

The Little Girl and the Mushrooms

By Leo Tolstoy

It was a perfect summer morning, pleasant, and not too hot. Two little sisters had been picking mushrooms. They were now returning home with baskets full of mushrooms, singing songs as they walked.

On their way was an embankment, and on the embankment was a railway track. They climbed the embankment, and since they could not see a train coming, nor hear the whistle that could warn them of one, they prepared to cross the track. But just then they heard the horn of a train. In a panic, the older sister ran back. She had assumed that her little sister was following her, but when she turned around, she found not only that she was not following her, but that she was actually in the track.

Frightened, the older sister ran back. “Run! Run back fast,” she screamed. The child did not hear her sister. She was carefully stepping over a rail of the track while holding on to her heavy basket. And while her older sister watched in horror, she fell in the track, scattering her mushrooms around. Now, she sat down in the middle of the track and began to pick them up and put them in her basket.

The terrified elder sister who was watching her little sister getting closer to the wheels of the train, was shouting that she leave the mushrooms and run back. But engrossed in retrieving her precious mushrooms, the little one paid no attention to her.

The engine driver now saw the girl sitting in the track, and in his panic, blew hard on his whistle. Meanwhile, the desperate older sister was crying loudly. But during those seconds which were terrifying for the older girl and the train driver, the little girl had got down on her hands and knees in the rail track to pick up the rest of the mushrooms.

Despite all his efforts, the engine driver was not able to stop the engine in time, and it rolled over the little girl. The older sister was by now sobbing in agony, shutting her eyes and clasping her face to blind herself to the horror unfolding before her.

Finally, when the guard managed to stop the engine, he ran back to the end of the train to see what had happened to the little girl after the train passed over her. What everybody; driver, passengers and sister, saw then was the child's face lying in the railway track, covered by her very still body.

Then, she raised her head, sprang to her knees and began gathering the remaining mushrooms.

The big sister ran towards her, her face wet with tears. They hugged each other and cried, shedding tears of joy.

The two sisters then together picked all the remaining mushrooms that were strewn on the train track. And then, hand in hand, they walked back home quietly, no doubt thinking about all that they had just been through. They were indeed two souls who had become wiser than their years, in the span of a few minutes.

Adapted by Amina Azfar

Leo Tolstoy (1828 to 1910), the writer of this story, was a well-known Russian author. He came from an upper class, aristocratic, family; was a ‘Count’, and owned a good deal of land. He had a wife who outlived him, and thirteen children. Two of his works, War and Peace, and Anna Karenina, are considered to be among the greatest novels ever written.

Although Count Leo Tolstoy was rich, and had become very famous, he was tired of both his riches and his fame. He founded a school for poor peasants’ children on his land, and helped the needy in other ways as well. In addition to his works for adults, he wrote many stories for the children in his school. You have just read one of them above.

