
The Poet's Corner

Levin's Complaint*

Alone in the vastness, I sleep in a haystack,
awake to confusion, a coach-and-four passing,
happenstance, my unaware wife-to-be dozing
on cushions inside. She startles, parts the curtains
precisely the moment of my wondering,
my lifting my eyes.

Now how probable is that? Yet you rely
on such twists, coincidence, tricks of the cheapest
hacks, my steward's wife, for instance,
so amiably settled, snug cottage, able sons,
an income secure and sufficient, happy,
her husband tells me, as she never has been,
then you strike her with irreparable illness,
damage her, a boot in the slats of a crate.

Do you delight in such irony?
What makes you so bitter?

You missed your mark with Madame Karenina,
Instead of indictment, a bite at unfairness,
she's an addict, a weakling, narrow, to blame.
How much truer to show her as she would be
had Vronsky failed her, his love or loyalty
transferred, Anna abandoned, humbled,
a hanger-on, a whore.

Vronsky deceives you. You wanted him shallow,
a privileged bounder, merciless rake, pursuing
Karenina as savagely as Laska, my setter bitch,
after a grouse. But his passion, his perplexity,
becomes him—how he puzzles over Anna's
despondence, his helplessness. In the end,
he's the victim we pity, the tragedy, flung
on the dust heap of the Serbian war.

*From Sharon McCartney's *Karenin Sings the Blues*. Reviewed in this issue of *Tolstoy Studies Journal*. Published with permission of the poet.

