

A Naughty Boy

Anton Chekhov

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IVAN LAPKIN, a youth of pleasing exterior, and Anna Zamblitskaya, a girl with a tip-tilted nose, descended the steep river bank and took their seats on a bench at its foot. The bench stood at the water's edge in a thicket of young willows. It was a lovely spot. Sitting there, one was hidden from all the world and observed only by fish and the daddy-long-legs that skimmed like lightning across the surface of the water. The young people were armed with fishing-rods, nets, cans containing worms, and other fishing appurtenances. They sat down on the bench and immediately began to fish.

"I am glad that we are alone at last," began Lapkin glancing behind him. "I have a great deal to say to you, Miss Anna, a very great deal. When first I saw you—you've got a bite!—I realized at last the reason for my existence. I knew that you were the idol at whose feet I was to lay the whole of an honourable and industrious life—that's a big one biting! On seeing you I fell in love for the first time in my life. I fell madly in love!— Don't pull yet, let it bite a little longer!— Tell me, dearest, I beg you, if I may aspire, not to a return of my affection—no, I am not worthy of that, I dare not even dream of it—but tell me if I may aspire to—pull!" With a shriek, Anna jerked the arm that held the fishing-rod into the air; a little silvery-green fish dangled glistening in the sunlight.

"Goodness gracious, it's a perch! Oh, oh, be quick, it's coming off!"

The perch fell off the hook, flopped across the grass toward its native element, and splashed into the water.

Somehow, while pursuing it, Lapkin accidentally seized Anna's hand instead of the fish and accidentally pressed it to his lips. Anna pulled it away, but it was too late, their lips accidentally met in a kiss. It all happened accidentally. A second kiss succeeded the first, and then followed vows and the plighting of troth. Happy moments! But perfect bliss does not exist on earth, it often bears a poison in itself, or else is poisoned by some outside circumstances. So it was in this case. When the young people had exchanged kisses they heard a sudden burst of laughter. They looked at the river in stupefaction; before them, up to his waist in water, stood a naked boy: it was Kolia, Anna's schoolboy brother! He stood there smiling maliciously with his eyes fixed on the young people.

"Aha! You're kissing one another, are you? All right, I'll tell mamma!"

"I hope that, as an honourable boy—" faltered Lapkin, blushing. "To spy on us is mean, but to sneak is low, base, vile. I am sure that, as a good and honourable boy, you—"

"Give me a rouble and I won't say anything!" answered the honourable boy. "If you don't, I'll tell on you—"

Lapkin took a rouble from his pocket and gave it to Kolia. The boy seized it in his wet hand, whistled, and swam away. The young couple exchanged no more kisses on that occasion.

Next day Lapkin brought Kolia a box of paints from town and a ball; his sister gave him all her old pillboxes. They next had to present him with a set of studs with little dogs' heads on them. The bad boy obviously relished the game and began spying on them so as to get more presents. Wherever Lapkin and Anna went, there he went too. He never left them to themselves for a moment.

"The little wretch!" muttered Lapkin grinding his teeth. "So young and yet so great a rascal! What will become of us?"

All through the month of June Kolia tormented the unhappy lovers. He threatened them with betrayal, he spied on them, and then demanded presents; he could not get enough, and at last began talking of a watch. The watch was given him.

Once during dinner, while the waffles were on the table, he burst out laughing, winked, and said to Lapkin: "Shall I tell them, eh?"

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Lapkin blushed furiously and put his napkin into his mouth instead of a waffle. Anna jumped up from the table and ran into another room.

The young people remained in this situation until the end of August when the day at last came on which Lapkin proposed for Anna's hand. Oh, what a joyful day it was! No sooner had he spoken with his sweetheart's parents and obtained their consent to his suit, than Lapkin rushed into the garden in search of Kolia. He nearly wept with exultation on finding him, and caught the wicked boy by the ear. Anna came running up, too, looking for Kolia, and seized him by the other ear. The pleasure depicted on the faces of the lovers when Kolia wept and begged for mercy was well worth seeing.

"Dear, good, sweet angels, I won't do it again! Ouch, ouch! Forgive me!" Kolia implored them.

They confessed afterward that during all their courtship they had never once experienced such bliss, such thrilling rapture, as they did during those few moments when they were pulling the ears of that wicked boy.