



Sanine

San

在阿尔志跋绥夫平平淡淡地率直地写出的文字中，我们读到却感到一种婉曲的秀美的动人的描写，他是无所顾忌地描写人间的兽的方面的丑恶，却一点也不使读者起一种无理之感。读来极为自然。

沙宁(下)

著——[苏] 阿尔志跋绥夫

译——郑振铎

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Mikhail Petrovich Artsybashev



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CHAPTER I

That important period in his life when character is influenced and formed by its first contact with the world and with men, was not spent by Vladimir Sanine at home, with his parents. There had been none to guard or guide him; and his soul developed in perfect freedom and independence, just as a tree in the field.

He had been away from home for many years, and, when he returned, his mother and his sister Lida scarcely recognized him. His features, voice, and manner had changed but little, yet something strange and new, and riper in his whole personality gave a light to his countenance and endowed it with an altered expression. It was in the evening that he came home, entering the room as quietly as if he had only left it five minutes before. As he stood there, tall, fair, and broad-shouldered, his calm face with its slightly mocking expression at the corners of the mouth showed not a sign of fatigue or of emotion, and the boisterous greeting of his mother and sister subsided of itself.

While he was eating, and drinking tea, his sister, sitting opposite, gazed steadfastly at him. She was in love with him, as most romantic girls usually are with their absent brother. Lida had always imagined

Vladimir to be an extraordinary person, as strange as any to be found in books. She pictured his life as one of tragic conflict, sad and lonely as that of some great, uncomprehended soul.

"Why do you look at me like that?" asked Sanine, smiling.

This quiet smile and searching glance formed his usual expression, but, strange to say, they did not please Lida. To her, they seemed self-complacent, revealing nought of spiritual suffering and strife. She looked away and was silent. Then, mechanically, she kept turning over the pages of a book.

When the meal was at an end, Sanine's mother patted his head affectionately, and said:

"Now, tell us all about your life, and what you did there."

"What I did?" said Sanine, laughing. "Well, I ate, and drank, and slept; and sometimes I worked; and sometimes I did nothing!"

It seemed at first as if he were unwilling to speak of himself, but when his mother questioned him about this or that, he appeared pleased to narrate his experiences. Yet, for some reason or other, one felt that he was wholly indifferent as to the impression produced by his tales. His manner, kindly and courteous though it was in no way suggested that intimacy which only exists among members of a family. Such kindness and courtesy seemed to come naturally from him as the light from a lamp which shines with equal radiance on all objects.

They went out to the garden terrace and sat down on the steps. Lida sat on a lower one, listening in silence to her brother. At her heart she felt an icy chill. Her subtle feminine instinct told her that her brother was not what she had imagined him to be. In his presence she felt shy and embarrassed, as if he were a stranger. It was now evening; faint shadows encircled them. Sanine lit a cigarette and the delicate odour of

tobacco mingled with the fragrance of the garden. He told them how life had tossed him hither and thither; how he had often been hungry and a vagrant; how he had taken part in political struggles, and how, when weary, he had renounced these.

Lida sat motionless, listening attentively, and looking as quaint and pretty as any charming girl would look in summer twilight.

The more he told her, the more she became convinced that this life which she had painted for herself in such glowing colours was really most simple and commonplace. There was something strange in it as well. What was it? That she could not define. At any rate, from her brother's account, it seemed to her very simple, tedious and boring. Apparently he had lived just anywhere, and had done just anything; at work one day, and idle the next; it was also plain that he liked drinking, and knew a good deal about women. But life such as this had nothing dark or sinister about it; in no way did it resemble the life she imagined her brother had led. He had no ideas to live for; he hated no one; and for no one had he suffered. At some of his disclosures she was positively annoyed, especially when he told her that once, being very hard up, he was obliged to mend his torn trousers himself.

"Why, do you know how to sew?" she asked involuntarily, in a tone of surprise and contempt. She thought it paltry; unmanly, in fact.

"I did not know at first, but I soon had to learn," replied Sanine, who smilingly guessed what his sister thought.

The girl carelessly shrugged her shoulders, and remained silent, gazing at the garden. It seemed to her as if, dreaming of sunshine, she awoke beneath a grey, cold sky.

Her mother, too, felt depressed. It pained her to think that her son did not occupy the position to which, socially, he was entitled. She

began by telling him that things could not go on like this, and that he must be more sensible in future. At first she spoke warily, but when she saw that he paid scarcely any attention to her remarks, she grew angry, and obstinately insisted, as stupid old women do, thinking her son was trying to tease her. Sanine was neither surprised nor annoyed: he hardly seemed to understand what she said, but looked amiably indifferent, and was silent.

Yet at the question, "How do you propose to live?" he answered, smiling, "Oh! somehow or other."

His calm, firm voice, and open glance made one feel that those words, which meant nothing to his mother, had for him a deep and precise significance.

Maria Ivanovna sighed, and after a pause said anxiously:

"Well, after all, it's your affair. You're no longer a child. You ought to walk round the garden. It's looking so pretty now."

"Yes, of course! Come along, Lida; come and show me the garden," said Sanine to his sister, "I have quite forgotten what it looks like."

Roused from her reverie, Lida sighed and got up. Side by side they walked down the path leading to the green depths of the dusky garden.

The Sanines' house was in the main street of the town, and, the town being small, their garden extended as far as the river, beyond which were fields. The house was an old mansion, with rickety pillars on either side and a broad terrace. The large gloomy garden had run to waste; it looked like some dull green cloud that had descended to earth. At night it seemed haunted. It was as if some sad spirit were wandering through the tangled thicket, or restlessly pacing the dusty floors of the old edifice. On the first floor there was an entire suite of empty rooms dismal with faded carpets and dingy curtains. Through the garden there was

but one narrow path or alley, strewn with dead branches and crushed frogs. What modest, tranquil life there was appeared to be centred in one corner. There, close to the house, yellow sand and gravel gleamed, and there, beside neat flower-beds bright with blossom stood the green table on which in summer-time tea or lunch was set. This little corner, touched by the breath of simple peaceful life, was in sharp contrast to the huge, deserted mansion, doomed to inevitable decay.

When the house behind them had disappeared from view and the silent, motionless trees, like thoughtful witnesses, surrounded them, Sanine suddenly put his arm round Lida's waist and said in a strange tone, half fierce, half tender:

"You've become quite a beauty! The first man you love will be a happy fellow."

The touch of his arm with its muscles like iron sent a fiery thrill through Lida's soft, supple frame. Bashful and trembling, she drew away from him as if at the approach of some unseen beast of prey.

They had now reached the river's edge. There was a moist, damp odour from the reeds that swayed pensively in the stream. On the other side, fields lay dim in twilight beneath the vast sky where shone the first pale stars.

Stepping aside, Sanine seized a withered branch, broke it in two, and flung the pieces into the stream where swiftly circles appeared on its surface and swiftly vanished. As if to hail Sanine as their comrade, the reeds bent their heads.

CHAPTER II

It was about six o'clock. The sun still shone brightly, but in the garden there were already faint green shadows. The air was full of light and warmth and peace. Maria Ivanovna was making jam, and under the green linden-tree there was a strong smell of boiling sugar and raspberries. Sanine had been busy at the flower-beds all the morning, trying to revive some of the flowers that suffered most from the dust and heat.

"You had better pull up the weeds first," suggested his mother, as from time to time she watched him through the blue, quivering stream. "Tell Grounjka, and she'll do it for you."

Sanine looked up, hot and smiling. "Why?" said he, as he tossed back his hair that clung to his brow. "Let them grow as much as they like. I am fond of everything green."

"You're a funny fellow!" said his mother, as she shrugged her shoulders, good-humouredly. For some reason or other, his answer had pleased her.

"It is you yourselves that are funny," said Sanine, in a tone of conviction. He then went into the house to wash his hands, and, coming back,

sat down at his ease in a wicker arm-chair near the table. He felt happy, and in a good temper. The verdure, the sunlight and the blue sky filled him with a keener sense of the joy of life. Large towns with their bustle and din were to him detestable. Around him were sunlight and freedom; the future gave him no anxiety; for he was disposed to accept from life whatever it could offer him. Sanine shut his eyes tight, and stretched himself; the tension of his sound, strong muscles gave him pleasurable thrills.

A gentle breeze was blowing. The whole garden seemed to sigh. Here and there, sparrows chattered noisily about their intensely important but incomprehensible little lives, and Mill, the fox-terrier, with ears erect and red tongue lolling out, lay in the long grass, listening. The leaves whispered softly; their round shadows quivered on the smooth gravel path.

Maria Ivanovna was vexed at her son's calmness. She was fond of him, just as she was fond of all her children, and for that very reason she longed to rouse him, to wound his self-respect, if only to force him to heed her words and accept her view of life. Like an ant in the sand, she had employed every moment of a long existence in building up the frail structure of her domestic well-being. It was a long, bare, monotonous edifice, like a barrack or a hospital, built with countless little bricks that to her, as an incompetent architect, constituted the graces of life, though in fact they were petty worries that kept her in a perpetual state of irritation or of anxiety.

"Do you suppose things will go on like this, later on?" she said, with lips compressed, and feigning intense interest in the boiling jam.

"What do you mean by 'later on'?" asked Sanine, and then sneezed.

Maria Ivanovna thought that he had sneezed on purpose to annoy

her, and, absurd though such a notion was, looked cross.

"How nice it is to be here, with you!" said Sanine, dreamily.

"Yes, it's not so bad," she answered, drily. She was secretly pleased at her son's praise of the house and garden that to her were as lifelong kinsfolk.

Sanine looked at her, and then said, thoughtfully:

"If you didn't bother me with all sorts of silly things, it would be nicer still."

The bland tone in which these words were spoken seemed at variance with their meaning, so that Maria Ivanovna did not know whether to be vexed or amused.

"To look at you, and then to think that, as a child, you were always rather odd," said she, sadly, "and now—"

"And now?" exclaimed Sanine, gleefully, as if he expected to hear something specially pleasant and interesting.

"Now you are more crazy than ever!" said Maria Ivanovna sharply, shaking her spoon.

"Well, all the better!" said Sanine, laughing. After a pause, he added, "Ah! here's Novikoff!"

Out of the house came a tall, fair, good-looking man. His red silk shirt, fitting tight to his well-proportioned frame, looked brilliant in the sun; his pale blue eyes had a lazy, good-natured expression.

"There you go! Always quarrelling!" said he, in a languid, friendly tone. "And in Heaven's name, what about?"

"Well, the fact is, mother thinks that a Grecian nose would suit me better, while I am quite satisfied with the one that I have got."

Sanine looked down his nose and, laughing, grasped the other's big, soft hand.

"So, I should say!" exclaimed Maria Ivanovna, pettishly.

Novikoff laughed merrily; and from the green thicket, came a gentle echo in reply, as if some one yonder heartily shared his mirth.

"Ah! I know what it is! Worrying about your future."

"What, you, too?" exclaimed Sanine, in comic alarm.

"It just serves you right."

"Ah!" cried Sanine. "If it's a case of two to one, I had better clear out."

"No, it is I that will soon have to clear out," said Maria Ivanovna with sudden irritation at which she herself was vexed. Hastily removing her saucepan of jam, she hurried into the house, without looking back. The terrier jumped up, and with ears erect watched her go. Then it rubbed its nose with its front paw, gave another questioning glance at the house and ran off into the garden.

"Have you got any cigarettes?" asked Sanine, delighted at his mother's departure.

Novikoff with a lazy movement of his large body produced a cigarette-case.

"You ought not to tease her so," said he, in a voice of gentle reproof. "She's an old lady."

"How have I teased her?"

"Well, you see—"

"What do you mean by 'well, you see?' It is she who is always after me. I have never asked anything of anybody, and therefore people ought to leave me alone."

Both remained silent.

"Well, how goes it, doctor?" asked Sanine, as he watched the tobacco-smoke rising in fantastic curves above his head.

Novikoff, who was thinking of something else, did not answer at once.

“Badly.”

“In what way?”

“Oh! in every way. Everything is so dull and this little town bores me to death. There’s nothing to do.”

“Nothing to do? Why it was you that complained of not having time to breathe!”

“That is not what I mean. One can’t be always seeing patients, seeing patients. There is another life besides that.”

“And who prevents you from living that other life?”

“That is rather a complicated question.”

“In what way is it complicated? You are a young, good-looking, healthy man; what more do you want?”

“In my opinion that is not enough,” replied Novikoff, with mild irony.

“Really!” laughed Sanine. “Well, I think it is a very great deal.”

“But not enough for me,” said Novikoff, laughing in his turn. It was plain that Sanine’s remark about his health and good looks had pleased him, and yet it had made him feel shy as a girl.

“There’s one thing that you want,” said Sanine, pensively.

“And what is that?”

“A just conception of life. The monotony of your existence oppresses you; and yet, if some one advised you to give it all up, and go straight away into the wide world, you would be afraid to do so.”

“And as what should I go? As a beggar? H.. m!”

“Yes, as a beggar, even! When I look at you, I think: there is a man who in order to give the Russian Empire a constitution would let him-

self be shut up in Schlüsselburg for the rest of his life, losing all his rights, and his liberty as well. After all, what is a constitution to him? But when it is a question of altering his own tedious mode of life, and of going elsewhere to find new interests, he at once asks, 'how should I get a living? Strong and healthy as I am, should I not come to grief if I had not got my fixed salary, and consequently cream in my tea, my silk shirts, stand-up collars, and all the rest of it?' It's funny, upon my word it is!"

"I cannot see anything funny in it at all. In the first case, it is the question of a cause, an idea, whereas in the other—"

"Well?"

"Oh! I don't know how to express myself!" And Novikoff snapped his fingers.

"There now!" said Sanine, interrupting. "That's how you always evade the point. I shall never believe that the longing for a constitution is stronger in you than the longing to make the most of your own life."

"That is just a question. Possibly it is."

Sanine waved his hand, irritably.

"Oh! don't, please! If somebody were to cut off your finger, you would feel it more than if it were some other Russian's finger. That is a fact, eh?"

"Or a cynicism," said Novikoff, meaning to be sarcastic when he was merely foolish.

"Possibly. But, all the same, it is the truth. And now though in Russia and in many other States there is no constitution, nor the slightest sign of one, it is your own unsatisfactory life that worries you, not the absence of a constitution. And if you say it isn't, then you're telling a lie. What is more," added Sanine, with a merry twinkle in his eyes, "you are worried not about your life but because Lida has not yet fallen in love

with you. Now, isn't that so?"

"What utter nonsense you're talking!" cried Novikoff, turning as red as his silk shirt. So confused was he, that tears rose to his calm, kindly eyes.

"How is it nonsense, when besides Lida you can see nothing else in the whole world? The wish to possess her is written in large letters on your brow."

Novikoff winced perceptibly and began to walk rapidly up and down the path. If anyone but Lida's brother had spoken to him in this way it would have pained him deeply, but to hear such words from Sanine's mouth amazed him; in fact at first he scarcely understood them.

"Look here," he muttered, "either you are posing, or else—"

"Or else—what?" asked Sanine, smiling.

Novikoff looked aside, shrugged his shoulders, and was silent. The other inference led him to regard Sanine as an immoral, bad man. But he could not tell him this, for, ever since their college days, he had always felt sincere affection for him, and it seemed to Novikoff impossible that he should have chosen a wicked man as his friend. The effect on his mind was at once bewildering and unpleasant. The allusion to Lida pained him, but, as the goddess whom he adored, he could not feel angry with Sanine for speaking of her. It pleased him, and yet he felt hurt, as if a burning hand had seized his heart and had gently pressed it.

Sanine was silent, and smiled good-humouredly.

After a pause he said:

"Well, finish your statement; I am in no hurry!"

Novikoff kept walking up and down the path, as before. He was evidently hurt. At this moment the terrier came running back excitedly and rubbed against Sanine's knees, as if wishful to let every one know how pleased he was.

"Good dog!" said Sanine, patting him.

Novikoff strove to avoid continuing the discussion, being afraid that Sanine might return to the subject which for him personally was the most interesting in the whole world. Anything that did not concern Lida seemed futile to him—dull.

"And—where is Lidia Petrovna?" he asked mechanically, albeit loth to utter the question that was uppermost in his mind.

"Lida? Where should she be? Walking with officers on the boulevard, where all our young ladies are to be found at this time of day."

A look of jealousy darkened his face, as Novikoff asked:

"How can a girl so clever and cultivated as she waste her time with such empty-headed fools?"

"Oh! my friend," exclaimed Sanine, smiling, "Lida is handsome, and young, and healthy, just as you are; more so, in fact, because she has that which you lack—keen desire for everything. She wants to know everything, to experience everything—why, here she comes! You've only got to look at her to understand that. Isn't she pretty?"

Lida was shorter and much handsomer than her brother. Sweetness combined with supple strength gave to her whole personality charm and distinction. There was a haughty look in her dark eyes, and her voice, of which she was proud, sounded rich and musical. She walked slowly down the steps, moving with the lithe grace of a thoroughbred, while adroitly holding up her long grey dress. Behind her, clinking their spurs, came two good-looking young officers in tightly-fitting riding-breeches and shining top-boots.

"Who is pretty? Is it I?" asked Lida, as she filled the whole garden with the charm of her voice, her beauty and her youth. She gave Novikoff her hand, with a side-glance at her brother, about whose attitude

she did not feel quite clear, never knowing whether he was joking or in earnest. Grasping her hand tightly, Novikoff grew very red, but his emotions were unnoticed by Lida, used as she was to his reverent, bashful glance that never troubled her.

"Good evening, Vladimir Petrovitch," said the elder, handsomer and fairer of the two officers, rigid, erect as a spirited stallion, while his spurs clinked noisily.

Sanine knew him to be Sarudine, a captain of cavalry, one of Lida's most persistent admirers. The other was Lieutenant Tanaroff, who regarded Sarudine as the ideal soldier, and strove to copy everything he did. He was taciturn, somewhat clumsy, and not so good-looking as Sarudine. Tanaroff rattled his spurs in his turn, but said nothing.

"Yes, you!" replied Sanine to his sister, gravely.

"Why, of course I am pretty. You should have said indescribably pretty!" And, laughing gaily, Lida sank into a chair, glancing again at Sanine. Raising her arms and thus emphasizing the curves of her shapely bosom, she proceeded to remove her hat, but, in so doing, let a long hat-pin fall on the gravel, and her veil and hair became disarranged.

"Andrei Pavlovitch, do please help me!" she plaintively cried to the taciturn lieutenant.

"Yes, she's a beauty!" murmured Sanine, thinking aloud, and never taking his eyes off her. Once more Lida glanced shyly at her brother.

"We're all of us beautiful here," said she.

"What's that? Beautiful? Ha! Ha!" laughed Sarudine, showing his white, shining teeth. "We are at best but the modest frame that serves to heighten the dazzling splendour of your beauty."

"I say, what eloquence, to be sure!" exclaimed Sanine, in surprise. There was a slight shade of irony in his tone.

"Lidia Petrovna would make anybody eloquent," said Tanaroff the silent, as he tried to help Lida to take off her hat, and in so doing ruffled her hair. She pretended to be vexed, laughing all the while.

"What?" drawled Sanine. "Are you eloquent too?"

"Oh! let them be!" whispered Novikoff, hypocritically, though secretly pleased.

Lida frowned at Sanine, to whom her dark eyes plainly said:

"Don't imagine that I cannot see what these people are. I intend to please myself. I am not a fool any more than you are, and I know what I am about."

Sanine smiled at her.

At last the hat was removed, which Tanaroff solemnly placed on the table.

"Look! Look what you've done to me, Andrei Pavlovitch!" cried Lida half peevishly, half coquettishly. "You've got my hair into such a tangle! Now I shall have to go indoors."

"I'm so awfully sorry!" stammered Tanaroff, in confusion.

Lida rose, gathered up her skirts, and ran indoors laughing, followed by the glances of all the men. When she had gone they seemed to breathe more freely, without that nervous sense of restraint which men usually experience in the presence of a pretty young woman. Sarudine lighted a cigarette which he smoked with evident gusto. One felt, when he spoke, that he habitually took the lead in a conversation, and that what he thought was something quite different from what he said.

"I have just been persuading Lidia Petrovna to study singing seriously. With such a voice, her career is assured."

"A fine career, upon my word!" sullenly rejoined Novikoff, looking aside.