

D. MAMIN
SIBIRYAK

THE PRIVALOV
FORTUNE



Д. Н. МАМИН-СИБИРЯК
ПРИВАЛОВСКИЕ МИЛЛИОНЫ
Роман

53

Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

16

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ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ

Москва

D. MAMIN-SIBIRYAK

THE PRIVALOV
FORTUNE



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

Moscow

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY V. SHNEERSON

DESIGNED BY M. TARANOV

PART
ONE



MATRYONA, the chambermaid, darted into the bedroom, gasping, "He's come, he's come—last night! He's at the 'Golden Anchor.'"

Khiona Zaplatina, a lady of uncertain age, with a faded face, was standing before the mirror in her morning dishabille. Her hair, the colour of camel wool, hung in strands down her back and shoulders, failing miserably to hide the sinewy gauntness of her neck. By reason of a missing button her soiled night-gown revealed a withered, bony breast. Matryona's communication struck the lady like a bolt of lightning. She dropped the comb with which she had been assiduously trying to disentangle her hair. In the corner, beside a narrow window overlooking the backyard, sat a man of about forty, entirely hidden from view by a newspaper. It was Victor Zaplatin, the surveyor of the Uzel land office. Reasonably plump, ruddy-cheeked, tanned, with a thick blond beard and kind grey eyes, he was as much the opposite in appearance to his worthy half as a ripe apple is to a dried pear. Stretched languidly in his blue upholstered armchair, he was sipping coffee from a glass. Matryona's precipitous entry and whispered information left him unmoved. He went on reading his paper with utter indifference.

"Matryona, dear, let Agrippina Veryovkina know at once," Zaplatina said hastily to her chambermaid. "Wait! Say, 'He's here.' Nothing more. Clear? Well, hurry—hurry, for heaven's sake!"

In emergencies such as this Matryona was indispensable. She would fly like the wind at the drop of the arm, even to the end of the world. Just an ordinary slatternly maid with a run-down doltish countenance and black circles under saucy brown eyes, her shabby calico dresses always too tight for her powerful young frame, she was a gold-mine in Zaplatina's hands, possessed as

she was of the happy knack of doing unquestioningly everything she was bid.

"Oh, dear! Victor, I say! Good heavens!" Zaplatina groaned, bustling aimlessly about the room.

"What's the matter?"

"Didn't you hear? He's come!"

"What of it?"

"Why, you ass! Privalov—the millionaire! Understand? Mil-lionaire! Heavens, where's my corset? Where's my corset?" Khiona chanted.

"Leave me alone."

"Idiot! Dear me! I've said to Agrippina so many times, '*Mon ange*,' I've said, 'there's something behind his coming.' Yes, that's what I've said. What an uproar this'll create at the Bakharevs', at the Lyakhovskys', at the Polovodovs'! Can you imagine? Serves them right, too—the Lyakhovskys and Polovodovs, I mean. Privalov will take them down a peg or two. Putting on airs—and their noses far from clean. The heir'll make them sit up, the precious dears, just wait and see! Ha-ha, Victor, you blockhead, d'you hear? *Privalov's come!*"

"Leave me alone, for heaven's sake!" Victor Zaplatin growled, and, imitating his wife, added, "'He's come, he's come!' What of it? He needed to come. A poor mortal like all of us. If I had a million, I'd..."

"Why doesn't he stay at the Bakharevs'?" Zaplatina mused, investing her bony frame in a corset. "Seems to be up to something. I'll go to the Bakharevs'. Must warn Marya. He's a heaven-sent match for Nadine! The rich have all the luck. With all their money a millionaire son-in-law drops from the clouds right into their lap. Just think: the Lyakhovskys have a daughter; the Veryovkins have a daughter; the Bakharevs have two, and Polovodov has a sister. They'll tear him to pieces!"

"A woman you are and a woman you'll always be," Zaplatin chuckled. He fixed his eyes abstrusely upon the

embroidered hem of his dressing gown. "All you can think of is matchmaking. . . . Why, the man's from Petersburg. He won't look at the local girls. Marry *him* off! Pfui!"

"Heavens, you're dense," Zaplatina retorted with feigned indifference. She slipped into a redyed apple-green silk dress and tried on a brown-trimmed straw hat. "Men have no idea. To hear you carry on Privalov will associate with the actresses from the 'Magnet.' Like Ivan Veryovkin, like Lepyoshkin and Lomtev? You'd love to join them, wouldn't you? Don't deny it. Men are all alike. But you can't hoodwink me. Oh no, I see right through you—ready to take up with the first wench who comes your way."

She turned abruptly and examined herself in the mirror over her shoulder. The dress, sack-like, bulged at the back and hung limply about her shanks in sickly folds, as if draping a pair of sticks. "Perhaps I'd better put on my new dress, the one the Panafidins gave me for finding their Kapochka a husband?" Zaplatina wondered, but decided: "No, better not. Marya Bakhareva might think I'm playing up to her."

The worthy dame assumed a proud, arrogant expression.

"I say, Khiona," uttered Zaplatin who had been watching his wife's movements. "Don't overdo it, d'you hear? With the jerez, I mean. Your nose is like a cranberry already."

"A cranberry? My nose?" Khiona drew herself up pompously to her full height and, giving her husband a killing look, declaimed with the air of a provincial actress:

"If Agrippina should come in my absence, tell her I'll be sure to visit her today. Clear?"

"Clear enough. The two of you are going to have your hands full now, aren't you?"

In the town of Uzel, adrift amidst the Ural wilderness, the Zaplatins were a peculiar phenomenon entirely in

keeping with the times—a logical product of a great many contemporary causes and effects. True to their day, they were the bearers of its aspirations, virtues and vices. Victor Zaplatin was the son of a watchman, a retired soldier. He had scrimped through a meagre education and at a very green age joined the local law-court, where, at thirty, he duly received the handsome sum of fifteen rubles a month. This sufficed for a respectable wardrobe, and gave him access to the modest homes of the local officialdom. Insignificant in itself, this latter circumstance had a decisive bearing on Zaplatin's future. At an evening social he was swept off his feet by the supreme petulance of a certain governess. True, she had a somewhat tarnished reputation, but this was amply compensated for by a dowry of three thousand rubles. Zaplatin had the good sense to see that her reputation mattered far less than this handsome round sum, which would be a welcome addition to his yearly hundred and eighty rubles.

The match came off and bore gradual fruit in the shape of a ten-ruble rise in salary, a house worth at least fifteen thousand, a horse and carriage, four servants, a respectable household and a fairly substantial deposit in the local savings bank. To cut the story short, the Zaplatins were comfortably installed and spent about three thousand a year. Victor Zaplatin, though he changed the law-court for the land office, still had his annual three hundred. His scanty salary was, of course, known to all. Yet whenever people spoke of his extravagance they usually said, "But Khiona runs a boarding-school. She speaks excellent French." Some put it more simply: "Khiona is indeed a very clever woman." Even the backwoods were waking up to the fact that "clever" people could earn three hundred and live on three thousand. This phenomenon, so wholly in the spirit of the day, surprised no one; it was only right—right just because it existed.

The Zaplatin home had a fairly respectable-looking front door, which led into a bright antechamber. From the antechamber one door issued directly into a pleasant little hall, another communicated with three separate rooms, and a third led to a dark corridor which separated the premises occupied by the Zaplatins from those of the boarding-school. The parlour with its tawdry splendour was, naturally enough, the heart of the entire establishment; it communicated with the Zaplatin half of the house by way of a modest-sized dining-room, and by a door with the three rooms which could serve at will either as separate chambers or as part of the hall. The latter contained a fairly decent grand piano and quite respectable furnishings. All the other chambers had no more than odd pieces of furniture; the wall-paper had seen better days, and the curtains bore spots and stains and greasy imprints of Matryona's soiled fingers. The Zaplatin establishment was in eternal turmoil. People kept coming and going, chiefly ladies who called for an earful of the latest gossip, imparted their share of rumour and made their departure brimming with information, like bees with pollen. Khiona dreamed of her parlour becoming a fashionable salon where young people would consummate their education and learn good manners from living examples, and where people of position would not be loath to congregate—the women to display their beauty and costumes, the visiting actors and actresses to seek patrons, the local talent to pick up advice and encouragement, and the young things on the look-out for likely matches. The Zaplatins lacked funds to accomplish this ambitious plan. But more than that, this being the hardest blow of all to Khiona's tender heart, their salon was ignored by the best Uzel families—the Bakharevs, Lyakhovskys and Polovodovs. Credit is due to Khiona's spirit, however. She did not lose hope. "Who knows," she mused to herself, "the bells may still ring in my street. Times do

change so!" Like a spider spinning its web, waiting greedily for its prey, she kept on hoping with a patience worthy of a better application.

"Khiona? She's nothing more nor less than a triple-decker parasite," Nicolas Veryovkin, the solicitor, said about her, "a water beetle—whatever its Latin name—whose bowels harbour a parasite worm, which, in its turn, harbours a tape-worm. D'you see my point? The parasite feeds off the beetle, and the tape-worm feeds off the parasite, much like our Khiona. She feeds off us, and we feed off anyone we can fleece."

As for her family life, the hours from two in the morning, when Khiona came home from her club activities or a social, until ten, when she rose from her beauty sleep, were devoted to that province. The rest of the day she received guests or paid visits. Victor Zaplatin had no quarrel with this state of affairs, for it allowed him ample freedom to pursue his favourite occupation—politics. All he asked from life was a chance to recline undisturbed in his soft chair, read the latest papers, and sip his fragrant Mocha. His thoughts were perpetually occupied with the higher aspects of European politics: Beaconsfield, Bismarck, Gambetta, Andrassy, Grant. *There* was something to ponder upon. As for the endless stream of guests invading his privacy, he had his own way with them, making his appearance, saying his halloes, smiling to those he knew, and deftly buttonholing a victim, whom he piloted into a quiet corner to discuss the latest European news.

"I must consult my husband," Khiona would say when faced by an exigency. "He gets so annoyed if I do anything without his consent."

But that was mere show, a conventionality intended simply to add to her husband's prestige. There was never really any exchange of opinion between the two, save some slight family friction on the mornings after an in-

judicious cup, or before a turn in the weather. Zaplatin had not the least wish to interfere in his wife's affairs.

Khiona's boarding-school was a mystery. Boarders—distant kin, orphans and retainers all—appeared, and vanished tracelessly after a few months to give place to new distant relations, orphans and retainers. One would think Khiona had dozens of relatives in every corner of the world. What knowledge was imparted at the boarding-school, and who imparted it, were questions even Khiona would have had difficulty in answering. What intercourse there was between the school and the outer world was effected solely through the medium of Matryona.

To conclude the description of the Zaplatin household, we should add that French was its soul, its alpha and omega. French hung in the air at all times—when guests came, when they departed, and when things were said that were better unsaid in Russian. French was used to impress the uninitiated, to cut a figure, to set the fashion. In Khiona's life French was an inexhaustible source of all manner of collocations, and, most important, it gave her the reputation of a high-minded, educated, progressive personality.

II

The Bakharevs lived at the end of Nagornaya Street in a single-storey house overlooking the thoroughfare with fifteen of its windows. There was something gracious and cheerful in its physiognomy (every house, strange as it may seem, has its own physiognomy). Regular and peaceful was the tide of human affairs passing in the shelter of its wide green roof and its low grey walls. Its small curtained windows with flower-pots ranged along the sills, looked out into the street most amiably, like well-preserved friendly old ladies. Pedestrians hasten-

ing by along the pavements cast envious glances through them at the Bakharev domain where everything breathed placid contentment and happiness. Many of these men and women thought in passing how much they would like, if even for a month, a week, a mere day, to recover their peace of mind in this fine old house, to rest there body and soul from life's vagaries and embroilments.

A massive stone gate opened into a spacious courtyard sprinkled, like a circus arena, with fine yellow sand. The side of the house overlooking the yard had two tidy porches separated by a large verandah, which was overgrown with garlands of wisteria and covered with a festooned sun-shade. Low steps descended from it into a spruce little flower garden enclosed by a green wooden palisade. Solidly built log outhouses stood in the back of the yard, a living wall of acacias and lilac shrubs stretching between them and the house, rising in green tufts from behind a handsome ironwork enclosure supported by elegant pillars. Parallel to the main building sprawled a long wooden structure which housed the kitchen, the baths and the coachmen's quarters.

The Bakharev ménage consisted of two halves, each with its own front entrance. The porch nearer the gate led to the half of the house occupied by the master, Vasily Nazarovich Bakharev, and the farther porch to that of his wife, Marya Stepanovna. One needed to go no farther than the antechamber to be enwrapped in the atmosphere of contentment that reigned in the house ever since it was built. Both halves had rows of bright, cosy chambers with shining floors and new wall-paper. The ceilings were embellished with colourful designs, and the narrow white doors were fresh as paint. Soft rugs ran the length of the house from room to room. There was, indeed, a difference between the half belonging to Vasily Bakharev, and that of his wife, but we shall speak of it later, because it is time to return to Khiona

Zaplatina, whose carriage has drawn clattering up to the second porch. She nodded cheerfully to a young woman who came out on the verandah.

"Ah, *mon ange!*" Khiona brushed the girl's pink cheeks with her dry blue lips. "*Je suis charmée!* Nadine, you are a rose! Your linen dress becomes you so well. You are the image of Faust's Marguerite when she steps into the garden. Do you remember that scene?"

Nadine, the Bakharevs' eldest daughter, was a tall, fetching girl of twenty. We daresay she was pretty, but there was nothing of Marguerite in her for all that. Khiona's comparison made her smile, but her deep-grey eyes, fringed with thick black lashes, looked thoughtfully from below her eyebrows. She pushed back loose strands of her light-blonde, smoothly-brushed hair, which had escaped from under her sun hat, and uttered quietly:

"Do I really resemble Marguerite?"

"Oh, you're a perfect Marguerite," Khiona replied hastily.

"But just the other day you compared me to someone else."

"Ah, yes, but that was a different thing entirely. That was when you wore a *sarafan*. . . . Is your mother home? I come on important business—highly important. In a way, *mon ange*, it concerns you."

"What, another young man?" Nadine asked.

"Nothing wrong in that, is there, *mon ange*? Every Marguerite must have her Faust. That's a law of nature. But this time I didn't have to look for him. He came by himself. Fell right out of the clouds."

"Didn't hurt himself, I hope!"

Khiona waved her hands in remonstrance and vanished in the nearest door. She passed several chambers with the assurance of one who knew her way about the house and issued forth into a dark narrow corridor, which joined the two halves of the house. In the darkness a pair

of small warm palms clapped over Khiona's eyes, and a ringing girlish voice sang out, "Guess who!"

"Ah, my frisky little goat," Khiona whispered, unclasping the plump hands. "No one but you would play pranks in this house. I just saw Nadine. She finds it hard to smile, it seems. No girlish thoughts on *her* mind! Well, how are you, dear Vera, *ma petite chèvre*! Ah, you young people, all you know is pranks and laughter!"

"Would you prefer me to mourn?" Vera asked, kissing Khiona resoundingly. Everything the girl did, she did with gusto, and had the habit of "smacking everyone," as Nadine described her kisses.

"Ah, *ma petite*, everything in due time; there'll be time for tears, perhaps, and time for heartaches too."

"Well, I'll cry when the time comes, but not before," replied Vera. "Not now. Mother's in the chapel. It's her you want to see, isn't it?"

"Yes, I absolutely must," Khiona uttered gravely. She arranged her ruffled ribbons, and added significantly, "It's positively imperative."

"Shan't be a minute," Vera chirped. Turning nimbly on one leg, she skipped down the corridor.

"That girl won't need my help to find a husband." Khiona smiled to herself. "She won't stay a maid for long, like those other duchesses who do nothing but put on airs. They think they're educated young women, but when it's time for wedding-bells, it's I who must find them a suitable match."

Khiona passed into a small corner room with old-fashioned furniture and diverse cupboards displaying pieces of rare silverware and expensive china. Chinese cups, Japanese vases, and splendid Sèvres and Saxon porcelain sparkled attractively behind large glass panes. In one corner icons by ancient masters were arranged neatly in a gilded image-case. Emaciated, withered saintly visages with thin noses and lips and deep furrows upon