

**THE DEATH OF IVAN ILYCH**

from the novella by Leo Tolstoy

adapted by Guy Micco

William J. Donnely, Marcus Ratliff, and Catherine Belling

Additional adaptation Johanna Shapiro

*Characters*

Person 1 .....

Person 2 .....

Person 3 .....

Ivan Ilych .....

Proskovya Fyodorovna, Ivan's wife ....

The Doctor.....

Gerasim .....

**PERSON 2:** Guess what. Ivan Ilych died... finally!

**PERSON 1:** Really? So what exactly was the matter with him? (aside to self: *Isn't that interesting... he's dead, and I'm not!*)

**PERSON 3:** The doctors couldn't decide. That is, they decided, but in different ways. When I last saw him I knew he would never recover. (aside to self: *thank God it was him, not me*)

**PERSON 1:** And I haven't been to his home since the holidays. I kept meaning to go but...

**PERSON 2:** Ivan Ilych was a member of the Court of Justice. In his work, he soon mastered the technique of dispensing with all considerations that were irrelevant to his job as examining magistrate. He wrote up even the most complicated cases in a style that reduced them to their externals. Personal issues were a distraction. He always removed all traces of his own opinion, and, most importantly, he adhered to all the prescribed formalities.

**PERSON 3:** Ivan Ilych tried to find enjoyment in family life, but if things didn't go smoothly, he immediately withdrew into his work. What mattered most was that Ivan Ilych had his work. Entering the courtroom made him feel important, as did his recognition of the skill with which he handled cases. And so Ivan Ilych's life proceeded as he felt it should, pleasantly and properly.

**PERSON 2:** One day that something happened. Something very small and insignificant.

**IVAN:** I fell off a ladder. Not a big deal, you know. I was trying to show the interior decorator how I wanted our drapes to hang, and I slipped and knocked my side against the window frame. I bruised myself. It hurt for a while; then I forgot about it. Mostly. But at some point the pain became a constant companion, and it made me irritable.

**PERSON 1:** Pain began to spoil the pleasure of Ivan's easy and proper life. He found himself quarreling more often with his wife.

**WIFE:** At first I fought back and said nasty things to him, but when I realized that it was always during dinner that he flew into such a rage, I realized it was from some physical discomfort, caused by eating. So I restrained myself, and just tried to get dinner over with as quickly as possible. But really, my husband had a horrid disposition and was making my life so miserable. I knew he wasn't well, but I began to feel sorry for *myself*. And the more I pitied myself the more I hated my husband.

**PERSON 2:** One night, after a particularly bad fight with his wife, Ivan admitted being irritable and said it was because he was ill. His wife told him that if he was ill he should go to the doctor.

**WIFE:** I told him he *must* go and consult this really good doctor I had just heard about.

**IVAN:** I don't like doctors... But, I gave in and went. The whole procedure was just what I expected, just what one always encounters. Complete waste of time. There was the waiting ... the doctor's exaggerated air of self-importance...

**PERSON 3:** This was so familiar to Ivan because it was the very air *he* assumed in court...

**IVAN:** He examined me with the usual probing and tapping, the listening, the questions requiring answers that were clearly superfluous since they were foregone conclusions, and then the meaningful look...

**DOCTOR:** Just put yourself in our hands and we'll take care of everything. We know exactly what has to be done. Such and such indicates that you have such and such, but if analysis of such and such does not confirm this, then we have to assume that you have such and such. On the other hand, if we assume such and such is the case then--

**IVAN:** (*interrupts doctor*) And so on and on. To me only one question mattered: was my condition *serious* or not? But that question he ignored. It was inappropriate.

**DOCTOR:** From my point of view that's an idle question and not worth considering. One simply has to weigh the alternatives: a kidney problem, or a disease of the colon – the cecum perhaps. It is not a matter of your life. It is the diagnosis that's important here.

**PERSON 2:** And in Ivan Ilych's presence the doctor resolved that conflict brilliantly in favor of the bowel ... with the reservation that if the urine analysis yielded new evidence, the case would be reconsidered.

**IVAN:** This is exactly what I had done a thousand times, and in the same brilliant manner with prisoners in the dock. From the doctor's summary I concluded that things were bad. Except that to the doctor, and everyone else, it didn't matter, even though for *me* it was bad.

**PERSON 1:** And this conclusion, which came as a painful shock to him, aroused a feeling of great self-pity and great resentment toward the doctor for being so indifferent to a matter of such importance.

**PERSON 3:** But Ivan hid his anger. He simply got up, paid his bill, heaved a sigh and said:

**IVAN:** No doubt we sick people ask inappropriate questions. But in general, would you say my illness is *serious* or not?

**DOCTOR:** I have already told you what I consider necessary and suitable. Anything more would be speculation. Now we must just wait for the blood test and urinalysis results to come back.

**IVAN:** I went out slowly. All the way home I kept going over and over in my mind what the doctor had said, trying to translate all his vague, confusing medical terms into simple

language and find an answer to my question: Is this condition *serious*? Or nothing much to worry about? And it seemed to me that the essence of what the doctor had said was that it was very serious.

**PERSON 3:** He reached home and began telling his wife about the visit. At first she was listening, but in the middle of his account their daughter came in—she and her daughter were preparing to go out. She forced herself to sit and listen politely to this tedious stuff, but she could not stand it for long. Then the daughter reminded her mother that they were late...

**IVAN:** And then the doctor told me--

**WIFE:** (*interrupts him*) Well, I'm very glad. Just see to it that you take your medicine regularly and I'm sure you'll be fine in no time. Give me your prescription. I'll send Gerasim to the pharmacy... Now we really have to leave.

**PERSON 1:** Ivan began to take his medicine and follow the doctor's instructions. Then the blood and urine results came back, and the instructions were changed.

**PERSON 2:** The pain in his side exhausted him, never let up, and seemed to get worse all the time. The taste in his mouth became more peculiar. He felt his breath had a foul odor, his appetite had diminished, and he was losing weight and strength. Something dreadful was happening to him, something of such vast importance that nothing in his life could compare to it. And he alone was aware of this. Those around him either did not understand or did not wish to understand.

**PERSON 3:** This tormented Ivan Ilych. He saw that people in his household - especially his wife and daughter, who were caught up in a whirl of social activity - were annoyed with him for being so miserable and demanding. He saw that he had become an obstacle to them, and that his wife had adopted a certain attitude toward his illness and clung to it regardless of what he said or did.

**PERSON 1:** That attitude said: “You, Ivan Ilych, are to blame for your own illness and misery.”

**WIFE:** I would tell our friends, and to his doctor: You know, Ivan simply cannot stick to the course of treatment prescribed for him. One day he takes his pills, sticks to his diet, and goes to bed on time. But if I don't keep an eye on him, the next day he'll forget to take his medicine, and sit up until one in the morning playing cards.

**PERSON 2:** Ever since his illness, Ivan had slept alone in a little room off his study. It was there, at night, after his friends had gone home and his wife and children had gone to bed, that Ivan Ilych had dark thoughts. He felt all pleasure in life had been drained away. He felt that his life had been poisoned and that he was poisoning the lives of others. And, with this knowledge - and with his pain - he would go to bed, miserable...

**PERSON 1:** Only to have to get up in the morning and face another day of this torture, without a single person to understand and comfort him. He felt alone. *Very alone.*

**IVAN:** I tried to think of the positive. I tried to hope. But, it was no use... It's not a matter of a kidney, or a cecum. It's a matter of life ... and death. Isn't it clear to everyone but me that I'm dying, that it's only a question of weeks, days - perhaps minutes?!

**PERSON 3:** Ivan broke out in a cold sweat thinking of this. All he could hear was the rapid beating of his heart, alone, in the dark.

**IVAN:** I'll be gone. What will there be then? ... *Nothing.* So, where will *I* be when I'm gone? Can this really be death? ... No! I don't want this!

**PERSON 3:** Ivan Ilych remembered the syllogism he learned in school:

All men are mortal.

Caius is a man.

Therefore, Caius is mortal.

That had always seemed correct to Ivan, as applied to Caius. Or to the abstract *man*. But not to himself!

**PERSON 1:** And, Ivan was seized with terror. He saw that he was dying.

**IVAN:** But what I suffer most from is The Lie. The Lie which, for some reason, everyone accepts - that I am not dying, just simply ill. That if I just stay calm and accept my treatments, I will recover... I know better.

I've come within a hairbreadth of shouting: "STOP YOUR LYING! You and I know that I am dying; so, at least, STOP LYING."

**PERSON 1:** But he never had the courage to say it.

**PERSON 2:** The hired caregiver, Gerasim, always came to empty his bed pan. Gerasim was a healthy young man, always bright and cheerful.

**PERSON 3:** At first it tormented Ivan to see this nice young fellow in his clean clothes performing such a revolting task.

**IVAN:** Gerasim...

**GERASIM:** Yes, sir?

**IVAN:** This must be very unpleasant for you. You must forgive me. I can't help it.

**GERASIM:** Oh, no, sir, of course you can't help it. You're very ill.

**IVAN:** Gerasim. Please come and help me over to the sofa.

**PERSON 2:** Gerasim led—almost carried—Ivan to the sofa and gently lifted his legs to place them in a comfortable position.

**PERSON 3:** Ivan felt much better while Gerasim was holding his legs. When he let them down again he seemed to feel worse.

**IVAN:** Gerasim, are you busy now?

**GERASIM:** Not at all, sir.

**IVAN:** Then could you hold my legs up, high like that, for a bit longer?

**PERSON 2:** Ivan had Gerasim sit down and hold his legs up, and while he sat there, Ivan began talking to him. And, strangely enough, Ivan thought he felt better.

**PERSON 1:** After that, Ivan Ilych would send for Gerasim from time to time. He loved to talk to him. Gerasim did everything with a goodness of heart that moved Ivan.

**IVAN:** Gerasim is the only who understands me. Gerasim is the only one who does not lie.

**PERSON 1:** Once, as Ivan Ilych was sending him away, he came right out and said ...

**GERASIM:** We all have to die someday, so why shouldn't I help you? I hope someday someone will do the same for me, when my time comes.

**PERSON 2:** Then there was the Doctor - fresh, hearty, stocky, cheerful. He would visit with a look on his face that seems to say: "Now, now, you're having a difficult time, but soon we're going to fix everything." The doctor knows this expression is inappropriate with Ivan Ilych, but he has put it on once and for all and can't take it off - like a man who has donned a coat in the morning to make a round of social calls. Ivan Ilych would look inquisitively at him, as if to say:

**IVAN:** Won't you ever be ashamed of your lying?



**PERSON 1:** But the doctor did not want to understand such a question. Instead, he makes some small talk and then examines Ivan Ilych - takes his temperature and pulse; listens to his heart and lungs ...

**PERSON 3:** Ivan's wife walked in once during the doctor's exam. Just as the doctor had adopted a certain attitude toward his patients which he could not change, she had adopted one toward Ivan - that he was not doing what he should and was to blame. She also told the doctor how Ivan made Gerasim hold up his legs. The doctor smiled disdainfully, indulgently, as if to say:

**DOCTOR:** What can you do? Patients sometimes get absurd ideas into their heads, but we have to forgive them.

**PERSON 2:** Ivan Ilych was pronounced dead at five o'clock in the afternoon on February fourth of this year, 1882. His obituary read: It is with profound sorrow that his wife and children inform relatives and friends of the demise of their beloved husband and father, Ivan Ilych, member of the court of justice. The funeral will take place on Friday at one o'clock in the afternoon.