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TOLSTOY

THE COSSACKS/HAPPY EVER AFTER
THE DEATH OF IVAN ILYICH

俄国文学



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COUNT LEO NIKOLAYEVICH TOLSTOY was born in 1828 at Yasnaya Polyana in the Tula province, and educated privately. He studied Oriental languages and law at the University of Kazan then led a life of pleasure until 1851 when he joined an artillery regiment in the Caucasus. He took part in the Crimean war and wrote *The Sevastopol Stories*, which established his reputation. After a period in St Petersburg and abroad, he married Sophie Andreyevna Behrs in 1862. The next fifteen years was a period of great happiness; they had thirteen children, and Tolstoy managed his vast estates in the Volga Steppes, continued his educational projects, cared for his peasants and wrote *War and Peace* (1865-68) and *Anna Karenin* (1874-76). *A Confession* (1879-82) marked an outward change in his life and works; he became an extreme rationalist and moralist, and in a series of pamphlets he expressed his doctrines such as inner self-perfection, rejection of institutions, indictment of the demands of the flesh, and denunciation of private property. His teaching earned him numerous followers in Russia and abroad, but also much opposition and in 1901 he was excommunicated by the Russian holy synod. He died in 1910, in the course of a dramatic flight from home, at the small railway station of Astapovo.

ROSEMARY EDMONDS was born in London and studied English, Russian, French, Italian and Old Church Slavonic at universities in England, France and Italy. During the war she was translator to General de Gaulle at Fighting France Headquarters in London and, after the liberation, in Paris. She went on to study Russian Orthodox Spirituality, and has translated Archimandrite Sophrony's *The Undistorted Image* (now published in two volumes as *The Monk of Mount Athos* and *The Wisdom from Mount Athos*) and *His Life is Mine*. She has also translated Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenin*, *Resurrection* and *Childhood, Boyhood and Youth*; *The Queen of Spades* by Pushkin and Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*. Her other translations include works by Gogol and Leskov. She is at present researching into Old Church Slavonic texts.

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LEO TOLSTOY

THE COSSACKS

HAPPY EVER AFTER

THE DEATH OF IVAN ILYICH

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TRANSLATED
WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY
ROSEMARY EDMONDS



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INTRODUCTION

'I AM unendurably vile in my craving for depravity,' Tolstoy confessed to himself at the age of twenty-seven. 'Actual depravity would be better.' He had long been dissatisfied with the life he was leading; but was it not too late for the remedy of marriage? 'People have given up thinking of me as a marrying man. And I've given up the idea myself this many a day,' declares his prototype in *Happy Ever After*.^{*} But through the autumn and winter of 1856 Tolstoy did his best to fall in love with a girl who lived on a neighbouring estate – although his first visit of inspection was not too auspicious: 'It is unfortunate that she is spineless and lacks animation – like vermicelli – though she is kind. And she has a smile which is painfully submissive. Came home and sent for the soldier's wife' (a peasant woman with whom Tolstoy had illicit relations), he wrote in his diary, which over the next four months registers the progress of the affair. Valeria is 'impossibly futile' and he is not at all in love. One day she is 'charming', the next 'downright stupid'. Eventually Tolstoy suddenly departed to Moscow to give the situation a chance to clarify. From Moscow he wrote 'I already love in you your beauty, but I am only just beginning to love in you that which is eternal and ever precious – your heart, your soul ...' But the letter ends on an infuriating admonitory note: 'Please go out for a *walk* every day, no matter the weather. This is an excellent thing, as any doctor will tell you; and wear stays and put on your stockings yourself, and generally make various such-like improvements in yourself. Do not despair of becoming perfect.'

From Moscow Tolstoy went to Petersburg and then, via

^{*} I dare to hope that Tolstoy himself, who undoubtedly meant his title to have an ironic flavour, might have approved of *Happy Ever After* in place of the more usual and misleading rendering, *Family Happiness*.

Warsaw, to Paris, and correspondence with Valeria dwindled and ceased. (The romance finally foundered on Tolstoy's demand for 'twenty years' quiet seclusion in the country' as a condition of marriage.) Tolstoy felt that he had behaved badly, and sought catharsis in writing *Happy Every After*, the story of a girl of seventeen who marries her guardian, who is twice her age. At first Tolstoy was well pleased with it, describing it as a 'poem', but before the novel was finished he was so uncertain of its success that he contemplated publishing it under a pseudonym. *Happy Ever After* belongs to the last phase of the 'Supremacy of the Artistic Influence' period (to quote the title of a public address Tolstoy gave). Written in the first person – by the young girl – it is a veritable *tour de force* on Tolstoy's part. The psychology is brilliant. For instance, annoyed because her husband will treat her as a child, but frightened by her own anger, Masha decides to go and explain to him, and put things right between them. Hearing her step, he looks up but continues to write. She stands beside his writing table, turning over the pages of a book. 'He shook his head, with a sweet, affectionate smile; but for the first time I had no answering smile for him.' The scene is set for their first quarrel. Masha heaps reproaches on him for 'always being in the right', until a look of pain and increasing attention comes into his face – she was 'finding it very pleasant to disturb his equanimity'. And so on, until she gains what has become her object and his serenity disappears.

The Death of Ivan Ilyich, a sombre, powerful record of the insidious progress of a fatal disease, is essentially a study in religious philosophy, written at a time when Tolstoy was concerned with the meaning and importance of life and death and human conduct. After his conversion Tolstoy condemned all his previous imaginative writings but the artist in him revolted and sometimes succeeded in persuading the moralist that art often preaches the more effective sermon.

The Death of Ivan Ilyich gives what Tolstoy required art to give: it is kinetic, moving the reader to intense pity and awareness of the spiritually therapeutic properties of prolonged physical suffering finally resolved in death. As soon as Ivan Ilyich could admit to himself that his life had been wrong, he

was able to die. Until then 'what hindered him was his claim that his life had been good. That very justification of his life held him fast and prevented him from advancing, and caused him more agony than everything else.' But once he recognizes that 'his life had not been what it ought to have been but that it was still possible to put it right' all his pain is as nothing and his fear of death disappears. 'There was no fear because there was no death. In place of death there was light.' Within an hour Ivan Ilyich is dead. It was the end, and the beginning.

Turgenev regarded *The Cossacks* as the 'finest and most perfect production of Russian literature', Fet was wildly enthusiastic, and Tatyana Bers, Tolstoy's sister-in-law, reported that everyone was in raptures over it, though according to her fiancé readers in Petersburg 'found the novel indecent and impossible to give to young girls'. In this tale Tolstoy, influenced by the work of Rousseau, describes the attempt of a restless, self-inquisitorial young Russian disenchanted with civilization to 'return to Nature' amid the grandeur of the Caucasian mountains and the primitive Cossacks of the Terek. Although the experiment fails Olenin finds a certain peace with himself and acquires a firmer grasp on reality. 'Again, as on the night of his departure from Moscow, a three-horsed post-chaise stood waiting at the door. But this time Olenin was not settling accounts with himself; nor was he saying to himself that all he had thought and done here was "not it". He did not promise himself a new life.'

The history of the creation of *The Cossacks* is complex and not easy to unravel. Tolstoy thought for some time of handling the theme in verse but soon went back to the prose form, and wrote at intervals over a period of ten years, from 1852 to 1862. The entry in his diary for 3 December 1853 reads 'I both like and dislike the Cossack story'. By 1854 the author seems to have fallen out of love with his novel and set it aside until 1856. Marriage and a pressing need for money brought about its conclusion in 1862, leaving Tolstoy's creative spirit free to conceive and eventually bring forth *War and Peace*.

Happy Ever After has its origins in Tolstoy's own experience. *The Cossacks* is largely autobiographical – like Pierre in *War and Peace*, and Levin in *Anna Karenina*, Olenin is very much of

a self-portrait. And in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* Tolstoy's understanding of Ivan Ilyich's moral life is so acute that he does not have to contrive. He has only to describe, for the reader's pulse to beat in unison.

*He touched mine eyes with fingers light
As sleep that cometh in the night,
And like a frightened eagle's eyes
They opened wide with prophecies.**

Tolstoy was a prophet.

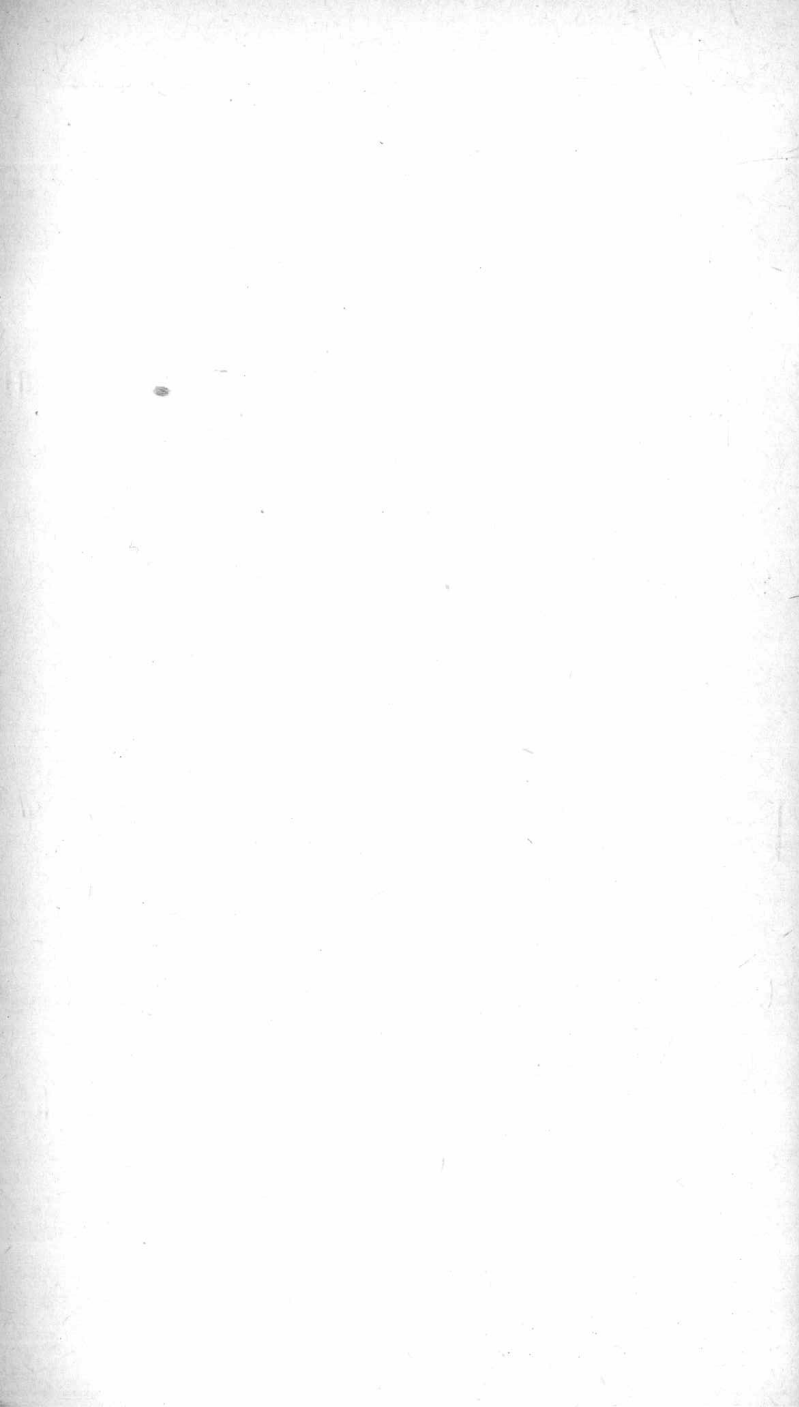
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* From Maurice Baring's translation of *The Prophet* by Pushkin.

HAPPY EVER AFTER

'Family Happiness'

A NOVEL



PART ONE

I

WE were in mourning for my mother, who had died in the autumn, and I spent all that winter alone in the country with Katya and Sonya.

Katya was an old friend of the family, our governess who had brought us all up and whom I had known and loved ever since I could remember. Sonya was my younger sister. We spent a dull, melancholy winter in our old house at Pokrovskoe. The weather was cold and windy so that the snow-drifts swept up higher than the windows, which were nearly always frozen over and dark with frost, and we hardly went out of doors the whole winter. Our visitors were few and those that came brought no increase of gaiety or happiness to the household. They all wore sad faces and spoke in low tones, as though afraid of waking someone; they never laughed, but would sigh and often – when they looked at me, and especially at little Sonya in her black dress – shed tears. Death still seemed to cling to the house: the grief and horror of death were in the air. Mamma's room was shut up, and whenever I passed it on my way to bed I felt terrified and something pulled at me to peep into that cold empty room.

I was then seventeen; and in the very year of her death mamma had intended moving to town to bring me out. The loss of my mother was a great grief to me; but I must confess that this grief was partly caused by the feeling that here was I, young and pretty (so everybody told me), wasting a second winter in the solitude of the country. Before the winter ended this sense of depression and loneliness and sheer boredom increased to such an extent that I refused to leave my room or open the piano or take up a book. When Katya urged me to find some occupation I answered, 'I don't feel like it; I can't,' while in my heart I asked: 'What is the use? What is the use

of doing anything when the best years of my life are being wasted like this? What is the use? And to that *What is the use?* the only answer was tears.

They told me I was growing thin and losing my looks but even this did not rouse me. What did it matter? To whom did it matter? It seemed to me that my whole life was destined to be spent in that lonely backwater, in that helpless dreariness, from which by myself I had neither the strength nor even the will to escape. Towards the close of the winter Katya became anxious about me and made up her mind to take me abroad whatever happened. But to do this we needed money, and we scarcely knew how my mother's death had left us. Daily we expected our guardian who was to come and settle our affairs.

In March he arrived.

'Thank goodness!' Katya said to me one day when I was wandering aimlessly about like a shadow, with nothing to do, no thought, no wish in my mind. 'Sergei Mihailych has arrived. He sent to inquire after us and would like to come to dinner. You must pull yourself together, my little Masha,' she went on, 'or what will he think of you? He was always so fond of you all.'

Sergei Mihailovich was a near neighbour of ours and although much younger than my father had been a friend of his. Apart from the fact that his arrival was likely to affect our plans and make it possible to get away from the country, since my childhood I had loved and respected him; and so when Katya told me to pull myself together she knew very well it would mortify me more to appear in an unfavourable light to him than to any other of our friends. Besides, although like everyone in the house, from Katya and his god-daughter Sonya down to the humblest stableboy, I loved him from habit, for me he had a special interest because of something mamma had once said in my presence. She had said that he was the sort of husband she would like for me. At the time the idea had seemed to me extraordinary and positively disagreeable: the hero of my dreams was quite different. My hero was slight, lean, pale and melancholy, whereas Sergei Mihailovich was no longer in his first youth, was tall and thickset and, it seemed to me, always cheerful. But in spite of that, mamma's words stuck in my imagina-

tion, and even six years before, when I was only eleven and he used to say *tu* to me, and play with me and call me his little violet I sometimes wondered, not without alarm, 'What *shall* I do if he suddenly wants to marry me?'

Sergei Mihailovich arrived before dinner, for which Katya made a cream tart and a special spinach sauce. From the window I watched him drive up to the house in a little sledge, but as soon as he turned the corner I hurried to the drawing-room, meaning to pretend that I was not waiting for him at all. But when I heard the stamping of feet in the hall, his ringing voice and Katya's step, I could not restrain myself and went out to meet him. He was talking loudly, holding Katya's hand and smiling. Catching sight of me, he stopped short and gazed for some little while without any greeting. I felt awkward, and was conscious of blushing.

'Ah, is it really you?' he said in his unhesitating direct manner, holding out his hands and coming towards me. 'Can such a change be possible? How you have grown up! Where's the violet now? It's a rose in full bloom you've turned into!'

He took my hand in his own large one and squeezed it so warmly, so heartily, that it almost hurt. I expected that he would kiss my hand, and was ready to incline towards him, but he only pressed it again and looked straight into my eyes with his frank, merry glance.

It was six years since I had seen him. He was much changed: he looked older and swarthier, and had grown side-whiskers which were very unbecoming. But he had the same simple way with him, the same strong-featured, open, honest face, the same shrewd, bright eyes and friendly, almost boyish smile.

In five minutes he had ceased to be a guest and to all of us had become one of the family, even to the servants whose obvious eagerness to serve him showed their delight at his arrival.

His behaviour was quite unlike that of the neighbours who had called after mamma's death and thought it necessary to sit in silence and shed tears while they were with us. He, on the contrary, was talkative and cheerful, and did not mention mamma at all, so that at first his apparent indifference struck me as strange, and even unseemly on the part of such a close

friend. But afterwards I understood that it was not indifference but sincerity, and felt grateful for it. In the evening Katya sat down in her old place in the drawing-room and poured out tea, as she had done in mamma's time. Sonya and I sat near her; old Grigori found a pipe of papa's and brought it to Sergei Mihailovich, who fell to pacing up and down the room just as in the old days.

'What a lot of terrible changes this house has lived through, when one thinks of it!' he said, stopping short.

'Yes,' said Katya with a sigh, and then she put the lid on the samovar and looked at him, on the verge of tears.

'You remember your father, don't you?' he said, turning to me.

'Only very slightly,' I replied.

'What a help he would have been to you now,' he went on in a low voice, looking at me thoughtfully just above my eyes. 'I was very fond of your father,' he added still more quietly, and it seemed to me that his eyes glistened brighter than usual.

'And now God has taken her too!' exclaimed Katya, and immediately she laid her napkin on the teapot, brought out her handkerchief and began to cry.

'Yes, this house has seen terrible changes,' he repeated, turning away. 'Sonya, show me your toys,' he added after a moment or two, and went off to the parlour. When he had gone I looked at Katya with eyes full of tears.

'What a fine friend he is!' she said.

And indeed I somehow felt warmed and comforted by the sympathy of this good man who was not a member of the family.

In the parlour we could hear squeals from Sonya and Sergei Mihailovich romping about with her. I sent tea into him and heard him sit down to the piano and start striking the keys with Sonya's little hands.

'Marya Alexandrovna!' he called. 'Come here and play something.'

I liked his easy, friendly manner with me, and the tone of command. I got up and went to him.

'Here, play this,' he said, opening the Beethoven album at the