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Anna Karenina

Leo Tolstoy

Between dinner and the beginning of the evening, Kitty experienced a feeling similar to that of a young man before battle. Her heart was beating hard, and she could not fix her thoughts on anything.

She felt that this evening, when the two of them would meet for the first time, must be decisive in her fate. And she constantly pictured them to herself, first each of them separately, then the two together. When she thought about the past, she paused with pleasure, with tenderness, over memories of her relations with Levin. Memories of childhood and memories of Levin's friendship with her dead brother lent her relations with him a special poetic charm. His love for her, which she was certain of, was flattering and joyful to her. And it was easy for her to recall Levin. But in her recollections of Vronsky there was an admixture of something awkward, though he was in the highest degree a calm and worldly man. It was as if there was some falseness – not in him, he was very simple and nice – but in herself, while with Levin she felt completely simple and clear. But on the other hand, the moment she thought of a future with Vronsky, the most brilliantly happy prospects rose before her, while with Levin the future seemed cloudy.

Going upstairs to dress for the evening and glancing in the mirror, she noticed with joy that she was having one of her good days and was in full possession of all her powers, which she so needed for what lay ahead of her: she felt in herself an external calm and a free grace of movement.

At half past seven, just as she came down to the drawing room, the footman announced: 'Konstantin Dmitrich Levin.' The princess was still in her room, and the prince also did not emerge. 'That's it,' thought Kitty, and the blood rushed to her heart. Glancing in the mirror, she was horrified at her paleness.

Now she knew for certain that he had come earlier in order to find her alone and to propose. And only here did the whole matter present itself to her for the first time with quite a different, new side. Only here did she realise that the question concerned not just herself – with whom would she be happy and whom she loved – but that at this very minute she must hurt a man she loved. And hurt him cruelly... Why? Because he, the dear man, loved her, was in love with her. But. No help for it, it must be so, it had to be so.

‘My God, can it be that I must tell him myself?’ she thought. ‘Well, what shall I tell him? Can I possibly tell him I don’t love him? It wouldn’t be true. What shall I tell him, then? That I love another man? No, that’s impossible. I’ll go away, just go away.’

She was already close to the door when she heard his steps. ‘No, it’s dishonest! What am I afraid of? I haven’t done anything wrong. What will be, will be I’ll tell the truth. I can’t feel awkward with him. Here he is,’ she said to herself, seeing his whole strong and timid figure, with his shining eyes directed at her. She looked straight into his face, as if begging him for mercy, and gave him her hand.

‘I’ve come at the wrong time, it seems – too early,’ he said, glancing around the empty drawing room. When he saw that his expectations had been fulfilled, that nothing prevented him from speaking out, his face darkened.

‘Oh, no,’ said Kitty, and she sat down at the table.

‘But this is just what I wanted, to find you alone,’ he began, not sitting down and not looking at her, so as not to lose courage.

‘Mama will come out presently. Yesterday she got very tired. Yesterday...’

She spoke, not knowing what her lips were saying, and not taking her pleading and caressing eyes off him.

He glanced at her; she blushed and fell silent.

‘I told you I didn’t know whether I had come for long...that it depended on you...’

She hung her head lower and lower, not knowing how she would reply to what was coming.

‘That it depended on you,’ he repeated. ‘I wanted to say...I wanted to say...I came for this...that...to be my wife!’ he said, hardly aware of what he was saying; but, feeling the most dreadful part had been said, he stopped and looked at her.

She was breathing heavily, not looking at him. She was in ecstasy. Her soul overflowed with happiness. She had never imagined that the voicing of his love would make such a strong impression on her. But this lasted only a moment. She remembered Vronsky. Raising her light, thoughtful eyes to Levin and seeing his desperate face, she hastily replied:

‘It cannot be...forgive me...’

How close she had been to him just a minute ago, how important for his life! And now how alien and distant she had become!

‘It couldn’t have been otherwise,’ he said, not looking at her.