

Tolstoy's Wife
By Frank Moher

ACT ONE

1.

(SOFYA TOLSTOY, 60, draped in a black cloak, a long white kerchief covering her head, faces upstage, one hand raised to her forehead, as if peering in a window.)

STERN MALE VOICE

Countess Tolstoy.

Countess Tolstoy!

(Blackout.)

2.

(SOFYA stands in precisely the same position, but this time facing right.)

STERN MALE VOICE

Countess Tolstoy.

Countess Tolstoy!

3.

(As before. SOFYA faces front, peering at us.)

STERN MALE VOICE

Countess Tolstoy.

Countess Tolstoy!

(Beat. She opens her mouth to scream. Music -- Rachmaninov -- comes out.)

4.

(SOFYA, ILYA, AXINYA, VANECHKA sitting about looking very bored. AXINYA has knitting in her hands, but she's forgotten about it.

Long pause.

Long, *long* pause.

Then:)

ILYA

Sultry.

SOFYA

Mm.

(Pause. TOLSTOY enters.)

TOLSTOY

Sofya! I wish you to come with me! I wish you to walk with me in the Zyaka forest, arm linked in arm, as we once did, when we would slip through the dappled shadows of the silver fir! I wish you to comfort me, when I raise my head wearily from my work, and tell me it is good, and correct my punctuation! You, who have been my constant, my angel, my brilliant helpmeet -- I want to take you from this place, or no! -- to chase from it all others, so that it is ours again, as it was when the peasants were simple and our children all were babes!

Will you do it? Will you come with me! Will you go there? Wherever there is?

(SOFYA has been regarding him. The OTHERS have not moved. She rises. Smiles.)

5.

(As at the beginning of the previous scene. SOFYA, ILYA, AXINYA, VANECHKA sit there. Pause.)

ILYA

Sultry.

Mm. SOFYA
 (Pause. TOLSTOY enters, with one shoe off.)

Where is my shoe? TOLSTOY

Your what? SOFYA

My shoe! Where is it? TOLSTOY
 (He gives a gasp of disgust, hobbles off. The OTHERS barely seem to have registered him. SOFYA looks straight out.)

6.

(Day. SOFYA, AXINYA.)

AXINYA
 Countess. Alexandra and Mr. Chertkov are here to see you.
 (Exit AXINYA, enter SASHA and CHERTKOV, slicked-back hair, monocle.)

Countess. CHERTKOV

Captain Chertkov. SOFYA

Mister Chertkov. SASHA

CHERTKOV
 I am no longer in the military. It is not necessary to address me as Captain.

SASHA
 He's told you that a dozen times.

CHERTKOV
 May I say how captivating you look.

SOFYA

You may.

CHERTKOV

Captivating and well. Your Mother is the epitome of mature grace. A lesson to us all.

SOFYA

And you are as coy as ever, Captain Chertkov.

CHERTKOV

Mister Chertkov.

SOFYA

Yes.

(Pause.)

CHERTKOV

Countess. We have come to tell you that your husband has undertaken a plan to resettle the Doukhobours in Canada, and that the entire royalty from his next book will go towards that purpose.

(Pause.)

SOFYA

Canada.

CHERTKOV

Yes.

SOFYA

The Doukhobours.

CHERTKOV

Quite.

SASHA

He told us you'd object, he told us you'd be like this, but there's nothing you can do, Mother, it's going to happen!

(Pause.)

SOFYA

Could he not have told me himself?

CHERTKOV

The Count anticipates your opinion on this matter and does not wish it to become an irritant in your relationship. Nevertheless, he hopes you will recognize how important it is that there be one oasis of righteousness in this wicked world.

SOFYA

Canada?

CHERTKOV

A territory of the north-west, actually. Called *Saska-chew-on*.

(Pause.)

SOFYA

Well, you may tell my husband that I wish him well in his venture.

CHERTKOV

He will be most pleased to hear this!

SOFYA

And that my body may be thrown behind the kitchen with the other trash.

SASHA

Here we go.

SOFYA

For in treating me this way he shows no more regard for me than for the pencil shavings on his desk.

CHERTKOV

Countess.

SOFYA

And I will be left with no choice but to end my life.

SASHA

She's threatened that a thousand times.

SOFYA

And I have died a thousand deaths! *Saska-chew-on*? *Saska-chew-on*? Does he really believe that he is aiding these people by sending them to some godforsaken place in the Arctic?

CHERTKOV

The sub-Arctic, I believe.

SOFYA

Am I wrong to care more for the fate of my children than for the travel plans of a few thousand religious fanatics?

SASHA

Yes. You are.

SOFYA

Oh yes the world is so simple for you, my little girl, so without contradiction. And as for you, you cozy little worm curled up in my husband's heart, you'll be glad when I'm dead, won't you?

CHERTKOV

Of course not.

SOFYA

Oh-ho, yes you will, because then you will have my Lyovochka all to yourself! But I shall be watching you from beyond the grave, you dissembler, you parasite! I will haunt you -- !

(She starts to go.)

-- *Captain Chertkov!*

(CHERTKOV cringes. SOFYA exits. Pause.)

SASHA

Shall we report to Father?

CHERTKOV

Yes. Let's.

7.

(ANNA KARENINA, PRINCE ANDREY BOLKONSKY, DOLLY OBLONSKY.)

ANNA

She must not be allowed to die!

PRINCE ANDREY

She won't die.

ANNA

He will kill her off! Just as he killed off us!

DOLLY

He didn't kill me.

ANNA

No. He only made you look like a fool.

PRINCE ANDREY

His novels are very long, Madame Karenina. His characters have to die. It's only natural.

ANNA

We must help her.

PRINCE ANDREY

How?

DOLLY

Yes, how?

ANNA

I don't know. I only know she is in danger. He is a madman. A sadist.

Murderer.

8.

(SOFYA at a table, copying. AXINYA knitting.)

AXINYA

Is it good?

SOFYA

What.

AXINYA

His novel. Is it good?

SOFYA

He is the greatest living novelist. Of course it is good.

AXINYA

I hope it's happier than his last one.

SOFYA

You are a maid. It is not his task to make you happy.
(She copies.)

AXINYA

My son sent me a letter the other day.

SOFYA

Oh?

AXINYA

Yes. He is very well.

SOFYA

Please. I am trying to --

AXINYA

He is trying his hand at a little writing himself. Funny that. Must have been the Count's influence.

(Pause.)

SOFYA

I suppose it was.

(Pause.)

AXINYA

I'll make beet soup for dinner.

SOFYA

Fine.

(She copies. Fade.)

9.

(AXINYA and ILYA. ILYA with a drink in hand, tippling. AXINYA knits.)

AXINYA

How is Moscow?

ILYA

The same.

Where is your Mother?
 AXINYA
 (ILYA shrugs.)

10.

(A barn. SOFYA enters, with rope.)

SOFYA

Think I won't do it, think I'm bluffing, again, as if I was bluffing the last two times, well maybe I was, but not this time, *not* this time, won't be here to be treated like some old rag, some dowager, show them I won't be humiliated, let them weep as they cut my body down!

(She has slung the rope over a beam.)

"Moral imperatives". As if every lunatic anarchistic radical *leech* has a right to our money, yes, *our* money, didn't I copy each word of that novel with my own hand, every comma, every vowel, every "I think I'll make that a period no a semi-colon no maybe a hyphen oh let's put it back the way it was." Idiot! As if anyone cared! As if anyone read a great artist for his use of punctuation!

(She has climbed atop a chair.)

Well. They shall think of me after I am gone. And know how I was treated!
 (She puts the noose around her neck, kicks the chair away. The beam cracks in two and she plummets to the ground.)

11.

(SOFYA sits staring out. AXINYA enters.)

AXINYA
 The Count approaches, Madame.
 (AXINYA withdraws. SOFYA stands.)

TOLSTOY bursts in. Glowers at her.)

TOLSTOY
 We really must do something about that faucet.
 (He motors about the room, distracted, transferring scraps of paper from pocket to pocket.)

I'll be travelling to Kharkov I'd really rather you didn't come with me we'll be meeting with the Quakers I'll have very little time. My shirts are in the basket please tell Axinya I'll need the manuscript by Monday and make sure the peasants receive their milk. If Dostoevsky sends a note you may tell him where I am.

I've given the address to Sasha.

You've done something to your neck.

(He goes.

SOFYA stands there.

He has left a small red notebook on a table.
SOFYA eyes it.

SOFYA sidles over to it. Regards it. Reaches out a hand towards it. Snatches her hand back. Regards it. Walks to the other side of the room. Looks back at the notebook. Strides purposefully towards it again --

-- just as TOLSTOY bursts back into the room.)

TOLSTOY

Ah there it is my diary thank goodness I thought I'd lost it don't touch anything in my room while I'm gone, will you, keep an eye out for my blotter!

(He goes, with the diary.

SOFYA arches an eyebrow.)

12.

(Night. SOFYA in the forest. Moonlight, leafy green. SOFYA stares up at a bedroom window.)

SOFYA

Very bright the moon on moonnights, but not so bright a Mother can't hide, can't know, can't know what's going on.

(VANECHKA appears. Pale.)

VANECHKA

What are you doing out here, Mother?

SOFYA

Your Father's gone to Kharkov. It all falls upon me. All of it.

VANECHKA

All of what, Mother?

SOFYA

Seeing. Knowing. All that needs to be known . . .

(Pause. VANECHKA shivers.)

VANECHKA

It's cold.

SOFYA

You were always my most sensitive child.

VANECHKA

I'm always cold. And tired. It's very tiring, wandering around, never sleeping, never quite waking either. I'm 12, but I feel 80.

SOFYA

You'd be 18 now.

VANECHKA

Would I?

SOFYA

18. A man.

VANECHKA

Can I hold you, Mama?

SOFYA

I have a sweater on.

VANECHKA

I don't.

(He holds her.)

SOFYA

He's up there with her. Chertkov. She's up there with him. All her talk of chaste dedication, of self-sacrifice, look! a shadow moves, look! His silhouette on the

blind! Death took you from me, my darling, but I won't let him take her. I see, I see, I watch, I know.

I *know*.

(VANECHKA holds her. Fade.)

13.

(SASHA and CHERTKOV.)

SASHA

My Mother suspects you, Mr. Chertkov.

CHERTKOV

Does she?

SASHA

She thinks you desire me.

(Pause. They kiss wildly.)

14.

(ANNA, PRINCE ANDREY, DOLLY.)

ANNA

He leaves her for months at a time!

DOLLY

Is it not just as well?

ANNA

No! I was left for months at a time too, and look what happened to me!

PRINCE ANDREY

Yes, well, we all know whose fault *that* was, don't we?

DOLLY

I say we take her some soup!

PRINCE ANDREY, ANNA

Some what?

DOLLY

Soup! Whenever I'm feeling *un peu triste*, soup is just the thing.
(They ignore her.)

PRINCE ANDREY

I'd love to help, but really, it's not the sort of thing I do.

ANNA

Then I'll help her. If you won't. I'll help her. Somebody must.

15.

(Day. SOFYA. AXINYA enters.)

AXINYA

Countess Tolstoy. A visitor to see you.
(AXINYA withdraws. A DOUKHOBOUR enters.)

SOFYA

Yes?

(The DOUKHOBOUR speaks incomprehensibly.)

DOUKHOBOUR

Cd sh#4 &6u77mslspmr hkk ,sopi9gw%- jksklreix6\$ j@0jshey.

SOFYA

I'm sorry. Your dialect is unfamiliar to me. Could you speak more slowly?

DOUKHOBOUR

(More slowly.)

kkf0^K -- g8khrjj5 -- as8)\$6jd8 hhje^klk ers9m -- l;kfdkd.
(Pause.)

SOFYA

I see.

Well, I will give your regards to Count Tolstoy, unfortunately he is not here at the moment --

DOUKHOBOUR

Gfsiur75 hfoe0* hsyir7 duur bbs6 bdf!

SOFYA

Yes, well there's very little reason to go on in that fashion, I can't understand a word you're --

DOUKHOBOUR

Dhsyu6jh hyte Saskatchewan gds0&y!

SOFYA

Wait a minute. I think I recognized a word there. Could you repeat that?

DOUKHOBOUR

Dhsyu6jh -- hyte -- Saskatchewan -- gds0&y!

SOFYA

Saskatchewan.

DOUKHOBOUR

Da.

SOFYA

Saskatchewan.

DOUKHOBOUR

Saskatchewan!

SOFYA

Saskatchewan!

DOUKHOBOUR

Saskatchewan!!!

(Pause.)

SOFYA

What about it?

DOUKHOBOUR

JHDKKR99K4S 88684&*%\$NJD HFDOOR74 30938%**^% HSD863%
%(**GH6 CH&(* \$%+UUF!!!!

SOFYA

Ohhhh, you're one of those Doukhobours! Saska-chew-on!
You're a Doukhobour! Of course!

Da! DOUKHOBOUR

Da! SOFYA

Da! DOUKHOBOUR

Da! SOFYA

Get out.

Hgdie7&65 hd6^t7er? DOUKHOBOUR

SOFYA
(Chasing him.)
Get out you subversive fanatical larcenous homebreaker, get out, stealing the bread out of my children's mouths!

Hkds7 44l (hdjf*73k&! DOUKHOBOUR

SOFYA
There is no use arguing, I would sooner have my house devoured by termites than entertain you!
(ILYA enters, removing a scarf.)

ILYA
Mother! What are you doing?

SOFYA
I'm fumigating the house, Ilya, stand aside!

ILYA
Mother, this is the worst sort of provincial behaviour. Stop it at once!
(SOFYA stops chasing the DOUKHOBOUR.)

ILYA
My good man, can I be of help?

DOUKHOBOUR
Your Mother is crazy!

Yes, I know. ILYA

She ought to be in a nut-house! DOUKHOBOUR

I couldn't agree more. ILYA

What is he saying? SOFYA

He's saying how much he admires your spirit, Mother, what else? ILYA

I merely dropped by to return this. DOUKHOBOUR
(He pulls a red notebook from his pocket.)

What is it? ILYA

Count Tolstoy left it on his last visit to our community. We supposed he might like it back. DOUKHOBOUR
(He gives it to ILYA.)

I will show myself out. (To SOFYA.)

Crazy vicious old bat! (The DOUKHOBOUR goes.)

What did he say? SOFYA

He called you a crazy vicious old bat. ILYA

Oh Ilya. It's not nice to tease your mother that way. SOFYA
(She moves to look at the notebook.)

What is it?

ILYA
(Leafing through.)

It appears to be one of Father's diaries.

I'm sure I couldn't care less.

(He tosses it aside insouciantly. Goes.)

SOFYA eyes the diary on the floor. Glances about surreptitiously. Picks it up.)

16.

(TOLSTOY appears in light, as, also in light, SOFYA reads the diary.)

TOLSTOY

"My soul is sorely depressed.

Life here at Yasnaya Polyana is completely poisoned.

I can't see her without unkind feelings.

How clearly one can see in her all the horrors of the love of body, love of self carried to the extent of loss of all spiritual sense of obligation.

It's very depressing to bear with and endure.

Egoism, that excludes everything that is not herself and which goes to comic lengths, vanity, self-satisfaction, cockiness, irritability.

I feel sorry for her."

SOFYA
(Simultaneous, after
"unkind feelings.")

Oh well he would say that . . . would feel that . . . doesn't know his own soul, never has, not like I do, all in all . . . All the frettings, fevers, nights endured, and I there to nurse him, stroke his forehead, oh I feel it now, the sweat upon my fingertips, heat, or the Sundays in the forest, embalmed in melancholy, and I there, hand-in-hand, in his hand, blushing.

And never knowing, what this cold is, that creeps in under the doors, through the cracks in the masonry, whistling, oh yes, I hear it sometimes, *whistling*,

absolutely, and I, ordering the flowers, making the tea, copying the books, draft after draft after waiting -- waiting for him to step through the door.

Oh no no no no, not I, the one to feature in his fictions, not I, the dancing bear, you say, *you* say, I am the lunatic, but it is not I who, who, *what do you know of me? You do not even hear me!*

He feels sorry for me.

Sorry for me.

Oh.

17.

(SASHA, reading. A pistol on a table nearby.
ILYA enters, sees the pistol.)

ILYA

What's this?

SASHA

A gun.

ILYA

Just lying there. For no good reason.

SASHA

I guess so.

(ILYA picks up the gun, examines it.)

ILYA

You know . . . Chekhov said that if a gun appeared on stage, at some point before the end of the play it would have to go off.

Of course, what did he know? He was a doctor.

(ILYA puts down the pistol, goes. SASHA reads.)

18.

(CHERTKOV stands waiting. SOFYA sweeps in.)

SOFYA

Mr. Chertkov.

CHERTKOV

Yes.

SOFYA

My husband has given you the manuscript of his next novel.

CHERTKOV

Yes.

SOFYA

As well as two new stories.

CHERTKOV

That is correct.

SOFYA

I wish to know if he has also given you his diaries.

I wish to pay you to give them to me. And then I wish you to leave the country.
(Taking a cheque book from her purse.)

How much would you like?

CHERTKOV

Countess Tolstoy --

SOFYA

Fifty-thousand rubles? Sixty thousand?

CHERTKOV

This is deeply insulting.

SOFYA

(Writing the cheque.)

I am sorry to have offended you. Perhaps an extra ten thousand will bind your wounds.

CHERTKOV
Wait just a moment. What is that in your purse?

SOFYA
Where?

CHERTKOV
In your purse. Right there. It looks like -- one of his diaries!

SOFYA
(Snapping her purse shut.)
It isn't.

CHERTKOV
It is!

SOFYA
Don't be ridiculous, Mr. Chertkov. He has given all his diaries to *you*.

CHERTKOV
I demand that you hand it over at once!

SOFYA
Hand over what?

CHERTKOV
His diary!

SOFYA
The Count keeps diaries?

CHERTKOV
Your attitude is insupportable, Countess. *It will not stand.*
(TOLSTOY enters.)

TOLSTOY
-- meretricious pseudo-poetic tripe. Write Maeterlinck about it, write Dickens too.

Where's my sandwich?

SOFYA
Lyovochka. Dear.

CHERTKOV
Count Tolstoy, I must --

SOFYA
I will ring Axinya to bring it around.
(Rings a bell.)

CHERTKOV
She has one of your diaries.

SOFYA
I have what?

TOLSTOY
You have my diaries.

CHERTKOV
I know but --

TOLSTOY
How can she have my diaries when I gave them to you?

CHERTKOV
Nevertheless --
(AXINYA enters.)

AXINYA
Someone rang?

SOFYA
The Count would like his sandwich now, Axinya.

AXINYA
Very good.

SOFYA
And please get Mr. Chertkov's coat.
(AXINYA goes.)
Here is that donation I promised you, Mr. Chertkov. And best of luck on your journey abroad.

TOLSTOY
You are going somewhere?

CHERTKOV
I am going nowhere!

SOFYA

I hope this will be enough. And please give my regards to those darling little Doukhobour children.

TOLSTOY

You are donating to the Doukhobours, Sofya?

SOFYA

I am donating to Mr. Chertkov's favourite charity.

TOLSTOY

But this is wonderful! I kiss you!

(He does.)

Oh praise God for his blessings! I kiss you again!

(He does. Beat.)

But it is unnecessary.

CHERTKOV

If I could speak for just one moment --

TOLSTOY

No no, it is unnecessary Vladimir Grigoryevich, because I have even better news for you. The diaries -- have been sold!

CHERTKOV

Sold?

SOFYA

Sold?

TOLSTOY

Yes, I have been offered 200,000 rubles for their publication -- after my death, naturally -- but the money will be forthcoming immediately! It is enough for the great migration to proceed!

(He and CHERTKOV embrace.)

CHERTKOV

Wonderful!

TOLSTOY

So you see, we have not been abandoned by Providence!

CHERTKOV

What a blessing!

(TOLSTOY turns to SOFYA, who looks stricken.)

TOLSTOY

Dearest wife. This is a great day for us. It means that all the travails of our private life will finally come to some good. It has been hard. But now we will know that our sufferings will make better the lives of a blameless people. Truly, we are the chosen!

Of course, you should still give Mr. Chertkov your cheque.

(He takes the cheque from her, gives it to
CHERTKOV, goes. CHERTKOV looks to
SOFYA. Smiles.)

19.

(TOLSTOY enters, followed by CHERTKOV
and SASHA.)

TOLSTOY

I will denounce her!

CHERTKOV

It was rather -- unseemly.

TOLSTOY

A bribe! A bribe with my own money, under my own roof!

CHERTKOV

Yes.

SASHA

She doesn't understand.

CHERTKOV

She understands *everything*.

SASHA

She doesn't understand how important it is. That the Doukhobours be moved. That there be one oasis of righteousness somewhere in this wicked world! She doesn't understand -- does she Father?

TOLSTOY

(Writing, distracted.)

What? Oh. No.

(He writes.)

SASHA

When we get to Moscow --

TOLSTOY

Oh by the way, Sasha. I wish you to stay here.

SASHA

Stay here? But --

TOLSTOY

I don't wish to tell her that we're leaving. You can tell her for me, after we're gone.

SASHA

Yes, but don't you think -- ?

CHERTKOV

She *is* liable to make a scene.

SASHA

Yes, but don't you think you might need me? Need me *there*. I could meet with Verigin in Moscow. I could --

TOLSTOY

Sasha. *Please*.

(Pause.)

SASHA

Oh. Oh well yes of course, Father. I'll -- stay here . . .

I'll have my bags put back in my room.

(She goes. TOLSTOY writes.)

CHERTKOV

Leo Nikolayevich. The time will come . . . when we will not have to abide these distractions. . . the time will come . . . when we shall go about our affairs undisturbed . . .

(He reaches out a hand as if to stroke TOLSTOY's hair. Snatches it back. Goes.)

TOLSTOY continues to write. Puts his pen down.)

TOLSTOY

There.

20.

(Dark. Squeaking bedsprings.
CHERTKOV calls out in passion.)

CHERTKOV
LEEEEOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!
 (Pause.)

SASHA
 What?

CHERTKOV
 What?

SASHA
 What did you just say?

CHERTKOV
 What.

SASHA
 You just said my father's name.

CHERTKOV
 No.

SASHA
 You did! You said my father's name.
 (Pause.)

CHERTKOV
 I said -- veal.

SASHA
 Veal?

CHERTKOV
 Yes. Veal. This moment of conjugal union reminds me of . . . the sweet white
 meat of the calf.

Oh. SASHA

Proceed. (Squeaking bedsprings.)

21. (SOFYA reading from the diary. VANECHKA nearby.)

SOFYA
 "How clearly one can see in her all the horrors of the love of body, love of self carried to the extent of loss of all spiritual sense of obligation." Ha! What does he know of obligation?

VANECHKA
 I thought you liked his writing.

SOFYA
 This isn't writing, it's . . . burbling! He has the ear and eye of all of Russia, and I am supposed to just -- absorb anything he wants to put out about me! How, Vanechka? *How!*

(She weeps.)

VANECHKA
 You know, mother . . . you don't really have to.

SOFYA
 You don't understand.

VANECHKA
 No, but really. You don't.

You could . . . you know . . . come with me. It's not so bad. A little chilly sometimes, but other than that . . .

SOFYA
 I've tried!

VANECHKA
 Really?

You know I have!

SOFYA

Yes but really? Have you *really* tried?

VANECHKA

Anyway. It's just a thought.

(He picks up the book.)

I'll put this away.

(He goes. SOFYA rises. She seems to make a decision, starts to go, is met by ANNA.)

Aaaaaa!

SOFYA

Excuse me.

ANNA

Oh my god. Oh my god.

SOFYA

I'm sorry to startle you. I had to wait until you were alone.
(Pause.)

ANNA

Go away.

SOFYA

Countess.

ANNA

I know who you are. Go away. Get back in your book.

SOFYA

I'm here.

ANNA

I'm here.

(They regard each other. Fade.)

22.

(ANNA, SOFYA.)

SOFYA

I will not do it!

ANNA

Oh go on.

SOFYA

Burn? Burn the work of the greatest living novelist?

ANNA

Just his diaries.

SOFYA

They are a national treasure! Besides, if he'll only allow *me* to prepare them for publication, I can --

ANNA

There! That's what I mean. You rant and rave about him, then spend half your days doing his secretarial work.

SOFYA

It's *not* secretarial work.

ANNA

Let him do his own scribbling, the lazy bastard. And if you --

SOFYA

It will not happen, now leave it alone!

(Pause. ANNA sulks.)

ANNA

Don't know where all this "greatest living novelist" stuff comes from anyway. Says who? What about de Maupassant, hm? What about Bjornson? Is there a ledger somewhere, someone who gets to decide, "Well let me see, we'll put Tolstoy at the top, Zola in the number two position, and for number three it's a toss-up between Dickens and Dostoevsky."

SOFYA

You're very bitter.

ANNA

He threw me under a train. *Why shouldn't I be bitter?*

(Pause. They both sulk.)

Oh stop sulking.

SOFYA

No you stop.

ANNA

No you.

Well you're going to have to do something. His behaviour is killing you.

SOFYA

I know.

ANNA

Worse, he's driving you crazy.

SOFYA

I'm *going* to do something.

ANNA

What?

SOFYA

Just you wait and see.

23.

(Night. SOFYA writing. She looks up to us. Smiles.)

24.

(SOFYA writing. She looks up to us. Opens her mouth. Russian opera -- a soprano hitting high C, something like that -- comes out.)

25.

(SASHA, knocking on a door.)

SASHA

Mother? What are you doing?

Mother?

26.

(Day. SOFYA fills the last page of a notebook. She shuts it, stands, lifts the pillow on her chair, and places the notebook atop a pile of three or four identical notebooks already there. Replaces the pillow. Sits. Takes out a fresh notebook from the drawer of the desk, and resumes writing.)

27.

(Day. SOFYA now elevated in her chair by a stack of ten or twelve notebooks. Writing.)

28.

(AXINYA and ILYA.)

AXINYA

She's been in there for four days.

No one cares.

29.

(Night. SOFYA recumbent on a settee, exhausted, a notebook dangling from one hand, her pen in the other. With great

effort, she brings paper and pen together to jot one last word, then falls limp again.)

30.

(TOLSTOY, CHERTKOV, SASHA, ILYA, drink in his hand, AXINYA to one side, VANECHKA, ANNA, and SOFYA, who looks much better now, addressing her family.)

SASHA

And to celebrate Leo Nikolayevich's return from Moscow, I wish to make an announcement.

ILYA

(Aside, to SASHA, quite sozzled.)

He returns at least twice a month.

SOFYA

(Aside, to ILYA.)

She's probably bought another chaise longue.

SOFYA

I wish to announce that I --

(She produces the pile of notebooks.)

-- have written my memoirs!

(Dull pause.)

ILYA

Oh. Well. Congratulations, Mother, I'm sure someone will want to read them.

SOFYA

Ohh, I'm sure many people will want to read them. After all, they're mostly about all of --

(Fixing her look on TOLSTOY.)

-- *you*.

(Pause.)

ILYA

Me?

TOLSTOY

Us?

SOFYA
(Fixing her look on CHERTKOV.)

All . . . of you.

ANNA

Lovely.

SOFYA
Ohh, there are one or two of you to whom I pay more attention. After all, your Father is a great man. Russia has an insatiable appetite for news of him. And his relationships. And I think it's so important to tell the truth in this sort of thing, don't you? All the truth. Every last bit of it.

VANECHKA

Oh / see.

ANNA

She's very good.

CHERTKOV

Of course it helps to have a publisher.

SOFYA
You don't really suppose I'll have any trouble there, do you?

ILYA
Mother . . . that episode with the Tsar's granddaughter, you didn't put -- ?

SOFYA
Shut up, Ilya.
(To TOLSTOY.)
Give me the diaries and I won't publish.

TOLSTOY
This is blackmail.

SOFYA
Yes. It is.

SASHA
You won't get away with this, Mother.

SOFYA
(Brandishing the notebooks.)
It seems to me I already have.

CHERTKOV

You don't think anyone's really going to be interested, do you?

SOFYA

No?

CHERTKOV

It's not that your life isn't *interesting*, Countess. It just lacks a certain significance.

SOFYA

You don't think people will be interested in your financial dealings with my husband? The fact that you manage to keep a great deal of the money you raise for those charming Doukhobour people?

(To SASHA.)

Or that Tolstoy's daughter, the one who puts all her energies into her father's work, actually has just enough energy at the end of the day to entertain middle-aged ex-military-men in her room?

(To AXINYA.)

Or that certain of the Great man's past romantic liaisons are so shameful they can only be alluded to?

TOLSTOY

This is appalling. Despicable!

SOFYA

Oh yes, you stand there so self-righteous, my darling Lyovochka. You, who have written so viciously about me!

You think you're the only one who can put his cruelest, most private thoughts down on paper? Who can publish them for all the world to see, no matter what the consequences to those around him?

TOLSTOY

I don't know what you're talking about.

SOFYA

"My soul is sorely depressed. Life here at Yasnaya Polyana is completely poisoned. *I can't see her without unkind feelings.*"

TOLSTOY

You have been reading my diaries.

SOFYA

"How clearly one can see in her all the horrors of the love of body, love of self carried to the extent of loss of all spiritual sense of -- "

CHERTKOV

She's *memorized* them.

SASHA

Mother needs to be assisted to her room, Ilya.

(ILYA, meanwhile, has spotted VANECHKA for the first time.)

ILYA

What?

SOFYA

I need nothing of the sort! I beg you, do not publish the diaries, Leo Nikolayevich, do not force me to do this, do not feed me to the public the way you fed them her!

(She points to ANNA. No one else can see her.)

ILYA

Who, Mother?

SOFYA

Her! Whom you treat with such delicacy, while I am treated like some old fishwife!

SASHA

You see someone standing in the corner, Mother?

ANNA

Don't hate me, Sofya. I am on your side.

SOFYA

I -- am utterly -- alone.

So. You will give me the diaries . . . or these find their way to a publisher.

(Pause.)

CHERTKOV

If we all rushed her at once . . . we could probably grab them.

SOFYA

Just try it.

(Pause.)

TOLSTOY

Give her what she wants.

(He abruptly turns and leaves. SOFYA reaches a hand after him - but he's gone.)

SASHA

I hope you're proud of yourself Mother.

CHERTKOV

I rather expect she is.

(They stand there. VANECHKA gives ILYA a little wave.)

31.

(SASHA, CHERTKOV, ILYA. ILYA, even more drunk, watches VANECHKA on the periphery.)

SASHA

Yes, well she's plainly going mad.

CHERTKOV

It's worse than I thought.

ILYA

She says she sees little Vanechka, too.

SASHA

Pathetic.

ILYA

I tell her, "Mother, you can't see Vanechka, he died years ago." But she insists. The funny thing is --

(Looking straight at VANECHKA.)

-- I sometimes think I see him myself.

(VANECHKA smiles at him. ILYA leaves.)

CHERTKOV

Well I know one thing.

SASHA

What's that?

CHERTKOV

This can't be allowed to continue. It's making it impossible to move the Doukhobours. How we're going to

replace the money the diaries would have brought I don't know. I mean I feel sorry for the woman, but . . . there are places for people with mental difficulties, and this isn't one of them.

Vladimir! SASHA

Well? CHERTKOV

(SASHA and CHERTKOV stare at each other.)

32.

(Night. SOFYA at her desk. AXINYA enters with a stack of diaries.)

AXINYA
(Placing them before SOFYA.)

The Count asked me to bring you these.

Countess --

(SOFYA waves her away. AXINYA goes. SOFYA eyes the diaries for a moment. Takes one off the top and begins to read.)

33.

(ANNA, PRINCE ANDREY BOLKONSKY,
DOLLY OBLONSKY.)

PRINCE ANDREY

Oh yes *that's* a good idea. Reading one of his diaries nearly kills her, so why not have her read them all?

ANNA

I told her to burn them. Not to read them.

DOLLY

Poor woman.

PRINCE ANDREY

Completely shatter her.

ANNA

Mind you, I rather liked the memoir ploy.

DOLLY

Oh yes that was very good.

ANNA

Clever.

DOLLY

I used to do that sort of thing all the time with my Stiva. *Toy* with him. Mind you . . . maybe that's why he left me . . .

(She ponders this.)

PRINCE ANDREY

Yes, well it's no wonder the women in his novels get treated as they do. You ask me . . . you're all rather "grist" for his "mill".

(Pause. ANNA and DOLLY look to each other. Look back to him.)

DOLLY

You know . . . you don't come off all that well either . . . *darling*.

PRINCE ANDREY

Whatever do you mean?

DOLLY

Well, look how he treats *you*. He saddles you with an old warhorse of a father, sends you off to fight the French, then wounds you before the book's half over.

PRINCE ANDREY

Well, it was perhaps a *bit* hasty.

DOLLY

Then he kills off your wife, blows you up with a hand grenade, but keeps you alive for *another* hundred pages so that you can bore everybody else to death first.

PRINCE ANDREY

That's putting it a bit harshly!

DOLLY

Is it dear? I suppose you're right.

No, you're right. After all, he is a great man. He must know what's best for us. Not that you're not a great man too, Prince. It's just that he's a little bit . . . *greater*.

34.

(Music. Rachmaninov. Night. SOFYA dancing to the music. VANECHKA watches.)

VANECHKA

Mother?

What was I like before the fever? When I was -- you know -- *alive*?

SOFYA
(Dancing.)

Oh you were lovely. Always quiet. So quiet we'd sometimes forget you were there. We'd put you down in that little wicker basket we used to carry you in, go about our business, swimming in the river, collecting blue poppies, then head home without even realizing we'd left you behind.

VANECHKA

How'd I get home?

SOFYA

Oh, someone would come back later. Usually your father. He was quite a bit more attentive then.

(She dances.)

I was thinking of that . . . as I read over his diaries . . . I was remembering those days . . . as I swallowed the pills . . .

VANECHKA

What pills, Mother?

SOFYA

Oh, this, that. I've been saving them up for quite awhile.

(VANECHKA looks pleased.)

You thought I wouldn't do it . . . but I have . . . I'll be with you soon . . . my darling quiet boy . . . and we'll roam through the woods together . . . and play skittles all night long . . .

(She weaves for a moment, then collapses to the ground.)

VANECHKA stands there, uncertain what to do. He moves to her.)

VANECHKA

Mother?

Mother?

I'll wait.

(He withdraws.

SOFYA lies there.

TOLSTOY enters.)

TOLSTOY

Sofya? I've come to my senses and --

SOFYA! My lord, what has happened, why are you lying there, still warm, let me feel your pulse, my darling! -- too late! Too late! The chill wind of death moves through you! *NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!*

35.

(SOFYA and VANECHKA, as before. SOFYA weaves for a moment, then collapses to the ground.

VANECHKA stands there, uncertain what to do. He moves to her.)

VANECHKA

Mother?

Mother?

I'll wait.

(He withdraws.

SOFYA lies there.

AXINYA enters.)

AXINYA

Countess, have you seen my medicine, I --

(She sees SOFYA, screams, bends to her.)

Oh Madame, no, no, you can't have done it, no no no!

(She slaps SOFYA awake. SOFYA sits up, startled.)

SOFYA

What? What?

(Sees AXINYA.)

Damn!

36.

(SOFYA, AXINYA, VANECHKA.)

AXINYA

You will forgive me if I speak frankly --

SOFYA

Oh go away.

AXINYA

But you must get hold of yourself! I have heard them plotting, in the night, in the hallways. They will put you in an insane asylum!

VANECHKA

Why don't you leave her alone?

(AXINYA does not hear him.)

SOFYA

If you hadn't interfered, I'd be dead by now!

AXINYA

And would that be better?

VANECHKA

Of course it would!

AXINYA

To be as lonely as little Vanechka?

I have seen him too, Madame. Not often, but . . . sometimes. Disappearing round corners, running down the hall. He looks so unhappy to me. As if death is no ending at all!

(VANECHKA, chastened, turns away.)

I know that you hate me. I know that you have hated me ever since --

SOFYA

Enough!

AXINYA

But you must do as I did. You must go to him, and throw yourself on his mercy, and ask him to save and keep you. If you do not -- believe me -- the alternatives are much, much worse!

(Pause.)

SOFYA

They wish to put me . . . in an insane asylum?

(AXINYA nods.)

How very unimaginative.

(She looks to AXINYA once more, then goes.)

37.

(TOLSTOY sits at a desk, writing. SOFYA approaches.)

SOFYA

Leo.

I have decided to return to you your diaries. They are on my desk, you may have Axinya bring them to your room. And of course I will destroy my own feeble effort. How ridiculous of me to attempt such a thing. I don't blame you for being disturbed.

I only ask you -- I do not demand, mind you, I only -- place myself at your mercy . . . do not publish the diaries . . . or, if you must, please tell them to wait until I am gone too, I won't live long once you are gone -- who knows? I might even die first!

But whatever you do . . . know that . . . I will still love you . . . with a love that no harm you do me can pierce . . .

TOLSTOY

Yes. Well that's all well and good, Sofya.

SOFYA

My darling Lyovochka.

TOLSTOY

But I'm afraid that I shall be leaving.

(He rises. SASHA, CHERTKOV appear.)

SOFYA

Leaving? Back to Moscow so soon?

TOLSTOY

Not Moscow.

SOFYA

Where then?

SASHA

The carriage is here, Father.

TOLSTOY

Thankyou, Sasha. Have my luggage taken out.

(To SOFYA.)

I have left instructions that legal title to the estate is to be transferred to you. Upon my return, I shall transfer all my literary affairs to an executor. Certain writings shall be used to support the Doukhobours; all others will be in the public domain.

(The DOUKHOBOUR appears.)

I must have time and peace to finish the effort I have begun. You will understand that I can have neither of those things here. You may keep the diaries; it was never my intention to harm you.

Goodbye, dearest Sofya. You will not see me again.

(He kisses her on the forehead, turns, goes, SASHA following. ANNA appears, watching.)

CHERTKOV

Adieu, Madame.

(He goes. The DOUKHOBOUR approaches.)

DOUKHOBOUR

Gy64ndyte hskdooru hsytyr,bvw.

Oh shut up.

SOFYA
(The DOUKHOBOUR goes.)

ANNA
Well. Thank goodness he's finally gone.

You can thank me later.

Oh well fine, if you're not going to talk to me, *fine*.

Sofya?
(Lights focus down to an intense pinspot on SOFYA's face.

Snap off.)

End of Act One

ACT TWO

38.

(A plain. TOLSTOY. The DOUKHOBOUR enters.)

DOUKHOBOUR
Count Tolstoy! We have made it! We are here! Saskatchewan! We are here!
(TOLSTOY looks about.)

TOLSTOY
Where?

39.

(TOLSTOY and A FARMER. They sit looking out at the horizon. Pause.)

FARMER
Well, it was a dry winnur, eh?

Course ya never know. Could be a wet Spring.

Yuh.

No use in tryna predict er, eh? Ya just take er as she comes.

So yer from that Russia, are ya? Uh-huh. Never been there mself.

Heard about it, though. Sounds like quite the place.

Me n the wife like ta travel, eh? Went down ta Bismarck a few weeks ago.

Course they had a dry winnur too, eh?

Might have a wet Spring.

Yuh.

(They sit there. Fade.)

40.

(SOFYA sitting. Emotionless. VANECHKA,
CHERTKOV.)

CHERTKOV

Count Tolstoy will be returning from Saska-chew-on in the near future.

As you know, he will not be returning here.

In his absence, I thought it best that you and I attempt to settle our differences. I know that his well-being is paramount in both of our minds.

To begin with, I thought you might wish to return to me . . . his diaries. It is true that he said that you may keep them, but naturally you will be sensitive to his real wishes.

The settlement of the Doukhobours has been an even more costly undertaking than we realized. I, personally, am carrying a debt of over 20,000 rubles. Or more. We offer our work up to the greater glory of God, of course . . . but you will understand that *I cannot tolerate losses of this sort.*

The sale of the diaries would more than cover our debts.

I also find it despicable that you would prevent their publication out of what is, let us face it, *spite.*

IF YOU DO NOT RETURN THE DIARIES TO ME MADAME, I WILL BE FORCED TO TAKE SOME SORT OF DRASTIC ACTION!!

(SOFYA looks to CHERTKOV, takes out a small pistol, shoots him. He falls dead.)

41.

(SOFYA, CHERTKOV and VANECHKA, as they were before SOFYA shot him.)

CHERTKOV

IF YOU DO NOT RETURN THE DIARIES TO ME MADAME, I WILL BE FORCED TO TAKE SOME SORT OF DRASTIC ACTION!!

DO YOU HEAR ME?

SOFYA

I'm sorry Mr. Chertkov. I was just considering my options.

Come back tomorrow. You may have the diaries then.

CHERTKOV

I may?

SOFYA

Yes.

(Pause.)

CHERTKOV

Oh. Oh well then. Well then. Oh.

(He starts out, turns, clicks his heels sharply, goes.)

VANECHKA

Are you sure you should do that?

SOFYA

Quite sure.

VANECHKA

After all you went through to get them?

It was not the diaries I wanted.

SOFYA
(She rises. Moves to a desk.)

ANNA, PRINCE ANDREY BOLKONSKY,
DOLLY OBLONSKY scoot in, PRINCE
ANDREY and DOLLY looking a little
disoriented.)

I'm not certain we should --

DOLLY

Just follow me.

ANNA

PRINCE ANDREY
This is it, eh? It's rather -- drabber than I imagined.
(ANNA moves to SOFYA.)

ANNA
Hello, Sofya! We've come to cheer you up. This is Madame Oblonsky --

DOLLY
Don't you worry, dear -- they always come back in the end.

ANNA
And Prince Andrey Bolkonsky, whose death scene you copied out so many
times.

PRINCE ANDREY
(Clicks his heels.)
I am deeply grateful.

SOFYA
He's not here.

DOLLY
No, we know that, we --

SOFYA
He's gone.

ANNA
Yes, well you're going to have to get over it, aren't you? Put up new paper in the
bedroom and throw his diaries down the well.

(SOFYA has pulled open her blouse to expose her upper breast. Now she holds a small letter-opener to it.)

DOLLY

What's she doing?

PRINCE ANDREY

Oh my lord -- she's killing herself again.

(ANNA moves to wrest the letter-opener from her.)

ANNA

Sofya --

VANECHKA

Leave her be.

ANNA

What sort of son are you?!

DOLLY

(Mothering him.)

A rather lonely one I think.

PRINCE ANDREY

Well at least we've got the diaries.

SOFYA

The diaries are going to Chertkov.

ANNA

What?!

SOFYA

I wish I had never heard of the damned diaries! He's coming round for them tomorrow.

ANNA

You told -- that monocled cretin that he could have them after all?

SOFYA

Yes.

ANNA

Oh well go on then, kill yourself. You might as well.

You're as good as dead anyway.

(SOFYA is a bit taken aback.)

Go on, go on!

VANECHKA

Hurry up, Mother.

ANNA

Yes, quite right. *Hurry up.*

(Beat. SOFYA makes a feint as if to do it. DOLLY and PRINCE ANDREY gasp. She wilts.)

SOFYA

No. I don't feel like it anymore.

ANNA

No, of course not, you can't stick to anything, life, death, the diaries. Next thing you'll be begging him to come home!

(SOFYA begins to weep. Falls back into the chair. VANECHKA moves to comfort her.)

DOLLY

Well that was unnecessary.

ANNA

Oh Sofya, I'm sorry, I --

VANECHKA

Why don't you be quiet?!

PRINCE ANDREY

Yes, tell you what, Anna darling -- why don't you let somebody else handle this for awhile?

(He moves to SOFYA.)

You've promised him the diaries?

(SOFYA nods yes.)

But you don't really want him to have them, do you?

(SOFYA nods no.)

No. Well that won't be too hard to fix then, will it? You just forget about everything. You just leave this to us.

42.

(Night. SOFYA's study. Her desk. ANNA.)

ANNA

All right. She's not here.

(PRINCE ANDREY and DOLLY emerge from beneath the desk.)

I'll watch the door. Look through her desk.

(They do. ANNA hears someone approaching.)

Wait!

(They freeze. CHERTKOV enters. Looks about surreptitiously, goes to the desk, rifles through the drawers. ANNA, PRINCE ANDREY, DOLLY stand there. CHERTKOV finds the diaries in a bottom drawer.)

CHERTKOV

Ah!

(He lifts them out with a self-satisfied grin, places them on the desk top.

ILYA approaches, very drunk. CHERTKOV spins about, concealing the diaries on the desk behind him. ILYA peers at him.)

ILYA

Are you alive . . . or dead?

(He topples over into CHERTKOV's arms. CHERTKOV looks for some place to put him, Then with an exclamation of disgust drags him from the room.

ANNA, PRINCE ANDREY and DOLLY emerge.)

DOLLY

That man -- trusts nobody.

ANNA

Some people are just like that.

(They divide the diaries among themselves, exit, reading.

CHERTKOV returns, hurries into the room, goes to the desk where he left the diaries. Looks under it. Behind it. Gone.)

43.

(A boat dock. SASHA by the gangplank as TOLSTOY laboriously descends.)

SASHA

Father! How good it is to have you back in Russia! Look! The people! Look how many have come to welcome you home!

(TOLSTOY has reached the bottom. He stops, scans the crowd. Collapses.)

Father!

44.

(ILYA, VANECHKA.)

ILYA

He's resting at a train station en route to Moscow.

VANECHKA

Resting?

ILYA

Apparently the trip to the Canadas has exhausted him. We're not to tell Mother, though. Sasha says she'll try to see him, and that will make matters worse.

VANECHKA

Sasha always was his favourite.

ILYA

And you were always *hers*.

(Enter SOFYA, CHERTKOV, SASHA, ANNA, PRINCE ANDREY BOLKONSKY, DOLLY OBLONSKY, all yelling at once. VANECHKA plugs his ears. CHERTKOV and SASHA, of course, cannot see ANNA, PRINCE ANDREY, DOLLY or VANECHKA.)

CHERTKOV
Countess, you promised!

DOLLY
Promises, shmomises.

ANNA
Ask him what he was doing around ten last night.

SASHA
Mother, we know you have them.

SOFYA
I had the diaries, but I have them no longer. I don't know what happened to them.
Though I --

(Looking to ANNA.)
-- have my suspicions.

CHERTKOV
What? What are your suspicions?

SOFYA
There is no use discussing them with you, Captain Chertkov. You would not understand.

SASHA
What are you staring at, Ilya?

ILYA
(Who now sees ANNA, DOLLY and THE PRINCE, too.)
I'm not sure.

CHERTKOV
Countess, if you do not give us the diaries, we shall be forced to take drastic measures.

SOFYA
Do what you must.

SASHA
Specifically, Mother, if you do not give us the diaries, then we shall not give you -
- these.

(She produces the notebooks.)

What are those?

SOFYA

Your "memoirs".

CHERTKOV

Where did you -- ?

SOFYA

SASHA

I've always known where you keep your valuables, Mother. In Vanechka's old dresser, under the smocks.

(Beat.)

SOFYA

Well what do I care if you have my memoirs? I don't intend to publish them, and I know that you two daren't.

SASHA

Oh no?

SOFYA

Not when we all know what's in them.

(SASHA takes one up, opens, reads.)

SASHA

"In racing down the brisk March air, the archbishop rang the trumpet."

PRINCE ANDREY

What did she say?

CHERTKOV

(Reading.)

"It was then that wings sprouted from my back, like unto an angel, and, singing, I rose into the air."

(SOFYA takes the notebook, reads with mounting horror.)

SASHA

That's all that's in there, Mother. Pages and pages and pages -- of that.

VANECHKA

(Reading over her shoulder.)

That is what it says.

SASHA

Oh the first few chapters are coherent enough. All those lovely memories of blintzes by the Volga. But after that And what do you think will happen, Mother, when people find out the wife of the great Count Tolstoy is mad? Hm? Do you think you'll be allowed to continue to manage his estate, much less hold title to his literary works, much less remain free?

(Pause. Then SOFYA moves to ANNA.)

SOFYA

You have the diaries, don't you?

ANNA

I? No.

SOFYA

Please! I must have them!

DOLLY

I don't think anyone's going to publish them anyway. They're really rather --
(She realizes she's given the game away.)

-- Oh.

SOFYA

If you do not give me the diaries, I am undone!

ANNA

If the diaries are published you are undone also!

SOFYA

I don't care! Let him embarrass me! But to be embarrassed by my own hand --

PRINCE ANDREY

I'm sorry, I cannot allow you to --

SOFYA

GIVE ME THE DIARIES IF YOU HAVE AN OUNCE OF MERCY IN YOUR SOUL!

(Pause. SASHA, CHERTKOV have turned away in embarrassment.)

ANNA

Get the diaries, Andrey.

PRINCE ANDREY

After all we've been through?

ANNA

Please.

(PRINCE ANDREY sighs, goes off.)

I wish you wouldn't do this, Sofya. But believe me . . . I do understand.

(Beat. PRINCE ANDREY returns, with the diaries and takes them to SOFYA.)

CHERTKOV

Countess, I warn you -- if you continue this behaviour, we will have no choice but to incarcerate you.

(SOFYA turns to him, holding the diaries.)

Oh. Oh well I didn't see that you -- I thought that you . . .

(SOFYA moves to take the diaries to him. ILYA leaps to intercept SOFYA.)

ILYA

No!

SASHA

Ilya! What are you doing?

(ILYA wrests the diaries from her.)

ILYA

No! I won't let you give them up, Mother! Don't try to get them away from me, my mind is made up!

I see them! I see them all! You're not mad, Mother! In fact -- you're the only one in this family who's quite sane!

CHERTKOV

You're drunk, Ilya.

ILYA

No, no, it's quite simple. We're right, you're wrong, and Father is a bastard!

ANNA

Quick! The memoirs!

VANECHKA

What?

The memoirs! Quick!

ANNA

(VANECHKA scoots around behind SASHA and grabs the notebooks.)

Here!

(He throws one to DOLLY. ILYA hands off the diaries to PRINCE ANDREY.)

Here!

ILYA

Where -- ?

SASHA

Here!

VANECHKA

(He throws another notebook to ANNA. PRINCE ANDREY hands off the diaries to DOLLY.)

There!

CHERTKOV

(A diary has fallen to the ground.)

Where?

SASHA

Here.

ILYA

(Scooping it up, giving it to SOFYA.)

There!

CHERTKOV

Here.

VANECHKA

(Giving the rest of the memoirs to SOFYA.)

Go.

DOLLY

(Bringing her her armload of stuff.)

Where?

SOFYA

PRINCE ANDREY

There.

ANNA

(As SOFYA turns to run, and CHERTKOV extends his leg to trip her.)

NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

(SOFYA goes sprawling, the memoirs and diaries flying from her arms and scattering around SASHA's feet. Pause.)

SASHA

I don't know what you and Ilya think you are doing, Mother. But it isn't impressive.
(She and CHERTKOV pick up the diaries.)

I shall recommend to Father that he publish these immediately. Obviously, to wait any longer is to invite more desperate measures on your part. As for the "memoirs" . . . I suggest you burn them at the earliest opportunity.

(They have finished picking them up.)

May god have mercy on you.

(SASHA, CHERTKOV exit. Pause.)

ILYA

Actually, I rather like your style, Mother. It reminds me of Lewis Carroll.
(Pause. VANECHKA goes to SOFYA, helps her to her feet.)

45.

(SOFYA, ANNA.)

ANNA

So. He has the diaries.

SOFYA

Yes.

ANNA

Which he can publish at any time.

SOFYA

Yes.

ANNA

Bringing further ignominy upon you. Plus, of course, he has ruined your life.

Well there's only one thing to do then.

SOFYA

What?

ANNA

I think you know.

SOFYA

No.

ANNA

Oh yes. I think you know. I think you do. I think you know.

46.

(A train station. TOLSTOY, lying in a makeshift bed, unconscious, in a sweat. SASHA mopping his brow. CHERTKOV looks out.)

CHERTKOV

There are people gathering across the tracks.

How is he?

SASHA

Worse, I fear.

CHERTKOV

Will he live?

(SASHA imply looks at him.)

47.

(SOFYA, ANNA, PRINCE ANDREY
BOLOKONSKY, DOLLY OBLONSKY.)

Kill him?!

DOLLY

C'est simple.

ANNA

Kill him?!

DOLLY

I see her point.

PRINCE ANDREY

ANNA
It is the only possible choice. The diaries will be published the minute he reaches Moscow. He must be stopped.

PRINCE ANDREY
What is he doing in a train station in Astapovo anyway?

Laying about.

ANNA

(To SOFYA.)
You must go there. You must go there and put an end to this wickedness.

I'll never see him again if I don't.

SOFYA

Precisely.

ANNA

Countess, I --

DOLLY

Enough!

SOFYA

He has ruined my life.

48.

(SOFYA, applying make-up.)

SOFYA

All the undone lacelets, rouge, the races, blush, highlight the eyes, accent the cheeks.

Skipping down a path no wider than the moon, his breath, the lanterns swaying in the branches, shadow, or were those eyes? his eyes, glittering like coins, darling, the hot rush of summer on my back, spackle, mascara, coins, dirt.

All the tsar's horses and all the tsar's men.

Scatter your posies on the black cold open sea, the undulating waves, powder, the Seine, poke hopeful tarnishing ribbons blueboy cinnamon framboise!

(She is obscured now by a cloud of finishing powder. ANNA enters.)

ANNA

Are you ready?

(SOFYA rises. She is a grotesque. Smiles.)

SOFYA

Yes.

49.

(A door. SOFYA approaches. Knocks. CHERTKOV opens it.)

SOFYA

I wish to see my husband.

CHERTKOV

That won't be possible.

SOFYA

I wish to see my --

CHERTKOV

Countess Tolstoy. Please. Go away.

(CHERTKOV closes the door.)

50.

(SOFYA, AXINYA.)

AXINYA

There is no use. I have just come back from the station master's hut. They have sealed it off. There is a huge crowd growing around it. Apparently the Count is unwell, worse than we knew, I hear rumours but I . . .

Countess. I know what you want. I want the same thing. To sit with him once more --

SOFYA

You are very impertinent.

AXINYA

Simply to be with him again! But do you really think that --

SOFYA

Go get my --

AXINYA

You forget, Madame -- you and I have more in common than you wish to believe!

Do you think -- that he could love us -- after what he did to his own son? *My* son. Whom he sent away without so much as a fare-thee-well? Knowing that all he wanted was one nod of recognition? *That* is all the Count has in his heart for those who love him Madame. That much and nomore!

Let us flee, together, while we still have some dignity, there is nothing for us here now Countess, nothing but grief and painful knowing!

(Pause.)

SOFYA

Your son. He is -- well, is he?

AXINYA

He is a tradesman in St. Petersburg. Well, yes, thankyou.

SOFYA

I remember his eyes . . .

(Pause.)

Yes, well, I'm sure that would all be just charming.

AXINYA

I'll have them flag the next train.

SOFYA

But you will be leaving. Not I.

We have nothing in common. How rude of you to suggest such a thing. He never loved you. I never believed that for a moment. And as for your son being his child -- ha! With a nose like that? It defies all reason.

AXINYA

My son *is* his child.

SOFYA

Oh you've gotten a good run out of it, forty, fifty years, but it's over now, go on, get your things, I don't want you here anymore. I will have your belongings moved to one of the barns when I get back, you may live there unmolested as long as you never show your face in my house again!

(AXINYA stands for a moment, unable to speak, then exits, weeping. SOFYA sits there.)

Ha.

(Fade.)

51.

(Music. SOFYA stands, one hand raised to her forehead, as if peering in a window.)

STERN MALE VOICE

Countess Tolstoy.

Countess Tolstoy!

(Music rises. SOFYA brings her other hand from behind her back. She carries a pistol.)

52.

(Inside the train station. TOLSTOY supine.
ILYA sits beside him, bottle in hand,
unbelievably drunk.)

ILYA

Oh yes his plays have a certain *something*. But really. What are they *about*?
(There is a knock on the door. ILYA stumbles
over to answer it.)

ILYA

Yes?

(A DOUKHOBOUR LADY, with babushka
pulled low and a scarf wrapped high around
her face, steps in.)

DOUKHOBOUR LADY

Bg34749snn6\ ksnmeyudf F6&*jjdy3kg?

ILYA

I beg your pardon?

DOUKHOBOUR LADY

J7gr573JR GSFFEEI)#!jo((H7 J.>JHHE\$7U^G! H+74456Gjd 9eSGBCMIR FRA!
(Pause.)

ILYA

There's no one here by that name.

DOUKHOBOUR LADY

Cdyejid^5 r_(84idFF\$d.

ILYA

No, I'm sorry, I can't allow you to --

DOUKHOBOUR LADY

(Whipping off the babushka and scarf.)

Oh you ridiculous child. It's me!

(It is, of course, SOFYA.)

ILYA

Mother!

(SOFYA still has her grotesque makeup on.)
 Mother?

SOFYA
 (Moving to TOLSTOY.)
 What are you doing here?

ILYA
 Why are you dressed like that?

SOFYA
 It was the only way I could get through the crowd.

ILYA
 I've been waiting for you.
 (SOFYA peers down at TOLSTOY.)

SOFYA
 He doesn't look well.

ILYA
 Just a -- bit of indigestion, you know.

SOFYA
 He's dying!

ILYA
 Yes.
 (SOFYA sits.)
 Look, Mother . . . I knew you'd come. That's why I'm here, you see. I've been waiting to let you in.

SOFYA
 Dying.

ILYA
 That's why I made up with Sasha. You understand? So she'd *trust* me. Sometimes it helps to be underestimated, you know. People think you're not capable of that sort of thing.

(SOFYA has knelt beside TOLSTOY.)
 See, I . . . I thought if I let you in you might . . . see, I know that Father was always more important to you than any of the rest of us . . . certainly than me . . . but see I thought, now that he's dying, that you might . . . that I might . . .

Y'see Mother, I truly think that . . . if you'd paid me a little more attention . . . or if I'd died, like that rotten little Vanechka . . . well you know, I'd probably drink a

whole lot less, and perhaps I'd be a bit more stable . . . and maybe I wouldn't see all the . . . awful things I do . . .

So on the whole . . . do you think that we could? . . . that you could? . . . Mother?

SOFYA
(To TOLSTOY.)

Lyovochka.

ILYA

Oh. I see. Well I see then. Fine.

Well I'll just leave you two together then. I'm sure you have a lot of -- catching up to do.

(He embraces SOFYA quickly, starts to go.)

Mother? I have just one thing to say to you.

You have too much makeup on.

(He goes, laughing to himself.)

53.

(ILYA stumbles outside. He closes the door behind him. SOFYA rushes to lock it. CHERTKOV and SASHA approach. ILYA steps up to them.)

Ha!

ILYA

(He goes. CHERTKOV and SASHA look to the closed door.)

54.

(Inside. SOFYA, ANNA, VANECHKA, PRINCE ANDREY, DOLLY, TOLSTOY. SOFYA paces.)

PRINCE ANDREY

She could strangle him.

Poison. DOLLY

Garrotting. ANNA

A sharp blow to the head. PRINCE ANDREY

I'm still a little uncomfortable with all this. Though I must say I've always been intrigued with asphyxiation. DOLLY

Decapitation. ANNA

Hanging! DOLLY

Oh yes that's very good. PRINCE ANDREY

Rather odd to be sitting about deciding his fate for a change. ANNA

I rather like it, actually. (DOLLY and PRINCE ANDREY enthusiastically agree.)

Enough! SOFYA

The decision has already been made. (She pats her pocket.)

Still, I thought it would be easier than this somehow. After all, if I shot him right now, all my problems would be over. The diaries -- mine. The books, still mine. My children, fed and happy, my grandchildren, frolicking on the estate. (She paces.)

Still . . . as I say . . . I can't quite bring myself to do it.

Here. Give it to me. ANNA

No! SOFYA

ANNA

Oh honestly, you point the damn thing, squeeze once, it's done!

SOFYA

Please keep your hands to yourself!

You may leave now. All of you.

DOLLY

Leave?

SOFYA

I wish to be alone with my son.

(Pause.)

PRINCE ANDREY

(Rising.)

Oh well fine. Relegated to the sub-plot again.

ANNA

Countess, I --

SOFYA

You will know my decision soon.

(PRINCE ANDREY, DOLLY and ANNA leave.)

What shall we do?

VANECHKA

It's a hard one, isn't it?

SOFYA

You tell me.

VANECHKA

I'm only twelve years old, Mother. It's not the sort of thing I should have to decide.

Of course, there is another possibility.

(SOFYA looks to him.)

SOFYA

Oh heavens, not that again.

VANECHKA

Well, you know, now that we've got the gun and everything.

I haven't the courage.

SOFYA

I have.

VANECHKA
(Taking the gun.)

Vanechka! What a wicked idea!

SOFYA

Is it? I mean it'd all be over in a moment. I'm a very good shot. Only it *wouldn't* be over, don't you see? We'd just be getting started.

VANECHKA

I *do* see.

SOFYA

And there we'd be, Mother, dangling our feet in the river, picking berries by the side of the road!

VANECHKA

They'd have some explaining to do.

SOFYA

It'd be wonderful. Wouldn't it, Mother? We'd be together again. *Really* together. With nothing to come between us ever again!

VANECHKA
(Taking aim at her, but unable to look.)

(He continues to point the gun at her, eyes clenched. SOFYA walks to him, gently takes the gun away.)

No, my child.

SOFYA

No?

VANECHKA

No. I'm sorry. But I have greater obligations here.

SOFYA

Dearest Lyovochka. I know that neither of us said the right things to each other these last few years. How could we -- when we had said them all our lives? That

we love each other. That your life is mine. That the work is greater than either of us. That's why I must go on. Protecting it. Now that you cannot.

Head or heart?

VANECHKA

Heart, I guess.

SOFYA

Right.

(SOFYA draws the pistol, shoots TOLSTOY through the heart. Pause. She turns to look at VANECHKA.)

55.

(SOFYA, VANECHKA, as before the shooting.)

SOFYA

Head or heart?

VANECHKA

Heart, I guess.

SOFYA

Right.

(She draws the pistol, takes aim at TOLSTOY.)

VANECHKA

Wait! I have a better idea. Onto the tracks. Under the train. Just like he did to that poor Mrs. Karenina.

SOFYA

Poetic justice.

VANECHKA

Exactly.

(SOFYA moves to TOLSTOY lifts him bodily from his deathbed.)

SOFYA

All right, come on Leo Nykolayevich, time to get this over with.

(VANECHKA moves to help her.)

TOLSTOY
(Awakening.)

What . . ? What . . ? What is going on?

VANECHKA

He's put on weight lately, hasn't he?

SOFYA

It's all that bread Axinya feeds him.

(They carry TOLSTOY out onto the station platform. Sound of large crowd looking on.)

VANECHKA

Back! Back! We've made up our minds, there's no stopping us!

SOFYA

Besides, he gave us the idea.

(Sound of train whistle, approaching train. They dump TOLSTOY out of sight on the tracks. The train passes through the station and away again. Pause.)

Of course, this is the part he left out of the book.

VANECHKA

I can see why.

(Fade.)

56.

(SOFYA, VANECHKA as before both the shooting and the train incident.)

SOFYA

Head or heart?

VANECHKA

Heart, I guess.

SOFYA

Right.

(She reaches into her pocket to draw the pistol. It isn't there.)

Where is it? My pistol. It's gone!

Ilya. (She looks in horror towards the door.)

Ilya! SASHA
(Outside.)

Mother! VANECHKA
(As SOFYA runs to fling open the door.)
(Offstage, a loud gunshot.
Pause.
SASHA and SOFYA stand staring off, shocked.
CHERTKOV approaches the door, calmly
brushes past SOFYA, steps inside. He
approaches TOLSTOY. Takes his wrist. Looks
up.)

He's dead. CHERTKOV
(SOFYA and VANECHKA turn to look at
TOLSTOY.)

57. (Nearby. SOFYA passing. Ilya's scarf lies on
the ground. She sees it, goes to it, picks it
up.)

Oh. SOFYA
(She lets it go. It flutters to the ground. SOFYA
goes.)

58. (ANNA, PRINCE ANDREY BOLKONSKY,
DOLLY OBLONSKY. SOFYA to one side.
Sitting there. A sullen pause.)

Well that wasn't the idea.

PRINCE ANDREY

Do you *have* to be so fatuous?

ANNA

I believe he does, yes.

DOLLY

(Pause.)

I should have known. I should have known he'd find a way to end it. *His* way. He always does.

ANNA
(Grim.)

(Pause. She moves to SOFYA.)

I'm sorry, Sofya. I shouldn't have come here. I should have stayed in my place. Down on the tracks.

At least he finished it for me. For you . . . what now? I wish I could do something for you. I wish . . . I could do anything at all.

(She hugs SOFYA, who seems not to notice.

Goes.)

Care for a candy?

PRINCE ANDREY

Thanks.

DOLLY

(Fade.)

59.

(ILYA and VANECHKA. The woods.)

Of course you had to go and die when you were a child.

ILYA

I didn't do it on purpose!

VANECHKA

Oh no. I'm sure.

ILYA

(Pause.)

It's cold here.

It's not so cold.

VANECHKA

Yes. It is.

ILYA

(He purposely pokes VANECHKA with his elbow. VANECHKA pokes him back. They fight.)

60.

(SOFYA. Shadows of bars cast across her. She looks out.)

Countess Tolstoy.

STERN MALE VOICE

Countess Tolstoy!

Please return to your cell.

(Lights fade around her. Pause.)

SOFYA

And I am Dido . . . flinging open my arms to welcome Troy's ships.

What light is this, creeping under the door crack, slipping, on furred feet, not so dark in here, the eyes, the eyes *adjust*, the *clip clip clip* of the water dripping, somewhere, lovely, but not in here.

And I come running, sometimes, when the noon is high, the fields spread out before us like fleece, and what's wrong with that? I say, the sun, tickling my arms, the freckles, like roses, I've always had freckles I say, and the river leaps to its conclusion, the blanket beneath me, sailing.

And then my Lyovochka comes --

(TOLSTOY appears. Light starts to spread.)

And again -- and again --

(Another TOLSTOY appears, and another -- in fact all the cast members now appear from all directions, dressed exactly alike, like, TOLSTOY, dark peasant outfit, bald head, long white beard -- and move to SOFYA.)

-- And dances with me, in the wheat, tumbling the stalks about us.

(She moves from TOLSTOY to TOLSTOY now, dancing with each one she comes to, a TOLSTOY occasionally breaking in. The stage has now filled with white light.)

And the children dash in all directions! And the day flows over us like honey!

(She begins to dance, a Russian folk-dance, with the TOLSTOYS quickly joining in. They dance, the music growing wilder, the dance growing more jubilant and breathless, until it ends with a grand flourish.

And the light narrows again on SOFYA, the TOLSTOYS disappearing into the shadows, as she stands there, facing out.)

End

Performance rights must be secured before production. For contact information, please see the *Tolstoy's Wife* information page (click on your browser's "Back" button, or visit <http://www.singlelane.com/proplay/tolstoy.html>).