Anna Karenina

Compact Editions

Leo Tolstoy

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Extract

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PART ONE

1

All happy families resemble one another, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

Everything was upset in the Oblonskys' house. The wife had discovered an intrigue between her husband and their former French governess, and declared that she would not continue to live under the same roof with him. This state of things had now lasted for three days, and not only the husband and wife but the whole household suffered from it. The wife kept to her own rooms; the husband stopped away from home all day; the children ran about all over the house uneasily; the English governess quarrelled with the housekeeper; the cook had gone out just at dinner-time the day before and had not returned; and the kitchen-maid and coachman had given notice.

On the third day after his quarrel with his wife, Prince Stephen Arkadyevich Oblonsky—Stiva, as he was called in his set in Society—woke up at his usual time, eight o'clock, not in his wife's bedroom but on the morocco leather-covered sofa in his study. He let down his legs, felt about with his feet for his slippers and from nine years' habit stretched out his arm towards where his dressing-gown usually hung in their bedroom. And then he suddenly remembered that, and why, he was not sleeping there but in his study. The smile vanished from his face and he frowned.

'Oh dear, dear, dear!' he groaned, recalling what had happened.

'No, she will never forgive me! And the worst thing about it is, that it's all my own fault; and yet I'm not guilty! That's the tragedy of it!' he thought despairingly, as he recalled the most painful details of the quarrel. The worst moment had been when, returning home from the theatre merry and satisfied, he saw her in her bedroom with the unlucky note which had betrayed him in her hand.

She sat there: the careworn, ever-bustling, and (as he thought) rather simple Dolly—with the note in her hand and a look of terror, despair, and anger on her face.

'What is this? This?' she asked, pointing to the note.

At the moment he had not had time to assume an expression suitable

to the position in which he stood toward his wife now that his guilt was discovered and he involuntarily smiled his usual kindly and therefore silly smile.

He could not forgive himself for that silly smile. Dolly, seeing it, shuddered as if with physical pain, and rushed from the room. Since then she had refused to see him.

'It's all the fault of that stupid smile,' thought Oblonsky. 'But what am I to do?' he asked himself in despair, and could find no answer.

2

Oblonsky could not feel repentant that he, a handsome amorous man of thirty-four, was not in love with his wife, the mother of five living and two dead children and only a year younger than himself. He repented only of not having managed to conceal his conduct from her. He had a vague notion that his wife had long suspected him of being unfaithful and winked at it. He even thought that she, who was nothing but an excellent mother of a family, worn-out, already growing elderly, no longer pretty, and in no way remarkable, ought to be lenient to him. It turned out that the very opposite was the case.

'How awful! Oh dear, oh dear, how awful!' Oblonsky kept repeating to himself. 'And how well everything was going on till now—how happily we lived! Of course it's not quite nice that *she* had been a governess in our house. There's something banal, a want of taste, in carrying on with one's governess—but as long as she was in the house I never took any liberties. The worst of the matter is, that she is already … Why need it all happen at once? Oh dear, dear, dear! What am I to do?'

He could find no answer, except life's usual answer to the most complex and insoluble questions. That answer is: live in the needs of the day, that is, find forgetfulness.

'We'll see when the time comes,' thought Oblonsky, and got up, put on his grey dressing-gown lined with blue silk, and went with his usual firm tread toward the window, drew up the blind and rang loudly. The bell was answered immediately by his old friend and valet, Matthew, who brought in his clothes, boots, and a telegram. He was followed by the barber with shaving tackle.

'Any papers from the Office?' asked Oblonsky, as he took the telegram and sat down before the looking-glass.

'They're on your table,' answered Matthew.

Oblonsky glanced at Matthew's face in the looking-glass. From their

looks, as they met in the glass, it was evident that they understood one another.

Oblonsky tore open the telegram and his face brightened.

'Matthew, my sister Anna Arkadyevna is coming to-morrow,' he said, motioning away for a moment the shiny plump hand of the barber.

'The Lord be thanked!' said Matthew, proving by his answer that he knew just as well as his master the importance of this visit: namely, that Anna Arkadyevna, Stephen Arkadyevich's favourite sister, might help to reconcile the husband and wife.

'Is she coming alone, or with Mr. Karenin?'

Oblonsky could not answer as the barber was busy with his upper lip; but he raised one finger.

'Alone. Would you like one of the upstairs rooms got ready?'

'Ask Darya Alexandrovna. See what she says.'

Oblonsky was washed and his hair brushed when Matthew re-entered the room. The barber was no longer there.

'Darya Alexandrovna told me to say that she is going away. "He may do as he pleases"—that is, as you please, sir,' he said, laughing with his eyes only; he gazed at his master. Oblonsky remained silent, then a kind and rather pathetic smile appeared on his handsome face.

'Ah, Matthew!' he said, shaking his head.

'Never mind, sir—things will shape themselves.'

'Do you think so?—Who's that?' asked Oblonsky, hearing the rustle of a woman's dress outside the door.

'It's me, sir,' answered a firm and pleasant woman's voice, and Matrena Filimonovna, the children's nurse, thrust her stern pockmarked face in at the door.

'What is it, Matrena?' asked Oblonsky, stepping out to her.

'Won't you go and try again, sir? By God's grace you might make it up! She suffers dreadfully; it's pitiful to see her, and everything in the house is topsy-turvy. You should consider the children …'

'But she won't admit me!'

'Do your part—God is merciful. Pray to Him, sir, pray to Him!'

'All right—now go,' said Oblonsky, suddenly blushing.

'I must get dressed,' said he, and threw off his dressing-gown.

3

When he was quite dressed Oblonsky, in spite of his misfortune, went with a slight spring in each step into the dining-room where his coffee