

directly I came of age, to demand an account as though I doubted his honesty? Yes. Anything besides? Was there anything else that kept me in bondage?

If you had looked at me a little askance, I should have blushed and replied, "Yes." And if you were to look at me even now when I have already grown many white hairs, I should tell you like a guilty child: "No, it is not true that I loved so much the house in which I grew up, or the uncle with whom I lived. There was something else."

There was some one there besides a cousin of the same age as myself, besides my uncle--my aunt was dead--besides the house, and a long-haired dog. There was somebody else!

Ah! This sort of somebody has reformed many a ne'er-do-well, has dazzled many a shy man, has turned many business men into poets, has shaken many a professor to the depths of his being, blowing away his system like the threads of a spider's web.

No doubt it was a very fascinating "somebody" who made you stay in tutelage twenty-four hours after you had reached your twenty-first year and come into 15,000 lei.

I think you have guessed the secret which I have hidden till now.

Oh, women, women! What do they care for the timid or the philosopher?

Neither innocence nor philosophy can resist a light step and a pair of eyes which sparkle and glow and pierce through the coldest, most selfish, most impenetrable heart.

Was it not the same Irinel, with whom I once played childish games? Was she not the same wild tomboy with her frocks down to her knees only, and her white stockings that became green by the evening? Was she not the same little demon who threw her books into the veranda on her return from school, and put both arms round my neck to make me give her a ride on my back?

The child turned into the woman, and instead of the gentle eyes with their extreme innocence in which I lost myself as in a boundless expanse, there shone two devilish fires in whose light I saw an explanation of life with all its sea of pleasures and emotions.

And now Irinel used to take me by the hand. She was fifteen years old; for some time her hand had felt different--warmer, softer, more I don't know what, when I took it in mine. Her gaiety was no longer even and continual as of old; she no longer talked quickly and incessantly.

And if I said to her: "Irinel, do you think it will rain to-day?" or "Irinel, there are only two weeks before the long vacation begins, shall you be pleased, as you used to be, when we go to Slanic?" Irinel remained silent, looking straight in front of her, and I am sure that at that moment she saw nothing--trees, houses, and sky disappeared as though in a thick mist.

This silence surprised and disquieted me, and I said to her in a low voice, almost as though I were guilty of something wrong:

"Irinel, you are scarcely back from school and you are bored already?"

An exaggerated gaiety was her immediate reply; she laughed, and talked, and told little anecdotes which she began and left unfinished, especially about life at school.

"You don't know," she said to me in a quick, loud voice, "what a letter one of my friends showed me. Only I read it, and another girl and her sister, and it seems to me she showed it to some others. I nearly died of laughter."