

Part 05, Chapter 09

1887

People :

Author : Leo Tolstoy

Text :

IX.

A score of years have passed. Much water has run since then, many men have died, many children have been born, many have grown up and become old; still more thoughts have been born and perished. Much that was beautiful and much that was ugly in the past have disappeared; much that is beautiful in the new has been brought forth, and still more that is incomplete and abortive of the new has appeared in God's world.

Count Feódor Turbin was long ago killed in a duel with some foreigner whom he struck on the street with his long whip. His son, who was as like him as two drops of water, had already reached the age of two or three and twenty, and was a lovely fellow, already serving in the cavalry.

Morally the young Count Turbin was entirely different from his father. There was not a shadow of those fiery, passionate, and in truth be it said, corrupt inclinations, peculiar to the last century.

Together with intelligence, cultivation, and inherited natural gifts, a love for the proprieties and amenities of life, a practical view of men and circumstances, wisdom and forethought, were his chief characteristics.

The young count made admirable progress in his profession; at twenty-three he was already lieutenant.... When war broke out, he came to the conclusion that it would be more for his interests to enter the[243] regular army; and he joined a regiment of hussars as captain of cavalry, where he soon was given command of a battalion.

In the month of May, 1848, the S. regiment of hussars was on its way through the government of K., and the very battalion which the young Count Turbin commanded was obliged to be quartered for one night at Morozovka, Anna Fedorovna's village. Anna Fedorovna was still alive, but was now so far from being

young that she no longer called herself young, which, for a woman, means much.

She had grown very stout, and this, it is said, restores youth in a woman. But that was not the worst of it: over her pale, stout flesh was a net-work of coarse, flabby wrinkles. She no longer went to the city, she even found it hard to mount into her carriage; but still she was just as good-natured and as completely vacant-minded as ever,—the truth might safely be told, now that it was no longer palliated by her beauty.

Under her roof lived her daughter Liza, a rustic Russian belle of twenty-three summers, and her brother, our acquaintance the cavalryman, who had spent all his patrimony in behalf of others, and now, in his old age, had taken refuge with Anna Fedorovna.

The hair on his head had become perfectly gray; his upper lip was sunken, but the mustache that it wore was carefully dyed. Wrinkles covered not only his brow and cheeks, but also his nose and neck; and yet his weak bow-legs gave evidence of the old cavalryman.

Anna Fedorovna's whole family and household were gathered in the small parlor of the ancient house. The balcony door and windows, looking out into a star-shaped garden shaded by lindens, were open. Anna Fedorovna, in her gray hair and a lilac-colored gown,[74] [244] was sitting on the sofa, before a small round mahogany table, shuffling cards. The old brother, dressed in spruce white pantaloons and a blue coat, had taken up his position near the window, knitting strips of white cotton on a fork, an occupation which his niece had taught him, and which gave him great enjoyment, as he had nothing else to do, his eyes not being strong enough to enable him to read newspapers, which was his favorite occupation. Near him Pímotchka, a *protégée* of Anna Fedorovna, was studying her lessons under the guidance of Liza, who with wooden knitting-needles was knitting stockings of goat-wool for her uncle.

The last rays of the setting sun, as always at this time, threw under the linden alley their soft reflections on the last window-panes and the little *étagère* which stood near it.

In the garden it was so still that one could hear the swift rush of a swallow's wings, and so quiet in the room that Anna Fedorovna's gentle sigh, or the old man's cough as he kept changing the position of his legs, was the only sound.

"How does this go, Lízanka? show me, please. I keep forgetting," said Anna Fedorovna, pausing in the midst of her game of patience. Liza, without stopping her work, went over to her mother, and, glancing at the cards, "Ah!" says she. "You have mixed them all up, dear mamasha," said she, arranging the cards. "That is the way they should be placed. Now they come as you desired," she added, secretly withdrawing one card.

"Now you are always managing to deceive me! You said that it would go."

"No, truly; it goes, I assure you. It has come out right." [245]

"Very well, then; very well, you rogue! But isn't it time for tea?"

"I have just ordered the samovár heated. I will go and see about it immediately. Shall we have it brought here?... Now, Pímotchka, hasten and finish your lessons, and we will go and take a run."

And Liza started for the door.

"Lízotchka! Lízanka!" cried her uncle, steadfastly regarding his fork, "again it seems to me I have dropped a stitch. Arrange it for me, my darling." [75]

"In a moment, in a moment. First I must have the sugar broken up."

And in point of fact, within three minutes, she came running into the room, went up to her uncle, and took him by the ear.

"That's to pay you for dropping stitches," said she laughing. "You have not been knitting as I taught you."

"Now, that'll do, that'll do, adjust it for me; there seems to be some sort of a knot." Liza took the fork, pulled out a pin from her kerchief, which was blown back a little by the breeze coming through the window, picked it out a couple of times, and handed it back to her uncle.

"Now you must kiss me for that," said she, putting up her rosy cheek toward him, and re-adjusting her kerchief. "You shall have rum in your tea to-day. To-day is Friday, you see."

And again she went to the tea-room.

"Uncle dear, come and look! some hussars are riding up toward the house!" her ringing voice was heard to say. Anna Fedorovna and her brother hastened into the tea-room, the windows of which [246]faced the village, and looked at the hussars. Very little was to be seen; through the cloud of dust it could be judged only that a body of men was advancing.

"What a pity, sister," remarked the uncle to Anna Fedorovna, "what a pity that we are so cramped, and the wing is not built yet, so that we might invite the officers here. Officers of the hussars! they are such glorious, gay young fellows! I should like to have a glimpse at them."

"Well, I should be heartily glad, but you know yourself that there is nowhere to put them: my sleeping-room, Liza's room, the parlor, and then your room,—judge for yourself. Mikháïlo Matveef has put the *stárosta's*[76] house in order for them; he says it will be nice there."

"But we must find you a husband, Lízotchka, among them,—a glorious hussar!" said the uncle.

"No, I do not want a hussar: I want an uhlan. Let me see, you served among the uhlans, didn't you, uncle?... I don't care to know these hussars. They say they are desperate fellows."

And Liza blushed a little, and then once more her ringing laugh was heard. "There's Ustiushka running: we must ask her what she saw," said she. Anna Fedorovna sent to have Ustiushka brought in.

"She has no idea of sticking to her work, she must always be running off to look at the soldiers," said Anna Fedorovna.... "Now, where have they lodged the officers?"

"With the Yeremkins, your ladyship. There are two of them, such lovely men! One of them is a count, they tell me."

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"What's his name?"

"Kazárof or Turbínof. I don't remember, excuse me."

"There now, you're a goose, you don't know how to tell any thing at all. You might have remembered his name!"

"Well, I'll run and find out."

"I know that you are quite able to do that. But no, let Danílo go.—Brother, go and tell him to go; have him ask if there is not something which the officers may need; every thing must be done in good form; have them understand that it is the lady of the house who has sent to find out."

The old people sat down again in the tea-room, and Liza went to the servants' room to put the lumps of sugar in the sugar-bowl. Ustiushka was telling them there about the hussars.

"O my dear young lady, what a handsome man he is! that count!" she said, "absolutely a little cherubim,[77] with black eyebrows. You ought to have such a husband as that; what a lovely little couple you would make!" The other maids smiled approvingly; the old nurse, sitting by the window with her stocking, sighed, and, drawing a long breath, murmured a prayer.

"It seems to me that the hussars have given you a great deal of pleasure," said Liza. "You are a master hand at description. Bring me the *mors*,[78] Ustiushka, please; we must give the officers something sour to drink." And Liza, laughing, went out with the sugar-bowl.

"But I should like to see what sort of a man this hussar is,—whether he is brunet or blondin. And I imagine he would not object to making our acquaintance.[248] But he will go away, and never know that I was here and was thinking about him. And how many have passed by me in this way! No one ever sees me except uncle and Ustiushka! How many times I have arranged my hair, how many pairs of cuffs I have put on, and yet no one ever sees me or falls in love with me," she thought with a sigh, contemplating her white, plump hand.

"He must be tall, and have big eyes, and a nice little black mustache.... No! I am already over twenty-two, and no one has ever fallen in love with me except the pock-marked Iván Ipátuitch. And four years ago I was still better-looking; and so my girlhood has gone, and no one is the better for it. Ah! I am an unhappy country maiden!"

Her mother's voice, calling her to bring the tea, aroused the country maiden from this momentary reverie.

She shook her little head, and went into the tea-room.

The best things always happen unexpectedly; and the more you try to force them, the worse they come out. In the country it is rare that any attempt is made to impart education, and therefore when a good one is found it is generally a surprise. And thus it happened, in a notable degree, in the case of Liza. Anna Fedorovna, through her own lack of intelligence and natural laziness, had not given Liza any education at all; had not taught her music, nor the French language which is so indispensable. But the girl had fortunately been a healthy, bright little child: she had entrusted her to a wet-nurse and a day-nurse; she had fed her, and dressed her in print dresses and goat-skin shoes, and let her run wild and gather

mushrooms[249] and berries; had her taught reading and arithmetic by a resident seminarist. And thus, as fate would have it, at the age of sixteen, she found in her daughter a companion, a soul who was always cheerful and good-natured, and the actual mistress of the house.

Through her goodness of heart, Anna Fedorovna always had in her house some *protégée*, either a serf or some foundling. Liza, from the time she was ten years old, had begun to take care of them; to teach them, clothe them, take them to church, and keep them still when they were inclined to be mischievous.

Then her old broken-down but good-natured uncle made his appearance, and he had to be taken care of like a child. Then the domestic servants and the peasants began to come to the young mistress with their desires and their ailments; and she treated them with elderberry, mint, and spirits of camphor. Then the domestic management of the house fell into her hands entirely. Then came the unsatisfied craving for love, which found expression only in nature and religion.

Thus Liza, by chance, grew into an active, good-naturedly cheerful, self-poised, pure, and deeply religious young woman.

To be sure, she had her little fits of jealousy and envy when she saw, all around her in church, her neighbors dressed in new, fashionable hats that came from K.; she was sometimes vexed to tears by her old, irritable mother, and her caprices; she had her dreams of love in the most absurd and even the crudest forms, but her healthy activity, which she could not shirk, drove them away; and now, at twenty-two, not a single spot, not a single compunction, had touched the fresh, calm soul of this maiden, now[250] developed into the fullness of perfect physical and moral beauty.

Liza was of medium height, rather plump than lean; her eyes were brown, small, with a soft dark shade on the lower lid; she wore her flaxen hair in a long braid.

In walking she took long steps, and swayed like a duck, as the saying is.

The expression of her face, when she was occupied with her duties, and nothing especially disturbed her, seemed to say to all who looked into it, "Life in this world is good and pleasant to one who has a heart full of love, and a pure conscience."

Even in moments of vexation, of trouble, of unrest, or of melancholy, in spite of her tears, of the drawing-down of the left brow, of the compressed lips, of the petulance of her desires, even then in the dimples of her cheeks, in the corners of

her mouth, and in her brilliant eyes, so used to smile and rejoice in life,—even then there shone a heart good and upright, and unspoiled by knowledge.[251]

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