

The Live Corpse

By

Leo Tolstoy

CHARACTERS

THEODORE VASÍLYEVICH PROTÁSOV (FÉDYA).

ELISABETH ANDRÉYEVNA PROTÁSOVA (LISA). His wife.

MÍSHA. Their son.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Lisa's mother.

SÁSHA. Lisa's younger, unmarried sister.

VICTOR MIHÁYLOVICH KARÉNIN.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA KARÉNINA.

PRINCE SERGIUS DMÍTRIEVICH ABRÉZKOV.

MÁSHA. A gipsy girl.

IVÁN MAKÁROVICH. An old gipsy man. }

} Másha's parents.

NASTÁSIA IVÁNOVNA. An old gipsy woman. }

OFFICER.

MUSICIAN.

FIRST GIPSY MAN.

SECOND GIPSY MAN.

GIPSY WOMAN.

GIPSY CHOIR.

DOCTOR.

MICHAEL ALEXÁNDROVICH AFRÉMOV.

STÁKHOV. }

}

BUTKÉVICH. } Fédyá's boon companions.

}

KOROTKÓV. }

IVÁN PETRÓVICH ALEXÁNDROV.

VOZNESÉNSKY. Karénin's secretary.

PETUSHKÓV. An artist.

ARTÉMYEV.

WAITER IN THE PRIVATE ROOM AT THE RESTAURANT.

WAITER IN A LOW-CLASS RESTAURANT.

MANAGER OF THE SAME.

POLICEMAN.

INVESTIGATING MAGISTRATE.

MÉLNIKOV.

CLERK.

USHER.

YOUNG LAWYER.

PETRÚSHIN. A lawyer.

LADY.

ANOTHER OFFICER.

ATTENDANT AT LAW COURTS.

THE PROTÁSOVS' NURSE.

THE PROTÁSOVS' MAID.

AFRÉMOV'S FOOTMAN.

KARÉNIN'S FOOTMAN.

THE LIVE CORPSE

ACT I

SCENE 1

Protásov's[1] flat in Moscow. The scene represents a small dining-room.

[1] Protásov is his family name, but the name by which he is usually addressed is Fédyá, an abbreviation of his Christian name--Theodore. The ceremonious form of address would be Theodore Vasílyevich.

Anna Pávlovna, a stout grey-haired lady, tightly laced, is sitting alone at the tea-table on which is a samovár. Enter nurse, carrying a teapot.

NURSE. May I have a little hot water, ma'am?

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Yes. How's Baby?

NURSE. He's restless.... There's nothing worse than for a lady to nurse her baby herself! She has her troubles, and the child must suffer. What can her milk be like, when she lies awake crying all night?

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. But she seems quieter now.

NURSE. Quiet, indeed! It makes one ill to see her. She's been writing something, and crying.

Enter Sáscha.

SÁSHA [to Nurse] Lisa is looking for you.

NURSE. I'm coming, I'm coming. [Exit].

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Nurse says she keeps on crying.... Why can't she control herself?

SÁSHA. Well really, mother, you are amazing!... A woman has left her husband, her child's father, and you expect her to be calm!

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Well, not calm ... But what's done is done! If I, her mother, not only allowed my daughter to leave her husband, but am even glad she has done it, that shows he deserved it. One ought to rejoice, not to grieve, at the chance of freeing oneself from such a bad man!

SÁSHA. Mother, why say such things? You know it's not true! He's not bad--but on the contrary, he's a wonderful man, in spite of his weaknesses.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Yes indeed, a "wonderful" man--as soon as he has money in

his pocket--his own or other people's....

SÁSHA. Mother! He has never taken other people's!

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Yes he has--his wife's! Where's the difference?

SÁSHA. But he gave all his property to his wife!

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Of course, when he knew that otherwise he was sure to squander it all!

SÁSHA. Squander or not, I only know that a wife must not separate from her husband, especially from such a one as Fédyá.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Then, in your opinion she ought to wait till he has squandered everything, and brought his gipsy mistresses into the house?

SÁSHA. He has no mistresses!

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. That's the misfortune--he seems to have bewitched you all! But not me--no! He won't come over me! I see through him, and he knows it. Had I been in Lisa's place I should have left him a year ago.

SÁSHA. How lightly you say it!

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Not lightly at all. It's not a light thing for me, as a mother, to see my daughter divorced. Believe me it's not! But yet it is better than ruining a young life.... No, I'm thankful to God that she has at last made up her mind, and that it is all over.

SÁSHA. Perhaps it's not all over!

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Oh! If he only consents to a divorce....

SÁSHA. What good will that do?

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. This good; that she is young, and may again be happy.

SÁSHA. Oh mother! It's dreadful to hear you speak so! Lisa can't love another.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Why not, when she's free? Many a man a thousand times better than your Fédyá might turn up who would be only too happy to marry Lisa.

SÁSHA. Mother, it's not right! I know you're thinking of Victor Karénin....

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. And why shouldn't I? He has loved her these ten years,

and she loves him.

SÁSHA. Yes, but not as a husband! They have been friends from childhood.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. We know those friendships! If only the obstacles were out of the way!

Enter Maid.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. What is it?

MAID. The mistress has sent the porter with a note for Mr. Karénin.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. What mistress?

MAID. Our mistress--Mrs. Protásova.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Well?

MAID. Mr. Karénin has sent back word that he will come round at once.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA [surprised] We were just speaking of him! Only I can't think why ... [to Sása] Do you know?

SÁSHA. Perhaps I do, and perhaps I don't!

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. You always have secrets!

SÁSHA. Lisa will tell you herself when she comes.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA [shakes her head. To Maid] The samovár must be made to boil again. Take it, Dounyásha.

Maid takes samovár, and exit.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA [to Sáša who has risen and is going out] It turns out just as I told you! She sent for him at once....

SÁSHA. She may have sent for him for quite a different reason.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. What for, then?

SÁSHA. Now, at this moment, Karénin is the same to her as old Nurse Trifonovna.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Well, you'll see.... Don't I know her? She has sent for him to comfort her.

SÁSHA. Oh mother, how little you know her, to be able to suppose ...!

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Well, we'll see!... And I am very, very glad.

SÁSHA. We shall see! [Exit, humming a tune].

ANNA PÁVLOVNA [alone, shakes her head and mutters] It's all right, it's all right!

Enter Maid.

MAID. Mr. Karénin has come.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Well then, show him in, and tell your mistress.

Maid exit by inner door. Enter Karénin, who bows to Anna Pávlovna.

KARÉNIN. Your daughter wrote to me to come. I meant to come and see you to-night, anyhow. So I was very pleased ... Is Elisabeth Andréyevna[2] well?

[2] Elisabeth Andréyevna is the polite way of speaking of Mrs. Protásova, otherwise Lisa.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Yes, she is well, but Baby is a bit restless. She will be here directly. [In a melancholy voice] Ah yes! It is a sad time.... But you know all about it, don't you?

KARÉNIN. I do. I was here, you know, the day before yesterday, when his letter came. But is it possible that everything is irrevocably settled?

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Why of course! Naturally! To go through it all again would be intolerable.

KARÉNIN. This is a case where the proverb applies: "Measure ten times before you cut once." ... It is very painful to cut into the quick.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Of course it is; but then their marriage has long had a rift in it, so that the tearing asunder was easier than one would have thought. He himself sees that, after what has occurred, it is impossible for him to return.

KARÉNIN. Why so?

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. How can you expect it, after all his horrid goings-on--after he swore it should not happen again, and that if it did he would renounce all rights as a husband and set her perfectly free?

KARÉNIN. Yes, but how can a woman be free when she is bound by marriage?

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. By divorce. He promised her a divorce, and we shall insist on it.

KARÉNIN. Yes, but Elisabeth Andréyevna loved him so....

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Ah, but her love has suffered such trials that there can hardly be anything left of it! Drunkenness, deception, and infidelity ... Can one love such a husband?

KARÉNIN. Nothing is impossible to love.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. You talk of love! But how can one love such a man--a broken reed, whom one can never depend on? Don't you know what it came to ...? [Looks round at the door, and continues hurriedly] All his affairs in a muddle, everything pawned, nothing to pay with! Then their uncle sends 2,000 roubles to pay the interest on their mortgaged estates, and he takes the money and disappears. His wife is left at home, with a sick baby, waiting for him--and at last gets a note asking her to send him his clothes and things!

KARÉNIN. Yes, yes; I know.

Enter Lisa and Sásha.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Well, here is Victor Miháylovich,[3] obedient to your summons.

[3] The polite way of naming Mr. Karénin.

KARÉNIN. Yes, but I am sorry I was delayed for a few minutes.

LISA. Thank you. I have a great favour to ask of you, and I have no one to turn to but you.

KARÉNIN. Anything in my power ...

LISA. You know all about ...?

KARÉNIN. I do.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Well then, I shall leave you [To Sásha] Come, we'll leave them alone. [Exit with Sásha].

LISA. Yes, he wrote to me saying that he considers everything at an end ... [struggling with her tears] ... and I was hurt!... and so ... In a word, I consented to break--I answered, accepting his renunciation.

KARÉNIN. And now you repent?

LISA. Yes. I feel that I was wrong, and that I cannot do it. Anything is better than to be separated from him. In short--I want you to give him this letter.... Please, Victor, give him the letter, and tell him ... and bring him back!

KARÉNIN [surprised] Yes, but how?

LISA. Tell him I ask him to forget everything, and to return. I might

simply send the letter, but I know him: his first impulse, as always, will be the right one--but then someone will influence him, and he'll change his mind and not do what he really wants to....

KARÉNIN. I will do what I can.

LISA. You're surprised at my asking you?

KARÉNIN. No.... Yet, to tell you the truth--yes, I am surprised.

LISA. But you are not angry?

KARÉNIN. As if I could be angry with you!

LISA. I asked you because I know you care for him.

KARÉNIN. Him, and you too! You know that. I am thinking not of myself, but of you. Thank you for trusting me! I will do what I can.

LISA. I know.... I will tell you everything. To-day I went to Afrémov's to find out where he was. I was told he had gone to the gipsies--which is what I feared most of all. I know he will get carried away if he is not stopped in time--and that's what has to be done.... So you'll go?

KARÉNIN. Of course, and at once.

LISA. Go!... Find him, and tell him all is forgotten and I am waiting for him.

KARÉNIN. But where am I to look for him?

LISA. He is with the gipsies. I went there myself.... I went as far as the porch, and wished to send in the letter, but changed my mind and decided to ask you. Here is the address.... Well, then, tell him to return: tell him nothing has happened ... all is forgotten. Do it for love of him, and for the sake of our friendship!

KARÉNIN. I will do all in my power! [Bows, and exit].

LISA. I can't, I can't! Anything rather than ... I can't!

Enter Sásha.

SÁSHA. Well, have you sent?

Lisa nods affirmatively.

SÁSHA. And he agreed?

LISA. Of course.

SÁSHA. But why just him? I don't understand.

LISA. But who else?

SÁSHA. Don't you know he is in love with you?

LISA. That's dead and gone. Whom would you have had me send?... Do you think he will come back?

SÁSHA. I am sure of it, because ...

Enter Anna Pávlovna. Sásha is silent.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. And where is Victor Miháylovich?

LISA. He's gone.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Gone! How's that?

LISA. I asked him to do something for me.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. "Do something?" Another secret!

LISA. It's not a secret. I simply asked him to give a letter into Fédyá's own hands.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Fédyá? What--to Theodore Vasílyevich?

LISA. Yes, to Fédyá.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. I thought all relations between you were over!

LISA. I can't part from him.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. What? Are you going to begin all over again?

LISA. I wanted to, and tried ... but I can't! Anything you like--only I can't part from him!

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Then do you want to have him back again?

LISA. Yes.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. To let that skunk into the house again?

LISA. Mother, I beg you not to speak so of my husband!

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. He was your husband.

LISA. No, he is my husband still.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. A spendthrift, a drunkard, a rake ... and you can't part from him?

LISA. Why do you torment me! You seem to want to do it.... It's hard enough for me without that.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. I torment you! Well then, I'll go. I can't stand by and see it....

Lisa is silent.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. I see! That's just what you want--I'm in your way.... I can't live so. I can't make you out at all! It's all so new-fangled--first you make up your mind to separate, then you suddenly send for a man who is in love with you ...

LISA. Nothing of the kind.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Karénin proposed to you ... and you send him to fetch your husband! Why? To arouse jealousy?

LISA. Mother, what you are saying is terrible! Leave me alone!

ANNA PÁVLOVNA. Very well! Turn your mother out of the house, and let in your rake of a husband!... Yes, I will not remain here! Good-bye, then--I leave you to your fate; you can do as you please! [Exit slamming door].

LISA [drops into a chair] That's the last straw!

SÁSHA. Never mind.... It will be all right; we'll soon pacify Mother.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA [passing through] Dounyásha! My trunk!

SÁSHA. Mother, listen!... [follows her out with a significant glance to Lisa].

Curtain.

SCENE 2

A room in the gipsies' house. The choir is singing "Kanavela." Fédyá in his shirt-sleeves is lying prone on the sofa. Afrémov sits astride a chair in front of the leader of the choir. An officer sits at a table, on which are bottles of champagne and glasses. A musician is taking notes.

AFRÉMOV. Fédyá, are you asleep?

FÉDYA [rising] Don't talk.... Now let's have "Not at Eve."

GIPSY LEADER. That won't do, Theodore Vasílyevich! Let Másha sing a solo now.

FÉDYA. All right! And then, "Not at Eve." [Lies down again].

OFFICER. Sing "Fateful Hour."

GIPSY. All agreed?

AFRÉMOV. Go on!

OFFICER [to musician] Have you taken it down?

MUSICIAN. Quite impossible! It's different every time.... And the scale

is somehow different. Look here! [Beckons to a gipsy woman who is looking on] Is this right? [Hums].

GIPSY. That's it, that's splendid!

FÉDYA. He'll never get it; and if he does take it down and shoves it into an opera, he'll only spoil it!... Now, Másha, start off! Let's have "Fateful Hour"--take your guitar. [Rises, sits down opposite her, and gazes into her eyes].

Másha sings.

FÉDYA. That's good too! Másha, you're a brick!... Now then, "Not at Eve"!

AFRÉMOV. No, wait! First, my burial song....

OFFICER. Why burial?

AFRÉMOV. Because, when I'm dead ... you know, dead and laid in my coffin, the gipsies will come (you know I shall leave instructions with my wife) and they will begin to sing "I Walked a Mile" ... and then I'll jump out of my coffin!... Do you understand? [To the musician] You just write this down. [To the gipsies] Well, rattle along!

Gipsies sing.

AFRÉMOV. What do you think of that?... Now then, "My Brave Lads"!

Gipsies sing.

Afrémov gesticulates and dances. The gipsies smile and continue singing, clapping their hands. Afrémov sits down and the song ends.

GIPSIES. Bravo! Michael Andréyevich![4] He's a real gipsy!

[4] The polite way of addressing Mr. Afrémov.

FÉDYA. Well, now "Not at Eve"!

Gipsies sing.

FÉDYA. That's it! It's wonderful ... And where does it all happen--all that this music expresses? Ah, it's fine!... And how is it man can reach such ecstasy, and cannot keep it?

MUSICIAN [taking notes] Yes, it's most original.

FÉDYA. Not original--but the real thing!

AFRÉMOV [to gipsies] Well, have a rest now. [Takes the guitar and sits down beside Kátya, one of the gipsies].

MUSICIAN. It's really simple, except the rhythm....

FÉDYA [waves his hand, goes to Másha, and sits down on sofa beside her]
Oh, Másha, Másha! How you do turn me inside-out!

MÁSHA. And how about what I asked you for?

FÉDYA. What? Money?... [Takes some out of his trouser-pocket] Here, take it!

Másha laughs, takes it, and hides it in her bosom.

FÉDYA [to the gipsies] Who can make it out? She opens heaven for me, and then asks for money to buy scents with! [To Másha] Why, you don't in the least understand what you're doing!

MÁSHA. Not understand indeed! I understand that when I am in love, I try to please my man, and sing all the better.

FÉDYA. Do you love me?

MÁSHA. Looks like it!

FÉDYA. Wonderful! [Kisses her].

Exeunt most of the gipsies. Some couples remain: Fédyá with Másha, Afrémov with Kátya, and the officer with Gáša. The musician writes. A gipsy man strums a valse tune on the guitar.

FÉDYA. But I'm married, and your choir won't allow it....

MÁSHA. The choir is one thing, one's heart's another! I love those I love, and hate those I hate.

FÉDYA. Ah! This is good! Isn't it?

MÁSHA. Of course it's good--we've jolly visitors, and are all merry.

Enter gipsy man.

GIPSY [to Fédyá] A gentleman is asking for you.

FÉDYA. What gentleman?

GIPSY. I don't know.... Well dressed, wears a sable overcoat--

FÉDYA. A swell? Well, ask him in. [Exit Gipsy].

AFRÉMOV. Who has come to see you here?

FÉDYA. The devil knows! Who can want me?

Enter Karénin. Looks round.

FÉDYA. Ah, Victor! I never expected you!... Take off your coat!...

What wind has blown you here? Come, sit down and listen to "Not at Eve."

KARÉNIN. Je voudrais vous parler sans témoins.[5]

[5] I wanted to speak to you alone.

FÉDYA. What about?

KARÉNIN. Je viens de chez vous. Votre femme m'a chargé de cette lettre et puis ...[6]

[6] I have come from your home. Your wife has entrusted me with this letter and besides ...

FÉDYA [takes letter, reads, frowns, then smiles affectionately] I say, Karénin, of course you know what is in this letter?

KARÉNIN. I know ... and I want to say ...

FÉDYA. Wait, wait a bit! Please don't imagine that I am drunk and my words irresponsible.... I mean, that I am irresponsible! I am drunk, but in this matter I see quite clearly.... Well, what were you commissioned

to say?

KARÉNIN. I was commissioned to find you, and to tell you ... that ... she ... is waiting for you. She asks you to forget everything and come back.

FÉDYA [listens in silence, gazing into Karénin's eyes] Still, I don't understand why you ...

KARÉNIN. Elisabeth Andréyevna sent for me, and asked me ...

FÉDYA. So ...

KARÉNIN. But I ask you, not so much in your wife's name as from myself.... Come home!

FÉDYA. You are a better man than I. (What nonsense! It is easy enough to be better than I) ... I am a scoundrel, and you are a good--yes, a good man.... And that is the very reason why I won't alter my decision.... No! Not on that account either--but simply because I can't and won't.... How could I return?

KARÉNIN. Let us go to my rooms now, and I'll tell her that you will return to-morrow.

FÉDYA. And to-morrow, what?... I shall still be I, and she--she. [Goes

to the table and drinks] It's best to have the tooth out at one go....
Didn't I say that if I broke my word she was to throw me over? Well, I
have broken it, and that's the end of it.

KARÉNIN. For you, but not for her!

FÉDYA. It is extraordinary that you should take pains to prevent our
marriage being broken up!

KARÉNIN [is about to speak, but Másha comes up] ...

FÉDYA [interrupting him] Just hear her sing "The Flax"!... Másha!

The gipsies re-enter.

MÁSHA [whispers] An ovation, eh?

FÉDYA [laughs] An ovation!... "Victor, my Lord! Son of Michael!" ...

Gipsies sing a song of greeting and laudation.

KARÉNIN [listens in confusion then asks] How much shall I give them?

FÉDYA. Well, give them twenty-five roubles.[7]

[7] About £2, 10s.

Karénin gives the money.

FÉDYA. Splendid! And now, "The Flax!"

Gipsies sing.

FÉDYA [looks round] Karénin's bunked!... Well, devil take him!

Gipsy group breaks up.

FÉDYA [sits down by Másha] Do you know who that was?

MÁSHA. I heard his name.

FÉDYA. He's an excellent fellow! He came to take me home to my wife. She loves a fool like me, and see what I am doing here ...!

MÁSHA. Well, and it's wrong! You ought to go back to her.... You ought to pity her.

FÉDYA. You think I ought to? Well, I think I ought not.

MÁSHA. Of course, if you don't love her you need not. Only love counts.

FÉDYA. And how do you know that?

MÁSHA. Seems I do!

FÉDYA. Well, kiss me then!... Now, let's have "The Flax" once more, and then finish up.

Gipsies sing.

FÉDYA. Ah, how good it is! If only one hadn't to wake up!... If one could die so!

Curtain.