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

load of melancholia, and that grievous fate which bore down and overshadowed his family: always haunted by that terrible foreboding that, sooner or later, he must still find his way to that eighth resting-place, that empty niche.

When the wars began his lustreless spirit burst into brilliance. When he put on his uniform, he came to me, and, grasping my hand, said with flashing eyes:

"I am bargaining in the market where a man may barter his worn-out life at a profit of a hundred per cent."

Yet he did not barter his.

Rumor talked of his boldness, people sang of his heroic deeds, he received fame and wreaths, only he could not find what he sought: a glorious death.

Of the regiment which he joined, in the end only a tenth part remained. He was among those who were not even wounded.

Yet how many bullets had swept over his head!

How he looked for those whistling heralds of death, how he waited for the approach of those whirring missiles to whom the transportation of a man to another world in a moment is nothing! They knew him well already and did not annoy him.

These buzzing bees of the battlefield, like the real bees, whir past the ear of him who walks undaunted among them, and sting him who fears them.

Once a bullet pierced his helmet.

How often I heard him say:

"Why not an inch lower?"

Finally, in one battle a piece of an exploded shell maimed his arm, and when he fell from his horse, disabled by a sword-cut, a Cossack pierced him through with his lance.

Yet even that did not kill him.

For weeks he lay unconscious in the public hospital, under a tent, until I came to fetch him home. Fanny nursed him. He recovered.

When he was better again, the war was over.

How many times I heard him say:

"What bad people you are, for loving me so! What a bad turn you did me, when you brought me away from the scene of battle, brother! How merciless you were Fanny, to watch beside me! What a vain task it was on your part to keep me alive! How angry I am with you: what detestable people you are!—just for loving me so!"

Yet we still loved him.

And then we grew old peacefully.

We buried kind grandmother, and then dear mother too: we remained alone together, and never parted.

Lorand always lived with us: as long as we lived in town he did not leave the house sometimes for weeks together.

The new order of things compelled me to give up the career which father had held to be the most brilliant aim of life. I threw over my yearning for diplomacy, and went to the plough.

I became a good husbandman.

I am that still.

Then too Lorand remained with us.

His was no longer a life, merely a counting of days.

It was piteous to know it and to see him.

A strapping figure, whose calling was to be a hero!

A warm heart, that might have been a paradise on earth to some woman!

A refined, fiery temperament that might have been the leading spirit of some country.

Who quietly without love or happiness, faded leaf by leaf and did not await anything from the morrow.

Yet he feared the coming days.

Often he chided me for wanting to brick up the door of that lonely building there beside the brook.

Lest my children should ask, "what can dwell within it?" Lest they try to discover the meaning of that hidden inscription as I had tried in my childish days.

Lorand did not agree with the idea.

"There is still one lodging vacant in it."

And that was a horror to us all.

To him, to us too.

Every evening we parted as if saying a last adieu.

Nothing in life gave him pleasure. He took part in nothing which interested other men. He did not play cards, or drink wine: he was ever sober and of unchanging mood. He read nothing but mathematical books. I could never persuade him to take a newspaper in his hand.

"The whole history of the world is one lie."

Every day, winter and summer, early in the morning, before anyone had risen, he walked out to the cemetery, to where Czipra lay "under the perfumed herb-roots:" spent some minutes there and then returned, bringing in summer a blade of living grass, in winter of dried grass from her grave.

He had a diary, in which nought was written, except the date: and pinned underneath, in place of writing, was the dry blade of grass.

The history of a life contained in thousands of grass-blades, each blade representing a day.

Could there be a sadder book?

The only things that interested him, were fruit trees and bees.

Animals and plants do not deceive him who loves them.

The whole day long he guarded his trees and his saplings, and waged war against the insects: and all day long he learned the philosophy of life from those grand constitutional monarchists, the bees.

There are many men, particularly to-day, in our country, who know how to kill time: Lorand merely struggled with time, and every day as it passed was a defeat for him.

He never went shooting, he said it was not good for him to take a loaded gun in his hand.

At night one of my children always slept in his room.

"I am afraid of myself," he confessed to me.

He was afraid of himself and of that quiet house, down there beside the brook.

"I would love to sleep there under the perfumed herb-roots."

A life wasted!

One beautiful summer afternoon my little son rushed to me with the news that his uncle Lorand was lying on the floor in the middle of the room, and would not rise.

With the worst suspicions, I hastened to his side.

When I entered his room, he was lying, not on the floor, but on the bed.

He lay face downward on the bed.

"What is the matter?" I asked, taking his hand.

"Nothing at all:—only I am dying slowly."

"Great heavens! What have you done?"

"Don't be alarmed. It was not my hand."

"Then what is the matter?"

"A bee-sting. Laugh at me—I shall die from it."

In the morning he had said that robber bees had attacked his hives, and he was going to destroy them. A strange bee had stung him on the temple.

"But not there. . . not there. . ." he panted, breathing feverishly: "not into the eighth resting-place—out yonder under the perfumed herb-roots. There let us lie in the dust one beside the other. Brick up that door. Good night."

Then he closed his eyes and never opened them again.

Before I could call Fanny to his side he was dead.

The valiant hero who had struggled single-handed against whole troops, the man of iron whom neither the sword nor the lance could kill, in ten minutes perished from the prick of a tiny little insect.

God moves among us!

When the last moment of temptation had come, when weariness of life was about to arm his hand with the curse of his forefathers, He had sent the very tiniest of his flying minions, and had carried him up on the wings of a bee to the place where the happy ones dwell.

* * * * *

And we are still growing older: who knows how long it will last?

FINIS