Riding Hood,' cried Smidge, quickly rescuing the little, fluff-covered stamp.

Karlson looked pleased with himself.

'That's what I do,' he said. 'I find lost things with one big sneeze. So maybe now you'll stop kicking up such a fuss about Red Riding Hood!'



Smidge dusted off his stamp and felt pretty happy.

Then Karlson sneezed again, and a cloud of dust rose from the floor.

'The world's best sneezer, guess who that is,' said Karlson. 'I'm going to sneeze all the dust back into its proper place, you wait and see!'

Smidge wasn't listening. All he wanted was to get his stamp stuck in the album.

But Karlson stood there in a cloud of dust, sneezing. He sneezed and sneezed, and by the time he'd

finished sneezing, he'd sneezed away most of the pile of dust and fluff.

'There, I told you we didn't need a paper bag,' said Karlson. 'And now all the dust's back where you usually keep it. Everything in its place, that's what I like. If I can't have things all nice and tidy around me, then you can count me out!'

But Smidge was concentrating on his stamp. There, he'd stuck it in now, and it looked great!

'Have I got to vacuum your ears again?' said Karlson. 'You're not listening, are you?'

'What did you say?' asked Smidge.

'What I said was that it can't be right that I'm the only one toiling away here and getting blisters on my hands. I've been cleaning and cleaning for you, so now it's not asking too much for you to come up and do some cleaning for me.'

Smidge tossed aside his stamp album. Go up on the roof with Karlson? There was nothing he'd rather do! He'd only been up to Karlson's little house on the roof once before. That time, his mum had created a huge scene and sent the fire brigade up to bring him down.

Smidge thought about it. That was ages ago, and

he was much bigger now, the sort of age when you can climb about on any roof at all. But did Mum realize this, that's what he wanted to know. She wasn't in, of course, so he couldn't ask her. Perhaps it would be just as well not to ask.

'Are you coming, then?' asked Karlson.

Smidge thought it over again.

'But what if you drop me when we're flying?' he said anxiously.

Karlson didn't seem worried.

'Oh well,' he said, 'there are plenty of children. One kid more or less, that's a mere trifle.'

This made Smidge really cross.

'I'm not a mere trifle, and if I fall . . . '

'Easy now, take it easy,' said Karlson, patting him on the head. 'You won't fall. I shall hold on to you as hard as Granny did. Because even though you're just a grubby little boy, I sort of like you, all the same. Especially now you've had your autumn cleaning and all that.'

He patted Smidge again.

'Yes, it's funny, but I like you all the same, silly little boy that you are. Just wait till we get up to the

roof: I'll give you a hug hard enough to make your face turn blue, just like Granny did.'

He turned the winder on his tummy, his motor started whirring, and Karlson took a firm grip on Smidge. Then they flew out of the window and up into the blue sky. The tattered curtain waved gently, as if it was trying to say goodbye.