

ASTRID LINDGREN



KARLSON
ON THE
ROOF

Translated by Sarah Death • Illustrated by Tony Ross

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KARLSON ON THE ROOF

In a perfectly ordinary street in a perfectly ordinary house in Stockholm lives a perfectly ordinary family called Stevenson. It consists of a perfectly ordinary father and a perfectly ordinary mother and three perfectly ordinary children, Seb, Sally, and Smidge.

'I'm not an ordinary Smidge at all,' says Smidge. But he's lying. He most certainly is ordinary. There are so many boys of seven with blue eyes and snub noses and unwashed ears and trousers that always have holes in the knees, so Smidge

most definitely is perfectly ordinary, there's no question about it.

Seb is fifteen and likes football and isn't getting on very well at school, so he's perfectly ordinary, too; and Sally is fourteen and has her hair in a ponytail like other perfectly ordinary girls.

There's only one person in the whole house who isn't ordinary, and that's Karlson on the Roof. He lives up on the roof, Karlson, and that's not very ordinary, for a start. It may be different in other parts of the world, but in Stockholm you scarcely ever find anyone living in a special little house up on the roof. Yet that's precisely what Karlson does. He is a very small, round, determined gentleman, and he can fly. Everybody can fly in aeroplanes and helicopters, but Karlson is the only one who can fly all by himself. Karlson simply turns a winder somewhere in front of his tummy button, and hey presto! A clever little motor on his back starts whirring. Karlson stands there for a moment while his motor revs up. And then—when his propellor is whizzing round fast enough—Karlson takes off and hovers away, as fine and stately as a high court judge, if you

can imagine a high court judge with a propellor on his back.

Karlson is very happy in his little house up on the roof. In the evenings he sits on his front step and smokes his pipe and looks at the stars. Of course, you can see the stars much better from up on the roof than anywhere else in the building, so it's strange, really, that not more people live on roofs. But the people who rent the flats in the house don't know you can live on roofs; they don't even know that Karlson has his little house up there, because it's so well hidden behind the big chimney. And anyway, most people don't notice houses as small as Karlson's, even if they trip over them. A chimney sweep once caught sight of Karlson's house as he was about to sweep the chimney, and he was quite astonished.

'That's strange,' he said to himself, 'there's a house up here. Who would have thought it, there's a house up on the roof, but however did it get here?'

Then he set about sweeping the chimney and totally forgot the house, and never thought of it again.

It was certainly a stroke of luck for Smidge, getting to know Karlson, because whenever Karlson flew in, things turned exciting and there were adventures to be had. Perhaps Karlson thought it was a stroke of luck getting to know Smidge, too, because after all, it can't always be much fun living all alone in a house without anyone else realizing you're there. It must be nice to have someone to call out 'Heysan hopsan, Karlson,' whenever you fly in.

This is how Karlson and Smidge met.

It was one of those difficult days when it wasn't the least fun being Smidge. Normally it was rather nice being Smidge, because he was the pet and darling of the whole family, and they all spoiled him as much as they could. But there were days when everything went wrong. On days like that you were told off by Mum for making more holes in your trousers, and Sally said, 'Blow your nose, kid,' and Dad was cross because you were late home from school.

'Why must you hang about the streets?' Dad asked. Hang about the streets? What Dad didn't know

was that Smidge had met a dog. A lovely, friendly dog that had sniffed at Smidge and wagged his tail and looked as if he would like to be Smidge's dog.



If it had been up to Smidge he could have been Smidge's dog, straight away. But the problem was that Mum and Dad didn't want a dog in the house. And anyway, a lady turned up just then and called, 'Here, Ricky,' and Smidge realized this couldn't be his dog, after all.

'Doesn't seem to be any chance of me getting a dog as long as I live,' Smidge said bitterly, that day

everything was going wrong. 'Mum, you've got Dad, and Seb and Sally always stick together, but I haven't got anybody.'

'But, Smidge, love, you've got all of us,' said Mum.

'Oh no, I haven't,' said Smidge even more bitterly, because he suddenly felt as if he had nobody in the whole wide world.

There was one thing he did have, though. He had his own room, so that was where he went.

It was a beautiful, light spring evening, and the window was open. The white curtains were swaying gently to and fro, just as if they were waving to the small, pale stars up there in the spring sky. Smidge went over to the window and looked out. He thought about that friendly dog and wondered what he was doing now: whether he was lying in a dog basket in a kitchen somewhere, and whether a boy—some other boy, not Smidge—was sitting on the floor beside him, patting his shaggy head and saying, 'Good dog, Ricky.'

Smidge gave a big sigh. Then he heard a faint buzzing sound. The buzzing grew louder, and all at

once, a fat little man flew slowly past the window. It was Karlson on the Roof, but Smidge didn't know that, of course.

Karlson merely gave Smidge a long look and went sailing by. He took a little detour over the roof of the house opposite, did a circuit of the chimney and then headed back to Smidge's window. He had got up speed now, and went whistling past Smidge almost like a little jet plane. He went whizzing past several times, while Smidge just stood there waiting, feeling his tummy flutter with excitement, because it wasn't every day of the week he had fat little men flying past his window. Finally Karlson came to a halt, right outside the window ledge.

'Heysan hopsan,' he said. 'Mind if I drop in for a while?'

'Oh no, please do,' said Smidge. 'It must be hard to fly like that,' he went on.

'Not for me,' said Karlson importantly. 'For me, it's not hard at all. Because I'm the world's best stunt flyer. But I wouldn't recommend any old sack of hay to try it.'

Smidge had a definite feeling he was 'any old sack

of hay', and decided on the spot not to try copying Karlson's flying stunts.

'What's your name?' asked Karlson.

'Smidge,' said Smidge. 'Though my real name is Steven Stevenson.'

'Imagine names being so different—mine's Karlson,' said Karlson. 'Plain Karlson and nothing else. Well, heysan hopsan, Smidge.'

'Heysan hopsan, Karlson,' said Smidge.

'How old are you?' asked Karlson.

'Seven,' said Smidge.

'Good. You carry on with that,' said Karlson.

He briskly swung one of his fat little legs over Smidge's window ledge and stepped into the room.

'How old are you, then?' asked Smidge, thinking Karlson seemed rather childish for a grown-up man.

'Me?' said Karlson. 'I'm a man in my prime, that's all I can say.'

Smidge didn't really know what that meant—being a man in his prime. He wondered whether he might be a man in his prime as well, without knowing it, and asked cautiously:
'Which bit is the prime?'

'All of it,' said Karlson with satisfaction. 'For me, at any rate. I'm a handsome, thoroughly clever, perfectly plump man in my prime,' he went on.

Then he took Smidge's steam engine from its place on the bookshelf.

'Shall we get this going?' he suggested.

'I'm not supposed to,' said Smidge. 'Dad says either he or Seb must be here when I have it running.'

'Dad or Seb or Karlson on the Roof,' said Karlson.

'He's the world's best steam engine driver, Karlson is. You tell your dad.'

He grabbed up the bottle of methylated spirits from beside the steam engine, filled the little spirit lamp and lit it. Although he was the world's best steam engine driver, he clumsily spilled a whole little lake of methylated spirits on the bookcase, and merry blue flames danced around the engine as the lake caught fire. Smidge gave a shriek and dashed across the room.

'Easy now, take it easy,' said Karlson, holding up a plump hand to keep Smidge at bay.

But Smidge couldn't take it easy as long as he could see things burning. He grabbed an old rag and smothered the merry little flames. Where they had

been dancing, there were now two big scorch marks on the varnish of the bookcase.

'Oh dear, look at the bookcase,' said Smidge anxiously. 'What's Mum going to say?'

'Ah, that's a mere trifle,' said Karlson on the Roof. 'A few insignificant marks on a bookcase—a mere trifle, you tell your mum.'

He was kneeling beside the steam engine, and his eyes were shining.

'We'll soon get some proper chuff from it,' he said. And he was right. The steam machine was soon working away. Chuff-chuff-chuff, it went. Oh, it was the splndidest steam engine you could imagine, and Karlson looked so proud and happy, as if he'd built it himself.

'I've got to check the safety valve,' said Karlson, fiddling eagerly with a little widget. 'There are always accidents if you don't check the safety valve.'

Chuff-chuff-chuff, went the steam engine. It puffed faster and faster and faster, chuffa-chuffa-chuffa. In the end it sounded as if it was galloping, and Karlson's eyes sparkled. Smidge stopped worrying about the marks on the bookcase; he felt terribly happy about

his steam engine and about Karlson, who was the world's best steam-engine driver and had checked the safety valve so well.

'Oh yes, Smidge,' said Karlson, 'we've got a real chuff-chuff-chuffer here! The world's best steam engine drive—'

He didn't get any further, because at that moment there came a huge bang, and suddenly there was no steam engine any longer, just bits of steam engine scattered all over the room.

'It exploded,' declared Karlson with delight, as if that was the greatest trick you could ever expect a steam engine to perform. 'Well I never, it exploded! What a bang, eh?'

But Smidge couldn't feel glad. His eyes filled with tears.

'My steam engine,' he said. 'It's broken.'
'That's a mere trifle,' said Karlson, with a careless wave of his chubby little hand. 'You can soon get a new one.'

'Where can I?' asked Smidge.
'I've got thousands up at my place.'
'What do you mean, up at your place?' said Smidge.

'Up at my house, on the roof,' said Karlson.

'You've got a house on the roof?' asked Smidge.

'With thousands of steam engines in it?'

'Yes, there must be at least a few hundred,' answered Karlson.

'Ooh, I'd love to see your house,' said Smidge. It sounded such a wonderful idea: a little house up on the roof, with Karlson living in it.

'Just think, a house full of steam engines,' said Smidge. 'Thousands of them.'

'Yes, I haven't counted exactly how many I've got left, but there are definitely several dozen,' said Karlson. 'They explode from time to time, you know, but I definitely always have a couple of dozen left.'

'Well maybe I could have one, then,' said Smidge.

'Of course,' said Karlson. 'Of course!'

'Right now?' Smidge asked.

'Well, I'd need to look it over a bit first,' said Karlson. 'Check the safety valve and that sort of thing. Easy now, take it easy! You'll get it another day.'

Smidge began collecting up the pieces of what had once been his steam engine.

'I wonder what Dad will say,' he muttered anxiously.

Karlson raised his eyebrows in surprise.

'About the steam engine,' he said. 'A mere trifle that he doesn't need to worry about in the least, tell him that from me. I'd tell him myself, if I had time to stay and meet him. But now I've got to get home and see to my house.'

'It was fun having you here,' said Smidge. 'Apart from the steam engine . . . Will you be coming back another day?'

'Easy now, take it easy,' said Karlson, turning the winder that was just in front of his tummy button. His motor started coughing and Karlson stood there waiting for enough lift to steer properly.

'My motor's coughing,' he said. 'I need to get to the garage for a good greasing. Could do it myself, of course,' he added, 'since I'm the world's best motor mechanic, but I haven't got time . . . no, I think I'll book myself into the garage.'

Smidge thought that would be the most sensible thing to do, too.

Karlson headed off through the open window,

his tubby little body clearly outlined against the star-dotted spring sky.

'Heysan hopsan, Smidge,' he said, waving his chubby hand.

And with that, Karlson was gone.



KARLSON BUILDS A TOWER

'I told you, he's called Karlson and he lives up on the roof,' said Smidge. 'What's funny about that? People can live where they like, can't they?'

'Now don't be silly, Smidge,' said Mum. 'You nearly scared the life out of us. Don't you see, you could have been killed when your steam engine exploded!'

'Yes, but anyway, Karlson is the world's best steam engine driver,' said Smidge, giving his mother a serious look. He had to make her understand that you couldn't say no, not when the world's best steam