

**THE NOVELS AND
STORIES OF IVAN
TURGENIEFF. ON THE EVE**

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The Novels and Stories of Ivan Turgenieff. On the Eve by Ivan Turgenieff & Isabel F. Hapgood

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IVAN TURGENIEFF & ISABEL F. HAPGOOD

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THE NOVELS AND STORIES OF
IVÁN TURGÉNIEFF

ON THE EVE

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY
ISABEL F. HAPGOOD



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PREFACE

IN a preface to the complete edition of his works, published in 1880 (the last before his death), Turgéniéff furnishes some extremely interesting details about "On the Eve," in the form of a brief episode from his literary career. This episode runs as follows:

"I spent nearly the whole of the year 1855 (as well as the three years preceding) in my village in the Mzensk county, Orél Government. Among all my neighbours, the one with whom I was most intimate was a certain Vasily Karatyéeff, a young landed proprietor, aged twenty-five. Karatyéeff was a romantic man and an enthusiast, very fond of music and literature, gifted, in addition, with peculiar humour, amorous, impressionable and straightforward. He had been educated in the Moscow University, and lived in the country with his father, who was seized with an attack of hypochondria, in the nature of insanity, every three years. Karatyéeff had a sister,—a very remarkable being,—who also ended by going insane. All these persons died long ago;—that is why I speak so freely of them. Karatyéeff forced himself to attend to the farming, of which he understood absolutely nothing, and was particularly fond of reading and of conversing with persons who were sympathetic to him. Very few such people were to be found. The

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neighbours did not like him, because of his free-thinking and his mocking tongue:—moreover, they were afraid to introduce him to their wives and daughters, because he had a well-established reputation—in reality not in the least deserved by him,—of a dangerous Lovelace. He came frequently to my house, and his visits constituted almost my sole recreation and pleasure at that period, which was not a very cheerful one for me.

“When the Crimean war broke out, and recruiting began among the nobility, under the name of the militia, the nobles of our county who disliked Karatyéeff conspired among themselves, as the saying is, to rid themselves of him,—and elected him the commanding officer of that militia company. On learning of his appointment, Karatyéeff came to me. I was immediately struck by his perturbed and alarmed aspect. His first words were: ‘I shall not return thence; I shall not survive it; I shall die there.’

“He could not boast of robust health: his lungs ached constantly, and he was of frail constitution. Although I feared for him all the hardships of the campaign, still I endeavoured to banish his gloomy forebodings and began to assure him that before a year had passed we should meet again in our lonely nook, should see each other, and chat and discuss as of old. But he obstinately persisted in his view; and after a rather prolonged stroll in my park, he suddenly turned to me with the following words:

“‘I have a request to make of you. You know that I spent several years in Moscow, but you do not know that I had an experience there which aroused in me the desire to narrate it—both to myself and to others. I have

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tried to do so; but I have been forced to the conviction that I possess no literary talent whatsoever—and the whole thing has ended in my writing it down in this copy-book, which I commit to your hands.’

“So saying, he drew from his pocket a small manuscript book, containing about fifty pages. ‘I am so firmly convinced,’ he went on, ‘despite all your friendly consolation, that I shall not return from the Crimea, that I beg you to be so good as to take these rough sketches, and make something out of them which shall not vanish without leaving a trace, as I shall!’

“I tried to refuse; but perceiving that my refusal pained him, I promised to fulfil his wish, and that same evening, after Karatyéeff’s departure, I glanced through the book which he had left me. There, in hasty outlines, was sketched that which afterward constituted the substance of ‘On the Eve.’ The story was not finished, however, and broke off abruptly.

“Karatyéeff, during his residence in Moscow, had fallen in love with a young girl, who reciprocated his affection; but, on making acquaintance with a Bulgarian named Katránoff (a person who, as I afterward learned, had formerly been very famous, and is not forgotten to this day in his native land), had fallen in love with him, and gone off with him to Bulgaria, where he soon died. —The story of this love was given with sincerity but inartistically. Karatyéeff really had not been born for literature. One scene alone, namely, the jaunt to Tzarftzyno, was limned with a good deal of animation—and in my romance I have preserved its chief features.

“Truth to tell, at that time I was turning over other images in my head: I was preparing to write ‘Rúdin’;

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but the task which I afterward tried to fulfil in 'On the Eve' started up before me from time to time. The figure of the principal heroine, Eléna, which was then a new type in Russian life, was pretty clearly defined in my imagination; but a hero was lacking,—the sort of person to whom Eléna, with her confused but powerful impulse toward freedom, could give herself. On perusing Karatyéeff's book I involuntarily exclaimed: 'Here's the hero whom I have been seeking!'—There was none of that sort, as yet, among contemporary Russians.

"When, on the following day, I saw Karatyéeff, I not only repeated my promise to fulfil his request, but I thanked him for having rescued me from a difficulty, and cast a ray of light into my hitherto dark meditations and inventions. Karatyéeff was delighted, and repeating once more, 'Don't let all that perish,' he went off to serve in the Crimea, whence, to my profound regret, he did not return. His forebodings were realized. He died of typhus in camp near the Putrid Sea, where our Orél militia was stationed,—in earthen huts,—never seeing a single enemy during the whole period of the war, and nevertheless losing, from various maladies, about one-half of its men.

"But I deferred the execution of my promise: I busied myself with other work; on completing 'Rúdin' I began on 'A Nobleman's Nest'; and only in the winter of '58-'59, on finding myself again in the same village and the same surroundings as at the time of my acquaintance with Karatyéeff, did I feel that the slumbering impressions were beginning to stir. I hunted up and re-read his copy-book; the figures which had retreated into the background again advanced into the foreground—and I

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immediately took up my pen. A number of my friends knew at the time all which I have now related; but I regard it as my duty now, on the definitive publication of my romances, to communicate it to the public also, and thereby pay at least a tardy tribute to the memory of my poor young friend.

“And this is how a Bulgarian became the hero of my romance. But the Messrs. Critics have unanimously reproached me for the artificiality and lifelessness of that character, have been surprised at my strange caprice in selecting a Bulgarian in particular, and have asked: ‘Why? For what reason? What’s the sense of it?’—The casket has simply been opened; but I did not consider it necessary, at that time, to enter into further explanations.”

Assuredly, no one of Turgénieff’s books raised a greater storm, or provoked so diametrically opposite opinions from the critics. Some declared that Insároff was nothing but another Rúdin; others that he was the precise antithesis of Rúdin. Some admired his reticence, his strength, the high relief in which he was depicted; others called him “shadowy,” could detect no force or attraction in him, and jeered at his having captivated Eléna by his “heroic” trip of forty miles, on behalf of his compatriots, and, in particular, his silly feat with the German at Tzarítzyna. Opinions as to Eléna were equally diverse. The point about her which seemed particularly to irritate society and the critics was her abandon-