

The Last Station:



The Last Station

A Novel of Tolstoy's Last Year

JAY PARINI

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Inspired by diaries kept by members of the household of Count Leo Tolstoy, Parini (The Patch Boys) here offers a searching view of the last year in the life of the author of War and Peace. His venture is complex, making use of alternating narrators taken from the contentious factions of the Master's vast estate to depict a man at war within and without, torn between his philosophy of poverty and the life of privilege he leads at the insistence of Sofya Andreyevna, his wife. She, one of the voices telling this tale, is consumed by paranoia and a fear that her husband will sign over his lucrative copyrights to the people (which he does). And like Vladimir Chertkov, Tolstoy's friend and chief acolyte, his wife causes his "perpetual state of compromise." Surrounded by hangers-on, beset by inner struggles, the great one makes a run for peace in his final days, and--in a closing that Tolstoy might have written himself--the chronicler of the aristocracy and hero to the peasants finds all he has yearned for in a humble trainmaster's house. In the end, it is not the people around him who speak most eloquently for Tolstoy, but the sincerity of his own words--and those of Parini in his kaleidoscopically rich and skillful novel.

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