

XXXVII. AFFAIRS OF THE HEART

Affaires du coeur exercised me greatly that winter. In fact, I fell in love three times. The first time, I became passionately enamoured of a buxom lady whom I used to see riding at Freitag's riding-school; with the result that every day when she was taking a lesson there (that is to say, every Tuesday and Friday) I used to go to gaze at her, but always in such a state of trepidation lest I should be seen that I stood a long way off, and bolted directly I thought her likely to approach the spot where I was standing. Likewise, I used to turn round so precipitately whenever she appeared to be glancing in my direction that I never saw her face well, and to this day do not know whether she was really beautiful or not.

Dubkoff, who was acquainted with her, surprised me one day in the riding-school, where I was lurking concealed behind the lady's grooms and the fur wraps which they were holding, and, having heard from Dimitri of my infatuation, frightened me so terribly by proposing to introduce me to the Amazon that I fled incontinently from the school, and was prevented by the mere thought that possibly he had told her about me from ever entering the place again, or even from hiding behind her grooms, lest I should encounter her.

Whenever I fell in love with ladies whom I did not know, and especially married women, I experienced a shyness a thousand times greater than I had ever felt with Sonetchka. I dreaded beyond measure that my divinity

should learn of my passion, or even of my existence, since I felt sure that, once she had done so, she would be so terribly offended that I should never be forgiven for my presumption. And indeed, if the Amazon referred to above had ever come to know how I used to stand behind the grooms and dream of seizing her and carrying her off to some country spot--if she had ever come to know how I should have lived with her there, and how I should have treated her, it is probable that she would have had very good cause for indignation! But I always felt that, once I got to know her, she would straightway divine these thoughts, and consider herself insulted by my acquaintance.

As my second *affaire du coeur*, I, (for the third time) fell in love with Sonetchka when I saw her at her sister's. My second passion for her had long since come to an end, but I became enamoured of her this third time through Lubotshka sending me a copy-book in which Sonetchka had copied some extracts from Lermontoff's *The Demon*, with certain of the more subtly amorous passages underlined in red ink and marked with pressed flowers. Remembering how Woloda had been wont to kiss his inamorata's purse last year, I essayed to do the same thing now; and really, when alone in my room in the evenings and engaged in dreaming as I looked at a flower or occasionally pressed it to my lips, I would feel a certain pleasantly lachrymose mood steal over me, and remain genuinely in love (or suppose myself to be so) for at least several days.

Finally, my third *affaire du coeur* that winter was connected with the lady with whom Woloda was in love, and who used occasionally to visit

at our house. Yet, in this damsel, as I now remember, there was not a single beautiful feature to be found--or, at all events, none of those which usually pleased me. She was the daughter of a well-known Moscow lady of light and leading, and, petite and slender, wore long flaxen curls after the English fashion, and could boast of a transparent profile. Every one said that she was even cleverer and more learned than her mother, but I was never in a position to judge of that, since, overcome with craven bashfulness at the mere thought of her intellect and accomplishments, I never spoke to her alone but once, and then with unaccountable trepidation. Woloda's enthusiasm, however (for the presence of an audience never prevented him from giving vent to his rapture), communicated itself to me so strongly that I also became enamoured of the lady. Yet, conscious that he would not be pleased to know that two brothers were in love with the same girl, I never told him of my condition. On the contrary, I took special delight in the thought that our mutual love for her was so pure that, though its object was, in both cases, the same charming being, we remained friends and ready, if ever the occasion should arise, to sacrifice ourselves for one another. Yet I have an idea that, as regards self-sacrifice, he did not quite share my views, for he was so passionately in love with the lady that once he was for giving a member of the diplomatic corps, who was said to be going to marry her, a slap in the face and a challenge to a duel; but, for my part, I would gladly have sacrificed my feelings for his sake, seeing that the fact that the only remark I had ever addressed to her had been on the subject of the dignity of classical music, and that my passion, for all my efforts to keep it alive, expired the following

week, would have rendered it the more easy for me to do so.