

## *An Unhappy Marriage*

Happy families are all the same, but unhappy families are unhappy in different ways.

Stiva Oblonsky had just woken up in his house in Moscow. It was eight o'clock and he had spent the night on the couch<sup>12</sup> in his study. He sat up and looked around the room.

'Why am I here?' he asked himself. And then he remembered. The Oblonsky family was a very unhappy one at the moment and it was all his fault. Stiva sighed.

'Dolly will never forgive me, this time!' he said out loud. 'Why was I so careless? Why did I let her find out? That little French governess was such a pretty girl! But there are lots of pretty girls in Moscow that my wife knows nothing about. This time, she knows everything and how very angry she is!'

And indeed, Stiva's poor, unhappy wife Dolly, had stayed in her room for three days. She was refusing to speak to him and their five children were running wild around the house and doing what they liked.

The servants had guessed everything, of course, and some of them had already left. Others were not doing any work at all. Everything was untidy and meals were not being served on time.

Stiva stood up and sighed again. 'Well, it's not all my fault,' he said to himself. 'I am still only thirty-four and I enjoy having a good time. I can't resist<sup>13</sup> a pretty woman, but not many young men can. Dolly is looking old these days, but I still love her. I know it's hard work looking after the house and five children – but she's a married woman and that's her job. I'd better go and speak to her now and tell her how sorry I am. Perhaps I can calm her down and get her to understand.'

In her bedroom, Dolly was crying and trying to pack. She looked up angrily as Stiva walked in with his usual happy smile.

'I've sent my sister Anna a telegram<sup>14</sup>. She will arrive here tomorrow,' Stiva said. 'I would like you to talk to her.'

Dolly's pale, thin face was covered with tears.

'I can't welcome your sister to my home when I look like this,' she replied quickly. 'Anyway, I probably won't be here. I am thinking of taking the children to my mother's.'

'I know how you feel, but please do forgive me, Dolly,' her husband said. 'We've been married for nine years and we have been happy, haven't we? Please don't leave me now. How could I live without you and the children? I only . . .'

'You only?' Dolly repeated angrily. 'You *only* had an affair with your children's governess! You only let the servants know everything! I hate you! Get out of this room and out of this house. Go and live with your mistress! You can laugh with her about me. Just go away. I never want to see you again.'

At that moment, a child began to cry in the room next door. Dolly listened and her angry expression suddenly softened.

'Well, at least she loves her child – my child,' Stiva thought to himself. 'My dear Dolly, just let me . . . ' he began.

'I'm busy. Leave me alone,' Dolly replied quickly. 'If you follow me, I shall tell the servants to send you away. Now I must go and look after the child.'

As she went out of the room, she banged the door behind her. Her husband sighed.

'I'll try to talk to her later,' he said to himself. 'I can't bear all this shouting. I'll leave her alone for a time. Anna will be here soon. She will know what to say and I think Dolly will listen to her. I suppose I'd better go to the office now.'

Dolly Oblonskaya heard the front door bang shut behind her husband and the sound of his carriage<sup>15</sup> driving away. Then she returned to her bedroom. She sat down and began to cry. As she cried, she turned her rings round and round on her thin fingers.

'He has gone! But has he gone to her?' she asked herself. 'Oh, how I loved him! How I loved him! Even now, I love him

more than ever, but we are strangers in our own house.'

But her thoughts were interrupted as a servant came into the room and asked about the children's food. Dolly stopped crying and stood up.

'I shall see about it at once,' she told the servant.

Stiva Oblonsky was busy in his office all day. He did not work hard, but he always had something to do and someone to talk to. He was a popular man and his life had always been easy. He was good-looking and cheerful, and had many friends with whom he enjoyed talking and eating good, expensive food. Stiva enjoyed spending money – mostly on himself – and he never had enough of it.

One of his oldest friends called at his office that afternoon.

'Why, it's you, Levin, at last,' Oblonsky cried when he saw the tall bearded figure of Constantine Levin. 'What are you doing in Moscow? I thought you were busy in the country, looking after your peasants and working on your committees.'

'The country must carry on without me for a time and the committees bore me,' Levin replied. 'I have come to Moscow for a special reason. How are the Shcherbatskys?'

'Don't you mean "How is Kitty Shcherbatskaya?"' Oblonsky replied with a laugh. 'Tell me the truth. You're here to propose<sup>16</sup> to Kitty, aren't you? Dolly will be delighted. Kitty's a pretty little girl, isn't she?'

Levin blushed<sup>17</sup> and smiled, but he did not reply.

'Well, as Kitty is my sister-in-law, I ought to help you,' Oblonsky went on. 'The Shcherbatsky family ice-skates<sup>18</sup> in the park from four to five every afternoon. Go and meet Kitty there. I can't ask you to dinner, because Dolly is not well. But I'll take you out for a meal tonight. Good luck with pretty little Kitty!'

Levin had known the Shcherbatsky family for many years and had been in love with Kitty Shcherbatskaya, their younger daughter, for a long time. But Levin had always believed that he was too dull and unattractive for her.

‘I am just a countryman,’ he had said to himself. ‘I work hard and my land is good and well-farmed. I have money, but I have no real position in society and what would Kitty do in the country? She is only eighteen and she enjoys living in the city. She would find the country too dull – and me too.’

But after several months had gone by, Levin realised that his feelings for Kitty remained very strong. It was then that he decided he had to return to Moscow to tell her how he felt. He needed to know for sure whether she would marry him or not.

‘I love her and I must tell her so,’ Levin thought as he left Stiva’s office. ‘I have come to Moscow to propose to Kitty Shcherbatskaya and that is what I am going to do! I shall meet her in the park. At least I have not forgotten how to ice-skate!’

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## *Rivals*<sup>19</sup>

Levin was a tall, heavy man, but he was a very fine skater. As soon as he reached the skating rink<sup>20</sup> in the park, he hired some skates. In a very short time, he was moving elegantly around on the ice. As he skated, he looked around for Kitty Shcherbatskaya and his heart began to beat fast.

And then he saw her. To Levin, Kitty was surrounded by a beautiful light. She made everything around her seem brighter.

‘Can I really go up to her and ask her to skate with me?’ Levin said to himself. Then, to his joy, Kitty saw him and began skating towards him. She was even more lovely than he remembered. She was very slim and with her fair hair and sweet smile, she looked like a pretty child.

Kitty was not skating very steadily. Without thinking, Levin moved forward and took her hand.

‘Thank you,’ she said with a smile. ‘I don’t skate very well. I

need more practice. But I remember what a good skater you are.'

'I wanted to be the best,' Levin said. 'I wanted to be perfect.'

'I think that you do everything perfectly,' Kitty said. 'Will you skate with me?'

'Yes!' Levin thought to himself, as they skated off together, side by side. 'This is happiness!' They went faster and faster. The faster they went, the more tightly Kitty held Levin's hand.

'I skate better with you. You give me confidence,' Kitty said.

'And when I am with you, I have more confidence too,' Levin replied boldly<sup>21</sup>.

'Are you here for long?' Kitty asked.

Levin took a deep breath. Then he said,

'I don't know. That depends on you.'

Kitty did not seem to hear his words, or perhaps she did not wish to hear them. She let go of his hand and skated away towards her mother.

'Oh, God, why did I say that?' Levin said to himself. 'Now I have ruined everything!'

He skated slowly towards the Shcherbatskys and to his joy, saw that Kitty and her mother were smiling. Levin was invited to the Shcherbatskys' home that evening.

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Levin left the ice-rink with Oblonsky, who took him out to dinner as he had earlier promised to do.

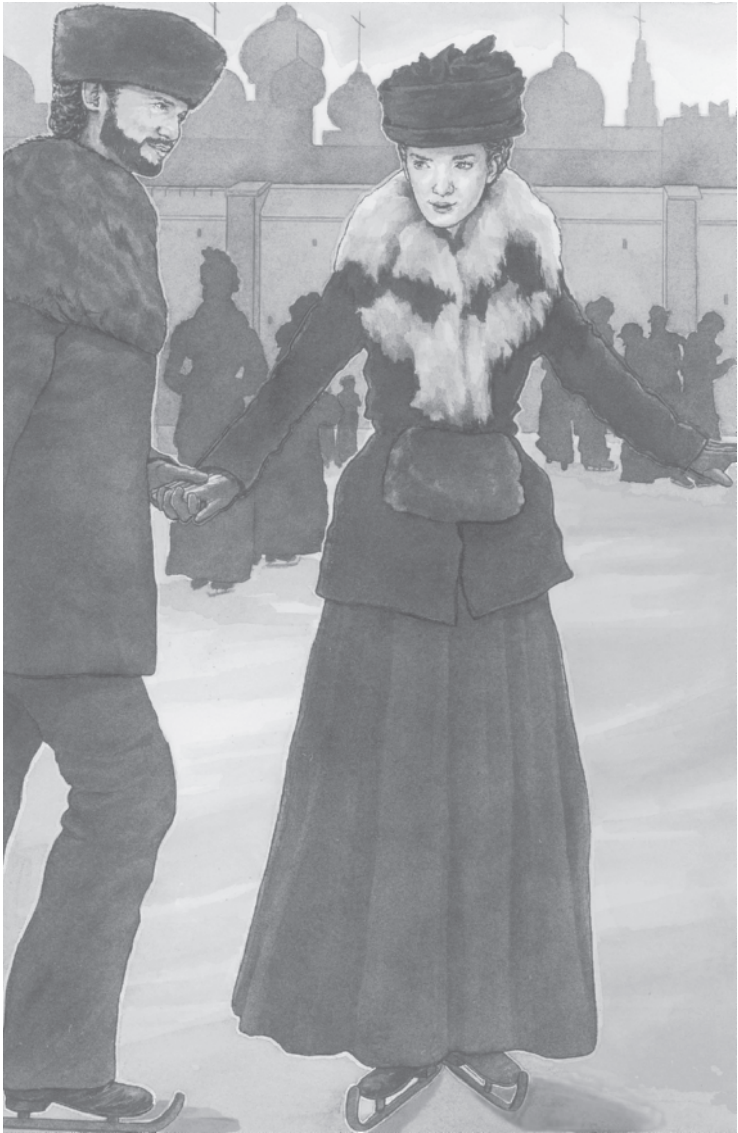
Both men wanted to talk about their love life. Stiva Oblonsky was anxious to talk about his problems with Dolly. Levin only wanted to talk about his hope of a future with Kitty.

'Dolly thinks that you will marry her sister,' Oblonsky told his friend. 'She is usually right about these things. But I have to tell you that you have a rival – Count Vronsky.'

Levin frowned<sup>22</sup>.

'I don't know him,' he said. 'Does he live in Moscow?'

'Vronsky is a rich young man from Petersburg,' Stiva replied. 'He is a soldier and very good-looking. He's intelligent and well-



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educated too. He would be very suitable for Kitty. In fact, he started seeing her just after you left Moscow. He really seems to love Kitty and her mother approves of him, I hear.'

'I wish now that I had stayed in the country,' Levin said. 'What chance have I got with any woman, especially a beautiful young girl like Kitty? I should forget about women altogether.'

Oblonsky laughed.

'No, no,' he said. 'We men can't live without women. Our lives are pointless without them. My problem is that I can love more than one woman at a time. Dolly cannot understand that.'

'Neither can I,' Levin said seriously. 'Married men and women should be faithful to one another. I shall speak to Kitty tonight. Pay for the meal, Stiva. I'm going to the Shcherbatskys.'

Nearly all the young men who danced with Kitty that winter were in love with her. But Levin and Vronsky were her most serious suitors<sup>23</sup>, or so everyone thought. Kitty's father was in favour of Levin, but her mother thought that Vronsky would be perfect for her pretty daughter. He was very rich, very handsome and had a great future as a soldier before him. So when Levin returned to Moscow, Kitty's mother was worried.

'Constantine Levin's had his chance,' she thought. 'If he proposes to Kitty now, she won't know what to say to him. I'm sure it's Vronsky that she loves!'

The truth was that Kitty was not sure at all. She wanted to be in love, but she did not know with whom.

'Constantine Levin is kind, but he is not very good-looking,' Kitty thought to herself. 'He is awkward too and does not enjoy society, as I do. He is always very serious and I have often found his ideas difficult to understand. However, Alexei Vronsky is charming<sup>24</sup> and he always makes me feel pretty and happy. But Vronsky's family is an important one in Petersburg society and everyone likes him. Does he really want to marry me?'

Levin had no idea what Kitty was thinking. He went straight to the Shcherbatskys' house. When he came into the sitting-room, Kitty was there by herself.

'I am too early,' he said to her. 'But I wanted to find you alone. I have come to Moscow for one reason – to see you!'

Levin took a deep breath, then went on quickly. 'I came to say, that is . . . I want you to be my wife, my dearest Kitty!'

Then he stopped speaking and looked at Kitty. She was breathing very fast. At first, Levin's proposal had excited her, but then she had thought of Vronsky.

'No, that cannot be – forgive me,' she said quickly.

'It is as I thought,' Levin said sadly. He turned to leave the room, but at that moment, Kitty's mother came in. She realised what had happened at once.

'Good, she has refused him,' she thought to herself, but she smiled at Levin and spoke to him politely.

A few minutes later, an officer came into the room. Levin watched Kitty's eyes shine as she saw the handsome young man.

'That must be Vronsky, my rival,' he thought to himself. 'There is no hope for me.'

Vronsky was a broad-shouldered young man of medium height. His dark hair was cut short and his face had a happy, confident expression.

'Constantine Levin, I think I met you earlier this winter,' Vronsky said with a smile, as he held out his hand. 'I understand that you live in the country. I would find that rather dull.'

'It's not dull at all,' Levin answered quickly. 'There is always so much to do. I shall be leaving Moscow in a day or two. There is nothing to keep me here.'

'Then you will miss the ball<sup>25</sup> next week,' Vronsky said. 'That will be a pity<sup>26</sup>.'

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When Kitty's mother told her husband about what had happened between Levin and Kitty, he became very angry.

'You and Kitty may agree that Vronsky is handsome and charming, but he has no intention<sup>27</sup> of marrying anyone,' her husband cried. 'Kitty will be as unhappy as poor Dolly. Levin is a