

## CHAPTER XXX

### I BELIEVE. . . .!

DAY was dawning.

Topándy had not left Czipra since she had been wounded. He sat alone beside her bed.

Servants and domestics had other things to do now: they were standing before the magistrate, face to face with the captured robbers. The magisterial inquiry demanded the presence of them all.

Topándy was alone with the wounded girl.

"Where is Lorand?" whispered Czipra.

"He drove over to the neighboring village to bring a doctor for you."

"No harm has come to him?"

"You might have heard his voice through the window, when all was over. He could not come in, because the door was closed. His first care was to bring a surgeon for you."

The girl sighed.

"If he comes too late. . . ."

"Don't fret about that. Your wound is not fatal; only be calm."

"I know better," said the girl in a flush of fever. "I feel that I shall not live."

"Don't worry, Czipra, you will get better," said Topándy, taking the girl's hand.

And then the girl locked her five fingers in those of Topándy, so that they were clasped like two hands in prayer.

"Sir, I know I am standing on the brink of the grave. I have now grasped your hand. I have clasped it, as people at prayer are wont to clasp their hands. Can you let me go down to the grave without teaching me

### I Believe . . . .!

one prayer. This night the murderer's knife has pierced my heart to liberate yours. Does not my heart deserve the accomplishment of its last wish? Does not that God, who this night has liberated us both, me from life, you from death, deserve our thanks?"

Topándy was moved. He said:

"Repeat after me."

And he said to her the Lord's Prayer.

The girl devoutly and between gasps repeated it after him.

How beautiful it is! What great words those are!

First she repeated it after him, then again said it over, sentence by sentence, asking "what does this or that phrase mean?" "Why do we say 'our Father?' What is meant by 'Thy Kingdom?' Will he forgive us our trespasses, if we forgive them that trespass against us? Will he deliver us from every evil? What power there is in that 'Amen!'"—Then a third time she repeated it alone before Topándy, without a single omission.

"Now I feel easier," she said, her face beaming with happiness.

The atheist turned aside and wept.

The shutters let in the rays of the sun through the holes the bullets had made.

"Is that sunset?" whispered the girl.

"No, my child, it is sunrise."

"I thought it was evening already."

Topándy opened one shutter that Czipra might see the morning light of the sun.

Then he returned to the sick girl, whose face burned with fever.

"Lorand will be here immediately," he assured her gently.

"I shall soon be far away," sighed the girl with burning lips.

It seemed so long till Lorand returned!

The girl asked no more questions about him: but she was alert at the opening of every door or rattling of

carriages in the street, and each time became utterly despondent, when it was not he after all.

How late he was!

Yet Lorand had come as quickly as four fleet-footed steeds could gallop.

Fever made the girl's imagination more irritable.

"If some misfortune should befall him on the way? If he should meet the defeated robbers? If he should be upset on one of the rickety bridges?"

Pictures of horror followed each other in quick succession in her feverish brain. She trembled for Lorand.

Then it occurred to her that he could defend himself against terrors. Why, he knew how to pray.

She clasped her hands across her breast and closed her eyes.

As she said "Amen" to herself she heard the rattling of wheels in the courtyard, and then the well-known steps approaching along the corridor.

What a relief that was!

She felt that her prayer had been heard. How happy are those who believe in it!

The door opened and the youth she worshipped stepped in, hastening to her bed and taking her hand.

"You see, I was lucky: I found him on the road. That is a good sign."

Czipra smiled.

Her eyes seemed to ask him, "Nothing has happened to you?"

The surgeon examined the wound, bandaged it and told the girl to be quiet, not to move or talk much.

"Is there any hope?" asked Lorand in a whisper.

"God and nature may help."

The doctor had to leave to look after the wounded robbers. Lorand and his uncle remained beside Czipra.

Lorand sat on the side of her bed and held her hand in his. The doctor had brought some cooling draught for her, which he gave the sufferer himself.

How Czipra blessed the knife that had given her that wound!

She alone knew how far it had penetrated.

The others thought such a narrow little wound was not enough to cut a life in two.

Topándy was writing a letter on Lorand's writing-table: and when asked "to whom?" he said "To the priest."

Yet he was not wont to correspond with such.

Czipra thought this too was all on her account.

Why, she had not yet been christened.

What a mysterious house it was, the door of which was now to open before her!

Perhaps a whole palace, in the brilliant rooms of which the eye was blinded, as it looked down them?

Soon steps were heard again outside. Perhaps the clergyman was coming.

She was mistaken.

In the new-comer she recognized a figure she had seen long before—Mr. Buczkay, the lawyer.

Despite the customary roundness of that official's face, there were traces of pity on it, pity for the young girl, victim of so dreadful a crime.

He called Topándy aside and began to whisper to him.

Czipra could not hear what they were saying: but a look which the two men cast in her direction, betrayed to her the subject of their discourse.

The judges were here and were putting the law into force upon the guilty.—They were examining into the events, from beginning to end.—They must know all.—They had taken the depositions of the others already: now it was her turn.—They would come with their documents, and ask her "Where did you walk? Why did you leave your room at night? Why did you open the house-door? Whom were you looking for outside in the garden?"

What could she answer to those terrible questions?

Should she burden her conscience with lies, before the eyes of God whom she would call as a witness from Heaven, and to whom she would raise her supplicating hands for pity, when the day of reckoning came?

Or should she confess all?

Should she tell how she had loved him: how mad she was: how she started in search of a charm, with which she wished to overcome the heart of her darling?

She could not confess that! Rather the last drop of blood from her heart, than that secret.

Or should she maintain an obdurate silence? That, however, would create suspicion that she, the robber's daughter, had opened the door for her robber father, and had plotted with workers of wickedness.

What a desperate situation!

And then again it occurred to her that she too could defend herself against terrors: she knew now how to pray. So she took refuge in the sanctuary of the Great Lord, and, embracing the pillars of his throne, prayed, and prayed, and prayed.

Scarce a quarter of an hour after the lawyer's departure, some one else came.

It was Michael Daruszegi, the magistrate.

The girl trembled as she saw him. The confessor had come!

Topányi sprang up from his seat and went to meet him.

Czipra plainly heard what he said in a subdued voice.

"The doctor has forbidden her to speak: in her present condition you cannot cross-question her."

Czipra breathed freely again. He was defending her!

"In any case I can answer for her, for I was present from the very beginning," said Lorand to the magistrate. "Czipra heard the noise in the garden, and was daring enough, as was her wont, to go out and see what was the matter. At the door she met the robber face to face: she barred his way, and immediately cried out for me: then she struggled with him until I came to her help."

How pleased Czipra was at that explanation, all the more because she saw by Lorand's face that he really believed it.

"I have no more questions to ask the young lady,"

said Daruszegi. "This matter is really over in any case."

"Over?" asked Topányi astonished.

"Yes, over: explained, judged, and executed."

"How?"

"The robber chief, Kandur, before he died in agony, made such serious and perfectly consistent confessions as, combined with other circumstances, compromised your neighbor in the greatest measure."

"Sár-völgyi?" inquired Topányi with glistening eyes.

"Yes.—So far indeed that I was compelled to extend the magisterial inquiry to his person too. I started with my colleague to find him. We found the two ladies in a state of the greatest consternation. They came before us, and expressed their deep anxiety at not finding Sár-völgyi anywhere in the house: they had discovered his room open and unoccupied. His bedroom we did indeed find empty, his weapons were laid out on the table, the key of his money-chest was left in it, and the door of the room open.—What could have become of him?—We wanted to enter the door of the dining-room opposite. It was locked. The ladies declared that room was generally locked. The key was inside in the lock. That room has two other doors, one opening on to the kitchen, one on to the verandah. We looked at them too. In both cases the key was inside, in the lock. Some one must be in the room! I called upon the person within, in the name of the law to open the door to us. No answer came. I repeated the command, but the door was not opened: so I was compelled to have it finally broken open by force; and when the sunlight burst through into the dark room, what horrible sight do you think met our startled gaze? The lord of the house was hanging there above the table in the place of the chandelier: the chair under his feet that he had kicked away proved that he had taken his own life. . . ."

Topányi at these words raised his hands in ecstasy above his head.

"There is a God of justice in Heaven! He has smitten him with his own hand."

Then he clasped his hands together with emotion and slipped towards the head of Czipra's bed.

"Come, my child, say: 'I believe in God'—I shall say it first."

The doctor had not forbidden that.

Czipra devoutly waited for the words of wonder.

What a great, what a comforting world of thoughts.

A God who is a Father, a mother who is a maiden. A God who will be man for man's sake, and who suffered at man's hands, who died and rose again promises true justice, forgiveness for sins, resurrection, life eternal!

"What is that life eternal?"

If only some one could have answered!

The atheist was kneeling down beside the girl's bed when the priest arrived.

He did not rise, was not embarrassed at his presence.

"See, reverend sir, here is a neophyte, waiting for the baptismal water: I have just taught her the 'credo.'"

The girl gave him a look full of gratitude. What happiness glittered in those eyes of ecstasy!

"Who will be the god-parents?" asked the clergyman.

"One, the magistrate,—if he will be so kind: the other, I."

Czipra looked appealingly, first at Topándy, then at Lorand.

Topándy understood the unspoken question.

"Lorand cannot be. In a few minutes you shall know why."

The minister performed the ceremony with that briefness which consideration for a wounded person required.

When it was over, Topándy shook hands with the minister.

"If my hand has sinned at times against yours, I now ask your pardon."

"The debt has been paid by that clasp of your hand," said the priest.

"Your hand must now pronounce a blessing on us."

"Willingly."

"I do not ask it for myself: I await my punishment: I am going before my judge and shall not murmur against him. I want the blessing for those whom I love. This young fellow yesterday asked of me this maiden's hand. They have long loved each other, and deserve each other's love:—give them the blessing of faith, father. Do you agree, Czipra?"

The poor girl covered her burning face with her two hands, and, when Lorand stepped towards her and took her hand, began to sob violently.

"Don't you love me? Will you not be my wife?"

Czipra turned her head on one side.

"Ah, you are merely jesting with me. You want to tease, to ridicule a wretched creature who is nothing but a gypsy girl."

Lorand drew the girl's hand to his heart when she accused him of jesting with her. Something within told him the girl had a right to believe that, and the thought wrung his heart.

"How could you misunderstand me? Do you think I would play a jest upon you—and now?"

Topándy interrupted kindly.

"How could I jest with God now, when I am preparing to enter his presence?"

"How could I jest with your heart?" said Lorand.

"And with a dying girl," panted Czipra.

"No, no, you will not die, you will get well again, and we shall be happy."

"You say that now when I am dying," said the girl with sad reproach. "You tell me the whole beautiful world is thine, now, when of that world I shall have nothing but the clod of earth, which you will throw upon me."

"No, my child," said Topándy, "Lorand asked your hand of me yesterday evening, and was only awaiting

his mother's approval to tell you yourself his feelings towards you."

A quick flash of joy darted over the girl's face, and then it darkened again.

"Why, I know," she said brushing aside her tangled curls from her face, "I know your intentions are good. You are doing with me what people do with sick children. 'Get well! We'll buy you beautiful clothes, golden toys, we'll take you to places of amusement, for journeys—we shall be good-humored—will never annoy you:—only get well.' You want to give the poor girl pleasure, to make her better. I thank you for that too."

"You will not believe me," said Lorand, "but you will believe the minister's word. See last night I wrote a letter to mother about you: it lies sealed on my writing-table. Reverend sir, be so kind as to open and read it before her. She will believe you if you tell her we are not cajoling her."

The minister opened the letter, while Czipra, holding Lorand's hand, listened with rapt attention to the words that were read:

"MY DEAR MOTHER:

"After the many sorrows and pains I have continuously caused throughout my life to the tenderest of mothers' hearts, to-day I can send you news of joy.

"I am about to marry.

"I am taking to wife one who has loved me as a poor, nameless, homeless youth, for myself alone, and whom I love for her faithful heart, her soul pure as tried gold, still better than she loves me.

"My darling has neither rank nor wealth: her parents were gypsies.

"I shall not laud her to you in poetic phrases: these I do not understand. I can only feel, but not express my feelings.

"No other letter of recommendation can be required of you, save that I love her.

"Our love has hitherto only caused both of us pain: now I desire happiness for both of us.

"Your blessing will make the cup of this happiness full.

"You are good. You love me, you rejoice in my joy.

"You know me. You know what lessons life has taught me.

"You know that Fate always ordained wisely and providentially for me.

"No miracle is needed to make you, my mother, the best of mothers, who love me so, and are calm and peaceful in God, clasp together those hands of blessing which from my earliest days you have never taken off my head.

"Include in your prayer, beside my name, the name of my faithful darling, Czipra, too.

"I believe in your blessing as in every word of my religion, as in the forgiveness of sins, as in the world to come.

"But if you are not what God made you,—quiet and loving, a mother always ready to give her blessing with the halo of eternal love round your brow,—if you are cold, quick to anger, a woman of vengeance, proud of the coronet of a family blazon, one who wishes herself to rule Fate, and if the curses of such a merciless lady burden the girl whom I love, then so much the worse, I shall take her to wife with her dowry of curses—for I love her.

". . . God intercede between our hearts.

"Your loving son,

"LORAND."

As the minister read, Czipra at each sentence pressed Lorand's hand closer to her heart. She could neither speak nor weep: it was more than her spirit could bear. Every line, every phrase opened a Paradise before her, full of gladness of the other world: her soul's idol loved her: loved her for love's sake: loved her for herself: loved her because she made him happy: raised her to

his own level: was not ashamed of her wretched origin: could understand a heart's sensitiveness: commended her name to his mother's prayers: and was ready to maintain his love amidst his mother's curses.

A heart cannot bear such glory!

She did not care about anything now: about her wound: about life, or death: she felt only that glow of health which coursed through every sinew of her body and possessed every thought of her soul.

"I believe!" she said in rapture, rising where she lay: and in those words was everything: everything in which people are wont to believe, from the love of God to the love of man.

She did not care about anything now. She had no thought for men's eyes or men's words: but, as she uttered these words, she fell suddenly on Lorand's neck, drew him with the force of delight to her heart, and covered him with her kisses.

The wound reopened in her breast, and as the girl's kisses covered the face of the man she loved, her blood covered his bosom.

Each time her impassioned lips kissed him, a fresh gush of blood spurted from that faithful heart, which had always been filled with thoughts of him only, which had beat only for him, which had, to save him, received the murderer's knife:—the poor "green-robed" faithful girl.

And as she pressed her last kiss upon the lips of her darling, . . . she knew already what was the meaning of eternity. . . .

## CHAPTER XXXI

## THE BRIDAL FEAST

"Poor Czipra! I thought you would bury us all, and now it is I that must give you that one clod of earth the only gift you asked from the whole beautiful world."

Topándy himself saw after the sad arrangements.

Lorand could not speak: he was beside himself with grief.

He merely said he would like to have his darling embalmed and to take her to his family property, there to bury her.

This wish of his must be fulfilled.

It would be a sad surprise for his mother, to whom Topándy only the day before had written that her son was bringing home a new daughter-in-law.

When Lorand had asked Topándy for Czipra's hand, he immediately wrote to Mrs. Áronffy, thinking that what Lorand himself wrote to his mother would be in a proud strain. He anticipated his nephew's letter, told his mother quietly and restrainedly in order that Lorand's letter might be no surprise to her.

Now he must write again to her, telling that the bride was coming, and the family vault must be ready for her reception.

And curiously Topándy felt no pain in his heart as he thought over it.

"Death is after all the best solution of life!"

He did not shed a single tear upon the letter he wrote: he sealed it and looked for a servant to despatch it.

But other thoughts occupied him.

He sought the magistrate.

"My dear sir, when do you want to lock me up?"

"When you like, sir."

"Would you not take me to gaol immediately?"

"With pleasure, sir."

"How many years have they given me?"

"Only two."

"I expected more. Well, then I can take this letter myself into the town."

"Will Mr. Aronffy remain here?"

"No. He will take his dead love home to the country. I have asked the doctor to embalm her, and I have a lead casket which I prepared for myself with the intention of continuing my opposition to the ordinance of God within it: now I have no need of it. I will lend it to Czipra. That is her dowry."

An hour later he went in search of Lorand, who was still guarding his dead darling. The magistrate was there too.

"My dear sir," he said to the officer. "I am not going to the gaol now."

"Not yet?" inquired Daruszegi. "Very well."

"Not now, nor at any other time. A greater master has given me orders—in a different direction."

They began to look at him in astonishment.

His face was much paler than usual: but still that good-humored irony and light-hearted smile was there.

"Lorand, my boy, there will be two funerals here."

"Who is the second dead person?" asked Daruszegi.

"I am."

Then he drew from his breast his left hand which he had hitherto held thrust in his coat.

"An hour ago I wrote a letter to your mother. As I was sealing it the hot wax dripped onto my nail, and see how my hand has blackened since."

The tips of his left hand were blue and swollen.

"The doctor, quickly," cried Daruszegi to his servant.

"Never mind. It is already unnecessary," said Topándy, falling languidly into an arm-chair. "In two hours it is over. I cannot live more than two hours."

In twenty minutes this swelling will reach my shoulder, and the way from thence to the heart is short."

The doctor, who hastened to appear, confirmed Topándy's opinion.

"There is nothing to be done," he said.

Lorand, horror-stricken, hastened to take care of his uncle: the old fellow embraced the neck of the youth kneeling beside him.

"You philosopher, you were right after all, you see. There is One who takes thought for two-legged featherless animals too. If I had known,—'Knock and it shall be opened unto you:' I should long have knocked at the door and cried, 'O Lord, let me in!'"

Topándy would not allow himself to be undressed and put to bed.

"Draw my chair beside Czipra. Let me learn from her how a dead man must behave. My death will not be so fine as hers: I shall not breathe my soul into the soul of my loved one: yet I shall be a gay travelling-companion."

Pain interrupted his words.

When it ceased, he laughed at himself.

"How a foolish mass of flesh protests! It will not allow itself to be overlorded. Yet we were only guests here! '*Animula, vagula, blandula. Hospes comesque corporis. Quae nunc adibis loca? Frigidula, palidula, undula! Nec, ut soles, dabis jocos.*' Certainly you will be '*extra dominium*' immediately. And my lord Stomach, his Grace, and my lord Heart, his Excellency, and my lord Head, his Royal Highness all must resign office."

The doctor declared he must be suffering terrible agony all the time he was jesting and laughing; and he laughed when other people would have gnashed their teeth and cried aloud.

"We have disputed often, Lorand," said the old man, always in a fainter voice, "about that German savant who asserted that the inhabitants of other planets are much nobler men than we here on earth. If he asks what has become of me, tell him I have ad-

vanced. I have gone to a planet where there are no peasants: barons clean earls' boots. Don't laugh at me, I beg, if I am talking foolishly.—But death dictates very curious verses."

The hand-grasp with which he greeted Lorand, proved that it was his last.

After that his hand drooped, his eyes languished, his face became ever more and more yellow.

Once again he raised his eyes.

They met Lorand's gaze.

He wished to smile: in a whisper, straining desperately he said:

"Immediately now. . . I shall know—what is—in the foggy spots of the Northern Dog-star:—and in the eyeless worm's—entrails."

Then, suddenly, with a forced final spasmodic effort, he seized the arms of his chair, and rose, lifted up his right arm, and turned to the magistrate.

"Sir," he cried in a strong full-toned voice, "I have appealed."

He fell back in the arm-chair.

Some minutes later every wrinkle disappeared from his face, it became as smooth as marble, and calm, as those of dead persons are wont to be.

Lorand was standing there with clasped hands between his two dear dead ones.

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On the morrow at dawn Lorand rose for his journey and stepped into the cart with a closed lead coffin. So he took home his dead bride.

The second letter which Topándy had written to his mother, the sealing of which had sealed his own fate, had not been posted, and could not have prepared them for his coming.

At home they had received only the first letter.

When that letter of good tidings arrived it caused feelings of intoxicated delight and triumph throughout the whole house.

After all they loved him still best of all. He was the

favorite child of his mother and grandmother. No word of Desiderius is required for his heart was already united to his darling: and good Fanny was doubly happy in the idea that she would not be the only happy woman in the house.

With what joy they awaited him!

Could he ever have doubted that the one he loved would be loved by all?—no need to speak of her virtues: everybody knew them: all he need say was "I love her."

It was certainly very well he did not send his mother that letter, in which he had written of Czipra and requested his mother's blessing:—well that he had not wounded the dearest mother's heart with those final words—"but if you curse her whom I love—"

Curse her whom he loves!

Why should they do so? That letter brought a holiday to the house. They arranged the country dwelling afresh: Desiderius took up his residence in the town, handing over to his elder brother his birthright.

The eldest lady put off her mourning. Lorand's bride must not see anything that could recall sad thoughts. Everything sad was buried under the earth.

Desiderius could relate so much that was pleasant of the gypsy girl: Lorand's letters during the past ten years of silence always spoke of the poor despised diamond, whose faithful attachment had been the sunny side of Lorand's life. They read the bundles of letters again and again: it was a study for the two mothers. Where Lorand had been giving merely a passing hint, they could make great explanations, all pointing to Czipra.

Providence had ordered it so!

After the first meeting in the inn, it had all been ordained that Lorand should save Czipra from the murderer's knife, in order to be happy with her later.

. . . Why the gypsy girl was happy already.

Topándy's letter informed them that, immediately after the despatch of the letter, Lorand would wed Czipra, and they would come home together to the house of his parents.

So the day was known, they might even reckon the hour when they would arrive.

Desiderius remained in town to await Lorand. He promised to bring them out, however late they came, even in the night.

The ladies waited up until midnight. They waited outside under the verandah. It was a beautiful warm moonlit night.

The good grandmother, embracing Fanny's shoulder, related to her how many, many years ago they had waited one night for the two brothers to come, but that was a very awful night, and the waiting was very sorrowful. The wind howled among the acacias, clouds chased each other across the sky, hounds howled in the village, a hay-wain rattled in at the gate—and in it was hidden the coffin.—And the populace was very suspicious: they thought the ice would break its bounds, if a dead man were taken over it.

But now it was quite a different world. The air was still, not a breath of air: man and beast sleeps, only those are awake who await a bride.

How different the weather!

Then, all at once, a wain had stood at the gate: the servants hastened to open it.

A hay-wain now rattled in at the gate, as it did then. And after the wain, on foot, the two brothers, hand in hand.

The women rushed to meet them, Lorand was the first whom everyone embraced and kissed.

"And your wife?" asked every lip.

Lorand pointed speechlessly to the wain, and could not tell them.

Desiderius answered in his place.

"We have brought his wife here in her coffin."

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## CHAPTER XXXII

### WHEN WE HAD GROWN OLD

SEVENTEEN years have passed since Lorand returned home again.

What old people we have become since then!

Besides, seventeen years is a long time:—and seventeen heavy years!

I have rarely seen people grow old so slowly as did our contemporaries.

We live in a time when we sigh with relief as each day passes by—only because it is now over! And we will not believe that what comes after it will bring still worse days.

We descend continuously further and further down, in faith, in hope, in charity towards one another: our wealth is dissipated, our spirits languish, our strength decays, our united life falls into disunion: it is not indifference, but "ennui" with which we look at the events of the days.

One year to the day, after poor Czipra's death Lorand went with his musket on his shoulder to a certain entertainment where death may be had for the asking.

I shall not recall the fame of those who are gone—why should I? Very few know of it.

Lorand was a good soldier.

That he would have been in any case, he had naturally every attribute required for it: heroic courage, athletic strength, hot blood, a soul that never shrank. War would in any case have been a delight for him:—and in his present state of mind!

Broken-hearted and crushed, his first love contemptuously trampling him in the dust, his second murdered in the fervor of her passion, his soul weighed with the