

And Irinel began to laugh, and laughed and laughed until the tears ran down her rosy cheeks. Then sighing and laughing she began:

"He wrote to her, trembling, of stars, two only, which burnt and spoke to him. How can the stars he talks about burn? Are they bits of coal? How can stars speak? I don't understand. After that came ice, thawing, marble, a bed of fire, a monastery, suicide--Ah! pauvre Marie! Indeed, I was sorry for her, poor girl! Many a time we put our arms round each other's necks and kissed each other. We kissed each other and began to cry. You must know, Iorgu, that we kept nothing from each other. Every Monday she read me a letter on which could be seen traces of big tears, and I, after I had controlled myself sufficiently not to burst out laughing over those 'two twin stars which burn and speak,' had to prepare to cry, and, believe me, I cried with all my heart. Pauvre chérie!"

Irinel was ready to cry after laughing with such enjoyment, but, when she noticed that I kept my eyes cast down and listened in silence as though I were offended, she asked me with malicious irony:

"Iorgu, do you think it will rain to-day?"

Such scenes took place early in the morning: Sunday was a day of torture for me. All day Irinel said "If you please" to me. She embroidered or played the piano instead of our walking about the yard and garden. All day I felt the terrible anger of a very shy person with "those two stars which speak."

For three years I lived this life of daring dreams during the week, of fear and misery on Sunday, of wonderful plans put off from day to day, and concealed with an hypocrisy possessed only by the timid and innocent.

During the last year, after a vacation passed at Slanic, I made up my mind.

The day she went back to school we hardly dared kiss each other. What cold kisses! We neither of us looked at the other. I remember I looked at the sofa, and it seemed to me as though my lips had touched the hard yellow material instead of those firm, rosy cheeks which were to me a fearful joy.

I made up my mind, and I am sure that no one could have come to a more heroic decision.

To give myself courage, during the first night I thought out the scene which should take place the following Sunday without fail. I did not sleep all night; in the intense darkness I saw the garden, I saw Irinel, I heard myself, I heard her.

The cocks crew. I was lying at full length, my face uppermost, my eyes shut. I was perspiring from the boldness which I had shown during the scene which was running in my mind.

"Irinel, will you come and walk in the garden?"

"No, merci!"

"That will not do, we must go for a walk."

She understood that I had decided to say something important to her. Such courage impressed and compelled.

The cocks crew. It was midnight. It was pouring; flashes of lightning, like serpents of light, shone for a second through my curtains.

"Irinel, you must come with me. Don't you see what a beautiful day it is? I have discovered a bunch of ripe grapes which I have kept for you all the week."