

"No, merci!"

"It is impossible for you not to come. I have made up my mind to tell you something----"

"What?" replied Irinel, and turned her eyes upon me.

Who could bear such a bright light? I looked down, but revolted by such cowardice I felt the courage of a hero, and lifting my head I replied to her:

"You must come!"

In all my life I had never commanded anyone. I was ordering her!

It was pitch dark; it was raining outside. I turned towards the wall. I closed my eyes. It was light. It was a beautiful Sunday. And still full of that courage I said to her once more:

"You must come!"

And I took her by the hand. From now on my heart almost ceased to beat. I told her all I had wanted to say to her for two years.

"Irinel, Irinel, I love you! Do you love me? Why are you silent? Why do you look down? Tell me, shall I leave the house where I have watched you growing up under my eyes, or----"

"Stay!"

We embraced each other; we kissed each other. It was over.

Lord! How brave men are when they are in love!

I grew cold all over when I reflected that this scene had not yet taken place, but was still to come. I sank down under my quilt afraid of such courage.

It began to grow light. I went off to sleep gradually, rehearsing this heroic scene:

"Irinel, will you come for a walk?"

"No, merci!"

"This cannot be, you must----"

The next day I woke up about ten o'clock. My uncle asked me in his kind, calm voice:

"Iorgu, are you not well that you got up so late to-day?"

I, feeling myself in fault, replied, embarrassed:

"No--a book--I went to sleep late."

My ears were burning as though I had held them against a hot stove.

The veranda seemed to be giving way under me. Do you know, at that moment a thought crossed my mind that overwhelmed me? Irinel was only Irinel, but, with my uncle, what courage I should need! How would he, an old man of pious habits, regard in his old age a marriage within the prohibited degree among members of his own family?

Why did he stand in front of me? Why did he look at me like that? He understood me and was appraising me! His look spoke, though his lips most certainly did not move. I heard the words passing through his mind as distinctly as though some one had whispered in my ear: