

robber's waist, raised him in the air, then screwing him round his right arm, flung him over his head.

This acrobatic feat required such an effort that he himself fell on his back—but it succeeded.

The robber, feeling himself in the air, lost his head, and left hold of Lorand's arm for a moment, with the intention of gripping his hair; in that moment he was thrown off and fell alone into the lime-pit.

Lorand leaped up at once from the ground and, tired out, leaned against the trunk of a tree, searching for his opponent everywhere, and not finding him.

A minute later from amidst the white lime-mud there rose an awful figure which clambered out on the opposite side of the pit, and with a yell of pain rushed away into the courtyard and out into the street.

Lorand, exhausted and half dazed, listened to that beast-like howl gradually diminishing in the distance.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE SPIDER IN THE CORNER

THAT day about noon the old gypsy woman who told Czipra her fortune had shuffled into Sárköly's courtyard, and finding the master out on the terrace, thanked him that he did not set his dogs upon her—did not tear her to pieces.

"I wish you a very good day, sir, and every blessing that is on earth or in Heaven."

Mistress Borcsa looked out from the kitchen.

"Well, it's just lucky you didn't wish what is in hell! And what is in the water! Gypsy, don't leave us a blessing without fish to go with it, for fish is wanted here twice a week."

"Don't listen to Mistress Boris' jokes."

"Good day, my daughter," said the master gently.

"Well he actually calls the ragged gypsy woman 'my daughter,'" grumbled the old housekeeper. "Blood is thicker than water."

"Well, what have you brought, Marcsa?"

"Csicsa sent to say he will come with his twelve musicians this evening: he begs you to pay him in advance as the musicians must hire a conveyance—then," she continued, dropping her voice to a tone of jesting flattery,— "a little suckling pig for supper, if possible."

"Very well, Marcsa," said Sárköly, with polite gentility. "Everything shall be in order. Come here towards evening. You shall get payment and sucking pig too."

Yet this overflowing magnanimity was not at all in conformity with the well-established habits of the devotee. Close-fisted niggardliness displayed itself in his

every feature and warred against this unnatural outbreak.

The gypsy woman kissed his hand and thanked him. But Mistress Boris saw the moment had arrived for a ministerial process against this abuse of royal prerogative; so she came out from the kitchen, a pan in one hand, a cooking-spoon in the other.

She began her invective with the following Magyar "*quousque tandem!*"

"The devil take your insatiable stomachs! When were they ever full? When did I ever hear you say 'I've eaten well, I'm satisfied!' I don't know what has come over the master, that, ever since he became a married man, he has nothing better to do with his income than to stuff gypsies with it!"

"Don't listen to her, Marcsa," said the pious man softly, "that's a way she has. Come this evening, and you shall have your sucking pig."

"Sucking pig!" exclaimed Mistress Boris. "I should like to know where they'll find a sucking pig hereabouts. As if all those the two sows had littered were not already devoured!"

"There is one left," said Sárkölygyi coolly, "one that is continually in the way all over the place."

"Yes, but that one I shall not give," protested Mistress Boris. "I shan't give it up for all the gypsies in the world. My little tame sucking pig which I brought up on milk and breadcrumbs. They shan't touch that. I won't give up that!"

"It is enough if I give it," said Sárkölygyi, harshly.

"What, you will make a present of it? Didn't you present me with it in its young days, when it was the size of a fist? And now you want to take it back?"

"Don't make a noise. I'll give you two of the same size in place of it."

"I don't want any larger one, or any other one: I am no trader. I want my own sucking pig; I won't give it up for a whole herd,—the little one I brought up myself on milk and bread-crumbs! It is so accustomed to me now that it always answers my call, and pulls at my

apron: it plays with me. As clever, as a child, for all the world as if it were no pig at all, but a human being.

Mistress Borcsa burst into tears. She always had her pet animals, after the fashion of old servants, who, being on good terms with nobody in the world, tame some hen or other animal set aside for eating purposes, and defend its life cleverly and craftily; not allowing it to be killed; until finally the merciless master passes the sentence that the favorite too must be killed. How they weep then! The poor, old maid-servants cannot touch a morsel of it.

"Stop whining, Borcsa!" roared Sárkölygyi, frowning. "You will do what I order. The pig must be caught and given to Marcsa."

The pig, unsuspecting of danger, was wandering about in the courtyard.

"Well, I shall not catch it," whimpered Mistress Boris.

"Marcsa'll do that."

The gypsy woman did not wait to be told a second time: but, at once taking a basket off her arms, squatted down and began to shake the basket, uttering some such enticing words as "*Pocza, poczo, net, net!*"

Nor was Mistress Borcsa idle: as soon as she remarked this device, she commenced the counteracting spell. "Shoo! Shoo!"—and with her pan and cooking-spoon she tried to frighten her *protégé* away from the vicinity of the castle, despite the stamping protests of Sárkölygyi, who saw open rebellion in this disregard for his commands.

Then the two old women commenced to drive the pig up and down the yard, the one enticing, the other "shooing," and creating a delightful uproar.

But, such is the ingratitude of adopted pigs! The foolish animal, instead of listening to its benefactor's words and flying for protection among the beds of spinach, greedily answered to the call of the charmer, and with ears upright trotted towards the basket to discover what might be in it.

The gypsy woman caught its hind legs.

Mistress Borcsa screamed, Marcsa grunted, and the pig squealed loudest of all.

"Kill it at once to stop its cries!" cried Sárkölygi. "What a horrible noise over a pig!"

"Don't kill it! Don't make it squeal while I am listening," exclaimed Borcsa in a terrified passion: then she ran back into the kitchen, and stopped her ears lest she should hear them killing her favorite pig.

She came out again as soon as the squeals of her *protégé* had ceased, and with uncontrollable fury took up a position before Sárkölygi. The gypsy woman smilingly pointed to the murdered innocent.

Mistress Borcsa then said in a panting rage to Sárkölygi:

"Miser who gives one day, and takes back—a curse upon such as you!"

"Zounds! good-for-nothing!" bawled the righteous fellow. "How dare you say such a thing to me?"

"From to-day I am no longer your servant," said the old woman, trembling with passion. "Here is the cooking-spoon, here the pan: cook your own dinner, for your wife knows less about it than you do. My husband lives in the neighboring village: I left him in his young days because he beat me twice a day; now I shall go back to the honest fellow, even if he beat me thrice a day."

Mistress Borcsa was in reality not jesting, and to prove it she at once gathered up her bed, brought out her trunks, piled all her possessions onto a barrow, and wheeled them out without saying so much as "good bye."

Sárkölygi tried to prevent this wholesale rebellion forcibly by seizing Mistress Borcsa's arm to hold her back.

"You shall remain here: you cannot go away. You are engaged for a whole year. You will not get a kreutzer if you go away."

But Mistress Borcsa proved that she was in earnest, as she forcibly tore her arm from Sárkölygi's grasp.

"I don't want your money," she said, wheeling her

barrow further. "What you wish to keep back from my salary may remain for the master's—coffin-nails."

"What, you cursed witch!" exclaimed Sárkölygi "What did you dare to say to me?"

Mistress Borcsa was already outside the gate. She thrust her head in again, and said:

"I made a mistake. I ought to have said that the money you keep from me may remain—to buy a rope."

Sárkölygi, enraged, ran to his room to fetch a stick, but before he came out with it, Mistress Borcsa was already wheeling her vehicle far away on the other side of the street, and it would not have been fitting for a gentleman to scamper after her before the eyes of the whole village, and to commence a combat of doubtful issue in the middle of the street with the irritated Amazon.

The nearest village was not far from Lankadomb; yet before she reached it, Mistress Borcsa's soul was brimming over with wrath.

Every man would consider it beneath his dignity to submit tamely to such a dishonor.

As she reached the village of her birth, she made straight for the courtyard of her former husband's house.

Old Kólya recognized his wife as she came up trundling the squeaking barrow, and wondering thrust his head out at the kitchen door.

"Is that you, Boris?"

"It is: you might see, if you had eyes."

"You've come back?"

Instead of replying Mistress Boris bawled to her husband.

"Take one end of this trunk and help me to drag it in. Take hold now. Do you think I came here to admire your finely curled moustache?"

"Well, why else did you come, Boris?" said the old man very phlegmatically, without so much as taking his hand from behind his back.

"You want to quarrel with me again, I see; well,

let's be over with it quickly: take a stick and beat me, then let us talk sense."

At this Kólya took pity on his wife and helped her to drag the trunk in.

"I am no longer such a quarreller, Boris," he answered. "Ever since I became a man with a responsible position I have never annoyed anyone. I am a watchman."

"So much the better: if you are an official, I can at any rate tell you what trouble brought me here."

"So it was only trouble drove you here?"

"Certainly. They robbed and stole from me. They have taken away my yellow-flowered calico kerchief, a red 'Home-sweet-Home' handkerchief, which I had intended for you, a silver-crossed string of beads, twelve dollars, ten gold pieces, twenty-two silver buttons, four pairs of silver buckles, and a scoloped-eared, pi-bald, eight-week-old pig. . . ."

"Whew!" exclaimed Kólya as he heard of so much loss. "This is a pretty business. Well, who stole them?"

"No one else than the cursed gypsy woman Marcsa, who lives here in this village."

"We shall call her to account as soon as she appears."

"Naturally. She went there while I was weeding in the garden; she prowled about and stole."

"Well I'll soon have her by the ears, only let her come here."

Not a word of the whole story of the theft was true: but Mistress Boris reasoned as follows:

"You must come here first, gypsy woman, with that scoloped-eared pig: if they find it in your possession, they will put you in jail, and ask you what you did with the rest. Whether your innocence is proved or not, the pig-joint will in the meanwhile become uneatable, and won't come into your stomachs. You may say you got it as a present,—no one will believe you, and the magistrate will not order such a gentleman as Sárkölygyi to come here and witness in your favor."

Kólya allowed himself to be made a participant in his wife's anger, and went at once to inform the servants of the magistrate, who was sitting in the village.

Towards evening Kólya, in ambush at the end of the village, spied the gypsy woman as she came sauntering by Lankadomb, carrying on her arm a large basket as if it were some great weight.

Kólya said nothing to her, he merely let her pass before him, and followed her on the other side of the street, until she reached the middle of the market-place, where many loiterers sauntered and listened to the tales of his wife.

"Halt, Marcsa!" cried Kólya, standing in the gypsy woman's way.

"What do you want?" she asked, shrugging her shoulders.

"What have you in your basket?"

"What should I have? A pig which you shall not taste, is in it."

"Of course. Has not the pig scoloped ears?"

"Suppose it has?"

"You speak lightly. Let me look at the pig."

"Well look—then go blind. Have you never seen such an animal? Have a look at it."

The gypsy woman uncovered the basket, in which lay the unhappy victim, reposing on its stomach, its scoloped ears still standing up straight.

A crowd began to collect round the disputants.

Mistress Boris burst in among them.

"There it is! That was my pig!"

"As much as the shadow of the Turkish Sultan's horse was yours. Off with you: don't look at it so hard, else you will be bewitched by it and your child will be like it."

The loiterers began to laugh at that; they were already ready to laugh at any rough jest.

The laughter enraged Kólya: he seized the much-discussed pig's hind legs and before the gypsy woman could prevent him, had torn it out of the basket.

But the pig was heavier than such animals are wont

to be at that age, so that Kólya bumped the noble creature's nose against the ground.

As he did so a dollar rolled out of the pig's mouth.

"Oho!—the thalers are here too!"

At these words the gypsy woman took up her basket and began to run away. When they seized her, she scratched and bit, and tried her best to escape, till finally they bound her hands behind her.

Kólya was beside himself with astonishment.

There was quite a heap of silver money sewn into that pig. Loads of silver.

Mistress Boris herself did not understand it.

This must be reported to the magistrate.

Kólya, accompanied by a large crowd, conducted Marcsa to the magistrate's house, where the clerks, pending that official's arrival, took the accused in charge, and shut her up in a dark cell, which had only one narrow window looking out on the henyard.

When the magistrate returned towards midnight, only the vacant cell was there without the gypsy woman. She had been able to creep out through the narrow opening, and had gone off.

The magistrate, when he saw the "*corpus delicti*," was himself of the opinion that the pig was in reality Mistress Boris's property, while the money that had been hidden in its inside must have come also from Sárvölgyi's house. There might be some great robbery in progress yonder. He immediately gave orders for three mounted constables to start off for Lankadomb; he ordered a carriage for himself, and a few minutes after the departure of the constables, was on his way in their tracks with his solicitor and servant.

* * * * *

The spider was already sitting in its web.

As night fell, Sárvölgyi hastened the ladies off to bed, for they were going to leave for Pest and so had to wake early.

When all was quiet in the house, he himself went round the yard and locked the doors: then he closed the door of each room separately.

Finally he piled his arms on his table—two guns, two pistols, and a hunting-knife.

He was loath to believe the old gossip. Suppose Kandur should, in the course of his feast of blood be whetted for more slaughter, and wish to slice up betrayer after betrayed?

In the presence of twelve robbers, he could not even trust an ally.

The night watchman had already called "Eleven."

Sárvölgyi was sitting beside his window.

The windows were protected on the street side by iron shutters, with a round slit in the middle, through which one could look out into the street.

Sárvölgyi opened the casements in order to hear better, and awaited the events to which the night should give birth.

It was a still warm evening towards the end of spring.

All nature seemed to sleep; no leaf moved in the warm night air: only at times could be heard a faint sound, as if wood and field had shuddered in their dreams, and a long-drawn sigh had rustled the tops of the poplars, dying away in the reed-forest.

Then, suddenly, the hounds all along the village began to bay and howl.

The bark of a hound is generally a soothing sound; but when the vigilant house-guard has an uneasy feeling, and changes his bark to a long whining howl, it inspires disquietude and anxiety.

Only the spider in the web rejoiced at the sound of danger! They were coming!

The hounds' uproar lasted long: but finally it too ceased; and there followed the dreamy, quiet night, undisturbed by even a breath of wind.

Only the nightingales sang, those sweet fanciful songsters of the night, far and near in the garden bushes.

Sárvölgyi listened long—but not to the nightingale's song. What next would happen?

Then the stillness of the night was broken by an awful cry as when a girl in the depth of night meets her enemy face to face.

A minute later again that cry—still more horrible, more anguished. As if a knife had been thrust into the maiden's breast.

Then two shots resounded:—and a volley of oaths.

All these midnight sounds came from above Tó-pándy's castle.

Then a sound of heavy firing, varied by noisy oaths. The spider in the web started. The web had been disturbed. The stealthy attack had not succeeded.

Yet they were many—they could surely overcome two. The peasants did not dare to aid where bullets whistled.

Then the firing died away: other sounds were heard: blows of crowbars on the heavy door: the thunder of the pole-axe on the stone wall, here and there a single shot, the flash of which could not be seen in the night. Certainly they were firing in at doors and out through windows. That was why no flash could be seen.

But how long it lasted! A whole eternity before they could deal with those two men! From the roots of Sárvölgyi's sparse hair hot beads of sweat were dripping down.

Not in yet? Why cannot they break in the door?

Suddenly the light of two brilliant flashes illuminated the night for a moment: then two deafening reports, that could be produced only by a weapon of heavy calibre. So easy to pick out the dull thunder roar from those other crackling splutterings that followed at once.

What was that? Could they be fighting in the open? Could they have come out into the courtyard? Could they have received aid from some unexpected quarter?

The crack of fire-arms lasted a few minutes longer. Twice again could be heard that particular roar, and then all was quiet again.

Were they done for already?

For a long time no sound, far or near.

Sárvölgyi looked and listened in restless impatience. He wished to pierce the night with his eyes, he wished to hear voices through this numbing stillness. He put his ear to the opening in the iron shutter.

Some one knocked at the shutter from without.

Startled, he looked out.

The old gypsy woman was there: creeping along beside the wall she had come this far unnoticed.

"Sárvölgyi," said the woman in a loud whisper: "Sárvölgyi, do you hear? They have seized the money: the magistrate has it. Take care!"

Then she disappeared as noiselessly as she had come.

In a moment the sweat on Sárvölgyi's body turned to ice. His teeth chattered from fever.

What the gypsy woman had said was, for him, the terror of death.

The most evident proof was in the hands of the law: before the awful deed had been accomplished, the hand that directed it had been betrayed.

And perhaps the terrible butchery was now in its last stage. They were torturing the victims! Pouring upon them the hellish vengeance of wounded wild beasts! Tearing them limb from limb! Looking with their hands that dripped with blood among the documents for the letter with five seals.

Already all was betrayed! Fever shook his every limb. Why that great stillness outside? What secret could this monstrous night hide that it kept such silence as this?

Suddenly the silence was broken by a wild creature's howl.

No it was no animal. Only a man could howl so, when agony had changed him to a mad beast, who in the fury of his pain had forgotten human voice.

The noise sounded first in the distance, beyond the garden of the castle, but presently approached, and a figure of horror ran howling down the street.

A figure of horror indeed!

A man, white from head to foot.

All his clothes, every finger of his hand, was white: every hair of his head, his beard, moustache, his whole face was white, glistening, shining white, and as he ran he left white footsteps behind him.

Was it a spirit?

The horror rushed up to Sárvölgyi's door, rattling the latch and in a voice of raving anger began to howl as he shook the door.

"Let me in! Let me in! I am dying!"

Sárvölgyi's face, in his agony of terror, became like that of a damned soul.

That was Kandur's voice! That was Kandur's figure. But so white!

Perhaps the naked soul of one on the way to hell?

The horrible figure thundered continuously at the door and cried:

"Let me in! Give me to drink! I am burning! Bathe me in oil! Help me to undress! I am dying! I am in hell! Help! Drag me out of it!"

All through the street they could hear his cries.

Then the damned soul began to curse, and beat the door with his fist, because they would not open to him.

"A plague upon you, cursed accomplice. You shut me out and won't let me in? Thrust me into the tanpit of hell and leave me there? My skin is peeling off! I am going blind! An ulcer upon your soul!"

The writhing figure tore off his clothes, which burned his limbs like a shirt of Nessus, and while so doing the hidden silver coins he had received from Sárvölgyi fell to the ground.

"Devil take you, money and all!" he shouted, dashing the coins against the door. "Here's your cursed money! Pick it up!"

Then he staggered on, leaning against the railing and howling in pain:

"Help! Help! A fortune for a glass of water! Only let me live until I can drag that fellow with me! Help, man, help!"

A deathly numbness possessed Sárvölgyi. If that figure of horror were no "spirit," he must hasten to

make him so. He would betray all. That was the greatest danger. He must not live.

He could not see him from the window. Perhaps if he opened the shutters, he could fire at him. He was a highwayman: who could call Sárvölgyi to account for shooting him? He had done it in self-defence.

If only his hands would not tremble so! It was impossible to hit him with a pistol except by placing the barrel to his forehead.

Should he go out to him?

Who would dare to go out to meet that demon face to face? Could the spider leave its web?

While he hesitated, while he struggled to measure the distance from door to window and back, a new sound was heard in the street:—three horsemen came trotting up from the end of the village, and in them Sárvölgyi recognized, from their uniforms, the country police.

Then the bell began to ring, and the peasants came out of their doors, armed with pitchforks and clubs: noisy crowds collected. In their midst were one or two bound figures whom they drove forward with blows: they had seized the robbers.

The battle was irremediably lost. The chief criminal saw the toils closing in on him but had no time to make his escape.