

Khodynka

Leo Tolstoy

1910

— I don't understand your stubbornness. Why do you need not to sleep and "join the people", when you can peacefully ride tomorrow with your aunt Vera directly to the pavilion. And you'll see everything. I told you Ber promised me to guide you through. And you, as a maid of honor, have the right.

That's what prince Paul Golitsin, famous to the higher circles under his nickname "Fop", told his twenty-three year old daughter Alexandra, recognized for her nickname "Rina". This conversation took place on the evening of May 17, 1896, in Moscow, on the eve of the national celebration of the coronation. The matter was that Rina, beautiful, strong girl, with a distinctive Golitsin's profile, with a hooked nose of a bird of prey, had already passed the period of affection for upper-class socializing and was, or at least believed that she was, a progressive woman, and was a populist, wanting to connect with common folks. She was her father's only daughter and his favorite, and acted the way she wanted. Now a crazy thought came to her, as her father said, go to the folks' fair with her cousin, and not at noon with the family, but with the folks, with the janitor and coachman's assistant from their household, who were going to go early in the morning.

— But, dad, I want to not look at people but to be with them. I want to see their attitude toward the young Czar. Can't you for once...

— Well, do as you will, I know your stubbornness.

— Don't get mad, daddy. I promise you that I will be reasonable, and Alec will accompany me. No matter how strange and wild this idea seemed to her father, he couldn't disagree.

— Of course, take it, — he answered to her question whether she could take a stroller. — Once you ride to Khodynka, send it back.

— Well, well.

She approached him. He customarily crossed her: she kissed his large white hand. And they dispersed.

The same night in an apartment, leased by a well-known socialite Maria Yakovlevna to the workers of a cigarette factory, there were talks about tomorrow's festival. In the apartment of Yemelyan Yagodnov, his fellows decided when they should get out there.

— It's better not to go to bed, to not to oversleep, — told Yasha, a joyful fellow who lived behind a partition.

— Why not to sleep, — answered Yemelyan. — We'll come out with dawn. And that's what the guys told.

— OK, to sleep so to sleep. Only you, Semenych, wake me up, if anything.

Semenych Yemelyan promised, and himself took a silk thread out from his desk, moved the lamp closer and started to stitch a torn button to his summer coat. Once finished, he prepared his best clothes, put them on the bench, polished his boots, then prayed, reading several prayers: the Father's prayer, and "Holy Mother", meaning of which he didn't understand and have never was interested in, removed his feet wraps, laid on rumpled futon of the squeaky bed.

"Why not?" — He thought. — "Sometimes people get lucky. Maybe and I'll get the winning ticket. (There was a rumor among the people that, in addition to gifts, they'll hand out winning tickets as well.) Let it be not ten thousand, — five hundred rubles would be great. I'd make use of them: would send some to my old folks, and would bring my wife here. Otherwise what kind of life is this, apart? I'd buy a real watch. Would get fur coats made for myself and for her. Otherwise I'm struggling, struggling, and still can't get out of poverty". And here he started to imagine how he and his wife walk along the Alexander's garden, and that same policemen, who detained him for being drunk and swearing, this policemen is already a general, and this general laughs and calls to the inn to listen organ play. And the organ plays, and plays, exactly as clock strikes. And Semenych wakes up and hears the clock sizzles and beats, and the hostess, Maria Yakovlevna, coughs behind the door, and in the window it's not as dark as it was yesterday.

"Need not to oversleep".

Yemelyan gets up, goes barefoot behind the partition, wakes up Yasha, dresses up, oils his head, combs his hair, gazes in a broken mirror.

"Not bad. That's what girls love you for. But I don't want to mess around."

He goes to the hostess. As was agreed yesterday, he puts in his sack some cake, two eggs, ham, half a bottle of vodka, and, just as at dawn, he and Yasha go out from the yard, and walk toward the Petrovsky's park. They are not alone. Some people are ahead of them, and others catching up from behind, and men, and women, and children, gathering from all sides, all cheerful and dressed up, walk toward the same road.

They've reached the Khodynka's field. But there were people already all over the field, like dark spots. And it smokes from different places. The dawn was cold, and people are finding boughs, logs, and are making fires.

Yemelyan met his mates, too, they also lit a bonfire, sat, pulled out appetizer, wine. And here and the sun rose, clear, bright. And it became joyful. They play songs, chat, joke, laugh, all rejoice, and anticipate the joy. Yemelyan drank with his companions, smoked, and became even more joyful.

All were well-dressed, but among the well-dressed workers and their wives were visible the rich and merchants with their wives and children, who occasionally appeared among the people. So pronounced was Rina Golitsyna, when she, joyful, shining from the idea that she's got what she wanted, and is with the people, among the people, celebrating the accession of the Czar, who was adored by his people, to the throne, and she walked with her brother Alec from fire to fire.

— Congratulations, good lady, — shouted to her a young factory worker, bringing a glass closer to his mouth. — Do not neglect our bread-and-salt.

— Thank you.

— Eat yourselves — Alec prompted, proud of his knowledge of folk customs, and they passed on.

As they used to always take the first seats, they passed through the people across the field, where it became too crowded (there were so many people that, despite of the clear morning, a thick fog stood over the field from the breaths of the people), they went straight to the Pavilion. But the police didn't let them in.

— Fine. Please, let's come back there again, — said Rina, and they returned to the crowd again.

— No way, — answered Yemelyan, sitting with his friends around snacks laid out on paper, to a stoic that his factory coworker told about what kind of gifts are given away. — No way.

— I'm telling you. Not supposed to, by the law, but they do give that. I saw that myself. He bears both a bundle and a glass.

— Known thing, union rascals. They don't care. They give who they want to.

— What is that. How can they do what's against the law?

— Those ones can.

— But let's go, guys. There's no point looking at them.

All stood up. Yemelyan has put his remaining bottle of vodka back, and went ahead with his comrades. They barely made twenty steps, as people tightened so that it became difficult to walk.

— Why are you pushing?

— And why are you pushing?

— What are you, alone here?

— Enough.

— Oh my God, they squeezed me, — a female voice said. Children cry was heard from the other side.

— Go to hell.

— What's with you? Are you the only one that needs everything?

— They'll take everything. Well, let me get to them. The devils, the devils!

That was Yemelyan screaming and, stiffening his strong, broad shoulders and elbows, he pushed as he could, and strove forward, barely knowing why, — only because everybody pushed, and because it seemed to him that he definitely needed to break forward. Behind and from both sides of him were people, and all squeezed him, but people ahead of him didn't move and didn't allow to go forward. And everybody was screaming, screaming something, groaning, oohing. Yemelyan was silent and, gritting his teeth and stiffening his eyebrows, didn't get discouraged, unabated, and continued to push forward, and moved, though slowly. Suddenly all shook and after an evenly paced movement dashed forward and rightward. Yemelyan glanced there and saw how something flew, then another, and third, and fell into the crowd. He did not understand what it was, but a voice close to him screamed:

— Damned devils — they started throwing onto the people.

And there bags with gifts flew, and shouts, laughter, weeping and moaning were heard.

Someone painfully pushed Yemelyan to his side. He became even gloomier and angrier. But before he recovered from his pain, someone stepped on his foot. His coat, a new coat, got stuck against something and torn. He felt anger in his heart, and he began to push with all his power on the people in front of him. But then suddenly something happened, which he could not understand. Earlier, he didn't see anything in front of him except for the people's backs, and now suddenly everything opened ahead of him. He saw tents, those tents, from which the gifts were supposed to be given. He rejoiced, but his joy lasted for only a minute, because he immediately realized that what has opened to him, ahead of him, opened only because they all came to a ravine and all who were in front of him, some on legs, others kneeling, fell in it, and he is falling

there, too, over the people, he's falling on the people, and others, from behind, are falling on him. And then, for the first time, fear found him. He fell. A woman in a headscarf fell upon him. He shook her off his back, wanted to return, but others pressed from behind and he didn't have the strength. He leant forward, but his feet set on the soft, — on people. They grabbed him by the legs and screamed. He saw nothing, heard nothing and moved forward, treading on people.

— Brothers, take my watch, the golden! Brothers, help me! — shouted the man beside him.

“I don't care about the watch now,” — thought Yemelyan and started to get to the other side of the ravine. In his soul, there were two feelings, and both excruciating: one — fear for himself, for his life, and another — anger against all these crazed people who pressed on him. Meanwhile, that goal, which he set from the beginning: to reach the tents and get a bag with goodies and the winning ticket, attracted him.

He already saw the tents, and the union people, he heard the cries of those who managed to reach the tents, heard the crack of wooden passages, on which the front crowd gathered. Yemelyan pushed, and there were less than twenty steps left, when he suddenly heard under his feet, or rather between his legs, a child screaming and crying. Yemelyan glanced under his feet: a boy, simple-haired, in a torn shirt, was supine, crying nonstop, grabbing him by the legs. Suddenly something touched Yemelyan's heart. Fear for himself has passed. The anger toward people has also passed. He felt sorry for the boy. He bent down, grabbed him under his belly, but people from behind have pushed him so much that he almost fell, let the boy off his hands, but immediately, gathered all his strengths, again picked him up and threw him over his shoulder. People pushed less now, and Yemelyan carried the boy.

— Pass him over here, — shouted a coachman, who walked near Yemelyan, and took the boy and raised him above the crowd.

— Run over the people.

And Yemelyan, looking around, saw how the boy, diving into people, then rising above them, went further and further on the shoulders and heads of people.

Yemelyan continued to move. He couldn't not to move, but now he was no longer been occupied by the gifts, neither by reaching the tents. He thought about the boy, and where Yasha was, and about those crushed people he saw, when passed along the ravine. When he reached the tent, he's got a sack and glass, but that no longer pleased him. What pleased him in the first minute was that the crowd ended there. It became possible to breathe and move. But even this joy has immediately ended because of what he saw there. And he saw a woman in a striped torn dress, with unkempt hair and in boots with buttons. She laid backwards; her legs in the boots were sticking straight up. One arm was lying on the grass, the other was, with clasped fingers, were laid below her breasts. Face was not even pale but blue white, which only the dead have. This woman was the first crushed to death and was thrown here, behind the fence, before the Imperial Pavilion.

At the time when Yemelyan saw her, two city policeman stood above her, and a policeman ordered something. Immediately the Cossacks drove in, and their commander ordered them something, and they embarked on Yemelyan and other people standing there and drove them back into the crowd. Yemelyan again hit the crowd, and there was crush again and crush was even worse than before. Again there were shouts, moans of women, children, again some people trampled others and couldn't not to trample. But Yemelyan already didn't have a fear for himself, neither an anger toward those who pressed him; he had the only desire — to go away, get rid of, to un-

derstand what turned up in his soul, to smoke and drink. He awfully wanted to smoke and drink. And he achieved his: went out to an empty space and lit up and drank.

But that's not what happened to Alec and Rina. Expecting nothing, they walked between sitting circles of people, talked with women, children, when suddenly all people rushed to the tents, after the rumor spread that union workers was not legally distributing the gifts. Before she could look around, Rina has already been separated from Alec and the crowd took her somewhere. Horror grasped her. She tried to keep quiet, but could not, and screamed, begging for mercy. But there was no mercy, she was pressed more and more, her dress was torn, hat fell off. She could not be certain, but felt like her watch with chain was torn away. She was a strong girl and could still hold, but the mental state of her horror was painful, she could not breathe. Ragged, crumpled, she somehow kept; but at that hour, when Cossacks rushed at the crowd to disperse it, she, Rina, despaired, and once despaired, weakened, and felt dizzy. She fell and did not remember anything more.

When she came to her senses, she was laying on her back on the grass. Some person, like a worker, with a beard, in a torn coat, was sitting on his haunches in front of her and was splashing water into her face. When she opened her eyes, this man crossed himself and spit out the water. It was Yemelyan.

— Where am I? Who are you?

— At Khodynka. And who I am? A man. They tumbled me, too. But our brother will get over anything, — said Yemelyan.

— What is that? — Rina pointed to the copper money on her belly.

— And this means that people thought that you've died, so it's for the funeral. And I looked closer: and think — no, she's alive. Started pouring.

Reena glanced at herself and saw that she was all ripped and part of her breast was naked. She got ashamed. The man realized and covered it.

— That's OK, lady, you'll live.

More people approached, and a policeman. Reena raised, sat, and announced whose daughter she was and where she lived. And Yemelyan went for the coachman.

A lot of people has gathered around when Yemelyan has arrived with the carriage. Rina got up, she was offered some help, but she sat down by herself. She was only ashamed for their tom look.

— Well, but where's your brother? — One of the women asked Rina.

— I do not know. Don't know, — Rina pronounced with despair. (Once home, Rina learned that Alec, when hustle has started, managed to get out of the crowd and returned home without being hurt.)

— Oh, here he is who saved me, — said Reena. — If it wasn't him, I don't know what would have happened. What is your name? — She asked Yemelyan.

— Me? Why to call me.

— Because she is a Lady, — one of the women prompted him — Ri-i-ch.

— Come me to my father. He will thank you.

And suddenly something turned up in Yemelyan's heart, so strong that he would not exchange that for two-hundred-thousand of winnings.

— That's nothing. No, lady, go yourself. What's there to thank for.

— No, I will not settle.

— Goodbye, lady, with God. Only don't take my coat.

And he smiled this his white-teethed joyful smile, which Rina remembered as a consolation at the most difficult moments of her life.

And even more joyful was the feeling, pulling him out from this life, which Yemelyan experienced each time he recalled Khodynka, and this young lady, and his last conversation with her.

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