

Tolstoy Leo

Katia



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Katia

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Leo Tolstoy

Katia

CHAPTER I

WE were in mourning for our mother, who had died the preceding autumn, and we had spent all the winter alone in the country – Macha, Sonia and I.

Macha was an old family friend, who had been our governess and had brought us all up, and my memories of her, like my love for her, went as far back as my memories of myself.

Sonia was my younger sister.

The winter had dragged by, sad and sombre, in our old country-house of Pokrovski. The weather had been cold, and so windy that the snow was often piled high above our windows; the panes were almost always cloudy with a coating of ice; and throughout the whole season we were shut in, rarely finding it possible to go out of the house.

It was very seldom that any one came to see us, and our few visitors brought neither joy nor cheerfulness to our house. They all had mournful faces, spoke low, as if they were afraid of waking some one, were careful not to laugh, sighed and often shed tears when they looked at me, and above all at the sight of my poor Sonia in her little black frock. Everything in the house still savored of death; the affliction, the horror of the last agony yet reigned in the air. Mamma's chamber was shut up, and I felt a painful dread and yet an irresistible longing to peep furtively into the chill, desolate place as I passed it every night on my way to bed.

I was at this time seventeen years old, and the very year of her death Mamma had intended to remove to the city, in order to introduce me into society. The loss of my mother had been a great sorrow to me; but I must confess that to this grief had been added another, that of seeing myself – young, beautiful as I heard from every one that I was, – condemned to vegetate during a second winter in the country, in a barren solitude. Even before the end of this winter, the feeling of regret, of isolation, and, to speak plainly, of ennui, had so gained upon me that I scarcely ever left my own room, never opened my piano, and never even took a book in my hand. If Macha urged me to occupy myself with something I would reply: "I do not wish to, I cannot," and far down in my soul a voice kept asking: "What is the use? Why 'do something' – no matter what – when the best of my life is wearing away so in pure loss? Why?" And to this "Why?" I had no answer except tears.

I was told that I was growing thin and losing my beauty, but this gave me not the slightest concern. Why, and for whom, should I take interest in it? It seemed to me that my entire life was to drift slowly away in this desert, borne down by this hopeless suffering, from which, given up to my own resources alone, I had no longer the strength, nor even the wish, to set myself free.

Towards the end of the winter Macha became seriously uneasy about me, and determined come what might to take me abroad. But for this, money was essential, and as yet we knew little of our resources beyond the fact that we were to succeed to our mother's inheritance; however, we were in daily expectation of a visit from our guardian, who was to examine the condition of our affairs.

He came at last, late in March.

"Thank Heaven!" said Macha to me one day, when I was wandering like a shadow from one corner to another, perfectly idle, without a thought in my head or a wish in my heart: "Sergius Mikailovitch has sent word that he will be here before dinner. – You must rouse yourself, my little Katia," she added; "what will he think of you? He loves you both so much!"

Sergius Mikailovitch was our nearest neighbor, and though much his junior had been the friend of our dead father. Besides the pleasant change which his arrival might cause in our life, by making it possible for us to leave the country, I had been too much accustomed, from my childhood, to love and

respect him, for Macha not to divine while urging me to rouse myself, that still another change might be worked and that, of all my acquaintances, he was the one before whom I would be most unwilling to appear in an unfavorable light. Not only did I feel the old attachment for Sergius Mikailovitch which was shared by every one in the house, from Sonia, who was his god-daughter, down to the under-coachman, but this attachment had derived a peculiar character from a few words Mamma had once let fall before me. She had said that he was just the husband that she would have wished for me. At the moment such an idea had appeared to me very extraordinary and even somewhat disagreeable; the hero of my imagination was totally different. My own hero was to be slender, delicate, pale, and melancholy. Sergius Mikailovitch, on the contrary, was no longer young, he was tall and large, full of vigor, and, so far as I could judge, had an extremely pleasant temper; nevertheless my mother's remark had made a strong impression on my imagination. This had happened six years before, when I was only eleven, when he still said "thou" to me, played with me, and gave me the name of *La petite violette*, yet ever since that day I had always felt some secret misgivings whenever I had asked myself the question what I should do if he should suddenly take a fancy to marry me?

A little before dinner, to which Macha had added a dish of spinach and a sweet *entre mets* Sergius Mikailovitch arrived. I was looking out of the window when his light sledge approached, and as he turned the corner of the house I hastily drew back into the drawing-room, not wishing to let him see that I had been watching for him the least in the world. But upon hearing sounds in the ante-chamber, his strong voice, and Macha's footsteps, I lost patience and went myself to meet him. He was holding Macha's hand, and talking to her in a raised voice, smiling. When he perceived me, he stopped and looked at me for some moments without saluting me; it embarrassed me a good deal, and I felt myself blush.

"Ah! is it possible that this is you, Katia?" he said in his frank, decided tone, disengaging his hand and approaching me.

"Can people change so! How you have grown! Yesterday a violet! To-day the full rose!"

His large hand clasped mine, pressing it so cordially, so strongly, that he almost hurt me. I had thought he might kiss me, and bent a little towards him; but he only caught it a second time, and looked me straight in the eyes with his bright, steady glance.

I had not seen him for six years. He was much changed, older, browner, and his whiskers, which he had allowed to grow, were not particularly becoming to him; but he had the same simple manners, the same open, honest face, with its marked features, eyes sparkling with intelligence, and smile as sweet as a child's.

At the end of five minutes he was no longer on the footing of a mere visitor, but on that of an intimate guest with us all, and even the servants manifested their joy at his arrival, by the eager zeal with which they served him.

He did not act at all like a neighbor who, coming to a house for the first time after the mother's death, thinks it necessary to bring with him a solemn countenance; on the contrary, he was gay, talkative, and did not say a single word about Mamma, so that I began to think this indifference on the part of a man standing in such near relation to us very strange, and rather unseemly. But I soon saw that it was far from being indifference, and read in his intention a considerateness for which I could not help being grateful.

In the evening Macha gave us tea in the drawing-room where it had been usually served during Mamma's lifetime. Sonia and I sat near her; Gregory found one of Papa's old pipes, and brought it to our guardian, who began to pace up and down the room according to his old fashion.

"What terrible changes in this house, when one thinks of it!" said he, stopping suddenly.

"Yes," replied Macha with a sigh; and replacing the top of the samovar, she looked up at Sergius Mikailovitch, almost ready to burst into tears.

"No doubt you remember your father?" he asked me.

"A little."

“How fortunate it would be for you, now, to have him still!” he observed slowly, with a thoughtful air, casting a vague glance into vacancy over my head. And he added more slowly still:

“I loved your father very much...”

I thought I detected a new brightness in his eyes at this moment.

“And now God has taken away our mother also!” exclaimed Macha. Dropping her napkin on the tea-tray, she pulled out her handkerchief and began to cry.

“Yes, there have been terrible changes in this house!”

He turned away as he spoke.

Then, a moment after: “Katia Alexandrovna,” he said, in a louder voice, “play me something!”

I liked the tone of frank, friendly authority with which he made this request; I rose and went to him.

“Here, play me this,” said he, opening my Beethoven at the *adagio* of the sonata, *Quasi una fantasia*. “Let us see how you play,” he continued, taking his cup of tea to drink in a corner of the room.

I know not why, but I felt it would be impossible either to refuse or to put forward a plea of playing badly; on the contrary, I submissively sat down at the piano and began to play as well as I could, although I was afraid of his criticism, knowing his excellent taste in music.

In the tone of this *adagio* there was a prevalent sentiment which by association carried me away to the conversation before tea, and, guided by this impression, I played tolerably well, it seemed. But he would not let me play the *scherzo*.

“No, you will not play it well,” said he, coming to me, “stop with that first movement, – which has not been bad! I see that you comprehend music.”

This praise, certainly moderate enough, delighted me so that I felt my color rise. It was something so new and agreeable to me to have the friend, the *equal* of my father, speak to me alone, seriously, and no longer as though he were talking to a child as he used to do.

He talked to me about my father, telling me how they suited each other, and what a pleasant life they had led together while I was occupied solely with my playthings and school-books; and what he said revealed my father to me in a light quite new to me, for the first time I seemed to know fully his simple goodness. My guardian questioned me as to what I liked, what I read, what I intended doing, and gave me advice. I had no longer beside me the gay talker, delighting in badinage, but a man serious, frank, friendly, for whom I felt involuntary respect, while at the same time I was conscious of being in perfect sympathy with him. This consciousness was pleasing to me, nevertheless there was a certain tension in conversing with him. Every word I uttered left me timid; I wished so much to deserve in my own person the affection which at present I only received because I was my father’s daughter!

After putting Sonia to bed, Macha rejoined us, and began to pour out to Sergius Mikailovitch her lamentations on the score of my apathy, which resulted she complained in my rarely having a single word to say.

“Then she has not told me the most important thing of all,” he answered, smiling, and shaking his head at me with an air of reproach.

“What had I to tell?” I replied: “that I was bored? – but that will pass away.” (And indeed it now seemed to me, not only that my ennui would pass away, but that it was something already gone by, which could not return.)

“It is not well not to know how to bear solitude: – is it possible that you are truly a ‘grown young lady?’”

“I believe so!” I answered smiling.

“No, no, or at least a naughty young lady, who only lives to be admired, and who, when she finds herself isolated, gives way, and no longer enjoys anything; all for show, nothing for herself.”

“You have a lovely idea of me, it seems!” I answered, to say something.

“No,” he returned, after a moment’s silence; “it is not in vain that you have that resemblance to your father; *there is something in you!*”

Again those kind, steadfast eyes exerted their charm over me, filling me with strange emotion.

I noticed for the first time at this moment that the face which to a casual glance seemed so gay, the expression, so peculiarly his own, where at first one seemed to read only serenity, afterwards revealed more and more clearly, a reserve of deep thought and a shade of sadness.

“You should not feel ennui,” he said, “you have music, which you are able to understand, books, study; you have before you a whole life, for which the present is the only moment to prepare yourself, so that hereafter you may not have to repine. In a year it will be too late.”

He spoke to me like a father or an uncle, and I understood that he was making an effort to come to my level. I was a little offended that he should think me so much below him, and on the other hand, it was gratifying to feel that he cared to make the effort for my sake.

The rest of the evening was devoted to a business conversation between him and Macha.

“And now, good-night, my dear Katia,” said he, rising, approaching me, and taking my hand.

“When shall we see each other again?” asked Macha.

“In the spring,” he replied, still holding my hand; “I am now going to Danilovka” (our other estate); “I must look into matters there and make some necessary arrangements, then I have to go to Moscow upon business of my own, and later – or in the summer – we shall see each other again.”

“Why do you go for so long a time?” I asked, dejectedly; for I was already hoping to see him every day, and it was with a sudden sinking of my heart that I thought of again battling with my ennui. Probably my eyes and voice let this be guessed.

“Come, occupy yourself more; drive away the blues!” he said in a voice that seemed to me too placid and cold. “In the spring I will hold an examination,” he added, dropping my hand without looking at me.

We accompanied him to the ante-chamber, where he hurriedly put on his pelisse, and again his eyes seemed to avoid mine.

“He is taking very useless trouble!” I said to myself, “can it be possible that he thinks he is giving me too great a pleasure by looking at me! – An excellent man – Perfectly good... But that is all.”

We remained awake a long time that night talking, not of him, but of the employment of the ensuing summer, of where and how we should spend the winter. Mighty question, yet why? To me it appeared perfectly simple and evident that life was to consist in being happy, and in the future I could imagine nothing but happiness, so suddenly had our sombre old dwelling at Pokrovski filled itself with life and light.

CHAPTER II

THE spring came. My former ennui had disappeared, and in exchange I felt the dreamy vernal sadness, woven of unknown hopes and unslaked desires. But my life was no longer the existence I had led during the early winter; I occupied myself with Sonia, with music, with studies, and I often went into the garden, to spend a long, long, time in wandering alone through the shady walks, or in sitting motionless upon some quiet bench. God knows what I was thinking, what I was wishing, what I was hoping! Sometimes for whole nights, especially if it was moonlight, I would remain kneeling at my window with my elbows on the sill; morning would find me there; and sometimes, without Macha's knowing it, I would steal down into the garden again after I was in my simple night-dress, and fly through the dew to the little pond; once I even went out into the fields, and spent the rest of the night roaming alone about the park.

Now it is difficult for me to recall, still less to comprehend, the reveries which at this period filled my imagination. If I can succeed in remembering them, I can hardly believe that these reveries were my own, so strange were they, so outside of real life.

At the end of May, Sergius Mikailovitch, as he had promised, returned from his journey.

The first time he came to see us was in the evening, when we were not expecting him at all. We were sitting on the terrace, preparing to take tea. The garden was in full verdure, and at Pokrovski nightingales had their homes on all sides in the thick shrubbery. Here and there, large clumps of lilacs raised their heads, enamelled with the white or pale purple of their opening flowers. The leaves in the birch alleys seemed transparent in the rays of the setting sun. The terrace lay in refreshing shade, and the light evening dew was gathering upon the grass. In the court-yard behind the garden were heard the sounds of closing day, and the lowing of cows returning to their stable; poor half-witted Nikone came along the path at the foot of the terrace with his huge watering-pot, and soon the torrents of cool water traced in darkening circles over the newly-dug earth of the dahlia beds. Beside us on the terrace, the shining samovar hissed and sputtered on the white cloth, flanked by cream, pancakes, and sweetmeats. Macha, with her plump hands, was dipping the cups in hot water like a good housekeeper. As to me, with an appetite sharpened by my late bath, I could not wait for tea, but was eating a crust of bread soaked in fresh, rich cream. I had on a linen blouse with loose sleeves, and my damp hair was bound in a handkerchief.

Macha was the first to perceive him.

"Ah! Sergius Mikailovitch!" she cried; "we were just talking about you."

I rose to run in and change my dress; but he met me as I reached the door.

"Come, Katia, no ceremony in the country," said he, smiling, and looking at my head and my handkerchief, "you have no scruples before Gregory, – I can be Gregory to you."

But at the same time it darted into my mind that he was not looking at me precisely as Gregory would have done, and this embarrassed me.

"I will be back directly," I replied, drawing away from him.

"What is wrong about it?" he exclaimed, following me, "one might take you for a little peasant girl!"

"How strangely he looked at me," I thought, as I hastened up-stairs to dress myself. "At last, thank Heaven, here he is, and we shall be gayer!" And with a parting glance at the mirror I flew down again, not even trying to conceal my eager delight, and reached the terrace, out of breath. He was sitting near the table, talking to Macha about our business matters. Noticing me, he gave me a smile, and went on talking. Our affairs, he said, were in very satisfactory condition. We had nothing to do but to finish our country summer, and then we could go, either to St. Petersburg for Sonia's education, or abroad.

“That would be very well, if you would come abroad with us,” said Macha, “but by ourselves we should be like people lost in the woods.”

“Ah! would to Heaven I could go around the world with you,” was the half-jesting, half-serious answer.

“Well and good,” said I, “let us go around the world then!”

He smiled and shook his head.

“And my mother? And my business? Come, we will let the tour of the world alone, now, and you can tell me how you have passed your time. Can it be possible that you have had the blues again?”

When I told him that I had been able, without him, to employ myself and not to yield to ennui, and Macha had confirmed the good account, he praised me, with the same words and looks of encouragement he would have used to a child, and as if he had a perfect right to do so. It seemed to me quite natural that I should tell him frankly and minutely everything I had done that was right, and also, on the contrary, own to him, as if in the confessional, whatever I had done that might deserve his censure. The evening was so beautiful that, when the tea-tray was carried away, we remained upon the terrace, and I found the conversation so interesting that I only gradually became aware that all the sounds from the house were ceasing around us. Upon all sides arose the penetrating night perfume of flowers, the turf was drenched with heavy dew, the nightingale in a lilac bush near us was executing his roulades, stopping abruptly at the sound of our voices. The starry sky seemed to stoop close above our heads.

What warned me that night had come, was the swift, heavy rush of a bat beneath the awning of the terrace, and its blind, terrified circling around my white dress. I fell back against the wall, and almost cried out, but with another dull swoop it was off again and lost in the blackness of the garden.

“How I love your Pokrovski,” said Sergius Mikailovitch, interrupting the conversation... “One could linger for a lifetime on this terrace!”

“Well,” said Macha, “linger!”

“Ah, yes! linger; but life – does not pause!”

“Why do you not marry?” continued Macha; “you would make an excellent husband!”

“Why?” he repeated, smiling. “People long ago, ceased to count me a marriageable man!”

“What!” replied Macha, “thirty-six years old, and already you pretend to be tired of living?”

“Yes, certainly, and even so tired that I desire nothing but rest. To marry, one must have something else to offer. There, ask Katia,” he added, pointing me out with a nod “Girls of her age are the ones for marriage. For us ... our rôle is to enjoy their happiness.”

There was a secret melancholy, a certain tension in the tone of his voice, which did not escape me. He kept silence a moment; neither Macha nor I said anything.

“Imagine now,” he resumed, turning towards the table again, “if all at once, by some deplorable accident, I should marry a young girl of seventeen, like Katia Alexandrovna! That is a very good example, and I am pleased that it applies so well to the point ... there could not be a better instance.”

I began to laugh, but I could not at all understand what pleased him so much, nor to what it applied so well.

“Come, now, tell me the truth, ‘hand on heart,’” he went on, turning to me with a bantering air, “would it not be a great misfortune for you, to bind your life to a man already old, who has had his day, and wants nothing except to stay just where he is, while you, – Heaven knows where you would not want to run off to, as the fancy took you!”

I felt uncomfortable, and was silent, not knowing very well what to say in reply.

“I am not making a proposal for your hand,” said he, laughing, “but, now, tell us the truth are you dreaming of such a husband, as you wander through your alleys in the evening, and would he not be a great misfortune?”

“Not so great a misfortune ...” I began.

“And not so great a boon, either,” he finished for me.

“Yes ... but I may be mistaken...”

He interrupted me again.

“You see?.. she is perfectly right... I like her honesty, and am delighted that we have had this conversation. I will add that – to me – it would have been a supreme misfortune!”

“What an original you are! you have not changed in the least!” said Macha, leaving the terrace to order supper to be served.

After her departure we were silent, and all was still around us. Then the solitary nightingale recommenced, not his abrupt, undecided notes of early evening, but his night song, slow and tranquil, whose thrilling cadence filled the garden; and from far down the ravine came for the first time a response from another nightingale. The one near us was mute for a moment, listening, then burst out anew in a rapture of song, louder and clearer than before. Their voices resounded, calm and supreme, amid that world of night which is their own and which we inhabit as aliens. The gardener went by, on his way to his bed in the orange-house, we heard his heavy boots on the path as he went farther and farther from us. Some one in the direction of the mountain blew two shrill, quick notes on a whistle, then all was still once more. Scarcely a leaf was heard to move; yet all at once the awning of the terrace puffed out slowly, stirred by a breath of air, and a more penetrating perfume stole up to us from below. The silence embarrassed me, but I did not know what to say. I looked at him. His eyes, bright in the darkness, were fixed upon me.

“It is good to live in this world!” he murmured.

I know not why, but at the words I sighed.

“Well?” he questioned.

“Yes, it is good to live in this world!” I repeated.

Again the silence fell upon us, and again I felt ill at ease. I could not get it out of my head that I had hurt him, by agreeing with him that he was old; I would have liked to console him, but did not know how to set about it.

“But good-bye!” he said, rising, “my mother expects me to supper. I have hardly seen her to-day.”

“I would have liked to play you my new sonata.”

“Another time,” he replied coldly, at least so it seemed to me; then, moving off a step, he said with a careless gesture: “Good-bye!”

I was more than ever convinced that I had given him pain, and this distressed me. Macha and I went with him, as far as the porch, and stood there awhile looking down the road where he had disappeared. When we no longer caught the slightest echo from his horse’s feet, I began to walk about the terrace and watch the garden, and I remained a long time there, amid the heavy mist that deadened all the sounds of night, busy seeing and hearing whatever my fancy chose to make me see and hear.

He came a second time, a third time, and the little embarrassment caused by our strange conversation soon vanished, and never returned.

Throughout the whole summer he came to see us two or three times a week; I was so accustomed to him that, when a longer time than usual passed without his coming, it seemed to me painful to live alone; I was secretly indignant with him, and thought he was behaving badly in thus deserting me. He transformed himself for me, as it were, into a friendly comrade; inducing the most sincere frankness on my part, giving me advice and encouragement, scolding me sometimes, checking me when necessary. But despite these efforts to remain always upon my level, I was conscious that, besides all I knew of him, there existed within him an entire world, to which I was a stranger, and he did not think it was necessary to admit me; and this, more than anything else, tended to keep up my feeling of deference, and at the same time to attract me towards him. I knew from Macha and the neighbors that, besides his attentive care of his old mother, with whom he lived, besides his agricultural interests, and our guardianship, he had also on hand certain matters affecting all the nobles, which caused him much trouble and annoyance; but how he faced this complex situation, what were his thoughts, his

plans, his hopes, I could never discover from him. If I endeavored to lead the conversation to his own affairs, a certain line appeared upon his brow, which seemed to say: “Stop there, if you please; what is that to you?” And he would immediately speak of something else. At first this offended me, then I grew so accustomed to it that we never talked of anything but what concerned me; which I finally came to think quite a matter of course.

At first, too, I felt some displeasure, (while afterwards, on the contrary, it had a kind of charm,) in seeing the perfect indifference, I might almost say contempt, which he showed for my appearance. Never, by word or look, did he give the least idea that he thought me pretty; far from it, he frowned and began to laugh if any one remarked before him that I was “not bad-looking.” He even took pleasure in criticizing the defects in my face, and teasing me about them. The fashionable dresses, the coiffures, with which Macha delighted to adorn me on our holidays, only excited his raillery, which chagrined my good Macha not a little, and at first disconcerted me. Macha, who had settled in her own mind that I was pleasing to Sergius Mikailovitch, could not at all comprehend why he did not prefer that a woman whom he admired should appear at her best. But I soon discovered what was the matter. He wished to believe that I was not coquettish. As soon as I understood this there no longer remained a trace of coquetry in my dress, hair, or manner; it was replaced – usual and shallow little trick – by another coquetry, the assumption of simplicity, before I had attained the point of really being artless. I saw that he loved me: whether as a child or woman I had not hitherto asked myself: this love was dear to me, and feeling that he considered me the best girl in the world, I could not help wishing that the delusion might continue to blind him. And indeed I deceived him almost involuntarily. But in deluding him, I was nevertheless growing more what he thought me. I felt that it would be better and more worthy of him to unveil to him the good points of my soul rather than those of my person. My hair, my hands, my face, my carriage, whatever they might be, whether good or bad, – it seemed to me he could appreciate at one glance, and that he knew very well that, had I desired to deceive him, I could add nothing at all to my exterior. My soul, on the contrary, he did not know: because he loved it, because just at this time it was in full process of growth and development, and finally because in such a matter it was easy to deceive him, and that I was in fact deceiving him. What relief I felt in his presence, when once I comprehended all this! The causeless agitation, the need of movement, which in some way oppressed me, completely disappeared. It seemed to me henceforth that whether opposite or beside me, whether standing or sitting, whether I wore my hair dressed high or low, he looked at me always with satisfaction, that he now knew me entirely; and I imagined that he was as well pleased with me, as I myself was. I verily believe that if, contrary to his custom, he had suddenly said to me as others did that I was pretty, I should even have been a little sorry. But, on the other hand, what joy, what serenity, I felt in the depth of my soul, if, upon the occasion of my expressing some thought or letting fall a few words, he looked at me attentively and said in a moved tone which he strove to render light and jesting:

“Yes, yes, there is *something* in you! You are a good girl, and I ought to tell you so.”

And for what did I receive this recompense which filled my heart with joy and pride? Perhaps because I had said that I sympathized with old Gregory’s love for his little daughter, perhaps because I had been affected to tears while reading a poem or a romance, perhaps for preferring Mozart to Schuloff! I was amazed by this new intuition, which enabled me to divine what was good and what one ought to like, though as yet I had no positive knowledge of either. Most of my past habits and tastes were displeasing to him, and a look or an imperceptible movement of his eyebrows was enough to make me understand his disapproval of what I was about to do; while a certain air of slightly disdainful pity, which was peculiar to him, would at once make me believe that I no longer liked what had formerly pleased me. If the thought of giving me advice upon any subject, occurred to him, I knew beforehand what he was going to say to me. He questioned me with a glance, and already this glance had drawn from me the thought he wished to ascertain. All my thoughts, all my feelings during that time, were not my own; they were his, which suddenly became mine, penetrating and

illuminating my life. In a manner insensible to me, I began to see everything with other eyes, Macha, my servants, Sonia, as well as myself and my own occupations. The books which formerly I had read only in order to ward off ennui appeared to me all at once one of the greatest charms of life, and for no reason except that we talked, he and I, of books, that we read them together, that he brought them to me. Hitherto I had considered my work with Sonia, the lessons I gave her, as a painful obligation, only fulfilled from a sense of duty; now that he sometimes came to assist at these lessons one of my delights was to observe Sonia's progress. To learn an entire piece of music had always seemed impossible, and now, knowing that he would listen and perhaps applaud it, I thought nothing of going over the same passage forty times in succession, poor Macha would end by stopping her ears with cotton wool, while I would not consider the performance at all tiresome. The old sonatas spoke out under my fingers in a very different and very superior voice. Even Macha, whom I had always known and loved as myself, seemed totally changed. It was only now that I understood that nothing had compelled her to be what she had been to us, a mother, a friend, a slave to our whims and fancies. I comprehended all the abnegation, all the devotion, of this loving creature, I realized the greatness of my obligations to her, and loved her so much the more. He had already taught me to regard our people, our peasants, our droroviés,¹ our men and women servants, in a totally different light. It is an odd fact, but at seventeen years of age, I was living in the midst of them a far greater stranger to them than to people I had never seen; not once had it crossed my mind that they were beings capable like myself of love, desires, regrets. Our garden, our woods, our fields, which I had known ever since I was born, suddenly became quite new to me, and I began to admire their loveliness. There was no error in the remark which he so often made, that, in life, there was but one certain happiness: to live for others. This had appeared strange to me, and I had not been able to understand it; but the conviction, unknown even to my own mind, was penetrating little by little into the depths of my heart. In short, he had opened before me a new life, full of present delights, without having in any wise changed or added to my old existence, save by developing each of my own sensations. From my infancy everything around me had remained buried in a sort of silence, only awaiting his presence to lift up a voice, speak to my soul, and fill it with happiness.

Often, in the course of this summer, I would go up to my chamber, throw myself upon my bed, and there, in place of the old anguish of the spring, full of desires and hopes for the future, I would feel myself wrapped in another emotion, that of present happiness. I could not sleep, I would get up and go and sit on the side of Macha's bed, and tell her that I was perfectly happy, – which, as I look back upon it to-day was perfectly needless; she could see it well enough for herself. She would reply that neither had she anything more to wish for, that she too was very happy, and would embrace me. I believed her, so entirely natural and necessary did it seem to me for every one to be happy. But Macha had her night's rest to think of, so, pretending to be angry, she would drive me away from her bed, and drop off to sleep; I, on the contrary, would lie for a long time running over all my reasons for being gladsome. Sometimes I would rise, and begin my prayers a second time, praying in the fulness of my heart that I might thank God better for all the happiness He had granted me. In my chamber all was peaceful; there was no sound save the long-drawn regular breathing of the sleeping Macha, and the ticking of the watch by her side; I would return to bed, murmur a few words, cross myself, or kiss the little cross hanging at my neck. The doors were locked, the shutters fast over the windows, the buzzing of a fly struggling in a corner came to my ear. I could have wished never to leave this room; desired that morning might never come to dissipate the atmosphere impregnated with my soul, that enveloped me. It seemed to me that my dreams, my thoughts, my prayers, were so many animated essences which in this darkness lived with me, fluttered about my pillow, hovered above my head. And every thought was his thought, every feeling his feeling. I did not yet know what love was, I thought that it might always be thus – that it might give itself and ask nothing in return.

¹ Peasants attached to the household, and not to the soil.

CHAPTER III

ONE day, during the grain harvest, Macha, Sonia, and I, went into the garden after dinner, to our favorite bench under the shade of the linden-trees at the head of the ravine, whence we could see the fields and the woods. For three days Sergius Mikailovitch had not been to see us, and we looked for him all the more confidently to-day, as he had promised our intendant to visit the harvest fields.

About two o'clock we saw him coming over the rising ground in the middle of a rye field. Macha, giving me a smile, ordered a servant to bring out some peaches and cherries, which he was very fond of, then stretched herself upon the bench and was soon fast asleep. I broke off a little linden bough, its leaves and bark fresh with young sap, and, while I fanned Macha, went on with my reading, not without turning every instant to watch the field-path by which he must come to us. Sonia had established herself on a linden root, and was busy putting up a green arbor for her dolls.

The day was very warm, without wind, it seemed as if we were in a hot-house; the clouds, lying in a low circle upon the horizon, had looked angry in the morning, and there had been a threat of storm, which, as was always the case, had excited and agitated me. But since mid-day the clouds had dispersed, the sun was free in a clear sky, the thunder was only muttering at a single point, rolling slowly through the depths of a heavy cloud which, seeming to unite earth and heaven, blended with the dust of the fields, and was furrowed by pale zig-zags of distant lightning. It was evident that for us at least there was no more to be dreaded for that day. In the part of the road running behind the garden there was continual sound and motion, now the slow, long grind of a wagon loaded with sheaves, now the quick jolt of the empty *telégas*² as they passed each other, or the rapid steps of the drivers, whose white smocks we could see fluttering as they hurried along. The thick dust neither blew away nor fell, it remained suspended above the hedges, a hazy background for the clear green leaves of the garden trees. Farther off, about the barn, resounded more voices, more grinding wheels; and I could see the yellow sheaves, brought in the carts to the enclosure, being tossed off into the air, and heaped up, until at length I could distinguish the stacks, rising like oval sharp-roofed buildings, and the silhouettes of the peasants swarming about them. Presently, there were new *telégas* moving in the dusty fields, new piles of yellow sheaves, and in the distance the wheels, the voices, the chanted songs.

The dust and heat invaded everything, except our little favorite nook of the garden. Yet on all sides, in the dust and heat, the blaze of the burning sun, the throng of laborers chattered, made merry, and kept in continual movement. As for me, I looked at Macha, sleeping so sweetly on our bench, her face shaded by her cambric handkerchief; the black juicy cherries on the plate; our light, dazzlingly clean dresses, the carafe of clear water, where the sun's rays were playing in a little rainbow; and I felt a sense of rare comfort. "What must I do?" thought I; "perhaps it is wicked to be so happy? But can we diffuse our happiness around us? How, and to whom, can we wholly consecrate ourselves – ourselves and this very happiness?"

The sun had disappeared behind the tops of the old birch-trees bordering the path, the dust had subsided; the distances of the landscape stood out, clear and luminous, under the slanting rays; the clouds had dispersed entirely, long ago; on the other side of the trees I could see, near the barn, the pointed tops rise upon three new stacks of grain, and the peasants descend from them; finally, for the last time that day, the *telégas* passed rapidly, making the air resound with their noisy jolts; the women were going homewards, singing, their rakes on their shoulders, and their binding withes hanging at their girdles; and still Sergius Mikailovitch did not come, although long ago I had seen him at the foot of the mountain. Suddenly he appeared at the end of the path, from a direction where I had not been looking for him at all, for he had to skirt the ravine to reach it. Raising his hat he came towards me, his face lighted up with sudden joy. At the sight of Macha, still asleep, his eyes

² Russian cart, consisting of a flat frame-work of bark, between four wheels.

twinkled, he bit his lip, and began tip-toeing elaborately. I saw at once that he was in one of those fits of causeless gayety which I liked so much in him, and which, between ourselves, we called "*le transport sauvage*." At such times he was like a boy just let out of school, his whole self from head to foot instinct with delight and happiness.

"How do you do, little violet, how goes the day with you? Well?" said he, in a low voice, coming near and pressing my hand... "And with me? oh, charmingly, also!" he replied to my similar question, "to-day I am really not over thirteen years old; I would like to ride a stick-horse, – I want to climb the trees!"

"*Le transport sauvage!*" I commented, looking into his laughing eyes, and feeling this *transport sauvage* take possession of me also.

"Yes," he murmured, at the same time raising his eyebrows with an enquiring glance, and keeping back a smile. "But why are you so furious with our poor Macha Karlovna?"

In fact I then became conscious that, while I was gazing up at him and continuing to brandish my linden bough, I had whipped off Macha's handkerchief, and was sweeping her face with the leaves. I could not help laughing.

"And she will say she has not been asleep," I said, whispering, as if afraid of waking her; but I did not do it altogether for that, – it was so delightful to whisper when I spoke to him!

He moved his lips in almost dumb show, imitating me, and as if he, on his side, was saying something that no one else must hear. Then, spying the plate of cherries, he pretended to seize it and carry it off by stealth, running away towards Sonia, and dropping on the grass under the linden-tree in the midst of her accumulation of dolls. Sonia was about to fly into a little rage, but he made peace with her by proposing a new game, the point of which lay in seeing which of the two could devour the most cherries.

"Shall I order some more?" I asked, "or shall we go gather them for ourselves?"

He picked up the plate, piled Sonia's dolls in it, and we all three started for the cherry orchard. Sonia, shouting with laughter, trotted after him, tugging at his coat to make him give her back her family. He did so; and turning gravely to me:

"Come, how can you convince me that you are not a violet?" he said, still speaking very low, though there was now no one for him to be afraid of waking; "as soon as I came near you, after having been through so much dust and heat and fatigue, I seemed to perceive the fragrance of a violet, not, it is true, that violet with the powerful perfume, but the little early one, you know, which steals out first, still modest, to breathe at once the expiring snow and the springing grass..."

"But, tell me, is the harvest coming on well?" I put in hastily, to cover the happy confusion his words caused me.

"Wonderfully! what excellent people these all are, – the more one knows them, the more one loves them."

"Oh, yes! – A little while ago, before you came, I sat watching their work, and it really went to my conscience to see them toiling so faithfully, while I was just idly taking my ease, and..."

"Do not play with these sentiments, Katia," he interrupted, with a serious manner, giving me at the same time a caressing glance, "there is holy work there. May God guard you from *posing* in such matters!"

"But it was only to you that I said that!"

"I know it. – Well, and our cherries?"

The cherry orchard was locked, not a single gardener was to be found (he had sent them all to the harvest fields). Sonia ran off to look for the key; but, without waiting for her return, he climbed up at a corner by catching hold of the meshes of the net, and jumped down inside the wall.

"Will you give me the plate?" he asked me, from within.

"No, I want to gather some, myself; I will go get the key, I doubt if Sonia can find it."

But at that moment a sudden fancy seized me, to find out what he was doing there, how he looked, in short his demeanor when he supposed no one could see him. Or rather, honestly, perhaps just then I did not feel like losing sight of him for a single instant. So on my tip-toes, through the nettles, I made a circuit around the little orchard and gained the opposite side, where the enclosure was lower; there, stepping up on an empty tub, I found the wall but breast-high, and leaned over. I made a survey of everything within; looked at the crooked old trees, the large serrated leaves, the black, vertical clusters of juicy fruit; and, slipping my head under the net, I could observe Sergius Mikailovitch through the twisted boughs of an old cherry-tree. He was certainly confident that I had gone, and that no one could see him.

With bared head and closed eyes he was sitting on the mouldering trunk of an old tree, absently rolling between his fingers a bit of cherry-gum. All at once, he opened his eyes, and murmured something, with a smile. The word and smile were so little in keeping with what I knew of him that I was ashamed of having watched him. It really seemed to me that the word was: Katia! "That cannot be!" I said to myself. "Dear Katia!" he repeated lower, and still more tenderly. And this time I heard the two words distinctly. My heart began to beat so fast, I was so filled with joyful emotion, I even felt, as it were, such a kind of shock, that I had to hold on to the wall with both hands, to keep myself from falling, and so betraying myself. He heard my movement, and glanced behind him, startled; then suddenly casting down his eyes he blushed, reddening like a child. He made an effort to speak to me, but could not, and this failure made his face grow deeper and deeper scarlet. Yet he smiled as he looked at me. I smiled at him too. He looked all alive with happiness; this was no longer, then, – oh, no, this *was* no longer an old uncle lavishing cares and caresses upon me; I had there before my eyes a man on my own level, loving me and fearing me; a man whom I myself feared, and loved. We did not speak, we only looked at each other. But suddenly he bent his brows darkly; smile and glow went out of his eyes simultaneously, and his bearing became again cold and fatherly, as if we had been doing something wrong, as if he had regained control of himself and was counselling me to do the same.

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