

# **OLD PORTRAITS**

Ivan Turgenev



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# OLD PORTRAITS

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ABOUT thirty miles from our village there lived, many years ago, a distant cousin of my mother's, a retired officer of the Guards, and rather wealthy landowner, Alexey Sergeitch Teliegin. He lived on his estate and birth-place, Suhodol, did not go out anywhere, and so did not visit us; but I used to be sent, twice a year, to pay him my respects—at first with my tutor, but later on alone. Alexey Sergeitch always gave me a very cordial reception, and I used to stay three or four days at a time with him. He was an old man even when I first made his acquaintance; I was twelve, I remember, on my first visit, and he was then over seventy. He was born in the days of the Empress Elisabeth—in the last year of her reign. He lived alone with his wife, Malania Pavlovna; she was ten years younger than he. They had two daughters; but their daughters had been long married, and rarely visited Suhodol; they were not on the best of terms with their parents, and Alexey Sergeitch hardly ever mentioned their names.

I see, even now, the old-fashioned house, a typical manor-house of the steppes. One story in height, with immense attics, it was built at the beginning of this century, of amazingly thick beams of pine,—such beams came in plenty in those days from the Zhizdrinsky pine-forests; they have passed out of memory now! It was very spacious, and contained a great number of rooms, rather low-pitched and dark, it is true; the windows in the walls had been made small for the sake of greater warmth. In the usual fashion (I ought rather to say, in what was then the usual fashion), the offices and house-serfs' huts surrounded the manorial house on all sides, and the garden was close to it—a small garden, but containing fine fruit-trees, juicy apples, and pipless pears. The flat steppe of rich, black earth stretched for ten miles round. No lofty object for the eye; not a tree, nor even a belfry; somewhere, maybe, jutting up, a windmill, with rents in its sails; truly, well-named Suhodol, or Dry-flat! Inside the house the rooms were filled with ordinary, simple furniture; somewhat unusual was the milestone-post that stood in the window of the drawing-room, with the following inscription:—"If you walk sixty-eight times round this drawing-room you will have gone a mile; if you walk eighty-seven times from the furthest corner of the parlour to the right-hand corner of the billiard-room, you will have gone a mile," and so on. But what most of all impressed a guest at the house for the first time was the immense collection of pictures hanging on the walls, for the most part works of the so-called Italian masters: all old-fashioned landscapes of a sort, or mythological and religious subjects. But all these pictures were very dark, and even cracked with age;—in one, all that met the eye was some patches of flesh-colour; in another, undulating red draperies on an unseen body; or an arch which seemed to be suspended in the air; or a dishevelled tree with blue foliage; or the bosom of a nymph with an immense breast, like the lid of a soup-tureen; a cut water-melon, with black seeds; a turban, with a feather in it, above a horse's head; or the gigantic brown leg of an apostle, suddenly thrust out, with a muscular calf, and toes turned upwards. In the drawing-room in the place of honour hung a portrait of the Empress Catherine II., full length; a copy of the famous portrait by Lampi—an object of the special reverence, one might say the adoration, of the master of the house. From the ceiling hung glass lustres in bronze settings, very small and very dusty.

Alexey Sergeitch himself was a stumpy, paunchy little old man, with a chubby face of one uniform tint, yet pleasant, with drawn-in lips, and very lively little eyes under high eyebrows. He wore his scanty locks combed to the back of his head; it was only since 1812 that he had given up wearing powder. Alexey Sergeitch invariably wore a grey "redingote," with three capes falling over his shoulders, a striped waistcoat, chamois-leather breeches, and high boots of dark red morocco, with heart-shaped scallops and tassels at the tops; he wore a white muslin cravat, a jabot, lace cuffs, and two gold English "turnip watches," one in each pocket of his waistcoat. In his right hand he usually carried an enamelled snuff-box full of "Spanish" snuff, and his left hand leaned on a

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cane with a silver-chased knob, worn smooth by long use. Alexey Sergeitch had a little nasal, piping voice, and an invariable smile—kindly, but, as it were, condescending, and not without a certain self-complacent dignity. His laugh, too, was kindly—a shrill little laugh that tinkled like glass beads. Courteous and affable he was to the last degree—in the old-fashioned manner of the days of Catherine—and he moved his hands with slow, rounded gestures, also in the old style. His legs were so weak that he could not walk, but ran with hurried little steps from one armchair to another, in which he would suddenly sit down, or rather fall softly, like a cushion.

As I have said already, Alexey Sergeitch went out nowhere, and saw very little of his neighbours, though he liked society, for he was very fond of talking! It is true that he had society in plenty in his own house; various Nikanor Nikanoritchs, Sevasticy Sevastietchs, Fedulitchs, Miheitchs, all poor gentlemen in shabby cossack coats and camisoles, often from the master's wardrobe, lived under his roof, to say nothing of the poor gentlewomen in chintz gowns, black kerchiefs thrown over their shoulders, and worsted reticules in their tightly clenched fingers—all sorts of Avdotia Savishnas, Pelagea Mironovnas, and plain Feklushkas and Arinkas, who found a home in the women's quarters. Never less than fifteen persons sat down to Alexey Sergeitch's table. . . . He was such a hospitable man! Among all those dependants two were particularly conspicuous: a dwarf, nicknamed Janus, or the Double-faced, of Danish—or, as some maintained, Jewish—extraction, and the mad Prince L. Contrary to what was customary in those days, the dwarf did nothing to amuse the master or mistress, and was not a jester—quite the opposite; he was always silent, had an ill-tempered and sullen appearance, and scowled and gnashed his teeth directly a question was addressed to him. Alexey Sergeitch called him a philosopher, and positively respected him; at table the dishes were handed to him first, after the guests and master and mistress. "God has afflicted him," Alexey Sergeitch used to say; "such is His Divine will; but it's not for me to afflict him further." "How is he a philosopher?" I asked him once. (Janus didn't take to me; if I went near him he would fly into a rage, and mutter thickly, "Stranger! keep off!") "Eh, God bless me! isn't he a philosopher?" answered Alexey Sergeitch. "Look ye, little sir, how wisely he holds his tongue!" "But why is he double-faced?" "Because, little sir, he has one face on the outside—and so you, surface-gazers, judge him. . . . But the other, the real face he hides. And that face I know, and no one else—and I love him for it . . . because that face is good. You, for instance, look and see nothing . . . but I see without a word: he is blaming me for something; for he's a severe critic! And it's always with good reason. That, little sir, you can't understand; but you may believe an old man like me!" The real history of the two-faced Janus—where he came from, and how he came into Alexey Sergeitch's hands—no one knew; but the story of Prince L. was well known to every one. He went, a lad of twenty, of a wealthy and distinguished family, to Petersburg, to serve in a regiment of the Guards. At the first levee the Empress Catherine noticed him, stood still before him, and, pointing at him with her fan, she said aloud, addressing one of her courtiers, who happened to be near, "Look, Adam Vassilievitch, what a pretty fellow! a perfect doll!" The poor boy's head was completely turned; when he got home he ordered his coach out, and, putting on a ribbon of St. Anne, proceeded to drive all over the town, as though he had reached the pinnacle of fortune. "Drive over every one," he shouted to his coachman, "who does not move out of the way!" All this was promptly reported to the empress: the decree went forth that he should be declared insane, and put under the guardianship of two of his brothers; and they, without a moment's delay, carried him off to the country, and flung him into a stone cell in chains. As they wanted to get the benefit of his property, they did not let the poor wretch out, even when he had completely recovered his balance, and positively kept him locked up till he really did go out of his mind. But their evil doings did not prosper; Prince L. outlived his brothers, and, after long years of adversity, he came into the charge of Alexey Sergeitch, whose kinsman he was. He was a stout, completely bald man, with a long, thin nose and prominent blue eyes. He had quite forgotten how to talk—he simply uttered a sort of inarticulate grumbling; but he sang old-fashioned Russian ballads beautifully, preserving the silvery freshness of his voice to extreme old age; and, while he was singing, he pronounced each word clearly and distinctly. He had attacks at times of a sort of fury, and then he became terrible: he would stand in the corner, with his face to the wall, and all perspiring and red—red all down his bald head and down his neck—he used to go off into vicious chuckles, and, stamping with his feet, order some one—his brothers probably—to be punished. "Beat 'em!" he growled hoarsely, coughing and choking with laughter; "flog 'em, don't spare 'em! beat, beat, beat the monsters, my oppressors! That's it! That's it!" On the day before his death he greatly alarmed and astonished Alexey Sergeitch. He came, pale and subdued, into his room, and, making him a low obeisance, first thanked him for his care and kindness, and then asked him to send for a priest, for death had come to him—he had seen death,

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and he must forgive every one and purify his soul. "How did you see death?" muttered Alexey Sergeitch in bewilderment at hearing connected speech from him for the first time. "In what shape? with a scythe?" "No," answered Prince L.; "a simple old woman in a jacket, but with only one eye in her forehead, and that eye without an eyelid." And the next day Prince L. actually did die, duly performing everything, and taking leave of every one in a rational and affecting manner. "That's just how I shall die," Alexey Sergeitch would sometimes observe. And, as a fact, something of the same sort did happen with him—but of that later.

But now let us go back to our story. Of the neighbours, as I have stated already, Alexey Sergeitch saw little; and they did not care much for him, called him a queer fish, stuck up, and a scoffer, and even a "martiniste" who recognised no authorities, though they had no clear idea of the meaning of this term. To a certain extent the neighbours were right: Alexey Sergeitch had lived in his Suhodol for almost seventy years on end, and had had hardly anything whatever to do with the existing authorities, with the police or the law—courts. "Police—courts are for the robber, and discipline for the soldier," he used to say; "but I, thank God, am neither robber nor soldier!" Rather queer Alexey Sergeitch certainly was, but the soul within him was by no means a petty one. I will tell you something about him.

To tell the truth, I never knew what were his political opinions, if an expression so modern can be used in reference to him; but, in his own way, he was an aristocrat—more an aristocrat than a typical Russian country gentleman. More than once he expressed his regret that God had not given him a son and heir, "for the honour of our name, to keep up the family." In his own room there hung on the wall the family—tree of the Teliegins, with many branches, and a multitude of little circles like apples in a golden frame. "We Teliegins," he used to say, "are an ancient line, from long, long ago: however many there've been of us Teliegins, we have never hung about great men's ante—rooms; we've never bent our backs, or stood about in waiting, nor picked up a living in the courts, nor run after decorations; we've never gone trailing off to Moscow, nor intriguing in Petersburg; we've sat at home, each in his hole, his own man on his own land . . . home—keeping birds, sir!—I myself though I did serve in the Guards—but not for long, thank you." Alexey Sergeitch preferred the old days. "There was more freedom in those days, more decorum; on my honour, I assure you! but since the year eighteen hundred" (why from that year, precisely, he did not explain), "militarism, the soldiery, have got the upper hand. Our soldier gentlemen stuck some sort of turbans of cocks' feathers on their heads then, and turned like cocks themselves; began binding their necks up as stiff as could be . . . they croak, and roll their eyes—how could they help it, indeed? The other day a police corporal came to me 'I've come to you,' says he, 'honourable sir,' . . . (fancy his thinking to surprise me with that! . . . I know I'm honourable without his telling me!) 'I have business with you.' And I said to him, 'My good sir, you'd better first unfasten the hooks on your collar. Or else, God have mercy on us—you'll sneeze. Ah, what would happen to you! what would happen to you! You'd break off, like a mushroom . . . and I should have to answer for it!' And they do drink, these military gentlemen—oh, oh, oh! I generally order home—made champagne to be given them, because to them, good wine or poor, it's all the same; it runs so smoothly, so quickly, down their throats—how can they distinguish it? And, another thing, they've started sucking at a pap—bottle, smoking a tobacco—pipe. Your military gentleman thrusts his pap—bottle under his moustaches, between his lips, and puffs the smoke out of his nose, his mouth, and even his ears—and fancies himself a hero! There are my sons—in—law—though one of them's a senator, and the other some sort of an administrator over there—they suck the pap—bottle, and they reckon themselves clever fellows too!"

Alexey Sergeitch could not endure smoking; and moreover, he could not endure dogs, especially little dogs. "If you're a Frenchman, to be sure, you may well keep a lapdog: you run and you skip about here and there, and it runs after you with its tail up . . . but what's the use of it to people like us?" He was exceedingly neat and particular. Of the Empress Catherine he never spoke but with enthusiasm, and in exalted, rather bookish phraseology: "Half divine she was, not human! Only look, little sir, at that smile," he would add, pointing reverentially to Lampi's portrait, "and you will agree: half divine! I was so fortunate in my life as to be deemed worthy to behold that smile close, and never will it be effaced from my heart!" And thereupon he would relate anecdotes of the life of Catherine, such as I have never happened to read or hear elsewhere. Here is one of them. Alexey Sergeitch did not permit the slightest allusion to the weaknesses of the great Tsaritsa. "And, besides," he exclaimed, "can one judge of her as of other people?"

One day while she was sitting in her peignoir during her morning toilette, she commanded her hair to be combed. . . . And what do you think? The lady—in—waiting passed the comb through, and sparks of electricity

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simply showered out! Then she summoned to her presence the court physician Rogerson, who happened to be in waiting at the court, and said to him: "I am, I know, censured for certain actions; but do you see this electricity? Consequently, as such is my nature and constitution, you can judge for yourself, as you are a doctor, that it is unjust for them to censure me, and they ought to comprehend me!" The following incident remained indelible in Alexey Sergeitch's memory. He was standing one day on guard indoors, in the palace—he was only sixteen at the time—and behold the empress comes walking past him; he salutes . . . "and she," Alexey Sergeitch would exclaim at this point with much feeling, "smiling at my youth and my zeal, deigned to give me her hand to kiss and patted my cheek, and asked me 'who I was? where I came from? of what family?' and then" . . . here the old man's voice usually broke . . . "then she bade me greet my mother in her name and thank her for having brought up her children so well. And whether I was on earth or in heaven, and how and where she deigned to vanish, whether she floated away into the heights or went her way into the other apartments . . . to this day I do not know!"

More than once I tried to question Alexey Sergeitch about those far-away times, about the people who made up the empress's circle. . . . But for the most part he edged off the subject. "What's the use of talking about old times?" he used to say . . . "it's only making one's self miserable, remembering that then one was a fine young fellow, and now one hasn't a tooth left in one's head. And what is there to say? They were good old times . . . but there, enough of them! And as for those folks—you were asking, you troublesome boy, about the lucky ones!—haven't you seen how a bubble comes up on the water? As long as it lasts and is whole, what colours play upon it! Red, and blue, and yellow—a perfect rainbow or diamond you'd say it was! Only it soon bursts, and there's no trace of it left. And so it was with those folks."

"But how about Potiomkin?" I once inquired.

Alexey Sergeitch looked grave. "Potiomkin, Grigory Alexandrovitch, was a statesman, a theologian, a pupil of Catherine's, her cherished creation, one must say. . . . But enough of that, little sir!"

Alexey Sergeitch was a very devout man, and, though it was a great effort, he attended church regularly. Superstition was not noticeable in him; he laughed at omens, the evil eye, and such "nonsense," but he did not like a hare to run across his path, and to meet a priest was not altogether agreeable to him. For all that, he was very respectful to clerical persons, and went up to receive their blessing, and even kissed the priest's hand every time, but he was not willing to enter into conversation with them. "Such an extremely strong odour comes from them," he explained: "and I, poor sinner, am fastidious beyond reason; they've such long hair, and all oily, and they comb it out on all sides—they think they show me respect by so doing, and they clear their throats so loudly when they talk—from shyness may be, or I dare say they want to show respect in that way too. And besides, they make one think of one's last hour. And, I don't know how it is, but I still want to go on living. Only, my little sir, don't you repeat my words; we must respect the clergy—it's only fools that don't respect them; and I'm to blame to babble nonsense in my old age."

Alexey Sergeitch, like most of the noblemen of his day, had received a very slight education; but he had, to some extent, made good the deficiency himself by reading. He read none but Russian books of the end of last century; the more modern authors he thought insipid and deficient in style. . . . While he read, he had placed at his side on a round, one-legged table, a silver tankard of frothing spiced kvas of a special sort, which sent an agreeable fragrance all over the house. He used to put on the end of his nose a pair of big, round spectacles, but in latter years he did not so much read as gaze dreamily over the rims of his spectacles, lifting his eyebrows, chewing his lips, and sighing. Once I caught him weeping with a book on his knees, greatly, I own, to my surprise.

He had recalled these lines:

"O pitiful race of man!  
Peace is unknown to thee!  
Thou canst not find it save  
In the dust of the grave. . .  
Bitter, bitter is that sleep!  
Rest, rest in death . . . but living weep!"



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These lines were the composition of a certain Gormitch–Gormitsky, a wandering poet, to whom Alexey Sergeitch had given a home in his house, as he struck him as a man of delicate feeling and even of subtlety; he wore slippers adorned with ribbons, spoke with a broad accent, and frequently sighed, turning his eyes to heaven; in addition to all these qualifications, Gormitch–Gormitsky spoke French decently, having been educated in a Jesuit college, while Alexey Sergeitch only "followed conversation." But having once got terribly drunk at the tavern, that same subtle Gormitsky showed a turbulence beyond all bounds; he gave a fearful thrashing to Alexey Sergeitch's valet, the man cook, two laundry–maids who chanced to get in his way, and a carpenter from another village, and he broke several panes in the windows, screaming furiously all the while: "There, I'll show them, these Russian loafers, rough–hewn billy–goats!"

And the strength the frail–looking creature put forth! It was hard work for eight men to master him! For this violent proceeding Alexey Sergeitch ordered the poet to be turned out of the house, after being put, as a preliminary measure, in the snow—it was wintertime—to sober him.

"Yes," Alexey Sergeitch used to say, "my day is over; I was a spirited steed, but I've run my last race now. Then, I used to keep poets at my expense, and I used to buy pictures and books of the Jews, geese of the best breeds, and pouter–pigeons of pure blood. . . . I used to go in for everything! Though dogs I never did care for keeping, because it goes with drinking, foulness, and buffoonery! I was a young man of spirit, not to be outdone. That there should be anything of Teliugin's and not first–rate . . . why, it was not to be thought of! And I had a splendid stud of horses. And my horses came—from what stock do you think, young sir? Why, from none other than the celebrated stables of the Tsar, Ivan Alexeitch, brother of Peter the Great . . . it's the truth I'm telling you! All fawn–coloured stallions, sleek—their manes to their knees, their tails to their hoofs. . . . Lions! And all that was—and is buried in the past. Vanity of vanities—and every kind of vanity! But still—why regret it? Every man has his limits set him. There's no flying above the sky, no living in the water, no getting away from the earth. . . . We'll live a bit longer, anyway!"

And the old man would smile again and sniff his Spanish snuff.

The peasants liked him; he was, in their words, a kind master, not easily angered. Only they, too, repeated that he was a worn–out steed. In former days Alexey Sergeitch used to go into everything himself—he used to drive out to the fields, and to the mill, and to the dairy, and peep into the granaries and the peasants' huts; every one knew his racing droshky, upholstered in crimson plush, and drawn by a tall mare, with a broad white star all over her forehead, called "Beacon," of the same famous breed. Alexey Sergeitch used to drive her himself, the ends of the reins crushed up in his fists. But when his seventieth year came, the old man let everything go, and handed over the management of the estate to the bailiff Antip, of whom he was secretly afraid, and whom he called Micromegas (a reminiscence of Voltaire!), or simply, plunderer. "Well, plunderer, what have you to say? Have you stacked a great deal in the barn?" he would ask with a smile, looking straight into the plunderer's eyes. "All, by your good favour, please your honour," Antip would respond cheerfully. "Favour's all very well, only you mind what I say, Micromegas! don't you dare touch the peasants, my subjects, out of my sight! If they come to complain . . . I've a cane, you see, not far off!" "Your cane, your honour, Alexey Sergeitch, I always keep well in mind," Antip Micromegas would respond, stroking his beard. "All right, don't forget it." And the master and the bailiff would laugh in each other's faces. With the servants, and with the serfs in general, his "subjects" (Alexey Sergeitch liked that word) he was gentle in his behaviour. "Because, think a little, nephew; nothing of their own, but the cross on their neck—and that copper—and daren't hanker after other people's goods . . . how can one expect sense of them?" It is needless to state that of the so–called "serf question" no one even dreamed in those days; it could not disturb the peace of mind of Alexey Sergeitch: he was quite happy in the possession of his "subjects"; but he was severe in his censure of bad masters, and used to call them the enemies of their order. He divided the nobles generally into three classes: the prudent, "of whom there are too few"; the prodigal, "of whom there are quite enough"; and the senseless, "of whom there are shoals and shoals."

"And if any one of them is harsh and oppressive with his subjects"—he would say—"then he sins against God, and is guilty before men!"

Yes, the house–serfs had an easy life of it with the old man; the "subjects out of sight" no doubt fared worse, in spite of the cane with which he threatened Micromegas. And what a lot there were of them, those house–serfs, in his house! And for the most part sinewy, hairy, grumbling old fellows, with stooping shoulders, in long–skirted

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nankeen coats, belted round the waist, with a strong, sour smell always clinging to them. And on the women's side, one could hear nothing but the patter of bare feet, the swish of petticoats. The chief valet was called Irinarh, and Alexey Sergeitch always called him in a long-drawn-out call: "I-ri-na-a-arh!" The others he called: "Boy! Lad! Whoever's there of the men!" Bells he could not endure: "It's not an eating-house, God forbid!" And what used to surprise me was that whatever time Alexey Sergeitch called his valet, he always promptly made his appearance, as though he had sprung out of the earth, and with a scrape of his heels, his hands behind his back, would stand before his master, a surly, as it were angry, but devoted servant!

Alexey Sergeitch was liberal beyond his means; but he did not like to be called "benefactor." "Benefactor to you, indeed, sir! . . . I'm doing myself a benefit, and not you, sir!" (when he was angry or indignant, he always addressed people with greater formality). "Give to a beggar once," he used to say, "and give him twice, and three times. . . . And—if he should come a fourth time, give to him still—only then you might say too: 'It's time, my good man, you found work for something else, not only for your mouth.'" "But, uncle," one asked, sometimes, "suppose even after that the beggar came again, a fifth time?" "Oh, well, give again the fifth time." He used to have the sick, who came to him for aid, treated at his expense, though he had no faith in doctors himself, and never sent for them. "My mother," he declared, "used to cure illnesses of all sorts with oil and salt—she gave it internally, and rubbed it on too—it always answered splendidly. And who was my mother? She was born in the days of Peter the Great—only fancy that!"

Alexey Sergeitch was a Russian in everything; he liked none but Russian dishes, he was fond of Russian songs, but the harmonica—a "manufactured contrivance"—he hated; he liked looking at the serf-girls' dances and the peasant-women's jigs; in his youth, I was told, he had been an enthusiastic singer and a dashing dancer; he liked steaming himself in the bath, and steamed himself so vigorously that Irinarh, who, serving him as bathman, used to beat him with a bundle of birch-twigs steeped in beer, to rub him with a handful of tow, and then with a woollen cloth—the truly devoted Irinarh used to say every time, as he crept off his shelf red as a "new copper image": "Well, this time I, the servant of God, Irinarh Tolobiev, have come out alive. How will it be next time?"

And Alexey Sergeitch spoke excellent Russian, a little old-fashioned, but choice and pure as spring water, continually interspersing his remarks with favourite expressions: "Pon my honour, please God, howsoever that may be, sir, and young sir. . . ."

But enough of him. Let us talk a little about Alexey Sergeitch's wife, Malania Pavlovna.

Malania Pavlovna was born at Moscow. She had been famous as the greatest beauty in Moscow—*la Vénus de Moscou*. *I knew her as a thin old woman with delicate but insignificant features, with crooked teeth, like a hare's, in a tiny little mouth, with a multitude of finely crimped little yellow curls on her forehead, and painted eyebrows. She invariably wore a pyramidal cap with pink ribbons, a high ruff round her neck, a short white dress, and prunella slippers with red heels; and over her dress she wore a jacket of blue satin, with a sleeve hanging loose from her right shoulder. This was precisely the costume in which she was arrayed on St. Peter's Day in the year 1789! On that day she went, being still a girl, with her relations to the Hodinskoe field to see the famous boxing-match arranged by Orlov. "And Count Alexey Grigorievitch" (oh, how often I used to hear this story!) "noticing me, approached, bowed very low, taking his hat in both hands, and said: 'Peerless beauty,' said he, 'why have you hung that sleeve from your shoulder? Do you, too, wish to try a tussle with me? . . . By all means; only I will tell you beforehand you have vanquished me—I give in! And I am your captive.' And every one was looking at us and wondering." And that very costume she had worn continually ever since. "Only I didn't wear a cap, but a hat à la bergère de Trianon; and though I was powdered, yet my hair shone through it, positively shone through it like gold!" Malania Pavlovna was foolish to the point of "holy innocence," as it is called; she chattered quite at random, as though she were hardly aware herself of what dropped from her lips—and mostly about Orlov. Orlov had become, one might say, the principal interest of her life. She usually walked . . . or rather swam, into the room with a rhythmic movement of the head, like a peacock, stood still in the middle, with one foot strangely turned out, and two fingers holding the tip of the loose sleeve (I suppose this pose, too, must once have charmed Orlov); she would glance about her with haughty nonchalance, as befits a beauty—and with a positive sniff, and a murmur of "What next!" as though some importunate gallant were besieging her with compliments, she would go out again, tapping her heels and shrugging her shoulders. She used, too, to take Spanish snuff out of a tiny bonbonnière, picking it up with a tiny golden spoon; and from time to time, especially when any one unknown to her was present, she would hold up—not to her eyes, she had splendid sight, but to her nose—a double eyeglass in*

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*the shape of a half-moon, with a coquettish turn of her little white hand, one finger held out separate from the rest. How often has Malania Pavlovna described to me her wedding in the church of the Ascension, in Arbaty—such a fine church!—and how all Moscow was there . . . "and the crush there was!—awful! Carriages with teams, golden coaches, outriders . . . one outrider of Count Zavadovsky got run over! and we were married by the archbishop himself—and what a sermon he gave us! every one was crying—wherever I looked I saw tears . . . and the governor-general's horses were tawny, like tigers. And the flowers, the flowers that were brought! . . . Simply loads of flowers!" And how on that day a foreigner, a wealthy, tremendously wealthy person, had shot himself from love—and how Orlov too had been there. . . . And going up to Alexey Sergeitch, he had congratulated him and called him a lucky man . . . "A lucky man you are, you silly fellow!" said he. And how in answer to these words Alexey Sergeitch had made a wonderful bow, and had swept the floor from left to right with the plumes of his hat, as if he would say: "Your Excellency, there is a line now between you and my spouse, which you will not overstep!" And Orlov, Alexey Grigorievitch understood at once, and commended him. "Oh! that was a man! such a man!" And how, "One day, Alexis and I were at his house at a ball—I was married then—and he had the most marvellous diamond buttons! And I could not resist it, I admired them. 'What marvellous diamonds you have, Count!' said I. And he, taking up a knife from the table, at once cut off a button and presented it to me and said: 'In your eyes, my charmer, the diamonds are a hundred times brighter; stand before the looking-glass and compare them.' And I stood so, and he stood beside me. 'Well, who's right?' said he, while he simply rolled his eyes, looking me up and down. And Alexey Sergeitch was very much put out about it, but I said to him: 'Alexis,' said I, 'please don't you be put out; you ought to know me better!' And he answered me: 'Don't disturb yourself, Melanie!' And these very diamonds are now round my medallion of Alexey Grigorievitch—you've seen it, I dare say, my dear;—I wear it on feast-days on a St. George ribbon, because he was a brave hero, a knight of St. George: he burned the Turks."*

For all that, Malania Pavlovna was a very kind-hearted woman; she was easily pleased. "She's not one to snarl, nor to sneer," the maids used to say of her. Malania Pavlovna was passionately fond of sweet things—and a special old woman who looked after nothing but the jam, and so was called the jam-maid, would bring her, ten times a day, a china dish with rose-leaves crystallised in sugar, or barberries in honey, or sherbet of bananas. Malania Pavlovna was afraid of solitude—dreadful thoughts are apt to come over one, she would say—and was almost always surrounded by companions, whom she would urgently implore: "Talk, talk! why do you sit like that, simply keeping your seats warm!" and they would begin twittering like canaries. She was no less devout than Alexey Sergeitch, and was very fond of praying; but as, in her own words, she had never learned to repeat prayers well, she kept for the purpose a poor deacon's widow who prayed with such relish! Never stumbled over a word in her life! And this deacon's widow certainly could utter the words of prayer in a sort of unbroken flow, not interrupting the stream to breathe out or draw breath in, while Malania Pavlovna listened and was much moved. She had another widow in attendance on her—it was her duty to tell her stories in the night. "But only the old ones," Malania Pavlovna would beg—"those I know already; the new ones are all so far-fetched." Malania Pavlovna was flighty in the extreme, and at times she was fanciful too some ridiculous notion would suddenly come into her head. She did not like the dwarf, Janus, for instance; she was always fancying he would suddenly get up and shout, "Don't you know who I am? The prince of the Buriats. Mind, you are to obey me!" Or else that he would set fire to the house in a fit of spleen. Malania Pavlovna was as liberal as Alexey Sergeitch; but she never gave money—she did not like to soil her hands—but kerchiefs, bracelets, dresses, ribbons; or she would send pies from the table, or a piece of roast meat, or a bottle of wine. She liked feasting the peasant-women, too, on holidays; they would dance, and she would tap with her heels and throw herself into attitudes.

Alexey Sergeitch was well aware that his wife was a fool; but almost from the first year of his marriage he had schooled himself to keep up the fiction that she was very witty and fond of saying cutting things. Sometimes when her chatter began to get beyond all bounds, he would threaten her with his finger, and say as he did so: "Ah, the tongue, the tongue! what it will have to answer for in the other world! It will be pierced with a red-hot pin!"

Malania Pavlovna was not offended, however, at this; on the contrary, she seemed to feel flattered at hearing a reproof of that sort, as though she would say, "Well! is it my fault if I'm naturally witty?"

Malania Pavlovna adored her husband, and had been all her life an exemplarily faithful wife; but there had been a romance even in her life—a young cousin, an hussar, killed, as she supposed, in a duel on her account; but, according to more trustworthy reports, killed by a blow on the head from a billiard-cue in a tavern brawl. A

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water-colour portrait of this object of her affections was kept by her in a secret drawer. Malania Pavlovna always blushed up to her ears when she mentioned Kapiton—such was the name of the young hero—and Alexey Sergeitch would designedly scowl, shake his finger at his wife again, and say: "No trusting a horse in the field nor a woman in the house. Don't talk to me of Kapiton, he's Cupidon!" Then Malania Pavlovna would be all of a flutter and say: "Alexis, Alexis, it's too bad of you! In your young days you flirted, I've no doubt, with all sorts of misses and madams—and so now you imagine . . ." "Come, that's enough, that's enough, my dear Malania," Alexey Sergeitch interrupted with a smile. "Your gown is white—but whiter still your soul!" "Yes, Alexis, it is whiter!" "Ah, what a tongue, what a tongue!" Alexis would repeat, patting her hand.

To speak of "views" in the case of Malania Pavlovna would be even more inappropriate than in the case of Alexey Sergeitch; yet I once chanced to witness a strange manifestation of my aunt's secret feelings. In the course of conversation I once somehow mentioned the famous chief of police, Sheshkovsky; Malania Pavlovna turned suddenly livid—positively livid, green, in spite of her rouge and paint—and in a thick and perfectly unaffected voice (a very rare thing with her—she usually minced a little, intoned, and lisped) she said: "Oh, what a name to utter! And towards nightfall, too! Don't utter that name!" I was astonished; what kind of significance could his name have for such a harmless and inoffensive creature, incapable—not merely of doing—even of thinking of anything not permissible? Anything but cheerful reflections were aroused in me by this terror, manifesting itself after almost half a century.

Alexey Sergeitch died in his eighty-eighth year—in the year 1848, which apparently disturbed even him. His death, too, was rather strange. He had felt well the same morning, though by that time he never left his easy-chair. And all of a sudden he called his wife: "Malania, my dear, come here." "What is it, Alexis?" "It's time for me to die, my dear, that's what it is." "Mercy on you, Alexey Sergeitch! What for?" "Because, first of all, one must know when to take leave; and, besides, I was looking the other day at my feet. . . . Look at my feet . . . they are not mine . . . say what you like . . . look at my hands, look at my stomach . . . that stomach's not mine—so really I'm using up another man's life. Send for the priest; and meanwhile, put me to bed—from which I shall not get up again." Malania Pavlovna was terribly upset; however, she put the old man to bed and sent for the priest. Alexey Sergeitch confessed, took the sacrament, said good-bye to his household, and fell asleep. Malania Pavlovna was sitting by his bedside. "Alexis!" she cried suddenly, "don't frighten me, don't shut your eyes! Are you in pain?" The old man looked at his wife: "No, no pain . . . but it's difficult . . . difficult to breathe." Then after a brief silence: "Malania," he said, "so life has slipped by—and do you remember when we were married . . . what a couple we were?" "Yes, we were, my handsome, charming Alexis!" The old man was silent again. "Malania, my dear, shall we meet again in the next world?" "I will pray God for it, Alexis," and the old woman burst into tears. "Come, don't cry, silly; maybe the Lord God will make us young again then—and again we shall be a fine pair!" "He will make us young, Alexis!" "With the Lord all things are possible," observed Alexey Sergeitch. "He worketh great marvels!—maybe He will make you sensible. . . . There, my love, I was joking; come, let me kiss your hand." "And I yours." And the two old people kissed each other's hands simultaneously.

Alexey Sergeitch began to grow quieter and to sink into forgetfulness. Malania Pavlovna watched him tenderly, brushing the tears off her eyelashes with her finger-tips. For two hours she continued sitting there. "Is he asleep?" the old woman with the talent for praying inquired in a whisper, peeping in behind Irinarh, who, immovable as a post, stood in the doorway, gazing intently at his expiring master. "He is asleep," answered Malania Pavlovna also in a whisper. And suddenly Alexey Sergeitch opened his eyes. "My faithful companion," he faltered, "my honoured wife, I would bow down at your little feet for all your love and faithfulness—but how to get up? Let me sign you with the cross." Malania Pavlovna moved closer, bent down. . . . But the hand he had raised fell back powerless on the quilt, and a few moments later Alexey Sergeitch was no more.

His daughters arrived only on the day of the funeral with their husbands; they had no children either of them. Alexey Sergeitch showed them no animosity in his will, though he never even mentioned them on his death-bed. "My heart has grown hard to them," he once said to me. Knowing his kindly nature, I was surprised at his words. It is hard to judge between parents and children. "A great ravine starts from a little rift," Alexey Sergeitch said to me once in this connection: "a wound a yard wide may heal; but once cut off even a finger nail, it will not grow again."

I fancy the daughters were ashamed of their eccentric old parents.

A month later and Malania Pavlovna too passed away. From the very day of Alexey Sergeitch's death she had

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hardly risen from her bed, and had not put on her usual attire; but they buried her in the blue jacket, and with Orlov's medallion on her shoulder, only without the diamonds. Those her daughters divided, on the pretext that the diamonds should be used in the setting of some holy pictures; in reality, they used them to adorn their own persons.

And so I can see my old friends as though they were alive and before my eyes, and pleasant is the memory I preserve of them. And yet on my very last visit to them (I was a student by then) an incident occurred which jarred upon the impression of patriarchal harmony always produced in me by the Teliegin household.

Among the house-serfs there was one Ivan, called "Suhys' Ivan," a coachman or coach-boy, as they called him on account of his small size, in spite of his being no longer young. He was a tiny little man, brisk, snub-nosed, curly-headed, with an everlastingly smiling, childish face, and little eyes, like a mouse's. He was a great joker, a most comic fellow; he was great at all sorts of tricks—he used to fly kites, let off fireworks and rockets, to play all sorts of games, gallop standing up on the horse's back, fly higher than all the rest in the swing, and could even make Chinese shadows. No one could amuse children better; and he would gladly spend the whole day looking after them. When he started laughing, the whole house would seem to liven up; they would answer him—one would say one thing, one another, but he always made them all merry. . . . And even if they abused him, they could not but laugh. Ivan danced marvellously, especially the so-called "fish dance." When the chorus struck up a dance tune, the fellow would come into the middle of the ring, and then there would begin such a turning and skipping and stamping, and then he would fall flat on the ground, and imitate the movement of a fish brought out of the water on to dry land; such turning and wriggling, the heels positively clapped up to the head; and then he would get up and shriek—the earth seemed simply quivering under him. At times Alexey Sergeitch, who was, as I have said already, exceedingly fond of watching dancing, could not resist shouting, "Little Vania, here! coach-boy! Dance us the fish, smartly now"; and a minute later he would whisper enthusiastically: "Ah, what a fellow it is!"

Well, on my last visit, this Ivan Suhih came into my room, and, without saying a word, fell on his knees. "Ivan, what's the matter?" "Save me, sir." "Why, what is it?" And thereupon Ivan told me his trouble.

He was exchanged, twenty years ago, by the Suhy family for a serf of the Teliegins';—simply exchanged without any kind of formality or written deed: the man given in exchange for him had died, but the Suhys had forgotten about Ivan, and he had stayed on in Alexey Sergeitch's house as his own serf; only his nickname had served to recall his origin. But now his former masters were dead; the estate had passed into other hands; and the new owner, who was reported to be a cruel and oppressive man, having learned that one of his serfs was detained without cause or reason at Alexey Sergeitch's, began to demand him back; in case of refusal he threatened legal proceedings, and the threat was not an empty one, as he was himself of the rank of privy councillor, and had great weight in the province. Ivan had rushed in terror to Alexey Sergeitch. The old man was sorry for his dancer, and he offered the privy councillor to buy Ivan for a considerable sum. But the privy councillor would not hear of it; he was a Little Russian, and obstinate as the devil. The poor fellow would have to be given up. "I have spent my life here, and I'm at home here; I have served here, here I have eaten my bread, and here I want to die," Ivan said to me—and there was no smile on his face now; on the contrary, it looked turned to stone.

"And now I am to go to this wretch. . . . Am I a dog to be flung from one kennel to another with a noose round my neck? . . . to be told: 'There, get along with you!' Save me, master; beg your uncle, remember how I always amused you. . . . Or else there'll be harm come of it; it won't end without sin."

"What sort of sin, Ivan?"

"I shall kill that gentleman. I shall simply go and say to him, 'Master, let me go back; or else, mind, be careful of yourself. . . . I shall kill you.'"

If a siskin or a chaffinch could have spoken, and had begun declaring that it would peck another bird to death, it would not have reduced me to greater amazement than did Ivan at that moment. What! Suhys' Vania, that dancing, jesting, comic fellow, the favourite playfellow of children, and a child himself, that kindest-hearted of creatures, a murderer! What ridiculous nonsense! Not for an instant did I believe him; what astonished me to such a degree was that he was capable of saying such a thing. Anyway I appealed to Alexey Sergeitch. I did not repeat what Ivan had said to me, but began asking him whether something couldn't be done. "My young sir," the old man answered, "I should be only too happy—but what's to be done? I offered this Little Russian an immense compensation—I offered him three hundred roubles, 'pon my honour, I tell you! but he—there's no moving him!

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what's one to do? The transaction was not legal, it was done on trust, in the old-fashioned way . . . and now see what mischief's come of it! This Little Russian fellow, you see, will take Ivan by force, do what we will: his arm is powerful, the governor eats cabbage-soup at his table; he'll be sending along soldiers. And I'm afraid of those soldiers! In old days, to be sure, I would have stood up for Ivan, come what might; but now, look at me, what a feeble creature I have grown! How can I make a fight for it?" It was true; on my last visit I found Alexey Sergeitch greatly aged; even the centres of his eyes had that milky colour that babies' eyes have, and his lips wore not his old conscious smile, but that unnatural, mawkish, unconscious grin, which never, even in sleep, leaves the faces of very decrepit old people.

I told Ivan of Alexey Sergeitch's decision. He stood still, was silent for a little, shook his head. "Well," said he at last, "what is to be there's no escaping. Only my mind's made up. There's nothing left, then, but to play the fool to the end. Something for drink, please!" I gave him something; he drank himself drunk, and that day danced the "fish dance" so that the serf-girls and peasant-women positively shrieked with delight—he surpassed himself in his antics so wonderfully.

Next day I went home, and three months later, in Petersburg, I heard that Ivan had kept his word. He had been sent to his new master his master had called him into his room, and explained to him that he would be made coachman, that a team of three ponies would be put in his charge, and that he would be severely dealt with if he did not look after them well, and were not punctual in discharging his duties generally. "I'm not fond of joking." Ivan heard the master out, first bowed down to his feet, and then announced it was as his honour pleased, but he could not be his servant. "Let me off for a yearly quit-money, your honour," said he, "or send me for a soldier; or else there'll be mischief come of it!"

The master flew into a rage. "Ah, what a fellow you are! How dare you speak to me like that? In the first place, I'm to be called your excellency, and not your honour; and, secondly, you're beyond the age, and not of a size to be sent for a soldier; and, lastly, what mischief do you threaten me with? Do you mean to set the house on fire, eh?"

"No, your excellency, not the house on fire."

"Murder me, then, eh?"

Ivan was silent. "I'm not your servant," he said at last.

"Oh well, I'll show you," roared the master, "whether you're my servant or not." And he had Ivan cruelly punished, but yet had the three ponies put into his charge, and made him coachman in the stables.

Ivan apparently submitted; he began driving about as coachman. As he drove well, he soon gained favour with the master, especially as Ivan was very quiet and steady in his behaviour, and the ponies improved so much in his hands; he turned them out as sound and sleek as cucumbers—it was quite a sight to see. The master took to driving out with him oftener than with the other coachmen. Sometimes he would ask him, "I say, Ivan, do you remember how badly we got on when we met? You've got over all that nonsense, eh?" But Ivan never made any response to such remarks. So one day the master was driving with Ivan to the town in his three-horse sledge with bells and a highback covered with carpet. The horses began to walk up the hill, and Ivan got off the box-seat and went behind the back of the sledge as though he had dropped something. It was a sharp frost; the master sat wrapped up, with a beaver cap pulled down on to his ears. Then Ivan took an axe from under his skirt, came up to the master from behind, knocked off his cap, and saying, "I warned you, Pietr Petrovitch—you've yourself to blame now!" he struck off his head at one blow. Then he stopped the ponies, put the cap on his dead master, and, getting on the box-seat again, drove him to the town, straight to the courts of justice.

"Here's the Suhinsky general for you, dead; I have killed him. As I told him, so I did to him. Put me in fetters."

They took Ivan, tried him, sentenced him to the knout, and then to hard labour. The light-hearted, bird-like dancer was sent to the mines, and there passed out of sight for ever. . . .

Yes; one can but repeat, in another sense, Alexey Sergeitch's words: "They were good old times . . . but enough of them!"

1881.