

THE LIFE-GIVING DROP

by Ivan Turgenev

by Rick Rofihe

"The Life-Giving Drop" by Ivan Turgenev on Fictionaut is an expansion and revision of a recounting of a story told by Turgenev to a child, found in Edmund Wilson's essay "Turgenev and the Life-giving Drop" which first appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1957 and subsequently in *TURGENEV'S LITERARY REMINISCENCES* (Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, New York, 1958). It is copyright 1990 by Rick Rofihe; all rights reserved.

[I was first made aware of this Turgenev-told tale by Edmund "Ted" Snow Carpenter (September 2, 1922—July 1, 2011) who was an anthropologist best known for his work on tribal art and visual media. -RR]

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A child had sick parents and did not know how to cure them; they were always terribly sad or awfully tired. they didn't like to get up in the morning, all day long they didn't want to do anything, and they fell asleep even before the child's bed-time at night. All these things made the child very upset.

One day the child heard someone say, "Somewhere there exists a huge rock into which a cave has been hollowed. In that cave, on certain days, a drop of water oozes down through the rock—a miraculous drop of life-giving water! Whoever drinks this drop of water will receive the gift of being able to heal both the troubles of the mind and the pains of the soul."

The child searched and searched for many, many days before finding the huge rock into which the cave had been hollowed.

The child went inside the cave but was immediately seized with fright--there was almost no light to see by, and all around were hissing snakes and lizards darting their tongues, each more frightening than the other and all looking at the child with evil in their eyes.

But the child did not want to go back without having gotten the drop, and decided to wait for the moment when it would ooze out of the rock.

After waiting a long, long time, very frightened, the child at last could see, far above, something small and wet and glistening.

Little by little it grew—it was the drop of water, round as a pearl, transparent as a tear.

But hardly had the drop formed when all the snakes and lizards stretched up on their tails and, opened their jaws to catch it.

Sometimes the drop seemed ready to fall, only to suddenly get smaller and almost disappear back up into the rock.

The child began to think only of the reason for being there in the cave, summoned up patience and continued to wait.

Every time the drop of water seemed ready to fall, again the snakes and lizards stretched themselves up on their tails and, with their heads almost touching the child's face, they opened their jaws toward the drop of water.

But the child was no longer afraid. Even though it seemed that at any minute the lizards might spring up, grabbing; and the snakes might strike, squeezing; even surrounded by all those fangs so ready to pierce, the child was no longer afraid.

Because the child never forgot the purpose of the search for the cave and the drop of water. And so the child just stood tall and waited.

Then the miracle occurred! The drop of water, clear and cold, fell right between the child's lips.

As soon as the child swallowed the drop of water, the snakes and lizards all began hissing loudly—what a horrible noise!—and darting their tongues quickly—what a disgusting sight!—but they knew they had been outdone and, reluctantly, they had to give way and allow the child to pass. They were forced to limit themselves to piercing the child with envious looks.

And it turned out that it had not been for nothing that the child waited and drank the drop of water—the child returned home able not just to cure sick, tired parents, but to grow up to be someone who many people wanted to meet and get to know better; someone who could make others happy and full of life.

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Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883) Novelist, poet, and playwright, known for his detailed descriptions about the everyday life in Russia in the 19th century. Turgenev portrayed realistically the peasantry and the rising intelligentsia in its attempt to move the country into a new age. Although Turgenev has been overshadowed by his contemporaries Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy, he remains one of the major figures of the 19th-century Russian literature. See more at <http://kirjasto.sci.fi/turgenev.htm>

