

MACMILLAN READERS

UPPER LEVEL

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Anna Karenina

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MACMILLAN

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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 couch¹² 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 resist¹³ 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 telegram¹⁴. 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 carriage¹⁵ 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 propose¹⁶ to Kitty, aren't you? Dolly will be delighted. Kitty's a pretty little girl, isn't she?'

Levin blushed¹⁷ 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-skates¹⁸ 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.