CHAPTER XXIV

THE MAD JEST

LET us leave the happy ones to rejoice.

Let us follow that other youth, in whom all that sweet strength for action, which might have brought a mutually-loving heart into the ecstasy of happiness, had changed into a bitter passion, capable of driving a mutually-hating soul to destruction.

It was evening when he reached Lankadomb.

Topándy was already very impatient. Czipra informed him she would not give Lorand even time to rest himself, but took him at once with her to the laboratory, where they had been wont to be together, to study alone the mysteries of mankind and nature.

The old fellow seemed to be in an extraordinarily good humor, which in his case was generally a sign of excitement.

"Well, my dear boy," he said, "I have succeeded in getting myself tangled up in a mess. I will explain it to you. I have always desired to make the acquaintance of the county prison by reason of some meritorious stupidity; so finally I have committed something which will aid my purpose."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, indeed:—for two years at least. Ha ha! I have perpetrated such a mad jest that I am myself entirely contented. Of course they will imprison me, but that does not matter."

"What have you done now, uncle?"

"Just listen, it is a long story. First I must begin by saying that Melanie is already married."

"So much the better."

"I only hope it is for her—for me it is. But it is the

turning-point of my fate too: so just listen to the end, to all the little trifling incidents of the tale—as Mistress Boris related them to Czipra, and Czipra to me. They all belong to the complete picture."

"I am all ears," said Lorand, sitting down, and determining to show a very indifferent face when they related before him the tale of Melanie's marriage.

"Well, after you left here, they knowing nothing of your departure, Madame Bálnokházy said to her daughter: 'Just for mere obstinacy's sake you must marry Gyáli: let these men see how much we care for their fables!'—therewith she wrote a letter herself to Gyáli to come back immediately to Lankadomb, and show himself: they were awaiting him with open arms. He must not be afraid of the brothers Áronffy. He must look into their faces as behooved a man of dignity. To provide against any possible insults, he must protect himself with a couple of pocket-pistols: such things he must always carry in his pocket, to display beneath the nose of anyone who attempted to frighten him with his gigantic stature!—Gyáli shortly appeared in the village again, and very ostentatiously drove up and down before my window, driving the horses himself with the ladies sitting behind, as if he hoped to take the greatest revenge upon me in this way. I merely said: 'If you are satisfied with him, it is nothing to me.' It seems that in the world of to-day the ladies like the man, upon whom others have spat, whom others have insulted and kicked out!—they know all—well, I had no wish to quarrel with their taste.

"I determined just for that reason not to do anything mad. I would be clever. I would look down upon the world's madness with contemplative philosophy, and merely carry out the clever jest of annulling my previous will in which I had made Melanie my heiress, and which had been stored away in the county archive room, making another which I shall keep here at home, in which not a single mention is made of my niece.

"The wedding was solemnized with great pomp.

"Sárvölgyi did not complain of the expense incurred.

He thought to revenge himself on me. He collected all the friends he could from the vicinity: I too received a lithographed invitation. Look at that!"

Topándy took the vellum from his pocket-book and handed it to Lorand.

DEAR MR. TOPANDY:
It will give me great pleasure if you and your nephew Lorand Aronffy will accept our invitation to the wedding of my daughter Melanie and Joseph Gyáli, at Mr. Sárvölgyi's house.
EMILIA BALNOKHAZY.

"Keep half for yourself."

"Thanks: I don't want even the whole."

"Well, it just happened to be Sunday. Sárvölgyi chose that day, because it would cost so much less to array the village folk in holiday garb. He had the bells rung, so did the Vicar: every window and door was full of curious on-lookers. I too took my seat on the verandah to see the sight.

"The long line of carriages started. First the bridegroom with Sárvölgyi, after them the bride, dressed in a white lawn robe, and wearing, if I am not mistaken, many theatrical jewels."

Lorand interrupted impatiently:

"You evidently think, uncle, that I shall write all this for some fashion-paper, as you are telling me in such detail about the costumes."

"I have learned it from English novel-writers: if a man wants to convince his hearers that something is true history and no fable, he must describe externals in detail, that they may see what an eye-witness he was.—Well, I shall leave out all description of the horses' trappings.

"As the long convoy proceeded up the street, a carriage drawn by four horses clattered up from the opposite end, a county court official beside the coachman, behind, two gentlemen, one lean, the other thickset.

"When this equipage met the wedding procession, the lean gentleman stopped his carriage and called out to Sárvölgyi's coachman to bring his coach to a standstill.

"The lean man leaped down from his carriage, the stout man after him, the official following them, and stepped up to the bridegroom.

"'Are you Joseph Gyálil?' inquired the lean man, without any prefix.

"'I am,' he said, looking at the dust-covered man with angry hauteur, not comprehending by what right anyone could dare to stop him at such a time and to address him so curtly.

"But the lean man seized the door of the carriage and said to the bridegroom:

"'Well, sir, have you any soul?'

"Our dear friend could not comprehend what new form of greeting it was, to ask a man on the road whether he had a soul.

"But the lean man seemed to wish to know that at any cost.

"'Sir, have you any soul?'

"'What?'

"Have you any soul, that you can lead an innocent maiden to the altar, in the position in which you are?'

"'Who are you? And how dare you to address me?'

"'I am Miklós Daruszegi, county court magistrate, and have come to arrest you, in consequence of a proclamation of the High Court of Justice in Vienna, which has sent us instructions to arrest you wherever you may be found on the charge of several forgeries and deceits, *in flagrante*, and not to accept bail!'

"'But, sir—!'

"'There is no chance for resistance. You knew already in Vienna to what charge you were liable, and you came directly to Hungary in the hope that if you could ally yourself with some propertied lady, your honorable person might be defended, thus practising fresh deceit against others. And now again I ask you, whether you have the soul to wish, on the prison's threshold, to drag an innocent maiden with you?'"

"Poor Melanie!"—whispered Lorand.

"Poor Melanie naturally fainted, and the poor P. C.'s widow was beside herself with rage: poor Sárvölgyi

wept like a child: all the guests fled back to the house, and the bridegroom was compelled to descend from the bridal coach, and take his place in the magistrate's muddy chaise, still wearing his costume covered with decorations: they supplied him with a rug, it is true, to cover himself with, but the heron-plumed hat remained on his head for the public wonder.

"I truly sympathised with the poor creatures! Still it seems I have survived that pain too.—If only it had not happened in the street! Before the eyes of so many men! If I at least had not seen it! If only I might give a romantic version of the catastrophe. But such a prosaic ending! A bridegroom arrested for the forgery of documents at the church door!—His tragedy is surely over!"

"But according to that, Melanie did not become his wife?" said Lorand. "Melanie has not been married at all."

Topándy shook his head.

"You are an impatient audience, nephew. Still I shall not hurry the performance. You must wait till I send a glass of absinthe down my throat, for my stomach turns at the very thought of what I am about to relate."

And he was not joking: he looked among the many chemicals for the bottle bearing the label "absynthium," and drank a small glass of it. Then he poured one out for Lorand.

"You must drink too."

"I could not drink it, uncle," said Lorand, full of other thoughts.

"But drink this glass, I tell you: until you do I shall not continue. What I am going to say is strong poison, and this is the antidote."

So Lorand drank, that he might hear what happened.

"Well, my dear boy. You must dispense with the idea that Melanie is not a wife: Melanie two days ago married—Sárvölgyi!"

"Oh, that is only a jest!" exclaimed Lorand incredulously.

"Of course it is a jest: only a very mad one. Who

could take such things seriously? Sárvölgyi was jesting when he said to Madame Bálnokházy: 'Madame, there is a scandal—your daughter is neither a miss nor a Mrs. She is burdened both by loss and contempt. You cannot appear any more before the world after such a scandal. I have a good idea: we are trying to agree now about a property; let us shake hands, and the bargain's made, the property and the price of purchase remain in the same hands.'—Madame Bálnokházy too was jesting when she said to her daughter: 'My dear Melanie, we have fallen up to our necks in the mire, we cannot be very particular about the hand that is to drag us out. Lorand will never come back again, Gyáli has deceived us; but only tit for tat,—for we deceived him with that tale of the regained property in which only one man believes,—honorable Sárvölgyi. If you accept his offer, you will be a lady of position, if not, you can come with me as a wandering actress. We can take our revenge upon them, for they hate Sárvölgyi too. And after all Sárvölgyi is a very pleasant fellow.'—And surely Melanie was jesting when two days later she said to the priest before the altar that in the whole world there was only one man whom she could deem worthy of her love, and he was Sárvölgyi.—I believe it was all a jest—but so it happened."

Lorand covered his face with his hands.

"A jest indeed, a fine jest fit to stir one's blood," Topándy angrily burst out. "That girl, whom I so loved, whom I treated as my child, who was to me an image of what they call womanly purity, throws herself away upon my most detested enemy, a loathsome corpse, whose body, soul, and spirit had already decayed. Why if she had returned broken-hearted to me, and said, 'I have erred,' I should have still received her with open arms: she should not thus have prostituted the feeling which I held for her.

"Oh, my friend, there is nothing more repulsive in this round world, than a woman who can make herself thus loathed."

Lorand's silence gave assent to this sentence.

" And now follows the madness I committed.

" I said: if you jest, let me jest too. My house was at that moment full of gay companions, who were helping me to curse. But what is the value of curses? A mad idea occurred to me. I said: ' If you are holding a marriage feast yonder, I shall hold one here.' You remember there was an old mangled-eared ass, used by the shepherd to carry the hides of slaughtered oxen, called by my servants, out of ridicule, Sárvölgyi. Then there was a beautiful thoroughbred colt, which Melanie chose betimes to bear her name. I dressed the ass and foal up as bridegroom and bride, one of the drunken revellers dressed as a ' monk ' and at the same time that Sárvölgyi and Melanie went to their wedding, here, in my courtyard, I parodied the holy ceremony in the persons of those two animals."

Lorand was horror stricken.

" It was a mad idea: I acknowledge it," continued Topándy. " To ridicule religious ceremonies! That will cost me two years at least in the county prison: I shall not defend myself—I have deserved it. I shall put up with it. I knew it when I carried out this raving jest—I knew what the outcome would be. But if they had promised me all the good things that lie between the guardian of the Northern Dog-star and the emerald wings of the vine-dresser beetle, or if they had threatened me with all that exists down to the middle of the earth, down to hell, I should have done it, when once I had thought it out. I wanted a hellish revenge, and there it was. How hellish it was you may imagine from the fact that the jovial fellows at once sobered, disappeared from the house; and since then one or two have written to beg me not to betray their presence here on that occasion. I am only pleased you were not here then."

" And I am sorry I was not. Had I been, it would not have happened."

" Don't say that, my dear boy. Don't think too well of yourself. You don't know what you would have felt, had you seen pass before you in a carriage her whom we had idolized with him whom we detest so. It destroyed my reason. And even now I feel a terrible void in my soul. That girl occupied such a large place therein. I feel it is still more painful for me that I perpetrated such a trivial jest in her name, in her memory.—Still, it has happened and we cannot recall it. We have begun the campaign of hatred, and don't know ourselves where it will end. Now let us speak of other things. During my imprisonment you will take over the farm and remain here."

" Yes."

" But you have still another difficult matter to get through first."

" I know."

" Oh dear no. Why do you always wish to discover my thoughts? You cannot know of what I am thinking."

" Czipra. . . ."

" That is not quite it. Though it did occur to me to ask how could I leave a young man and a young girl here all alone. Yet in that matter I have my own logic: the young man either has a heart or none at all. If he has a heart, he will either keep his distance from the girl, or, if he has loved her, he will not ask who her father and mother were or what her dowry is. He will estimate her at her own value for her own self—a faithful woman. If he has no heart, the girl must see to having more: she must defend herself. If neither has a heart, —well a daily occurrence will occur once more. Who has ever grieved over it? I have nothing to say in the matter. He who knows himself to be an animal, nothing more, is right: he who considers himself a higher being, a man, a noble man, is right too: and he who wishes to be an angel, is only vain. Whether you make the girl your mistress or your wife, is the affair of you two: it all depends which category of the physical world you desire to belong to. The one says, ' I, a male ass, wish to graze with you, a female-ass, on thistles; ' or, ' I, a man, wish to be your god, woman, to care for you.' It is, as I say, a matter of taste and ideas. I entrust it

to you. But I have matter for serious anxiety here. Have you not remarked that here, round Lankadomb, an enormous number of robberies take place?"

"Perhaps not more than elsewhere: only we do not know about the misfortunes of others."

"Oh, dear, no; our neighborhood is in reality the home of a far-reaching robber-band, whose dealings I have long followed with great attention. These marshes here around us afford excellent shelter to those who like to avoid the world."

"That is so everywhere. Fugitive servants, marauding shepherds, bandits, who visit country houses to ask a drink of wine, bacon and bread,—I have met them often enough: I gave them from my purse as much as I pleased, and they went on their way peacefully."

"Here we have to deal with quite a different lot. Czipra might know more about it, if she chose to speak. That tent-dwelling army, out of whose midst I took her to myself, is lurking around us, and is more malicious than report says. They conceal their deeds splendidly, they are very cunning and careful. They are not confined to human society, they can winter among the reeds, and so are more difficult to get at than the mounted highwaymen, who hasten to enjoy the goods they have purloined in the inns. They have never dared to attack me at home, for they know I am ready to receive them. Still, they have often indirectly laid me under obligation. They have often robbed Czipra, when she went anywhere alone. You were yourself a witness to one such event. I suspect that the robber-chief who strove with Czipra in the inn was Czipra's own father."

"Heavens! I wonder if that can be so."

"Czipra always closed their mouths with a couple of hundred florins, and then they remained quiet. Perhaps she threatened them in case they annoyed me. It may be that up to the present they have not molested us in order to please her. But it may be, too, that they have another reason for making Lankadomb their centre of operations. Do you remember that on the pistol you

wrenched from that robber were engraved the arms of Sárvölgyi?"

"What are you hinting at, uncle?"

"I think Sárvölgyi is the chieftain of the whole highwayman-band."

"What brought you to that idea?"

"The fact that he is such a pious man. Still, let us not go into that now. The gist of the matter is, that I would like to relieve our district of this suspicious guest, before I begin my long visit."

"How?"

"We must burn up that old hay-rick, of which I have said so many times that it has inhabitants summer and winter."

"Do you think that will drive them from our neighborhood?"

"I am quite sure of it. This class is cowardly. They will soon turn out of any place where war is declared against them: they only dare to brawl as long as they find people are afraid of them: wolf-like they tear to pieces only those they find defenceless: but one wisp of burning straw will annihilate them. We must set the rick on fire."

"We could have done so already; but it is difficult to reach it, on account of the old peat-quarries."

"Which our dangerous neighbors have covered with wolf traps, so that one cannot approach the rick within rifle-shot."

"I often wished to go there, but you would not allow me."

"It would have been an unreasonable audacity. Those who dwell there could shoot down, from secure hiding-places, any who approached it, before the latter could do them any harm. I have a simpler plan: we two shall take our seats in the punt, row down the dyke, and when we come against the rick, we shall set it on fire with explosive bullets. The rick is mine, no longer rented: all whom it may concern must seek lodging elsewhere."

Lorand said it was a good plan: whatever Topándy

desired he would agree to. He might declare war against the bandits, for all he cared.

That evening, guided by moonlight, they poled their way to the centre of the marsh: Lorand himself directed the shots, and was lucky enough to lodge his first shell in the side of the rick. Soon the dry mass of hay was flaming like a burning pyramid in the midst of the morass. The two besiegers had reached home long before the blazing rick had time to light up the district far. As they watched, all at once the flame scattered, exploding millions of sparks up to heaven, and the fragments of the burning rick were strewed on the water's surface by the wind. Surely hidden gunpowder had caused that explosion.

At that moment no one was at home in this barbarous dwelling. Not a single voice was heard during the burning, save the howling of the terrified wolves round about.

CHAPTER XXV

WHILE THE MUSIC SOUNDS

At Lankadomb the order of things had changed.

After the famous scandal, Topándy's dwelling was very quiet—no guest crossed its threshold: while at Sárvölgyi's house there was an entertainment every evening, sounds of music until dawn of day.

They wished to show that they were in a gay mood.

Sárvölgyi began to win fame among the gypsies. These wandering musicians began to reckon his house among one of their happy asylums, so that even the bands of neighboring towns came to frequent it, one handing on the news of it to the other.

The young wife loved amusement, and her husband was glad if he could humor her—perhaps he had other thoughts, too?

Sárvölgyi himself did not allow his course of life to be disturbed: after ten o'clock he regularly left the company, going first to devotions and these having been attended to, to sleep.

His spouse remained under the care of her mother —in very good hands.

And, after all, Sárvölgyi was no intolerable husband: he did not persecute his young wife with signs of tenderness or jealousy.

In reality he acted as one who merely wished, under the guise of marriage to save a victim, to free an innocent, caluminated, unfortunate girl in the most humane way from desperation.

It was a good deed,—friendship, nothing more.

Sárvölgyi's bedroom was separated from the rest of the dwelling house by a kind of corridor, bricked in, where the musicians were usually placed, for the obvi-

ous reason that the sun-burnt artists are passionately fond of chewing tobacco.

This mistaken arrangement was the cause of two evils: firstly, the master of the house, lying on his bed, could hear all night long the beautiful waltzes and mazurkas to which his wife was dancing; secondly, being obliged to pass through the gypsies on his way from the ball-room to his bedroom, he came in for so many expressions of gratitude on their part that his quiet retirement gave rise to a most striking uproar, disagreeable alike to himself, to his wife, and his guests.

He called the brown worthies to order often enough: "Don't express your gratitude, don't kiss my hand. I am not going away anywhere:" but they would not allow themselves to be cheated of their opportunity for grateful speeches.

One night in particular an old, one-eyed czimbalom-player, whose sole remaining eye was bound up—he had only joined the band that day—would not permit himself to be over-awed: he seized the master's hand, kissed every finger of it in turn, then every nail: "God recompense you for what you intend to give, multiply your family like the sparrows in the fields: may your life be like honey. . . ."

"All right, foolish daddy," interrupted Sárvölgyi. "A truce to your blessings. Get you gone. Mistress Borcsa will give you a glass of wine as a reward."

But the gypsy would not yield: he hobbled after the master into his bedroom, opening the door vigorously, and thrusting in his shaggy head.

"But if God call from the world of shadows. . ."

"Go to hell: enough of your gratitude."

But the czimbalom-player merely closed the door from the inside and followed his righteous benefactor.

"Golden-winged angels in a wagon of diamonds. ."

"Get out this moment!" cried Sárvölgyi, hastily looking for a stick to drive the flatterer out of his room.

But at that moment the gypsy sprang upon him like a panther, grasping his throat with one hand and placing a pointed knife against his chest with the other.

"Oh!"—panted the astonished Sárvölgyi. "Who are you? What do you want?"

"Who am I?" murmured the fiend in reply, looking like the panther when it has set its teeth in its victim's neck. "I am Kandur, * the mad Kandur. Have you ever seen a mad Kandur? That is what I am. Don't you know me now?"

"What do you want?"

"What do I want? Your bones and your skin: your black blood. You highwayman! You robber!"

So saying, he tore the bandage from his eye: there was nothing amiss with that eye.

"Do you know me now, herdsman?"

It would have been in vain to scream. Outside the most uproarious music could be heard: no one would have heard the cry for help. Besides the assailed had another reason for holding his peace.

"Well, what do you want with me? What have I done to you? Why do you attack me?"

"What have you done?" said the gypsy, gnashing his teeth so that Sárvölgyi shivered—this gnashing of human teeth is a terrible sound. "What have you done? You ask that? Have you not robbed me? Eh?"

"I robbed you? Don't lose your senses. Let go of my throat. You see, I am in your hands anyhow. Talk sense. What has happened to you?"

"What has happened to me? Oh yes—act as if you had not seen that beautiful illumination the day before yesterday evening—that's right—when the rick was burned down, and then the gunpowder dispersed the fire, so that nothing but a black pit remained for mad Kandur."

"I saw it."

"That was your work," cried the fiend, raising high the flashing knife.

"Now, Kandur, have some sense. Why should *I* have set it on fire?"

"Because no one else could have known that my

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* Tom-cat.

money was stored away there. Who else would have dreamed I had money, but you? You who always changed my bank-note into silver and gold, giving me one silver florin for a small bank-note, and one gold piece for a large one. How do I know what was the value of each?—You knew I collected money. You knew how I collected, and why—for I told you. My daughter is in a certain gentleman's house; they are making a fool of her there. They are bringing her up like a duchess, until they have plucked her blossoms,—and then they will throw her away like a wash-rag. I wished to buy her off! I had already a pot of silver and a milk-pail of gold. I wanted to take her away with me to Turkey, to Tartary, where heathens dwell; and she would be a real duchess, a gypsy duchess! I shall murder, rob, and break into houses until I have a pot full of silver, and a pail full of gold. The gypsy girl will want it as her dowry. I shall not leave her for you, you white-faced porcelain tribe! I shall take her away to some place where they will not say 'Away gypsy! off gypsy! Kiss my hand, eat carrion, gypsy, gypsy!'—Give me my money."

"Kandur."

"Don't gape, or tire your mouth. Give me a pot of silver, and a pail of gold."

"All right, Kandur, you shall get your money—a pot of silver and a pail of gold. But now let me have my say. It was not I who took your money, not I who set the rick on fire."

"Who then?"

"Why those people yonder."

"Topándy, and the young gentleman?"

"Certainly. The day before yesterday evening I saw them in a punt on the moat, starting for the morass, and I saw them when they returned again—the rick was then already burning. Each of them had a gun: but I did not hear a single shot, so they were not after game."

"The devil and all his hell-hounds destroy them!"

"Why, Kandur, your daughter was mad after that young gentleman—she certainly confessed to him that

her father was collecting treasures: so the young gentleman took off daughter and money too—he will shortly return the empty pot."

"Then I shall kill him."

"What did you say, Kandur?"

"I shall kill him, even if he has a hundred souls. Long ago I promised him, when first we met. But now I wish to drink of his blood. Did you see whether the old mastiff too was there at the robbing?"

"Topándy? A plague upon my eyes, if I did not see him. There were two of them, they took no one with them, not even a dog: they rowed along here beside the gardens. I looked long after them, and waited till they should return. May every saint be merciless to me, if I don't speak the truth!"

"Then I shall murder both."

"But be careful: they go armed."

"What?—If I wish I can have a whole host. If I wish I can ravish the whole village in broad daylight. You do not yet know who Kandur is."

"I know well who you are, Kandur," said Sárvölgyi, carefully studying the robber's browned face. "Why we are old acquaintances. It is not you who are responsible for the deeds you have done, but society. Humankind rose up against you, you merely defended yourself as best you could. That is why I always took your part, Kandur."

"No nonsense for me now," interrupted the robber hastily. "I don't mind what I am. I am a highwayman. I like the name."

"You had no ignoble pretext for robbing,—but the saving of your daughter from the whirlpool of crime. The aim was a laudable one, Kandur: besides you were particular as to whom you fleeced."

"Don't try to save me—you'll have enough to do to save yourself soon in hell, before the devil's tribunal—you may lie his two eyes out, if you want. I have been a highwayman, have killed and robbed—even clergymen. I want to kill now, too."

"I shall pray for your soul."

"The devil! Man, do you think I care? Prayer is just about as potent with you as with me. Better give a pile of money to enable me to collect a band. My men must have money."

"All right, Kandur: don't be angry, Kandur:—you know I'm awfully fond of you. I have not persecuted you like others. I have always spoken gently to you and have always sheltered you from your persecutors. No one ever dared to look for you in my house."

"No more babbling—just give over the money."

"Very well, Kandur. Hold your cap."

Sárvölgyi stepped up to a very strong iron safe, and unfastening the locks one by one, raised its heavy door —placing the candle on a chair beside him.

The robber's eyes gleamed. Sufficient silver to fill many pots was piled up there.

"Which will you have? silver or bank-notes?"

"Silver," whispered the robber.

"Then hold your cap."

Kandur held his lamb-skin cap in his two hands like a pouch, and placed his knife between his teeth.

Sárvölgyi dived deeply into the silver pile with his hand, and when he drew it back, he held before the robber's nose a double-barrelled pistol, ready cocked.

It was a fine precaution—a pistol beautifully covered up by a heap of coins.

The robber staggered back, and forgot to withdraw the knife from his mouth. And so he stood before Sárvölgyi, a knife between his teeth, his eyes wide opened, and his two hands stretched before him in self-defence.

"You see," said Sárvölgyi calmly, "I might shoot you now, did I wish. You are entirely in my power. But see, I spoke the truth to you.—Hold your cap and take the money."

He put the pistol down beside him and took out a goodly pile of dollars.

"A plague upon your jesting eyes!" hissed the robber through the knife. "Why do you frighten a fellow? The darts of Heaven destroy you!"

He was still trembling, so frightened had he been.

The loaded weapon in another's hand had driven away all his courage.

The robber could only be audacious, not courageous.

"Hold your cap."

Sárvölgyi shovelled the heap of silver coins into the robber's cap.

"Now perhaps you can believe it is not fear that makes me confide in you?"

"A plague upon you. How you alarmed me!"

"Well, now collect your wits and listen to me."

The robber stuffed the money into his pockets and listened with contracted eyebrows.

"You may see it was not I who stole your money; for, had I done so, I should just now have planted two bullets in your carcass, one in your heart, the other in your skull. And I should have got one hundred gold pieces by it, that being the price on your head."

The robber smiled bashfully, like one who is flattered. He took it as a compliment that the county had put a price of one hundred gold pieces on his head.

"You may be quite sure that it was not I, but those folks yonder, who took away your money."

"The highwaymen!"

"You are right—highwaymen:—worse even than that. Atheists! The earth will be purified if they are wiped out. He who kills them is doing as just an action as the man that shoots a wolf or a hawk."

"True, true;" Kandur nodded assent.

"This rogue who stole away your daughter laid a snare for another innocent creature. He must have two, one for his right hand, the other for his left. And when the persecuted innocent girl escaped from the deceiver to my house and became my wife, those folks yonder swore deadly revenge against me. Because I rescued an innocent soul from the cave of crime, they thrice wished to slay me. Once they poured poison into my drinking-well. Fortunately the horses drank of the water first and all fell sick from it. Then they drove mad dogs out in the streets, when I was walking there, to tear me to pieces. They sent me letters, which, had

I opened them, would have gone off in my hands and blown me to pieces. These malicious fellows wish to kill me."

"I understand."

"That young stripling thinks that if he succeeds he can carry off my wife too, so as to have her for his mistress one day, Czipra, your daughter, the next."

"You make my anger boil within me!"

"They acknowledge neither God nor law. They do as they please. When did you last see your daughter?"

"Two weeks ago."

"Did you not see how worn she is? That cursed fellow has enchanted her and is spoiling her."

"I'll spoil his head!"

"What will you do with him?"

Kandur showed, with the knife in his hand, what he would do—bury that in his heart and twist it round therein.

"How will you get at him? He has always a gun in the daytime: he acts as if he were going a-shooting. At night the castle is strongly locked, and they are always on the lookout for an attack,—they too are audacious fellows."

"Just leave it to me. Don't have any fears. What Kandur undertakes is well executed. Crick, crick: that's how I shall break both the fellows' necks."

"You are a clever rascal. You showed that in your way of getting at me! You may do the same there, by dressing your men as fiddlers and clarinet-players."

"Oh ho! Don't think of it. Kandur doesn't play the same joke twice. I shall find the man I want."

"I've still something to say. It would be good if you could have them under control before they die."

"I know—make them confess where they have put my money which they stole?"

"Don't begin with that. Supposing they will not confess?"

"Have no fears on that score. I know how to drive screws under finger-nails, to strap up heads, so that

a man would even confess to treasures hidden in his father's coffin."

"Listen to me. Do what I say. Don't try long to trace your stolen money: it's not much—a couple of thousand florins. If you don't find it, I shall give you as much—as much as you can carry in your knapsack. You can, however, find something else there."

"What?"

"A letter, sealed with five black seals."

"A letter? with five black seals?"

"And to prevent them making a fool of you, and blinding you with some other letter which you cannot read, note the arms on the respective seals. On the first is a fish-tailed mermaid, holding a half-moon in her hand—those are the Áronffy arms:—on the second a stork, three ears of corn in its talons—those are the High Sheriff's arms: on the third a semi-circle, from which a unicorn is proceeding,—those are the Nyárády arms; the fourth is a crown in a hand holding a sword —those are the lawyer's arms. The fifth, which must be in the middle, bears Topándy's arms,—a crowned snake."

The robber reckoned after him on his fingers:

"Mermaid with half moon—stork with ears of corn—a half circle with unicorn—crown with sword-hand—snake with crown. I shall not forget. And what do you want the letter for?"

"That too I shall explain to you, that you may see into the innermost depths of my thoughts and may judge how seriously I long to see the completion of that which I have entrusted to you. That letter is Topándy's latest will. While my wife was living with him, Topándy, believing she would wed his nephew, left his fortune to his niece and her future husband, and handed it in to the county court to be guarded. But when his niece became my wife, he wrote a new will, and had all those, whose arms I have mentioned, sign it; then he sealed it but did not send it to the court like the former one; he kept it here to make the jest all the greater,

thinking we stand by the former will. Then the latter will comes to light, making void the former—and excluding my wife from all."

"Aha! I see now what a clever fellow you are!"

"Well, could that five-sealed letter come into my hands, and old Topándy die by chance, without being able to write another will—well, you know what that little paper might be worth in my hands?"

"Of course. Castle, property, everything. All that would fall to you—the old will would give it you. I understand: I see—now I know what a wise fellow you are!"

"Do you believe now that if you come to me with that letter. . . . ."

The robber bent nearer confidingly, and whispered in his ear:

"And with the news that your neighbors died suddenly and could not write another."

"Then you need have no fear as to how much money you will get in place of what they stole. You may go off with your daughter to Tartary, where no one will prosecute you."

"Excellent—couldn't be better. Leave the rest to me. Two days later Kandur will have no need to indulge in such work."

Then he began to count on his fingers, as if he were reckoning to himself.

"Well, in the first place, I get money—in the second, I have my revenge—in the third, I take away Czipra,—in the fourth, I shall have my fill of human blood,—in the fifth, I get money again.—It shall be done."

The two shook hands on the bargain. The robber left by the same door through which he had entered; Sárvölgyi went to bed, like one who has done his business well; and in the corridor the gypsies still played the newest waltz, which Melanie and Madame Bálnokházy were enjoying with flushed faces amidst the gay assembly.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE ENCHANTMENT OF LOVE

How many secrets there are under the sun, awaiting discovery!

Books have been written about the superstitions of nations long since passed away: men of science have collected the enchantments of people from all quarters of the globe: yet of one thing they have not spoken yet: of that unending myth, which lives unceasingly and is born again in woman's heart and in the heated atmosphere of love.

Sweet are the enchantments of love!

"If I drink unseen from thy glass, and thou dost drain it after me:—thou drinkest love therefrom, and shalt pine for me, darling, as I have pined for thee.

"If at night I awake in dreams of thee and turn my pillow under my head: thou too wilt have as sweet dreams of me, as I of thee, my darling.

"If I bind my ring to a lock of thy hair thou hast given me, and cast the same into a glass, as often as it beats against the side of the glass, so many years wilt thou love me, darling.

"If I can sew a lock of my hair into the edge of thy linen garment, thy heart will pine for me, as often as thou puttest the same on, my darling.

"If, in thinking of thee, I pricked my finger, thou wert then faithless to me, darling.

"If the door opens of itself, thou wert then thinking of me, and thy sigh opened the door, my darling.

"If a star shoots in the sky, and I suddenly utter thy name as it shoots, thou must then at once think of me, darling.