



The Death of Ivan Ilych (The Art of the Novella)

Leo Tolstoy

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There is no explanation.

Written eight years after the publication of *Anna Karenina*—a time during which, despite the global success of his novels, Leo Tolstoy renounced fiction in favor of religious and philosophical tracts—*The Death of Ivan Ilych* represents perhaps the most keenly realized melding of Tolstoy's spirituality with his artistic skills.

Here in a vibrant new translation, the tale of a judge who slowly comes to understand that his illness is fatal was inspired by Tolstoy's observation at his local train station of hundreds of shackled prisoners being sent off to Siberia, many for petty crimes. When he learned that the sentencing judge had died, Tolstoy was roused to consider the judge's thoughts during his final days—a study on the acceptance of mortality only deepened by the death, during its writing, of one of Tolstoy's own young children.

The final result is a magisterial story, both chilling and beguiling in the fullness of its empathy, its quotidian detail, and the beauty of its prose, and is, as many have claimed it to be, one of the most moving novellas ever written.

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