

Dostoevsky for Parents and Children: (X) Marie's Story

Scris de Dostoievski et al.

Sâmbătă, 25 Iunie 2022 16:10



Previously in the *_Dostoevsky for Parents and Children_* series:

[Varenka's Memoirs](#) (from the novel *_Poor Folk_*, 1846 [1883, 1887, 1897, DPC I])

[An Honest Thief](#) (from *_Stories of a Man of Experience_*, 1848 [suggested by the Introduction to the 1897 anthology, DPC V])

[Nellie's Story](#) (from *_The Insulted and Injured_*, 1861 [1883, 1887, DPC VI])

Dostoevsky for Parents and Children: (X) Marie's Story

Scris de Dostoievski et al.
Sâmbătă, 25 Iunie 2022 16:10

[At The Select Boarding School](#) (from the novel *The Adolescent*, 1875 [1883, 1897, DPC II])

[The Merchant's Story](#) (from the novel *The Adolescent*, 1875 [1897, DPC IV])

[A Little Boy at Christ's Christmas Tree](#) (from *The Diary Of A Writer*, January 1876 [1883, 1897, DPC VII])

[The Peasant Marey](#) (from *The Diary Of A Writer*, February 1876 [1883, 1897, DPC III])

[A Centenarian](#) (from *The Diary Of A Writer*, March 1876 [1883, 1897, DPC VIII])

[Foma Danilov](#) - The Russian Hero Tortured to Death (from *The Diary Of A Writer*, 1877 [1883, 1897, DPC IX])

{In square brackets we indicate the original Anna Grigorievna Dostoevskaya anthologies in which each story appeared, followed by its order of posting in the present *_Dostoevsky for Parents and Children_* (DPC) collection. Thus [1883, 1897, DPC II] means the story appeared in the first (1883) and third (1897), but not in the second (1887) Anna Dostoevskaya anthology, and was the second in this series of postings. Please find [here](#) our brief introduction to the original *_Dostoevsky for Children_* anthologies, and to this English online version. Accompanying picture: grave of Sophya ("Sonia") Dostoevskaya (+1868, Geneva); memorial plaque donated by the International Dostoevsky Society}

--//--

"But you should know that [he] is right even when he is wrong."

(Dostoevsky on Belinsky, as quoted in K. Lantz, *_The Dostoevsky Encyclopedia_*)

"Marie's Story" from *The Idiot* (1868) was intended by Anna Dostoyevskaya for publication in a further *Dostoevsky for Children* volume, a tome that remained unpublished. We include her short story here. Like many pieces we have read, it has the inherent charm and savor of a short story entirely understandable on its own. It is a self-sufficient gem.

It is true that Marie's name is not always found in the indexes of the most outstanding works on Dostoevsky. It tends to be forgotten. Like other pages in this collection, and indeed, like all of Anna Dostoyevskaya's "children's books". Perhaps because of their subdued, some might say "kenotic", family air.

Nevertheless, today's story is also a kind of key to *The Idiot*. And *The Idiot* is a key to any understanding of Dostoevsky's work and persona. In particular, Marie's story might be the finest embodiment of our author's "Russian Idea", and of his lifelong Slavophile Idea. We glimpsed at this idea before, from

[a less happy angle](#)

. Today's story, however, suggests that what Dostoevsky said of Belinsky might well apply to himself: "you should know that [he] is right even when he is wrong."

For, here is the key to love and friendship, a central theme in Dostoevsky since as early on as *Poor Folk*

, "An Honest Thief", or "Nellie's Story". Marie's story at first seems only a redeeming pastoral of the innocent and of the innerly pure. It is that, and that makes any reading of it profitable.

But it is more than that. In it, there are already "two kinds of love" implied, Joseph Frank discerns: essentially, the worldly and the otherworldly. Egotistic love, versus co-suffering love. And only innocent children may be allowed to ignore the difference, the story suggests.

Later on in the novel, confusion between the "two kinds of love" brings down two unforgettable Dostoevskian leading ladies, also ending the saga on this side of eternity of Prince Myshkin, their potential rescuer, and perhaps the most memorable alter ego of the author himself. Myskin's plight, in this interpretation, echoes that of [Vanya Petrovich, Nellie's rescuer](#), in *The Insulted and Injured*.
. The innocent may be excused, but in their rescuers spiritual clarity seems needed!

Perhaps deeper insight into the ideal of monasticism might have cleared this confusion. Dostoevsky was naturally led to explore this direction later, in the *Brothers Karamazov*. But even Alyosha Karamazov leaves the monastery, so the issue of worldly v. otherworldly was left to somehow be settled by his posterity, as previously intimated in this series.

Be this as it may, the essence of Dostoevsky's Russian Idea is before us in the short story of Marie. The Karamazovs, the "Dream of a Ridiculous Man", even the "Pushkin Speech", etc., can all be seen as gravitating around this central case, with their refinements and accidents illuminated by it.

Dostoevsky for Parents and Children: (X) Marie's Story

Scris de Dostoievski et al.
Sâmbătă, 25 Iunie 2022 16:10

For here is *__Russian__* love and friendship successfully *__universalized abroad__*, in an almost hesychast fashion, as in no other Dostoevsky story we can think of. And perhaps there are more kinds of love than two implied - how many can

you
count?

Here are almost epigenetically inherited aristocracy and humility fused in one (the Russian quality without a name?) and rescuing a whole Arcadian community from the clutches of... well, of the Western God of pride and legalistic satisfaction (the same god that pervades every Dostoevskian instantiation of the ever offended Romantic Ego, and its "Underground".)

True enough, only a small, almost Jane Austen-like, pastoral setting is rescued. But doesn't this only make the story *__more__* "Slavophile"? More innerly free, and less dependent on "the Roman Idea"? (cōmp. Met. Anthony Khrapovitsky quoted [he](#)
[re](#)
.)

Having adumbrated some of our author's ambiguities, a note of caution: For the spiritual edification of our homeschooling readers, we have tried to capitalize on the *__practically__* tested, if somewhat overlooked, readings of these stories (by Met. Anthony, Prof. Andreyev, etc.) But, as on any Ladder, this is only one of the options available to every reader, at each step. In this connection, it is perhaps relevant how St. Isaac the Syrian (later to occasion Dostoevsky's last riddle, as we hope we shall see) counsels against lazy delay in the twilight, hinting at the kind of "accidents" that can happen, even to the "elect":

Without wine no one can get drunk, nor will his heart leap with joy; and without inebriation in God, no one will obtain by the natural course of events the virtue that does not belong to him, nor will it remain in him serenely and without compulsion. Now there is one who is serene in his nature and compassionate, and he loves everyone with ease, having compassion on every (created) nature - not just human beings, but domestic animals, birds and wild animals and so on as well: there do exist such souls, but there are times when they are perturbed too, if certain causes of anguish pass by them, originating from someone (else). In the case of the person who had been worthy to taste of divine love, that person customarily forgets everything (else) by (reason of) its sweetness, (for) it is something at whose taste all visible things seem despicable: such a person gladly draws near to a luminous love of humanity, without distinguishing (between good and bad); he is never overcome by the weakness to be found in people, nor is he perturbed. He is just as the blessed Apostles were as well: people who in the midst of all the bad things they endured from others, were (nonetheless) utterly incapable of hating them or of being fed up with showing love for them. This was manifested in actual deed, for after all the other things they even accepted death in order that these people may be retrieved. These were men who only a little previously had begged Christ that fire might descend from heaven upon the Samaritans just because they had not received them into their village! But once they had received the gift and tasted the love of God, they were made perfect even in love for wicked man: enduring all kinds of evils in order to retrieve them, they could not possibly hate them." (this specific passage translated by S. Brock from the Syriac was not available to Dostoevsky, but perhaps much of it was implied in what was available.)

F.M. Dostoevsky

MARIE'S STORY

(from *The Idiot*, 1868, part I, chap. VI. Constance Garnett transl., 1913. Russian original [here](#).)

"Here you all are," began the prince, "settling yourselves down to listen to me with so much curiosity, that if I do not satisfy you you will probably be angry with me. No, no! I'm only joking!" he added, hastily, with a smile.

"Well, then—they were all children there, and I was always among children and only with children. They were the children of the village in which I lived, and they went to the school there—all of them. I did not teach them, oh no; there was a master for that, one Jules Thibaut. I may have taught them some things, but I was among them just as an outsider, and I passed all four years of my life there among them. I wished for nothing better; I used to tell them everything and hid nothing from them. Their fathers and relations were very angry with me, because the children could do nothing without me at last, and used to throng after me at all times. The schoolmaster was my greatest enemy in the end! I had many enemies, and all because of the children. Even Schneider reproached me. What were they afraid of? One can tell a child everything, anything. I have often been struck by the fact that parents know their children so little. They should not conceal so much from them. How well even little children understand that their parents conceal things from them, because they consider them too young to understand! Children are capable of giving advice in the most important matters. How can one deceive these dear little birds, when they look at one so sweetly and confidingly? I call them birds because there is nothing in the world better than birds!

"However, most of the people were angry with me about one and the same thing; but Thibaut simply was jealous of me. At first he had wagged his head and wondered how it was that the children understood what I told them so well, and could not learn from him; and he laughed like anything when I replied that neither he nor I could teach them very much, but that *they* might teach us a good deal.

"How he could hate me and tell scandalous stories about me, living among children as he did, is what I cannot understand. Children soothe and heal the wounded heart. I remember there was one poor fellow at our professor's who was being treated for madness, and you have no idea what those children did for him, eventually. I don't think he was mad, but only terribly unhappy. But I'll tell you all about him another day. Now I must get on with this story.

"The children did not love me at first; I was such a sickly, awkward kind of a fellow then—and I know I am ugly. Besides, I was a foreigner. The children used to laugh at me, at first; and they even went so far as to throw stones at me, when they saw me kiss Marie. I only kissed her once in my life—no, no, don't laugh!" The prince hastened to suppress the smiles of his audience at this point. "It was not a matter of *love* at all! If only you knew what a miserable creature she was, you would have pitied her, just as I did. She belonged to our village. Her mother was an old, old woman, and they used to sell string and thread, and soap and tobacco, out of the window of their little house, and lived on the pittance they gained by this trade. The old woman was ill and very old, and could hardly move. Marie was her daughter, a girl of twenty, weak and thin and consumptive; but still she did heavy work at the houses around, day by day. Well, one fine day a commercial traveller betrayed her and carried her off; and a week later he deserted her. She came home dirty, draggled, and shoeless; she had walked for a whole week without shoes; she had slept in the fields, and caught a terrible cold; her feet were swollen and sore, and her hands torn and scratched all over. She never had been pretty even before; but her eyes were quiet, innocent, kind eyes.

"She was very quiet always—and I remember once, when she had suddenly begun singing at her work, everyone said, 'Marie tried to sing today!' and she got so chaffed that she was silent for ever after. She had been treated kindly in the place before; but when she came back now—ill and shunned and miserable—not one of them all had the slightest sympathy for her. Cruel people! Oh, what hazy understandings they have on such matters! Her mother was the first to show the way. She received her wrathfully, unkindly, and with contempt. 'You have disgraced me,' she said. She was the first to cast her into ignominy; but when they all heard that Marie had returned to the village, they ran out to see her and crowded into the little cottage—old men, children, women, girls—such a hurrying, stamping, greedy crowd. Marie was lying on the floor at the old woman's feet, hungry, torn, draggled, crying, miserable.

"When everyone crowded into the room she hid her face in her dishevelled hair and lay cowering on the floor. Everyone looked at her as though she were a piece of dirt off the road. The old men scolded and condemned, and the young ones laughed at her. The women condemned her too, and looked at her contemptuously, just as though she were some loathsome insect.

"Her mother allowed all this to go on, and nodded her head and encouraged them. The old woman was very ill at that time, and knew she was dying (she really did die a couple of months later), and though she felt the end approaching she never thought of forgiving her daughter, to the very day of her death. She would not even speak to her. She made her sleep on straw in a shed, and hardly gave her food enough to support life.

"Marie was very gentle to her mother, and nursed her, and did everything for her; but the old woman accepted all her services without a word and never showed her the slightest kindness. Marie bore all this; and I could see when I got to know her that she thought it quite right and fitting, considering herself the lowest and meanest of creatures.

"When the old woman took to her bed finally, the other old women in the village sat with her by turns, as the custom is there; and then Marie was quite driven out of the house. They gave her no food at all, and she could not get any work in the village; none would employ her. The men seemed to consider her no longer a woman, they said such dreadful things to her. Sometimes on Sundays, if they were drunk enough, they used to throw her a penny or two, into the mud, and Marie would silently pick up the money. She had begun to spit blood at that time.

"At last her rags became so tattered and torn that she was ashamed of appearing in the village any longer. The children used to pelt her with mud; so she begged to be taken on as assistant cowherd, but the cowherd would not have her. Then she took to helping him without leave; and he saw how valuable her assistance was to him, and did not drive her away again; on the contrary, he occasionally gave her the remnants of his dinner, bread and cheese. He considered that he was being very kind. When the mother died, the village parson was not ashamed to hold Marie up to public derision and shame. Marie was standing at the coffin's head, in all her rags, crying.

"A crowd of people had collected to see how she would cry. The parson, a young fellow

ambitious of becoming a great preacher, began his sermon and pointed to Marie. 'There,' he said, 'there is the cause of the death of this venerable woman'—(which was a lie, because she had been ill for at least two years)—'there she stands before you, and dares not lift her eyes from the ground, because she knows that the finger of God is upon her. Look at her tatters and rags—the badge of those who lose their virtue. Who is she? her daughter!' and so on to the end.

"And just fancy, this infamy pleased them, all of them, nearly. Only the children had altered—for then they were all on my side and had learned to love Marie.

"This is how it was: I had wished to do something for Marie; I longed to give her some money, but I never had a farthing while I was there. But I had a little diamond pin, and this I sold to a travelling pedlar; he gave me eight francs for it—it was worth at least forty.

"I long sought to meet Marie alone; and at last I did meet her, on the hillside beyond the village. I gave her the eight francs and asked her to take care of the money because I could get no more; and then I kissed her and said that she was not to suppose I kissed her with any evil motives or because I was in love with her, for that I did so solely out of pity for her, and because from the first I had not accounted her as guilty so much as unfortunate. I longed to console and encourage her somehow, and to assure her that she was not the low, base thing which she and others strove to make out; but I don't think she understood me. She stood before me, dreadfully ashamed of herself, and with downcast eyes; and when I had finished she kissed my hand. I would have kissed hers, but she drew it away. Just at this moment the whole troop of children saw us. (I found out afterwards that they had long kept a watch upon me.) They all began whistling and clapping their hands, and laughing at us. Marie ran away at once; and when I tried to talk to them, they threw stones at me. All the village heard of it the same day, and Marie's position became worse than ever. The children would not let her pass now in the streets, but annoyed her and threw dirt at her more than before. They used to run after her—she racing away with her poor feeble lungs panting and gasping, and they pelting her and shouting abuse at her.

"Once I had to interfere by force; and after that I took to speaking to them every day and whenever I could. Occasionally they stopped and listened; but they teased Marie all the same.

"I told them how unhappy Marie was, and after a while they stopped their abuse of her, and let her go by silently. Little by little we got into the way of conversing together, the children and I. I

concealed nothing from them, I told them all. They listened very attentively and soon began to be sorry for Marie. At last some of them took to saying 'Good-morning' to her, kindly, when they met her. It is the custom there to salute anyone you meet with 'Good-morning' whether acquainted or not. I can imagine how astonished Marie was at these first greetings from the children.

"Once two little girls got hold of some food and took it to her, and came back and told me. They said she had burst into tears, and that they loved her very much now. Very soon after that they all became fond of Marie, and at the same time they began to develop the greatest affection for myself. They often came to me and begged me to tell them stories. I think I must have told stories well, for they did so love to hear them. At last I took to reading up interesting things on purpose to pass them on to the little ones, and this went on for all the rest of my time there, three years. Later, when everyone—even Schneider—was angry with me for hiding nothing from the children, I pointed out how foolish it was, for they always knew things, only they learnt them in a way that soiled their minds but not so from me. One has only to remember one's own childhood to admit the truth of this. But nobody was convinced... It was two weeks before her mother died that I had kissed Marie; and when the clergyman preached that sermon the children were all on my side.

"When I told them what a shame it was of the parson to talk as he had done, and explained my reason, they were so angry that some of them went and broke his windows with stones. Of course I stopped them, for that was not right, but all the village heard of it, and how I caught it for spoiling the children! Everyone discovered now that the little ones had taken to being fond of Marie, and their parents were terribly alarmed; but Marie was so happy. The children were forbidden to meet her; but they used to run out of the village to the herd and take her food and things; and sometimes just ran off there and kissed her, and said, '*Je vous aime, Marie!*' and then trotted back again. They imagined that I was in love with Marie, and this was the only point on which I did not undeceive them, for they got such enjoyment out of it. And what delicacy and tenderness they showed!

"In the evening I used to walk to the waterfall. There was a spot there which was quite closed in and hidden from view by large trees; and to this spot the children used to come to me. They could not bear that their dear Leon should love a poor girl without shoes to her feet and dressed all in rags and tatters. So, would you believe it, they actually clubbed together, somehow, and bought her shoes and stockings, and some linen, and even a dress! I can't understand how they managed it, but they did it, all together. When I asked them about it they only laughed and shouted, and the little girls clapped their hands and kissed me. I sometimes went to see Marie secretly, too. She had become very ill, and could hardly walk. She still went with the herd, but could not help the herdsman any longer. She used to sit on a stone near, and wait there almost motionless all day, till the herd went home. Her consumption was so advanced, and she was so

weak, that she used to sit with closed eyes, breathing heavily. Her face was as thin as a skeleton's, and sweat used to stand on her white brow in large drops. I always found her sitting just like that. I used to come up quietly to look at her; but Marie would hear me, open her eyes, and tremble violently as she kissed my hands. I did not take my hand away because it made her happy to have it, and so she would sit and cry quietly. Sometimes she tried to speak; but it was very difficult to understand her. She was almost like a madwoman, with excitement and ecstasy, whenever I came. Occasionally the children came with me; when they did so, they would stand some way off and keep guard over us, so as to tell me if anybody came near. This was a great pleasure to them.

"When we left her, Marie used to relapse at once into her old condition, and sit with closed eyes and motionless limbs. One day she could not go out at all, and remained at home all alone in the empty hut; but the children very soon became aware of the fact, and nearly all of them visited her that day as she lay alone and helpless in her miserable bed.

"For two days the children looked after her, and then, when the village people got to know that Marie was really dying, some of the old women came and took it in turns to sit by her and look after her a bit. I think they began to be a little sorry for her in the village at last; at all events they did not interfere with the children any more, on her account.

"Marie lay in a state of uncomfortable delirium the whole while; she coughed dreadfully. The old women would not let the children stay in the room; but they all collected outside the window each morning, if only for a moment, and shouted '*Bon jour, notre bonne Marie!*' and Marie no sooner caught sight of, or heard them, and she became quite animated at once, and, in spite of the old women, would try to sit up and nod her head and smile at them, and thank them. The little ones used to bring her nice things and sweets to eat, but she could hardly touch anything. Thanks to them, I assure you, the girl died almost perfectly happy. She almost forgot her misery, and seemed to accept their love as a sort of symbol of pardon for her offence, though she never ceased to consider herself a dreadful sinner. They used to flutter at her window just like little birds, calling out: '

Nous t'aimons, Marie!

,

"She died very soon; I had thought she would live much longer. The day before her death I went to see her for the last time, just before sunset. I think she recognized me, for she pressed my hand.

"Next morning they came and told me that Marie was dead. The children could not be restrained now; they went and covered her coffin with flowers, and put a wreath of lovely blossoms on her head. The pastor did not throw any more shameful words at the poor dead woman; but there were very few people at the funeral. However, when it came to carrying the coffin, all the children rushed up, to carry it themselves. Of course they could not do it alone, but they insisted on helping, and walked alongside and behind, crying.

"They have planted roses all round her grave, and every year they look after the flowers and make Marie's resting-place as beautiful as they can. I was in ill odour after all this with the parents of the children, and especially with the parson and schoolmaster. Schneider was obliged to promise that I should not meet them and talk to them; but we conversed from a distance by signs, and they used to write me sweet little notes. Afterwards I came closer than ever to those little souls, but even then it was very dear to me, to have them so fond of me.

"Schneider said that I did the children great harm by my pernicious 'system'; what nonsense that was! And what did he mean by my system? He said afterwards that he believed I was a child myself—just before I came away. 'You have the form and face of an adult' he said, 'but as regards soul, and character, and perhaps even intelligence, you are a child in the completest sense of the word, and always will be, if you live to be sixty.' I laughed very much, for of course that is nonsense. But it is a fact that I do not care to be among grown-up people and much prefer the society of children. However kind people may be to me, I never feel quite at home with them, and am always glad to get back to my little companions. Now my companions have always been children, not because I was a child myself once, but because young things attract me. On one of the first days of my stay in Switzerland, I was strolling about alone and miserable, when I came upon the children rushing noisily out of school, with their slates and bags, and books, their games, their laughter and shouts—and my soul went out to them. I stopped and laughed happily as I watched their little feet moving so quickly. Girls and boys, laughing and crying; for as they went home many of them found time to fight and make peace, to weep and play. I forgot my troubles in looking at them. And then, all those three years, I tried to understand why men should be for ever tormenting themselves. I lived the life of a child there, and thought I should never leave the little village; indeed, I was far from thinking that I should ever return to Russia. But at last I recognized the fact that Schneider could not keep me any longer. And then something so important happened, that Schneider himself urged me to depart. I am going to see now if I can get good advice about it. Perhaps my lot in life will be changed; but that is not the principal thing. The principal thing is the entire change that has already come over me. I left many things behind me—too many. They have gone. On the journey I said to myself, 'I am going into the world of men. I don't know much, perhaps, but a new life has begun for me.' I made up my mind to be honest, and steadfast in accomplishing my task. Perhaps I shall meet with troubles and many disappointments, but I have made up my mind to be polite and sincere to everyone; more cannot be asked of me. People may consider me a child if they like. I am often called an idiot, and at one time I certainly was so ill that I was nearly as bad as an idiot; but I am not an idiot now. How can I possibly be so when I know

myself that I am considered one?

“When I received a letter from those dear little souls, while passing through Berlin, I only then realized how much I loved them. It was very, very painful, getting that first little letter. How melancholy they had been when they saw me off! For a month before, they had been talking of my departure and sorrowing over it; and at the waterfall, of an evening, when we parted for the night, they would hug me so tight and kiss me so warmly, far more so than before. And every now and then they would turn up one by one when I was alone, just to give me a kiss and a hug, to show their love for me. The whole flock went with me to the station, which was about a mile from the village, and every now and then one of them would stop to throw his arms round me, and all the little girls had tears in their voices, though they tried hard not to cry. As the train steamed out of the station, I saw them all standing on the platform waving to me and crying ‘Hurrah!’ till they were lost in the distance.

“I assure you, when I came in here just now and saw your kind faces (I can read faces well) my heart felt light for the first time since that moment of parting. I think I must be one of those who are born to be in luck, for one does not often meet with people whom one feels he can love from the first sight of their faces; and yet, no sooner do I step out of the railway carriage than I happen upon you!

“I know it is more or less a shamefaced thing to speak of one’s feelings before others; and yet here am I talking like this to you, and am not a bit ashamed or shy. I am an unsociable sort of fellow and shall very likely not come to see you again for some time; but don’t think the worse of me for that. It is not that I do not value your society; and you must never suppose that I have taken offence at anything.

“You asked me about your faces, and what I could read in them; I will tell you with the greatest pleasure. You, Adelaida Ivanovna, have a very happy face; it is the most sympathetic of the three. Not to speak of your natural beauty, one can look at your face and say to one’s self, ‘She has the face of a kind sister.’ You are simple and merry, but you can see into another’s heart very quickly. That’s what I read in your face.

“You too, Alexandra Ivanovna, have a very lovely face; but I think you may have some secret sorrow. Your heart is undoubtedly a kind, good one, but you are not merry. There is a certain suspicion of ‘shadow’ in your face, like in that of Holbein’s Madonna in Dresden. So much for your face. Have I guessed right?

“As for your face, Lizabetha Prokofievna, I not only think, but am perfectly *sure*, that you are an absolute child—in all, in all, mind, both good and bad—and in spite of your years. Don’t be angry with me for saying so; you know what my feelings for children are. And do not suppose that I am so candid out of pure simplicity of soul. Oh dear no, it is by no means the case! Perhaps I have my own very profound object in view.”