

recollected those words with which Fanny a moment before had betrayed our secret. "This hand is mine"—and he smiled at me.

"Is that the way matters stand? Then you have your reward in your hands, . . . and you can leave these two weeping women to me."

Therewith he threw himself on his face upon the floor before them, and embracing their feet kissed the dust beneath them.

"Oh, my darlings! My loved ones."

## CHAPTER XXI

## THAT LETTER

WHAT those who had so long waited, spoke and thought during that night cannot be written down. These are sacred matters, not to be exposed to the public gaze.

Lorand confessed all, and was pardoned for all.

And he was as happy in that pardon as a child who had been again received into favor.

Lorand indeed felt as if he were beginning his life now at the point where ten years before it had been interrupted, and as if all that happened during ten years had been merely a dream, of which only the heavy beard of manhood remained.

It was very late in the morning when he and Desiderius woke. Sleep had proved very pleasant for once.

Sleep—and in place of death too.

"Well old fellow," said Lorand to his brother, "I owe you one more adventurous joke, with which I wish to surprise you."

The threat was uttered so good-humoredly that Desiderius had no cause to be frightened, but he said quietly: "Tell me what it is."

Lorand laughed.

"I shall not go home with you now."

"Well, and what shall you do?" inquired Desiderius quite as astonished as Lorand had expected.

"I shall escape from you," he said, shaking his head good-humoredly.

"Ah, that is an audacious enterprise! But tell me, where are you going to escape to?"

"Ha, ha! I shall not merely tell you where I am go-

ing, but I shall take you with me to look after me henceforward as you have done hitherto."

"You are very wise to do so.—May I know whither?"

"Back to Lankadomb."

"To Lankadomb? Perhaps you have lost something there?"

"Yes, my senses.—Well don't look at me so curiously as if you wished to ask whether I ever had any. You and this little girl quite understand each other. I see that mother and grandmother too are sufficiently in love with her to give her to you: but my blessing has yet to come, old man—that you have not received yet."

"Hope assures me that perhaps I have softened your hard heart."

"Not all at once. I shall tell you something."

"I am all ears."

"In my will I passed over all my worldly wealth to you: the sealed letter is in your possession. As far as I know you, I believe I shall cause you endless joy by asking back my will from you, and telling you that you will now be poorer by half your wealth, for the other half I require."

"I know that without waiting for you to teach me. But what has your old testament to do with the gospel of my heart?"

"Oh your head must be very dense, old fellow, if you don't understand yet. Then listen to my ultimatum. I refuse to give my consent to your marrying—before me."

Desiderius threw himself on Lorand's neck; he understood now.

"There is somebody you love?"

Lorand assented with a smile.

"Of course there is. But—you know how that blackguard (by Jove, you gave him a powerful shaking!) confused my calculation for an entire life. I could not make her understand about that of which the continuation begins only to-day. Still, all the more reason for hastening. A half hour is necessary to tell an-

other all about it, half an hour in a carriage: they will remain here meanwhile. We shall fly to Topándy at Lankadomb: by evening we shall have finished all, and to-morrow we shall be here again, like two flying madmen, who are striving to see which can carry the other off more rapidly towards the goal—where happiness awaits him. I shall drive the horses to Lankadomb, you can drive them back."

"Poor horses!"

Desiderius did not dare to go himself with these glad tidings to his mother. He entrusted Fanny to prepare her for them—perhaps so much delight would have killed her.

They told her Lorand had official business which called him to Lankadomb for one day; and they started together with Topándy.

Topándy was let into the secret, and considered it his duty to go with Lorand—he might be required to give the bride away.

The world around Lorand had changed—at least so he thought, but the change in reality was within him.

He was indeed born again: he had become quite a different man from the Lorand of yesterday. The noisy good-humor of yesterday badly concealed the resolve that despised death, just as the dreaminess of to-day openly betrayed the happiness that filled his heart.

The whole way Desiderius could scarcely get one word from him, but he might easily read in his face all upon which he was meditating: and if he did utter once or twice encomiums on the beautiful May fields, Desiderius could see that his heart too felt spring within it.

How beautiful it was to live again, to be happy and gay, to have hopes, expect good in the future, to love and be proud in one's love, to go with head erect, to be all in all to someone!

At noon they arrived at Lankadomb.

Czipra ran out to meet them and clapped her hands.

"You were driven away; how did you get back so soon? Well no one expected you to dinner."

Lorand was the first to leap off the cart, and tenderly offered his hand to the girl.

"We have arrived, my dear Czipra. Even if you did not expect us to dinner, you can give us some of your own."

"Oh, no," said the girl in a whisper, blushing at the same time, "I have been accustomed to eat at the servant's table, when you were not at home, and you have brought a guest too. Who is that gentleman?"

"My brother, Desi, a very good fellow. Kiss him, Czipra."

Czipra did not wait to be told twice, and Desiderius returned the kiss.

"Now give him a room: to-day we shall stay here. Send up water to my room, we have got very dusty on the way, although we wished to be handsome to-day."

"Indeed?"—Czipra took Desiderius' hand, and as she led him to his room, asked him the whole history of his life: where he lived: why he had not visited Lorand sooner: was he married already, and would he ever come back there again?

Desiderius had learned from Lorand's letters about Czipra that he might readily answer any question the poor girl might ask, and might at first sight tell her every secret of his heart. Czipra was delighted.

Lorand, however, did not wait for Topándy, who was coming behind, but rushed to his room.

That letter, that letter!—it had been on his mind the whole way.

His first duty was to take it out of the closed drawer and read it over.

He did not deliberate long now whether to break the seal or not: and the envelope tore in his hand, as the seal would not yield.

And then he read the following words:

"SIR:

"That minute, in which I learned your name, raised a barrier for ever between us. The recollections which are a burden upon you, cannot be continued by an

alliance between us. You who dragged my mother down into misfortune, and then faithlessly deserted her, cannot insure me happiness, or expect faithfulness from me. I shall weep over Bálint Tátray, as my departed to whom my dream gave being, and whom cold truth has buried; but Lorand Áronffy I do not know. It is my duty to tell you so, and if you are, as I believe, a man of honor, you will consider it your duty, should we ever meet in life, never again to make mention of what was Bálint Tátray.

Good-bye,

"MELANIE."

Lorand fell back in his chair broken-hearted.

That was the contents of the letter he had kissed—the letter which, on the threshold of the house of death he had not dared to open, lest the happiness which would beam upon him should shake the firmness of his tread. Ah, they wished to make death easy for him! To write such a letter to him! To utter such words to one she had loved! . . . .

"Why, she is right. I was not the Joseph of the Bible: but does not love begin with pardon? Did I blame her for the possession of that ring she let fall in the water? And from whom could she know that my crime was worse than that which hung round that ring?"

"And if I were steeped in that crime with which she charges me, how can an angel, who may know nothing of what happens in hell, put such a thought in these cold-blooded words.

"They wished to kill me.

"They wished to close the door behind me, as Johanna of Naples did to her husband, when he was struggling with his assassins.

"And they wished to wash clean the murderer's hands, throwing upon me the charge of having killed myself because my love was despised.

"They knew everything well, they calculated all with cold mercilessness. They waited for the hour to come, and whetted the knife before I took it in my hands.

"And yet I can never hate her! She has plunged the dagger into my heart, and I remember only the kiss she gave. . . ."

That moment he felt a quiet pressure on his shoulder. Confused, he looked up. Czipra was standing behind him. The poor gypsy girl could not allow anyone else to wait on Lorand: she had herself brought him the water.

The girl's face betrayed a tender fear: she might long have been observing him, unknown to him.

"What is the matter?" she asked in trembling anxiety.

Lorand could not speak. He merely showed her the letter he had read.

Czipra could not understand the writing. She did not know how one could poison another with dumb letters, could wound his heart to its depths, and murder it. She merely saw that the letter made Lorand ill.

She recognized that rose-colored paper, those fine characters.

"Melanie wrote that."

By way of reply Lorand in bitter inexpressible pain turned his gaze towards the letter.

And the gypsy girl knew what that gaze said, knew what was written in that letter: with a wild beast's passion she tore it from Lorand's hand and passionately shred it into fragments and cast it on the ground, then trampled upon its pieces, as one tramples upon running spiders.

Thereupon she hid her face in her hands and wept in Lorand's stead.

Lorand went towards her and taking her hand, said sadly:

"You see, such are not the gypsy girls whose faces are brown, who are born under tents, and who cut cards, and make that their religion."

Then with Czipra's hand in his he walked long up and down his room without a word. Neither knew what to say to the other. They merely reflected how they could comfort each other's sorrow—and could not find a way.

This melancholy reverie was interrupted by Topándy's arrival.

"Now I beg you, Czipra, if you love me—" said Lorand.

If she loved him?

"To say not a single word to anybody of what you have seen. Nothing has happened to me.—If from this moment you ever see me sad, ask me 'What is the matter?' and I shall confess to you. But *that* pale face shall never be among those for which I mourn."

Czipra was rejoiced at these words.

"Let us show cheerful faces before my uncle and brother. Let us be good-humored. No one shall see the sting within us."

"And who knows, perhaps the bee will die for it—" Czipra departed with a cheery face as she said that. At the door she turned back once more:

"The cards told me all that last night. Till midnight I kept cutting them. But the murderer always threatens you albeit the green-robed girl always defends you.—See, I am so mad—but there is nothing else in which I can believe."

"There will be something else, Czipra," said Lorand. "Now I am going away with my brother to celebrate his marriage, then I shall return again."

Thereupon there was no more need to insist on Czipra's being good-humored the whole day. Her good-humor came voluntarily.

Poor girl, so little was required to make her happy.

Lorand, as soon as Czipra was gone, collected from the floor the torn, trampled paper fragments, carefully put them together on the table, until the note was complete, then read it over once again.

Before the door of his room he heard steps, and gay talk intermingled with laughter. Topándy and Desiderius had come to see him. Lorand blew the fragments off the table: they flew in all directions: he opened the door and joined the group, a third smiling figure.