

TWO CLASSIC NOVELS

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EDITED BY AUGUST NEMO

III

The next moment there entered the room a tall, loosely built man who evidently did not believe in refinement of costume, nor was in any way ashamed of the fact. This was Mikhei Andreievitch Tarantiev, a native of the same district as Oblomov. Though an individual of rough, sullen mien, and of rather an overbearing manner, he did not lack a certain keen ruggedness of wit; nor could any one be a better judge of mundane questions in general, nor a better resolver of tangled juridical problems (though usually he behaved rudely to the person who had sought his advice on these matters). Nevertheless, his abilities stopped short at a talent for verbal exposition; and no sooner was he called upon to transmit a theory into action than his whole bearing underwent a change, and in every case he discovered practical difficulties in the way of what he conceived to be the best course to take.

“How are you?” he said brusquely as he extended a hairy hand. “What do you mean by lying in bed like a log? Presently it will be twelve o’clock, yet you are sprawling about on your back!” The other forestalled him by hurriedly slipping his feet into his slippers, or the new-comer would have pulled him out of bed.

“I was just about to rise,” said Oblomov with a yawn.

“Yes; I know how you rise—how you go rolling about until lunch-time! Zakhar, come and help your master to dress!”

Zakhar entered and glared at Tarantiev. Raising himself on his elbow, Oblomov stepped from the bed like a man who is thoroughly worn out, and, dropping into an arm-chair, sat there without moving. Meanwhile Zakhar pomaded, parted, and combed his master’s hair, and then asked him if he desired to wash.

“Presently,” said Oblomov. “Do you wait a little.”

“Ah! So *you* are here?” said Tarantiev suddenly as he turned to Alexiev. “I had not seen you. By the way, what a swine is that kinsman of yours!”

“*What* kinsman?” inquired Alexiev with a stare. “I do not possess a single relative.”

“I mean Athanasiev. Surely he is a relative of yours? I *know* he is.”

“My name is Alexiev, not Athanasiev,” said the other. “And I repeat that I do not possess a single relative.”

“But he is just like you an ugly man, as well as (like yourself, again) a man of the name of Vassili Nikolaitch?”

“Nevertheless he is no kinsman of mine. Besides, my first names are Ivan and Alexeitch.”

“Well, he is exactly *like* you, and a swine besides. You can tell him that when next you meet him.”

“I neither possess his acquaintance nor have ever set eyes upon him,” said Alexiev, opening his snuffbox.

“Give me a pinch,” put in Tarantiev. “You use the plain stuff, and not the French, do you? Why not use the French? Never have I seen a swine like that relative of yours. On one occasion I borrowed of him fifty roubles. That was two years ago. And fifty roubles are not a very large sum, are they? They are a sum which he might well have forgotten, mightn’t he? Yes, he very well might. But as a matter of fact, he remembered it. Not a month had passed before he took to saying, whenever he met me: ‘How about that debt?’ I assure you I found him a perfect nuisance! And only yesterday he walked into our office, and said to me: ‘I expect you have just received your salary, and are therefore in a position to repay me?’ Well, I handed him over my salary, even though he had come there for the express purpose of shaming me in public. I had much ado not to put him out of the door. ‘Poor fellow, you need the money, I suppose?’ As though I had *not* needed it! Am I such a rich man that I should quietly let him pouch fifty roubles? Oblomov, hand me a cigar.”

“The cigars are in that box there,” said Oblomov, pointing to a whatnot. He was still posed in his usual lazy but becoming attitude—he was still taking no notice whatever of what was being done or said around him, but contemplating his small white hands.

“What a rubbishy weed!” Tarantiev remarked, after sending out a puff of tobacco smoke and inhaling another.

“You have come too early in the morning,” suggested Oblomov with a yawn.

“Then I am boring you, am I?”

“No; I was merely making a remark. Usually you arrive at lunch-time, but to-day you have come an hour beforehand.”

“I have come an hour beforehand because I wish to find out what there is likely to be to eat at dinner. As a rule you provide such rubbishy stuff.”

“You had better go into the kitchen and inquire.”

Taramiev departed for the purpose,

“We are to have beef and veal,” he remarked, on returning. “Ah, friend Oblomov, though a landowner, you haven’t the smallest notion how to live. Your *ménage* is the *ménage* of a tradesman. Have you bought that Madeira yet?”

“I don’t know,” replied Oblomov, scarcely noticing what had been said. “You had better inquire of Zakhar. At all events there will be some sort of wine.”

“What? The rubbishy old stuff which you bought of a German dealer? You ought to go to the English Store for your wines.”

“Very well. Please send to the Store for some.”

“Money first, please!”

Oblomov fumbled in a cashbox, and produced therefrom a ten-rouble, note.

“Madeira costs seven roubles the bottle,” he said. “Here are ten roubles. You will be given change at the Store.”

Tarantiev hastened to cram the note into his pocket.

“Likewise, do you feel like hiring a conveyance and going to the Ekaterinhov today?” he inquired. “If so, you might take me with you.”

Oblomov shook his head.

“I have met with two misfortunes,” he remarked. “In the first place, I am to be turned out of this fiat.”

“Because you haven’t paid your rent, I suppose?”

“No, that is *not* the reason. I always pay in advance. Tell me what had better be done.”

“Who made *me* your adviser? Do you think I give advice for nothing? Ask *him*, rather”—and Tarantiev pointed to Alexiev—“or else that kinsman of his.”

“No, no. Tell me what I ought to do.”

“I should advise you to move to another flat.”

“I could have said that myself.”

“To the flat of a friend of mine in the Veaborg Quarter,” continued Tarantiev.

“What? To a flat in the Veaborg Quarter? In winter the whole district is overrun with wolves!” *

* *The Veaborg Quarter is one of the most outlying suburbs of Petrograd.*

“True, at times they come there from the Neva Islands, but my friend’s house has high walls to it, and, in addition, she and her family and a bachelor brother are nice people, and not like that fellow over there.” He pointed to Alexiev.

“But what has all this to do with me?” said Oblomov irritably. “I tell you I am *not* going to move there.”

“You fool!” exclaimed Tarantiev. “In that house you would be much quieter and more comfortable than you are here, and you would pay less, and you would have larger quarters. Besides, it is a more respectable place than this. Here one has to sit at a dirty table on which the pepper-pot is empty, the vinegar bottle the same, the knives are not clean, the tablecloth is falling to pieces, and dust, dust, dust, lies everywhere. Give me my cab-fare, and I will go and secure you the flat at once. Then you can move into it to-morrow.” Tarantiev started to leave the room.

“Stop, stop!” cried Oblomov. “I tell you I am *not* going to the Veaborg Quarter. Pray exercise your wits in contriving how I may remain where I am. Moreover, I have a still more important affair on hand. That is to say, I have just received from my *starosta* a letter concerning which I should be glad of your advice.”

With that he searched for the document, found it after some difficulty, and read it aloud.

“So you hear what the *starosta* says as to drought and a failure of the crops? What ought I to do?”

“The prime necessity,” replied Tarantiev, “is complete quiet for you. That you would get at the house of the friend of whom I have just spoken; and I could come to see you every day.”

“Yes, yes,” said Oblomov. “But what about this affair of the *starosta*?”

“The *starosta* is lying. He is a thief and a rogue. Why, I know an estate, only fifty versts from yours, where the harvest of last year was so good that it cleared the owner completely of debt. That being so, why have the crops on *your* estate threatened to fail? Clearly the *starosta* is a robber. If I were there I’d teach him! Do you suppose this letter to be a natural, an honest one? No, no more than we can suppose that that sheep’s head over there he pointed to Alexiev again—“is capable of writing an honest letter, or his kinsman either.”

“Whom am I to appoint in the *starosta*’s place?” asked Oblomov. “Another man might prove even worse than he.”

“You yourself had better go to the estate, and stay there for the summer, and then move into my friend’s house. I will see that her rooms shall be ready for you—yes, I will see to it at once. Personally, I should have sold that property of yours, and bought another. Hand it over to me, and I will very soon make the folk there aware that I am alive!”

The upshot of it was that Oblomov accorded a half-hearted consent to Tarantiev’s procuring him a new lodging, and also to his writing to the governor of the district where his (Oblomov’s) property was situated. After that Tarantiev departed, stating that he would return to dinner at five o’clock.

With Tarantiev's departure a calm of ten minutes reigned in the apartment. Oblomov was feeling greatly upset, both by the *starostas* letter and by the prospect of the impending removal. Also, the tumultuous Tarantiev had thoroughly tired him out.

"Why do you not sit down and write the letter?" asked Alexiev. "If you wish I will clean the inkstand for you."

"Clean it, and the Lord bless you!" sighed Oblomov. "Let me write the letter alone, and then you shall fair-copy it after dinner."

"Very well," replied Alexiev. "But now I must be off, or I shall be delaying the Ekaterinhov party. Good-bye!"

Oblomov did not heed him, but, sinking back into a recumbent position in the armchair, relapsed into a state of meditative lethargy.