

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE UNCONSCIOUS PHANTOM

WHAT were they laughing at so much?

"Do you know what counsel Czipra gave us?" said Topányi. "As she did not expect us to dinner, she advised us to go to Sárvölgyi's, where there will be a great banquet to-day. They are expecting somebody."

"Who will probably not arrive in time for dinner," added Desiderius.

Czipra joined the conversation from the extreme end of the corridor.

"The old housekeeper from Sárvölgyi's was here to visit me. She asked for the loan of a pie-dish and ice: for Mr. Gyáli is expected to arrive to-day from Szolnok."

"Bravo!" was Topányi's remark.

"And as I see you have left the young gentleman behind, just go yourselves to taste Mistress Boris's pies, or she will overwhelm me again with curses."

"We shall go, Czipra," said Lorand: "Yes, yes, don't laugh at the idea. Get your hat, Desi: you are well enough dressed for a country call: let us go across to Sárvölgyi's."

"To Sárvölgyi's?" said Czipra, clasping her hands, and coming closer to Lorand. "You will go to Sárvölgyi's?"

"Not just for Sárvölgyi's sake," said Lorand very seriously,— "who is in other respects a very righteous pious fellow; but for the sake of his guests, who are old friends of Desi's.—Why, I have not yet told you, Desi. Madame Bálnokházy and her daughter are staying here with Sárvölgyi on a matter of some legal business. You

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cannot overlook them, if you are in the same village with them."

"I might go away without seeing them," replied Desiderius indifferently; "but I don't mind paying them a visit, lest they should think I had purposely avoided them. Have you spoken with them already?"

"Oh yes. We are on very good terms with one another."

Lorand sacrificed the caution he had once exercised in never writing a word to Desiderius about Melanie. It seemed Desi did not run after her either; what had his childish ideal come to? Another ideal had taken its place.

"Besides, seeing that Gyáli is the ladies' solicitor, and seeing that you, my dear friend, have '*manu propria*' despatched Gyáli out of Szolnok—he immediately took the post-chaise and is already in Pest, or perhaps farther—it is your official duty to give an explanation to those who are waiting for their solicitor and to tell them where you have put their man—if you have courage enough to do so."

Desiderius at first drew back, but later his calm confidence and courage immediately confirmed his resolution.

"What do you say,—if I have courage? You shall soon see. And you shall see, too, what a lawyer-like defence I am able to improvise. I wager that if I put the case before them, they will give the verdict in our favor."

"Do so, I beseech you," said Lorand, soliciting his brother with humorously clasped hands.

"I shall do so."

"Well be quick: get your hat, and let us go."

Desiderius with determined steps went in search of his hat.

Czipra laughed after him. She saw how ridiculous it would be. He was going to calumniate the bridegroom before the bride. With what words she herself did not know: but she gathered from the gentlemen's talk that Gyáli had been driven from the company the



night before for some flagrant dishonor. Since two days she too had detested that fellow.

Lorand meanwhile gazed after his brother with eyes flashing with a desire for vengeance.

Topándy grasped Lorand's hand.

"If I believed in cherubim, I should say: a persecuting angel had taken up his abode in you, to whisper that idea to you. Do you know, Desiderius is the very double of what your father was when he came home from the academy: the same face, figure, depth of voice, the same lightning fire in his eyes, and that same murderous frown, and you are now going to take that boy before Sárvölgyi that he may relate an awful story of a man who wished to murder a good friend in the most devilish manner, just as he did!"

"Hush! Desi of that knows not a word."

"So much the better. A living being, who does not suspect that to the man whom he is visiting, he is the most horrible phantom from the other world! The murdered father, risen up in the son!—It will make me acknowledge one of the ideas I have hitherto denied—the existence of hell."

Desiderius returned.

"Look at us, my dear Czipra," said Lorand to the girl, who was always fluttering around him: "are we handsome enough? Will the eyes of the beautiful rest upon us?"

"Go," answered Czipra, pushing Lorand in playful anger, "as if you didn't know yourselves! Rather take care you don't get lost there. Such handsome fellows are readily snapped up."

"No, Czipra, we shall return to you," said Lorand, pressing Czipra so tenderly to him, that Desiderius considered as superfluous any further questions as to why Lorand had brought him there. He approved his brother's choice: the girl was beautiful, natural, good-humored and, so it seemed, in love with him. What more could be required?—"Don't be afraid, Czipra; nobody's beautiful blue eyes shall detain us there."

"I was not afraid for your sakes of beautiful eyes,"

replied Czipra, "but of Mistress Boris's pies:—such pies cannot be got here."

Thereat all three laughed—finally Desiderius too, though he did not know what kind of mythological monster such a sadly bewitched cake might be, which came from Mistress Boris's hand.

Topándy embraced the two young fellows. He was sorry he could not accompany them, but begged Lorand notwithstanding to remain as long as he liked.

Czipra followed them to the door. Lorand there grasped her hand, and tenderly kissed it. The girl did not know whether to be ashamed or delighted.

Thrice did Lorand turn round, before they reached Sárvölgyi's home, to wave his hand to Czipra.

Desiderius did not require any further enlightenment on that point. He thought he understood all quite well.

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Mistress Boris meanwhile had a fine job at her house.

"He was a fool who conceived the idea of ordering a banquet for an indefinite time:—not to know whether he, for whom one must wait, will come at one, at two, at three,—in the evening, or after midnight."

Twenty times she ran out to the door to see whether he was coming already or not. Every sound of carriage wheels, every dog-bark enticed her out into the road, from whence she returned each time more furious, pouring forth invectives over the spoiling of all her dishes.

"Perhaps that gypsy girl again! Devil take the gypsy girl! She is quite capable of giving this guest a breakfast there first, and then letting him go. It would be madness surely, seeing that the town gentleman is the fiancé of the young lady here: but the gypsy girl too has cursed bright eyes. Besides she is very cunning, capable of bewitching any man. The damned gypsy girl,—her spells make her cakes always rise beautifully, while mine wither away in the boiling fat—although they are made of the same flour, and the same yeast."



It would not have been good for any one of the domestics to show herself within sight of Mistress Borcsa \* at that moment.

"Well, my master has again burdened me with a guest who thinks the clock strikes midday in the evening. It was a pity he did not invite him for yesterday, in that case he might have turned up to-day. Why, I ought to begin cooking everything afresh.

"I may say, he is a fine bridegroom for a young lady, who lets people wait for him. If I were the bridegroom of such a beautiful young lady, I should come to dinner half a day earlier, not half a day later. There will be nice scenes, if he has his cooking ever done at home. But of course at Vienna that is not the case, everybody lives on restaurant fare. There one may dine at six in the afternoon. At any rate, what midday diners leave is served up again for the benefit of later comers:—thanks, very much."

Finally the last bark which Mistress Boris did not deign even to notice from the kitchen, heralded the approach of manly footsteps in the verandah: and when in answer to the bell Mistress Boris rushed to the door, to her great astonishment she beheld, not the gentleman from Vienna, but the one from across the way, with a strange young gentleman.

"May I speak with the master?" inquired Lorand of the fiery Amazon.

"Of course. He is within. Haven't you brought the gentleman from Vienna?"

"He will only come after dinner," said Lorand, who dared to jest even with Mistress Boris.

Then they went in, leaving Mistress Boris behind, the prey of doubt.

"Was it real or in jest? What do *they* want here? Why did they not bring him whom they took away? Will they remain here long?"

The whole party had gathered in the grand salon.

They too thought that the steps they heard brought the one they were expecting—and very impatiently too.

\* Boris.

Gyáli had informed them he would take a carriage and return, as soon as he could escape from the revelry at Szolnok. Melanie and her mother were dressed in silk: on Melanie's wavy curls could be seen the traces of a mother's careful hand: and Madame Bálnokházy herself made a very impressive picture, while Sárvölgyi had put on his very best.

They must have prepared for a very great festival here to-day!

But when the door opened before the three figures that courteously hastened to greet the new-comer, and the two brothers stepped in, all three smiling faces turned to expressions of alarm.

"You still dare to approach me?"—that was Melanie's alarm.

"You are not dead yet?" inquired Madame Bálnokházy's look of Lorand.

"You have risen again?" was the question to be read in Sárvölgyi's fixed stare that settled on Desiderius' face.

"My brother, Desiderius,"—said Lorand in a tone of unembarrassed confidence, introducing his brother. "He heard from me of the ladies being here, so perhaps Mr. Sárvölgyi will pardon us, if, in accordance with my brother's request, we steal a few moments' visit."

"With pleasure: please sit down. I am very glad to see you," said Sárvölgyi, in a husky tone, as if some invisible hand were choking his throat.

"Desiderius has grown a big boy, has he not?" said Lorand, taking a seat between Madame Bálnokházy and Melanie, while Desiderius sat opposite Sárvölgyi, who could not take his eyes off the lad.

"Big and handsome," affirmed Madame Bálnokházy. "How small he was when he danced with Melanie!"

"And how jealous he was of certain persons!"

At these words three people hinted to Lorand not to continue, Madame Bálnokházy, Melanie and Desiderius. How indiscreet these country people are!

Desiderius found his task especially difficult, after such a beginning.



But Lorand was really in a good humor. The sight of his darling of yesterday, dressed in such magnificence to celebrate the day on which her poor wretched cast-off lover was to blow his brains out, roused such a joy in his heart that it was impossible not to show it in his words. So he continued:

"Yes, believe me: the lively scamp was actually jealous of me. He almost killed me—yet we are very true to our memories."

Desiderius could not comprehend what madness had come over his brother, that he wished to bring him and Melanie together into such a false position. Perhaps it would be good to start the matter at once and interrupt the conversation.

On Madame Bálnokházy's face could be read a certain contemptuous scorn, when she looked at Lorand, as if she would say: "Well, after all, prose has conquered the poetry of honor, a man may live after the day of his death, if he has only the phlegm necessary thereto. Flight is shameful but useful,—yet you are as good as killed for all that."

This scorn would soon be wiped away from that beautiful face.

"Mesdames," said Desiderius in cold tranquillity. "Beyond paying my respects, I have another reason which made it my duty to come here. I must explain why your solicitor has not returned to-day, and why he will not return for some time."

"Great Heavens! No misfortune has befallen him?" cried Madame Bálnokházy in nervous trepidation.

"On that point you may be quite reassured, Madame: he is hale and healthy; only a slight change in his plans has taken place: he is just now flying west instead of east."

"What can be the reason?"

"I am the cause, which drove him away, I must confess."

"You?" said Madame Bálnokházy, astonished.

"If you will allow me, and have the patience for it,

I will go very far back in history to account for this peculiar climax."

Lorand remarked that Melanie was not much interested to hear what they were saying of Gyáli. She was indifferent to him: why, they were already affianced.

So he began to say pretty things to her: went into raptures about her beautiful curls, her blooming complexion, and various other things which it costs nothing to praise.

As long as he had been her lover, he had never told her how beautiful she was. She might have understood his meaning. Those whom we flatter we no longer love.

Desiderius continued the story he had begun.

"Just ten years have passed since they began to prosecute the young men of the Parliament in Pressburg on account of the publication of the Parliamentary journal. There was only one thing they could not find out, viz:—who it was that originally produced the first edition to be copied: at last one of his most intimate friends betrayed the young man in question."

"That is ancient history already, my dear boy," said Madame Bálnokházy in a tone of indifference.

"Yet its consequences have an influence even to this day; and I beg you kindly to listen to my story to the end, and then pass a verdict on it. You must know your men."

(What an innocent child Desiderius was! Why, he did not seem even to suspect that the man of whom he spoke was the designated son-in-law of Madame Bálnokházy.)

"The one, who was betrayed by his friend, was my brother Lorand, and the one who betrayed his friend, was Gyáli."

"That is not at all certain," said Madame. "In such cases appearances and passion often prove deceptive mirrors. It is possible that someone else betrayed Mr. Áronffy, perhaps some fickle woman, to whom he babbled of all his secrets and who handed it on to her am-



bitious husband as a means of supporting his own merits."

"I know positively that my assertion is correct," answered Desiderius, "for a magnanimous lady, who guarded my brother with her fairy power, hearing of this betrayal from her influential husband, informed Lorand thereof in a letter written by her own hand."

Madame Bálnokházy bit her lips. The undeserved compliment smote her to the heart. She was the magnanimous fairy, of whom Desiderius spoke, and that fickle woman of whom she had spoken herself. The barrister was a master of repartee.

Melanie, fortunately, did not hear this, for Lorand just then entertained her with a wonderful story: how that, curiously enough, when the young lady had been at Topándy's, the hyacinths had been covered with lovely clusters of fairy bells, and how, one week later, their place had been taken by ugly clusters of berries. How could flowers change so suddenly?

"Very well," said Madame Bálnokházy, "let us admit that when Gyáli and Áronffy were students together, the one played the traitor on the other. What happened then?"

"I only learned last night what really happened. That evening I was on a visit to Lorand, and found Gyáli there. They appeared to be joking. They playfully disputed as to who, at the farewell dance, was to be the partner of that very honorable lady, who may often be seen in your company. The two students disputed in my presence as to who was to dance with the 'aunt.'"

"Of course, as a piece of unusual good fortune."

"Naturally. As neither wished to give the other preference, they finally decided to entrust the verdict to lot; on the table was a small piece of paper, the only writing material to be found in Lorand's room after a careful rummaging, as all the rest had just been burned. This piece of lilac-colored paper was torn in two, and both wrote one name; these two pieces they put in a hat

and called upon me to draw out one. I did so and read out Lorand's name."

"Do you intend to relate how your brother enjoyed himself at that dance?"

Melanie had not heard anything.

"I have no intention of saying a single word more about that day—and I shall at once leap over ten years. But I must hasten to explain that the drawing had nothing to do with dancing with the 'aunt' but was the lottery of an 'American duel' caused by a conflict between Gyáli and Lorand."

Desiderius did not remark how the coppery spots on Sárvölgyi's face swelled at the words "American duel," and then how they lost their color again.

"One moment, my dear boy," interrupted Madame Bálnokházy. "Before you continue: allow me to ask one question: is it customary to speak in society of duels that have not yet taken place?"

"Certainly, if one of the principals has by his cowardly conduct made the duel impossible."

"Cowardly conduct?" said Madame Bálnokházy, darting a piercing side glance at Lorand. "That applies to you."

But Lorand was just relating to Melanie how the day-before-yesterday, when the beautiful moonlight shone upon the piano, which had remained open as the young lady had left it, soft fairy voices began suddenly to rise from it. Though that was surely no spirit playing on the keys, but Czippa's tame white weasel that, hunting night moths, ran along them.

"Yes," said Desiderius in answer to the lady. "One of the principals who accepted the condition gave evidence of such conduct on that occasion as must shut him out from all honorable company. Gyáli wrote in forged writing on that ticket the name of Lorand instead of his own."

Madame Bálnokházy incredulously pursed her lips.

"How can you prove that?"

"I did not cast into the fire, as Gyáli bade me, the



two tickets, but in their stead the dance programme I had brought with me, the two tickets I put away and have kept until to-day, suspecting that perhaps there might be some rather important reason for this calculating slyness."

"Pardon me; but a very serious charge is being raised against an absent person, who cannot defend himself, and to defend whom is therefore the duty of the next and nearest person, even at the price of great indulgence. Have you any proof, any authentic evidence, that either one of the tickets you have kept is forged?"

Madame Bálnokházy had gone to great extremes in doubting the faithfulness and truth-telling of a man,—but rather too far. She had to deal with a barrister.

"The similarity admits of no doubt, Madame. Since these two slips are nothing but two halves that fit together, of that same letter in which Lorand's good-hearted fairy informed him of Gyáli's treachery; on the opposite side of the slips is still to be seen the handwriting of that deeply honored lady: the date and watermark are still on them."

Madame's bosom heaved with anger. This youth of twenty-three had annihilated her just as calmly, as he would have burnt that piece of paper of which they were speaking.

Desiderius quietly produced his pocket-book and rummaged for the fatal slips of paper.

"Never mind. I believe it," panted Madame Bálnokházy, whose face in that moment was like a furious Medusa head. "I believe what you say. I have no doubts about it:" therewith she rose from her seat and turned to the window.

Desiderius too rose from his chair, seeing the sitting was interrupted, but could not resist the temptation of pouring out the overflowing bitterness of his heart before somebody; and, as Madame was displeased and Melanie was chatting with Lorand of trifles, he was obliged to address his words directly to his only hearer, to Sárkölygi, who remained still sitting, like one enchanted, while his gaze rested ever upon Desiderius'

face. This faze, drunken with rage and terror, could not tear itself from the object of its fears.

"And this fellow has allowed his dearest friend to go through life for ten years haunted with the thought of death, has allowed him to hide himself in strangers' houses, avoiding his mother's embraces. It did not occur to him once to say 'Live on; don't persecute yourself; we were children, we have played together. I merely played a joke on you.' . . ."

Sárkölygi turned livid with a deathly pallor.

"Sir, you are a Christian, who believes in God, and in those who are saints: tell me, is there any torture of hell that could be punishment enough for so ruining a youth?"

Sárkölygi tremblingly strove to raise himself on his quivering hand. He thought his last hour had come.

"There is none!" answered Desiderius to himself. "This fellow kept his hatred till the last day, and when the final anniversary came, he actually sought out his victim to remind him of his awful obligation. Oh, sir, perhaps you do not know what a terrible fatality there is in this respect in our family? So died grandfather, so it was that our dearly loved father left us; so good, so noble-hearted, but who in a bitter moment, amidst the happiness of his family turned his hand against his own life. At night we stealthily took him out to burial. Without prayer, without blessing, we put him down into the crypt, where he filled the seventh place; and that night my grandmother, raving, cursed him who should occupy the eighth place in the row of blood-victims."

Sárkölygi's face became convulsed like that of a galvanized corpse. Desiderius thought deep sympathy had so affected the righteous man and continued all the more passionately:

"That fellow, who knew it well, and who was acquainted with our family's unfortunate ill-luck, in cold blood led his friend to the eighth coffin, to the cursed coffin—with the words 'Lie down there in it!'"

Sárkölygi's lips trembled as if he would cry "pity: say nothing more!"



"He went with him down to the gate of death, opened the dark door before him, and asked him banteringly 'is the pistol loaded?' and when Lorand took his place amid the revellers: bade him fulfil his obligation—the perjured hound called him to his obligation!"

Sárvölgyi, all pale, rose at this awful scene:—for all the world as if Lőrincz Áronffy himself had come to relate the history of his own death to his murderer.

"Then I seized Lorand's arm with my one hand, and with the other held before the wretch's eyes the evidence of his cursed falseness. His evil conscience bade him fly. I reached him, seized his throat. . . ."

Sárvölgyi in abject terror sank back in his chair, while Madame Bálnokházy, rushing from the window, passionately cried "and killed him?"

Desiderius, gazing haughtily at her, answered calmly: "No, I merely cast him out from the society of honorable men."

To Lorand it was a savage pleasure to look at those three faces, as Desiderius spoke. The dumb passion which inflamed Madame Bálnokházy's face, the convulsive terror on the features of the fatal adversary, strove with each other to fill his heart with a great delight.

And Melanie? What had she felt during this narration, which made such an ugly figure of the man to whom fate allotted her?

Lorand's eyes were intent upon her face too.

The young girl was not so transfixed by the subject of the tale as by the speaker. Desiderius in the heat of passion, was twice as handsome as he was otherwise. His every feature was lighted with noble passion. Who knows—perhaps the beautiful girl was thinking it would be no very pleasant future to be the bride of Gyáli after such a scandal! Perhaps there returned to her memory some fragments of those fair days at Pressburg, when she and Desiderius had sighed so often side by side. That boy had been very much in love with his beautiful cousin. He was more handsome and more spirited than

his brother. Perhaps her thoughts were such. Who knows?

At any rate, it is certain that when Desiderius answered Madame's question with such calm contempt—"I cast him out, I did not kill him,"—on Melanie's face could be remarked a certain radiance, though not caused by delight that her fiancé's life had been spared.

Lorand remarked it, and hastened to spoil the smile.

"Certainly you would have killed him, Desi, had not your good angel, your dear Fanny, luckily for you, intervened, and grasped your arm, saying 'this hand is mine. You must not defile it.'"

The smile disappeared from Melanie's face.

"And now," said Desiderius, addressing his remarks directly to Sárvölgyi; "be my judge, sir. What had a man, who with such sly deception, with such cold mercilessness, desired to kill, to destroy, to induce a heart in which the same blood flows as in mine—to commit a crime against the living God, what, I ask, had such a man deserved from me? Have I not a right to drive that man from every place, where he dares to appear in the light of the sun, until I compel him to walk abroad at night when men do not see him, among strangers who do not know him;—to destroy him morally with just as little mercy as he displayed towards Lorand?—Would that be a crime?"

"Great Heavens! Something has happened to Mr. Sárvölgyi," cried Madame Bálnokházy suddenly.

And indeed Sárvölgyi was very pale, his limbs were almost powerless, but he did not faint. He put his hands behind him, lest they should remark how they trembled, and strove to smile.

"Sir," he said in a hesitating voice, which often refused to serve him: "although I have nothing to say against it, yet you have told your story at an unfortunate time and in an ill-chosen place:—this young lady is Mr. Gyáli's fiancée and to-day we had prepared for the wedding."

"I am heartily glad that I prevented it," said Desiderius, without being in the least disturbed at this dis-



covery. "I think I am doing my relations a good service by staying them at the point where they would have fallen over a precipice."

"You are a master-hand at that," said Madame Bálnokházy with scornful bitterness. She remembered how he had done her a service by a similar intervention—just ten years ago. "Well, as you have succeeded so perfectly in rescuing us from the precipice, perhaps we may hope for the honor of your presence at the friendly conclusion of this spoiled matrimonial banquet?"

Madame Bálnokházy's wandering life had whetted her cynicism.

It was a direct hint for them to go.

"We are very much obliged for the kind invitation," replied Lorand courteously, paying her back in the same coin of sweetness, "but they are expecting us at home."

"Hearts too, which one may not trifle with," continued Desiderius.

"Then, of course, we should not think of stealing you away," continued Madame Bálnokházy, touched to the quick. "Kindly greet, in our names, dear Czipra and dear Fanny. We are very fond indeed of the good girls, and wish you much good fortune with them. The arms of Áronffy, too, find an explanation therein: the half-moon will in one case mean a horse-shoe, in the other a bread-roll. Adieu, dear Lorand! Adieu, dear Desi!"

Then arm-in-arm they departed and hurried home to Topándy's house.

Madame's last outburst had thrown Desiderius into an entirely good humor. That was the first thing about which he began to converse with Topándy. Madame Bálnokházy had congratulated the Áronffy arms on the possession of a "horse-shoe" and a "roll," a gypsy girl and a baker's daughter!

But Lorand did not laugh at it:—what a fathomless deep hatred that woman must treasure in her heart against him, that she could break out so! And was she

not right that woman who had desired the young man to embrace her, and thus embracing her to rush on to the precipice, into shame and death, and damnation, if he could love really:—had she no right to scorn him who had fled before the romantic crimes of passion and had allowed her to fall alone?

At dinner Desiderius related to Topándy what he had said at Sár völgyi's. His face beamed like that of some young student who was glorying in his first duel.

But he could not understand the effect his narration had caused. Topándy's face became suddenly more determined, more serious; he gazed often at Lorand.

Once Desiderius too looked up at his brother, who was wiping his tear-stained eyes with his handkerchief.

"You are weeping?" inquired Desiderius.

"What are you thinking of? I was only wiping my brow. Continue your story."

When they rose from table Topándy called Lorand aside.

"This young fellow knows nothing of what I related to you?"

"Absolutely nothing."

"So he has not the slightest suspicion that in that moment he plunged the knife into the heart of his father's murderer?"

"No. Nor shall he ever know it. A double mission has been entrusted to us, to be happy and to wreak vengeance. Neither of us can undertake both at once. He has started to be happy, his heart is full of sweetness, he is innocent, unsuspecting, enthusiastic: let him be happy: God forbid his days should be poisoned by such agonizing thoughts as will not let me rest!—I am enough myself for revenge, embittered as I am from head to foot. The secret is known only to us, to grandmother and the Pharisee himself. We shall complete the reckoning without the aid of happy men."



## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE DAY OF GLADNESS

"LET us go back at once to your darling," said Lorand next morning to his brother. "My affair is already concluded."

Desiderius did not ask "how concluded?" but thought it easy to account for this speech. It could easily be concluded between Topándy and Lorand, as the former was the girl's adopted father: Lorand had only to disclose to him everything about which it had been his melancholy duty to keep silence until the day of the catastrophe, which he was awaiting, had arrived.

Nor could Desiderius suspect that the word "concluded" referred to the visit they had paid together to Sárvölgyi. How could he have imagined that Melanie, who had been introduced to him as Gyáli's fiancée, had one week before filled Lorand's whole soul with a holy light.

And that light had indeed been extinguished forever.

Even if they had not succeeded in murdering Lorand they had made a dead man of him, such a dead man as walks, throws himself into the affairs of the world, enjoys himself and laughs—who only knows himself the day of his death.

Desiderius ventured to ask "When?"

He always thought of Czipra.

Lorand answered lightly:

"When we return."

"Whence?"

"From your wedding."

"Why, you said yours must precede mine."

"You are again playing the advocate!" retorted Lorand. "I referred not to the execution, but to the

arrangements. My banns have been called before yours; that was my desire. Now it is your business to carry your affair through before I do mine. Your affair of the heart can easily be concluded in three days."

"An excellent explanation! And your marriage requires longer preparations?"

"Much longer."

"What obstacle can Czipra present?"

"An obstacle which you know very well: Czipra is still—a heathen. Now the first requisite here for marriage is the birth-certificate. You know well that Topándy has hitherto brought the poor girl up in an uncivilized manner. I cannot present her to mother in this state. She must learn to know the principles of religion, and just so much of the alphabet as is necessary for a country lady—and you must realize that several weeks are necessary for that. That is what we must wait for."

Desiderius had to acknowledge that Lorand's excuse was well-grounded.

And perhaps Lorand was not jesting? Perhaps he thought the poor girl loved him with her whole soul, and would be happy to possess these fragments of a broken heart. Yet he had not told her anything. Czipra had seen him in desperation over that letter: as far as the faithful, loving girl was concerned, it would have been merely an insult, if the idol of her heart had offered her his hand the next moment, out of mere offended pride; and, while she offered him impassioned love, given her merely cold revenge in return.

This feeling of revenge must soften. Every impulse guided to the old state of things.

Meantime the marriage of Desiderius would be a good influence. He was marrying Fanny. The young couple would, during their honeymoon, visit Lankadomb: true love was an education in itself: and then—even cemeteries grow verdant in spring.

The two young men reached Szolnok punctually at noon.



And thence they returned home.

Home, sweet home! At home in a beloved mother's house. A man visits many gay places where people enjoy themselves: finds himself at times in glorious palaces; builds himself a nest, and rears a house of his own:—but even then some sweet enchantment overcomes his heart when he steps over the threshold of that quiet dwelling where a loving mother's guardian hand has protected every souvenir of his childhood,—so that he finds everything as he left it long ago, and sees and feels that, while he has lived through the changing events of a period in his life, that loving heart has still clung to that last moment, and that the intervening time has been but as the eternal remembrance of one hour spent within those walls.

There are his childhood's toys piled up; he would love to sit down once more among them, and play with them: there are the books that delighted his childhood's days; he would love to read them anew, and learn again what he had long forgotten, what was in those days such great knowledge.

Lorand spent a happy week at home, in the course of which Mrs. Fromm took Fanny back to Pressburg.

As Desiderius had asked for Fanny's hand, it was only proper that he should take his bride away from her parents' house.

One week later the whole Áronffy family started to fetch the bride; only Desiderius' mother remained at home.

In the little house in Prince's Avenue the same old faces all awaited them, only they were ten years older. Old Márton hastened, as erstwhile, to open the carriage door; only his moving crest was as white as that of a cockatoo. Father Fromm, too, was waiting at the door, but could no longer run to meet his guests, for his left arm and leg were paralyzed: he leaned upon a long bony young man, who had spent much pains in trying to twist into a moustache by the aid of cunning unguents the few hairs on his upper lip, that would not under any circumstances consent to grow. It was easy

to recognize Henrik in the young fellow who would have loved so much to smile, only that cursed waxed moustache would not allow his mouth to open very far.

"Welcome, welcome," sounded from all sides. Father Fromm opened his arms to receive the grandmother: Henrik leaped on to Desiderius' neck, while old Márton slouched up to Lorand, and, nudging him with his elbows, said with a humorous smile, "Well, no harm came of it, you see."

"No, old fellow. And I have to thank this good stick for it," said Lorand, producing from under his coat Márton's walking stick, for which he had had made a beautiful silver handle in place of the previous dog's-foot.

The old fellow was beside himself with delight that they thought so much of his relics.

"Is it true," he asked, "that you fought two highwaymen with this stick? Master Desiderius wrote to say so."

"No, only one."

"And you knocked him down?"

"It was impossible for he ran away. Now I have done my walking, and give back the stick with thanks."

But it was not the silver handle that delighted Márton so. He took the returned stick into the shop, like some trophy, and related to the assistants, how Master Lorand had, with that alone, knocked down three highwaymen. He would not have surrendered that stick for a whole Mecklenburg full of every kind of cane.

Old Grandmother Fromm, too, was still alive and counted it a great triumph that she had just finished the hundredth pair of stockings for Fanny's trousseau.

And last, but not least, Fanny, even more beautiful, even more amiable!—as if she had not seen Desiderius and his grandmother for an eternity!

"Well, you will be our daughter!"

And they all loved Desiderius so.

"What a handsome man he has grown," complimented Grandmother Fromm.

"What a good fellow!"—remarked Mother Fromm.



"What a clever fellow! How learned!" was Father Fromm's encomium.

"And what a muscular rascal!" said Henrik, overcome with astonishment that another boy too had grown as large as he. "Do you remember how one evening you threw me on to the bed? How angry I was with you then!"

"Do you remember how the first evening you put away the cake for Henrik?" said grandmamma. "How you blushed then!"

"Do you remember," interrupted Father Fromm, "the first time you addressed me in German? How I laughed at you then!"

"Well, and do you remember me?" said Fanny playfully, putting her hand on her fiancé's arm.

"When first you kissed me here," retorted Desiderius, looking into her beaming eyes.

"How you feared me then!"

"Well, and do you remember," said the young fellow in a voice void of feeling, "when I stood resting against the doorpost, and you came to drag my secret out of me. How I loved you then!"

Lorand stepped up to them, and laying his hands on their shoulders, said with a sigh:

"Forgive me for standing so long in your path!"

At that everyone's eyes filled with tears, everyone knew why.

Father Fromm, deeply moved, exclaimed:

"How happy I am,—my God!" and then as if he considered his happiness too great, he turned to Henrik, "if only you were otherwise! but look, my dear boy: nothing has come of him! *fuit negligens*. If he too had learned, he would already be an '*archivarius!*' That is what I wanted to make of him. What a fine title! An '*archivarius!*' But what has become of him? An '*asinus!*' *Quantus asinus!* I ought to have made a baker of him. He did not wish to be other, the fool: the '*perversus homo.*' Now he is nothing but a '*pistor.*'"

At this grievous charge poor Henrik would have

longed to sink into the earth for very shame, a longing which would have met with opposition, not only from the ground-floor inhabitants, but also from the assistants working in the underground cellars.

Lorand took Henrik's part.

"Never mind, Henrik. At any rate in both families there is a good-for-nothing who can do nothing except produce bread: I am the peasant, you the baker: I thresh the wheat, you bake bread of it: let the high and mighty feast on their pride."

Then the common good-humor of the high and mighty put a good tone on the conversation. Father Fromm actually made peace though slowly with fate, and agreed that it was just as well Henrik could continue his father's business. He might find some respite in the fact that at least his second child would become a "lady."

Desiderius had a joy in store for him in that he was to meet his erstwhile Rector,\* who was to give away the bride. The old fellow had still the same military mien, the same harsh voice, and was still as sincerely fond of Desiderius and the two families as ever.

Lorand was to be Desiderius' best man.

In this official position he was obliged to stand on the bridegroom's left, while the latter swore before the altar, to provide for the bride's happiness "till death us do part," receiving in trust a faithful hand which even in death would not loosen its hold on his. He was the first to praise the bride for repeating after the minister so courageously and clearly those words, at which the voices of girls are wont to tremble. He was the first to raise his glass to the happy couple's health: he opened the ball with the bride: and one day later, it was he who took her back on his arm to his mother's home, saying:

"Dear sister-in-law, step into the house from which your calm face has driven all signs of mourning: em-

\*The director of the school when he was educated at Pressburg.



brace her who awaits you—the good mother who has to-day for the first time exchanged her black gown for that blue one in which we knew her in days of happiness. Never has bride brought a richer dowry to a bridegroom's home, than you have to ours. God bless you for it."

And even Lorand did not know how much that hand which pressed his so gently had done for him.

It is the fate of such deeds to succeed and remain obscure.

"Let the children spend their happy honeymoon in the country," was the opinion of the elder lady. "They must grow accustomed to being their own masters, too."

But the idea met with the most strenuous opposition from Desiderius' mother and Fanny. The mother's prayers were so beautiful, the bride so irresistible, that the other two, the grandmother and Lorand, finally allowed themselves to be persuaded, and agreed that the mother should stay with Desiderius.

"But we two must leave," whispered grandmother to Lorand.

She had already noticed that Lorand's face was not fit to be present in that peaceful life.

His gaiety was only for others: a grandmother's eyes could not be deceived.

While the others were engaged with their own happiness, the old lady took Lorand's hand and, without a word of "whither," they went down together to the garden, to the stream flowing beside the garden: to the melancholy house built on the bank of the stream.

Ten years had passed and the creeper had again crawled over the crypt door: the green leaves covered the motto. The two juniper trees had bowed their green branches together over the cupola.

They stayed there, her head leaning on his bosom.

How much they must have said to one another, tacitly, without a single word! How they must have understood each other's unspoken thoughts!

Deep silence reigned around: but within, inside the closed, rusted, creeper-covered door, it seemed as if

someone beckoned with invisible finger, saying to the elder boy, "one great debt is not yet paid."

One hour later they returned to the house, where they were welcomed by boisterous voices of noisy gladness—master and servant were all merry and rejoicing.

"I must hasten on my way," said Lorand to his mother.

"Whither?"

"Back to Lankadomb."

"You will bring me a new joy."

"Yes, a new joy for you, mother,—and for you, too," he said pressing his grandmother's hand.

She understood what that handclasp meant.

The murderer lived still.—The account was not yet balanced! Lorand kissed his happy relations. The old lady accompanied him to the carriage, where she kissed his forehead.

"Go."

And in that kiss there was the weight of a blessing that urged him to his difficult duty.

"Go—and wreak vengeance."