

XIII. THE TRAITRESS

After luncheon we began to play at round games, in which I took a lively part. While indulging in "cat and mouse", I happened to cannon rather awkwardly against the Kornakoffs' governess, who was playing with us, and, stepping on her dress, tore a large hole in it. Seeing that the girls--particularly Sonetchka--were anything but displeased at the spectacle of the governess angrily departing to the maidservants' room to have her dress mended, I resolved to procure them the satisfaction a second time. Accordingly, in pursuance of this amiable resolution, I waited until my victim returned, and then began to gallop madly round her, until a favourable moment occurred for once more planting my heel upon her dress and reopening the rent. Sonetchka and the young princesses had much ado to restrain their laughter, which excited my conceit the more, but St. Jerome, who had probably divined my tricks, came up to me with the frown which I could never abide in him, and said that, since I seemed disposed to mischief, he would have to send me away if I did not moderate my behaviour.

However, I was in the desperate position of a person who, having staked more than he has in his pocket, and feeling that he can never make up his account, continues to plunge on unlucky cards--not because he hopes to regain his losses, but because it will not do for him to stop and consider. So, I merely laughed in an impudent fashion and flung away from my monitor.

After "cat and mouse", another game followed in which the gentlemen sit on one row of chairs and the ladies on another, and choose each other for partners. The youngest princess always chose the younger Iwin, Katenka either Woloda or Ilinka, and Sonetchka Seriosha--nor, to my extreme astonishment, did Sonetchka seem at all embarrassed when her cavalier went and sat down beside her. On the contrary, she only laughed her sweet, musical laugh, and made a sign with her head that he had chosen right. Since nobody chose me, I always had the mortification of finding myself left over, and of hearing them say, "Who has been left out? Oh, Nicolinka. Well, DO take him, somebody." Consequently, whenever it came to my turn to guess who had chosen me, I had to go either to my sister or to one of the ugly elder princesses. Sonetchka seemed so absorbed in Seriosha that in her eyes I clearly existed no longer. I do not quite know why I called her "the traitress" in my thoughts, since she had never promised to choose me instead of Seriosha, but, for all that, I felt convinced that she was treating me in a very abominable fashion. After the game was finished, I actually saw "the traitress" (from whom I nevertheless could not withdraw my eyes) go with Seriosha and Katenka into a corner, and engage in secret confabulation. Stealing softly round the piano which masked the conclave, I beheld the following:

Katenka was holding up a pocket-handkerchief by two of its corners, so as to form a screen for the heads of her two companions. "No, you have lost! You must pay the forfeit!" cried Seriosha at that moment, and Sonetchka, who was standing in front of him, blushed like a criminal

as she replied, "No, I have NOT lost! HAVE I, Mademoiselle Katherine?"
"Well, I must speak the truth," answered Katenka, "and say that you HAVE lost, my dear." Scarcely had she spoken the words when Seriosha embraced Sonetchka, and kissed her right on her rosy lips! And Sonetchka smiled as though it were nothing, but merely something very pleasant!

Horrors! The artful "traitress!"