

PALLADIUM SHORT STORY PAGE



Nastasia

TOLSTOY'S FIRST STORY—“How I Became Spoiled”

(Copyright, 1911, by American-Journal-Examiner
Great Britain Rights Reserved.)

By COUNT LEO TOLSTOY

“VAN VASSILIEVITCH, let us have something to drink. Here is a restaurant. Its manager is my good friend. I understand that his brother is also a military man somewhere in Siberia.”

Thus spoke Bohdan Petrovitch, my young friend and comrade, brother of officer in my regiment. This was in Tiflis, where our regiment was stationed during the Summer manoeuvres. The restaurant was one of those clean, inviting places which attract the better class of those who spend freely.

“Excuse me, Bohdan Petrovitch, I have never been in a restaurant, and have never drunk any alcoholic liquors in my life, and I do not wish to make their acquaintance. I have promised my father and mother that until my twenty-fifth birthday I will neither enter a barroom, nor drink. I have lived up to this promise until now, and I would not like to break it during these few weeks which I must live before I am twenty-five years old. In six weeks I shall be twenty-five. After that I may do as I please, for my parents think that when a man is twenty-five his judgment is mature, and he is master of his passions and feelings. I think that is true. In the meantime I do not wish to break my word.”

“Oh, I see!” replied Bohdan. “But it was a good thing that you did not promise them that you would not fall in love. Or, perhaps, it would be better if you had given them this promise also. Then you could easily have resisted all the temptations which have been yours of late.”

His half-earnest, half-teasing words cut me to the heart. My soul was sorrowful. There was a bench nearby, and I asked my friend to sit down with me, but I could not rest and I looked like a criminal who had been caught in the act. He knew nothing of the wild tempest raging in my breast, and he began to whistle a merry tune while I sat there, apparently quiet. After a moment speech returned to me, and I said:

“Bohdan Petrovitch, your light words have touched a sore spot in my soul. You have disturbed me very much with your jest. I am going to speak to you in confidence. What I tell you must remain a secret.”

“Ivan Vassilievitch, you know that you can trust me. I have never betrayed a confidence.”

“I know that. Therefore I will hide nothing from you. It is true that I did promise my mother not to make love to a girl unless I intended to marry her. She spoke very seriously to me on this subject. And now, Bohdan Petrovitch, what shall I do? I have broken my promise to my mother. I have loved Nastasia. I have left her for the reason that she was a poor servant and a peasant girl whom I could not marry because of my rank, my profession and my relatives. But you know how I have loved her. I still love her. But how terrible that I cannot marry her!”

“A fig for such promises and thoughts! She is an ignorant peasant girl and ought to be thankful that she has had the privilege of loving a nobleman and an officer. She has no hard feelings toward you because you cannot marry her and have only given her a youthful and platonic love. A monk in a monastery has the same love for the Virgin Mary as he gazes on her beautiful picture. It is a holy love containing no element of wrong.” My friend finished his sermon and looked at me very earnestly.

“That may be so, but I am bound by my promise to my mother. Nastasia loves me, and it was a horrible shock to her that I could not continue my love because it was impossible to marry her. I call it seduction if a man and a woman love each other with their eyes only, without any words, if they do not continue this love.”

“I could never love another woman as I love Nastasia, if I should be an unnatural villain. Do you not consider this right and moral?”

“Nonsense, comrade!” replied Bohdan Petrovitch. You must leave all those dreams of morality and justice behind you when you become a man and enter the stage of practical life. Now let us go into the restaurant and have a drink, in spite of your foolish promises to your parents. I did not know that you were such a baby as never to have entered a restaurant. You should be ashamed to tell this to other men. You have broken your promise concerning love affairs, and now you should break the other. Come, Ivan Vassilievitch, you shall see how a restaurant looks, and how a drink tastes.”

As in a dream I entered the restaurant with him. I could not resist him. The manager of the place extended his hand to my comrade and to me, out with any feeling of friendship, but as a matter of business.

“Very glad to meet you, Ivan Vassilievitch! Your friend, Bohdan Petrovitch, has often spoken of you, and I was anxious to meet you. What do you drink?” said the manager with seeming cordiality.

I despised him from the very first moment I saw him.

“Ivan Vassilievitch has never taken a drink of any kind, and you know what to give him. He is just a boy in a restaurant, and I am going to make a man of him,” said my friend gaily.

I felt somewhat embarrassed at his slighting remarks. I saw many of my other comrades of the regiment with the general of our division at one table. They all smiled at sight of me, which struck me as very odd.

The waiter brought drinks and some very delicious breads with caviar and other refreshments. I took sweet liquor, but my friend drank two big glasses of vodka with the manager. I tasted the liquor and then emptied the glass, in order to show that I was not a boy. After that I felt that I was more of a man and I was proud of my much courage. My friend and the manager both congratulated me. This pleased me greatly. I had entirely forgotten my promise to my mother!

The waiter refilled our glasses, and we began to talk. A feeling of intoxication changed my timidity to boldness, and the manager began to look upon me as a fine gentleman.

The other comrades whom I had formerly despised on account of their intemperate habits seemed very brave boys to me now, and we began to talk freely. Before this I had never ventured to start a conversation, but now I had hundreds of themes to present, and I was very talkative. Even the general, an old brute and drunkard, became interested and asked me to drink with him. I was exceedingly happy to be on such friendly terms with the chief of the army, and Bohdan Petrovitch murmured in my ears:

“Now you see how necessary it is to visit restaurants

and to drink, for it gives a man the opportunity of meeting the right kind of people, and enables him to make some advancement in life. The general has just told me that he did not know until he met you here what a brave, intelligent man you were, and to-morrow he will make you a captain. Is not that fine?”

I nodded and was very glad I had entered the restaurant. I was a changed man, and it seemed to me that I had discovered a good thing in the restaurant. I completely forgot Nastasia, and my trouble concerning her. I heard some very vulgar remarks on the subject of love, and thoroughly enjoyed them. I drank several glasses of liquor and the general invited me to have a glass of brandy with him.

I was quite intoxicated, and it made no difference to me now what I drank. I no longer dreaded the bitter taste of brandy. I accepted his invitation, for it is a great honor for a young officer to be treated by his chief. I drained the big glass dry, and it was no longer bitter, but very delicious. My mind was full of great thoughts, and never in my life had I felt so big, so happy, or so well educated. It seemed quite natural to me to join some other officers in a drunken song and dance. The old general embraced me and said:

“You are an excellent boy, and I will see how I can help you to advance. See! All these gentlemen have made their careers by keeping in touch with me. It is the way of the world, you know. A man drinks to forget troubles.”

Another gentleman who was intoxicated stepped up to me and said he was the President of the Justice Court, and asked me to join him next week in a driving party. Thirty or more people drinking in the restaurant at once became my intimate friends. All were intoxicated and talked at random.

My friend Bohdan was sitting on a sofa and seeing my good humor he said: “Is it not good to mingle with the right class of men? You will see how you will get rid of all those foolish theories of morality and marriage. You must forget your Nastasia and everything your father and mother have said.”

His foolish babble sounded very sensible to me. I joined in his idle talk, and was indeed a very great man.

We were all very drunk, and I do not remember how I reached home or who accompanied me. I awoke with a heavy headache and was disgusted with my foolishness, but it was a great comfort to know that I had met the proper class of men that could further my career.

All the men whom I had met in the restaurant yesterday smiled with increased friendliness and sympathy. I was very glad to see them so very cordial, and they questioned me concerning the enjoyment of the previous night. The general was entirely changed. He ordered my advancement to the rank of captain.

The figures of Nastasia and of my parents appeared before me in imagination, and I began to realize how I had abused their love and confidence. But I remembered the conversation with my comrade Bohdan in the other restaurant, how intoxication had freed me of all my remorse and how I was then able to forget my troubles. I ordered some sweet liquor.

I drank one glass and immediately a sensation of relief came over me. I took another glass and felt still better. I experienced the enjoyment of drunkenness. My head became clear and full of merry pictures. Again I felt that I was a great and important man. I left the restaurant in a very good humor.

“Oh, it is so good to be free from the remorseful thoughts which have caused me so much suffering,” said I to myself, as half drunk I made my way home. My books no longer interested me, nor did my painting. I was happy without them. I had discovered the magic influence of alcoholic liquors.

Now I must tell the story of my love and its sad ending.

One evening after returning from my daily military service, not feeling disposed to go to a restaurant, I sat alone in my studio and let the story pass through my mind. It can be told in a few words.

Besides being an army officer I was an amateur artist and painted good pictures. The priest of the town in which my parents lived had seen many of my paintings and was very enthusiastic over my artistic abilities. He thought that I could become as great as Correggio or Raphael if I would paint religious pictures. He suggested that I should try to paint a new Russian Madonna for his church. The face of the Madonna must not be of the Italian or Jewish type, but purely Slavish.

“You, Ivan Vassilievitch, are a genius, and if you succeed in painting a great Slavish Madonna you will be compared to a Russian Raphael. Your great name will go down the ages.”

These words excited my ambition. I would paint a great and beautiful Slavish Madonna for his church.

I began to study the Slavish beauties and to search for a suitable model for my Madonna. Nearly half a year passed before I succeeded in finding a Russian girl who impressed me as a Madonna. She must be holy, great and beautiful. At last, quite accidentally, I met the daughter of a Siberian vagabond, exiled in a small village in the province of Tobolsk. Her eyes and face were simply and impressively beautiful, innocent and holy. She was the ideal type of a Slavish Madonna, and I decided to ask her to be my model. I needed only to hire her as my servant and the rest followed as a matter of course.

She came to the town with me and I began to work on the picture. During the sittings I discovered that she was a gifted and a good-hearted young girl, a veritable Madonna in her sweet simplicity. I decided to educate her.

I began to teach her. She learned with marvelous rapidity. I discovered that she was a great woman in heart and mind, and I felt an intense love toward her. I loved her as a Madonna and she began to love me. In five months the picture was finished, and it was wonderful. I invited the priest to see it, and he marvelled at its perfection, but I said that I could not part with the Madonna, I promised, however, to make him a copy.

Meantime I had made an educated lady of my Madonna. She was an admired beauty in the town and the eyes of society were upon her. There were rumors that I would marry her. I really loved her passionately, as Madonna, but had not ventured to confess my love to her, but our eyes had spoken the secret language of our hearts, which needs no words. Just when I was on the point of confessing my love to her my friend Bohdan Petrovitch began to tell me that it would be foolishness to marry the daughter of a vagabond and that already society was connecting our names very freely.

Of course my friend imagined that Nastasia was my real sweetheart and that we lived as man and wife. That was untrue. I had never touched her lips in love. The touch of her hand made me tremble, yet I never let her see how deeply she affected me. My friend

Bohdan suggested that I should send Nastasia away at once, and think no more about her.

For a long time I paid no attention to his talk, but finally he convinced me, and I decided to give her some money and send her away. We parted. She understood my reasons for so dealing with her, and she also understood my great suffering. She too suffered horribly in her heart and her sad eyes reproached me terribly at the moment of parting. After she had left my house I shut myself up and cried like a little boy who had been suddenly bereft of his parents. I walked the streets like a madman. Bohdan met me and asked me drink with him.

I could find no satisfaction equal to that offered by the restaurants with their liquors. My painted Madonna became a horrible temptation to me, and I covered the great picture with a black curtain. I could no longer look at it. I could not think that I would ever meet a woman whom I could love as I loved Nastasia. If I should I would be a bestial criminal, an offender against nature and morality. The world was lost and life was over for me! I began to meditate suicide.

The restaurant saved me from suicide, and alcoholic drinks seemed a good medicine for my bleeding soul. A glass of liquor always cheered me and soothed my tongue. I recognized the great influence of drinking upon my career and my social success. I advanced, I was invited to all the receptions. I was honored more than ever before—but I had sacrificed my conscience.

One day very soon after I had become acquainted with the restaurants, I was sitting in one of the most fashionable of them, chatting with a Chief of Police and a Coroner. We were drinking heavily. The Coroner was advising me to marry the sister of the Chief of Police, for a marriage like that would help me so much in my career, both socially and financially.

I met the daughter of a Siberian vagabond, exiled in a small village in the Province of Tobolsk. “I Met the Daughter of a Siberian Vagabond, Exiled in a Small Village in the Province of Tobolsk.”

“Care and wealth are everything. Believe me, Ivan Vassilievitch, you will find it so in life. Love and all the great phantasies of poetry are illusions. Money and social influence are the main things. You know very well that Napoleon made his career through women,” said the Coroner, and suggested that I should cultivate the acquaintance of the Chief of Police and his sister.

“Of course,” I replied, “if this is the decree of society I must grasp every opportunity for advancement.”

While we were discussing our plans for the future

By the Late Count Tolstoy, Published Here for the First Time

I was in July, 1855, at Tchernaya, in the Crimea, just a few weeks before the great battle, that we used to joke about Count Leo Nicolaevitch Tolstoy as a story writer. We would ask him to tell us some of his stories, and many a pleasant evening was passed in this way. Of all the stories which he told us the most popular was this: “How I Became Spoiled.”

I liked the story so much that I copied it while he was telling it. He said it was one of his very first efforts in fiction, but for some unknown reason he had never cared to have it published. Later on he even disliked to tell us this story, but I kept the copy of it as a souvenir.

I found the copy of the story accidentally among my old papers, and I publish it here in English at the time when the whole world mourns the great Tolstoy, who died in a miserable hut, self-exiled from his home and family.

V. R.



sight of this young woman affected me a little. How did it happen?”

“I do not pay any attention to these cases. They never interest me. She may have been forsaken by her lover, and the end of that is always suicide. Do you know her?”

“—know her! Ha, ha, ha! Why should you think that? How should I know a suicide? And as I made this reply in my cold and brutal voice, I killed the last rays of humanity and noble feeling in my soul.

“Excuse me, Ivan Vassilievitch. I was jesting with you. I know that neither you nor I have any dealings with this class of women,” said the Coroner with a smile, as he signed a document stating that the body of an unknown woman who had for some unknown reason drowned herself had been found and should be buried immediately in the city graveyard.

I witnessed the document with a firm hand.

I spoke to myself slowly: “Ha, ha, ha! I do not know her and never have seen her—finished! I will marry the sister of the Chief of Police. That should surely help me to become a colonel next year! Such is life!”

What a blessing is alcohol! It helps one to live without ideals and principles! How very droll!”

The other morning on entering my studio, the first thing that I did was to cut my painted Madonna to pieces. I also destroyed my mother’s portrait. Then all the noble pictures in my studio disappeared—I had spoiled my life.

“The Other Morning, On Entering My Studio, the First Thing I Did Was to Cut My Painted Madonna to Pieces.”

Ian Vassilievitch and Feodor Semenovitch, what is your hurry? Will you soon be back? We will await you. Good luck!”

We drove to the police station and the clerk informed us that the corpse was that of a young woman who had drowned herself. The fishermen had found her body in the river, but there was nothing to identify her.

We entered a small room which was lighted by a kerosene lamp. On the table was the body of a young woman dressed in black. Her hair was loose, and her hands convulsively grasped a small piece of paper. What the piece of paper contained could not be seen? I began to tremble. I saw her black gown and a small ring on her finger, a string of beads, and cast a swift glance at her face. The Coroner and the clerk were busy at the other end of the room and paid no attention to me. I recognized her immediately, and a low moan escaped my lips:

“Nastasia—You! Oh, my God!”

I fell on the chair—a horrible tempest in my heart. The Coroner noticed my agitation, but, thinking that I had drunk a little too much, he ordered a glass of cold water to bring me.

“Ivan Vassilievitch, I will dispose of this case very quickly, then we will return immediately. Do you feel faint?” asked the Coroner.

“No, no, Feodor Semenovitch. I am all right. The

