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Rudin

Ivan Turgenev · *1856 · Constance Garnett translation (1894)*

In the country house of a rich Moscow lady, Darya Mihailovna Lasunsky, a visitor named Rudin arrives, a man of about thirty-five who can speak wonderfully of ideas. Within an evening he has dazzled the household, and the daughter of the house, Natalya, falls in love with him. Turgenev's first novel is a short, exact study of a man who inspires others with words and cannot act on them.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What is the worth of an idealist whose fine words are not followed by deeds, and what happens when he is asked to act?

Rudin's eloquence is real, and so is his failure. He talks of sacrifice, and when Natalya asks him to act, he advises submission. The novel gives him the credit he deserves: he awakens others, even though he cannot do for himself what he says. The epilogue lets him die on a Paris barricade in 1848, and Turgenev shows that a man may be better at the last than he was in his life.

KEY CHARACTERS

Dmitri Rudin
A brilliant talker who cannot act.

Natalya Alexyevna
The daughter of the house, who loves him.

Lezhnyov
A neighbor who understands him.

Darya Mihailovna
The rich, ambitious hostess.

Pigasov
A sour skeptic.

Volintsev
A neighbor in love with Natalya.

Bassistoff
A young tutor who admires Rudin.

Grades 9–12

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01

The Country House

CHAPTERS I–II

Alexandra Pavlovna and Volintsev meet in the morning. Darya Mihailovna receives guests, among them the sour Pigasov and the smooth Pandalevsky, and waits for a new celebrity, Rudin.

- The household of Darya Mihailovna is a small court.
- Pigasov is a cynic.
- The visitor is awaited with curiosity.

02

Rudin Arrives

CHAPTERS III–IV

Rudin makes an immediate impression, defeats Pigasov in argument, and is invited to stay. Darya Mihailovna plans to use him as an ornament.

- His speaking is the first thing noticed.
- He wins the household over.
- He is a guest and a showpiece.

03

Natalya

CHAPTERS V–VII

Natalya, the daughter of the house, is moved by Rudin's talk of ideas and sacrifice, and the young tutor Bassistoff admires him greatly. Natalya's feeling for Rudin grows.

- Natalya is serious and sincere.
- Bassistoff sees Rudin as a hero.
- Rudin's words work on them both.

04

The Pond

CHAPTERS VIII–X

Rudin tells Volintsev, who loves Natalya, that he and she love each other. Natalya sends a note asking him to meet her at the Avduhin pond. He advises submission, and she breaks with him. Lezhnyov explains Rudin's motives to Volintsev.

- The meeting at the pond is the turning point.
- Natalya wants action and he gives advice.
- Lezhnyov understands Rudin.

05

Departure

CHAPTERS XI–XII

Rudin writes two letters and leaves the house. Two years later Alexandra Pavlovna has married Lezhnyov, and he defends the absent Rudin to his friends.

- Rudin's letters are honest and weak.
- Lezhnyov's defense is generous.
- Life goes on without him.

06

Epilogue

EPILOGUE

Rudin, poor and traveling, visits Lezhnyov, who consoles him. The last pages describe an unknown man who dies on a barricade in Paris in 1848.

- Rudin is an older, poorer man.
- Lezhnyov's kindness is real.
- The man on the barricade is a surprise.

Words and Deeds · Idealism · Love · Russia

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. Notice how Rudin's speaking is described. Is it real or only showy?
2. The scene at the pond is the center. Ask what Natalya wants from him.
3. Lezhnyov defends Rudin. Ask whether he is right.
4. The epilogue changes how you see Rudin. Look at what Turgenev adds.

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