

Anna Karenina

A NOVEL IN EIGHT PARTS

LEO TOLSTOY

Translated by Richard Pevear
and Larissa Volokhonsky

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are needed and how the sewer pipes should be installed in a town I don't live in; to be a juror and judge a muzhik who has stolen a ham, and listen for six hours to defence lawyers and prosecutors pouring out all sorts of drivel, and hear the foreman of the jury ask my old Alyoshka-the-fool: "Mister defendant, do you acknowledge the fact of the stolen ham?" "Wha?"

Konstantin Levin was already side-tracked, impersonating the foreman of the jury and Alyoshka-the-fool; it seemed to him that it was all to the point.

But Sergei Ivanovich shrugged his shoulders.

'Well, what do you mean to say?'

'I only mean to say that I will always defend with all my might those rights that I . . . that touch on my interests. When the gendarmes searched us as students and read our letters, I was ready to defend those rights with all my might, to defend my rights to education, to freedom. I understand military service, which touches the future of my children, my brothers and myself. I'm ready to discuss anything that concerns me. But to decide how to dispose of forty thousand in zemstvo funds, or to judge Alyoshka-the-fool – that I do not understand and cannot do.'

Konstantin Levin spoke as if his words had burst their dam. Sergei Ivanovich smiled.

'And if you were brought to trial tomorrow, do you mean you'd rather be tried by the old criminal courts?'

'I won't be brought to trial. I'm not going to kill anybody, and I have no need of all that. Really!' he went on, again skipping to something completely inappropriate, 'our zemstvo institutions and all that – it's like the birches we stick up on the day of the Trinity,⁴ so that it looks like the forest that grew up by itself in Europe, and I can't put my heart into watering and believing in those birches!'

Sergei Ivanovich merely shrugged his shoulders, expressing by this gesture his surprise at the appearance out of nowhere of these birches in their discussion, though he immediately understood what his brother meant to say by it.

'Excuse me, but one cannot argue that way,' he observed.

But Konstantin Levin wanted to vindicate himself in this shortcoming which he knew he had, in his indifference to the common good, and he went on.

'I think,' said Konstantin, 'that no activity can be solid unless it's based on personal interest. That is a general truth, a philosophical one.'

he said, resolutely repeating the word 'philosophical', as if wishing to show that he, too, had the right, like anyone else, to speak of philosophy.

Sergei Ivanovich smiled once more. 'And he, too, has some sort of philosophy of his own to serve his inclinations,' he thought.

'Well, you should leave philosophy alone,' he said. 'The chief task of philosophy in all ages has consisted precisely in finding the connection that necessarily exists between personal and common interests. But that is not the point, the point is that I must correct your comparison. The birches are not stuck in, they are planted or seeded, and they ought to be carefully tended. Only those nations have a future, only those nations can be called historical, that have a sense of what is important and significant in their institutions, and value them.'

And Sergei Ivanovich transferred the question to the philosophical-historical realm, inaccessible to Konstantin Levin, and showed him all the incorrectness of his view.

'As regards your not liking it, forgive me, but that is our Russian laziness and grand manner, and I'm sure that with you it's a temporary error and will pass.'

Konstantin was silent. He felt himself roundly beaten, but together with that he felt that his brother had not understood what he had wanted to say. Only he did not know why he had not understood: whether it was because he had not been able to say clearly what he meant, or because his brother had been unwilling or unable to understand him. But he did not go deeper into these thoughts and, without objecting to his brother, began thinking about a completely different matter, a personal one for him.

Sergei Ivanovich reeled in the last line, Konstantin untied the horse, and they drove off.

IV

The personal matter that had occupied Levin during his conversation with his brother was the following: once last year, coming to the mowing and getting angry with the steward, Levin had used his remedy for calming down – he had taken a scythe from a muzhik and begun mowing.

He had liked the work so much that he had taken to mowing several more times; he had mowed the whole meadow in front of the house,

and since the spring of that year he had made a plan for himself – to spend whole days mowing with the muzhiks. Since his brother's arrival, he had been pondering: to mow or not? He was ashamed to leave his brother alone for whole days, and he feared that his brother would laugh at him for it. But having walked through the meadow, recalling his impressions of mowing, he was now almost decided that he would mow. And after the vexing conversation with his brother, he again recalled this intention.

'I need physical movement, otherwise my character definitely deteriorates,' he thought, and he decided to mow no matter how awkward it was in front of his brother and the peasants.

In the evening Konstantin Levin went to the office, gave orders about the work, and sent to the villages to summon mowers for tomorrow to mow the Viburnum Meadow, the biggest and best.

'And please send my scythe to Titus to be sharpened and brought along tomorrow – perhaps I'll do some mowing myself,' he said, trying not to be embarrassed.

The steward smiled and said:

'Yes, sir.'

That evening over tea Levin told his brother as well.

'The weather seems to have settled,' he said. 'Tomorrow I'll start mowing.'

'I like that work very much,' said Sergei Ivanovich.

'I like it terribly. I've mowed with the muzhiks occasionally, and tomorrow I intend to mow the whole day.'

Sergei Ivanovich raised his head and looked at his brother with curiosity.

'How do you mean? On a par with the muzhiks, the whole day?'

'Yes, it's very satisfying,' said Levin.

'It's wonderful as physical exercise, only you'll hardly be able to hold out,' Sergei Ivanovich said without any mockery.

'I've tried it. It's hard at first, but then you get into the rhythm. I don't think I'll lag behind . . .'

'Really! But tell me, how do the muzhiks look at it? They must be chuckling over the master's whimsies.'

'No, I don't think so; but it's such cheerful and at the same time such hard work, that one has no time to think.'

'But how are you going to have dinner with them? It's a bit awkward to send Lafite⁵ and roast turkey to you out there.'

'No, I'll just come home when they take their break.'

The next morning Konstantin Levin got up earlier than usual, but tasks on the estate detained him and when he came to the mowing, the mowers had already started the second swath.

From the top of the hill there opened out before him, at its foot, the shady, already mowed part of the meadow, with greying rows and black heaps of caftans, which the mowers had taken off where they started their first swath.

As he rode nearer, the muzhiks came into his view, following each other in a strung out line and swinging their scythes variedly, some in caftans, some just in shirts. He counted forty-two men.

They moved slowly along the uneven lower edge of the meadow, where the old dam was. Levin recognized some of his people. There was old Yermil in a very long white shirt, bent over and swinging his scythe; there was the young lad Vaska, Levin's former coachman, taking each swath at one swing. There was also Titus, Levin's tutor in mowing, a small, skinny muzhik. He walked straight ahead without bending, as if playing with his scythe, cutting down his wide swath.

Levin got off his horse, tethered it by the road, and met Titus, who took a second scythe from a bush and handed it over.

'It's ready, master; like a razor, mows by itself,' said Titus, doffing his hat with a smile and handing him the scythe.

Levin took the scythe and began to get the feel of it. Their swaths finished, the sweaty and cheerful mowers came out on the road one after another, chuckling and greeting the master. They all gazed at him, but nobody said anything until a tall old man with a wrinkled, beardless face, in a sheepskin coat, came out on the road and addressed him.

'Watch out, master, once you start there's no stopping!' he said, and Levin heard repressed laughter among the mowers.

'I'll try to keep up,' he said, taking a stand behind Titus and waiting for the moment to start.

'Watch out now,' the old man repeated.

Titus cleared his place and Levin followed him. The grass near the road was low, and Levin, who had done no mowing for a long time and was embarrassed by the looks directed at him, mowed poorly for the first few minutes, though he swung strongly. Voices were heard behind him:

'It's not hafted right, the handle's too long, see how he has to bend,' one voice said.

'Bear down on the heel,' said another.

'Never mind, he'll get himself set right,' the old man went on. 'See, there he goes . . . The swath's too wide, you'll get tired . . . He's the owner, never fear, he's doing his best! And look at the hired men! Our kind would get it in the neck for that.'

The grass became softer, and Levin, listening but not answering, and trying to mow the best he could, followed after Titus. They went some hundred steps. Titus kept on without stopping, without showing the slightest fatigue, but Levin was already beginning to fear that he would not hold out, he was so tired.

He felt he was swinging with his last strength and decided to ask Titus to stop. But just then Titus himself stopped and, bending down, took some grass, wiped the blade and began to whet it. Levin straightened up and, taking a deep breath, looked back. Behind him came a muzhik, and evidently he was also tired because he stopped at once, before reaching Levin, and began to whet. Titus whetted his and Levin's scythes, and they went on.

The second time it was all the same. Titus moved on swing after swing, without pausing and without tiring. Levin followed him, trying not to lag behind, and finding it harder and harder: there came a moment when he felt he had no strength left, but just then Titus stopped and whetted his scythe.

So they finished the first swath. And this long swath seemed especially hard to Levin; but then, when the swath was finished and Titus, shouldering his scythe, went back with slow steps over his own heel-prints in the mowing, and Levin went back the same way over his own mowing, though sweat streamed down his face and dripped from his nose, and his back was all wet as if soaked with water, he felt very good. He rejoiced especially knowing now that he would hold out.

His satisfaction was poisoned only by the fact that his swath did not look good. 'I'll swing less with my arm, more with my whole body,' he thought, comparing Titus's swath, straight as an arrow, with his own rambling and unevenly laid swath.

Titus had taken the first swath very quickly, as Levin had noticed, probably wanting to test his master, and the swath happened to be a long one. The following swaths were easier, but even so Levin had to strain all his strength not to lag behind the muzhiks.

He thought of nothing, desired nothing, except not to lag behind and to do the best job he could. He heard only the clang of scythes and ahead of him saw Titus's erect figure moving on, the curved semicircle of the

mowed space, grass and flower-heads bending down slowly and wavily about the blade of his scythe, and ahead of him the end of the swath, where rest would come.

Not understanding what it was or where it came from, in the midst of his work he suddenly felt a pleasant sensation of coolness on his hot, sweaty shoulders. He glanced at the sky while his blade was being whetted. A low, heavy cloud had come over it, and big drops of rain were falling. Some muzhiks went for their caftans and put them on; others, just like Levin, merely shrugged their shoulders joyfully under the pleasant freshness.

They finished another swath and another. They went through long swaths, short swaths, with bad grass, with good grass. Levin lost all awareness of time and had no idea whether it was late or early. A change now began to take place in his work which gave him enormous pleasure. In the midst of his work moments came to him when he forgot what he was doing and began to feel light, and in those moments his swath came out as even and good as Titus's. But as soon as he remembered what he was doing and started trying to do better, he at once felt how hard the work was and the swath came out badly.

Having finished one more swath, he wanted to walk back again, but Titus stopped, went over to the old man and quietly said something to him. They both looked at the sun. 'What are they talking about? Why doesn't he go back down the swath?' thought Levin, to whom it did not occur that the muzhiks had been mowing without a break for no less than four hours and it was time for them to have breakfast.

'Breakfast, master,' the old man said.

'Already? Well, let's have breakfast then.'

Levin handed the scythe back to Titus and, together with the muzhiks, who were going to their caftans to fetch bread, walked to his horse over the swaths of the long mowed space lightly sprinkled with rain. Only now did he realize that his guess about the weather had been wrong and that the rain was wetting his hay.

'The hay will be spoiled,' he said.

'Never mind, master, mow when it rains, rake when it shines!' said the old man.

Levin untethered the horse and went home to have coffee.

Sergei Ivanovich had just risen. After having coffee, Levin went back to the mowing, before Sergei Ivanovich had time to get dressed and come out to the dining room.

After breakfast Levin landed not in his former place in the line, but between an old joker who invited him to be his neighbour and a young muzhik married only since autumn, for whom it was his first summer of mowing.

The old man, holding himself erect, went ahead, moving his turned-out feet steadily and widely, and in a precise and steady movement that apparently cost him no more effort than swinging his arms while walking, as if in play, laid down a tall, uniform swath. Just as though it were not him but the sharp scythe alone that swished through the succulent grass.

Behind Levin came young Mishka. His fair young face, with a wisp of fresh grass bound round his hair, worked all over with the effort; but as soon as anyone looked at him, he smiled. He clearly would sooner have died than admit it was hard for him.

Levin went between them. In this hottest time the mowing did not seem so hard to him. The sweat that drenched him cooled him off, and the sun, burning on his back, head and arm with its sleeve rolled to the elbow, gave him firmness and perseverance in his work; more and more often those moments of unconsciousness came, when it was possible for him not to think of what he was doing. The scythe cut by itself. These were happy moments. More joyful still were the moments when, coming to the river, where the swaths ended, the old man would wipe his scythe with thick, wet grass, rinse its steel in the cool water, dip his whetstone box and offer it to Levin.

'Have a sip of my kvass! Good, eh?' he said with a wink.

And, indeed, Levin had never before drunk such a drink as this warm water with green floating in it and tasting of the rusty tin box. And right after that came a blissfully slow walk with scythe in hand, during which he could wipe off the streaming sweat, fill his lungs with air, look at the whole stretched-out line of mowers and at what was going on around him in the woods and fields.

The longer Levin mowed, the more often he felt those moments of oblivion during which it was no longer his arms that swung the scythe, but the scythe itself that lent motion to his whole body, full of life and conscious of itself, and, as if by magic, without a thought of it, the work got rightly and neatly done on its own. These were the most blissful moments.

It was hard only when he had to stop this by now unconscious movement and think, when he had to mow around a tussock or an unweeded clump of sorrel. The old man did it easily. The tussock would come, he would change movement and, using the heel or tip of the scythe, cut around it on both sides with short strokes. And as he did so, he studied and observed what opened up before him; now he picked off a corn-flag, ate it or offered it to Levin, now flung aside a branch with the tip of his scythe, or examined a quail's nest from which the female had flown up right under the scythe, or caught a snake that had got in his way and, picking it up with the scythe as with a fork, showed it to Levin and tossed it aside.

For Levin and the young lad behind him these changes of movement were difficult. Both of them, having got into one strenuous rhythm, were caught up in the passion of work and were unable to change it and at the same time observe what was in front of them.

Levin did not notice how the time passed. If he had been asked how long he had been mowing, he would have said half an hour – yet it was nearly dinner-time. Walking back down the swath, the old man drew Levin's attention to the girls and boys, barely visible, coming towards the mowers from different directions, through the tall grass and along the road, their little arms weighed down with bundles of bread and jugs of kvass stoppered with rags.

'See the midges come crawling!' he said, pointing to them, and he looked at the sun from under his hand.

They finished two more swaths and the old man stopped.

'Well, master, it's dinner-time!' he said resolutely. And, having reached the river, the mowers set out across the swaths towards their caftans, near which the children who had brought their dinners sat waiting for them. The muzhiks gathered together – those from far away under their carts, those from near by under a willow bush on which they heaped some grass.

Levin sat down with them; he did not want to leave.

Any constraint before the master had long since vanished. The muzhiks were preparing to have dinner. Some were washing, the young fellows were bathing in the river, others were preparing a place to rest, untying sacks of bread and unstopping jugs of kvass. The old man crumbled some bread into a bowl, kneaded it with a spoon handle, poured in some water from his whetstone box, cut more bread, sprinkled it with salt, and turned eastward to pray.

'Here, master, try a bit of my mash,' he said, squatting down in front of the bowl.

The mash tasted so good that Levin changed his mind about going home for dinner. He ate with the old man and got to talking with him about his domestic affairs, taking a lively interest in them, and told him about all his own affairs and all circumstances that might interest the old man. He felt closer to him than to his brother, and involuntarily smiled from the tenderness that he felt for this man. When the old man stood up again, prayed, and lay down right there under the bush, putting some grass under his head, Levin did the same and, despite the flies and bugs, clinging, persistent in the sunlight, tickling his sweaty face and body, he fell asleep at once and awoke only when the sun had passed over to the other side of the bush and begun to reach him. The old man had long been awake and sat whetting the young fellows' scythes.

Levin looked around him and did not recognize the place, everything was so changed. An enormous expanse of the meadow had been mowed, and its already fragrant swaths shone with a special new shine in the slanting rays of the evening sun. The mowed-around bushes by the river, the river itself, invisible before but now shining like steel in its curves, the peasants stirring and getting up, the steep wall of grass at the unmowed side of the meadow, and the hawks wheeling above the bared meadow – all this was completely new. Coming to his senses, Levin began to calculate how much had been mowed and how much more could be done that day.

They had done an extraordinary amount of work for forty-two men. The whole of the big meadow, which in the time of the *corvée*⁷ used to be mowed in two days by thirty scythes, was already mowed. Only some corners with short swaths remained unmowed. But Levin wanted to get as much mowed as possible that day and was vexed with the sun for going down so quickly. He felt no fatigue at all; he only wanted to work more and more quickly and get as much done as possible.

'What do you think, can we still mow Mashka's Knoll?' he said to the old man.

'As God wills, the sun's not high. Or might there be some vodka for the lads?'

At break time, when they sat down again and the smokers lit up, the old man announced to the lads that if they 'mow Mashka's Knoll – there'll be vodka in it'.

'See if we can't! Go to it, Titus! We'll clear it in a wink! You can eat

tonight. Go to it!' came the cries, and, finishing their bread, the mowers went to it.

'Well, lads, keep the pace!' said Titus, and he went ahead almost at a trot.

'Get a move on!' said the old man, hustling after him and catching up easily. 'I'll cut you down! Watch out!'

And it was as if young and old vied with each other in the mowing. But no matter how they hurried, they did not ruin the grass, and the swaths were laid as cleanly and neatly. A little patch left in a corner was cleared in five minutes. The last mowers were coming to the end of their rows when the ones in front threw their caftans over their shoulders and went across the road to Mashka's Knoll.

The sun was already low over the trees when, with whetstone boxes clanking, they entered the wooded gully of Mashka's Knoll. The grass was waist-high in the middle of the hollow, tender and soft, broad-bladed, speckled with cow-wheat here and there under the trees.

After a brief discussion – to move lengthwise or crosswise – Prokhor Yermilin, also a famous mower, a huge, swarthy man, went to the front. He finished the first swath, went back and moved over, and everybody started falling into line after him, going downhill through the hollow and up to the very edge of the wood. The sun sank behind the wood. The dew was already falling, and only those mowing on the hill were in the sun, while below, where mist was rising, and on the other side, they walked in the fresh, dewy shade. The work was in full swing.

Sliced down with a succulent sound and smelling of spice, the grass lay in high swaths. Crowding on all sides in the short swaths, their whetstone boxes clanking, to the noise of scythes clashing, of a whetstone swishing along a sharpening blade, and of merry shouts, the mowers urged each other on.

Levin went as before between the young lad and the old man. The old man, who had put on his sheepskin jacket, was just as gay, jocular and free in his movements as ever. In the wood they were constantly happening upon *boletus* mushrooms, sodden in the succulent grass, which their scythes cut down. But the old man, each time he met a mushroom, bent down, picked it up, and put it into his jacket. 'Another treat for my old woman,' he would mutter.

Easy as it was to mow the wet and tender grass, it was hard going up and down the steep slopes of the gully. But the old man was not hindered by that. Swinging his scythe in the same way, with the small, firm steps

of his feet shod in big bast shoes, he slowly climbed up the steep slope, and, despite the trembling of his whole body and of his trousers hanging lower than his shirt, he did not miss a single blade of grass or a single mushroom on his way and joked with the muzhiks and Levin just as before. Levin came after him and often thought that he would surely fall, going up such a steep slope with a scythe, where it was hard to climb even without a scythe; but he climbed it and did what was needed. He felt that some external force moved him.

VI

Mashka's Knoll was mowed. They finished the last swaths, put on their caftans and cheerfully went home. Levin got on his horse and, regretfully taking leave of the muzhiks, rode homewards. He looked back from the hill; the men could not be seen in the mist rising from below; he could only hear merry, coarse voices, loud laughter, and the sound of clashing scythes.

Sergei Ivanovich had long ago finished dinner and was drinking water with lemon and ice in his room, looking through some newspapers and magazines that had just come in the post, when Levin, with his tangled hair sticking to his sweaty brow and his dark, drenched back and chest, burst into his room talking cheerfully.

'And we did the whole meadow! Ah, how good, it's remarkable! And how have you been?' said Levin, completely forgetting yesterday's unpleasant conversation.

'Heavens, what a sight!' said Sergei Ivanovich, glancing round at his brother with displeasure in the first moment. 'The door, shut the door!' he cried out. 'You must have let in a good dozen.'

Sergei Ivanovich could not bear flies. He opened the window in his room only at night and kept the doors carefully shut.

'By God, not a one. And if I did, I'll catch it. You wouldn't believe what a pleasure it was! How did your day go?'

'Very well. But did you really mow for the whole day? I suppose you're hungry as a wolf. Kuzma has everything ready for you.'

'No, I don't even want to eat. I ate there. But I will go and wash.'

'Well, go, go, and I'll join you presently,' said Sergei Ivanovich, shaking his head as he looked at his brother. 'Go, go quickly,' he added

with a smile and, gathering up his books, he got ready to go. He suddenly felt cheerful himself and did not want to part from his brother. 'Well, and where were you when it rained?'

'What rain? It barely sprinkled. I'll come presently, then. You had a nice day, then? Well, that's excellent.' And Levin went to get dressed.

Five minutes later the brothers came together in the dining room. Though it seemed to Levin that he did not want to eat, and he sat down to dinner only so as not to offend Kuzma, once he started eating, the dinner seemed remarkably tasty to him. Smiling, Sergei Ivanovich looked at him.

'Ah, yes, there's a letter for you,' he said. 'Kuzma, bring it from downstairs, please. And see that you close the door.'

The letter was from Oblonsky. Levin read it aloud. Oblonsky was writing from Petersburg: 'I received a letter from Dolly, she's in Yergushovo, and nothing's going right for her. Go and see her, please, help her with your advice, you know everything. She'll be so glad to see you. She's quite alone, poor thing. My mother-in-law and the others are all still abroad.'

'That's excellent! I'll certainly go and see them,' said Levin. 'Or else let's go together. She's such a nice woman. Isn't it so?'

'Are they near by?'

'Some twenty miles. Maybe twenty-five. But the road is excellent. An excellent trip.'

'Delighted,' said Sergei Ivanovich, still smiling.

The sight of his younger brother had immediately disposed him to cheerfulness.

'Well, you've got quite an appetite!' he said, looking at his red-brown sunburnt face and neck bent over the plate.

'Excellent! You wouldn't believe what a good regimen it is against all sorts of foolishness. I want to enrich medical science with a new term: *Arbeitskur*.*'

'Well, it seems you've no need for that.'

'No, but for various nervous patients.'

'Yes, it ought to be tried. And I did want to come to the mowing to have a look at you, but the heat was so unbearable that I got no further than the wood. I sat a little, then walked through the wood to the village, met your nurse there and sounded her out about the muzhiks' view of

* Work-cure.