

## IX -- A FIRST ESSAY IN LOVE

PRETENDING to gather some "American fruit" from a tree, Lubotshka suddenly plucked a leaf upon which was a huge caterpillar, and throwing the insect with horror to the ground, lifted her hands and sprang away as though afraid it would spit at her. The game stopped, and we crowded our heads together as we stooped to look at the curiosity.

I peeped over Katenka's shoulder as she was trying to lift the caterpillar by placing another leaf in its way. I had observed before that the girls had a way of shrugging their shoulders whenever they were trying to put a loose garment straight on their bare necks, as well as that Mimi always grew angry on witnessing this manoeuvre and declared it to be a chambermaid's trick. As Katenka bent over the caterpillar she made that very movement, while at the same instant the breeze lifted the fichu on her white neck. Her shoulder was close to my lips, I looked at it and kissed it, She did not turn round, but Woloda remarked without raising his head, "What spooniness!" I felt the tears rising to my eyes, and could not take my gaze from Katenka. I had long been used to her fair, fresh face, and had always been fond of her, but now I looked at her more closely, and felt more fond of her, than I had ever done or felt before.

When we returned to the grown-ups, Papa informed us, to our great joy, that, at Mamma's entreaties, our departure was to be postponed until the following morning. We rode home beside the carriage--Woloda and

I galloping near it, and vieing with one another in our exhibition of horsemanship and daring. My shadow looked longer now than it had done before, and from that I judged that I had grown into a fine rider. Yet my complacency was soon marred by an unfortunate occurrence, Desiring to outdo Woloda before the audience in the carriage, I dropped a little behind. Then with whip and spur I urged my steed forward, and at the same time assumed a natural, graceful attitude, with the intention of whooting past the carriage on the side on which Katenka was seated. My only doubt was whether to halloo or not as I did so. In the event, my infernal horse stopped so abruptly when just level with the carriage horses that I was pitched forward on to its neck and cut a very sorry figure!