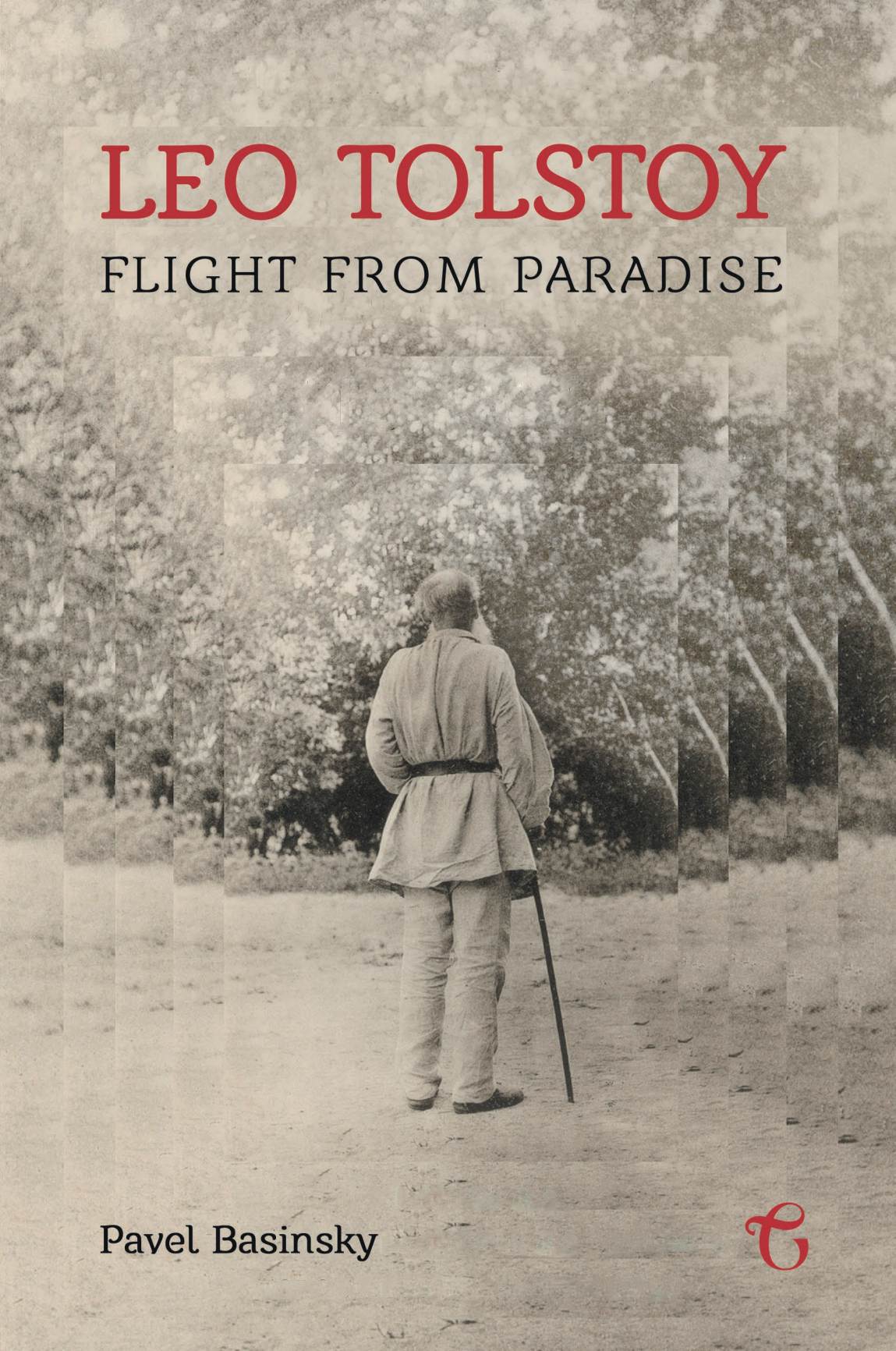
LEO TOLSTOY

FLIGHT FROM PARADISE



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by Pavel Basinsky

Translated by Huw Davies and Scott Moss

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Chapter 1

Departure or Flight?

On the night of October 27, 1910, an unbelievable event took place in the Krapivensky District of the Tula Province, one that was exceptional even for such an extraordinary place as Yasnaya Polyana, the ancestral estate of the internationally acclaimed writer and thinker Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy. The eighty-two year old Count fled from his home in secret, his destination unknown, escorted by his personal physician, a man named Makovitsky.

The eyes of the press

The news media of that time did not differ greatly from the media today. News of the scandalous events spread like wildfire throughout Russia and across the world. On October 29th, urgent telegrams from Tula began arriving at the Petersburg Telegraph Agency, to be reprinted in the newspapers the next day. "News has come in that has surprised everyone, to the effect that L.N. Tolstoy, escorted by Dr. Makovitsky, has unexpectedly fled Yasnaya Polyana and gone away. On leaving, L.N. Tolstoy left a letter, in which he declares that he is leaving Yasnaya Polyana forever."Tolstoy's fellow traveler, Makovitsky, didn't even know about this letter, written by L.N. for his wife, who was asleep, and handed to her in the morning by their youngest daughter, Sasha. He learned of its existence from the newspapers, like everyone else.

The Moscow-based newspaper *Russkoye Slovo* ("Russian Word") was quickest off the mark. On October 30th, it published a report by its own correspondent in Tula, containing detailed information about what had happened at Yasnaya Polyana.

"Tula, 29, X (*urgent*). Having returned from Yasnaya Polyana, I announce the departure of Lev Nikolayevich, with the details.

Lev Nikolayevich left yesterday, at 5am, when it was still dark.

Lev Nikolayevich went to the coachman's quarters and ordered that the horses be hitched to the cart.

The coachman Adrian did as instructed.

When the horses were ready, Lev Nikolayevich, together with Dr. Makovitsky, taking a few necessary items, laid out earlier that night, went to the Shchekino Station.

The postman Filka went in front of them, lighting the way with a torch.

At the Shchekino Station, Lev Nikolayevich bought a ticket to one of the stations on the Moscow-Kursk railway line and left on the first train that came along.

When it became known at Yasnaya Polyana that Lev Nikolayevich had upped and left, there was a terrible fuss. The despair of Lev Nikolayevich's wife, Sofia Andreyevna, defies description."

This report, which the whole world was talking about the next day, was printed not on the front page of the newspaper, but on the third. The front page, as was customary at that time, was reserved for advertisements for all manner of products.

"San Rafael wine – the stomach's best friend.""Medium sturgeon. Twenty kopecks a pound."

After receiving the nightly telegram from Tula, "Russian Word" immediately sent its correspondent to the Tolstoys' Hamovniki House (today this building is the house-museum of L.N. Tolstoy, between the "Park of Culture" and "Fruzensky" subway stations). The newspaper was hoping that the Count had perhaps fled from Yasnaya Polyana to his home in Moscow. But, as the newspaper put it, "Tolstoy's lordly old house was quiet and calm. There was nothing to suggest that Lev Nikolayevich might soon be coming back to the old hearth and home. The gates were locked. Everyone inside was fast asleep."The reporter sent off in pursuit along the supposed route of Tolstoy's flight was the young journalist Konstantin Orlov, a theatre critic and the son of one of Tolstoy's followers, the teacher and populist Vladimir Fyodorovich Orlov, who was portrayed in the stories *Dream* and *There Are None that are Guilty in the World*. He caught up with

the fugitive in Kozelsk and accompanied him in secret as far as Astapovo, from whence he informed Sophia Andreyevna and Tolstoy's children by telegram that their husband and father was seriously ill and was currently at the central railroad station, at the home of the station master, I.I. Ozolin.

If it wasn't for Orlov's initiative, the family would not have found out about the whereabouts of the gravely ill L.N. until the newspapers all announced where he was. Need it be said how painful such a thing would have been for the family? Therefore, by contrast with Makovitsky, who felt that "Russian Word" had been behaving like "detectives on a manhunt", Tolstoy's eldest daughter, Tatiana Lvovna Suhotina, according to her memoirs, was grateful "till her dying day" to the journalist Orlov.

"Father is dying somewhere not far away, and I don't know where he is. And I can't take care of him. It may be that I will never see him again. Will they at least allow me to see him on his death-bed? A sleepless night. Genuine torture," Tatiana Lvovna later wrote of what she and her family were going through after Tolstoy's "flight" (to use her word). "But a man was found whom we did not know, who understood and took pity on the Tolstoy family. He sent us a telegram: "Lev Nikolayevich is at Astapovo at the station master's house. He has a temperature of 1040."

Generally speaking, it has to be said that in their attitude toward his family and, first and foremost, toward Sofia Andreyevna, the newspapers behaved in a more controlled and delicate manner than they did toward the fugitive from Yasnaya Polyana, whose every step was tracked mercilessly, even though all the journalists knew that in his farewell note Tolstoy had asked: don't search for me! "Please… don't come after me, if you find out where I am," he had written to his wife.

"In Belevo, Lev Nikolayevich got off the train and had some fried eggs in the station dining room," the journalists reported, savoring this indulgent act on the part of the frugal Tolstoy. They interrogated his coachman and Filka, the servants and peasants from Yasnaya Polyana, cashiers and waiters at the stations, the driver who took L.N. from Kozelsk to the Optina Monastery, the hotel monks and anyone who might be able to tell them the travel plans of this eighty-two year old man, a man whose sole desire was to run away, to hide, to become invisible to the world.

"Don't search for him!" the "Odessa News" exclaimed cynically, addressing the family. "He's not just yours – he belongs to all of us!"

"His new place of residence will of course be revealed very soon," the "Petersburg Gazette" coolly announced.

L.N. was not fond of the newspapers (although he kept an eye on them) and made no secret of it. Not so with S.A. The writer's wife understood well that her husband's reputation and her own reputation, like it or not, would be shaped by what people read in the press. She was therefore always willing to talk to journalists and give them interviews, explaining away the latest oddities in Tolstoy's behavior or the things he said and never forgetting, when doing so (this was her weakness) to outline her own role alongside the great man.

The journalists therefore treated S.A., with warmth, in the main. The tone was set by a piece in "Russian Word" by Vlas Doroshevich, entitled "Sofia Andreyevna", in the issue dated October 31st. "The old lion has gone off to die in solitude," wrote Doroshevich. "The eagle has flown away from us, so high; how then can we track his flight?!"

(Yet track him they did – and how!)

He compared S.A. with Yasodara, the young wife of Buddha. This was undoubtedly a compliment, because Yasodara was in no way to blame for her husband's departure. More malicious types, meanwhile, compared Tolstoy's wife not with Yasodara, but with Xanthippe, the wife of the Greek philosopher Socrates, who allegedly exhausted her husband with her peevishness and failure to understand his outlook.

Doroshevich rightly pointed out that without his wife, Tolstoy wouldn't have lived such a long life and wouldn't have written his later works. (Although how does this fit in with the Yasodara comparison?)

The piece concluded as follows. Tolstoy was a "superperson", and his actions could not be judged by any normal standards. S.A. was a simple, salt-of-the-earth woman, who had done everything she could for her husband whilst he was a mere mortal. In the realm of the "superhuman", however, he wasn't accessible to her, and in this was the tragedy of her situation.

"Sofia Andreyevna is alone. She is without her child, her old man-child, her titan-child, whom she had to think about and care for every minute of the day: is he warm enough, is he full, is he in good health? Now she has no-one to whom she can give her entire life, drop by drop."

S.A. read this article. She liked it. She was grateful to the newspaper "Russian Word" for both Doroshevich's article and Orlov's telegram. Thanks to these things she was able to overlook certain trifling matters, such as the unflattering description of Tolstoy's wife's outer appearance which the self-same Orlov provided: "Sofia Andreyevna's wandering eyes expressed inner torture. Her head was quivering. She was dressed in a cowl that had been carelessly thrown over her shoulders." She was also able to forgive the night-time surveillance of their house in Moscow, the very improper revelation about how much money the family had spent in order to hire a private train from Tula to Astapovo: 492 rubles and 27 kopecks, and Vasily Rozanov's transparent hint that Tolstoy had, after all, been fleeing from his family: "The prisoner has left his delicate dungeon".

A quick glance at the newspaper headlines covering Tolstoy's departure reveals that the word "departure" seldom appears in them. "SUDDEN EXIT...", "DISAPPEARANCE...", "FLIGHT...", "TOLSTOY QUITS HOME".

And this is in no way a reflection of the newsmen's desire to grab their readers' attention. This event was sensational enough already. The fact is that the circumstances surrounding Tolstoy's disappearance from Yasnaya Polyana are indeed far more reminiscent of an escape than a stately departure.

A nightmare at dead of night

Firstly, the event happened at night, when the Countess was sleeping soundly.

Secondly, Tolstoy's route was kept secret so carefully that the first she knew of his whereabouts was when she received Orlov's telegram on November 2nd.

Thirdly (and this is something that neither the reporters nor S.A knew about), the route in question – the final destination, at least – wasn't even known to the fugitive himself. Tolstoy clearly understood whence and from what he was running, but as for where he was headed and where his final refuge was going to be, not only did he not know; it was also something he tried not to think about.

In the first few hours after his departure, only Tolstoy's daughter Sasha and her friend Feokritova knew that L.N. intended to visit his sister, a nun named Maria Nikolayevna Tolstaya, at the Shamordino Monastery. On the night of the flight, however, this too was thrown into question.

"You'll stay here, Sasha", he said to me. "I'll summon you in a few days, when I've made up my mind once and for all where I'm going. And I'll go, in all likelihood, to visit Mashenka in Shamordino", - A.L. Tolstaya recalled.

When he roused Dr. Makovitsky from his slumbers, during the night, Tolstoy didn't even tell him this information. Most strikingly, he didn't even tell the doctor that he was leaving Yasnaya Polyana for good, as he had informed Sasha. In the first few hours Makovitsky thought they were going to Kochety, an estate owned by Tolstoy's son-in-law, M.S Suhotin, on the border of the Tula and Orlov provinces. Tolstoy had visited the estate on more than one occasion over the last two years, either alone or with his wife, to get away from the constant stream of visitors at Yasnaya Polyana. There he took, as he himself expressed it, his "vacation". His eldest daughter, Tatiana Lvovna, lived at Kochety. Unlike Sasha, she did not approve of her father's desire to leave their mother, although she was on her father's side in the conflict between them. In any case, it would be impossible to hide from S.A. at Kochety. His arrival at Shamordino would be less easy to predict. A visit to an Orthodox monastery by Tolstoy – a man who had been excommunicated from the church – would be an act no less sensational than the departure itself. And last but not least, once there Tolstoy could count entirely on his sister's support and silence.

Poor Makovitsky didn't realize straight away that Tolstoy had decided to leave home for good. Thinking that they were going to Kochety for a month, Makovitsky didn't take all of his money. He was also unaware that at the moment of flight, the only money Tolstoy had with him was fifty rubles in his notebook and some small change in his wallet. It was only during Tolstoy's parting with Sasha that Makovitsky heard about Shamordino. And only when they were sitting in the carriage did Tolstoy begin to ask his advice: where might they go, to get as far away as possible?

Tolstoy had certainly chosen his fellow-traveler well. One had to have the unflappable nature and devotion with which Makovitsky was blessed, in order not to be all at sea in such a situation. Makovitsky quickly

proposed that they go to Bessarabia, to the home of a worker named Gusarov, who lived with his family on an estate that he owned. "L.N. gave no answer." They went to the Shchekino Station. The train to Tula was due to stop there in twenty minutes, and in one-and-a-half hours there would be a train to Gorbachevo. The route from Gorbachevo to Shamordino was shorter, but Tolstoy, hoping to throw anyone who might come after him off the scent and fearing that S.A might wake up and catch up with him, suggested that they go through Tula. Makovitsky talked him out of it: in Tula they were bound to be recognized immediately! They went instead to Gorbachevo...

All things considered, this bears little resemblance to a departure – in either a literal or figurative sense. Yet it is specifically this literal idea of Tolstoy leaving home that still serves as a heartwarming image for the locals to this day. In this image he will without fail be on foot, of a dark night, with a knapsack on his shoulders and a cane in his hand. And we are talking about an eighty-two year old man who, though strong, was nonetheless very sick, and suffered from fainting spells, memory lapses, heart failure and distention of the veins in his legs. What could possibly be said to be wonderful about a "departure" such as this? Yet the locals for some reason like to imagine that the great Tolstoy simply upped and left.

In Ivan Bunin's book *The Liberation of Tolstoy*, the words written by Tolstoy in his leaving note are quoted with admiration: "I am doing what old men of my age usually do. They depart from worldly life, in order to live out the last days of their lives in quiet solitude." *What old men usually do?*

S.A. noticed these words, too. Having barely recovered from the initial shock caused by her husband's running off in the middle of the night, she began to write letters begging him to return home, counting on the fact that third parties would help get these letters to him. In the second of these letters, which Tolstoy was never to read, she retorted: "You write that old men depart from the world. Where on earth have you seen that happen? Old peasant men live out their last days lying on the stove surrounded by their family and grandchildren, just like the nobility and everyone else. Surely it is not natural for a weak old man to depart from the care, concern and love of the children and grandchildren surrounding him?"

She was wrong. The departure of old men, and even old women, was a regular occurrence in peasant homes. They would leave home to go on

pilgrimages or simply to live in isolated peasant huts. They would leave to live out their days, so as not to cause a nuisance for the younger ones, not to be reproached for having an extra serving of food, when it was no longer possible for the old man in question to take part in work in the fields or in the home. They would leave when "sin had taken root" in the home: drunkenness, discord, unnatural sexual relations. Old men did indeed leave. But they didn't flee at night from their ageing wife with the consent and support of their daughter.

Let us return to that fateful night of October 27-28th and retrace Tolstoy's departure, step by step.

From Makovitsky's notes:

"At 3 o'clock in the morning, L.N., wearing a robe, in slippers over his bare feet, and holding a candle, woke me up; the look on his face was one of suffering, and also expressed anxiety and determination.

"I have decided to leave. You are going to come with me. I'll go upstairs, and then you'll join me, only don't wake up Sofia Andreyevna. We won't take too many things – just the bare essentials. Sasha will come after us in three days' time and bring us what we need."

The "determined" look on his face did not signify that he felt calm and collected. It was the determination that comes before leaping from a precipice. Wearing his physician's cap, Makovitsky notes: "Nervous. I felt his pulse - 100." What are the "bare essentials" for an eighty-two year-old man who is leaving home? Tolstoy gave less thought to this than anything else. He was concerned that Sasha should hide his diary manuscripts from S.A. He took with him a fountain pen and some notebooks. Makovitsky, Sasha and Sasha's friend Varvara Feokritova packed up their belongings and provisions. It turned out that there were quite a lot of "bare essentials" after all, and they could have done with a large suitcase, which they couldn't retrieve without making a din and waking up S.A.

There were three doors between Tolstoy's bedroom and that of his wife. S.A. used to leave them open at night so that she would wake up if any sounds of distress were to come from her husband's room. Her explanation for this was that if the doors were kept closed, she wouldn't be able to hear him if he needed help during the night. The main reason was something else, though. She feared that he might run away one night. For some time now, this threat had been a real one. It is even possible to

give the precise date when it first began to hang over Yasnaya Polyana: July 15th, 1910. After a heated row with her husband, S.A. spent a sleepless night and in the morning wrote him a letter:

"Levochka, my darling, I'm writing these words, not saying them, because after a sleepless night it's difficult for me to talk, I'm too anxious and might upset everyone again, and I want, so desperately want, to be calm and rational. I pondered over everything during the night, and here's what has become painfully clear to me: though you caressed me with one hand, in the other you brandished a knife. I had a vague feeling yesterday that this knife had already wounded my heart. This knife – it's a threat, and a very decisive one at that, to take back the promise you made and quietly leave me, if I go on being the way I am now… Does this mean that every night, just like last night, I will be listening out, in case you've left and gone off somewhere? Any absence on your part, even one that is slightly longer than expected, will torment me with the fear that you have gone away for good. Think about it, my darling Levochka, for after all your departure and your threat are tantamount to a threat of murder."

When Sasha, Varvara and Makovitsky had packed the things (they acted "like conspirators", Feokritova recalled, blowing out the candles on hearing the slightest noise from S.A.'s room), Tolstoy tightly closed all three of the doors leading to his wife's bedroom, and managed to retrieve the suitcase without making any noise. It turned out that even this case wasn't big enough, and they also had to take another bundle containing a blanket and a coat, and a basket with provisions. Tolstoy didn't wait around whilst they finished packing, incidentally. He hurried to the coachman's quarters to wake up the coachman, Andrian, and help him harness the horses.

Departure? Or flight…

From Tolstoy's diary:

"…I'm on my way to the stables to order that the horses be harnessed; Dushan, Sasha and Varya are finishing off the packing. The night is pitch black, I stumble off the path to the outbuilding, fall into a thicket, get stung, bump into trees, then I fall down, my hat falls off, I can't find it, I get to my feet with difficulty, go home, grab another hat and with the lantern in my hand I reach the stables and order that the horses be harnessed. Sasha, Dushan and Varya arrive… I'm shaking, expecting to be pursued."

What had seemed to Tolstoy, when he wrote these lines the next day, to be a "thicket", which he had struggled out of "with difficulty", had in fact been his orchard, which he knew like the back of his hand.

What old men usually do?

"It took us around half an hour to pack the things," Alexandra Lvovna recalled. "Father was already starting to worry, and was hurrying, but our hands were shaking, we couldn't fasten the straps and the suitcases wouldn't close".

Alexandra Lvovna also noticed the determined look in her father's eye. "I had been expecting his departure, expecting it to come any day, any hour, but nevertheless, when he said: "I'm leaving for good," I was stunned by it as if it were something new and unexpected. I will never forget the sight of him standing in the doorway, in his tunic, with a candle and an expression that was bright, beautiful and full of determination." "The look on his face was determined and bright," Feokritova wrote. But let's not get carried away. On a dark October night, when in rural homes, regardless of whether they're owned by peasants or nobles, you can't even see your own hand when you hold it in front of your face. An old man in bright clothing, holding a candle near his face, suddenly appears on the doorstep. This would be a pretty striking sight for anyone!

Of course, Tolstoy's fortitude was phenomenal. But this tells us more about his ability not to lose his cool under any circumstances. The musician Alexander Goldenweiser, a friend of the Yasnaya Polyana household, recalled one particular incident. One winter they had travelled in sleighs to village six miles from Yasnaya to help a peasant family in need.

"When we were approaching the Zaseka Station, a small snowstorm began, which got stronger so that in the end we lost our way and went off the road. Having strayed a bit, we noticed a lodge in the woods not far away and went toward it, so as to ask the forester how to get back onto the road. When we approached the lodge, three or four huge German Shepherds Dogs jumped out at us and surrounded the horse and sleigh, barking like mad. I felt pretty uneasy, I have to admit. With a decisive movement, L.N. handed me the reins and said: "Hold these" – and then he stood up, got out of the sleigh, gave a loud howl and bravely walked straight toward the dogs with nothing but his bare hands. And suddenly the terrifying dogs immediately stopped barking, moved aside and gave

him right of way. L.N. passed calmly between them and walked into the lodge. At that moment, with his flowing gray beard, he looked more like a character from a fairytale than a weak, eighty-year old man..."

On the night of October 28th, 1910, this same self-control had not deserted him.. He met his assistants, who had brought along his things, halfway along the path. "It was muddy, our feet slipped on the path, and we found it hard going in the dark," Alexandra Lvovna recalled. "Next to the outbuilding there was a little blue light flickering. It was father coming to meet us.

'Ah, it's you,' he said, 'well, this time I made it safely. They're already harnessing the horses for us. Well then, I'll go ahead and light the way for you. Why did you give Sasha the heaviest things to carry?' he reproached Varvara Mikhailovna. He took the basket from her hands and carried it, and Varvara Mikhailovna helped me carry the suitcase. Father went on ahead, occasionally pressing the button on the electric lamp and then immediately releasing it, which made it seem even darker. Father was always trying to economize, and in this case, as ever, was reluctant to use up too much electricity." Sasha had talked him into taking this lamp after her father had got lost in the orchard.

Yet when Tolstoy was helping the coachman harness the horse, "his hands were shaking, they refused to obey him, and hard as he tried he couldn't fasten the buckle." Then "he sat down in the corner of the carriage shed, on the suitcase, and straight away his spirits sank."

Dramatic mood-swings were to accompany Tolstoy throughout the entire journey from Yasnaya Polyana to Astapovo, where he passed away on the night of November 7th, 1910. Decisiveness and consciousness of the fact that he had acted in the only correct way were to alternate with a lack of will and an extremely keen sense of guilt. No matter how prepared he was for this departure – and he had spent twenty-five years preparing for it! – it's understandable that he was not in fact ready for it, either mentally or physically. He could picture this departure in his mind's eye as much as he liked, but the first actual steps that he took, such as getting lost in his own orchard, brought surprises for which Tolstoy and his fellow travelers were unprepared.

But why had his decisive mood in the house suddenly given way to a sinking of his spirits in the carriage shed? All his things were packed (in

just two hours – simply astounding!), the horses were almost ready, and only a few minutes remained until he was to be "liberated". And yet his spirits sank.

Besides the physiological reasons (he hadn't had enough sleep, was anxious, had got lost, and had helped to carry the things along a slippery path in the dark), there is also another circumstance, which can only be properly understood by thinking about the bigger picture. If S.A. were to wake up when they were packing the things, it would have resulted in an outrageous scandal. Yet it would nonetheless have been a scandal within the four walls of the house. It would have caused a scene merely among the "inner circle". Such scenes were something that nobody could grow used to, although lately they had been taking place with increasing frequency in the Yasnaya Polyana household. Yet the further Tolstoy was to get from home and hearth, the larger the number of people would get drawn into his departure. What happened was the very thing that he wanted least of all to see. Tolstoy was like a lump of snow, around which a huge snowball would gather, and this happened at every passing minute whenever he went anywhere.

It would be impossible to leave without waking up Andrian Bolhin, the coachman. And they also needed Filka (Filipp Borisov), the thirty-three year old groom, so that, sitting on horseback, he could light the way in front of the carriage with a lantern. By the time L.N. Tolstoy was in the carriage shed, the snowball had already begun to grow and grow, and with every passing minute it was becoming ever more impossible to stop it. The police officers, newspapermen, governors and priests were all still sleeping serenely… Not even Tolstoy himself could have imagined how many people were to become accomplices in his flight, whether willingly or otherwise – right up to ministers, the leading bishops, Stolypin and Nicholas II.

It goes without saying that he could not help but be aware that to disappear from Yasnaya Polyana without people noticing would be impossible. To disappear unnoticed was a feat that not even Fedya Protasov from Tolstoy's tale *The Living Corpse* could achieve: Fedya feigns suicide but is eventually exposed. Let us not forget, though, that besides *The Living Corpse*, he also wrote *Father Sergius* and *The Posthumous Papers of the Elder Fyodor Kuzmich*. And if, at the moment of departure, there was

one thought that gave him solace, then it was this: a famous person, by disappearing, dissolves into the crowd, becoming one of the smaller forces that are invisible to everyone. The legend that was Tolstoy existed in its own right, and he himself existed in his own right. And it is irrelevant who you were in the past: a Russian tsar, a well-known miracle-worker or a great writer. What matters is that in the here and now you are the simplest and most common of people.

When Tolstoy was sitting on the suitcase in the carriage shed, in an old armyak, dressed in a padded coat and an old knitted hat, he was, it seemed, fully equipped to make his long-cherished dream a reality. And yet… That time of day, 5 A.M., "between the wolf and the dog". That dank end of October – the most disgusting of all the periods between the main seasons in Russia. That unbearable torment of expectation, when the groundwork for his departure has been done, the walls of the family home are abandoned and behind him, and there can be no going back, and yet… The horses are not yet ready, Yasnaya Polyana has not yet been abandoned… And his wife, with whom he has lived for forty-eight years, who bore him thirteen children, of which seven are still alive, and have produced twenty-three grandchildren in turn; his wife, on whose shoulders he placed the burden of all the housekeeping at Yasnaya Polyana, all his publishing matters concerning his literary works, who copied out his two main novels multiple times, section by section, as well as many other works, and who had stayed up through the night in the Crimea, when he had been at death's door nine years ago, because no one, besides her, could administer the most intimate care of all to him – this dear person might wake up at any second, find the doors all closed and see the mess in his room and realize that the thing she feared more than anything in the world had come to pass!

Or had it? It doesn't take an over-active imagination to picture the scene had S.A. suddenly appeared in the carriage shed, when her husband was buckling the harness to the horses with trembling hands. Things would rapidly have become more Gogolesque than Tolstoyan. It was not without good reason that Tolstoy both liked and disliked Gogol's short story, *The Carriage*, in which an aristocrat from the provinces, Pythagoras Pythagorovich Chertokutsky, hides from his guests in the carriage shed, but is discovered in extremely embarrassing circumstances. He considered

this work a wonderfully crafted piece of writing, but an absurd joke. *The Carriage* was by no means a piece of comedy, by the way. When the general walks into the carriage shed, where the little Chertokutsky is curled up on the seat under the leather canopy, he represents Fate itself, catching up with a person at the very moment when he is less prepared for it than ever. How pitiful and helpless he is before it!

Sasha later wrote:

"At first father was chivvying the coachman, but then he sat down in the corner of the carriage shed, on the suitcase, and immediately his spirits sank:

'I sense that at any moment they'll discover us, and then all will be lost. There will be no leaving without a terrible fuss."

Tolstoy's weakness

Much in Tolstoy's mood at the moment of flight, before it, and after it can be explained by something so simple as delicacy.

By nature, Tolstoy remained an old Russian landowner, in the most wonderful sense of the word. This complex and, alas, long-lost mental and spiritual outlook incorporated such concepts as moral and physical purity, the inability to look someone in the eye and tell them a lie, or say spiteful things about a person behind their back, a fear of hurting anyone's feelings with careless words or simply of being in any way unpleasant for people. In his youth, due to his unbridled mind and character, Tolstoy sinned a lot against these spiritual qualities which were in the family by birth and upbringing and he suffered as a result of this. As he got older, however, besides the principles of love and compassion toward people he had acquired, his opposition to all that was ugly, dirty or scandalous became increasingly apparent.

For the duration of the conflict with his wife, Tolstoy was almost irreproachable. He pitied her, suppressed any attempts people made to say spiteful things about her, even when he knew these words to be just. He submitted as much as was possible, and even to an extent that was impossible, to her demands, occasionally utterly ridiculous, patiently put up with all her antics, occasionally monstrous, such as when she threatened to commit suicide. Yet at the core of this behavior, which surprised and

even irritated his supporters, were not abstract principles, but the nature of an old landowner, and simply that of a wonderful old man, who found any strife, discord or scandal a painful thing to endure.

The strongest emotion that Tolstoy felt in the carriage shed, therefore, was fear. Fear lest his wife might wake up, run out of the house and catch him on the suitcase, beside the carriage which was not yet ready... And then it would be impossible to avoid a scandal, a painful, gut-wrenching scene, which would serve as the culmination of what had been going on in Yasnaya Polyana lately.

He never ran away from difficulties... Latterly, on the contrary, he had thanked God whenever He sent him trials. He accepted any "unpleasantness" with a humble heart. He was glad when people judged him. But now he passionately wanted to be spared such things.This was not something that was in his power.

Yes, Tolstoy's departure was a manifestation not only of strength, but also of weakness. He openly admitted as much to an old friend and confidante, Maria Alexandrovna Schmidt, a former teacher, who had believed in Tolstoy as in a new Christ, the most sincere and consistent Tolstoyan of all, who lived in a peasant hut in Ovsyanik, six versts away. Tolstoy often visited her whilst out riding, knowing that these visits not only brought her joy but were her *raison d'*ê*tre*. He consulted her on spiritual matters on October 26th, just two days before the departure, telling her of his plans – at this stage he had yet to make up his mind once and for all – to leave. Maria Alexandrovna clasped her hands:

"My dear, Lev Nikolayevich!" - she said. - "This is weakness, it will pass". "Yes," - he answered - "it is weakness." Tatiana Lvovna Suhotina records this conversation, as recounted to her by Maria Alexandrovna, in her memoirs. The conversation doesn't feature in the diary of Makovitsky, who had accompanied L.N. on the stroll of October 26. Moreover, Maria Alexandrovna herself, when she spoke to a correspondent from "Russian Word", asserted that L.N. didn't say "a word" to her about his departure that day. This was a blatant lie, which can be explained by her unwillingness to wash her dirty laundry (dirty laundry that wasn't even her own) in public and reveal the conflict within the Tolstoy family to the rest of the world. In his secret "diary for myself alone", Tolstoy writes, on October 26th: "I am more and more oppressed by this life. Maria Alexandrovna forbids me

to leave and moreover my own conscience doesn't allow me to do so." On October 26, Makovitsky, too, noticed that "L.N. is weak" and not with it. Along the road to Schmidt's house, Tolstoy committed a "foolish" act, as he himself put it: he rode through the "greenery" (winter crops), and this is something that mustn't be done in the dirt, because the horse leaves deep traces and destroys the tender greenery.

One wants to protest: he felt sorry for the "greenery", but not his old wife?! Unfortunately this is the typical way in which people judge Tolstoy. This is the kind of reasoning of those who see in Tolstoy's flight the act of the "father of mankind"and relate it to his "humane, all too humane ideas about the family. The strong Tolstoy left his weak wife, who was not compatible with him in terms of her spiritual development. It makes perfect sense, this is why he's known as a genius, but what a pity for poor S.A., of course! How dangerous it can be to marry a genius.

This widely held point of view, strangely, almost coincides with the one which is cultivated in intellectual circles, and, with a little help from Ivan Bunin, became popular.

Tolstoy left so as to die. This was an act of liberation for a spiritual titan from the material captivity which tortured him. The "liberation of Tolstoy". How wonderful! Synopsis: just as a strong animal, on sensing the approach of death, leaves the pack, so Tolstoy, feeling the approach of the inevitable end, fled from Yasnaya Polyana. There was also a wonderful heathen version which Alexander Kuprin set out in the newspapers in the first few days after Tolstoy's departure.

But Tolstoy's act was not the action of a titan who had decided to make a grandiose, symbolic gesture. Still less was it the reflex of an old but strong animal. It was the act of a weak, sick old man who had dreamed of leaving for twenty-five years, but, while he had had the strength, didn't allow himself to do so because he felt it would be cruel on his wife. And now, when he no longer had any strength, and the family rows had reached boiling point, he could see no other way out, either for himself or for those around him. He left at the very moment when he was utterly unprepared for the trip, physically. When it was late October outside. When nothing was prepared and when even the most ardent advocates of his departure, such as Sasha, couldn't imagine what it would be like for the old man to be in "the open countryside". It was at the very moment when his departure

would almost inevitably mean certain death that Tolstoy no longer had the strength to remain at Yasnaya Polyana.

Did he leave in order to die? This explanation was proposed by Professor V.F. Snegirev, an obstetrician who treated S.A. and performed an emergency operation on her in the Yasnaya Polyana house. He was not only a wonderful doctor but also an uncommonly intelligent and delicate person. Desirous of consoling and comforting his patient, who, after her husband's death, was accused by all and sundry of having driven him to flight and to his grave, he wrote her a lengthy letter on April 10, 1911, on Easter Sunday, in which he tried to outline the objective and non-domestic reasons for Tolstoy's departure. He could see two such reasons.

The first was as follows. Tolstoy's departure had been a complex form of suicide – or at any rate, a subconscious acceleration of the process of death.

"Throughout almost all his life, he worked on and cultivated his spirit and body in an identical way, and due to his unquenchable energy and talents, he cultivated them equally strongly, binding them tightly together and merging them: where the body ended and the spirit began – it was impossible to say. Anyone who looked at his stride, the turn of his head, the fall of his foot, could *always* clearly see the deliberate nature of his movements: that is to say, every movement was worked out, developed, given meaning, and expressed an idea... On the death of such a fused combination of body and soul, the separation, the discharge of the spirit from the body could not and cannot be accomplished quietly, calmly, as is the case with those for whom the rupture between soul and body happened long ago ... to effect such a separation, it is necessary to have *inordinate* control over the body..."

Snegirev's other explanation was strictly medical. Tolstoy had died of pneumonia. "This infection is sometimes accompanied by manic seizures," Snegirev wrote. "Might not the night-time flight have occurred during just such a seizure, for sometimes the infection doesn't manifest itself until a few days before the illness, i.e. the organism is poisoned before the localized process begins. His hastiness and the fact that he changed direction so often during his travels fully support this theory..."

In other words, Tolstoy was already ill on the night of his departure, and the infection with which he was poisoned had affected his brain.

Let us not speculate to what extent Snegirev wrote this as a doctor and to what extent he simply wanted to comfort poor S.A. One thing is apparent: on the night of the flight and on the day before it, Tolstoy had been mentally and physically weak. This is confirmed by both Makovitsky's notes and L.N.'s diary. He had dreamed some "awful", confused dreams... In one of them, some kind of "struggle with his wife" had taken place, and in another, characters from Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, which he was reading at the time, were mixed together with people who were real but had already passed away, such as N.N. Strahov.

Less than a month before his departure, he had come very close to dying. What happened on October 3 looked very much like the real end, right down to deathly seizures and sweeping hand movements that are sometimes observed immediately prior to death. This is how Tolstoy's last secretary, Valentin Bulgakov, describes this episode:

"Lev Nikolayevich overslept, and, having waited for him until seven o'clock, we sat down to dinner without him. After serving the soup, Sofia Andreyevna got up and went yet again to listen out to see whether or not Lev Nikolayevich was getting up. When she came back, she announced that at the very moment when she had gone up to the bedroom door, she had heard the striking of a match against a match box. She had gone in to see Lev Nikolayevich. He was sitting on the bed. He asked what time it was and whether they were having dinner. But it seemed to Sofia Andreyevna that something was wrong: Lev Nikolayevich's eyes seemed strange to her:

"His eyes had a nonsensical look in them... – That's what happens before his seizures. He lapses into semi-consciousness. I know what it's like. His eyes are always like that before an attack." Soon Tolstoy's son, Sergei Lvovich, the servant Ilya Vasiliyevich, Makovitsky, Bulgakov and Tolstoy's first biographer, P.I. Biryukov, had gathered in Tolstoy's room.

"Lying on his back, with the fingers of his right hand squeezed together as though he was holding a pen in them, Lev Nikolayevich began to run his hand over the blanket weakly. His eyes were closed, his brows were furrowed and his lips quivered, he was definitely experiencing something... Then... then the strange attacks of seizures began, one after another, causing his whole body, which lay helpless on the bed, to shake and tremble. He thrashed out violently with his feet. It was difficult to hold

them down. Dushan (Makovitsky - P.B.) held Lev Nikolayevich by the shoulders, whilst Biryukov and I rubbed his legs. There were five attacks in all. The fourth was particularly powerful, when Lev Nikolayevich's body was thrown almost right across the bed, his head rolling off the pillow and his legs dangling on the other side.

Sofia Andreyevna threw herself to her knees, embraced those legs and pressed her head against them and stayed for a long time in that position, until we had positioned Lev Nikolayevich correctly on the bed again.

In general, Sofia Andreyevna made a horribly pitiful impression. She raised her eyes, hurriedly crossed herself with little crosses and whispered "Lord, don't let it be this time, don't let it be this time!..." And she didn't do this in front of the others: when I happened to go into the "Remington room" [in which the typewriter was housed], I found her uttering this prayer."After the seizure, L.N. became delirious, just as would later occur at Astapovo before his death, uttering a meaningless series of numbers:

"Four, sixty, thirty-seven, thirty-eight, thirty-nine..."

"S.A.'s behavior at the time of this attack was touching," Biryukov recalled. "She was pitiful in her fear and humiliation. Whilst we, the men, were holding L.N. down, so that the seizures wouldn't throw him from his bed, she threw herself to her knees at his bedside and prayed a passionate prayer, along the lines of: "Lord, save me, forgive me, Lord, don't allow him to die, I drove him to this, don't let it be this time, don't take him from me, Lord."S.A. also admitted in her diary that she felt guilty during the attack suffered by L.N.:

"When, as I embraced my husband's twitching legs, I felt that extreme despair at the thought of losing him, – remorse, pangs of conscience, a mad love and a prayer took hold of my entire being with incredible force. I would do anything, anything for him – just as long as he stayed alive on this occasion at least and recovered, so that in my soul there would be no more pangs of conscience for all the disquiet and worry I had caused him through my nervousness and painful anxieties." Not long before this she had had a horrible falling out with Sasha and Feokritova and effectively chased her daughter out of the house. Sasha went to stay in Telyatniki, not far from Yasnaya Polyana, in her own home. Tolstoy took this separation with Sasha, whom he loved and whom he trusted more than all his other relatives, badly. She was his invaluable assistant and just as good a secretary

as Bulgakov. The rift between mother and daughter was one of the things that brought on the attack. They both realized this and patched things up the following day.

From Sasha's memoirs:

"When I went downstairs to the foyer, I found out that my mother was looking for me.

- Where is she?

- On the porch.

I go outside, mother is standing there wearing a dress.

- You wanted to talk to me?

- Yes, I wanted to take another step toward making up with you. Forgive me!

And she starting kissing me, saying over and over: forgive me, forgive me! I kissed her too and asked her to calm down...

We talked, whilst standing there outside. Some passerby looked at us in surprise. I asked mother to come inside the house."

It makes one wonder: isn't the theory that Tolstoy left in order to die, not only baseless, but also a very cruel myth? Why don't we look at the matter from a different perspective, the way L.N. saw it. He left, so as *not* to die. Or at least, if he were to die, then it would not be as a result of yet another attack of convulsions.

The fear that S.A. might catch up with him was not only a moral fear but also a very real, physical fear. This fear passed the further Tolstoy got from Yasnaya, although the voice of reason wasn't silenced in him.

When he and Makovitsky finally left the estate and the village and drove out onto the highway, L.N., as the doctor writes, "who up until then had been silent, melancholy and anxious, said, in a stilted voice, as if lamenting the situation and apologizing, that he had not been able to bear it any longer, and that he was leaving Sofia Andreyevna without telling her." And immediately after this he asked:

Where can we go, to get as far away as possible?

Once they were sitting in a separate compartment in the second-class car "and the train pulled out, he probably felt confident that Sofia Andreyevna was not going to catch up with him; he said happily that he was in good spirits." Once he had warmed up and drunk some coffee, however, he suddenly said:

What's going to become of Sofia Andreyevna now? I feel sorry for her.

This question was to torture him until the last conscious moment of his life. And for those who have some idea of Tolstoy's moral views in his later life, it will be very clear that for him there could be no justification for his departure. The morally correct thing to do, from his point of view, would have been to bear his cross until the end, whereas to leave was to free himself from this cross. All the talk about how Tolstoy left so as to die, so as to become one with the people, so as to free his eternal soul, holds true as far as his dream of twenty-five years is concerned, but not for specific moral practices. These practices left no room to pursue a selfish dream at the expense of real people.

This tormented him all the way from Yasnaya to Shamordino, when it would still have been possible to change his mind and go back. Yet not only did he not change his mind and not go back; he fled further and further, urging on his travelling companions. This behavior on his part was the biggest mystery of all.

We find a solution of sorts to it in three letters written by Tolstoy to his wife at the time of his departure. In the first of them, a "farewell" letter, he stresses the moral and spiritual reasons: "… I can't live any more in the luxury in which I lived, and am doing what old men of my age usually do: leaving the hustle and bustle of life behind, to live out the last days of my life in quiet solitude." This explanation was given as a way of taking pity on his wife. In the same letter he writes: "I thank you for your honest forty-eight years of life with me and I ask that you forgive me for everything of which I was guilty before you, just as I forgive you, with all my soul, for everything in which you may have been guilty before me." In addition to the fact that this letter is touching on a personal level, every word in it had been carefully weighed, on the off-chance that it might be discovered. Tolstoy wrote two draft versions of it the day before he left it – and with good reason. This letter was a sort of "safe conduct" for his wife. It was something that she could have no qualms about showing to reporters (and show it she did). Its meaning, roughly speaking, was this: Tolstoy had departed not from his wife, but from Yasnaya Polyana. He could no longer live in such lordly conditions, which did not chime with his worldview.

It's possible that Tolstoy believed S.A. would be satisfied with this explanation, and would not try to pursue him or doing anything crazy. But

on learning that she had tried to drown herself in a pond in the Yasnaya Polyana Park, and on receiving her letter of reply, containing the words: "Levochka, my darling, come back home, save me from a repeated attempt at suicide," he realized that the threats on her part were continuing. And it was then that he decided to have it out with her directly, and express what he had omitted from his letter of farewell.

He didn't send the first version of the second letter, written in Shamordino. It was too harsh. "A meeting between us can only, as I wrote to you, can only worsen our situation: your – as everyone says, and as I think too, as far as I am concerned, for me such a meeting, let alone a return to Yasnaya, is completely impossible and would be tantamount to suicide".

There was a softer tone in the letter that he *did* send: "Your letter - I know that it is written with sincerity, but you have no power to do what you would wish. And it isn't about fulfilling any of my desires and requirements, but solely about your balanced, calm, reasonable approach to life. And until this is not present, for me, life with you is inconceivable. To return to you when you are in such a state, for me, would be to give up on life. And that is something I do not consider myself entitled to do. Farewell, dear Sonia, may God help you. Life isn't a joke, and we have no right to throw it away through our own will, and to measure it in terms of time is also unwise. It may be that those months that we have left to live are more important than all the years we have already lived through, and we must live them well."

Did he leave so as to die? Yes, if by this we are to understand his fear of an absurd, unconscious death, a death which, if he were to resign himself to it, would be tantamount to suicide as far as he saw it.

Tolstoy fled from such a death. He wanted to die with a clear mind. And this, for him, was more important than rejecting lordly living conditions or becoming one with the people.

When Sasha asked him in Shamordino whether he regretted that he had acted in that way in relation to her mother, he answered her question with a question of his own: "How can someone regret something if he could not act otherwise?"

He gave a more precise explanation of his act to his sister, a nun at the Shamordino monastery, in a conversation which was heard by her daughter,

Tolstoy's niece, and, oddly enough, also his daughter-in-law, Elizaveta Valeryanovna Obolenskaya (L.N.'s daughter Masha was married to E.V. Obolenskaya's son, Nicholas Leonidovich Obolensky). E.V. Obolenskaya left some extremely interesting memoirs about her mother, and one of the most important parts of them is dedicated to L.N.'s meeting with Maria Nikolayevna in her convent cell on October 29th, 1910.

"One could see just by looking at him to what extent this man was exhausted both physically and mentally ... telling us about his latest attack, he said:

"Another one like that and it will be the end; death is pleasant at such a time, because one is in a completely unconscious condition. But I should like to die whilst fully conscious.

And he started crying ... Mother expressed the idea that the Countess was sick; after thinking about it a little, he said:

"Yes, yes, of course, but what was I to do? One would have had to use force, and I couldn't do that, so I left; and now I want to make use of this fact to start a new life."

One must be extremely cautious and critical about words attributed to Tolstoy in the memoirs and diaries of other people. And we must be particularly critical when such people were close to him, and had an interest. It is only by comparing different documents that one can find the "point of intersection" and accept that the truth must lie here. Yet for all this, it must be remembered that Tolstoy himself didn't know this truth either. Here's an entry in his diary from October 29th, made after a conversation with Maria Nikolayevna:

"... I kept thinking about a way out of my situation and her (Sophia Andreyevna. – *P.B.*) situation and couldn't think one up at all, and yet, whether you like it or not, there will be a way out, and it won't be the one you expect."

Becoming one with the people

From the earliest days of Tolstoy's departure, the newspapers began to put forward their version of events, among which was this one: Tolstoy had left in order to become one with the people. In a word, it was described as follows: adoption of the "*simple life*".

This theory was the one that prevailed in the Soviet era. It was the one instilled into schoolchildren. Tolstoy had rebelled against the social conditions in which he, and all of the nobility, lived. However, not having the Marxist world outlook, he had acted as an anarchist-populist: he had literally gone out to the people.

The fact that this hypothesis was adopted by the Communist ideology, which worshiped the hero of V.I. Lenin's article "Lev Tolstoy as a mirror of the Russian Revolution", does not necessarily mean that it is inaccurate. In any case, there is far more truth in it than in any of the romantic myths, like the one which claimed that Tolstoy had fled in order to meet death head-on. The desire to become one with the people, to be indistinguishable in their midst, genuinely was a cherished dream for Tolstoy. How happy he was during his walks along the Kiev high road, which ran alongside Yasnaya Polyana, and ceased to be a count, dissolving into a crowd of pilgrims who took him to be an ordinary old peasant. How many precious minutes and hours he spent in conversation with the peasants of Yasnaya, Kochety, Pirogov, Nikolayevsk, and other places where he happened to spend some time, and where he considered it his primary duty to speak with the local elders.

In the 20th century it became the norm among the intelligentsia, unfortunately, to snigger at Tolstoy's adoption of the "simple life". The following joke was repeated *ad nauseam*: "Your Lordship, the plow has been brought to the front door! Do you wish to go for a plow?" In reality, participation in peasant labor (plowing, haymaking, harvesting), in which he tried, with some success, to instruct his children as well (his daughters showed a particular aptitude for them), had a deep meaning for Tolstoy. It was part of a very complex package of self-education, without which the phenomenon that was the later Tolstoy would never have existed. In this image of the great sage and brilliant artist, humbly walking in peasant clothes behind a plow, there is something extremely important in terms of understanding the essence of being human, no less important than the image of the pyramids of Egypt or the sight of a simple village cemetery. It is no coincidence that this image doesn't require a "translation", it is clear to each and every national culture, because what it expresses is not some whim on the part of a Russian noble, but the way man is bound to the earth and a literal embodiment of the Biblical truth: "by the sweat of

thy brow, thou shalt eat bread." "... A writer of great purity and holiness - lives among us ..." Alexander Blok had written in his article, "The Sun over Russia", on the occasion of Tolstoy's eightieth birthday. "The thought often occurs to me: nothing is so very important, everything is still simple and not terrible, relatively speaking, whilst Lev Nikolayevich still lives. After all, a genius, merely by being alive, seems to suggest that there are some firm foundations, some granite pillars: it's as though he holds his country and his people on his shoulders and feeds and nourishes them with his joy... Whilst Tolstoy is alive, and walks in the furrow behind the plow, behind his white horse, the morning is still dewy, fresh, not horrible, the ghouls are asleep, and thank God for that. Tolstoy is up and on the move – and it's as if the sun itself is on the move. Yet if the sun should set, if Tolstoy should die, if the last genius were to leave us, what then?" These words were written two years before Tolstoy's departure and death, but there is already a foretaste of these things within them. Sunset – departure – death – this was how Blok envisioned the end of Tolstoy's life. He could not have known that both the departure and death would occur at night, when the "ghouls" are *not* "asleep". Yet it is typical that, as he thinks about the death of Tolstoy, Blok could not picture him in any way other than as he appears in Repin's painting "Tolstoy behind the plow".

Blok would have had even less chance of knowing that initially, Tolstoy didn't plan to head in an unknown direction at all. In its first guise, his departure had a very specific destination. This destination was a peasant hut...

On the night of October 20-21, an acquaintance of L.N., Mikhail Petrovich Novikov, a peasant from the Tula Region, visited Yasnaya Polyana. The two met had met in 1895 in Moscow, when the twenty-six year-old Novikov had been working as a clerk at the military headquarters. His journey from revolutionary pursuits to an enthusiasm for Tolstoy's ideas was, on the whole, a fairly well-trodden one at that time. But Tolstoy took note of, and wrote an entry in his diary about this visit by a young man who was passionate, sincere and devil-may-care. He brought Tolstoy secret papers from the Military Headquarters about the shooting of workers at the Korzinkin factory in Yaroslavl. Tolstoy urged him to put the case files back where they belonged. Novikov was nonetheless arrested

a month later, though not for stealing secret documents, but for the same reason for which Solzhenitsyn was to be arrested exactly half a century later: for discussing too brazenly, in private correspondence, the person of the head of state, who, at the time, was the Emperor Nicholas II. In later life, the peasant Novikov tilled the soil on a lean patch of land, wrote prose and articles, and met several times with Tolstoy. After the revolution, he sent bold letters to Stalin and Gorky about the difficult plight of the peasantry, was arrested again and was executed in 1937. For all his desperate courage, he was a surprisingly sensible peasant, sober and extremely hard-working, one of those who managed to turn Stolypin's agrarian reforms to his advantage, increase the size of his allotted patch of land and feed his family through his own labor.

It was on this man, specifically, that Tolstoy decided to rely. After visiting Tolstoy on October 20 and talking with him (in their conversation Novikov expressed regret that Tolstoy didn't call at his house, in turn), the peasant asked permission to stay the night because he was afraid he might bump into some drunk vagrants on the road. He was given Makovitsky's room. He had gone to bed, when suddenly L.N. came in. At first Novikov took Tolstoy for a ghost, "so light and soundless were his movements". He was struck by Tolstoy's appearance during this visit to Yasnaya Polyana: "... it was so bad that I wondered to myself, how can a person live, think and move around, when they are so exhausted and dried up?" Tolstoy sat on the edge of the bed and began a conversation with Novikov, which Mikhail Petrovich recounted in his memoirs, recently republished. To the uninitiated reader it may seem strange, but let's not forget that L.N. was trying to talk to the peasant in his own language, as he always did during conversations with the peasants and as he even spoke to Gorky when the two first met in Khamovniki, thinking that Gorky was a "real man of the people".

"Of course," said L.N., "if, when I was still young, I had yelled at my wife even once, and stamped all over her, she probably would have submitted just as your wives submit, but I, in my weakness, couldn't bear family rows, and whenever they started, I always thought that I alone was to blame, that I had no right to make someone who loved me suffer, and I always gave in.

"Whenever he spoke to me," Novikov recalled, referring to his repeated visits to Yasnaya Polyana, "he told me how painful it was for

him to live at the manor house, where he was considered a parasite, a sponger, because he wasn't providing income to his family through his own labors." It hardly needs saying that no-one in Tolstoy's family considered him either a "sponger" or a "parasite". To do so would have been absurd; to say nothing of the fact that, although he had refused to accept the rights to his works, he had left Sofia Andreyevna the power of attorney to publish those of his works written before 1881 ("Childhood", "Boyhood", "Youth", "Sevastopol Sketches", "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina" and, essentially, all the best material that Tolstoy ever wrote as an artist), and this brought the family real income. Yet Novikov could hardly have made up these words. The most likely explanation is that L.N. was playing the role of someone with a peasant's mentality, in order to explain, in rough and ready terms, the reason for his departure from the estate to a peasant who was working until his strength failed him on a worthless plot of land.

"I'm boiling in this house, as if I were in hell," he complained, yet people envy me, and say that I live like a lord, and no-one sees or understands how much I'm suffering here."

That night, Tolstoy outlined his plan to Novikov.

"I will not die in this house. I have decided to go to an unfamiliar place, where the people won't know who I am. It may be that I'll come and die in your hut. Only I know in advance that you'll start scolding me, because nobody likes strangers anywhere. I have seen as much in your peasant families, but I have become so helpless and useless... I'll merely get in your way and grumble as old men do."

"It took a lot of effort for me not to burst into tears on hearing these words..." recalled Novikov. "I was embarrassed that I had sort of forced him to confess in front of me, and at the same time glad that he, as a man, forgetting the differences between us, hadn't hidden from me his weaknesses and the sorrows of his soul, for which I had always loved him and had grown spiritually attached to him... Dear, kindly grandfather, could I ever have imagined at that moment that you were living out your last days in that house, and in this life? ..."

Even if we allow that Novikov quoted L.N. relatively accurately, it's impossible not to suspect an underlying irony in them (a poor wanderer, whom the peasantry were going to scold) and, again, an innocent game of playing the simple "peasant". It is significant that when L.N. recounted

his conversation with Novikov to his daughter Sasha, he was chuckling a little.

"When I came to see him to collect the letters to the hall, he took me into the study, smiling happily and a little slyly, and then into the bedroom.

"Come on, let's go, I'll tell you a big secret! A very big secret!

I followed him and as I looked at him,I began to feel better.

'So this is what I came up with. I told Novikov a little about our situation and about how hard things are for me here. I'll go to his place. They won't find me there. You know, Novikov told me that his brother's wife was an alcoholic, and that if she starts to get really out of hand, his brother walks up and down her back, and she gets better. It helps.' And father laughed good-naturedly ... I had a good laugh, too, and told father that once, the coachman Ivan had been taking Olga somewhere (L.N.'s daughter-in-law, the first wife of his son Andrei - PB), and she asked him what sort of things went on at Yasnaya. He replied that things were bad, and then turned to her and said:

"Well what of it, your Highness, forgive me if I tell you. At our place we do things in the country-style, if a woman plays the fool, her husband takes a set of reins to her! It works an absolute treat!"

Obviously, one mustn't take this seriously. But the atmosphere in the Yasnaya Polyana household was such that "jokes" like this had become possible.

LN wrote matter-of-factly in his diary about the meeting with Novikov: "Mikhail Novikov arrived. I talked to him a great deal. A seriously smart fellow."

For some time, Tolstoy had been afraid to write the whole truth in his diary, knowing that S.A., who had got hold of the keys to his desk, would read his daily entries. He even started a special small notebook, in which he began to keep what he called a "Diary for myself alone", which he hid in the toe of his boot. On September 24, he writes: "I lost the little diary." He hadn't misplaced it, as it turned out. His wife had found it in the boot and taken it to her room. According to her later account, she had accidentally dropped some bed linen on the boot and lo and behold... But in this case it is neither here nor there. What is important is that the atmosphere in the Tolstoy house was such that it astonished the servants and peasants of Yasnaya Polyana, and L.N., in the conversations he had, had to somehow

find ways to get out of awkward situations, including through the use of such "jokes".

His decision to go to Novikov's place turned out to be far from a joke, however. On October 24, he sends a letter:

"Mikhail Petrovich,

With regard to what I said to you before your departure, I am appealing to you once again with the following request: if it were really to happen that I were to come to your house, would you be so good as to find a hut for me, in your village – I don't mind how small it is, as long as it is isolated and warm, so that I would be inconveniencing you and your family for only the shortest possible amount of time. In addition I would like to tell you that if were to telegraph you, I would sign the telegraph not with my name but with the name T. Nikolayev.

I will look forward to receiving an answer from you, and I extend a warm hand-shake to you.

Lev Tolstoy.

Keep in mind that all this must remain known to you alone."

There certainly isn't much joking going on here! The secret code that Sasha, Tolstoy and Chertkov were to use during L.N.'s flight from Yasnaya Polyana to deceive S.A. and newsmen makes its first appearance in this letter. The great Tolstoy, who despised pseudonyms and had never been afraid to sign bold letters to the Tsars, to Stolypin or to Pobedonostsev with his own name, is hiding behind the shadow of a certain T. Nikolayev.

On receiving the letter, Novikov was at a loss as to what to do. It was one thing to pour out their hearts to one another, man-to-man, in the comfort of the Yasnaya Polyana house, and quite another to take on the responsibility before the whole world for having hidden Tolstoy as a fugitive.

"I can't forgive myself for the slowness," Novikov wrote in his memoirs, "which I allowed myself in replying to his letter, which, as it turned out later, Lev Nikolayevich had spent two days waiting for, and only after that, having decided that it is impossible for him to come to me, that I wasn't answering, headed south, to some acquaintances who lived there, and he only received my response when he was already ill at the Astapovo station. Who knows, perhaps through this his life could have been prolonged for a few more years, since the two-hour journey to our station from Yasnaya

Polyana would not have hurt him, all the more so given that the hut he was requesting, which was warm and clean, stood empty, exactly as if it was just waiting for someone to come and live in it. And there was a small, cozy room in my hut, too, where he could have taken shelter for a while without anyone noticing.

I will never forgive myself for this oversight!"

It was in vain that Novikov blamed himself. Tolstoy was no needle, and the Tula village was no haystack. With his world-famous appearance, and the network of reporters that existed at the time, along with both state investigators and private ones, L.N. was destined to be found very quickly.

What is curious is something else entirely. This hut itself, the "warm and clean" one, appeared in Novikov's memoirs later, after Tolstoy's death. In his letter of reply, not only was there no mention of any hut, but the letter itself was, essentially, a form of polite refusal. Therefore, even if this letter had not been delayed, and Tolstoy had received it not when he was terminally ill at Astapovo, but whilst he was still at Yasnaya Polyana, it wouldn't have changed anything. Tolstoy had nowhere to run, and Novikov had tried to explain as much to him.

"Dear Lev Nikolayevich, I received your letter and am very touched by your closeness and sincerity toward me. I couldn't answer immediately, so as not to act rashly. I have always been frank with you and said what was in my heart, and now have decided to tell you only what is in my soul concerning the request you made in the letter, without thinking about whether it will please you or not. That time when you ought, both for the benefit of the situation, and because of the force of the consciousness awakening within you, to have changed your outward conditions of life – has now passed, and now there would be no sense in changing them for any lasting period of time... As much as I'd like to see you conversing in freedom with all the ordinary people, nonetheless for the sake of preserving your life in such an old body, for the communication with you that everyone holds dear – I cannot have any serious desire to see this. My only wish is that what remains of your life here is not inhibited by external conditions for dialogue with those who love you, but for such temporary visits to see your friends for a day, a week, two weeks, or a month, my hut would be very uncomfortable. There is a bright little room in it that all my family will gladly give up for you, and they will serve you lovingly, all the

more so given that I don't have any very young children who might make noise at the wrong time. The youngest is 5 years old. This is what I think, but if you think otherwise, let things be not as I wish them to be, but as you wish them to be, and in this case my little room will be yours for as long as you want. And particularly from April to October, you can live at my place without us getting in one another's way at all. We are not afraid that you will get in our way, but of the reverse...

With love from the peasant Mikhail Novikov."

In the post script there was a clarification concerning the separate hut.

"I think it would be impossible for you to live in a separate hut because of your weakness. Moreover peasants don't usually have completely separate huts. Usually there are cold second huts, which, although they can easily be adapted so that they are suitable for living in, by carrying out some repairs to them, they are nonetheless not separate, but will be accessed through a passage. My neighbor has just such a hut, measuring fourteen feet, and he wouldn't say no to the idea of giving it to you as an apartment. Or alternatively an elderly aunt of mine plans to have just such a fourteen-foot hut built next spring; she is lonely, and being an intelligent old woman, would also be glad to take you in and serve you."

It is clear that Tolstoy, with his extreme independence and at the same time delicacy, would not agree to these terms. And Novikov knew this, too… Just as he also knew that for a sick old man to change his place of residence in late autumn was madness, plain and simple! The thing to do was to wait until spring.

But Tolstoy could not wait.

It was not until November 3 that Novikov's letter was read out to Tolstoy in Astapovo by Chertkov, who had recently arrived there. L.N. listened attentively and asked him to write on the envelope: "Thank you. I went in completely the opposite direction."

"That Melancholy Road, the Railroad ..."

They travelled from Shchekino to Gorbachevo in a private compartment in a 2nd class car. They had now left behind them the estate and the village of Yasnaya Polyana, through which a surprising cortege had travelled two hours before. In a carriage drawn by a pair of horses

had sat the aged count, in a quilted jacket and armyak, wearing two hats (his head was very sensitive to the cold); alongside him was the doctor, Dushan Petrovich, unflappable, with an unchanging expression on his face, in a shabby brown sheepskin coat and a yellow felt hat; in front, on a third horse, rode the groom Filya holding a burning torch (in Sasha's account) or a lantern (in Makovitsky's account). People who live in the countryside tend to be early risers: lights had already come on in the windows of some of the huts, and stoves were already being warmed up. At the upper end of the village the reins came loose. Makovitsky came down out of the cab to try to find the end of the rein, and at the same time checked to make sure that L.N.'s legs were covered. Tolstoy was in such a hurry that he began to shout at Makovitsky. At this, some of the villagers from the surrounding houses came out to see what was going on. A silent scene took place.

When Makovitsky bought the tickets in Shchekino, he initially wanted to name a different station as his destination, rather than Gorbachevo, in an effort to throw anyone chasing them off the scent. He realized, however, that lying would not only be wrong, but also pointless.

In Astapovo S.A. would later interrogate Makovitsky:

- Where were you planning to go?

- Far away.

- Well, where?

- First, to Rostov-on-Don; we wanted to get hold of foreign passports when we got there.

- Well, and after that?

- To Odessa.

- After that?

- To Constantinople.

- And then where?

- To Bulgaria.

- Do you have any money with you?

- There's enough money.

- Well, how much?

- ...

This conversation was put down on paper by A.P. Semenovsky, a senior doctor at the district hospital, who was summoned by telegram

on November 1 to Astapovo from the nearby district town of Dankovo. He also wrote in his memoirs about a fascinating private conversation he had with Makovitsky, in which the doctor admitted that each time he had asked for the tickets at the stations, instead of paying for them, he had allegedly told the people at the ticket window that he was getting the tickets for Tolstoy. "We'll work out how much we owe later." And they had given him the tickets.

Tolstoy's skills as a conspirator left a lot to be desired. In Shchekino, walking into the station building ahead of Makovitsky, he immediately asked the bartender: is there a direct link to Kozelsk in Gorbachevo? He then asked the same thing of the station's duty officer. (The next day, S.A. already knew from the ticket office staff roughly in which direction her husband was headed.) While Makovitsky repacked their things, sending back anything they didn't need, he was wandering around 400 paces away with a boy who was on his way to school. The train pulled into the station.

"Let's travel with the boy," said Tolstoy.

On the train L.N. calmed down, took a nap for an hour and a half, then asked Makovitsky to get hold of a copy of "The Circle of Reading" or "For Every Day", collections of wise thoughts which he compiled. As it transpired, there were no copies on sale.

One of the most bitter aspects of Tolstoy's last journey was the fact that his long-standing habits were constantly coming into conflict with the new, unusual conditions in which the old man now found himself. One would have thought he needed so little, to such an extent had he simplified his life at Yasnaya Polyana ... And yet, lo and behold, it was the small, trifling things that seemed to be lacking all the time...

In this context, Sofia Andreyevna's exclamation about her husband's flight doesn't seem quite so absurd:

"Poor Levochka! Who on earth is going to give him his butter!"

And it is very touching that, when she set off to see her husband in Astapovo, S.A. didn't forget to bring with her a pillow, sewn by her own hand, on which L.N. was accustomed to sleeping. He recognized this pillow. But this was later.

Beginning with the loss of his hat in the garden, small, annoying frustrations troubled the fugitive from Yasnaya Polyana constantly, and all this placed a heavy burden on Makovitsky in the initial stages.

L.N. was determined to travel in the 3rd class car, with the common people, from Gorbachevo to Kozelsk. Once he had sat down in the car on a wooden bench, he said:

"How wonderful and free this is!"

But Makovitsky was the first to express some alarm. The "Sukhinichi-Kozelsk" train was a commercial one, a mixed train, with one 3rd class carriage, overcrowded and full of smoke. Due to how crowded it was, the passengers moved into the heated freight cars. Without waiting for the departure of the train and saying nothing to L.N., Makovitsky hurried to the station master to demand that he attach an additional car. The station master sent him to see another official, the second official pointed to the attendant on duty. At that moment the attendant on duty was in the car, staring at Tolstoy, whom the passengers had already recognized. He would have been happy to help, but it turned out that he was not the duty officer responsible for the cars. The "right" duty officer was also standing there, staring at Tolstoy. Makovitsky repeated his request.

"He said to a railway worker, somehow reluctantly and hesitantly (through gritted teeth), that the worker should pass on an order to the chief conductor to attach another third-class carriage," writes Makovitsky. "Six minutes later a locomotive brought the car past our train. The chief conductor, after coming in to inspect the tickets, announced to the public that another car was going to be hooked up and that there would be room for everyone, for at that point a lot of people were standing up in the train or on the gangways. But then the second bell was heard, followed by the third half a minute later, and they didn't hitch the car. I ran over to the official on duty. He replied that they didn't have a free car. The train started moving. I found out from the conductor that the car which had been brought over for hitching was needed in order to transport the station's schoolchildren."

"Our car was the worst and most cramped in which I have ever had to travel in Russia," Makovitsky recalled. "The entrance was not positioned in symmetry with the direction of travel. Anyone entering it whilst the train was starting to move risked hitting their face on the corner of the raised back, which was directly opposite the middle of the door; you had to walk around it. The compartments in the car were narrow, there was little room between the benches, and there wasn't enough room for the luggage either. Stuffy."

Makovitsky offered L.N a blanket to sit on. Tolstoy refused. "On this trip he was particularly reluctant to accept any of the services which he previously used."

Soon he began to suffocate due to the lack of air and the smoke, because half the passengers were smoking. After putting on a fur coat and hat, and deep winter galoshes, he went out onto the rear gangway. But there were smokers there, too. Then he moved to the front gangway, where the wind was blowing into his face, but there no one was smoking and the only people there were a woman and her child and some peasant..."

Makovitsky was later to describe the three quarters of an hour that L.N. spent on the gangway as "fatal". It was enough time for him to catch a cold.

After returning to the car, Tolstoy, as he was in the habit of doing, quickly began to get to know the other people; he chatted to a fifty year-old peasant – about his family, the housekeeping, carting, smashing bricks. L.N. was interested in every last detail. "Ein typischer Bauer" ("A typical peasant") - he said to Makovitsky in German.

The man turned out to be very talkative. He talked boldly about the vodka trade, complained about a landlord named B., with whom the community had refused to share the forest, on account of which authorities conducted a "flogging" in the village. A surveyor who was sitting nearby cut in to speak up for B. and began to blame the peasants for everything. The peasant refused to back down.

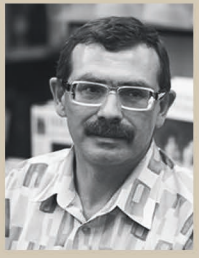
"We work more than you peasants do," said the surveyor.

"You can't compare the two things," objected Tolstoy.

The peasant assented, the surveyor argued back. It didn't bother him at all that he was arguing with Tolstoy himself. "I knew your brother, Sergei Nikolayevich," said the surveyor. According to Makovitsky, "he was ready to argue endlessly, and not in order to arrive at the truth in the conversation," but to prove his case at any cost. The argument spilled over onto wider issues: from Henry George's 'Single-tax' system, to Darwin, science and education. Tolstoy grew excited; he got to his feet and spoke for over an hour. The other passengers began to crowd in more tightly from both ends of the car: peasants, tradesmen, laborers, intellectuals. "Two Jews," noted Makovitsky, who had harbored an intense dislike of Jews ever since his youth in Austria-Hungary. A schoolgirl was noting

Over a hundred years ago something outrageous happened in Yasnaya Polyana. Count Leo Tolstoy, a famous author eighty two years of age at the time, took off, destination unknown. Since then, circumstances surrounding the writer's whereabouts during his final days and his eventual death bred many myths and legends. Russian popular writer and reporter Pavel Basinsky picks into archives and presents his interpretation of facts prior to Leo Tolstoy's mysterious disappearance. Basinsky follows Leo Tolstoy throughout his life up to the very end. Reconstructing the story from historical documents, he creates a visionary account of events that led to the Tolstoy family drama.

Flight from Paradise is of special interest to international researchers of Leo Tolstoy's life and work, and is recommended to a wider audience worldwide.



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For his book Leo Tolstoy: Flight From Paradise Pavel Basinsky received the National Literary Prize "Big Book".

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