

"And that one, Irinel."

"To Mehadia! To Mehadia! Won't it be beautiful? I am bored with Slanic."

She ran about the house so quickly that her petticoats worked up above her knees. I blushed; she blushed; then breaking into a silvery laugh she threw herself upon me and said:

"We will dance a polka. I will sing. I will be gentleman; I will steer you."

Then I heard my uncle calling her: "Irinel! Irinel! where are you?"

She disappeared in a second.

I threw myself on my bed. I took up the "Chronicles," but instead of reading I began to think. "Irinel! Irinel!" The first Irinel was quick, severe, malicious, the second one was lingering, much softer, almost caressing. Of course he had meant to reassure her, he had wanted to deceive me. He thought to make me believe he had meant nothing. But what did that "where are you?" signify?

I understood from the way in which he had said "where" that there lay the real drift of the question. He had not anything to say to her, but he very much wanted to know "where" she was. In other words, was she perchance with me in my room? Such espionage was humiliating for an orphan whose whole life he had directed, and whose fortune he had controlled, because he had the right to say to him with a single word, by a single look: "This is how I reward an ungrateful person, a youth who has no regard for the old men who are soon to pass away, burying with them the moral customs of this country." That "where are you?" was as clear as noonday. Do you suppose he did not know where she was?

"Ah! An orphan must not fall in love!"

I don't know what other thoughts I had. The door of the room opened; Irinel stood in the doorway.

How great an unhappiness it is to see happiness standing on the threshold, and to know it will not cross; that it will remain yonder, so near and yet so far!

Irinel crossed the threshold; she came up to me. I realized that she had crossed the threshold, but still my happiness remained outside. I understood the old man had sent her back in order to deceive me, and that she had guessed nothing.

"Do you know what Father has just told me? A guest is coming to us at the festival of St. Peter. A big merchant."

What did that mean?

"And did he say anything else?"

"Nothing; but yes, he did. We are to kill our fattest chicken and the house is to be put into the most spick and span order, for our guest is an important merchant, a deputy, elderly, and I don't know what all and what else."

After teasing me and laughing at me because I coughed just as the girls at school did to make the doctor prescribe iron and old wine, but more particularly old wine than iron, Irinel left me.

"Ugh! It's lucky he is old. Supposing he had been a young man?"

On St. Peter's day I rose in such a state of anxiety that I started at every sound. Has it not been known for old men to lose their heads