



Karolina Světlá: The Village Novel [Vesnický román]

Read by Lily Ann Chu Fencik

One of the most successful novels of Karolina Světlá is called Village Novel written in 1867. It is written in the language of the 19th century, and today's reader may find this style a bit unusual. That's why we dared to adjust the style of a part of this story into a more understandable version using today's English. On our website, however, you will find the original version that is four times longer. The main characters in this novel are Antoš (a man caught between his obligations and true love), his wife (formerly the Magistrate's widow), and Sylva (the young, fierce and proud housekeeper). After the death of the village's magistrate, his widow remarries young Antoš. Their new marriage is full of happiness and she gives birth to two sons. Then, she becomes unfairly jealous of Antoš, starts terrorizing him and hires Sylva to spy on him. The novel leads them into an unusual love triangle and we enter the story when Antoš discovers Sylva eavesdropping outside his room. At this time, he knows only that Sylva triumphed over all the men in the village during the annual tradition of beheading a rooster. This caused a great stir in the community.

Meanwhile Sylva took off her shoes and stole quietly upstairs to Antoš's door. ...

But before she could press her face to the door, it swiftly burst open, throwing her to the wall. Antoš stood before the girl, well prepared for his journey. Sylva lowered her eyes before him and blushed as if inflamed.

"Look who's here! A girl so proud that she would rather go to jail than give a good word to her telltales," Antoš smiled bitterly, "And look! Here she is, spying! How does this make sense? I would not have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. A strange thing, that pride of yours. What does my wife give you when you bring her the right gossip of me? Do you think that this craft of yours will bring you riches? It is not necessary for me to tell you now, how things stand between me and my wife. ... We remain together in the eyes of the world, but in reality, we have been drifting apart. What is hers is no longer mine and what is mine she has no rights to. I left from here with borrowed money, in order to be independent. ... I rode to Hungary for horses and started my own business at my own risk. I had peculiar luck from the very start. I bought well and sold even better; ... I think that my next trip will be even more blessed than my first.... I do not however intend to leave the care of the children and the household to my wife alone, I want to clothe the children and provide for their schooling, but let her feed them. ... However I will not let her take them away this time, that I assure her. Here, take these banknotes and give them to her. I've been keeping an exact track of expenses since precisely the time when she left the room with the children, the room in which I lived with her since the wedding, in which both of our sons were born. She left the room, threatened the boys with punishment when they cried out for me, she left the room when I practically got down on my knees to her, like a beggar for her love, when I swear I was without a drop of guilt. Nobody can consider that a sin, that I



wanted to stand by her as her husband, not just as a lovesick boy, which is what she wanted. Since that time I ceased considering her my wife... something she will never again be.... I was young and inexperienced when my wife took me for her husband, but I loved her and obeyed her like a son. Her very self, her every wish for me was sacred to me. I would have been eternally grateful had she only had a little understanding for me, and we would have been happy together unto death. But pride, her pride intoxicated her. ... But let's leave all that aside—I only ask from her that she not speak badly of me to the children. She owes this to me, because if I wanted, she would have to give them to me, those golden boys of mine, and remain on her own, abandoned and widowed. However, I know already that these righteous things I ask of her in vain—there is nothing left for me to do but trust in God and enjoy a clear conscience.”

Sylva remained as if rooted in the place where she had listened to Antoš. She had never in her life heard anyone speak in such words, in such pain and anguish. Up until that time she considered misery as something when some relative died, somebody was hurt, some building caught fire, all at once she now realized that there could be more depths to misery, more dejection than the loss of property or friends. Sylva's heart was trembling....

She rested her heavy head on the pillar where a few moments ago Antoš had rested his head, and Sylva began at once to awake from an unconscious dream of carefree youth ... The more Antoš entered her thoughts, the more bashful she was in his presence. How could he speak to her without patent hate, how could he still trust her after all the evil she caused him? —She wanted to prove to him that she regretted her transgressions, she made up her mind that she would leave his wife's services immediately and let him know why she made such a decision. Would that be sufficient though? Couldn't she prove her regret to him some other way, less obviously perhaps, but more efficiently? Was it really not possible to right all the injustices he's experienced himself? Perhaps...

Doubly stunned, Sylva returned to Antoš's wife, who was dying from impatience. Sylva related to her the conversation with Antoš quite disinterestedly, without her ordinary embellishments. However, she placed special emphasis on the places where she recited on his behalf how he abandoned forever her wealth, her love, but in no way his obligations to her.

Antoš's wife flew into a right rage, tearing to pieces the banknotes Sylva handed her, tearing her own garments; she would have torn the whole world to shreds, had she been able. Sylva, looking at her in mute astonishment, wondered how she had not noticed this woman's wickedness for so long. Watching her tear away a veil of contrived pain resembled the most ferocious rabid animal. Antoš's wife finally fell into terrible convulsions.

Sylva did not leave the lady's side all night, even though it was difficult to suppress her feelings, and self-control, as we know, was not her strong suit. But in her sprouted an idea, for which she would still need to be in favor with her lady. Not only did Sylva not quit her job



but she never confronted her lady about what she now knew were nothing but lies. Sylva still acted as if she were her loyal confidante. Wild Sylva, who always shot off her mouth with the thoughts she could not suppress, quickly became familiar with all the strategies that the race of Eve has been famous for since the beginning of the world.

Translated by Matthew Sweney, adapted by Eric Rafoth

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