

## XXII -- THE MAZURKA

AFTERWARDS the same young man formed one of the first couple in a mazurka. He sprang to his feet, took his partner's hand, and then, instead of executing the pas de Basques which Mimi had taught us, glided forward till he arrived at a corner of the room, stopped, divided his feet, turned on his heels, and, with a spring, glided back again. I, who had found no partner for this particular dance and was sitting on the arm of Grandmamma's chair, thought to myself:

"What on earth is he doing? That is not what Mimi taught us. And there are the Iwins and Etienne all dancing in the same way-without the pas de Basques! Ah! and there is Woloda too! He too is adopting the new style, and not so badly either. And there is Sonetchka, the lovely one! Yes, there she comes!" I felt immensely happy at that moment.

The mazurka came to an end, and already some of the guests were saying good-bye to Grandmamma. She was evidently tired, yet she assured them that she felt vexed at their early departure. Servants were gliding about with plates and trays among the dancers, and the musicians were carelessly playing the same tune for about the thirteenth time in succession, when the young lady whom I had danced with before, and who was just about to join in another mazurka, caught sight of me, and, with a kindly smile, led me to Sonetchka And one of the innumerable Kornakoff princesses, at the same time asking me, "Rose or Hortie?"

"Ah, so it's YOU!" said Grandmamma as she turned round in her armchair.

"Go and dance, then, my boy."

Although I would fain have taken refuge behind the armchair rather than leave its shelter, I could not refuse; so I got up, said, "Rose," and looked at Sonetchka. Before I had time to realise it, however, a hand in a white glove laid itself on mine, and the Kornakoff girl stepped forth with a pleased smile and evidently no suspicion that I was ignorant of the steps of the dance. I only knew that the pas de Basques (the only figure of it which I had been taught) would be out of place. However, the strains of the mazurka falling upon my ears, and imparting their usual impulse to my acoustic nerves (which, in their turn, imparted their usual impulse to my feet), I involuntarily, and to the amazement of the spectators, began executing on tiptoe the sole (and fatal) pas which I had been taught.

So long as we went straight ahead I kept fairly right, but when it came to turning I saw that I must make preparations to arrest my course. Accordingly, to avoid any appearance of awkwardness, I stopped short, with the intention of imitating the "wheel about" which I had seen the young man perform so neatly.

Unfortunately, just as I divided my feet and prepared to make a spring, the Princess Kornakoff looked sharply round at my legs with such an expression of stupefied amazement and curiosity that the glance undid me. Instead of continuing to dance, I remained moving my legs up and

down on the same spot, in a sort of extraordinary fashion which bore no relation whatever either to form or rhythm. At last I stopped altogether. Every-one was looking at me--some with curiosity, some with astonishment, some with disdain, and some with compassion, Grandmamma alone seemed unmoved.

"You should not dance if you don't know the step," said Papa's angry voice in my ear as, pushing me gently aside, he took my partner's hand, completed the figures with her to the admiration of every one, and finally led her back to, her place. The mazurka was at an end.

Ah me! What had I done to be punished so heavily?

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"Every one despises me, and will always despise me," I thought to myself. "The way is closed for me to friendship, love, and fame! All, all is lost!"

Why had Woloda made signs to me which every one saw, yet which could in no way help me? Why had that disgusting princess looked at my legs? Why had Sonetchka--she was a darling, of course!--yet why, oh why, had she smiled at that moment?

Why had Papa turned red and taken my hand? Can it be that he was ashamed of me?

Oh, it was dreadful! Alas, if only Mamma had been there she would never have blushed for her Nicolinka!

How on the instant that dear image led my imagination captive! I seemed to see once more the meadow before our house, the tall lime-trees in the garden, the clear pond where the ducks swam, the blue sky dappled with white clouds, the sweet-smelling ricks of hay. How those memories--aye, and many another quiet, beloved recollection--floated through my mind at that time!