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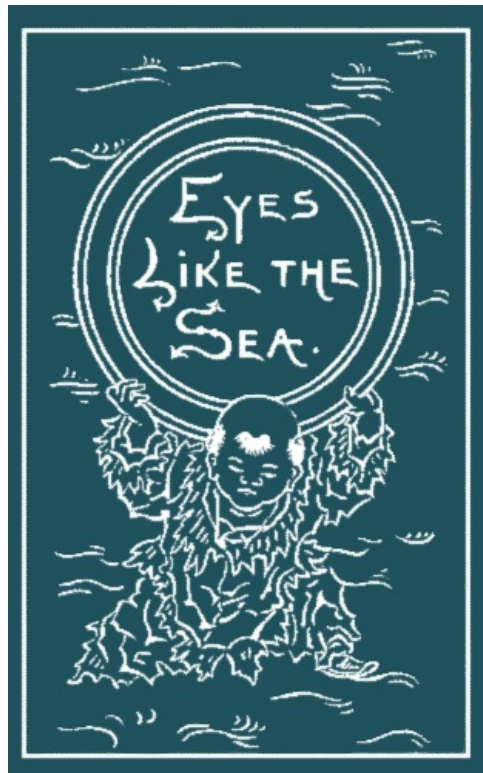
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EYES LIKE THE SEA

A NOVEL

By **MAURUS JÓKAI**

TRANSLATED FROM THE HUNGARIAN
BY
R. NISBET BAIN

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PREFACE

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The pessimistic tone of Continental fiction, and its pronounced preference for minute and morbid analysis, are quite revolutionizing the modern novel. Fiction is ceasing to be a branch of art, and fast becoming, instead, a branch of science. The aim of the novelist, apparently, is to lecture instead of to amuse his readers. Plot, incident, and description are being sacrificed more and more to the dissection of peculiar and abnormal types of character, and the story is too often lost in physiological details or psychological studies. The wave of *Naturalism*, as it is called (though nothing could really be more unnatural), has spread from France all over Europe. The Spanish and Italian novels are but pale reflections of the French novel. The German Naturalists have all the qualities of the French School, minus its grace. In Holland, the so-called *Sensitivists* are at great pains to combine a coarse materialism with a sickly sentimentality. Much more original, but equally depressing, is the new school of Scandinavian novelists represented by such names as Garborg, Strindberg, Jacobsen, Löffler, Hamsun, and Björnson (at least in his later works), all of whom are more or less under the influence of Ibsenism, which may be roughly defined as a radical revolt against conventionality. In point of thoroughness some of these Northern worthies are not a whit behind their fellow craftsmen in France. The novel of the year in Norway for 1891 was a loathsomely circumstantial account of slow starvation. There is a lady novelist in the same country who could give points to Zola himself; and nearly every work of Strindberg's has scandalized a large portion of the public in Sweden. Nay, even remote Finland has been reached at last by the wave of *Naturalism* in fiction, and Respectability there is still in tears at the perversion of the most gifted of Finnish novelists, Juhani Aho. In the Slavonic countries also the pessimistic, analytical novel is paramount, though considerably chastened by Slavonic mysticism, and modified by peculiar political and social conditions. Though much nobler in sentiment, the novel in Poland, Russia, and Bohemia is quite as melancholy in character as the general run of fiction elsewhere. A minor key predominates them all. There is no room for humour in the mental vivisection which now passes for *Belles-lettres*. We may learn something, no doubt, from these *fin de siècle* novelists, but to get a single healthy laugh out of any one of them is quite impossible.

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There is, however, one country which is a singular exception to this general rule. In Hungary the good old novel of incident and adventure is still held in high honour, and humour is of the very essence of the national literature. This curious isolated phenomenon is due, in great measure, to the immense influence of the veteran novelist, Maurus Jókai, who may be said to have created the modern Hungarian novel,¹ and who has already written more romances than any man can hope to read in a life-time. Jókai is a great poet. He possesses a gorgeous fancy, an all-embracing imagination, and a constructive skill unsurpassed in modern fiction; but his most delightful quality is his humour, a humour of the cheeriest, heartiest sort, without a single *souçon* of ill-nature about it, a quality precious in any age, and doubly so in an overwrought, supercivilized age like our own. Lovers of literature must always regret, however, that the great Hungarian romancer has been so prodigal of his rare gifts. He has written far too much, and his works vary immensely. Between such masterpieces, for instance, as "*Karpáthy Zoltán*" and "*Az arány ember*" on the one hand, and such pot-boilers as "*Nincsen Ordög*," or even "*Szerelem Bolondjai*," on the other, the interval is truly abysmal. But that such a difference is due not to exhaustion, but simply to excessive exuberance, is evident from the story which we now present for the first time to English readers. "*A tengerszemű hölgy*" is certainly the most brilliant of Jókai's later, and perhaps² the most humorous of all his works. It was justly crowned by the Hungarian Academy as the best Magyar novel of the year 1890, and well sustains the long-established reputation of the master. Apart from the intensely dramatic incidents of the story, and the originality and vividness of the characterization, "*A tengerszemű hölgy*" is especially interesting as being, to a very great extent, autobiographical. It is not indeed a *professed* record of the author's life-like "*Emlékeim*" (My Memoirs) for instance. It professes to be a novel, and a most startling novel it is. Yet in none of Jókai's other novels does he tell us so much about himself, his home, and his early struggles both as an author and a patriot; *he* is one of the chief characters in his own romance. Of the heroine, Bessy, I was about to say that she stood alone in fiction, but there is a certain superficial resemblance, purely accidental of course, between her and that other delightful and original rogue of romance, Mrs. Desborough, in Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson's "More New Arabian Nights," though all who have had the privilege of making the acquaintance of both ladies will feel bound to admit that Jókai's Bessy, with her five husbands, is even more piquant, stimulating, and fascinating than Mr. Stevenson's charming and elusive heroine.

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R. NISBET BAIN.

[1] I do not forget *Kármán*, *Jósika*, and *Eötvös*, but the former was an imitator of Richardson,

and the two latter of Walter Scott.

[2] I say "perhaps," as I can only claim to have read twenty-five out of Jókai's one hundred and fifty novels.

EYES LIKE THE SEA

[Pg 1]

CHAPTER I

SEA-EYES—MONSIEUR GALIFARD—THE FIRST NEEDLE-PRICK

Never in my life have I seen such wonderful eyes! One might construct a whole astronomy out of them. Every changeful mood was there reflected; so I have called them "Eyes like the Sea."

When first I met pretty Bessy, we were both children. She was twelve years old, I was a hobbledehoy of sixteen. We were learning dancing together. A Frenchman had taken up his quarters in our town, an itinerant dancing-master, who set the whole place in a whirl. His name was Monsieur Galifard. He had an extraordinarily large head, a bronzed complexion, eyebrows running into each other, and short legs; and on the very tip of his large aquiline nose was a big wart. Yet, for all that, he was really charming. Whenever he danced or spoke, he instantly became irresistible. All our womankind came thither on his account; all of them I say, from nine years old and upwards to an age that was quite incalculable. I recall the worthy man with the liveliest gratitude. I have to thank him for the waltz and the quadrille, as well as for the art of picking up a fallen fan without turning my back upon the lady.

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Bessy was the master's greatest trouble. She would never keep time; she would never take to the elegant "*pli*," and he could never wean her from her wild and frolicsome ways. Woe to the dancer who became her partner!

I, however, considered all this perfectly natural. When any one is lovely, rich, and well-born, she has the right to be regarded as the exception to every rule. That she was lovely you could tell at the very first glance; that she was rich anybody could tell from the silver coach in which she rode; and by combining the fact that every one called her mother "Your Ladyship" with the fact that even the "country people" kissed her hand, you easily arrived at the conclusion that she must be well-born. Her lady-mother and her companion, a gentlewoman of a certain age, were present at every dancing lesson, as also was the girl's aunt, a major's widow in receipt of a pension. Thus Bessy was under a threefold inspection, the natural consequence of which was that she could do just as she liked, for every one of her guardians privately argued, "Why should I take the trouble of looking after this little girl when the other two are doing the same thing?" and so all three were always occupied with their own affairs.

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The mother was a lady who loved to bask on the sunny side of life; her widowhood pined for consolation. She had her officially recognised wooers, with more or less serious intentions, graduated according to rank and quality.

The companion was the scion of a noble family. All her brothers were officers. Her father was a Chamberlain at Court; his *own* chamber was about the last place in the world to seek him in. The young lady's toilets were of the richest; she also had the reputation of being a beauty, and was famed for her finished dancing. Still, time had already called her attention to the seriousness of her surroundings; for Bessy, the daughter of the house, had begun to shoot up in the most alarming manner, and four or five summers more might make a rival of her. Her occupation during the dancing hour was therefore of such a nature as to draw her somewhat aside lest people should observe with whom and in what manner she was diverting herself, for there is many an evil feminine eye that can read all sorts of things in a mere exchange of glances or a squeeze of the hand, and then, of course, such things are always talked to death.

But it was the aunt most of all who sought for pretexts to vanish from the dancing-room. She wanted to taste every dish and pasty in the buffet before any one else, and well-grounded investigators said of her, besides, that she was addicted to the dark pleasure of taking snuff, which naturally demanded great secrecy. When, however, she was in the dancing-room, she would sit down beside some kindred gossip, and then they both got so engrossed in the delight of running down all their acquaintances, that they had not a thought for anything else.

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So Bessy could do what she liked. She could dance *csárdás*³ figures in the Damensolo; smack her *vis-à-vis* on the hands in the *tour de mains*, and tell anecdotes in such a loud voice that they could be heard all over the room; and when she laughed she would press both hands between her knees in open defiance of Monsieur Galifard's repeated expostulations.

[3] The national dance of Hungary.

One evening there was a grand practice in the dancing-room. With the little girls came big girls, and with the big girls big lads. Such lubbers seem to think that they have a covenanted right to cut out little fellows like me. Luckily, worthy Galifard was a good-natured fellow, who would not allow his *protégés* to be thrust to the wall.

"Nix cache-cache spielen, Monsieur Maurice. Allons! Walzer geht an. Nur courage. Ne cherchez pas toujours das allerschlekteste Tänzerin! Fangen sie Fräulein Erzsike par la main. Valsez là."⁴ And with that he seized my hand, led me up to Bessy, placed my hand in hers, and then "ein, zwei."

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- [4] "Don't play hide-and-peek, Master Maurice. Off you go! 'Tis a waltz, remember. Come, come! courage. Don't always pick out the worst partner. Take Miss Bessy by the hand. Waltz away!"

Now, the waltzes of those days were very different from the waltzes we dance now. The waltz of to-day is a mere joke; but waltzing then was a serious business. Both partners kept the upper parts of their bodies as far apart as possible, whilst their feet were planted close together. Then the upper parts went moving off to the same time, and the legs were obliged to slide as quickly as they could after the flying bodies. It was a dance worthy of will-o'-the-wisps.

The master kept following us all the time, and never ceased his stimulating assurances: "Très bien, Monsieur Maurice! Ça va ausgezeiknet! 'Alten sie brav la demoiselle! Nix auf die Füße schauen. Regardez aux yeux. Das ist riktig. Embrassiren ist besser als embarrasiren! Pouah! Da liegst schon alle beide!"⁵

- [5] "Very good, Master Maurice! That's capital! Hold the lady nicely! Don't look at your feet. Look at her eyes. That's right! To embrace is better than to embarrass. Pooh! There, they both are together!"

No, not quite so bad as that! I had foreseen the inevitable tumble, and in order to save my partner I sacrificed myself by falling on my knees, *she* scarcely touched the floor with the tip of her finger. My knee was not much the worse for the fall, but I split my pantaloons just above the knee. I was annihilated. A greater blow than that can befall no man.

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Bessy laughed at my desperate situation, but the next moment she had compassion upon me.

"Wait a bit," said she, "and I'll sew it up with my darning-needle." Then she fished up a darning-needle from one of the many mysterious folds of her dress, and, kneeling down before me, hastily darned up the rent in my dove-coloured pantaloons, and in her great haste she pricked me to the very quick with the beneficent but dangerous implement.

"I didn't prick you, did I?" she asked, looking at me with those large eyes of hers which seemed to speak of such goodness of heart.

"No," I said; yet I felt the prick of that needle even then.

Then we went on dancing. I distinguished myself marvellously. With a needle-prick in my knee, and another who knows where, I whirled Bessy three times round the room, so that when I brought her back to the *garde des dames*, it seemed to me as if three-and-thirty mothers, aunts, and companions were revolving around me.

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CHAPTER II

MY FIRST DISTINCTION—MY FIRST GRIEVANCE—THE DAMENWALZER—THE FRIGHTFUL MONSTER—THE READJUSTED SCARF—THE SECOND NEEDLE-PRICK

I am really most grateful to Monsieur Galifard. I have to thank him for the first distinction I ever enjoyed in my life. This was the never-to-be-forgotten circumstance that when my colleagues, the young hopefuls of the Academy of Jurisprudence at Kecskemet, gave a lawyers' ball, they unanimously chose me to be the *elötánczos*.⁶ To this day I am proud of that distinction; what must I have been then? On the heels of this honour speedily came a second. The very same year, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, on the occasion of the competition for the Teleki prize, honourably mentioned my tragedy, "The Jew Boy," and there were even two competent judges, Vörösmarty and Bajza,⁷ who considered it worthy of the prize.... When, therefore, I returned to my native town, after an absence of three years, I found that a certain *renommée* had preceded me. I had also very good reasons for returning home. The legal curriculum in my time embraced four years. The third year was given to the *patveria*, the fourth year to the *jurateria*.⁸ Every respectable man goes through the *patveria* in his own country, but the *jurateria* at Buda-Pest.

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- [6] The dancer who leads off the ball.

- [7] Two of the most eminent Hungarian poets.

- [8] Different branches of Hungarian law.

And I had something else to boast of, too. In my leisure hours I painted portraits, miniatures in oil. So well did I hit off the Judge of Osziny (and he did not give me a sitting either) that every one recognised him; but a still greater sensation was caused by my portrait of the wife of the Procurator Fiscal, who passed for one of the prettiest women in the town.

And yet, despite all this, when in the following Shrovetide the Lord Lieutenant gave a ball to the county (they were something like Lord Lieutenants in those days), I was *not* called upon to open the ball! Ungrateful fatherland!

And who was it, pray, who caused me this bitter slight? A dandy, who did not belong to our town at all; a certain Muki Bagotay, of whom the world only knew that he had been to Paris, and was a good match. In my rage I had resolved not to dance at the Lord Lieutenant's ball, although I had received an invitation. Moreover, my indignation was increased by the circumstance that rumour had already designated Bessy as the semi-official partner of the opener of the ball.

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However, Nemesis overtook the pair of them.

At this ball Bessy wore a frisure *à l'Anglaise*, which did not suit her face at all; and I rejoiced beforehand at the misadventure I clearly foresaw, for I was certain that her flying dishevelled hair would catch in the buttons of her partner's dress-coat.

As for Muki Bagotay himself, the first time we cast eyes upon him, my young brother and I immediately agreed that it was an absolute impertinence to be so handsome. Only a romance-writer has the right to produce such perfect figures; they have no business to exist in reality. I comforted myself with the reflection that such a handsome fellow *must* be a blockhead. I didn't know then that dulness was fashionable. Why, even *gold* has a dull ring!

But I was a very inexperienced youngster in those days. I had no down on my face, I did not know how to smoke, I would not have drunk wine for worlds, and had never even looked a lady in the face.

But, as I said before, Nemesis overtook them.

The dance opened with a waltz. If I had been master of the ceremonies, I should have started with a *körmagyar*.⁹ Ah! that *körmagyar*. That is something like a dance. It requires enthusiasm to dance *that*, and you want eight or sixteen couples to dance it properly, and all thirty-two dancers must dance it with histrionic precision, and that was not an easy thing to do, I can tell you. But, then, Bagotay was all for waltzes. The "Pecsovics"!¹⁰

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[9] An old Hungarian round dance.

[10] One who preferred foreign and especially Austrian customs to Hungarian.

But there's a Nemesis!

It was the regular custom then for the band to play ten or twelve bars of each dance before it began, and then stop for a few moments so that the public might know whether the next dance was to be a polka, quadrille, or waltz. Muki Bagotay did not know this (what did he know, forsooth?), so when the band gave the usual signal, he took his partner on his arm and started off with her in a fine whirl, till the band suddenly stopped, and they found themselves high and dry at the other end of the room with no music for their feet to dance to; so they had to sneak back shamefacedly to the place from whence they had started. Bessy was furious, and Muki was full of excuses; you would have taken them for a married couple of six months' standing. Serve them right!

I did not watch them dance any more, but sat down in a corner and sketched caricatures on the back of my invitation card. Then I made my way to the buffet to drink almond-tea, and gathered round me two or three *blasé* young men, like myself weary of existence. Let the gay company inside there try and amuse themselves without our assistance if they could!

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Suddenly some one tapped me on the shoulder with a fan, then I recognised a voice; it was Bessy. "What," she said, "not content with flying from the dancing-room yourself, must you keep away other dancers also! Come back, sir! A *Damenwalzer* is beginning."

For the privilege of a *Damenwalzer* I capitulated unconditionally of course. Having completed the turn round the room with my partner, I led Bessy back to her mother, and thanked her for the never-to-be-forgotten distinction. She had to be off again almost immediately, for the voice of the master of the ceremonies announced a cotillon. The couples flew round with the velocity of will-o'-the-wisp. But her mother remained where she was, and there was an empty chair beside her.

"You are quite forgetting your old acquaintances," said she, breathing heavily (she was stout and suffered from asthma). "You don't trouble your head about us now you have become a famous man."

A famous man! What! then does *she* also know that the Academy of Sciences honourably mentioned my tragedy? No, no! My other fame it was that had reached her—my pictorial successes.

"We have seen the lovely portrait that you painted. Yes, it was Madame Müller to the life—just as she looked fifteen years ago. Why did you not rather paint her daughter, she is much prettier? But you don't like painting girls, do you—you are afraid it is a losing game, eh?"

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The lady had certainly very peculiar expressions.

Of course I could only reply that I was not a bit afraid, and that if they would let me, I should have the greatest pleasure in painting Miss Bessy.

She was gracious enough to give her consent. The only thing was to fix when it should be. It could not be at once, as for some days after a ball young ladies do not look their best. Then they had to get ready for another dancing party, or were busy, and on Sundays they went to church. At last, however, after much calculation, a day was hunted up on which Bessy was free to sit to me.

Then there was another question for consideration: was the portrait to be painted on ivory with water-colours, or on linen with oils? "Ivory is better," I insinuated, "because one can always wipe off a portrait in water-colours with a wet sponge whenever one likes."

The lady remarked the self-reproach, and was gracious enough to neutralize it by a contradiction.

"Then I declare for oils, for we wish to keep the picture for ever."

I felt that I could have done anything for her.

Meanwhile the cotillon had come to an end. Bessy returned to her mother, and the companion also resumed her place. The chair which I had appropriated belonged to her, and resigning it to its lawful possessor, I would have withdrawn, but the lady considered it her duty to present me to the ruling planet of the day, Muki Bagotay, who was escorting back his partner. She immediately acquainted him with my artistic qualifications, and made it generally known that I was going in a few days to paint her daughter's portrait.

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On the afternoon of the day appointed I appeared at Bessy's house. I had sent on beforehand my easel and my canvas by our servant. I found not a single soul of a lackey either in the passage or the ante-chamber. I was obliged to stand there and wait till some one came to announce me, and in the meantime I could not help overhearing the conversation in the adjoining room.

"You are a good-for-nothing rascal yourself—a shameful, impertinent fellow!"

I recognised the voice of the mistress of the house.

In reply came a protesting shriek.

"Where is there a stick?" cried the lady.

And at the same instant a hoarse voice replied: "Madame, vous êtes une friponne!"

A pretty conversation truly. I had certainly arrived at the wrong time.

Meanwhile the door opened, and the flunkey came in rubbing one of his hands with the other; he was evidently in pain.

"Have you been beaten?" cried I, in amazement; to which he angrily replied: "No! I have been bitten."

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What, actually bitten the footman!

"Would you kindly walk in, sir; they are waiting for you."

The moment I entered the room this enigmatical state of things was immediately plain to me. The personage to whom her ladyship was meting out these offensive epithets, and who was returning her such contemptuous replies, was a grey parrot who had just bitten the lackey in the finger and been chastised for this misdeed. The whole company was in the utmost excitement. There was a large assembly both of ladies and gentlemen; amongst the latter my eye immediately caught sight of Muki Bagotay. But the chief personage was the parrot. He was a grey-liveried, red-tailed, big-billed monster, and he stood in the middle of the tea-table in a threatening attitude. Somehow or other he had contrived to open the door of his bronze cage, and in a twinkling he stood in the midst of the tea-things on the covered table. "Oh, I only hope he won't get on my head!" cried a somewhat elderly lady, holding on to her chignon with both hands. Nobody dared to assume the offensive. The footman who had attempted to seize the fugitive had already been laid *hors de combat* by the winged rebel, while the parlour-maid declared that she would not go near him if they gave her the whole house. The lady of the house meanwhile was making little dabs at the bird with a small Spanish cane, and calling it all sorts of abusive names; but the warlike pet always grasped the end of the cane with its strong beak, while he repaid with interest the injurious epithets bestowed upon him.

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When I joined the company I was scarcely noticed and the lady of the house, in reply to my salutation, "I kiss your hand," said, "You infamous scoundrel!" though she immediately added, "I did not mean you."—"You're one yourself," retorted the bird.

"Come now, find a rhyme to that, Mr. Rhymster!" said Mr. Muki Bagotay. The wretch was apostrophizing me.—Rhymster, indeed!

"Don't go near it!" cried Bessy; "he might bite your hand, and then you would not be able to paint me."

They'd terrify me, eh? It only needed that. I instantly went straight for the bird. I would have done so had it been the double-headed Russian eagle itself. Was it divination which made me hit upon the proper word to say to such a human-voiced monster? "Give me your head!" said I. And at that word the terrible wretch bobbed down his head till he was actually standing on his curved beak, while I scratched his head with my index finger, which gratified him so much that he began

to flutter his wings.

Then I hazarded a second command.

"Give me your foot!"

And then, to the general amazement, the parrot raised its formidable three-pronged foot and clasped me tightly round the index finger with its claws; then it seized my thumb with its other foot, and allowed me to lift it from the table. Nor was that all. While I held it on my hand, just as the mediæval huntsmen held their falcons, the parrot bent its head over my hand and began to distribute kisses; but finally he went through every variation of the kiss till it was a perfect scandal. The ladies laughed. "Who ever could have taught him?"

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"I got the bird during the lifetime of my late lamented husband," explained the lady of the house, with some confusion.

Finally, the conquered sphinx affectionately confided to me his name: "Little Koko! Darling Koko!" But I transferred Koko from my fist to his cage, and put him on to the swinging ring, which he seized, and began to climb upwards with his beak. He was a veritable triped! On settling comfortably in his ring, he made me a low bow, and cried with a naïve inflexion of voice—"Your humble servant!"

"Positively marvellous!" gasped the lady-mother; "you ought really to be a tamer of animals!"

"I mean to be."

"Indeed! And what sort of beasts will you tame?"

"Men!"

Not one of them understood me.

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"Well, Mr. Poet," joked Muki Bagotay, "the ballad was a success; now let us see whether the picture also will be superlative."

"How do you want to see it?"

"So!" and with that he stuck his eye-glass into the corner of his nose.

"Then you're just mistaken!" said I, "for when I paint a portrait nobody is allowed in the room except myself and the sitter."

The whole company was amazed. Every one fancied that it would have been a public exhibition, and so they had all congregated together to see how a person's eye, mouth and ear came out. A large round table had been prepared for me, in order that a whole lot of them might sit around it with their hands on their elbows, and give me general directions as I went along: That eye a bit higher! that ringlet a little lower! A little more red here, and a little more white there! However, I declared plainly that I would not paint before a crowd; it was the rule in painting, I said. When portraits were being painted, nobody must be in the atelier but the painter and his model. Barabás,¹¹ too, always made that a rule.

[11] Michael Barabás, a famous Hungarian painter, born at Markosfalu in 1810.

My resolution produced an imposing effect on the company. It's a very nice thing when a man can do something which nobody else can! They had to agree that Bessy and I should sit alone in a little side room, which had only one window, and the lower part of even this window had to be covered by a Spanish screen so as to get a proper light. And nobody was to disturb us so long as the sitting lasted.

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The first sitting did not last long. In oil painting, the image should first of all be painted *under*, that is to say, with dull neutral colours. In those days I had never heard of such a thing as a first coating; while it is in this stage the picture is not fit to be looked at. It is absolutely hideous, and the better the likeness, the worse it looks. I allowed nobody to look at it, not even Bessy. I locked up the first essay in my painter's knapsack; it was a miniature. At this stage it was quite sufficient if the *insetting* had succeeded, with the figure in profile, but the countenance quite *en face*; the shadows piled up, but the background merely thrown out tentatively, and the fundamental colours of the dress just insinuated. Every one will see that this last part is the hardest of all.

The company was very much deceived in its expectations when it was informed that I had nothing to show it. Every one had expected that in an hour and a half I should have finished the eye or the mouth at any rate; they now thought to themselves that nothing at all would come of it.

"Well, but will Bessy look pretty in this dress?" asked her mother.

What could I do at such a question as this but look silly? As if I knew whether Bessy had had a pretty dress on or not! All I knew was that I had had to use for it a little "English lake," some "Neapolitan yellow," "Venetian white," and just a scrinch of "burnt ochre."

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"I can tell you that it was a very tiresome amusement," said Bessy. "The face a little more that way—Not so serious—Not so smiling—Don't sit so stiffly—Raise your finger—Don't move about so much.—And you've laid so much licorice-juice on my portrait that they'll fancy I'm a gipsy girl."

I hastened to assure her that this was only laying the ground work, and that on the morrow it

would be a much merrier business.

The next day I was there again after an early dinner. In the forenoon I was with my chief at the office. Thus before dinner I was a lawyer, and after dinner I was artist, poet, and reciter.

This time there was no company. The picture proceeded briskly, and the members of the family were allowed to come in from time to time, one by one, and have a peep at it.

I had now begun to study the face more in detail. It was an interesting head. The face was almost heart-shaped, terminating below in a little chin which was delicately divided by a single dimple. There were spiral-like lips of dazzling red enamel; a slightly *retroussé* nose, with vibrating nostrils; round, rosy-red cheeks, with little beauty spots here and there, which I christened "black stars in the ruddy dawning heavens!" Her densely thick hair curled naturally, and gleamed like golden enamel, diminishing, after the manner of Phidias' ideal Venus, the smoothest of foreheads, and fluttering the most roguish of little ringlets over the blue-veined temples. (How could I help learning by heart such minute details when every one of them passed beneath my brush?) But what my brush could not possibly reproduce was her marvellous pair of eyes. They drove me entirely to despair. I really believe that even if I had been a true artist instead of a wretched dilettante, I should never have been able to conjure forth their secrets. Just when I was thinking I had fixed them, her eyes would flash, and my whole work was thrown away. At last I had to be content with a dreamy expression, which pleased *me*, at any rate, best. The inspecting family trio said that they had never seen such an expression on Bessy's face; nevertheless they acknowledged, with one voice, that it was a speaking likeness. [Pg 20]

The head was now ready, the dress was to remain till to-morrow.

On that day there was a *préférence* party in town at the General's. Bessy's mother was an enthusiastic *préférence* player.... Consequently she was not at home. The aunt alone remained as the guardian of maidens, and she used generally to take a nap in the afternoon, or play patience. I don't know who presided over Bessy's toilet on this occasion, perhaps nobody. That clean-cut, pale pink bodice on other days had given full scope to her charming figure; but on this particular day it was more insinuating than ever. It seemed to me as if the frill of English tulle had crept considerably lower down the shoulder, nay, lower still. [Pg 21]

One cannot imagine a lovelier masterpiece of a creative hand than that bust. And it is a painter's right, nay, his duty, not merely to look, but to observe. A dangerous privilege. My hand trembled, I seemed to freeze, and yet beads of sweat stood out upon my forehead.... She, too, seemed to remark my agitation. A roguish flame sparkled in her eye. She was now not a bit like her yesterday's portrait. She seemed to be flouting me. And I was putting that treacherous frill of tulle to rights in the picture, putting it where it *ought* to have been. That is what I really call "*corriger la fortune*."

At this sitting the face was completely finished, and the dress also was painted. I thanked the fair self-sacrificing victim, and told her that she might now look at the picture; it was ready. The girl rose from her chair and peeped over my shoulder. She looked at the picture and laughed in my face.

"Why, you've readjusted the frill of my dress, haven't you?" said she.

"So you wore it like that purposely, eh?"

"Then was there something you didn't want to see?" [Pg 22]

"There was something I didn't want other people to see."

"Well, now, I've been looking at you for days and days, and I've observed something *on you* which is very nasty, and which I don't like at all."

"I had no idea you gave me so much of your attention."

"It is only a mere speck, no bigger than the eye of a bean."

"What can it be?"

"The wart on your right hand."

And, indeed, on my right hand, just below the thumb, was a not very ornamental excrescence, which everybody could see when I was writing or painting.

"I cannot cut it out, because it is just above the artery. I showed it to a doctor, and he said it would be a rather dangerous operation."

"What does the doctor know about it? I'll destroy it for you; it won't hurt you. I learned it at school from my school-fellows. I'll destroy it in a moment."

"By incantations, eh?"

"Oh, dear no! It will smart dreadfully. But if a girl can stand it, you can."

I consented.

She lit a candle forthwith, and placed it on the table beside me. Then she produced a darning-needle from somewhere (I thought of the other darning-needle), took firm hold of it, [Pg 23]

shoved it right down to the very roots of the wart, held up my hand, and placed the head of the needle in the candle flame till it was heated to a white heat. And all the time her wondrous eyes were opened round and wide, and looked straight into my eyes with irises turned downwards. It is thus that the demons of hell must look upon those whom they are roasting!

"Does it hurt?" she hissed between her teeth. She appeared to be in a state of ecstatic delight.

"It hurts, but it is not the needle."

"Well, now you can take your wart away with you."

Two days after, the calcined wart fell from my hand, leaving behind it a little speck no bigger than a lentil; and that speck is there still, and is of a whiteness which contrasts strongly with the colour of the rest of the hand. And every day I set to work writing, I must needs look at this little white spot, and when I have looked at it long, it seems to me as if *her* face were appearing before me in the midst of this tiny circle just as it looked then; and then that face runs through all its variations down to that last shape of all, which still startles me from my slumbers.

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CHAPTER III

MY MASTERPIECE AND MY HUT

In the later stages of the painting we could converse. Indeed, conversation is necessary for completing one's study of one's subject, and prevents, besides, the constraint of sitting from becoming too tiresome.

"Have you read the poems of Petöfi?"¹²

[12] The Burns of Hungary.

"Oh, at our house we read nothing."

"Why not?"

"Because those who come to see us bring no books with them."

"Then don't you get any newspaper?"

"Oh, yes, the *Journal des Demoiselles*; but it's a frightful bore."

"A Hungarian paper would be better, the *Pesti Divatlap*, for instance."

"I'll tell my mother to order it. You write for it sometimes, don't you?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"The description of a desert island among the sedges."

"Have you ever been on this desert island?"

"No; I only imagine it."

"What's the good of that?"

"It's part of a romance I'm working at."

"Ah, so you write romances! Will you put us into them?"

"Oh, no! Romance writing does not consist in merely copying down all that one sees and hears about one."

"I should like to know how you set about it?"

"First of all I think out the end of the story."

"What, you begin at the end?"

"Yes. Then I create the characters of the story. Then I deal out to these characters the parts they must play, and the vicissitudes they must go through down to the very end of the story."

"Then, according to that, none of it is true?"

"It is not real, perhaps, but it may be true, for all that."

"I don't understand. And how much time do you take to write a story? I suppose it will come out?"

"Certainly."

"Ah, yes, 'tis an easy thing for you to do! You have a rich aunt at Ó Gyalla, and you've only got to say a word to her and she'll get your book printed for you. I suppose you've only got to ask her?"

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"I shall not tell my rich aunt a word about it."

"Then you'll get your book printed at Fani Weinmüller's, I suppose. Now listen, that won't do at all. I knew an author who published his own book and went from village to village, and persuaded every landed proprietor to buy a copy from him. That is a rugged path."

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"My romance will not be one of those which the author himself has to carry from door to door; it will be one of those for which the publisher pays the author an honorarium."

She absolutely laughed in my face.

And after all, when you come to think about it, surely it is somewhat comical when a person comes forward and barefacedly says, "Here, I've written something in which there is not one word of truth, and nevertheless I insist upon people reading it, and paying me for writing it."

"Do you fancy, Miss Bessy, that Petöfi was not paid for his poems? He got two hundred florins for 'Love's Pearls.'"

"'Love's Pearls'! And pray what are they?"

"Lovely poems to a beautiful girl."

"And did he get the girl?"

"No, he did not."

"Well, now, that *is* a nice thing. A fellow courts a girl, puts his feelings into verse, finally gets a basket¹³ from her, and then demands that this basket should be filled for him with silver pieces."

[13] The Hungarian "Kosarat kapni," like the German "einen Korb bekommen" (to get a basket), is the equivalent of our "to get a flea in one's ear," *i.e.*, "a rejection."

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The same day I sent her Petöfi's "Love's Pearls," and his "Cypress Leaves" also.

I resumed my portrait painting three days afterwards, and immediately asked her whether she had taken up "Love's Pearls."

"Oh, yes; I took them up to dry flowers in them."

"But I suppose you've just dipped into the 'Cypress Leaves'?"

"I don't like such things. I always burst into tears; and then my nose gets quite red."

I did not pursue the subject further.

Miss Bessy hastened, however, to sweeten my bitter disappointment with the delightful intelligence that, at my suggestion, mamma had at once subscribed to the *Pesti Divatlap*, and for six months, too.

I was there when the postman brought the first four copies of the paper. In those days every paper had to be sent through the post in an envelope, postage stamps had not yet been invented....

After the solemnity of breaking open the envelope, the assembled womankind naturally looked to see if there were any pictures, especially pictures of the fashions.

Was it not called "Divatlap"?¹⁴ And a fashionable journal it really was. That worthy, high-souled patriot, Emericus Vahot, was labouring with iron determination to make fashion a national affair.

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[14] Fashionable journal.

"Well, whoever wore that might exhibit herself for money!" That was the universal verdict of the ladies. They alluded to one of the fashion patterns.

The illustrated supplement to the second number was Gabriel Egressy as Richard III., in the dream scene, surrounded by spectres; the picture was sketched by our countryman Valentine Kiss.

Her ladyship asked me which was the head of the principal figure, and which the feet. And I must confess that I myself could not quite make out how Richard III. had got his head between his knees.

With the illustrated supplement to the third number, however, they were quite satisfied. It was Rosa Laborfalvy¹⁵ as Queen Gertrude, by Barabás, a work of real artistic merit. This interested the ladies greatly.

[15] Jókai's future wife, as will be seen in the sequel.

"They say she has such wonderful eyes that there's nothing like them anywhere," said Miss Bessy.

The logical consequence of this should have been a contradiction accompanied by a flattering compliment on my part; but all at once it was as if something so squeezed my throat that I absolutely could not get the courtly expression out anyhow. "I have never seen her," I replied.

At the end of the fourth number was a lithograph representing a slim, youthful figure, and beneath it was written the name, Alexander Petöfi. It was one of the best sketches of Barabás. It is the one absolutely faithful portrait of the immortal poet. As such he was known by all those who lived with him, that eye gazing forth into the far distance, that mouth opened prophetically, those hands crossed behind him as if he would hide something in them. The whole portrait seems to say, "I *will* be Petöfi"; all the other portraits say, "I *am* Petöfi."

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This picture produced a great impression upon the ladies, for the appearance of a lithographed portrait in a journal was a great event. In those days there were none of the beneficent penny papers, whose right of existence is considered amply justified if the frontispiece represents some one battering an old woman's head in with an axe. Only great and famous patriots enjoyed the distinction of figuring on title-pages, and photography was not yet invented.... The appearance, then, of Petöfi's portrait in an illustrated supplement of the *Divatlap* created quite a sensation.... The companion at once undertook to read the book of verses which had been sent to the house by me. Bessy, on the other hand, desired to know whether she would find anything of mine in the portion of the journal devoted to the Belles-Lettres. Immediately afterwards she actually hit upon it. It was a portion of my romance, which appeared there under the title of "Az ingovány oáza"—"The Oasis of the Fens."

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"Well, I mean to read this at once."

I gave her plenty of time to do so, for I only appeared again after the lapse of several days.

She really *had* read it. It was the first thing she told me.

"Now I am curious to know," she added, "what was the beginning of the story and what will be the end? You know, don't you?"

"How can I help knowing?"

"But I don't understand the title. Where does the 'oiseau'¹⁶ come in?"

[16] The Hungarian *oáza* (oasis) and the French *oiseau* are pronounced so very much alike, that the ill-instructed Bessy, who had never heard of the former, not unnaturally confounded them.

I explained to her that the "oáz" was not a flying fowl, but a plot of verdure concealed in the desert.

"Then why don't you write 'island'?"

She was right there.

"Apropos of island," she continued, "I often see you from the verandah of our island summer-house walking up and down in front of our garden; yet you never give us so much as a glance, though we make noise enough."

"That is quite possible. At such times I am immersed."

"Immersed in what?"

"In working at my romance."

"Working and walking at the same time?"

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"Such is my habit. I work out the whole scene in my head first of all, down to the smallest details, so that when I sit down it is a mere mechanical a-b-c sort of business."

"Then according to that, when you are marching with rapid strides up and down that long path, you neither hear nor see anything?"

"Pardon me, I see grass, trees, flowers, birds, stumps of trees, and huts of reeds overgrown with brambles. Amongst all these I weave my thoughts like the meshes of a spider's web. And I hear, too. I hear the piping of the yellow-hammer, the twittering of the titmouse, the notes of the horn from distant ships, the humming of the gnats, and they all have something to whisper to me, something to tell me. A buzzing wasp lends wings to my imagination; but if I meet a human face, the whole thing flies out of my thoughts, and a single 'your humble servant' will dissolve utterly my *fata Morgana*, until I turn back and reconstruct the ends of my spider's-web among the freshly-discovered reed-built huts, tree-trunks and trailing flowers, when the well-known voices of the dwellers in the wilderness bring back to me again my scattered ideas; then I retreat into the little wooden summer-house in our garden, and there, disturbed by nobody, I transfer to paper the images which stand before my mind."

And Bessy, contrary to my expectation, didn't laugh at this elucidation. On the contrary, she had grown quite serious. The expression of her eyes now resembled the expression which I had given them in her portrait.

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"And this gives you pleasure?" she whispered. "It is just as if a man were to set off dreaming after taking care beforehand that all his dreams should turn out beautiful."

"Mr. Muki Bagotay," announced the footman.

I took up my hat. I could not endure that fellow. He had already enjoyed everything in reality

which existed for me only in imagination....

The little wooden hut there in the orchard on the Danubian islet (whether it is still there I know not) was the most splendid palace in which I ever dwelt. 'Twas there I wrote my first romance. It is true that it had to put up with a lot of criticism, that first romance. What, indeed, did a young mind which knew nothing of men or of the world understand about romance writing? And yet I loved my first work, just as much as a man loves his first-born, though it may be deformed by all sorts of physical and spiritual defects. How plainly I still see before me those large, wide-spreading *Reineclaudes* trees, crammed with fruit ripe to bursting, which covered the little hut. A little farther off was an apple-tree covered with blood-red fruit, and then a second with taffety white, and a third with velvety apples. From the open door of the hut one could see right along the overgrown path, which was bordered on both sides by bowery vines. When the warm blood-red rays of summer pierced through the meshes of the foliage, it seemed as if every shadow was of green-gold. Far away on the banks of the Danube could be heard the delusive echoes from the military band in the "English Garden," whilst closer at hand the yellow-hammer piped, and a frog here and there croaked in the irrigating trenches. I was writing the hardest part of my romance—the love part, that most undiscoverable of all unknown worlds. One may write down a description of the marsh world from the imagination, but not a description of the world of love. If the heart has not already discovered it, the head can tell us nothing at all about it.

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All at once the green-gold shadows were lit up by something bright. *She* was standing there in the door of my hut, dressed in a white frock, with a straw hat fastened to two blue ribbons hanging upon her arm, and her dishevelled locks floating down her shoulders. For a moment I fancied that the dream-shapes of my imagination had taken bodily form. Then her ringing peal of laughter assured me that a living person stood before me.

"How did you come here?"

"How? Why, by walking over the soft grass, of course."

"Alone?"

"Alone! Why not? Whom *should* I have brought with me, I should like to know? I suppose I may come to a neighbour's garden unattended?"

It was quite true that our gardens were only about a hundred feet apart, lying one on each side of the common path, which ran right through the island. [Pg 34]

"You don't seem to give me a very hearty reception," pouted she, as she entered my hut.

My head began to swim.

"On the contrary, I am overjoyed at the honour you do me, and I'll gather for you at once some of our princely plums."

Nobody else had such plums then, and it was a good excuse, besides, for quitting the hut.

"I did not come for the sake of your princely plums; I filch them long before you ever taste them. I have come now to see how you make up your romance."

I pointed out to her that here was the paper and there the pen, and all a man had to do was to take up the pen, and it went on writing of its own accord.

"Then you don't peep into any book first of all?"

"You can see that I am provided with no tools of that sort."

"Well, now, sit down, and I'll sit down beside you and see how you write."

And then, not waiting for an invitation, she sat down at the end of my sofa, driving me into the dilemma of sitting down by the table, willy-nilly, likewise. I may mention that my hut was so narrow that the table reached from the door to the window.

"I can't write a word, though, at this moment," said I.

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"Why? Because I'm here?"

"Naturally."

"Then read me what you have just written."

"There's a lot of it."

"So much the better. I can remain here all the longer."

"Won't they miss you at home?"

"They know that I am sure to turn up again."

Vanity is the horn by which one may always catch hold of a man. It flattered me to read what I had written, whoever the listener might be. In other parts of the kingdom I had already gained applause with my recitations, but nobody in my own narrow little town had ever heard me speak. *Nemo profeta in patria.*

And Bessy was a very appreciative audience. You could read from her face the effect I produced

and the interest she took. She rested her face on her hand, smoothed down her hair, and fixed her attention that she might listen the better. She seemed quite frightened at the exciting scenes, her eyes and lips opened wide. I do not say this to praise myself, but simply as a justification of the fact that in those days I could recite with considerable emphasis. In one place, however, my voice began to falter.

"Well, what is it? Can't you read your own writing?"

"Yes—no, I mean. I think we had better leave off here?"

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"Why? You've come to the most interesting part."

"I don't want to read it to you."

"Why? Do you mean to say you write such things as a girl ought not to know?"

"No, no! Anybody may read it except myself—before you."

The girl laughed, but there was something bitter in her laugh too.

"Oh, don't be anxious on my account, pray! We read, at school, things of which you have no idea. It is an old institution among us that every girl when she marries shall write a letter to her school friends on the very day after her wedding. We have a whole collection of such letters."

"And do you mean to tell me that *you* have promised to increase this collection?" I cried, with all the indignation of my youthful mind.

The girl must have guessed my anger from my face, for she cast down her eyes and said, in a low voice: "It depends upon whose I shall be."

Immediately afterwards she laughed uproariously: "You may read your love-scene before me."

I answered more firmly than ever: "I will not read it before you."

She understood and stared at me.

"You fear, perhaps, that I shall take it for a declaration? You think, perhaps, that I shall laugh at you in consequence?"

"No! You will not laugh at me."

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"Then what are you afraid of?"

"I do not fear, I wait."

"Wait! For what?"

"I am waiting till I count for something in the world; at present I am a mere cipher."

"One who is born a man can never be a mere cipher."

"Look now! This wooden booth is at present the whole of my property, this little pile of paper my whole claim upon the world; but in my soul there is a vigorous flame to which I can give no name. This flame would suffice to make a man a pretender to a throne, but it is not sufficient to make him propose to a girl."

"But you know that I am rich."

"And I am still richer, for I dine deliciously off a crust of bread, and I sleep sweetly on a bed of straw."

"Well, and that pleases me too. *I* like a crust of bread and a bed of straw. You do not know me. A man might make a she-devil of me, though he built a temple in my name straight off, enshrined me on the altar, and knelt down before me. But he whom I truly loved might make an angel of me. I could be happy anywhere: in a shepherd's hut, a strolling player's tent, at a soldier's bivouac, in a schoolmaster's clay cabin. I would dream of luxury on my bed of straw."

And with that, she threw herself at full length on my bare sofa, and clasped her hands above her head.

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Oh, what distracting loveliness!

Was it a blessing or a chastisement on the part of guiding Providence that I was able, at that moment, to see with my soul as well as with my eyes? This girl had in a few words unfolded before me the whole of her coming destiny.... I sat down at her feet by the side of the bare old sofa, and looked into her eyes.

Very softly I said to her: "She whom I love will not be my slave, but my queen. I will not filch my happiness, but win it. And she to whom I shall dedicate my heart shall be crowned by me with an aureola of glory, just as the rich of this world load *their* darlings with pearls and diamonds. The lady of my heart must be honoured by all the world—but most of all by myself."

At these words the half-closed eyelids opened. The girl began to sob violently, leaped to her feet, threw her arms round my neck, kissed me, and ran away.

And I looked after her like one that dreams, while the shrubs and the vine-leaves concealed her

vanishing form. The yellow-hammer cried in my ear, "Silly boy, silly boy!" And immediately there occurred to my mind the story of the young man whose confessor gave him a bundle of hay to eat as a penance for a sin unachieved.

And now, too, when I stand before the big silly bookcase, which is filled with nothing but my own works, I often think, would it not have been better if they had none of them been ever thought out? And instead of writing so much for the whole world, would it not have been better if I had written for my own private use, just so much as would go within the inside cover of a family Bible? Nowadays, a whole street in my native town is called after my name: would it not have been better if all I had there were a simple hut? [Pg 39]

But no! I willed it so, and if it were possible for me to go back to the diverging cross-roads of my opening life, I would tread once more in the self-same footprints that I have left so long behind me.

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CHAPTER IV

PETÖFI WITH US—PLANS FOR THE FUTURE—THE RAPE OF THE BRIDES—AMATEUR THEATRICALS—MY MENSHIKOV

I really imagined that I loved and was beloved. I was always a welcome guest at her ladyship's house, and was a regular visitor on her "at home" days. On such occasions I learnt to know Bessy from another point of view. She was a musician also. She could play the fiddle. Whether she played artistically I really cannot say, for I don't understand music, and couldn't tell the difference between Paul Racz¹⁷ and Sarasate; but so much is certain, she knew all the cunning tricks and poses which I admired so much in the famous musicians of a later day. She could make arpeggios and pizzicatos like Ole Bull, *fughe di diavolo* like Reményi, and pianissimos like Sarasate. She could make her fiddle weep softly like Milanollo and Miss Terezina Tua, and she could lash it savagely with her fiddle-bow like the Russian Princess Olga Korinshka, or play with the instrument close up to ear like a gipsy *primás*.¹⁸ When she played she had the beauty of a demon; every limb was set in motion, her shoulders marked time, her bosom heaved, her body waved to and fro, her mouth smiled provocatively, her eyes sparkled; at one moment she softly caressed the fiddle with her bow, at another she flogged the strings unmercifully, and at the end of the performance she stood there with the pose of a triumphant Toreadrix. At such moments every one was fascinated by her; why, then, should I have been an exception? [Pg 41]

[17] A famous gipsy musician.

[18] The leader of a gipsy band.

One day I got a letter from Petöfi, in which he informed me he was going to call upon us the following Sunday. I naturally skipped off to town at once, and showed the letter to all my acquaintances. It was a great event in our little town. Petöfi's popularity in those days was great indeed; he was worshipped from one end of the kingdom to the other. His visit was regarded as an extraordinary distinction. On Sunday afternoon, therefore, half the population of the town had assembled on the island, where the landing-stage of the steamers now is. Bessy's family was also there. All the religious persuasions were represented by the presence of the Benedictine priests and the Calvinist and Lutheran ministers. The captain of the civic train bands, with two lackeys in gold liveries; represented the magistracy; and Muki Bagotay was there on behalf of the county (he held some petty office or other), and maintained that he knew Petöfi very well.

Congratulatory speeches had been got ready, and lovely hands were to present handsome bouquets to the coming guest. Petöfi, however, when he had crossed over the steamship bridge to the other side, troubled himself not one bit about the congratulatory mob, left in the lurch the lovely ladies with their bouquets, and the distinguished gentlemen with their speeches, and, dressed as he was in his short *carbonari* mantle, rushed straight towards me, threw his arms round my neck, knocked my hat from my head, and cried, "Why, Marksi! Is it you, you old scoundrel, Marksi!" (he never would call me by my proper name), and, with that, wrapping me in one-half of his mantle, he dragged me with him towards the town just as if he knew the way quite well (he had never been there before in his life). The windows of the chief thoroughfares of the town were adorned with flowers and with fair damsels, who had tricked themselves out in Petöfi's honour, which, when he perceived, he thrust me down a side street, and so we got at last to our house by roundabout by-paths, on which we met not a single soul. My worthy mother received our dear guest most heartily, not because he was such a famous poet, but because he was my good friend. I had known him ever since we had been students together at Pápá, when they had called him "Petrovics." Now, however, they added a syllable to his name, and called him "Petrekovics." Nothing used to put Petöfi into such a rage as when anybody called him by his rejected family name. But even this he took in good part from my mother. He never even tried to put her right. "Let me always remain Petrekovics in your house!" he would say to her, as he kissed her hand. This was by no means his usual custom, the only other person whose hand he used to kiss was his own mother. The first question after that naturally was about his favourite dish. My mother herself looked after the *cuisine*, and the following day the whole family [Pg 42]

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assembled to dinner—my brother Charles, my sister Esther, and my brother-in-law Francis Vály included.

We had scarcely risen from the table when a lackey in silver livery arrived from Bessy's mother with a gold-edged letter for Petöfi, in which her ladyship invited him to her "at home" that evening. The entertainment was arranged in his honour. All the beauties and the notabilities of the town would be there together. I had naturally received a similar invitation some days before.

'Twas thus that Petöfi answered the messenger—his words are recorded in the family records: "Tell her ladyship that I am inconsolable at the impossibility of coming to her reception this evening; but this time I have come specially to visit my beloved Marksi, and will go nowhere else."

The astonished lackey could scarcely grasp the meaning of this terrible reply. But my mother understood it right well, and said, "Noble young fellow!"

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But I said nothing, for I candidly confess that in those days I worshipped a pretty girl far, far more than any man however famous, or any friend however good.

I tried, therefore, to explain the situation to my good friend. "I tell you what, though; that pretty girl is there about whom I wrote to you."

"Then give *yourself* up to that pretty girl, but don't sacrifice *me* to her likewise."

"If you could only hear how splendidly she plays the fiddle."

"Fiddle, do you say? Then don't give yourself up to her either! You know there are three things in this world that I hate—horse-radish with milk, the critics, and after that, music." (He could never be persuaded to listen to an opera.)

"But Tony Várady also plays the fiddle!" (I should explain that this young lawyer shared Petöfi's room with him.)

"He fiddles, it is true, but it is useful to me."

"How so?"

"In our neighbourhood dwells a rascally card-player, who comes home every night between two and three, and begins to sing. I immediately wake Tony and say to him, 'Rise, and fiddle away at that fellow there!' Then he begins to fiddle in a way that makes your hair stand on end, and your blood run cold, and in ten minutes our neighbour, falling upon his knees, sobs for mercy, and declares that he will leave off singing. However, from to-day I live no longer with Tony."

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"Have you quarrelled?"

"On the contrary, we are the best of friends. But I'll tell you about that later on; let us now talk about serious things. What have you been doing since I last saw you?"

I showed him the MS. of "Hétköznepok."¹⁹ It was just ready.

[19] "Every-day Days." One of the best, if not *the* best, of Jókai's earlier works.

"Why do you call it 'Hétköznepok'?"

"In order that nobody may expect anything extraordinary in it."

He turned over the leaves, but only read the headings of the chapters.

"Well, that was an original idea of yours, I must say, to choose mottoes from popular ballads for your chapter headings. I'll take this with me to Pest, and get it published."

"Nobody knows me."

"You're wrong. Bajza and Vörösmarty are inquiring about you. Your specimen composition has been much approved. I've squeezed twelve florins for it out of Emericus Vahot. Frankenburg was more liberal. He sends you fifteen for 'The Island Nepean.'"

And Petöfi counted out the twenty-seven silver florins on to the table. It was my first honorarium. I fancied myself a Rothschild.

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"This romance now shall be published by Hartleben."

"Are you on good terms with him?"

"I don't know the German fellow, but he's the publisher of Ignatius Nagy's romances, and Nagy shall recommend it to him."

"But will Ignatius Nagy like to do it?"

"What! When I bring him such work as yours! He is a great enemy of mine, I know, but he is a man of honour."

And with that he thrust my manuscript into his knapsack, but without locking it.

"And what else have you written?"

I produced another heap of papers.

"A play entitled *Two Guardians*."

"And what do you want to do with it?"

"To compete for the Academy prize."

"Don't do that! I won't allow you. You competed once, and they did not give you the prize, and yet two Academicians were on your side; don't give them any more. Give your pieces to the theatre."

I had nothing for it but to surrender.

"Now, I'll take your piece to Szigligeti.²⁰ He will at once recognise in you a dangerous rival, and for that very reason will have your piece brought out instantly. That's the sort of man he is!"

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[20] Pseudonym of the eminent Hungarian dramatist, Joseph Szathmáry.

I entrusted my piece to his care.

"And try to get up to Pest as soon as possible. Don't go loafing about all your days in a village!"

"As soon as I have got through with my *patvaria* I'll hasten to join you."

"Get ready to go away at once. To-morrow I'll take you with me to Gran."

I was greatly astonished.

"To Gran! Why, what business have we there?"

"We go not to do business, but to *rob*. We must steal away Tony Várady's bride for him. That is why we no longer live together."

But now the members of my family had also a word to say.

Petőfi then related, quite calmly, that our common friend, the worthy lawyer, wished to take to wife the daughter of a landed proprietor at Gran. The girl's parents were Catholics, the bridegroom was a Calvinist, they therefore would not permit the marriage. But the young people really loved each other. So there was nothing for it but to steal the bride.

The thing was quite clear. I could make no objection. When a man is poet and Protestant, girl-stealing in such a situation becomes a duty. Just then a great parliamentary strife was going on concerning mixed marriages. It was Guelph and Ghibelline over again. One had to choose one's party.

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So on the following day I really did set out with Petőfi to steal a girl for the benefit of a third friend. The affair succeeded beyond all expectation. We had no need of the darkness of midnight and scaling ladders, the mere appearance of Petőfi and myself at the bride's house was sufficient; the parents gave way, and the priest united the two lovers. Yet for all that we always made much of our damsel-robbing adventure. And, indeed, it seemed likely to turn out a dangerous precedent. Example is contagious.

But I returned home with the guilty consciousness that I had absolutely spoiled the *soirée*. I expected that I should be pretty severely taken to task for it. How should I put things to rights again?

I discovered how to make amends, but it was not without great artfulness that I succeeded.

Our city was not only the capital of the county, but a fortress. Consequently one might frequently come upon vehicles in our streets which consisted of little more than a round chest on two wheels, crammed full of water-butts from the Danube, ammunition, bread, and sacks of meal, and between the poles of these conveyances were fastened a couple of human beings in garments of grey baize, with twenty-pound chains fastened to their legs. The creatures were called in plain Hungarian—slaves.²¹ You could hear the rattling of their fetters from afar. On certain days while the self-same creatures were suffering the flogging with sticks, which was part of their sentence, their woful cries resounded through the whole town. Thus the rattling of chains and the howls of woe were a sort of speciality in our town. And the sight of those starved faces too! From my childish years upwards this slave-life used to disturb my dreams.

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[21] They were prisoners condemned to penal servitude.

I got up an agitation among the more enthusiastic of the youths and maidens of our town on behalf of the poor slaves. If the affair had succeeded, I should of course never have bragged about it; but as I failed in it, I may as well make a clean breast of it.

It was determined, at my suggestion, to invite Bessy's mother to be the president of our philanthropic society. A deputation set off at once to her house, and, naturally, I was its spokesman. The distinction thus conferred upon her quite wiped out my former offence, and I was again taken into favour.

The first problem in any case was to establish our beneficent scheme on a sound, financial basis, and the simplest way of getting funds was by means of an amateur entertainment. Of this, too, I was the manager. With very great difficulty the programme was finally settled. Overture: *Beatrice di Tenda*.—"What's the watchword? Death, torture, ruin, to the betrayers of the

fatherland!" rendered by the glee club of the College. After that a flute duet from *Lucia di Lammermoor*, piped by the local musical society and a young lawyer. That was to be followed by a humorous recitation of my own: "Gregory Sonkolyi"; then came an exhibition of legerdemain by Muki Bagotay; and last of all, as *pièce de résistance*, Bessy's fiddling.

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It was a terrible business to bring all this about. We had rehearsals every day at Bessy's house. I was very busy just then. I ought to have been working as an articled clerk, but I'm quite sure I never looked at a law-book. At last, however, it was possible to fix the day on which the concert would come off.

Meanwhile, the time was approaching when I ought to have passed my *patvaria*, and gone through my *jurateria*. My elder brother Charles wrote to a well-known lawyer at Pest, who had a large practice, to take me into his office as a juratus. And as winter was also drawing nigh, and I was about to go far, far away into a strange world, my good and ever-blessed mother was busying herself about my outfit. Nowadays people will regard it as a fable, but say it I must, that all the linen I wore during the time when I was a juratus was spun by my mother's own hands. I verily believe that that shirt, spun by a mother's hand, and worn by me, was the magic web which turned aside so many of the blows of fate.

A tailor and a weaver lived in some of the smaller houses we possessed; we had no need of the help of strangers. My mother also provided me with a good winter overcoat.

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It was really a capital overcoat, which covered me down to the very heels, a real Menshikov overcoat, very fashionable forty years later, but in those days worn by nobody but the porters of the Benedictine Order.

When I appeared at the amateur rehearsals at Bessy's house in this prematurely born Menshikov, a circle was instantly formed round me, and every one asked me, with ironical congratulations, where I had had it made. Was it possible to get the fellow of it? Bessy even remarked that there was room for two in it, and I was not a bit offended with her.

When I withdrew (a letter, just arrived from Pest, called me home), I scarcely had time to close the door behind me, when I heard an outburst of merriment inside. When, however, I had got out into the street and turned round to have a last look at the house I had left behind me, lo and behold! all the windows were filled with groups of smiling faces, amongst which I saw Bessy's face also. "They are all in a very good humour to-day," I thought to myself.

Hastening home, I found there the letter from the Pest lawyer, in which he informed me, with official brevity, that there was a vacant place for a juratus in his office, which I might occupy. If, however, I did not come and claim it within three days, the vacant place would be given to some one else. The amateur entertainment had been fixed for Sunday, and it was now Tuesday. If I am not there by Friday, another will sit in my place. But what will become of the concert? Ought I to leave Bessy in the lurch—so faithlessly?

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And how about the poor slaves?

Perhaps the lawyer at Pest would make a bargain with me and give me a couple of days' grace? I sat down to reply to him: "Worshipful Mr. Advocate—I feel in duty bound to say, in reply to your honourable communication——" Yes, but what? I must tell him some lie or other. Nay, not a lie, only a freak of fancy. A sudden illness? No, that's no joke. An uncompleted piece of law business, which I must finish for my old chief? The Pest lawyer will never believe that. What pretext could I hit upon to steal a little more time?

While I was still biting my pen, my mother came into the room, and said to me: "Where have you been, my dear son?"

I said I had been at Bessy's house.

Then she said: "Now, tell me, my darling, why do you run after these great people? Don't you see that they are only making fun of you?"

Something like a cold ague fit ran down my back.

Hadn't I myself seen and heard them laugh at me, and didn't know it? and here was my mother who had neither seen nor heard it, and yet *she* knew it!

Not another word did I say, but I went on with my letter ... "that I will come to Pest at once to-morrow morning, and take the place of juratus offered by you."

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I then showed my mother both letters, whereupon she rewarded me with that blessed smile of hers which has made her face so unforgettable to me.

She immediately packed up my belongings and placed in my hand what little money she had put by, so that I might not want for anything in the expensive capital. I wanted to write to Bessy with an apology for my sudden departure.

"Don't go scribbling to them," said my mother; "I'll go myself to-morrow to her ladyship and tell her what has happened."

The following afternoon I was sitting on the steamer, and in three days I arrived at Pest.... And for this sudden change of fortune I had to thank my Menshikov alone.

OLYMPIAN STRIVINGS

[22] This chapter is somewhat condensed.

It was Petöfi who introduced me to my associates of the "Table of Public Opinion" (as the long table close to the counter in the Café Pillwax was called), and who got me a place there. "This is a true Frenchman!" said Petöfi, as he presented me to his young army of *litterati* who were assembled there. In those days this was the highest conceivable praise. The face of every liberty-loving nation was turned towards France, and from thence we expected the dawn of the new era. We read nothing but French books. Lamartine's "History of the Girondists" and Tocqueville's "Democracy" were our bibles. Petöfi worshipped Beranger, I had found my ideal in Victor Hugo.... This school might easily have become dangerous to us had not its influence fortunately coincided with the opening up of a new and hitherto unexplored field—popular literature. Hitherto it had been the endeavour of Hungarian writers to write in a style which was distinct from the language of ordinary life. Our group, on the other hand, started the idea that it was just those very constructions, expressions, and modes of thought employed in every-day life that Hungarian

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writers ought to take as the fundamental principle of their writing; nay, that they should even develop the ideally beautiful, poetry itself, from the life of the common people.... As belonging to this camp of ours I must also reckon Sigismund Czakó, who acclimatized the modern drama to our stage with marked success; and finally Anthony Csengery, the editor of the *Pesti Hirlap*, who wrote nothing in the way of *belles lettres* himself, but whose immense erudition and thorough knowledge of literature enabled him to exercise a most beneficial influence over the whole of our group. Amongst our older writers also, Vörösmarty and Bajza watched over us with stimulating encouragement; but it was Ignatius Nagy in particular who befriended us, and of him I have the most pleasant recollections.... At this time he was a cripple. He was rarely to be seen in the street, and then only on his wife's arm. He stopped at home all day at his writing-table, writing those life-like sketches of the little world of Buda-Pest which testify to such a serene good-humour. The first time I saw him was when I went to speak to him about my novel, "Hétköznepok." He had a most embarrassing face covered with dark-red spots right up to his astonishingly lofty forehead, whose shiny baldness was half cut in two, as it were, by a bright black peruke. He had also an inconceivably big red nose, at which, however, you had no time to be amazed, so instantly were you spell-bound by a couple of squinting eyes, one of which glared as fixedly at you as if it were made wholly of stone. His voice, on the other hand, was as the voice of a sick child. And within this repulsive frame dwelt the noblest of souls, in this crippled body the most energetic of characters. From no strange face did I ever get a kinder glance than I got from those stiff fishy eyes, and that sick voice announced to me my first great piece of good news. Upon his recommendation, the publisher Hartleben agreed to publish my first romance, and gave me for it 360 silver florins. In those days that was an immense fortune to me. I had no further need to go scribbling all day long in a lawyer's office at six florins a month. And his fatherly solicitude for me went still further. He introduced me to Frankenburg as a dramatic critic. The editor of the *Eletképek* had just parted with his dramatic critic (he had been a little too unmerciful to the artistes), and was looking out for a new colleague. By way of honorarium he offered me a free seat at the theatre, and ten florins a month. But my year of office came to an end the very first week. To make amends for the sins of my predecessor, I lauded every artist to the skies, according to the dictates of my youthful enthusiasm. And I can honestly say that I wrote it all from my very heart. It was then that I saw a ballet for the first time in my life. It was my solemn conviction that I was bound by a debt of gratitude to the excellent damsel who exhibited her natural charms to the public eye with such magnanimous frankness. And a pretty lecture Frankenburg read me for it too! "Delightful Sylphid indeed! A clumsy stork, I should say!" Still, *that* might have passed. But it was my magnifying of Lilla Szilágyi who took the part of Smike in the *Beggars of London* which did the business for me. I said of her that she was "a lovely sapling!" and promised her a brilliant future in her dramatic career. "Leave her where you found her! She has got no heart that's certain!" said the editor. "Then she'll get one!" said I. "But you'll never get to be a critic," said he.

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And so, for Lilla Szilágyi's sake, I laid down my *rôle* of critic, and yet I was right after all, for, as Madame Bulyovszky, she really did become a great artiste. Now, however, I bless my fate that things fell out as they did. Terrible thought: fancy if I now only had the reputation of a famous—critic!

A few days after that, a new career suddenly opened before me. Paul Királyi invited me to join his newspaper, the *Jelenkor*, as a correspondent. He offered me a salary of thirty-five florins a month. Of course I jumped at it. Newspaper writing was a very grateful task in those days. The paper appeared thrice a week. That was quite sufficient to give us all the news. It is different now. Nowadays more murders, suicides, and burglaries occur in the twenty-four hours than occurred in a whole twelvemonth then.

And a newspaper contributor was then a personage of some importance. Let me give an example:

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I lived with the dramatist, Szigligeti. In the summer we occupied a whole flat in a brand-new house in Pipe Street, and there I had a room of my own, with an exit opening on the staircase. The other flats were empty. The Szigligetis flitted during the summer to the suburbs of Buda.

Thus I had the whole of the first floor of the new house at my disposal, to my great satisfaction, for I could work away quite undisturbed. In the autumn, however, the Szigligetis returned, and the adjoining flats at the same time got new tenants. The very next night I discovered, to my horror, with whom I was living under the same roof. It was the wife of the possessor of a flower-garden, who also kept a dancing academy. What afternoons, what nights I passed!

At last I could stand it no longer, and I implored Szigligeti to appeal most energetically to the authorities against the nuisance. Szigligeti fully shared my indignation himself, so he posted off at once to the Town Captain to lay his complaint.

"Sir," said he, "the proprietress of a flower-garden has settled down in my immediate neighbourhood."

"But flowers must bloom somewhere, I suppose?"

"But the people dance the livelong night."

"That doesn't injure any one, surely?"

"But after dancing they sit down to rest."

"That is very natural."

"But they take their rest and recreation very noisily."

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The Town Captain shrugged his shoulders, he could do nothing in the matter; it was a ticklish business to interfere in; it did not fall within his jurisdiction, etc., etc.

But when, finally, Szigligeti said: "My lodger, the correspondent of the *Jelenkor*, cannot sleep all night because of them," then, indeed, the Town Captain suddenly leaped from his chair, set all his myrmidons in motion, and by the next day the whole flower-garden and dancing academy was transferred to another forcing bed. Such in those days was the authority of a newspaper correspondent.... I was therefore no longer a mere cipher. I was a something now. And, more than that, I was a somebody also. For it was in those days that I passed my legal examination, and became a certificated lawyer in the ordinary and commercial courts. My diploma, indeed, was not *præclarus*, but at any rate it was *laudibilis*. The oral *rigorosum* I passed through brilliantly, but in the *scripturistik* (there's a fine dog Latin word for you!) my *Hungarian style* was not considered satisfactory.

The publication of my legal diploma in the county court was a sufficiently dignified excuse for a visit to my native town. With head erect I could now enter the presence of the fairy damsel with the sparkling "eyes like the sea."

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CHAPTER VI

AN ODD DUEL—THE FATEFUL LETTER J.—I ALSO BECOME A PETER GYURICZA

Emericus Vahot had discovered a youthful humorist whom he attached to the staff of his newspaper. Ultimately he became a most eminent writer, but at first he was quite a savage genius. He knew no languages but Hungarian and Latin. He was really after all a very worthy young fellow. He, too, took his place amongst us at the "Table of Public Opinion," and even brought a pair of friends with him. One of the friends was a wry-shouldered critic, who judged the stage from a philological point of view, but the other was Muki Bagotay. He was not a writer, but a mere figure head. As, however, he drank with us, he considered himself as one of us.

One afternoon the humorist and Muki fell out. Muki had thought good to boast of a certain conquest of his, the humorist had made a joke of it; a squabble ensued, and from words they came to blows. I was not there, but I heard all about it from those who were. There could not be a doubt that the end of it would be a duel. Late in the evening, just as I was preparing to go to bed, the wry-shouldered critic rushed into my room. His face was even more portentous than usual.

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"I have to communicate a secret to you, but you must give me your word as a gentleman not to let the matter go any further."

"I give you my word upon it."

"Our friend is going to fight Muki Bagotay to-morrow, I am his second."

"That's all right."

"Would you be so good as to lend us the weapons?"

"My friend, I only possess one pistol, and that is a double-barrelled one."

"That will just do!"

"What the deuce? I suppose one of them will fire with it first, and if he does not hit his man he'll

hand it over to the other, and he'll fire back with it?"

"Precisely!"

The crooked critic said this with such a solemn face that it was impossible not to believe him. This was quite a novel mode of duelling, and not a bad idea either.

Early next morning, before I had got up, the second again appeared before me. He brought back the fatal pistol.

"It is over," said he, with mournful dignity.

"What was the result?"

"Our poor friend was hit!"

"Dangerously?"

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"The bullet penetrated his arm. But it has been taken out now."

The news excited all my sympathy.

I threw on my clothes and made my way to the Pillwax coffee-house. I found my good friends already at the "Table of Public Opinion," and every one of them shared my compassion. The critic related the mournful details to us.

All at once two of our comrades, Degré and Lauka, rushed excitedly into the coffee-house. "The whole duel was a swindle!" they cried. "There was no harm done to any one. He was not even wounded. He is lying in bed with his arm tied up, and a bloody shirt; they are giving him ice cataplasms—the whole thing is a pure farce!"

The second, however, solemnly maintained that his principal had been wounded.

"We will convince ourselves of the fact."

"Surely you would not want them to tear the bandages from the gaping wound?" This I also resolutely opposed, and, taking the part of my colleague, devised another expedient.

"Who was the doctor who bound up the wound?"

The critic mentioned the doctor's name.

"We'll go to the doctor, then."

Dr. K—y was a worthy, honest, high-spirited fellow, who well deserved the public respect.

We rushed upon him in a body.

"Tell us, now," we said, "is there a wound on the arm of the humorist?"

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"There is," replied the doctor.

"Is it true that you took a bullet out of it?"

"It is true."

"On your professional reputation?"

"On my professional reputation."

With that my friends were bound to be satisfied. No further inquiries could be made.

When, however, my two friends had withdrawn, I remained behind with the doctor, and I said to him, "My dear doctor, you have answered the question, did you take a bullet out of our friend's arm? but now answer me this question, who put that bullet in?"

"Egad! egad! egad!" growled the doctor, "you imaginative people are really sad scamps!"

The fact was that our humorist and Muki Bagotay had fought an American duel: whoever drew the black ball had—well, not to die, but to get Dr. K—y to make a wound in his arm. The doctor, with his lancet, made an incision about two centimètres in length and four millemètres in depth, in the epidermis just below the biceps; into this wound he insinuated a bullet, then took it out, sewed up the wound, and so wounded honour was amply satisfied. And I'll not say a single word against this being the most correct mode of procedure imaginable.

Then I went home to my native town, ostensibly to advertise my legal diploma, but really to look once more upon her from whom I had been so long absent.

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I was very well received in the bosom of my family; the whole clan came together for dinner at my mother's, and for supper at the house of my brother-in-law, Francis Vály. The two Calvinist ministers were also invited, and one of them toasted me as "the ward of one guardian and the guardian of two wards" (an allusion to my father's profession and my new drama, *The Two Wards*); it was the first toast that made me blush.

The next day was the meeting of the county board, at the end of which, with open doors, my diploma was promulgated. On that self-same day my dear mother gave me my father's silver-

mounted sword, and the cornelian signet-ring, with the old family crest engraved upon it, which he used to wear. Democrat as I am, I frankly confess that to me there was a soul-stealing thought in the reflection that with this sword my worthy ancestors, who were much better men than myself, had defended their nation, country, laws, and constitution of yore, and that this signet-ring had put the seal upon their covenanted rights for all time. According to ancient custom, the sword and signet-ring of the father belonged of right to the *younger* son; my father had given my elder brother a ring and sword of his own when he brought home *his* diploma.

After that, I had to pay visits of ceremony to the county and municipal authorities; I called upon my principal also, and a pretty little girl was there whose features I had perpetuated in a portrait; she still went to the convent school. This little girl, I may add, never had her romance; she died young, and thus found her true bliss.

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It was only in the afternoon that I was able to get to Bessy's.

Among all earthly joys, is there one that can be compared with that heart-throbbing which a young man feels when he again approaches, after a long absence, the woman whom he idolises, with the thought that she also has been dreaming of him all the time? It is true that our parting had been somewhat abrupt, and a hill of thorns had risen up between us perhaps in consequence; but, on the other hand, my absence had had a definite, deliberate aim—I went to win for myself name and fame, and a worldly position. And lo! but six months had passed and all this was already accomplished. I was an author. I had the right to speak of myself in the plural "we," like a king; nay, I had even a *better* right, for the king can only lay the peasantry under contribution, but I could make the gentry pay up as well, and that right was also "*Dei gratia*." I fancied the whole world was mine, and that triumphs would go before and follow after me whithersoever I went.

I was dressed according to the latest fashion. The famous firm of tailors, "Martinek and Korsinek," had performed a masterpiece upon me: my feet were shod with varnished dress-shoes, I had a whale-bone cane with a gold-headed handle, I wore Jaquemar gloves. I no longer singed my hair with heated hair-tongs as in the days when I was a patvarist, but a hairdresser had twisted it into ringlets; and now, too, I had a sprucely twisted moustache and a beard.

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I really must make the most of all these glories to emphasize the dramatic climax.

I found Bessy's mother and her aunt in the well-known reception room; the companion was on a visit to her relations. After the ceremonial kissing of hands, my first question was, "And Miss Bessy?"

"She is in her own room, yonder."

"May I go there?"

"Oh, by all means!"

It was that memorable room in which I had painted her portrait.

The girl was alone, seated by her little table, and was bending over her embroidery frame. She really must have been very much absorbed in her work, as otherwise she must certainly have seen through the window that I was coming to her. It was a sort of pearl embroidery that she was busy over, meant apparently for the cover of a portfolio. On perceiving me enter, she hastily covered it with her handkerchief, but for all that, my eyes caught a momentary glimpse of a large letter "J." on the embroidery. What else could it be but the initial letter of my surname? I was confirmed in this belief by the circumstance that on the same little table stood my portrait of her on a gorgeous stand.

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She greeted me kindly, but I could detect a certain hostile sentiment in her smile. It is only in the eyes that one can read such things, and practised swordsmen always can tell from the expression of their opponents' eyes how they are going to lunge.

She questioned me about everything, and I replied with great precision; but these questions and answers were mere feints: the points of the swords were so far only twirling around each other.

All at once she lunged straight at my head with her sword.

"And pray what is the *amiable little sapling* doing?"

In my first amazement I absolutely did not know what she was alluding to.

"What sapling?"

"Why, that darling little stage fairy, of course, who kindled you to such enthusiasm."

So it turned up again now! Even here they cast it in my teeth! Was it not enough to have smarted once in my life for pretty Lilla's sake? In vain did I assure her that never in my life had I seen the young artiste except on the stage; that there indeed she had earned my admiration, but that I had never felt any tender sentiment either for her or for any other mortal maiden in the whole of Buda-Pest.

"Let that go, then!" said Bessy mockingly. "We are well informed of everything that goes on. How about your landlord's three pretty daughters?"

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"Pardon me, but the eldest of them is only nine years old."

"And your gay neighbours, the flower-garden ladies?"

Well, this was simply appalling. How could I tell her the whole story? And yet I was the very person who had got them removed.

"Whom the Town Captain was forced to interfere with? Oh, we know all about it! My little finger has whispered it to me."

I was quite confused. Who could have been tittle-tattling about me so?

And all the time her eyes were flashing sparks at me!

But I was not to remain in doubt long. A new visitor arrived, his voice was already heard in the ante-chamber. It was Muki Bagotay.

It was plain to me now that it was he who had whispered all these things to Bessy.

Into the room he rushed. He certainly was infamously handsome. My head of curls was quite dwarfed by his. His dress was much more fashionable than mine. And what a cocksure air he had! I dared not so much as press Bessy's hand, while he knelt down before her and laid his hat—together with his heart—at her feet.

"Go away with you—don't be silly!" said Bessy, by way of correction, pointing at me.

"Your servant, comrade," cried Muki, becoming aware of my presence.

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Then he occupied himself with me no more, but turned towards Bessy and tried to remove the handkerchief from the embroidery, which attempt Bessy resisted with all her might.

"It's mine, after all, you know," insisted Muki.

"Then wait your turn, and you shall have it on your birthday."

His birthday! A thought flashed through my brain. Muki's name was János. That initial letter was *his*, not mine.

A dramatic climax. How instantly Muki became the sensible fellow and I the blockhead! At that moment I must have cut a somewhat queer figure the very type of gaping confusion.

By way of explanation Muki seized Bessy's hand and raised it to his lips, and said to me as a matter of form, "Bessy is my betrothed."

And it was for this, then, that all these Sardanapalian accusations had been piled upon my head. The sapling of the stage, the flower-garden, and my landlord's young ladies were the golden bridge for a retreat.

It was only then that I hit upon more sensible ideas and hastened to congratulate them.

And now I made it a point to remain where I was. They shall see that the whole matter is of the utmost indifference to me.

"You know, I suppose," said Muki, "what was the cause of my last duel?"

"That famous duel of yours, eh?"

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"Yes, it was pretty famous, I think. That poor young fellow whom I shot was a worthy comrade, but had he been my born brother I would have shot him for his disrespectful allusions to my bride."

"Go along with you, you bloodthirsty man!" cried Bessy, with coquettish self-satisfaction.

And he had the cheek to say all this before me who knew the whole history of the duel! How ridiculous I could have made him look, if I had told how it had happened! But do it I wouldn't, because I felt that they were a worthy pair. I merely said: "I must admit, friend Muki, that in the way of imagination you are much greater than I."

"And greater in other things also," said Muki, half drawing his sword.

"We'll see about that one of these days in the fencing-school."

"What! That swindling fencing! Wrestling is the thing to test a man's mettle. That fashionable gymnastic rubbish is a mere farce. I should like to see a fellow do what I can do when I go out on my *puszta*.²³ I have a stout *gulgásy*²⁴ there, Peter Gyuricza, with whom I am wont to wrestle. A stalwart fellow, hard as a stone; he can keep the upper hand over a hundred steers. Twice out of three bouts have I floored Peter Gyuricza, and Peter Gyuricza has only floored me once."

[23] The Hungarian steppe or great plain.

[24] Neat-herd, peculiar to Hungary.

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"A pretty pastime, certainly."

"It is not to be learnt by pen-scribbling or brush-daubing, anyhow."

That I had to let pass, for there's no getting over the truth. It is not only true that I was no Samson, but it is also true that, compared with a hundred oxen, my poor Pegasus was but a sorry beast of draught. But Muki Bagotay was not even content with this triumph, he wanted to absolutely trample me beneath his feet; and as if he had only just observed for the first time the picture of Bessy painted by me, he chose to make *that* the bone of contention.

"Meanwhile, till I possess the original, I appropriate this picture."

Bessy protested. "No, no, I will not part with that."

But Muki thereupon took the picture from the table and held it aloft, so that Bessy could not get it out of his hand. She begged, implored, raved, but Muki only laughed and said he meant to stick to the picture.

It was then that my ill-humour got the better of me.

"Sir," said I, laying my hand on his shoulder, "put down that portrait! I did not paint it for you."

How scornfully he looked at me over his shoulder! "*You* would needs try conclusions with me —*you*, a mere poet!"

And he flung himself upon me with the pious resolve of forcing me out of Bessy's boudoir into the ante-chamber. When he saw that I resisted, he threw both his arms round my body. I also hugged him, and to work we went straightway. [Pg 72]

Muki was furious because I would not allow my frame to be smashed so easily. Bessy began shrieking, and took refuge in the bow window. Suddenly I rallied all my strength and pitched Muki on to the sofa with such violence that the back of it cracked and came off.

"I also am a Peter Gyuricza!" I cried.

I would not have exchanged that triumph for all the glory in the world.

At the noise of this great scuffle, the mother and the aunt rushed into the room, and great was their indignation when they saw me kneeling on Muki's breast.

"Let me get up, fellow!" said my antagonist.

All that I wanted to do was to take the portrait from the hands of its unlawful possessor. Meanwhile the poor portrait had got terribly mauled. During the struggle it had fallen to the ground, and the pair of us had left the impression of our heels upon it. Bessy burst into tears when she saw the wreckage of her own portrait, but her mother lamented over the broken sofa.

I comforted Bessy with the assurance that I would make the damaged portrait all right again—there were special colours for that.

"But she must not sit again," hastily intervened her mother. She was afraid I should begin coming to the house again and spoil the good match. [Pg 73]

"And I haven't got that dress either," said Bessy.

It certainly was a pretty dress. Would that she had never had it!

I assured them, however, that I would be able to put the picture to rights at home, all by myself. And with that I put it in my pocket. I never went back there again.

The mother and the aunt ostentatiously occupied themselves with Muki, expressing all the time their regretful sympathy, at which he was beside himself for fury.

I beat a retreat without any attempt to say good-bye. But Bessy ran after me, and, overtaking me in the doorway, seized my hand, and whispered in an ardent voice, "You'll put *me* to rights, won't you?"

"The *portrait*? oh yes!"

An hour afterwards I was sitting on the steamer and gazing at the lingering smoke which hid my native town from my eyes. It was just as if I were returning from a funeral.

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CHAPTER VII

WELTSCHMERZ CONDITIONS²⁵—"REMAIN OR FLY!"

[25] *Világ fájdalmas* állapotok. There is no English equivalent of *Világ fájdalmas*.

When I got back to Pest, I found two letters awaiting me on my writing-table, one from Tony Várady, inviting me to stand godfather to his new-born son, and the other from Petöfi, informing me that he had just been married to Julia Szendrey, and that they were having very happy days at Teleky's Castle, Koltó. Both of these friends were poor fellows, like myself; and the ladies who

had chosen to be their companions through life were girls belonging to wealthy, eminent families, accustomed to luxury and splendour, surrounded by obsequious wooers, and their mothers loved them as the apples of their eyes. Their families opposed the marriages, and the enamoured young ladies, handicapped as they were by the weight of their parents' refusal, followed their beloveds notwithstanding.

Then true love is no dream after all, but pure gold. And yet when I seek this pure gold they call me a crazy alchemist!

And now Petöfi begged me by letter to seek out a convenient lodging for him, where they and I could live together. That a newly-married bridegroom should invite his faithful bachelor comrade to be a fellow-lodger with him is a fact which belongs to the realm of fairy tales. [Pg 75]

I immediately hunted up in Tobacco Street a nice first-floor-apartment,²⁶ consisting of three chambers and their domestic offices; the first room was for the Petöfis, the second for me, while the intermediate one was to be a common dining-room, and there were separate entrances for each of us.

[26] Used here in the French sense of a suite of rooms.

The young couple came in during the autumn; they kept one maid, and I had an old servant. We had both very primitive furniture. Mrs. Petöfi had left her father's house without a dowry; she had not so much as a fashionable hat to bless herself with; she had sewed herself together a sort of head-dress of her own invention, which she never wore. Her hair was cut short, so that she looked like a little boy. They had nothing, and yet they were very happy! Julia's sole amusement was to learn English from Petöfi, and afterwards, at dinner (which was sent in from "The Eagle"), we spoke English, and laughed at each other's blunders. And I had to be a witness of their bliss every day!

It was just as if one were to season hell with piquant pepper.

Just about this time there appeared in *Eletképek* some very ordinary verses entitled "Word-Echoes," by one "Aggteleki,"²⁷ ostensibly addressed to a certain actress. I am now able to confess that *I* was the author of those verses. But for all that (though the verses were not so bad) I solemnly forbid any one at any time to include these verses among my works, for even now, forty years after the event, I am not such an old, decrepit, suicidally inclined fellow as Aggteleki was. [Pg 76]

[27] Aged Teleki.

But, indeed, every one of the works that I wrote at that period breathe the same bitter tone. The paroxysms of a crushed spirit, the dreamy phantoms of a diseased imagination, self-contempt, a moon-sick view of the world in general, characterise all my tales belonging to that period. And yet they pleased people then. I even had imitators. I turned Petöfi himself away from the right path. He himself confessed that his novel entitled "Hóhér Kötele"²⁸ was written under the influence of my "Nyomarék naplója,"²⁹ a literary abortion.

[28] "The Hangman's Rope." It certainly is a wretched performance.—TR.

[29] "The Cripple's Diary."

Who knows whither I should have got to with my tower of Babel, had not a healthy earthquake brought it to the ground?

One day Petöfi caught me in the act of touching up Bessy's portrait. He saw from my eyes that I had been weeping. I tried to hide it, for I was a bit ashamed.

"*It is well that it is so, my son,*" said he on that occasion; "*it is men who are unhappy that the world wants now.*" [Pg 77]

A memorable saying!

It was in those days that he wrote "I dream, I dream of bloody days," and "My Songs," with this final strophe, all blood and fire:—

"Wherefore doth this race of thralls endure it?
Wherefore rise not? Rend your chains and cure it!
Do ye wait, forsooth! till God's good pleasure
Rusts them off, and makes them drop at leisure?"

And then he would lead me into his room. On the walls there, in handsome frames, hung the portraits of the chiefs of the French Revolution—this was his only luxury—Danton, Robespierre, Camille Desmoulins, Saint-Juste, Madame Roland. There, too, the parts we were to play were distributed; Saint-Juste was designed for me, Madame Roland for Julia. And then we spoke of "the bloody days." They were to be no mere dream, we were to see them with our eyes wide open. And we were to be among the first to feel them.

A healthy-minded man would have been ready after such words as these to have left the house by jumping out of the window; but they had a charm for me. It suited my peculiar frame of mind just then to set on fire the Dejanira robe that was about me, and then rush out among the people and set them on fire also.

"Man's fate is woman!"

Had that young lady the last time I held her hand in mine said "Stay!" I should certainly have remained. I should have crept into my little nook of bliss and never have gazed after the moonshine of fame. In that case I should now perhaps have been one of the judicial assessors at the Royal Courts, and have joined heartily in the laugh when one or other of my colleagues at the end of a friendly banquet might take it into his head to quote some monstrous sentences out of my earliest romance, an imperfect copy of which turns up now and then as a literary curiosity among other antiquarian rubbish.

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This is what would have happened if the young lady had said "Stay!"

But if that young lady had said "Fly!" then I should have flown like the rest after the falling stars. And, indeed, of those who stood with me on the 11th March³⁰ before the mob on the balcony of the town-hall to announce "This is the day of national liberty!" of those my youthful-visaged, warm-hearted comrades, three have perished in defence of that word "Liberty" then pronounced: those three names are "Petöfi,"³¹ "Vasváry," "Bozzai." And certainly, in that case, the four ounces of lead, or the cossack's lance, or the grenade splinter which killed them, might have sufficed for me also—that is, of course, if that young lady had said "Fly!" Fate, in fact, confronted me with this paradox—"Either live and be forgotten, or be remembered as one who died young!"

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[30] When the Hungarian revolution of 1848 began.

[31] Petöfi was most probably killed at the battle of Segesvár in July, 1849; at any rate he was never seen or heard of afterwards. He was only twenty-seven, and in him the world lost one of its great lyric poets.

"Stay!" or "Fly!"

Then a voice said to me: "Go! but let us go together!"

But it was not the voice of the lady with the eyes like the sea.

One morning Petöfi rushed into my room roaring with laughter.

"Ha! ha! ha! Do you want to laugh? Just catch hold of that *Honderü*." And into my hands he thrust the latest number of the opposition paper.

I immediately caught sight of what had made him laugh so much. There was a magnificent description from my native town of the wedding which had taken place between Mr. János Nepomuk Bagotay and the world-renowned beauty—I didn't trouble to look at the name. "The happy pair will spend their honeymoon at Paris!"

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!"

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CHAPTER VIII

PETER GYURICZA'S CONSORT

After the March days, I quitted the Petöfis and went into another lodging. I had got on so well that I could maintain a bachelor's establishment, consisting of two rooms, which I furnished myself. Properly speaking, it only became a bachelor's establishment when I entered, for before I took it it was occupied by a little old woman who kept a registry office for providing respectable families with servants. Every one knew "Mámi," as she was called.... I was very well satisfied with my lodging, which quite answered all my requirements. It had this one drawback, however, that a whole mob of cooks, parlour-maids, and nursery-maids were constantly opening my door under the persuasion that I could provide them with places, and they disturbed my work terribly. Besides, this constant flow of petticoats towards my door was sufficient of itself to bring a young man into disrepute. From the apartments at the opposite end of the corridor it was possible to catch a glimpse of my door, and it was just in these very apartments that Rosa Laborfalvy lived. I was afraid that *some one* might think ill of me.

It was no longer the *Weltschmerz*, but a *Privatschmerz*,³² that afflicted me.

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[32] *Privát fájdalmas*—private anxiety.

Again I had applied myself to portrait-painting. A tall, slender girl in a white atlas dress, with large black eyes, and coal-black ringlets *à l'Anglaise* rolling down to her shoulders, was standing on my easel; I was just giving it the finishing-touch, I had no need for the original to be my model. I have the portrait to this day.

All at once there came a knocking at my door "Come in!" The door opened, and in came a stylish young peasant girl. I thought as much; here we have another nursery-maid in search of a place.

"No, no; go away! The registry-office lady does not live here!" said I viciously, for I was busy with my portrait; and perceiving that the intruder did not retire even now, I bawled out, not over

gently: "In Heaven's name, be off, my dear!"

At this the peasant girl began to laugh. Had I not heard that laughing voice somewhere before? I turned round and looked at her, and the more I looked, the more astonished I felt. It was Bessy!

She wore a bright red gown trimmed with yellowish-green flowers, over that a dark blue, double-bordered damask apron, and a black silk bodice with puff sleeves. Above the bodice was a bib with beautifully embroidered palm flowers; on her head sat a cockscomb like Haube, frilled with starched thread-lace; on her arm she carried a covered basket by the handle.

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Her face was ruddy and bronzed from exposure to the sun, and a sort of waggish little imp was nestling provocatively in her smiling features. I couldn't believe my own eyes.

"What! don't you know me?" she cried, with a merry laugh. "I'm Bessy!"

I saw that, but for the life of me I could not conceive what her object was in coming masquerading like this through the streets of Buda in broad daylight. And to hit upon *my* lodgings of all places in the world!

"Madame de Bagotay?" I stammered in my confusion.

"Oh, I am no longer Madame Bagotay, but Madame Peter Gyuricza!"

"What on earth do you mean? Mrs. Gyuricza! The wife of a herdsman?"

My amazement was so genuine that Bessy clapped her hands together with glee.

"Then you actually don't know about it? They haven't written to you from home?"

"It is a long time since I received a letter from home."

"But this was a scandal which set seven counties in an uproar; there has been nothing like it since the French Revolution—and you call yourself the editor of a newspaper!"

"My paper does not meddle with purely family matters."

Bessy's face was flushed, and she began smoothing it with the palms of both hands; she thought, perhaps, that she would brush the tell-tale blush away.

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"I have heated myself a little on that steep staircase of yours," she said.

She blamed the staircase for that flaming face of hers.

It then occurred to me that it would only be polite to ask my fair visitor to take a seat. I offered her the sofa.

"Oh, dear, no! That's only for ladies! This will do quite well enough for me." And with that she sat down on my trunk, and put down her basket beside it. "I really am quite tired. I have travelled by the corn-boat as far as Vác,³³ and thence I have walked all the way to Pest."

[33] Waitzen.

"But you could have gone by steamer?"

"But my master³⁴ could not give me steamboat fare. We are poor people. Look! this is my whole provision for the journey."

[34] *i.e.*, husband.

And with that she lifted the lid of the basket, and showed me what was inside it: a piece of black bread, and something wrapped up in greasy paper—a piece of cheese possibly, and a garlic-seasoned sausage.

"I must keep this for my return journey."

The cynicism of the proceeding revolted me.

"But now, if you please, I should very much like to know what's the meaning of it all. Is it a practical joke you are playing upon me?"

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"Oh, no! certainly not! Pray don't suppose that I have dressed up on your account. I am now a real peasant woman, and such I mean to remain. It is a serious thing for me, I can tell you, and I've come to you, not that you may write about it in your paper, but that you may give me advice."

"I give *you* advice?"

"Certainly! Whom else should I ask? The whole world condemns and tramples upon me, and yet I have offended nobody, not even in thought. You are the only one I have injured, bitterly injured, so it is from you that I must seek protection."

Woman's logic with a vengeance! I stood up in front of her, leaning on the edge of the table. I was contriving all the time to prevent her from seeing the portrait I was painting.

"I'll begin from the very beginning," continued the lady, lowering her long eyelashes. "I was married. So much you know. We gave a splendid banquet. The whole town, half the county was there. I fancy they described it in the newspapers; and why shouldn't they, when the richest,

best-known, and most handsome girl in the town was married to the ideal cavalier? The lady brought a dowry of 100,000 florins, and the gentleman conveyed his bride to his ancestral castle in a carriage drawn by four fiery horses. The universal envy was a more piquant grace to the meal than the benediction of the priest. The gentlemen envied the bridegroom, and the ladies envied the bride, and every one was forced to say: 'A couple made for each other.' Alas! the only joy which remained in my heart when I came out of church and looked among the crowd was the thought, 'Ah! you all envy me, I know!'

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"We went straight from church to my husband's castle," continued Bessy. "Thirty carriages escorted us. I counted them. A splendid banquet followed. That day I changed my dress four times. The fifth time I put on a lace *négligé*, and the bridesmaids led me to the bridal chamber. This room was a veritable masterpiece of upholstery. A Vienna furnisher had decorated it most elaborately. I couldn't sleep all night. The voice of the bass viol and the clarinet resounded in my ears from the banqueting-room, and the noise and uproar of the guests also. I did not see my husband till the morning. Then the guests began to disperse. Only now and then did a cracked and piping voice mingle with the frantic music of the gipsies. Then it was that my husband appeared before me, and a pitiable object he looked. He called me his darling little sister, and asked me if I could tell him where he lived. Then he undressed himself on the sofa and talked such nonsense that at last I couldn't help laughing. 'Well,' said I to myself, 'I suppose this is always the way when they take leave of their bachelordom.' Then sleep overcame me and I dreamed the silliest stuff. *You* were continually in my dreams. But why mention such things now?"

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With that she readjusted the kerchief which was tied around her head-dress and proceeded:—

"It was afternoon when I awoke. I must have wept a great deal in my dreams, for the pillow on which my head lay was quite wet. My husband was no longer reposing on the sofa, but sprawling on the floor like a stuffed frog. It cost me a great deal of trouble to shake him into life again. It was a still greater effort to make him understand in what part of the world he was, and in what relations we stood to each other here below. After that he insisted upon my crawling with him under the sofa, and when I wouldn't hear of it, he began to cry like a child, and demanded a pistol from me that he might blow his brains out. Then I brought a washing-basin and washed his face for him, and ducked it once or twice in cold water. He roared like a baby who is being tubbed, but finally recovered his spirits, and allowed himself to be raised from the ground. Then he drank out of the water-jug, and his eyes opened, but they were as tiny as a mole's, and I now perceived for the first time that they were a little crooked."

During this narration Bessy laughed and laughed again.

"What a sight the fellow did look! his hair all rumpled, his moustache all askew, his clothes soiled and tousled. He had to be dressed all over again. I began to scold him a little, 'A pretty condition of things, I must say!' To which he replied that I ought to have seen his comrades, Nusi, and Lenezi, and Blekus, and how *they* had been settled. They had all fallen under the table, and he had remained the victor. And he yawned so much as he told me this, that I had to beg him not to swallow me. At last I got him to sit down on a chair while I did his hair for him, and he meanwhile howled and swore continually that every single hair pained him as much as if devils were tweaking him with iron pincers."

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Again the lady stopped to laugh.

"That's quite a novel state of things to you, eh? A person who becomes the bride of an out-and-out dandy must expect to see something extraordinary. But perhaps there was nothing extraordinary in it after all. And now the banquet was resumed, commencing with a pick-me-up. I presided at the table with a turban on my head. All our guests were still drunk. I had to listen to very peculiar anecdotes. At such times the best man is he who can pay the new bride the compliment which will make her blush the most. The lady guests had all departed in the morning, and had come to bid me good-bye one by one. They all wept over me—it is the usual thing. I was the only lady left, and glad was I when I managed to get away from the gentlemen. I think that they had been awaiting my withdrawal; they could then continue their interrupted pastime. Again I could not sleep; my head was throbbing. For the first time in my life I recognised the existence of the headache, that frightful curse of feminine nerves which I had hitherto always put down to affectation or imagination. How good it would have been for me if some one had laid a cool, refreshing hand upon my temples! Perhaps a single word of comfort would have relieved my pangs! I waited for it in vain. I sent a message. He never came to me. Suddenly, while an oppressive dream was benumbing my pain, a hellish uproar awoke me. I fancied that Pandemonium had been let loose. It was only my husband, but he had brought with him the whole of his drunken crew. I saw before me a whole legion of them, with guffawing, sardonic, lascivious, distorted faces, and amongst them my husband, with the grin of a satyr on his idiotic face. I rose in terror from my bed, cast my counterpane around me, fled into my waiting-maid's room, and barricaded myself behind the door. There he thumped and thundered for some time. I threatened to throw myself out of the window if he broke in by force. Thereupon some of his comrades, in whom a little human feeling still remained, contrived to drag him away, though not without difficulty. Then followed a little sulky squabble on both sides. I wouldn't leave my room for four-and-twenty hours; he wouldn't come to me. The noise that he made over head was sufficient evidence to me that he hadn't committed suicide in the meantime. The third day was passed by the bridal guests in a more profitable occupation. They played at cards. The table, vigorously punched by their fists, proclaimed their handiwork aloud. It was like blacksmiths'

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apprentices pounding iron on the anvil with sledgehammers. Only in the morning did 'my lord and master' turn up while I was still only half-dressed. He was sober then, and, what is more, ill-tempered. His loss at cards was mirrored in his face like a guilty conscience. He frankly told me all about it. He had been peppered finely, and his comrades were vile curs.... Such was my wedding."

Bessy covered her face with both her hands. Was she laughing? Was she weeping? I cannot say. All at once she asked me, "Did you ever play at cards?"

"Yes, but only for copper coins."

"It's all one. You ought not to waste your time with it."

"Well, really, I only spend that time on it which I do not know how to employ otherwise, the time when I am tired of work, and want a rest from thinking. Cards are very good things at such times."

"Then what a pity girls also do not learn the science of card-playing at school, just as they learn to find out towns on maps, or gather the properties of exotic plants and animals from zoological albums; then at least a newly-married bride would understand why it is necessary to subtract so much from her heritage to sacrifice it to such mythological deities as *skiz* and *pagát*.³⁵ ..." [Pg 90]

[35] Terms used in Tarok.

Meanwhile I didn't interrupt her, but remained standing and looking at her with my hands resting on the table. This seemed to put her out.

"Why don't you smoke a cigar? Don't mind me."

"I would only remind you that you used always to make fun of me because I didn't smoke."

"True. Smoking becomes a man. A cigar or a pipe makes his face so cosy-looking. Just look at any man who hasn't a pipe stuck into his mouth, and tell me if he doesn't look like a judge pronouncing judgment, or a priest shriving a penitent? Believe me, that one of the reasons why I was faithless to you was that you didn't smoke. Well, at any rate, I have got my reward for it."

"Now, Muki used to suck Havannahs all day. Yes, nothing but Havannahs; but Gyuricza smokes the coarsest tobacco, and even chews pigtail."

I burst out laughing; I couldn't help it. In what ways are a woman's graces gained! No, I wouldn't chew pigtail if the favour of the Goddess Melpomene herself depended on it.

"I will not weary you with our diversions at Paris. There, I perceived, it is the common practice for husband and wife to take their pleasures apart. My husband did no more than what other husbands do. It is not good form to ask a husband who returns home at dawn where he has been. Besides, Muki, with perfect candour, informed me all about these places of public entertainment and the joys of *les petits soupers*; once he took me with him to these delights—I didn't ask to go again.... I was very glad when the season was over and we returned to our village, and after all the bustling diversions, flirtations, visitings and boredom, I could once more be alone and fill my straw hat with forget-me-nots on the banks of the river, as of old on the island. You remember my visit to your rustic hut, don't you? You remember the golden thrushes who used to speak to you? To you they said, 'Silly boy! silly boy!' to me they cried, 'What's the good! what's the good!' On returning to his estates my husband became quite another man: you would have said that he was a changeling. The dainty dandy became an enthusiastic agriculturist. He was up early, on horseback all day, went from one *puszta* to another, and brought home ears of barley in his hat. The only things he talked about at home were sheepshearing and the diseases of horned cattle. He had a stud and a neat-herd, and of the latter he appeared to be particularly proud. Sometimes he drove me all over his demesne in a light gig. A fine demesne it was. You might drive about it the whole day and not see the whole of it. He showed me his herds. He told me that herds like them were not to be had in the whole kingdom. I didn't understand it. All that I could see was that the oxen had very large horns. But the form of the herdsman really did surprise me. He was a veritable ancient-hero sort of a man, such as we imagine the primeval Magyars to have been who wandered hither out of Asia. His bronzed face beamed with health, his thick black hair whipped his shoulders with its greasy curls, and add to that his sun-defying glance, his stately bearing, his long mantle embroidered with tulips and cast lightly across his shoulder. His white linen garment fluttered in the breeze, and when he raised his arm to take off his cap, the loose fluttering short sleeves fell right back and revealed an arm like the arm of the figure of an athlete cast in bronze. 'Why, Peter,' said I, 'is it with you that your master is wont to wrestle?' The Hercules, thus addressed, timidly cast down his eyes and said: 'Yes!' 'But how on earth is your master ever able to throw you?' At this question, Peter Gyuricza shifted his mantle from one shoulder to the other, and twisting his moustache, replied: 'As often as his Excellency throws me I get five florins.' So that was the secret of Muki's acrobatic triumphs. After that, the herdsman conducted us to the great summer farm, which was a good distance from the hut where the calves are put to rest at midday. There, a savoury luncheon, prepared by the wife of the herdsman, awaited us. She was a buxom, smart young woman, with roguish eyes and radiating eyebrows, all life and freshness, a true blossom of the *puszta*.³⁶ I caught myself looking repeatedly in the mirror, and making comparisons between her face and my own. After luncheon we went all round the farm, and the herdsman's wife guided us from stable to stable. A thorn got [Pg 91]

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into my foot through my slipper. The herdsman's wife bobbed down and drew the thorn out. 'You don't feel the thorn now, do you?' she asked, flashing a look upon me. 'I do not feel it in my foot,' I replied."

[36] *i.e.*, a true heath-flower.

Bessy paused for a moment, and smoothed her brows with both hands as if to refresh her memory.

"I took another sort of thorn away with me. I began to be suspicious of the grand economical zeal of my husband. Such assiduity was not natural. Early one morning he again took horse, called to his greyhounds, and told me not to wait for him to dinner, he would not be home till evening. A certain instinct would not let me rest. I went out into the garden, right to the boundary fence and into the stubble beyond, and then I went on foot into the *puszta*, through the turnip fields and the Indian corn. Nobody saw me. The vesper-bell was ringing in the village when I entered the courtyard of the herdsman. In the stubble I saw the two dogs hunting a hare on their own account. Truly, a Cockney sportsman who allows his dogs to win their own meat like that! I whistled to them, they recognised me and came leaping around me. 'Where's your master?' The dogs understood me. They began yelping and barking, and darted on before me helter-skelter, with their heads between their legs as if to give me to understand that they would lead me to the spot if I followed them. They made straight for the hut. No doubt they fancied they were doing something very knowing. When I marched in at the door the little servant exclaimed, 'Good gracious!' and let fall the wooden trencher in which she was kneading some dough with a large pot-ladle, and when I advanced towards the dwelling-room door, she stood in my way, and said, 'Please don't go in now!' I boxed her ears for her, first on the right side and then on the left, pushed her into a cupboard and locked the door upon her. Then I opened the door of the dwelling-room. There was nobody there. But the door of a little side room, which in peasants' houses is, as a rule, always open, was closed. On the table, however, I perceived my lord's hat and his riding-whip. I made no disturbance. The clothes of the herdsman's wife lay in a heap on a bench. I took off my clothes and put on hers carefully, one by one. I was just as you see me now."

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She stood up before me and turned herself round that I might have a better look at her.

"Then I went into the outer hut again, and picked the ladle from the floor which the maid had let fall in her terror. It was a mess of bacon dumplings that she had been engaged upon. I kneaded the dough for the dumplings, I made twelve beautiful little round ones out of it, boiled them, beat up a nice garlic sauce with them, and poured the whole lot of it into a varnished jug, first tasting to see that it was not over salted. Then I tied up the jar in my kerchief, and set off with it towards the pasturage. But another idea also occurred to me. I concealed behind my apron my husband's riding whip that was reposing on the table, and took it away with me.

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"The pasturage is pretty far from the hut. It was somewhat late when I arrived there. The herdsman was quite impatient, and had climbed up a 'look-out' tree, and when he saw my striped dress and bright red kerchief, he began to bawl out, 'Hillo! Come along, can't you! I'll give you what for! I'll teach you something, you cursed blockhead! What have you done with my dinner? A pretty time when they're already ringing vespers in the village. I suppose you've been carrying on with his honour again? Let me catch you at it, that's all, and I'll tickle your hide for you with my whip.' When I got up to him and lifted the kerchief from my head, he stopped short with his mouth open. 'Well, I never! if it isn't her ladyship!'—'True, Peter!' said I. 'I've cooked your dinner for you, and now you see I've brought it to you. Your wife cannot come. She's learning French from my husband. I've also brought with me my husband's whip. I found it on your table. You may flog with it whomever you like, either me or your wife.'"

Here she stopped short. She evidently meant me to find out the rest of the story for myself.

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"Poor woman!" I murmured. I was sorry and embarrassed.

She burst out laughing.

"Don't pity me, pray! I am perfectly happy. Gyuricza did not strike me with his whip. I am now mistress in the herdsman's hut."

And she seemed quite proud of it all!

Then she began to tell me of her new hero with real enthusiasm. He was what man was meant to be when first created, all strength and truth; there was nothing artificial, nothing false, nothing effeminate about him. "When he comes home at night he goes to the fireplace to smoke his pipe; then he empties a can of buttermilk to the very dregs. Wine is only put upon the table on Sundays. Then he asks, 'Have you any good dumpling soup, sweetheart?' 'Of course I have, and cured bacon and groat pottage as well.' As soon as it is ready we turn it out and sit down to it. We eat with tin spoons out of a large common dish. No invitation is needed there. The lady herself fetches the water from the spring. The master drinks one half of it and offers the other half to his wife: 'You drink too!' And after that they don't go in for much stargazing, nor do they care a fig for the world and all its thousand troubles. They sleep with open doors, and the four sheep-dogs guard the house.

"At three o'clock in the morning Bessy gets up and goes into the stable to milk the cows; by dawn it must be all done. The little milking-stool is now her throne. She pours the fresh foaming milk into the pails and takes them into the cellar with the help of the serving maid. When the boy

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sounds his horn the cows must be driven out; they must be pastured apart from the brood-cows. And all this time the master is eating his breakfast: peppered bacon and green leeks with good *papramorgó*,³⁷ and then he follows his herds out into the pastures. The reason why he cracks his whip so loudly is because he knows that some one is standing there in the little door and looking after him. Then *she* has to skim the cream from the standing milk, churn the milk, and take the butter to market. Then she has to buckle to bread-baking. The maid is sent to heat the oven; meanwhile she herself is kneading the dough, then she shovels out the burning embers with the oven scoop, and wipes down the inside of the oven with a wet kitchen-clout; then the loaves are shot in by means of the long baking-shovel (first of all, however, are baked the 'fire-cakes,' which 'my soul'³⁸ loves so much), finally the 'lock-up' stone is smeared with clay and placed in front of the oven, and one must be ready to an instant to pull the stone from the mouth of the oven again and take out the loaves. Meanwhile, she has had time to prepare upon the hearth a pottage of millet and smoked bacon, and carry it quickly, pot and all, to the pasturage, so that when the mid-day bell rings, the master may have his victuals ready laid on his outspread fur pelisse. After dinner, beneath the shadow of the big wild nut-tree, she may take a nap with an apron thrown over her face. On returning home she gets out her bruised flax and heckles it, so that when the husband returns home he finds wife and family sitting by the distaff and singing together the spinning songs of the country folk, till the pigs come running home with a great grunting and demand their slush.—Oh, such a life as that is pure enjoyment!"

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[37] A sort of *eau-de-vie*.

[38] *Lelkem*, i.e., "My darling."

I shook my head dubiously.

"It will bore you one day."

"Bore me! Don't you recollect when I was in your lath hut I painted this very life to you as my ideal?—A hut of rushes and a bed of straw. You spoke to me of fame and glory. The lowing of kine, the tinkling of sheep-bells, the cracking of whips is my delight. It was so even then. Since that time I have learnt to know the great world, but it hasn't altered me. I am full of disgust with everything that is to be found in palaces. Those demi-men, those Sunday husbands—those refined and exquisitely polite she-sinners, those model sticklers for virtue who sin through the whole ten commandments day after day, and vie even with the ladies of the ballet, with this difference, however, that the ballet-dancers are much more modest in private than these great ladies are in public—I am sick and weary of the whole lot of them. I would rather have a man who never washes his mouth after he has eaten garlic, than a man who returns home from an orgie and pretends he has been to a political conference. The famous Hamilton bed, which costs you a hundred ducats if you sleep in it for a single night, is wretchedness itself compared to the bed of fresh straw on which I sleep. Believe me when I tell you that I am perfectly happy."

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"I'll believe anything you like, but there's one circumstance I cannot understand. How is it that nobody disturbs this sweet idyll of yours? Is the one man who is so confoundedly nearly interested in your happiness, is that man still alive? Does Muki Bagotay still exist anywhere in the wide world?"

"I fancy so."

"Well, if he does, I'll only say that what flows through his veins is milk, not blood. Is he content to carry the horns of his hundred oxen? A rich and powerful landlord, a county magnate, and the master of your ideal peasant!—A thousand lightnings! if I were only in his place!"

Bessy, with a sarcastic smile, folded her hands together above her knees.

"Well, come now! If you were in dear Muki's place what would *you* do?"

"I'll tell you. I wouldn't call Peter Gyuricza out, but one fine day I would put my democratic principles on the shelf, and collecting my heydukes and my rustics, I'd give chase to the herdsman, trounce him according to his deserts, and kick him out of my employment. I would get another herdsman; but as for my wife, I'd tie her to the pommel of my saddle, and drag her like that to my castle. That's what *I* would do, were I the husband of Muki Bagotay's wife!"

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I had certainly got a little heated. It was only afterwards that I reflected, "What's Hecuba to me? Why should I bother my head about Peter Gyuricza?"

Bessy, however, laughed most heartily.

"Ha! ha! ha! You'd have done that to me, would you? You'd have tied me to your horse's tail and whipped me home, eh? How sorry I am then that I did not choose you! What a fine thing it would have been if I could have boasted of bearing the impression of your blows on my body! Tell me now, have you ever struck any one who was unable to hit you back?"

At this I was fairly put to silence.

"But let that be! You could not be so good a Muki Bagotay as Muki Bagotay himself would have been if he could. He actually *did* try the very recipe which you now recommend. The very next day he sent his bailiff with the verbal message to Peter Gyuricza to pack himself off forthwith, but me the bailiff was to bring straight home. The bailiff gave himself airs, and would have used force, so I gave him a sound box on the ears, which he'll not forget in a hurry; whereupon Peter

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Gyuricza threw him out of the house.

"Next day the wounded honour of the offended husband resorted to still stronger measures: six *pandurs*³⁹ appeared upon the scene with swords and pistols. Peter and I were outside in the pastures. Thither they came after us. But Peter was not a bit put out. He hastily called together his young shepherds; there were four of them; they caught up their cudgels, and the four sheep dogs took the same side. The six *pandurs* never dreamt we should tackle them. The corporal of the *pandurs* threatened to fire if we offered the least resistance. I immediately rushed forward in front of Peter, and said to them, 'Very well! there you are! Fire!' There was a pretty rumpus, the dogs began to bark, and at last even the stolid steers got mad, and the big old bull rushed out of the herd and charged straight at the *pandurs*, who were thronging round the herdsman. They took to their heels straightway, and those who did not leave their shakos behind them might think themselves lucky."

[39] County police.

"Why, that was quite an epic poem!"

"Wasn't it! But you haven't heard the end of it yet. After the repulse of the second assault, Muki began to carry on the war in grim earnest. One evening, our maid, who had been sent out as a spy, came back with the terrifying news that his honour had sent out orders that on the following day all his tenants were to assemble in the courtyard of the castle armed with cudgels, flails, and pitchforks; to his huntsmen and heydukes also he had distributed guns and ammunition. The whole of this host was to advance upon us in battle array on the morrow. It would have been well, perhaps, to have fled before them while there was yet time. But we did not fly."

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"Then what was the end of it all?"

"A very droll ending indeed. When the danger was greatest, good luck sent a deliverer, a good friend, just as usually happens in happily-constructed dramas, who intervened with a mighty hand and diverted the stroke from our heads."

"And who was this good friend?"

"Why, who else but the bearer of this fine blonde beard!" cried she, with an ironical smile, caressing my chin.

"I? Why, I was not in that part of the country at all."

"Ah! but poets have long arms, you know. At the very moment when Muki was placing firearms in the hands of his peasants, freedom was proclaimed at Pest. The rumour spread throughout the kingdom like wildfire—the Revolution had broken out. They say in Pressburg that Petöfi and you were on the Rákos⁴⁰ at the head of 40,000 peasants, and that a new Dózsa⁴¹ war had begun. The retainers of Muki also thronged up to his castle, not to carry me off by force, but to demand their liberties. 'We'll work no more!' they cried; 'we'll pay no more tithes, and no more hearth-money.'⁴² Freedom had broken out with a vengeance! Muki was thereupon so terrified that he fled incontinently through the back door in the clothes of his lackey, and never stopped till he was safely out of the kingdom. I have heard nothing of him since. So you see your mighty hand turned aside the danger that was hovering over our heads. We drank your health afterwards in big bumpers."

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[40] A plain to the east of Pest, where, from the earliest times, elective assemblies were held.

[41] George Dózsa, the leader of the Hungarian *jacquerie* of 1514, who was finally captured and executed after truly infernal torments.

[42] *Füstpenz*—lit., smoke money, so much on each chimney.

I certainly had never calculated upon success of this sort.

"Well," said I, "you have certainly disposed of Mr. János Nepomuk Bagotay for a time (though I would call your attention to the fact that he will not be very long in perceiving that there is no Dózsa war in Hungary, and will then return with reinforcements), but may I ask what her ladyship your mother says to all this?"

"I should have come to that, even if you had not asked me. In fact, this is the very thing which brings me to you. One fine evening when I was returning home from the maize fields, with my kerchief full of pods, I found an official notification nailed on the door of our hut. The lawyer's clerk who brought it, delighted to find nobody at home, had fastened the document to the door-post and decamped. It gave me to understand that Muki was bringing an action against me for adultery. A term was fixed, however, within which, according to custom, we might appear before the priest at any place we liked and be reconciled if possible. After the lapse of six weeks the priest would make another attempt to bring about a reconciliation; if this did not succeed, he would bid us go to the —! and we should have to appear before the judge instead!"

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I now began to see to what I was indebted for the pleasure of her visit. I should very much have liked to have banged the door in her face with the words: "I am not a lawyer, though I have served my terms!" But I let her go on.

"I immediately took down the notification from the door," she resumed, "and sent my little maid with it to town to my mother's. By way of explanation I wrote her a letter, a task not unattended

with difficulty, as Peter Gyuricza's hut was singularly ill-provided with writing materials. First of all I had to manufacture ink from wild juniper berries, then I carved a pen from a goose-quill; in place of paper I made use of beautifully smooth maize leaves."

"Just as the Egyptians used papyrus?"

"Yes, and if papyrus was good enough for the daughters of the Pharaohs, why shouldn't maize-membranes be good enough for me? I wrote and told her everything that had happened. I entirely justified my proceedings. If there was but one drop of justice in her composition she would be bound to acknowledge that my line of action was as clear as the day. Muki had made off with the herdsman's wife; I, following the *lex talionis*—an eye for eye—had made off with Gyuricza. He had brought an action against me; Gyuricza would bring an action against his own wife. The pair of us stood on exactly the same legal footing. If the two divorces were carried out, I meant to make the man of my choice my lawful husband, and would become in name what I already was in fact, the wife of Peter Gyuricza. I referred to you also in my letter."

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"To me?"

"Yes. I argued that there was now no difference between peasants and gentlemen, and pointed out that since the 15th March you had omitted the privileged 'y'⁴³ from the end of your name, and had substituted for it a simple 'i,' and you were a 'glorious patriot,' as every one knew. Nobody therefore had any reason to be ashamed of Peter Gyuricza. Besides, I did not mean that he should remain a herdsman any longer; but as soon as my mother handed over to me my patrimony (so much of it I mean as Muki had not already squandered away), I meant to purchase a farm, and Gyuricza and I would settle down upon it as independent proprietors."

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[43] The "y" at the end of Hungarian personal names has much the same value as the French *de* or the German *von*—TR.

The matter now really began to amuse me. I could imagine to myself the Hogarthian group when the trio of ladies began spelling out syllable by syllable the letter that had been written on a maize-leaf.

"Well! and what answer did you get?"

"The answer you may easily have anticipated. My mother replied that she repudiated me entirely, that I should not get a farthing from her, and that I was never again to presume to show my face in a family which I had so utterly disgraced."

"And did Peter know all about this?"

"I was obliged to tell him, for my mother had nearly frightened to death the bearer of my letter, our little serving maid. She told her that if she ever dared to come to town again she would have her seized and tied to the pillory (though there wasn't one), and well flogged into the bargain; so that neither by cuffs nor entreaties was the wench to be persuaded to go to town again. She said as much to Peter. She said she would rather lose her place. And yet she ought to have gone every market-day to the town with cheese and butter, for these wares were Peter's chief means of livelihood. What was I to do now? I did this. I resolved to take the butter and cheese to market myself."

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"You? But how?"

"Not in a glass carriage, you may be sure. The market is a good two hours' journey from our hut, and the direction is marked by the church tower. The peasant women, when they pack with wares the baskets which they put on their heads, make, first of all, a sort of wreath of rags, which they place below the baskets to lighten the pressure and maintain the equilibrium."

"And you did the same?"

"Naturally! It is no greater hardship for me, surely, than for the other poor girls who do it. And remember, besides, that this marketing is just as great an amusement to the peasant women as a promenade concert is to fine ladies. There was only one little nuisance connected with it. Just at this time all the irrigation waters had overflowed, and all the fields and meadows between our hut and the market town were turned into a lake, through which we had to wade."

"What! you waded through the flooded fields?"

"Oh, the water did not really come above my knees. It was only here and there, by the side of the streams, that we had to truss up our petticoats pretty high, and then we took off our boots and carried them tied on to the handles of our baskets. That is how all the women go."

"And you picked your way along like that too?"

"Again and again! I might, indeed, have gone along by the dykes, but then I should have had to turn into the village and make a circuit of four miles with the mud up to my knees. Along the even marshes, on the other hand, it is pleasant going, the soft soil does not hurt your heels, and there are no leeches."

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"But did no one see you?"

"What did I care? I quite enjoyed my aquatic promenade. It was every bit as good as bathing at Trouville, and there I had by no means so ample a toilet. On arriving in town, I at once readjusted

my clothes, put on my boots, and went to sell butter and cheese right in front of my mother's house. It was really a capital position that I chose; a corner-house between two thoroughfares, opening out upon the market-place."

"And nobody recognised you?"

"Why shouldn't they? Every one recognised me, even the money-collector who hires out the standing-rooms. He allowed me my standing-room gratis, because I 'belonged to the place.' I was surrounded by quite a crowd of my former cavaliers, who bought up all my butter, and I sold my cheese by the ounce, at fancy prices; there was quite a run upon it. Never had Peter Gyuricza seen so much money as I brought home to him from the sale of his butter and cheese."

"And your worthy mother?"

"Alas! all that the poor thing could do was to pull down all the blinds in broad daylight. I, however, purchased with the proceeds of the butter and cheese as much salt and tobacco as we required, packed them all up in the basket, and, placing it on my head, returned through the floods the same way by which I came."

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"And did you do this often?"

"Every market day. Sometimes it was rainy. Then the peasant woman is wont to throw her upper garment over her head, that is her umbrella. I had to get accustomed to that too. Once, a couple of my former young gentlemen acquaintances took it into their heads to play me a practical joke. They paddled a canoe out of the Danube into the submerged plain, and when I began my wading tour they paddled after me. That did *me* no harm, but it turned out badly for them, for the peasant girls who went with me charged upon them like the host of Sisera, wrested the paddles from their hands, and left them rocking helplessly to and fro in the midst of the waters."

"But hasn't the water all dried up now?" I asked impatiently.

"Oh, how he snaps at me! Of course! Now we can go dry-shod. Only when we come to a ditch do we take off our shoes. But, dear heart! how I do go on gabbling without ever coming to the point. I must explain why I have come all the way hither to you, my dear Mr. Advocate. As I will not appear before the priest to further the reconciliation project, and my husband (my first, I mean) will do so neither, I must, of course, appear before the judge! and as, moreover, my mother must be admonished to hand over my little property, if you would take my case up for me I should be exceedingly obliged to you."

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I told her that I did not practise as an advocate, and that I had no experience whatever of divorce proceedings, not having been taught the subject in the schools.

Then she began to speak in a very solemn voice. She said she had never expected me to take up her case, but had sought me out because she had been informed that the advocates with whom I had served my articles were very eminent practitioners; she would like to entrust her double suit to them. As, however, she feared that they would neither receive her nor believe her if she appeared before them in her present costume, she earnestly begged that I would give her a letter of introduction to the firm of Molnár & Vérchovszky for friendship's sake—or for any other price.

"Well, I can do that for you—for nothing."

To write this letter I had to sit down at my writing-table.

"May I peep and see what you write about me?"

"If you like."

I could not take offence at her curiosity.

"I'll help you!" said she, with naïve archness, and went and stood behind my back.

I must say that she had a very odd notion of helping me. She leant right over me so that I could feel her burning breath on my face, and the throbbing of her heart against my shoulder. I spoiled the first sheet of paper by writing last year's date at the top of it. Then I could not call to mind the name of my client, and I thought one thing and wrote another. Add to that that I made a mess of the simplest sentences, and wrote in a style worthy of a pedantic grammarian. Finally I got hopelessly involved in the maze of a long-winded phrase which I began but could not finish. That's what happens to a man when he has to listen to the beating of two hearts!

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It was on this self-same table that the picture stood which I have already mentioned. I had no time to conceal it in my drawer. And why should I have tried to hide it? Was I bound to make a mystery of it before her?

Right opposite to my writing-table was a mirror on the wall. On one occasion, when I was pursuing an elusive word, I raised my head from my writing-desk and saw in the mirror the figure of the woman who was standing behind my back. Oh, what a face was that! She was not looking into my letter, but at the portrait. The eyes were turned sideways, so that the upper parts of the whites were visible; the lips were drawn aside, and the teeth clenched.

I saw this from the mirror. And this mirror, too had the property of making things look green. Viewed in this magic light, the fair lady standing behind me appeared like the Iblis of the *Thousand-and-one Nights*, who sucks the blood of her lovers and leads the dances of the dead.

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I finished the letter to my old chiefs.

Then I dried it with a piece of blotting-paper. Sand I have always hated. I also felt, in this respect, like Stephen Szechenyi,⁴⁴ who, whenever he received a sanded-letter, used to give it first of all to his lackey to be taken out in the hall and dusted. Before enclosing the letter, however, I turned round and handed it to her.

[44] Count Stephen Szechenyi, "the greatest of the Magyars," was born in 1791. He brilliantly distinguished himself at the battle of Leipsic, and at Tolentino, in 1815, at the head of his Hussars, annihilated Murat's cavalry. After the war, he devoted himself to domestic politics with a tact, courage, and noble liberality which speedily made him the most popular man in Hungary. The Hungarian Academy and the Hungarian National Theatre were founded at his initiative and mainly at his expense. The breach with Austria in 1848 so preyed upon his mind that he went mad, and was confined in an asylum, where he destroyed himself in 1860.—Tr.

"Would you read it, please?"

The menacing spectre was no longer there. Iblis had changed into a smiling young bride.

"And how do you know that I haven't read the letter?" she asked, in her astonishment.

"My little finger whispered it to me!"

At this she burst out laughing, and pushed the letter away.

"I don't mean to read it! I know that you have written no end of good things about me."

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I folded up my letter, sealed it and wrote the address—"Joseph Molnár and Alexander Vérchovszky, Advocates." Then I handed it to her.

Still she kept standing there in front of my writing-table, twirling the letter round and round in her hands, and gazing continually at the portrait. Her face had become quite solemn. In her deeply downcast eyes there was a suspicious brightness testifying to restrained tear-drops.

She heaved a deep sigh.

"But this is mere folly!" She thrust my letter beneath her bodice, and in a voice of real warmth and sincerity, she stammered: "I thank you most kindly." Then she added, in a voice half grave, half gay: "But come now! You won't write my story in the newspapers, will you?"

"I assure you it is not my practice."

"And you won't put my stupid story into a novel or a romance, eh? At least not while I'm alive?"

"Never! Put your mind at rest on that point."

"No; don't say never. Let it be only as long as I'm alive. But when I die, wherever it may be, you shall receive a letter from me, which I will write to you at my last hour, authorizing you to write all that you know of me."

"My dear friend, death is written much more plainly on my brow than on yours."

She shuddered. Twice she shuddered. Then she threw her basket over her arm, and took her leave. I would have escorted her to the door of the ante-chamber, but she held me back.

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"Stay where you are. I do not wish any one to see you paying attention to a country wench."

When I was by myself again and thinking over the whole scene, it seemed to me as if a golden thrush were piping derisively in my ear again—

"Foolish fellow! Foolish fellow!"

For the second time I had let slip the opportunity of pilfering Paradise, conceded to me by a special and peculiar favour of the gods. I candidly confess that I am no saint.... I am a true son of Adam, of real flesh and blood. No vow binds me to an ascetic life. Let temptation come to me again in the shape of that pretty woman to-day and she shall see what I am made of!... All day long these feverish imaginings haunted me. In the drawer of my writing-table was the portrait which I once wrested in knightly tourney from her bridegroom, and which she herself had given me to put to rights. I went again and again to my writing-table in order to take out that portrait and have another look at it. But that other portrait lay there on my table and would not allow it. It was much better to leave the house. I occupied the whole day in strolling about the town. Perhaps I may meet her somewhere in the street.

Late in the evening I returned home.

I was alone. My lackey only came to me in the morning.

I had scarcely lighted my lamp when I heard a knocking at my door. I certainly had forgotten to shut the door of my ante-chamber, and so my visitor had managed to penetrate so far. Who could it be at such a late hour? "Come in!"

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The blood flew to my head when the door opened.

She had come back!

Then she was here again!

She did not come in, however, but stood with the door-latch in her hand, as if she were afraid of me.

"It is not nice of me, I know," she stammered, with a faltering voice, "to come here so late. I have been here three times, but you were out. I must tell you what I've heard. Don't be angry."

I begged her to come in, and took her by the hand. My heart beat feverishly.

"The lawyers received me very well. They were both at home. They took up my case and assured me that it was bound to result in my favour, and that they would pay the preliminary expenses. They behaved like gentlemen. Then the conversation turned upon you. They asked how long we had been acquainted. I told them as much as was necessary, and wound up by saying that you were the one thoroughly disinterested friend that I possessed. Then one of the advocates, the tall dry one I mean, said, with perfect good-nature: 'Well, if you are kindly disposed towards our young friend, just tell him that *the path along which he is now rushing so impetuously leads straight to the gallows,*' whereupon the blonde, ruddy-faced man added, '*or else to suicide.*' I felt I must tell you that." [Pg 116]

And with these words she stepped back from the door.

An icy shudder would have run down the shoulders of any other man at these words, but the message regularly set *me* on fire. It was my pet idea they wanted me to give up, the idea which I adored even more than my lady-love, the idea of my youth—the idea of liberty. If any one offends my lady-love I will shed his blood, but let not even my lady-love interfere with my principles, as for them I am ready to pour out my own blood to the last drop.

"Be it so!" I cried passionately; "that has nothing to do with you;" and I shut the door in her face. Every fibre of my body quivered with rage.

They threaten me with the gallows, or with the suicidal dagger of a Cato! I fear them not.

My poor chiefs! Half a year later they were rushing along the self-same path, at the end of which so many monsters were lurking. I only lost my hair in the hands of these monsters, but they lost their heads. Their own prophecy was fulfilled on them both.

From that day forth I was very wrath with the lady with the eyes like the sea.

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CHAPTER IX

THE WOMAN WHO WENT ALONG WITH ME

And now we'll go back to the day which forms so remarkable a turning-point in the life of the Hungarian nation, the 15th March, 1848.

It did not come without due preparation. The emancipation of the people, a free press and a free soil, equality of taxation and equality before the law—all these splendid ideas had been fought for during the last ten years by those great minds which towered above their fellows. The time had now arrived, the process had been decided, the judgment lived in the heart of every honest patriot. The great sacrifices which the metamorphosis required were not demanded, but volunteered. We debated about them in the Diet, party against party, with all the fervour of conviction.

A melancholy example was before us, which, like that *fata Morgana* of the ocean, the phantom galley overturned, warns the seaman of the danger that is hovering over his head. I allude to the events in Galicia the year before.

The Polish gentry of Galicia demanded their liberties, and emphasized their demands by force of arms. There was no need on the part of the authorities to set in motion an army corps against this new confederacy, the peasantry did the work for them instead. The Galician peasants⁴⁵ crushed the Polish gentry. The censorship had prevented the Hungarian newspapers from making known the details of this rebellion, but when the Diet met, it was impossible to prevent the fiery deputy for Comorn, the youthful Denis Pazmandy, from raising his mighty voice on behalf of the Poles, and making known the shocking particulars of the bloody massacre to the Hungarian nation. There are many sad pages in the history of the Polish nation, but none so sad as this. And the hand which wrote that page could easily glide over to the next page also, and that next page was the history of the Hungarian nation. Here half a million of gentry stand face to face with fifteen millions of serfs which serve, suffer, pay, carry arms, and are silent. Then the Paris Revolution broke out. The French nation overthrew the throne. (By the way, a tatter from the canopy over the French throne was brought home by one of our young writers, Louis Dóbsa, as a present for Petöfi. Dóbsa fought on the February barricades.) Serious debates were held in the Hungarian Diet. But Pressburg⁴⁶ was much too cold a field for such things. They wanted assistance from Pest. We didn't say Buda-Pest then, Buda⁴⁷ was not ours.... Meanwhile the Vienna Revolution [Pg 118]

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broke out. The streets of Vienna resounded with the watchword "Freedom," and were painted with the blood of the heroes that had fallen for it.

[45] They were mostly Ruthenians, and racial and religious differences had much to do with their antagonism. This inveigling of the peasantry against the gentry, generally attributed to Metternich, is one of the darkest blots in Austrian history.—Tr.

[46] The old coronation city of Hungary, but more of a German than a Magyar city then.—Tr.

[47] It was an Austrian fortress.—Tr.

"So these Vienna people whom we blackguard so much show that they know how to shed their blood for freedom while we glorious Magyars sit at our firesides!" cried Petöfi bitterly. "Let us send no more petitions to the Diet," he added, "it is deaf! Let us appeal to the nation: it will hear!"

Then he wrote his "Talpra Magyar!"⁴⁸

[48] "Up! Magyar, up!"

Early in the morning we assembled in my room by lamplight. There were four of us—Petöfi, Paul Vasváry, Julius Bulyovszky, and myself. My companions entrusted me with the drawing up of the Pest Articles in a short popular form intelligible to everybody. While I was thus occupied, they were disputing about what should happen next. The most violent of them was Paul Vasváry, who had the figure of a mighty young athlete. In his hand was a sword-stick with a horn handle, which he was flourishing about in a martial manner, when, all at once, the jolted stiletto flew from its case, and turning a somersault, flew through the air over my head and struck the wall.

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"A lucky omen!" cried Petöfi.

The proclamation was ready. We hastened into the street. We said nothing to Madame Petöfi. Every one of us had arms of some sort. I pocketed the famous duplex pistol already mentioned.

Every one knows *ad nauseam* what followed—how the human avalanche began to move, how it grew, and what speeches we made in the great square. But speech-making was not sufficient, we wanted to *do* something. The first thing to be done was to give practical application to the doctrine of a free press. We resolved to print the Twelve Articles of Pest, the Proclamation, and the "Talpra Magyar" without the consent of the censor.

The printing press of Landerer and Heckenast was honoured with this compulsory distinction. The printers were naturally not justified in printing anything without permission from the authorities, so we turned up our sleeves and worked away at the hand-presses ourselves. The name of the typesetter who set up the first word of freedom was *Potemkin*.

While Irinyi and other young authors were working away at the press, it was my duty to harangue the mob that thronged the whole length of Hatváni Street. I had no idea how to set about it, but it came of its own accord.

My worthy and loyal contemporary, Paul Szontagh, occasionally quotes to me, even now, some of the heaven-storming phrases which he heard me say on that occasion; *e.g.*, "... No! fellow-citizens; he is not the true hero who can *die* for his country; he who can *slay* for his country, he is the true hero!"

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That was the sort of oratory I used to practise in those days!

Meanwhile the rain began to fall, and rain is the most reactionary opponent of every revolution. But my people were not to be dispersed by the rain, and all at once the whole street was filled with expanded umbrellas.

"What! gentlemen," thundered I from the corner of the street, "if you stick up your umbrellas now against mere rain-drops, what will you stick up against the bullets which will presently begin to fall?"

It was only then that I noticed that there were not only gentlemen around me but ladies also. A pair of them had insinuated themselves close to my side. In one of them I recognised "Queen Gertrude."⁴⁹ On her head she wore a plumed cap, and was wrapped up in a Persian shawl embroidered with palm-tree flowers. Both cap and shawl were dripping with rain. I had met the lady once or twice at the Szigligetis'. I exhorted the ladies to go home; here they would get dripping-wet, I said, and some other accident might befall them.

[49] *i.e.*, the actress who took that part.

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"We are no worse off here than you are," was the reply.

They were determined to wait till the printed broad-sides were ready.

Not very long afterwards Irinyi appeared at the window of the printing-office, for to get out of the door was a sheer impossibility. He held in his hands the first printed sheets from the free press.

Ah, that scene! when the very first free sheets were distributed from hand to hand! I cannot describe it. "Freedom, freedom!" It was the first ray of a new and better era!... A free press! the first-fruit of the universal tree of knowledge of Paradise. What a tumult arose when they actually clutched that forbidden fruit in their hands.... Hail to thee, O Freedom of the Press! Thou seven-

headed dragon, how many times hast thou not bitten me since then! Yet I bless the hour when I first saw thee creep out of thy egg and gave thee what little help I could!

Young authors, clerks, advocates, all hot-headed young people, crowded around the invisible banner.

A young county official was now seen forcing his way through the dense crowd right to the very door of the printing-office, and from thence he addressed me. The influential Vice-Lieutenant of the County, Paul Nyáry, sent word to me that I was to go to him to the town hall.

"Why *should* I go?" cried I from my point of vantage. "I'll be shot down with cannon-balls rather! If the Vice-Lieutenant of the County wants to speak to us, let him come here. We are the 'mountain' now." [Pg 123]

And Mohammed really did come to the "mountain," and with him came a group of grave-faced men, the veteran leaders of the camp of freedom.

Amongst them was a dwarfish little oddity of a man, the assistant editor of the *Eletképek*, the gallant little Sükey, who, despite a chronic asthma, fought through the whole campaign, musket in hand. Besides being a cripple, he was a really extraordinary stammerer. When he saw the grave-visaged men making their way to us through the crowd, he scrambled along beside them, and with all the force of his lungs bellowed out this notable declaration: "D-d-d-don't li-li-li-listen to those wi-wi-wi-wiseacres!"

But the wiseacres hadn't come to convert us to wisdom. On the contrary, Nyáry had come to approve of what we had done hitherto, and then to go together with us to the town hall, that they might there, together with the town councillors, ratify the Articles of the liberal programme.

It was a fine scene. The town hall was crammed to suffocation. Those who were called upon to speak stood upon the green table, and remained there afterwards, so that at last the whole magistracy of the county, and I and all my colleagues were standing on the top of the table. The flames spread! The burgomaster, the worthy Rotterbiller, announced from the balcony of the town hall, that the town of Pest had adopted the Twelve Articles as its own; and with that the avalanche carried the whole of the burgesses along with it. But the matter did not end even there. In the evening crowds of workmen inundated the streets. They had got from somewhere or other a banner, inscribed with the three sacred words, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!" [Pg 124]

... Such a great day must needs have a brilliant close, so the town was illuminated in the evening, and a free performance was given at the theatre, *Bánk-bán*⁵⁰ being the piece selected. But the mob, which by this time was in a state of ecstasy, had no longer the patience to listen to the pious declamations of Ban Peter. It called for "Talpra Magyar."

[50] Joseph Katona's celebrated tragedy.

What was to be done? The brilliant court of King Andrew II., with the Queen and Bánk-bán to boot, had to stand aside and form a group round Gabriel Egressy, who, in a simple attila, with a sword by his side, stood in the middle of the stage and declaimed with magnificent emphasis Petöfi's inspiring poem.

That was all very well, but it was not enough.

Then the whole company sang the "Szózat," and the people in the pit and the galleries joined in.

That also was soon over.

What shall we give next? [Pg 125]

The band struck up the Rákóczy⁵¹ march. That kindled the excitement, instead of extinguishing it. And it was high time that something should be done to quench it, for the excited populace was drunk with triumph.

[51] Prohibited in Hungary at this time as being of revolutionary tendency.

Then a voice from the gallery cried: "Long live Tánctsis!"⁵²

[52] Michal Tánctsis, a prisoner who had been released from the citadel of Buda the same morning by the mob.

And with that the whole populace suddenly roared with one voice: "Let us see Tánctsis!"

A frightful tumult arose. Tánctsis was not at hand. He lived some way out in the suburb of Ferenczváros. But even had he been near, it would have been a cruel thing to have dragged on the stage a worn-out invalid, that he might merely bow to the public like a celebrated musician.

But what was to be done?

"Well, my sons," said Nyáry, with whom I was standing in the same box, "you have awakened this great monster, now see if you can put him to sleep again!"

My young friends attempted to address the people one after the other, Petöfi from the Academy box, Irinyi from the balcony of the Casino club, but their voices were drowned in the howling of the mob. The curtain was let down, but then the tumult was worse than ever; the gallery stamped like mad; it was a perfect pandemonium. [Pg 126]

Then a thought occurred to me. I could get on to the stage from Nyáry's box; I rushed in through the side wings.

I cut a pretty figure I must say. I was splashed up to the knees with mud from scouring the streets all day. I wore huge, dirty overshoes, my tall hat was drenched, so that I could easily have made a crush-hat of it and carried it under my arm.

I looked around me and perceived Egressy. I told him to draw up the curtain, I wanted to harangue the people from the stage.

Then "Queen Gertrude" came towards me. She smiled upon me with truly majestic grace, greeted me and pressed my hand. No sign of fear was to be seen in her face. She was wearing the tricoloured cockade⁵³ on her bosom, and, of her own accord, she took it off and pinned it on my breast. Then the curtain was raised.

[53] Red, white, and green, the Hungarian colours.

When the mob beheld my drenched and muddy figure, it began to shout afresh, and the uproar gradually became a call for every one to hear me. When at last I was able to make my voice heard, I came out with the following oratorical masterpiece: "Brother citizens! our friend Táncsis is not here. He is at home in the bosom of his family. Allow the poor blind man to taste the joy of *seeing* his family once more!"

It was only then that I felt I was talking nonsense. How could a "*blind* man" *see* his family? If the mob began to laugh I should be done for! [Pg 127]

It was the tricoloured ribbon that saved me.

"Do you see," I cried, "this tricoloured cockade on my breast? Let it be the badge of this glorious day! Let every man who is Freedom's warrior wear it; it will distinguish us from the hireling host of slavery! These three colours represent the three sacred words: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity! Let every one in whom Hungarian blood and a free spirit burns wear them on his breast."

And so the thing was done.

The tricoloured cockade preserved order. Whoever wished to pin on the tricoloured cockade had to hurry home first. Ten minutes later the theatre was empty, and next day the tricoloured cockade was to be seen on every breast, from the paletots of the members of the Casino⁵⁴ to the buckram of the populace, and those who went about with mantles on wore the cockade in their hats.

[54] The Nobles' club.

In the intoxication of my triumph I hastened after Rosa Laborfalvy as soon as this scene was over, and pressed her hand.

With that pressure of our hands our engagement began.

I have recorded the whole of this episode in order to explain how it was that *that* portrait found its way to my table, which was able to convert in an instant the smiling face of the lady with the eyes like the sea into the hideous features of Iblis. Four months had passed away since then. [Pg 128]

And the honeymoon was in keeping with the engagement. The roar of cannon and the clash of swords was the music that played at my wedding.

Oh what a marriage night was that!

At the very moment when the happy bridegroom asks his bride, "Dost thou love me as I love thee?" at that very moment there is the roll of drums in the streets, and the cry goes forth, "To arms, citizens!" An Italian regiment had revolted against the Hungarian Government. Without waiting for a kiss or an embrace, I had to snatch up my musket and hurry off to the place of meeting, and thence to go straight into fire among the flying bullets. We had to storm the Károly Barracks. By dawn the mutinous regiment had to lay down its weapons, and the bridegroom, with his face sooty with smoke, returned home, and again put the question to his bride, "Dost thou love me as I love thee?"

And the answer? Ah! the heart alone can feel it, the lips cannot express it.

That was our honeymoon. With the shame of lost battles in our hearts, and despairing even of divine justice, those who can love under such circumstances must love dearly indeed!

And then out into the desolate world, in the midst of a Siberian winter, with everything crackling with cold in a night lit only by the blaze of artillery, forcing one's way along through the snowy deserts of the Alföld⁵⁵ with the retreating Honved⁵⁶ army! Passing the night in an inhospitable hut where the closed door had frozen to the ground by morning, and the roll of drums and the blare of trumpets aroused us to toil on still farther! Those who can love under such circumstances must love indeed! [Pg 129]

[55] The low-land. The name given to the great Hungarian plain.

[56] Defending the country. The title of the Hungarian national forces.

My wife went everywhere with me.

She quitted a comfortable home, sacrificed a fortune, a brilliant career, to endure hunger, cold, and hardship with me. And I never heard her utter one word of complaint. When I was downhearted, she comforted me. And when all *my* hopes were stifled, she shared *her* hopes with me. At the new seat of the Hungarian Government, Debreczin, we were huddled together in a tiny little room, compared with which the hut of Peter Gyuricza was a palace from the *Thousand-and-one Nights*. And my queen worked like a slave, like the wife of a Siberian convict. She worked not for a joke, not in sheer defiance; she did not *play the part* of a peasant girl, she was a serving-woman in grim earnest.

The hazard of the die of war changed. We advanced. We marched in triumph from one battle-field to another. I was present at the storming of the citadel of Buda. Even in those awful days she never left me, when every night the sky seemed about to plunge down upon our heads.

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The brilliant days of triumph were again succeeded by misfortune. The Northern ogre⁵⁷ threw all his legions upon us. Again we had to fly, to leave our happy hut, and continue our marriage tour through desolate wildernesses, where savage hordes had devastated whole villages. Our night's lodging was four bare sooty walls, our couch a bundle of charred straw. Hated by strangers, feared by acquaintances, we were a terror to the people from whom we begged a shelter.

[57] Pastliewich, by command of the Tzar, invaded Hungary in 1849, with 100,000 men.

The chaos of war finally parted us. I insisted that she should remain away from me. I could not endure to see her suffering any longer. It was not right that I should accept such sacrifices. I bade her leave me to meet my fate alone.

After the catastrophe of Vilagós⁵⁸ my life was ended. That mighty giant, the famous Hungary of our dreams, collapsed into atoms: her great men became grains of dust.

[58] When the Hungarian Commander-in-chief finally capitulated to the Russians.

I also became a nameless, weightless, aimless grain of dust.

The end of all things had arrived. The prophecy of the lady with the eyes like the sea lay literally fulfilled before me. Either the gibbet or suicide was to be my fate. I was twenty-four years of age, and a dead man. My former chief, the brave Catonian, Joseph Molnar, the president of the national court martial, had set me the example. He lay before me on the sword of Vilagós, slain by his own hand. The last hussar breaking his sword was a spectacle he could not bear to survive. Then it was that a burning hand seized my hand. It was hers, the hand of the woman who loved me. When all was lost, her love was not lost. She came after me. She took me with her. She set me free. When all Hungary was already subdued, there was still one corner in our native land where the hand of authority never came. She discovered that corner, and led me thither with her through every hostile camp.

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That was "the woman who went along with me."

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CHAPTER X

WHERE THE WORLD IS WALLED UP

It required quite a strategical combination to transport me from the town of Vilagós to where the world is boarded up.

This place was selected for me by my wife while she was already in Pest, whence on the approach of the catastrophe she set out from home on a peasant's car to seek me up and down the kingdom. For a time she travelled with the wife of Alexander Körösy, who set her on my track. At the storming of Szegedin we were all within an ace of being blown into the air by the explosion of a powder magazine.

It was a little village called Tordona, deep in the beech forests of Borsod, the name of which was not even to be found on the chart of Francis Karacs.⁵⁹ Here the celebrated comedian and scene-painter of the National Theatre, Telepi, had built a house with the intention of seeking an asylum there with his family in troublous times. When the Russians came, he sent thither his wife and his son Charles, who was then a young artist student. Telepi gave my wife this sage piece of advice. "When the bottom of the world falls out, take your husband where nobody will find him." Tordona had taken no part in the Revolution.... The journey was quite an Odyssey. In a small covered peasant's car a lady conveys water-melons to market; the coachman and the footman sit in front together. The footman is myself, the coachman János Rákóczy, who only the day before was Kossuth's secretary. The price of water-melons was a silver *tizes*⁶⁰ a-piece. Our heads were not worth so much as that. The way from Vilagós to Bekes-Gyula is long, and the whole way we were going straight towards the advancing Russian host. Cossacks, lancers, infantry, artillery, gun-carriages, met us at every step, and yet nobody asked us the price of those melons or the price of those heads. It was only the two splendid horses in front of our car which might have raised suspicions that we were not itinerant market-gardeners, although Rákóczy wore the genuine blue livery of a coachman. When we got into the domain of swamp and rushes, a mounted *betvár*⁶¹

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took us under his protection, and guarded us along paths where a carriage had never yet gone, where our horses repeatedly waded up to their breasts in water, till we fought our way through into the endless plain. He would take nothing from us but a "God bless you!"

[59] The first Hungarian engraver (1769-1838). His celebrated map of Hungary was first published in 1813.

[60] The tenth of a florin.

[61] A peasant drover.

Our dear friend János Rákóczy, as an old country gentleman, was a capital coachman so long as he had only to guide the horses, but that part of the stableman's science which deals with harnessing and unharnessing he had never learnt. So when we came to a place in the sweltering heat of the dog-days after a long drive through the vast plain, the very first thing he did was to let the unharnessed horses immediately drink their fill at the spring, and then tie them up in the stable, in consequence of which the shaft horse caught inflammation of the lungs, and expired an hour afterwards. The saddle horse survived as by a miracle. Instead of the deceased horse, therefore, we had to harness another nag, which we picked up on the road for 100 florins. This new horse was a hand and a half smaller than the steed that still remained with us. With this slap-dash team nobody would have taken us any longer for gentry.

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We had still to pass through Miskolcz, where the Russians were encamping. Here dwelt my wife's father, the wise and worthy professor Benke Laborfalvy. He pointed out to us the road which led into Tordona. Five hours long we penetrated through dense forests: not a human dwelling place, not a beaten tract was to be seen. A stream cut through the winding valley and along its bank, shifting now to the right hand and now to the left, a sort of path wound its way naturally, without anything like a bridge; for the convenience of foot passengers, huge stones at irregular intervals had been cast into the bed of the racing stream. There, in a deeply hidden, delightful valley, lay the little spot which is walled off from the world.

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My wife and I descended at the Telepi's house and were heartily welcomed by our worthy hostess. Rákóczy, with his equipage, had to be lodged in another house. Madame Telepi's brother, my tenderly remembered good friend, the worthy Béni Csányi, dwelt in a house a little farther off. It was he who stabled the horses. Later on I joined him.

He was really a model of a "small country gentleman," such as they ought to be nowadays. An accomplished, intelligent man, speaking, besides his own language, Latin and German, with a thorough knowledge of the law, for which he had been trained, and who, for all that, now went out and ploughed his own land with the aid of a man-servant. He ate his home-made bread, drank his home-brewed wine, welcomed guests with all his heart, and slew a sheep or a pig in their honour. His wife baked and brewed, led the way at the spindle, and sewed her children's clothes with her own hand. They had three sons, and the little money that flowed into the domestic coffers was spent in the schooling of the children. Csányi never borrows, and owes no man anything. His work-room is a joiner and wheelwright's shed; when anything breaks in the wagon he mends it himself: it is his pet pastime. He has a library also, full of such books as Sir Walter Scott's historical work on the French Revolutionary Wars. Newspapers he never reads. If, again, a poem pleases him, he learns it by heart, and passes it on further by word of mouth. He never goes to law with his neighbour, and when two fall out he makes peace between them. But when the cry goes forth, "The fatherland is in danger! Let us make sacrifices for the commonweal!" then he cuts the large silver buttons off his mantle, and lays them on the altar of his country.

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I owe it for the most part to this worthy man that I did not lose my reason altogether in these hard times.

Thus we arrived hither. I was saved. I was no longer a dead man. I lived.

But what sort of a life was it? It was the sort of life which belongs to a new-born babe: absolute inability to help one's self. Rákóczy quitted us on the following day. He was off to the Carpathians. There he took service as coachman (naturally under an assumed name) in the family of a wealthy territorial Count. They were more than contented with him, for he was an excellent and honest coachman. But one day a strange misadventure befell him. He was taking the Count and his brother-in-law out for a drive, when the gentleman began talking of the era of Louis XIV., and one of them could not call to mind the name of a celebrated statesman of those days. Then the coachman could not help turning round towards them, and saying, "Colbert!" The Counts immediately dismounted from the coach and went home on foot. The learned coachman, however, was discharged. It is not good to sleep under the same roof with a coachman who knows so much.

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My wife and I agreed that *she* should return to Pest and resume her engagement at the National Theatre there till I should get back my patrimony. Then we would purchase a little property in the depths of the beech forest, close to Béni Csányi, and plough and sow to the end of our days. What else *could* we do? Our country, our nation, our liberty were now no more. Our souls had no wings. We stuck fast in the mire.

On the very anniversary of our wedding, which was my wife's birthday as well, we parted. Our wedding tour had lasted exactly a year. I wish nobody such another, but I would not exchange all the joys in the world for the recollection of it.

I remained behind in a vast primeval forest, entombed, forgotten.

The latest rumours I got from worthy Béni Csányi, who had taken my wife to Pest, driving his four horses himself all the way from his stable door to the capital. They were evil times there. Haynau had appropriated even the National Theatre for the German players. But the director, worthy János Simoncsics, formerly a Conservative celebrity, protested against the proceedings of the high-handed tyrant, and when Haynau began to haggle with the stiff-necked old magistrate as to how many days a week he would allow the German players to act in the Hungarian National Theatre, brave old Simoncsics replied in his own peculiar Buda-German: "Wen i reden *musz*, so sag i: amol; wen i reden *darf*, so sag i: komol."⁶² And "komol"⁶³ it remained.

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[62] If I *must* speak: once; if I *may* speak: not at all.

[63] Not once.

My wife counselled me not to write to her through the post-office, as the whole town was full of spies. When she wrote to me she would send the letter to her father at Miskolcz, directed to Judith Benke.

Even now I often draw out those *love-letters* which were written to me and began "My dear Juczi."⁶⁴ Even now they light up that endless darkness which I call the *cancelled* portion of my life.

[64] Contraction for Judith.

From August to the middle of October I knew absolutely nothing of what was going on in the world.

It was a corner of the earth where no visitor ever came, and where the inhabitants themselves went nowhere. Now that winter was approaching, there would be a sledge drive, and communications would be opened up between Tordona and Miskolcz. Then one would be able to convey timber into the town. Of timber there was no lack. Csányi had four hundred acres of virgin forest to forty acres of arable land.

Day after day I rambled up and down these forests that had never heard the voice of man. Never did I meet a fellow creature. However many heights I might ascend, I saw from thence nothing but the smoking chimneys of Tordona. I discovered the source of the stream that sped through the valley. "Linden-spring" was the name they gave it. It was entirely circled by lindens. I hit upon the childish sport of cutting a water-mill out of elder-tree wood, piecing it together, and placing it across the little stream. Thus I amused myself.

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One day I received a box of water-colours from my wife. I was immensely delighted. I now had something to occupy myself with all day. I filled a whole album with my landscapes. Then I painted that journey through the plain with a horse and a half in the covered car. I painted my own portrait on a piece of paper no bigger than a finger-nail, which could be inserted in a medallion. I sent it to my wife. Béni Csányi's wife asked me to paint her a portrait of her "old man" also. She wanted it about the size of a kidney bean; she had a medallion just as large as that. This was my only work in that terrible year.

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CHAPTER XI

VALENTINE BÁLVÁNYOSSI AND TIHAMÉR RENGETEGI

When the beech-mast began to fall from the trees in the beginning of October, unexpected guests came to us at Tordona—two country gentlemen from the beechwood district. They were kinsmen keeping house together, whose whole estate consisted of forest, and whose whole economy was an enormous herd of swine. They were both jolly thick-set men, with fur pelisses of nicely embroidered sheepskins, and boots of red Russian leather. They had come to rent the beech-mast district in the Tordona forests. Pig just then was an article not quoted in the market. Hungarian money there was none. It had all been destroyed. German money had not yet been introduced. Pig-rearers were therefore obliged to let their herds go into winter quarters. The pigs in question were really fine fellows of the good old Szalonta breed, with legs as long as stags', red bristles and pointed ears; they were half-savage beasts, too, who faced the wolf instead of fleeing from him. They develop but slowly, however; only after two years' time do they become as large as the Mangalicza swine. But they more than atone for this fault by the good quality of wanting neither stall nor sty; winter and summer alike they camp out in the woods and seek their own food, thus costing their masters no more than two florins a head, and three pints of *palinka*,⁶⁵ which is the perquisite of the swine-herd. Each of these kinsmen had a thousand of such pigs.

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[65] Hungarian brandy.

And a thousand pigs give a man a lot to think about.

They were good, genial fellows. In fact, they knew not what melancholy meant. It was now the season when the new wine was beginning to ferment. The two kinsmen used to drink it in that state, and I joined them. It went very well with well-peppered swine stew.

They brought a new song with them also, and I learnt it.

"The milk-pail stood behind the door,
The Gendarme came, flopped in and swore!
Dárum-madárum, dárum-madárum!"

From this song I gathered that there was now a being in the world called Gendarme,⁶⁶ and also that the Magyars had no very great affection for him.

[66] *Zsandar*. The name as well as the thing was quite new to Hungary.—Tr.

It was only after supper that the guests began to give me to understand that they did not yet know "whom they had the honour of addressing."

My worthy host constrained his honest features, and introduced me under the pseudonym by which I was known in the village, "Mr. Albert Benke."

"Surely not the actress Rosa Laborfalvy's younger brother, Bebus?"

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"Yes, Bebus! the very same."

(That might pass very well. Poor Bebus! he had perished in some out-of-the-way corner during the war.)

"Why, I knew him quite well! I have a lively recollection of his features. Why, 'tis Bebus, of course! And how's your sister? Is it true that she's married?"

"So I have heard."

"To a certain Maurus Jókai, eh? Do you know him?"

"I have never spoken to him."

(And this was quite true.)

"You were one of those theatre-fellows, too, I understand?"

"Yes, I was an actor, certainly."

"I saw you once at Miskolcz. What were you playing then?"

"Claude Frolló in the *Tower of Notre Dame*."

"And won't you join some other company now?"

"I don't know whether there is one to be found."

"What! There is a troupe all ready at Miskolcz at the present moment. They mean to play at the new theatre during the coming winter, and then they are going to Kassa. Bálványossi wants to put new blood into his company. You know the director, Valentine Bálványossi, don't you?"

I was just on the point of blurting out that he was from the same birthplace as myself. He was, in fact, the person who had coached Bessy in the *rôle* which she had to play with me in our second dramatic entertainment. All I *did* say, however, was that I knew him by report.

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"Anyhow, he knows you very well. He asks frequently about you. If he only knew that you were loafing about here he would certainly come and see you."

It only needed that!

"I was not aware that he was able to collect together another troupe."

"Oh dear, yes! Why, he's got a prima donna now. She is his wife also. Such a bonny little bride! She'll turn the heads of all the young fellows, I know. But you're in hiding here, are you not?"

"In hiding?"

"Yes, and I tell you what—*entre nous*, of course—Bálványossi also has reason to make himself scarce."

"Why?"

"Why, because he played such a great part in the Revolution."

"I never heard anything about it."

"Ah! but he might have been a famous man without *your* hearing anything about it. You also were a comedian during the Revolution, weren't you?"

I allowed him to suppose so.

Then the second kinsman took up his parable. He was better informed than the first one.

"Let me make things clear to you, *amice*! During the Revolution, the theatre director, Valentine Bálványossi, acted under the name of Tihamér Rengetegi."

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"Ah! yes, of course, I remember the name."

"Many a nut has he cracked beneath the very noses of the Germans."

The other kinsman confirmed the statement.

"If they can only catch him they'll make the wind cool his heels for him."

"But that theatre director is really a most knowing rogue," explained the younger kinsman, with a laugh. "During the Revolution, he entered the service of the Hungarian Government and rose to be major. They say he performed prodigies. But at the same time he took the precaution to completely alter his personal appearance. During the Revolution he dyed his beautiful fair hair a deep black, and carefully fostered a gigantic moustache with whiskers to correspond; in that guise he looked exactly like Don Cæsar de Bazan. When, however, things began to go wrong, he speedily had his hair shaved off and his beard also, and is now waiting in retirement till his original fair hair has grown again. Then he will once more come before the world as Valentine Bálványossi; and who will dare to say that there was ever such a person as Tihamér Rengetegi?"

One really must admit that it was a stroke of genius to serve the Revolution with a black-dyed head of hair!

"When he hears that you are strolling about here he will most certainly come and engage you." [Pg 145]

It was necessary to put a stop to this forthwith.

"I regret that I shall not remain here very long," I said; "I, too, have to go up to Pest."

"And what is your business at Pest?"

"I want to look out for some appointment."

At this, both the pig-Cræsus pulled a very wry face. Whoever went to Pest in those days to seek an appointment was looked upon with suspicion. It was as well to have as little as possible to do with such a person.⁶⁷

[67] It was a point of honour with every loyal Hungarian to starve rather than to accept any appointment whatsoever from the Austrian Government.—TR.

Henceforth the pair of them treated me very superciliously.

I, however, continued to go about and paint landscapes in the vast beech forests. I have those pictures by me still. What splendid *motives* I had; if only the hand of a true artist had been there to seize them! In the midst of the gloomy virgin forest lay the ruin of a Paulinian cloister—gigantic Gothic walls of grey granite; on the friezes of the pillars winged angel-heads; the pointed arches terminated in flowers, and these stone-flowers were supplemented by the living stone-rose, which grew luxuriantly between the mouldings. Behind the vast blue-shadowed ruin lay the dark beech forest; in front was a spring, which, in wondrous wise, bubbled forth from the roots of a huge prostrate linden. From the summit of the ruin depended a large and ample hazel-nut tree, the foliage of which was now a reddish-brown from the autumn frost, while from the windows the dark-green chaplets of the wild-rose tree hung down in the midst of cornel-shrubs and spindle-plants variegated with scarlet, pink, and vermilion berries. And the floor of the ruin is covered with a tangled carpet of brownish-green angelica. And there is but one single living figure in this vast and silent tableau. From the gloom of the ancient church porch a timidly glancing stag peeps forth like the mythical guiding-star of the Hunnic-Magyar pagan legends. Alas! thou white-antlered hind of our ancient leader Almos, whither hast thou led us? Would that thou hadst left us in Asia! There, at any rate, we should not have been obliged to learn German!

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And then that other picture, the mighty stone of the Holy Ghost. This was a rock as large as a tower, which rose from the edge of the table-land. Close beside it were two gigantic beech-trees, whose summits just reached up to the middle of this rock, and Autumn, that great decorative artist, had touched the leaves of one with reddish-brown, and the other with golden-yellow. On the very top of this rock are three trees rich with verdure: how did they ever get up there?

It is possible to scramble up at the risk of one's neck, and from thence one can see fresh pictures to paint. From the dizzy height of the rock a view into a deep valley opens out. The two lines of hill opposite are closed up by a curved and undulating range of other hills. The setting sun lights up the hillside, and bathes the whole scene in transparent lilac mist, while the forest fringe of the summits projects in sharply defined golden lines. Down below, the valley winds along like a dark-green ribbon, and on the spot where it is lost in the evening mist is to be seen a little hut whose kitchen fire twinkles from the depths like a blood-red star. Can any human creature be living there?

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But the most magnificent landscape-motive (in which I was happily immersed) was the panorama which presented itself from the "Precipice Stone." This "Precipice Stone" was the highest point of the beech mountain-district. Viewed from Tordona, it was like a projecting mountain-spar, but one could get to the top of it by making a long circuit. This rock was generally the goal of my wanderings. It took half a day to get there and half a day to get back, and at midday I used to kindle a fire of twigs and make a princely banquet of toasted bread and bacon; and then, sitting down on the dizzy edge of the rock, I would tackle the impossible artistic problem—at least it was impossible to me. Beneath my feet, in the foreground, was a dark spot formed by a crown of beech-trees, and where this ended there was a smiling little nook, and in the midst of it tiny, smoky, stony Tordona, with its scattered cottages, surrounded by their yellow dice-like vineyards,

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and their hills striped with green corn, above which the still darker green beech hills show their heads. Above these crowds the group of the Gömöri Hills, whose shadows are now deepening into lilac; but these again are dominated by the chain of the Trencsényi and Turoczi Hills. These hills are of a clouded blue, and above them rises, like a *fata Morgana*, the princely range of the fair Carpathians, as blue as heaven itself, and only to be distinguished from it by the dividing line of their diamond-like snowy peaks. My skill was, naturally, not equal to such a task. If I succumbed when I struggled with it, that was not my fault.

With a mighty lead-loaded oaken staff in my hand, and a sharp kitchen-knife in my roomy jack-boots, I deemed myself sufficient to cope with any wolf I might meet on the way. As for a musket, those who had them took good care to keep them well hidden. Rumour said that to be found with a musket was as much as a man's life was worth.

The middle of October had come.

Another guest now arrived at Tordona. This time it was a heartily welcome guest, the merry-minded Telepi. He had come to fetch his little Charlie that he might take him abroad for his education. He was the favourite comic actor of the National Theatre.... He had a round face, a round figure, and was all vivacity, with sparkling eyes, pointed eyebrows, and tiny pointed moustache; it was just as if he had four eyebrows and four moustaches: he was Hungarian humour personified.

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'Twas he who brought me my first news from the outside world: the horrible events of the October days, the inconceivable deeds of horror done by a madman,⁶⁸ who was not even sufficiently punished by being burned alive twice.

[68] Haynau.—An allusion to the massacre of Hungarian prisoners and the brutalities inflicted on their wives.—Tr.

Fortunately, I heard these things from a joking, smiling, devil-may-care, comic mouth! For Telepi knew how to season the tidings with so many happy anecdotes and comforting assurances that he quite turned the edge off the murderous knife. And then he was so full of optimism. "Our time is coming," he would say. "England and France are hastening to our assistance. The Turks are arming, the Americans are showing their fists." And when I shook my head at all this, he comforted me with the assurance that an amnesty was at hand.

But when we were quite alone, and nobody else was listening, then he told me everything frankly, and without embellishment.

My wife would have come herself, but she had been ailing; in fact she had been very ill. She was better now. As soon as she could leave her bed she would hasten to me at Tordona. I might expect her this very month. My wife had a plan whereby she hoped to free me completely, so that I should not be exposed to persecution any more. What it was, however, she could not tell me. She only begged *one* thing of me, but *that* she begged most earnestly, and it was this: until she came to me I was to show myself nowhere, hold no communication with anybody, let nothing be known of my whereabouts. I was not even to write a letter, for they might recognise my handwriting, and then all would be over. So I had to solemnly promise that I would go nowhere, and speak to nobody whatever but the good and honest men of Tordona. I gave my word upon it.

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My wife sent me at the same time a warm winter overcoat, a large fur cap, and a pair of double-soled Russia-leather boots. Winter was approaching, and I should have to spend it here among the forests. Telepi also brought me a little silver money from my wife, for bank-notes were of no use here. She also sent me some coffee. That, too, was not to be had here, and I am fond of it in the morning. In the course of the conversation, Telepi inadvertently let out that my wife had sold her emeralds, had gone into pokey lodgings, and was living very sparingly. "But what's the good of fretting?" he added. "The God of the Magyars is still alive!" I shall never forget that jocose, smiling face, when, in the midst of his magnanimous assurances, a tear suddenly rolled down his round, red countenance!

Then I gave all the pictures I had painted hitherto to Telepi, that he might take them home to my wife.

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CHAPTER XII

THE MEETING AT THE PAGAN ALTAR

After Telepi had gone back, a deep melancholy took possession of me.

My wife was ill, and I had never even dreamt of the possibility of such a thing. What if she were to die without being able to exchange a last adieu? She wants to set me free, she says; but how? She cannot tell me. She cannot tell anybody. Why should she have any secrets from me? Ah! that green-eyed monster is a bad guide to the imagination. A celebrated actress can so readily find protectors. Perhaps they are men in authority, who hold life and death in their hands. Oh, eternal darkness, do not deprive me of the light of my reason! Suppose I were to gain readmittance into the world at such a price as that! This condition of mind was becoming absolutely unendurable.

Sometimes the desire seized me to rush out of the forest, knock at the door of the first Commandant I came to, and give up my name: "I am that notorious rebel—take my head, I'll pay the price!"

But my given word, my word of honour, held me back. Ah! a man's word of honour must be kept, even though it be only given to his wife.

I had promised to go nowhere. But surely the forest is nowhere, and that Precipice Stone is, indeed, the most out-of-the-way nowhere in the whole world. Thither no man ever goes. Thither at least I am free to go. [Pg 152]

My first, not very successful, picture of the great panorama I had sent to my wife. I would now have another try at it.

One fine autumn morning I again took up my lead-loaded stick, and said to my dear good hostess that she was not to expect me home to dinner that day, as I was going to scramble up to the Pagan Altar and sketch there.

The gentry call this rocky pinnacle the Pagan Altar; the peasants call it the Precipice Stone.

"But don't stay long," said Mrs. Csányi; "suppose your dearest were to arrive in the meantime?"

My dearest! As if she thought of seeking me out! They only put me off with promises, just as they tell a sick child that he shall have a rocking-horse when he gets well. It was exactly seven weeks since she had left me. What an endless time!

I made my way at once towards the linden spring, and thence up the forest hill-side by the often-trodden familiar path. The nuts came showering down; the frost had already tweaked the Cornelian cherries. I crammed my knapsack full of both: I shall have a luxurious banquet to-day. I also found a large coral-coloured mushroom; roasted in embers, it would make a tit-bit worthy of a gourmet.

It was about ten o'clock when I got up to the Pagan Altar. [Pg 153]

When I went out upon the rocky ledge, a truly wondrous scene spread itself out before me; it was quite certain that I should never be able to paint it. The whole kingdom was under the sea! The autumn mist, like a snow-cloud, covered the whole landscape to the very horizon, from which towered vast snowy peaks and snowy cupolas; in other places the misty mantle resembled frozen waves, out of which here and there rose round, blackish islands, the peaks of the higher mountains. It was a faithful image of reality: nothingness. There was nothing left now.

I could calculate pretty surely on the mist descending at midday, and painting field and forest with frost; but till then I could sketch nothing.

So I lay down upon the rocky ledge, and marvelled at this motionless, huge, white winding-sheet which covered a whole realm. I had no thought of eating now. I hung up my knapsack with my bread and bacon on a spruce-fir tree, and when I had looked my fill of wonder at the sea of mist, I watched the itinerant ants who, following their regular road, crept right over my body, never troubling themselves very much about the circumstance that a giant, like a mountain range, lay right across their path.

At this height not even the thrush's whistle broke the stillness.

The sun shone down. Not a breeze was stirring. My head was resting on a large green mossy stone; I felt like dropping off to sleep. [Pg 154]

All at once, as if I really were dreaming, from somewhere not very far off a song rang out:—

"Lo! on the mountain top
A valiant man doth stand,
And on his trusty weapon rests
His stalwart good right hand."

It was a man's voice, and I seemed to recognise it.

My first feeling was joy. I was about to meet some old acquaintance in that vast wilderness. It only occurred to me afterwards that this would be contrary to my compact. I was to meet no man who could possibly recognise me.

But it was too late to avoid him now. Only one single path led up to the summit of the Precipice Stone, whether one came from Tordona or from Malyinka, and my songster was evidently coming from the latter place.

The next verse of the song sounded very much nearer:—

"Lo! on his *kalpag*⁶⁹ see
A blood-red nodding plume;
A mantle black surrounds his neck,
His wild eye lowers with gloom."

[69] The tall fur hat, generally plumed, which forms part of the Hungarian national costume.

And now I heard a woman's voice also.

Some one was telling the singer not to sing while climbing.

So there was a pair of them!

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And as the singer gradually mounted higher and higher, his figure also became visible from behind the rocky ledge.

"Presumptuous mortal, quake and fear
When thou his awful name dost hear:
Diavolo, Diavolo, Diavolo!"

Yet nobody quaked so much as Fra Diavolo himself, when he perceived a human shape stretched before him on the ground as he scaled the very summit of the rocky ledge.

And certainly I was not a very reassuring spectacle, as, with my sheepskin cap pressed closely to my head, and a large cudgel in my fist, I slowly rose from my knees.

I recognised him before he recognised me.

"Your servant, Bálványossi! Why, how did you manage to get here, where not even the bird that flies can come?"

Then his terror was turned into joy.

"Ah, ha! my poet-friend! What a divine encounter here in Heaven above!" With that he hastened up to me and we embraced.

By this time his lady companion had also got the better of the rocky zig-zag which led up to the mountain ledge.

It was now the turn of my own heart to stop beating. That female shape was Bessy—the sea-eyed beauty!

How came they two to be together? How came they to be both here at the same time?

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But it was no vision. The fair lady recognised me instantly. Her face, red already from her mountain scramble, could be no redder at the sight of me, nor could her bosom heave more than it was heaving now; but on her face there was a sort of holding-back expression.

Friend Valentine perceived the look of amazed inquiry on my face, and turning with true histrionic humour towards his lady-companion, introduced her to me with the words, "My grandmother!"

At this witticism the lady laughed, and I had sufficient self-control not to reply to this introduction with a single word.

"Then come to my bosom, my son, for I am thy grandfather."

"It is very strange we should meet here," I put in.

But my friend's features suddenly darkened as if he were obeying a stage direction like, "here he suddenly assumes a grave face."

"First of all, my dear friend," said he, "I demand your word of honour not to reveal to any one in the created world that you have seen me. You know that I am now Tihamér Rengetegi till the old blonde hair grow again (what I'm wearing now is a wig); for a heavy price is fixed upon my head. A word, and I am lost. Your *parole* that you'll say nothing about me?"

"The promise must be mutual, then," I replied. "I just as solemnly require you to say not a word to anybody about me, for I also am in hiding here." [Pg 157]

At this he began to laugh. It was a stage laugh, for he placed his hand on his stomach, crooked his back, and turned upon his heel, choking with laughter.

"And you also are hiding away here from the Germans! Well, that *is* a joke!"

I inquired somewhat brusquely what there was to laugh at.

"Why, at your hiding—hiding away from the Imperialists. You, of all people! Why, don't you know, then, that very many deputies defended themselves before the court-martials by declaring themselves the former contributors to your *Esti Lap*?⁷⁰ Why, every one knows that you were the organ of the peace party at Debreczin. Every one is well aware that you were the ally of the Imperialists."

[70] *Evening News*.

At this I at once flew into a rage.

"Have you ever seen the *Esti Lap*?"

"No, I've not actually *seen* it, but it was the general opinion among us soldiers that you were higgling with the Imperialists."

At this Bessy intervened by giving a good tug at her friend's collar.

"Rubbish! Such rumours are only circulated by pot-house heroes like yourself. He certainly was no traitor! Would that all who open their mouths so loudly were as good patriots?"

My friend, with sheepish obsequiousness, hastened to readjust his opinion to the satisfaction of his "grandmother."

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"Good, good! I never believed a word of it myself—why should I?" said he.

"The best proof that I am not what calumny would make me is the fact of my meeting you here at the Pagan Altar; and again I beg of you to tell nobody that we have met."

Here Bessy again intervened.

"I'll answer for that. I shall now be constantly at the side of this honest gentleman, and if his tongue begins to wag, my hand will be ready to stop it for him."

Mr. Valentine laughed.

"What a woman it is! She really has a most rapid hand. Not a day passes but she lets me feel the weight of her palm."

At this I made a very critical face. My good friend could read very well from it that I wished to know by what right his cheeks were allowed to feel the force of Bessy's rosy palms day by day.

"We met together in camp, and the field-chaplain blessed our union to the roaring of guns and the beating of drums."

That was right enough, surely!

Bessy's eyes were raised towards me as if she could add a great deal to this short history. Friend Valentine thought it good to become loudly enthusiastic.

"What a woman, my friend! A heroine! A perfect Jeanne d'Arc! We were bound together by a whole chain of wonders and exploits. She was not my consort—nay! she was much more, my companion in arms. I'll tell you the whole thing one of these days."

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"That will do...."

"What? That will do? Are you, then, so poor-spirited? I am ready to meet the spectres of the darkness face to face. I'll set in motion the avalanche which shall wrench the world from its hinges."

I left him to set his avalanche in motion while I went to gather dry twigs and leaves and make a heap of them. Meanwhile Valentine declaimed to the clouds.

"What a spectacle! The whole realm a sea! We stand alone, like the co-operating Demiurges at the creation, in the face of chaos."

"Have you got your troupe together?" I inquired, thus bringing him down at once from his pedestal.

"My troupe? That's just what I am going about now. Brutus must play the fool until his day has come. But when once the hour of retribution arrives, we will rise as one man and win back our outraged liberties."

"With my bludgeon, I suppose?"

"Oh, not with that sort of thing," said friend Valentine, with haughty condescension. "I have no secret to hide from you. An American hero of freedom has invented a weapon which, placed in the hand of a simple citizen, will give him an irresistible advantage over the hireling soldiery. Its English name is 'revolver.' I have one by me. Thanks to my acquaintances beyond the ocean, I have managed to provide myself with it. Look here!"

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With that he produced from his side pocket a pistol, the like of which I had never seen before. It was the Colt revolver, for discharging five shots. You loaded it in front, and with this object in view, you had to shove out the cartridge cylinder and sprinkle powder out of the powder-flask in every loop-hole; at the end of the bullet was a nail, which had to be made firm with a cork-stopper, then the bullet had to be driven into the barrel by means of a hammer and ramrod, then the cartridge cylinder had to be fastened down again into its place, and pyramids of priming powder piled on the top of it—while the enemy was supposed to be looking on all the time and watching good-naturedly to see what would come of it all.

Friend Valentine had immense confidence in his wondrous firearm.

"You can see that I am prepared for every conceivable emergency. My faith, I will sell my life dearly! I may tell *you*, for you will not betray me. Beneath this Pagan Altar is a cave, the existence of which is known only to the initiated. I have selected it for my hiding-place. When the chase against me begins, and a whole brigade of gendarmes marches out to seize me, I will creep into this cave; victuals and brandy for a whole week are already there for me; let them riot round me then as they like."

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I could not help laughing at these wise precautions. But friend Valentine's explanations became

still more fiery.

"My friend! a single narrow little path leads to this cave. The bears used possibly to resort thither in the days when bears camped in the beech districts. If they attempt to storm me there, I can defend myself with this revolver against a whole host."

All this time I had been employed in piling up a nice little heap of dry twigs and leaves, which I now set on fire with my flint and steel.

Friend Valentine caught me nervously by the hand.

"What are you doing, my friend?"

"Lighting a fire, my friend."

"Why, my friend?"

"To cook bacon with, my friend."

"They will see the blaze of our fire from below."

"How *can* they see when the mist is so thick there?"

He admitted that I was right, and allowed me to ignite my heap, which immediately began to crackle merrily.

Meanwhile, friend Valentine went and stood on the edge of the Precipice Stone to watch the mist, and from time to time informed me of the changes of scene that were going on: now the mists were beginning to break, now they were rising, the houses would be visible almost immediately. [Pg 162]

And all the time I was toasting slices of bread by the fire, and after that slices of bacon, allowing the bacon fat to drip gradually down and soak through the toast with a deftness that would have done honour to a professional cook.

Bessy took it into her head to follow my example.

"Give me the bread and bacon out of the knapsack," said she to Valentine.

"But what necessity for it is there now?"

"I must have it at once."

And with that she went up to him and began rummaging in the knapsack.

"Why, what a prosaic nature is yours!" said Valentine reproachfully to the lady. "At such a sublime moment, too, in the presence of such a glorious spectacle! Just look at that magnificent scene! The whole of the cloud of mist is rising like a stage curtain. The gigantic theatre appears like magic from behind the hanging cloudy tapestries. Behold the sunlit heights, the white shimmering houses. And now a fresh mountain-chain emerges crowned with dim forests. Just as if they were of massive gold..."

"Give me the bacon, I say."

"My heart, my blood is thine, but ask me not for bacon! Look how the earth rises up before us; nothing but mountains, mountains, mountains! Still nothing to be seen of the dome of Heaven! And that deep divine calm around us! Only from the distant forge resounds the measured thud of the sledge hammer, as though one heard the throbbing of the heart of the universe! And does not thine own heart beat faster in this sublime place?" [Pg 163]

"It throbs, it throbs! Right sorely does it throb! But we'll look at the august spectacle a little later."

"What! Not look when an instant like this is worth a world?"

The natural phenomenon before us really was very fine, as the whole misty cloud rose swiftly from the mountains, covering with a deep shadow the sky that up to that moment had been shining bright and blue before us, and at the same time unfolding before us the muffled panorama of hill behind hill beneath our feet; the solar rays, like the broad diverging spokes of a huge wheel, shot down from the cloudy rifts with a milky sort of glare. It would really have been a majestic scene but for the false, disturbing pathos of friend Valentine.

"Nay, nay! I cannot view it standing on my feet! Here one should go down upon one's knees. Here the gods themselves walk abroad!"

Valentine plumped down upon his knees, and because Bessy would not follow his example, he wound his arm around her and clasped her to his breast. She, however, was impatient at his insipid vapourings.

"You are just like that professor," said she, "who held up his oil-lamp against the moon that his guests might see her better." [Pg 164]

"Elizabeth!" sighed the Celadon bitterly (Bessy was a name which could not be emphasized with sighs so well as Elizabeth), "dost thou not remember that solemn moment when we said to one another, 'How sweet it would be to die together this instant'? Has not our common friend said (here he looked at me), 'A good death is better than a bad life'? Come, let us verify that saying:

wrapped in each other's embrace, heart throbbing responsive to heart, a dizziness, a plunge forward from this rock, and then a delicious flight whose goal will be the stars!"

"Go away with you! Don't make a fool of yourself! I have no wish to plunge into Heaven!"

"But I'll bear thee thither with me like a Valkyrian. And thou, my friend, wilt immortalize our final catastrophe in a heroic ballad."

And with that he seized the lady by the arm, and rushed with her upon the steep rocky ledge.

"Hast thou said thy prayers to-day, Desdemona?"

Bessy looked towards me with a timid look. I pretended to observe nothing. What had I to do with these amorous passages? I was frizzling bacon.

"Dost thou doubt me capable of dying with thee at this moment?" cried Valentine Bálványossi, with his wig awry over his eyes.

Then the lady cried with a supplicating voice: "Nay; but help me, dear Maurice!"

"Very well, I *will* help you," thought I; "I did it once before, so you say. Poets have long arms." [Pg 165]

"Friend Valentine," said I, without rising from my squatting position beside the frizzling bacon, "don't you see those two men with muskets coming up this way along the mountain path?"

"Wha-a-at, two m-m-men with mus-us-kets?" said the hero, his rumbling bass-baritone voice suddenly dwindling into a piping treble. "Where are they?" All his longing for death had instantly vanished, and he immediately released his victim from his embrace.

I indicated the approaching strangers with my toasting-fork. "There!"

Then he also saw them.

"Br-r-rother, those are gend-end-end-arnes!"

"Possibly they *are* gend-end-arnes, for there are two of them."

"Put out the fire at once!"

"I would if I could, but I can't now. And if I did, what good would that do? They have seen it already."

"I told you not to make a fire here."

But now Bessy turned furiously upon him.

"It is your stagey spouting that has saddled us with them. What business had you to go declaiming on the mountain tops? The people fancy you are murdering some one."

"They are coming straight towards us," gasped friend Valentine. "If they get hold of me, I am lost."

I tried to reassure him: "Come, come! recollect there are two of us; with my loaded cudgel and your revolver we shall offer a stubborn resistance." [Pg 166]

"Br-r-other, they have guns which hit at four hundred yards, while my revolver has only a range of thirty, and it doesn't always hit the mark even then. We cannot risk so much. It is quite another thing when I am in the dark cave, and they are out in the light, for then I can see them, but they can't see me."

"Then you'll hide away in your cave, I suppose?"

"Oh, not for my own life's sake, but for the sake of my country, whose fate I carry in my bosom. The heels of my boots are full of secret despatches from England and Turkey. I am not free to stake everything so lightly."

"Well, go and hide yourself, by all means!"

But then Bessy put in a word: "'Tis all very well, but what's to become of me. I cannot crawl on all fours into your big bear-garden."

"Nor would I allow it. Is not our common friend here? He will remain here. *You* will not run away, will you? I am sure they don't know you. Your portrait has appeared nowhere, but mine has gone from hand to hand. A full description of my personal appearance flutters at every street corner. If they come, say that it was you who kicked up that row; say that she is your wife."

"I won't say that."

"Then do what you like. I rely upon you, mind!" [Pg 167]

"That's all very well," cried Bessy peevishly, "but what will happen afterwards? If you remain in your hole, and our good friend goes home, what am I to do all alone here by myself on the top of a rock? I shall never find my way home through this wood."

Then my friend, with cheap generosity, made this magnanimous offer:—

"Dear friend, take her home with you."

So that was to be the *dénouement* of this odd drama!

"No, my magnanimous friend. Not so! You go and reserve yourself for posterity. We two will remain here. One of two things is bound to happen. If those two men, armed with muskets, find me painting pictures in my album, they will believe either that I am a simple painter (they know that Károly Telepi is wandering about on a sketching tour here, and they'll take me for him, and Bessy for—my sister); or they'll not believe anything of the kind, and in that case they'll escort us both to Miskolcz. In the latter case you need have no fear of turning back. If, on the other hand, after the lapse of a few hours, you creep out of your cave and see me sitting as before, on the rocky ledge, and peaceably continuing my sketching, then you will know that the armed invasion has passed on further, and you can come back again to the Lady Elizabeth. Then I'll give you my blessing, and we'll return from whence we came—you to the east, I to the west."

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With this he was satisfied.

"But don't betray me!" he murmured, casting a terrified look upon us; "even though they hale you off to the block, don't say where I am."

I gave him my word of honour that not even the Spanish boot should extort his secret from me, whereupon he went gingerly down upon all fours, scrambled up the rocky summit by the corkscrew path, and vanished among the bushes.

"Ugh! I only wish he hadn't taken the bread and bacon along with him!" lamented the girl he left behind him.

"I'll share mine with you; there's enough for two."

And with that I seized my crooked clasp-knife, cut the slice of bread in two, minced the bacon into little bits, and sprinkled it with salt and pepper.

Nor was that all. I rubbed both sides of the toasted bacon with a knob of garlic. It was a sort of Oriental language of flowers. I meant to remind her that her ideal of a man was one who did not rinse his mouth after eating garlic.

Thus we were alone on the summit of the Pagan Altar, crouching together beside a fire of burning embers, and dividing a piece of toast and a slice of bacon—I and the former mistress of my heart.

That "former" was not so very long ago. It was scarcely three years since the golden thrushes mingled their songs with our chats. The idyllic contemplation of the matter, however, was considerably disturbed by the concrete circumstance that, during these three years, a third masterpiece of creation had found in my former paragon the rib that had been subtracted from him while he slept. Her first venture was a fashionable fop, her second an Antinous of the wilderness, her third was now a stage Othello.

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And our feelings were still further subdued by the disagreeable tension occasioned by the approach towards us of two armed men, who kept on popping up before us in the clearings of the forest, now here, now there, but continually drawing nearer to the Pagan Altar. There could not now be a doubt that they were making towards us.

"It would be as well if I set to work and sketched something in my album while they are approaching," said I, "in case they inquire what I am doing here."

With that, I sat down on the steep rocky ledge, placed my sketch-book on my knee, and designed the contours of my picture on a grand scale.

The lady sat down close beside me, and observed how I looked now on the hills and now on my paper—but never into her fine eyes.

We did not exchange a word with each other, not a single word.

At last, however, I grew impatient of the silence, and without looking up from my sketch, I said to her: "I really thought that by this time you and Peter Gyuricza had filled the whole world full of butter and cheese."

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But then, with both her hands, she seized my sketching hand, so that I had to leave off my work, and said, with a mournful voice:

"You have the most sovereign contempt for me now, eh? But if I were to tell you what frightful calamities I have gone through since last we met, then I am sure you would have compassion on me."

I told her that if she liked to speak, I could now listen, as I had plenty of time.

"You remember when last we met, don't you? When you banged the door in my face, I mean—though, God knows, I only meant to do you good then. I never meant to make you so angry, and immediately made the best of my way home to the hut of Peter Gyuricza. Ah! how sorry I then was that I had not pleaded my cause with you better. I had another reason for going to you. When the lawyers took up my case, the fair-haired partner offered me a little money, which I might repay him, he said, when I gained my suit. But I chose to ride the high horse, and rejected the

proffered money, although I had really nothing about me but three *huszases*,⁷¹ which I had saved from the proceeds of the butter. That was not even enough for the steam-boat. A couple of florins or so would have done. But, of course, when you drove me out of your room I had to do without."

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[71] The *husza*—20 kreutzers.

"I am very sorry that I did not guess your need."

"Still more sorry was I. I was obliged, in my straits, to climb into the cart of a poulterer who was going to Vienna, and who, for two of my *huszases*, found a place for me among the hen-coops. I still had a few *garashes*⁷² for my journey, which were sufficient to pay for the straw on which I slept at the inns where we descended. On the third day I arrived safely at Uj-Szöny, and by that time I had eaten the last bit of bread and cheese in my basket. In front of the inn stood a lame and paralysed beggar, who begged alms of me in God's name. I had only two kreutzers still left. I kept back one kreutzer from the beggar, for I knew that I should have to pay a toll on the bridge. Now, that was your fault, look you. You might have inserted a paragraph in the Twelve Articles of Pest abolishing the tolls."

[72] A *garash*—3 kreutzers.

I was furious. I had to erase half my drawing. Bessy laughed at my misfortune, and at her own also. Then she proceeded:—

"From thence I had to make my way home on foot. I could go right along by the banks of the Danube without entering the town. I did not meet a single acquaintance. In front of me I saw a large group of National Guards in blue attilas, hastening rapidly towards the fortress amidst the beating of drums. It must have been a serious business which prevented them from looking at a pretty woman. Then I went nicely and quietly along the well-known way. Like the egg-selling woman in the fairy-tale, I began to consider what I would do when I got back my patrimony. I would go with my Gyuricza right away into Transylvania, there I would buy him a property, where he might rear as many cattle as he liked. I myself would learn to spin like the Pákular⁷³ women: my husband should wear clothes of my own weaving. I would adorn my bedchamber with embroidered napkins, hang varnished vases all round, and there should be rows of pewter dishes on every shelf. We should have our plum-orchard too, and from the plums I would make *palinka*. I would keep bees, and make mead, and bake honey-cakes, which Peter loves so much when he can get them at the fair. All this time I had never noticed that I was getting quite close to the hut. It was drawing towards evening, and smoke was coming from the chimney. No doubt the little serving-maid was cooking supper according to my directions. How surprised Peter would be when I brought his flesh-pot out to him in the pastures! When I entered the hut I found by the hearth—nobody. I went into the room. What do I see? My Peter Gyuricza sitting at the table— with his wife; and they were supping sweetly together out of the same dish, like two turtle-doves!"

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[73] A village in Transylvania, chiefly inhabited by Wallachs.—Tr.

("Aha!" I murmured, "poetic justice with a vengeance; I myself could not have devised a happier *dénouement*.")

"Everything became green and blue before my eyes. My throat contracted. I was incapable of uttering a word. But the tongue of the little peasant woman wagged all the brisker. No sooner did she see me than she bounced from her place, cocked her *haube* on the side of her head, stuck her arms akimbo, and fell foul of me.

"Ah, ha! my dear precious lady! I suppose 'tis Carnival time, since you come masquerading hither like that! Perhaps you've come because you've lost something here, eh? A shawl, perhaps? A very pretty little ladyship, that I *will* say! Haven't you got a nice enough lord and master of your own at home? Must you befool the poor peasant also? Or if your lawful husband is not enough for you, can't you go and choose another from among the cavaliers of your own rank? You hanker after laying your little stuck-up noddle on my patch-pillow, eh? You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"I was dumbfounded. This face of a fury, with the eyes sticking out of its head, robbed me of all my pluck. In my despair and doubt I looked at Peter.

"He all this time was sitting with his elbows on the table and swallowing one dumpling after another.

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"Is this justice, Peter?" stammered I, half-sobbing; 'will you let me be treated like this?'

"At this he struck the table with his fist a mighty blow and roared at his wife: 'Woman! Shut up! Hold your tongue! Sit down at that table and fill your stomach! I'll speak now.'

"The woman sulked in silence, but, even while her husband was speaking, she could not forbear putting in a word or two here and there, such as: 'She has worn out my dress, too!—I didn't steal that! My lovely chintz dress! How she has rumpled it! Just as if she had been tumbling it about in every pot-house!'

"But Peter spoke very sagely.

"My lady, I beg pardon! I know what honour is. I was once a soldier. I know my duty. What won't match can't match. A horse and an ox won't draw together. A peasant woman's meet for a

peasant, a lady's meet for a gentleman. Now did I ever so much as raise my little finger to your ladyship? You know I didn't. And yet how many times haven't you ruined the butter? You never moistened the maize. The pigs wouldn't eat it because it set their teeth on edge, for you threw them hard raw grain. This won't do, you know! When the cows calve, who'll be there to see to them? And who is there to clean out the furnace? The mice have gnawed away the sleeves of my jacket, it's all in rags. Besides that, I have got into the way of saying, "Hie, you Jutka! d'ye hear?" and then she knows very well what her duty is; and when I strike her she makes no bones about it, either. I couldn't live without thrashing her occasionally; it does my back good, which would else grow double; and she always knows how to come round me again."

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I threw my sketch-book and my palette out of my hand, and flung myself down on my back, I laughed so much. How could I help laughing? Bessy laughed too.

"I can laugh mightily at it now, but situated as I was then, his words were so many lashes. At last I flew into a rage and attacked Peter.

"Can't you say straight out that Muki Bagotay has bribed you to take back your wife, whom you drove away on his account?"

"Oh, I humbly beg your pardon, you must not say that I am bribed. I am an upright man. His honour, my lord Bagotay, gave me ten head of oxen as a gift, but he didn't bribe me.'

"My heart was ready to break at these words.

"Ten head of oxen indeed! For the sake of this peasant I had sacrificed my whole existence, the world in which I had hitherto lived, the respect of my acquaintances, my ease and comfort. I had made the earnest resolve to become a peasant woman for his sake, to work, do without things, suffer penury, and when once I had recovered my property, to give it all to him, make him a gentleman according to *his* notion of a gentleman, and the wretched creature had bartered me for ten oxen!"

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I hastened to explain to Bessy that this was really the legally appointed fine for adultery in case the affair came to be settled. Verböczy⁷⁴ says: "*Raptor solvat decem juvencos.*"—"The seducer must pay ten oxen."

[74] The great Hungarian jurist (1460-1541), and one of the most eminent statesmen of his day. His *opus magnum*, entitled "Tripartitum opus juris consultudinarii inclyti regni Hungariæ," was first published in 1517.—Tr.

Bessy then proceeded:—

"Peter next began to give me counsels worthy of a patriarch.

"My lady, I've only one thing to say. Go back to his lordship. God's my witness that nothing will befall you. Say now, Jutka—come, on your soul be honest—have I so much as touched you with my little finger since you came back? His lordship, too, knows all about it. He will close one eye. Let's look upon the matter as if he and I had been wrestling together, and first one had had a fall and then the other. One box on the ears deserves another. So it is among men of honour!"

"Oh, don't make me laugh so, or I cannot go on sketching!" said I to Bessy, with the tears in my eyes.

"I don't know what you can find to laugh at, I could cry for vexation even now."

"Why, that of itself is enough to make one laugh!"

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Bessy continued:—

"But then the woman began talking nicely to me, which was ever so much worse. 'Come, come, my dear, good, pretty lady, have respect for your nice, handsome, lawful lord. Why, what a fine gentleman it is! Why, if I hadn't my Peter ...'

"You manage to forget that, though, pretty often!' intervened Peter.

"The long and short of it all was that I had to resume the clothes I had left behind me, and restore to Jutka the draggles which she had charged me with spoiling. But what objection could I make? What belongs to another is his, so I began to strip off my frock and neckerchief before the pair of them straightaway.

"The other woman then got a bit ashamed on my account. 'Let us go into the inner room,' said she; and drew me into the little chamber, and took out of her wardrobe the lordly raiment I had left there, and then helped me to dress. And all the time she was so mild, so friendly, and quite lost herself in rustic caresses and flatteries: 'Why, what a nice slim waist! What a shame that a mere clown should clasp it round! What lovely white shoulders! What a sin to ruin them by carrying about heavy loads! And how swollen the little feet are from much walking! Why, they'll scarcely go into the old dress-boot, I do declare! Why fly into such tantrums about such trifles! Good gracious me! suppose every lady who caught her lord with a little milkmaid were to carry on with the first clown that fell in her way! Things like that should not be taken so seriously. A man is but a man, especially if he is a gentleman! Why, I've seen *countesses* even, whose husbands went on the loose. You expect too much, my dear! Chocolate is the nicest dish in the whole world; but if one were to give one's husband nothing but chocolate every day, he would soon loathe the very sight of it. Come, come! go home, dear heart, my darling ladykin, to your

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dear good lord and master, and you'll see how heartily he'll receive you!"

"I replied that I would never go back to him again. I wept for shame. The woman guessed the cause of my tears.

"Come, come, good heart! Why, my lady, we'll all of us agree to deny that this little holiday ever happened. We were talking about it just now. We'll lie the thing away, and say that your ladyship only wanted to frighten the good gentleman, and that you were hiding the whole time at the house of the local magistrate."

"And how about the flower-selling in the market-place, and the promenade through the waters?"

"We'll say that that was only done out of spite. How should a dirty clown like my husband presume to cast his eyes on such a precious treasure as your ladyship? Why, anybody who could believe such a thing would be called a downright fool. We'll put it all to rights finely."

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"But a separation suit is already going on?"

"Your ladyship needn't trouble your head about that. His honour has withdrawn his complaint. Yes, I declare he has. He told me he was in great embarrassment. He had been deprived of his tithes and land tax, and did not know whither to turn for money. The gentlemen up at Pest had reintroduced the *morgatorium*, or whatever the plaguy thing is called, which as good as said that all the old debts were not to be paid, but that no new debts were to be made. Now, if he is divorced from your ladyship, he will have to pay you back your 100,000 florins, and then he'll be ruined. That's a fact."

"A light began to dawn upon me. This garrulous little peasant woman had let out the secret why my idyll had terminated so abruptly. A very pretty twice-two certainly! They receive me back like a pupil returning to school after the vacation. For that very reason I resolved I would *not* go back.

"When I was dressed again in my old clothes, she opened the little door and readmitted me into the larger apartment. Peter was now tricked out in his grandest array. He had donned his Sunday mantle, drawn on his new boots, and stood before me hat in hand. He was as humble as a lackey. He kissed my hand, and I noticed now for the first time how very bristly his chin was. When he spoke it sounded like the whining voice of a burnt-out beggar-man who stands at the stable-door and begs an alms."

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"I kiss your gracious hands, my lady. I humbly beg pardon if I have offended you in any way. I didn't mean to do it. Forgive me my fault, and I'll never do it again."

"At this I knew not whether to laugh or to cry.

"Then he got quite touched, and wiped his eyes with the flapping sleeves of his shirt.

"Behind the door stood a stout willow-wood stick, which he laid hold of. I wondered what he was going to do with it. Would he give it to me as a staff for my pilgrimage?"

"Permit me, your ladyship, to accompany you as far as the castle. Some evil might befall you on the way. There are bad men about. The dogs might bark at you, and the bull is quite savage."

"But I am not going to the castle," I said.

"He gaped at me. 'Whither away, then?'"

"That's my business! The road goes up, and the road goes down. I'll go whichever way the wind blows."

"Then he rallied all the wisdom he possessed, and preached a sermon to me with all the unction of an Old Testament patriarch.

"Don't do that, my dear good lady! Don't grieve your good and loving lord! There's not a better man in the world. Allow me to accompany you home. I'll keep well behind—twenty yards if you like."

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"I stamped my foot impatiently, and bawled at him to come away from the door and let me go my way.

"Then it was that Peter showed his true colours.

"My lady, this cannot be! The good and worthy squire, when he gave me the ten oxen to take back my wife, said this to me: 'Well! Peter Gyuricza, if you bring my wife home also, ten young calves shan't stand between us.'"

(The rocks and woods re-echoed with my laughter. I couldn't keep it back.)

"Then my fury boiled over. You know that when I fly into a rage I am a perfect lioness, don't you? I snatched the stick from Peter Gyuricza's hand. 'Lubber, lout! I'll give you your ten young calves! There you are, take them!' I don't know whether I gave him exactly ten blows. I didn't count them. And the big lout of a man turned tail, rushed into the room, dodged round the table, and roared like a hippopotamus, while I broke the stick over his shoulders. His consort thought it best not to interfere, but leaped upon the bench and looked on. It was a real luxury for her to meet with some one who could thoroughly trounce her tyrant."

"I only wish my previous journey had not fatigued me so much.

"I began to recover a little when I found myself out in the fields, and the breeze blew the heat out of my head. My idyll had come to a pretty end. What was I to do now? One thing was certain, I could not return to Muki Bagotay.

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"But whither was I to go, then?

"Before me lay the beautiful Danube. The road by the dam ran all the way along it. From time to time I leaned against an old willow-tree and looked at the great living-water. Now and then a fish would leap up into the air with a loud splash. I was not afraid of the water, but of the fishes I was afraid. I could not kill myself. I should have rejoiced, if that had been true with which they used to frighten us in our childish days when we leaned over the bank and looked into the water: Beware of the devil who lurks behind you and will push you in! But he didn't push me in. The devil can do nothing now. He cannot compete at all with the sons of men. But was it really worth while to kill myself for the sake of two such men as Muki Bagotay and Peter Gyuricza? No, my death would then have been as ridiculous as my life!

"I thought I would go home to my mother. She couldn't exactly turn me out of doors. Let her punish me as she will—I'll humble myself; I'll bow down before her; I'll endure her wrath. After all, is she not my mother, and am I not her only child? She cannot but love her little one. From any one else I could not expect to find pity or love. Why, I even hated myself!

"With these thoughts I set off towards the town.

"It was baking hot. A strong south wind was blowing, as dry and burning as if it had come out of a stove. Clouds of sand covered the whole region, and whenever a gust came, I had to take refuge under a willow-tree, lest I should be hurled into the dam. I can't say what time of the day it was, but I know that it was the forenoon to me, for I had eaten nothing yet that day. The Gyuriczas had forgotten to invite me to sit down to their dumplings.... To quench my thirst, I descended once or twice to the Danube and drank some water out of the palm of my hand. On the road-side I found a flower which I thought was a cheese-poppy. I tasted it, but it was very nasty. Weary as I was, I must hasten to get to the town as soon as possible. I should have been glad even of such a piece of bread as I used to distribute to the beggars at home on Friday.

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"I was hastening on towards the town, when suddenly a kind of darkness rose up before me in the sky, and on looking at it more attentively, I was horrified to observe that in the town a fire had broken out, the black smoke of which was rolling up into the dust-clouded sky.

"The burning simoon blew back the black smoke upon the town. Great Heaven! the whole town will be reduced to ashes.

"And now I began to run. I forgot that I was weary, I forgot that I was hungry. Fear lent me fresh strength. The nearer I got to the town the higher the smoke rolled up. Now, however, it was not black, but red. Millions of sparks shot flashing upwards, and huge fragments of flaming roofs were to be seen flying in the midst of them. When a tiled house caught fire, the burning tiles shivered like fiery rockets in every direction. A whole street was already in flames when I reached the town. Howling heaps of men, carts and carriages in full career, wailing women, children half crushed and suffocated, and in the midst of them all lowing kine and oxen wildly struggling back into their dark stables at the sight of the conflagration—the whole mass was rushing backwards and forwards in aimless confusion. I forced my way into a side street, lest I should be crushed to death, with the intention of getting home that way. Everywhere I encountered lamenting crowds attempting to drag along the streets the things they had saved from their houses. Nobody thought of extinguishing the flames. The burning embers fell in torrents. When I got to my mother's house I found it already wrapped in flames. It was the highest house in the street. A handful of Honveds were attempting to extinguish the flames. Others had mounted on the roof, and were throwing the furniture out of the windows. I saw a gold-framed picture flying through the air—it was the portrait of my poor father. Oh! he indeed used to love me. If he had only lived, I should not be what I am now. There were none but strange faces around me. In vain I asked them where my mother was. They had not heard of her. All at once a white-collared officer, some major or other I suppose, came up and cried to the fire-extinguishing Honveds, 'Why are you putting out that fire? It doesn't deserve it. It was there that the colonel lodged who set the town on fire! Leave the cursed hole alone, and go and protect the hospital!' I knew not whether I had gone mad or not. Why did they curse our house? The Honveds began execrating the name of a colonel who had often come to our *soirées*. If they recognise me, I thought, perhaps they'll pitch me into the fire also. One heavy cart after another rattled over my poor father's portrait. I couldn't even save that. I was aroused from my benumbing stupor by a frightful yell, the shout of thousands and thousands of men: 'Saint Andrew's Church is burning!'

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One of the slender towers of that vast cathedral was already in flames, while in the other the alarm-bells were ringing furiously. The mob carried me with it. Every one hastened along to save the church. But it was already too late. The other tower had also caught fire, the bells were silenced, the roof of the church was also ablaze. The beautiful church banners, which the guildsmen used to carry all round the town with great pomp on Corpus Christi day, were dragged out half charred amidst the falling firebrands. The heat was so terrible that one could not remain in the market-place. 'The whole town's done for!' cried the men. 'Let us fly to the island!' And with that the human flood poured through the narrow streets towards the Danube. The thought occurred to me that *there* was a little villa which belonged to us. Happy thought! Perhaps I might find my mother there: she might have fled there for refuge. So I went along with the human

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torrent. By the time we got to the island drawbridge, it was impossible to get any farther through the densely packed crowd. Why were they coming back? Because the drawbridge was also burning. It was a terrible spectacle. The whole Danube shore was in flames, and the drawbridge leading to the island carried the conflagration still farther. The Danube was hissing with falling red-hot beams. Corn-ships, windmills, swam blazing along, and dashed against the ice-breakers. A band of armed Honveds posted by the custom-house kept the people back from rushing upon the burning bridge. They told us what had happened. There was a greater danger even than fire. An Imperial regiment had tried to creep quietly into the town. They were already at Tatá. The citizens, however, had found it out, and raised the drawbridge against them. The troops, enraged at the failure of their stratagem, had set the town on fire. What a cursing there was! I heard one particular name branded again and again, the name of the colonel who was to have married my mother if the revolution had not intervened."

I could not go on with my drawing. The mist no longer lay upon the landscape, but upon my eyes.

The young lady continued circumstantially the history of those horrors:—

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"Then three cannon-shots thundered from the fortress. No doubt it was only a signal which the troops often give in times of fire. But at this roaring of guns the fear of the people became still greater. 'The enemy is storming the town!' At this the whole crowd, which had hitherto entirely covered the Danube's bank, immediately rushed back again into the burning town, through the flaming streets and the burning rafters. 'To the Waag, to the Waag!'⁷⁵ everybody cried. In that direction there was a hope of deliverance. I am only amazed that I was not crushed to death. In my terror I seized hold of a boatman's arm, and the worthy man, whom I had never seen before, allowed me to cling on to him like grim death; assured me that he would take care I was not left behind, and dragged me along with him over the backs of the struggling mob."

[75] A confluent of the Danube.

Here she had to pause. The recollections of these horrors stopped her breath. Pearls of sweat stood upon her forehead. It was only after a very long pause that she was able to resume.

"I shall never forget that day. The alarm-bells were still pealing from a single tower, the tower of the Calvinist church. All the other church towers were in ashes, this one alone remained. The wind was blowing in a contrary direction. The fire had not yet extended to that part of the town. Every one hastened in the direction of the Calvinist church tower. The streets in the vicinity of the fortress were barred against the flying crowd by the Honved regiments; the only street by which it was possible to get to the Waag was Sunday Street. This also was half in flames, but from where Great St. Michael Street cuts across it, it still remained untouched. Your house was the border building beyond which the fire had not yet extended, but the inn at the opposite corner was burned to the ground. Oh, that dear familiar house, with those cool corridors, and those red marble columns, on the iron cross-bars of which you, as a boy, so often used to show off your acrobatic feats before me! The thought occurred to me of seeking sanctuary there in my great extremity. At one time I was wont to be heartily welcomed there. It is true that I had sinned grievously against that house, and the lady had reproached me with it to my face. I *had laughed at her son*, and that laughter had driven him out into the world. But in seasons of great calamity wrath is forgotten. I would seek a refuge there with your mother. Such were my thoughts when I saw your mother's house. That sight I shall never forget. There stood the good old lady on the threshold of her house, in that very brown dress, that very frilled turban in which you painted her portrait. Whenever she recognised anybody among the flying crowd, she stopped him, and asked, 'Have you not seen my son?' and when he replied, 'I have not!' she would wring her hands and sob bitterly, 'Oh, Holy Father! why is not my son here?'"

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Alas! what was the matter with my eyes? They suddenly filled with something.

The young lady continued her story:—

"When I heard your mother saying these words, I was possessed with fresh horror. It never occurred to me that you had an elder brother who was the guardian of the orphan wards of the town, and that his proper place then was in the Town Hall, with the roof blazing over his head, trying to save the property of the orphans. I dared not go along that side of the street; I crossed over to the other side. Suppose she were to seize me also and ask: 'What have you done with my son? But for those accursed, colour-shifting eyes of yours, he would now be beside me, he would never have left me all alone!' I dared not, I dared not meet her eye. I would rather endure the sight of my own mother's angry face than the tearful look of your mother. I hid my face in my hands, and hurried past."

She could say no more. She let her face fall on my breast, and sobbed aloud.

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CHAPTER XIII

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THAT

When she again lifted up her face, her eyes were like a somnambulist's gazing fixedly in the

moonlight. They appeared absolutely dark-blue, so much were the irises distended. Her voice was quite low.

"The whole picture is still vividly before my eyes. The greater part of the town was in flames. It must have been evening. The sound of the clock in the Calvinist church tower mingled with the peal of the alarm-bells. The clock struck eight, the alarm-bells five. The people counted the strokes: exactly thirteen. The sun shone no longer, but the whole vault of heaven was alight; the fiery reflection of the thick clouds of smoke made a hellish daylight, and in the midst of this terrible illumination, like some dread idol, rose the tower of the Calvinist church, with its large copper roof, and its spire with the great gold ball and star. Star and ball glowed like phantoms from the world beyond the grave. The crackling of the fire roared down the howling of the beasts and the cries of ten thousand terrified men. In that part of the town where the carters dwelt, carts, horses and oxen, and their owners were all huddled together in one dense mass. To move was an impossibility. Then upon this howling, cursing, blaspheming multitude came pouring that mass of men which had fought its way from the banks of the Danube through the burning town, with the terrifying cry, 'The enemy has attacked the town!' By this time the alarming rumour had gained such proportions that there were those who said they had actually seen the enemy's soldiers entering the town. 'They are burning, they are plundering—fly! fly!' Some even exclaimed, 'They are about to bombard the captured town from the fortress!' All at once the whole street, as far as the Waag bridge, was filled with flying vehicles. In my terror I had clutched hold of the mud-splasher of one of these vehicles as it came tearing along, and ran along after it till there was scarcely a breath left in my body. My light buskins were completely worn off my feet and full of gravel. I had no time to stop and empty them. This particular carriage had excellent horses in it, and the coachman did not spare his whip. Two women, dressed in peasants' hoods, were sitting in this carriage. I was astonished that they should wrap themselves up so closely in their hoods, and cover their heads with big kerchiefs, when such an infernal heat was blazing all around us, from the earth, from the sky, and from every side of us.

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"The coachman reached the Waag bridge safely before the other fugitive carriages had blocked up the way. At the entrance they had to stop, for there the custom-house officers demanded the bridge-tolls. That the whole town was in flames mattered not a button to them, all they wanted was their tolls. One of the women handed them an Austrian bank-note for 100 florins. The toll-collector could not give change. A queer sort of peasant woman, truly, who had no smaller change than a bank-note for 100 florins! While they were haggling about it, it occurred to me that I was now wearing my genteel clothes, and that in the pockets there was sure to be a silver *tizes*⁷⁶ for any beggar I might chance to meet on my way. So I went up and said to the peasant women: 'I've got a *tizes* which I'll give to the toll-collector; all that I ask is that you will take me in your carriage—there's room for me beside the coachman. I don't mind where you take me.' At this, one of the women called to the coachman: 'Don't let that girl get up, we won't have her.' Then they told the toll-collector that he might keep the 100-florin note if he couldn't give them change, if only he would let their coachman go on. I was horrified at such inhumanity. What a heartless woman it must be who, in such a time of peril, could refuse a fugitive girl a place in her carriage, and who, rather than do so, preferred to sacrifice a bank-note for 100 florins, peasant though she was! In my indignation I tore the big muffling clout from the head of the peasant woman and discovered her face. And now my blood froze to ice. I recognised my own mother! 'Mother, dear mother!' I cried, 'don't you know me? I am your own little girl, Bessy!' Then my mother, pulling up the collar of her mantle over her face, said, in a simulated peasant voice: 'Be off! Don't bother us! I don't know the girl. I'm not your mother. Let go my kerchief!'

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[76] The tenth part of a florin.

"I thought I was going mad. My own mother wouldn't know me! She wouldn't let me get into her carriage. Like lightning the thought flashed through my mind that she it was whom the people were cursing so. No doubt they were cursing her unjustly, but in such times as these that mattered little. Whomsoever the popular fury points out is condemned already. I could not betray my own mother. I hastily threw my silver coin to the toll-collector that they might let the carriage go on. I thought that if once we got beyond the bridge, and my mother had no further fear of pursuit, she would take me into the carriage. So catching hold of the back part of the vehicle, I ran on beside the carriage till we had got beyond the trenches of the fortress and out upon the highway. Then I again began to supplicate, so far as my gasping voice would allow me: 'Mother, dear, good mother! take me into the carriage; I am dropping. I can go no farther.' They would not hear me. They only cursed and scolded: 'Be off! Decamp!' And when I still persisted in clinging on, they at last seized my fingers, which were still clutching the splasher, violently wrenched them off, and gave me a rough push so that I fell at full length into the highway. Then the carriage rolled on farther.

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"I had held out till then, but now my strength failed me. I trembled so that I could no longer stand upon my legs. Utterly crushed in mind and body by the sufferings of that terrible day, I dragged myself on my knees to the edge of the wayside ditch. My instinctive fear of death told me that I must avoid the middle of the road if I didn't want to be trampled to death. There then I lay clinging to a roadside poplar, gazing apathetically at the dreadful scene. The fugitive vehicles dashed madly along the highway in threes and fours, colliding every moment. The cursing and swearing were something awful. Every now and then one conveyance overturned another into the ditch, and the women who were sitting in them screamed and cried most piteously. One coachman hit upon the foolhardy idea of forcing his way through the ditch into the open field, and others followed his example. They came so close to me as to all but run over me, and I had

not sufficient strength left to draw up my legs out of reach of their revolving wheels.

"Then the blast of trumpets mingled with the hurly-burly. A regiment of Hussars was trying to cut its way through the fugitive carriages with a convoy of hay-waggons, which, as was explained to me later on, the Commandant of the fortress was transferring from the burning town to the village of Izsa across the Waag. The commanding officer was cursing and swearing, and striking all the coachmen he met with the flat of his sword for stopping his soldiers' way. 'Damned rascals! instead of putting out the fire, you all take to your heels. What the devil is the matter with you? There's no enemy behind you! Would that the souls of your ancestors could revivify you!'

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"The voice seemed familiar to me, but the face I had never seen before. A spiral moustache, a French beard, a Hussar uniform, and a plumed hat—I had never seen *that* figure before.

"Thus he appeared before me like the dragon-slaying hero of a fairy tale.

"Hitherto, of all those who scurried past me, not one had noticed the wretched creature lying in the ditch. Some girl or other quite past help, they thought, perhaps. Nobody took any notice of me.

"This officer *did* notice me. In the midst of the greatest turmoil he perceived a woman lying beneath his horse's feet. He hastily reined in his charger, and called me by my name. 'My lady Elizabeth! how ever did you come here? In Heaven's name, what has befallen you?'

"I recognised him by his mode of addressing me. There was only one man who used to address me in this way, the man who taught me my *rôle* at those famous amateur theatricals that you remember.

"'Mr. Bálványossi! Mr. Director!' I stammered, in my joy.

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"'No, no! Captain Rengetegi is my name. Why, where is your mother? Run away? She did well. Get up, my lady, into my carriage, and I'll take you now to a place of safety.'

"'I cannot get up.'

"Then he hastily dismounted from his horse, gave his bridle to his orderly, went up to me, raised me in his arms, carried me to his carriage, and laid me down there among sweet-smelling hay.

"I felt just as if I had been placed in Paradise.

"Then he threw his mantle over me. It was cold outside now, and a strong wind was blowing.

"But his care for me went even further than that.

"'There is food in my knapsack, lady Elizabeth. I suppose you have had no supper to-day? Take whatever you find there. There's some drink, too, in my flask. It will do you good. You have nothing more to fear. The finger-pointing virgin still stands there on the bastions of our fortress.'

"Then he mounted his horse again, and continued commanding his men loudly and authoritatively to force their way through the crush of carts and carriages with their convoy of hay. I fancied that I saw before me an archangel.

"I didn't wait to be asked twice. As soon as I was able to get hold of the knapsack of victuals, I stuffed myself indiscriminately with all it contained—ham, cake, rolls. I gorged like a wild beast broken loose from a menagerie. I verily believe that if my bliss in Heaven had depended upon it, I would have renounced it for that couch of soft straw and those greedily devoured delicacies.

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"When I had satisfied my appetite as I had never done before, I unscrewed the top of the flask and put it to my mouth. I didn't taste what was in it, but I gulped and gulped so long as I had any breath in my body, as much as my thirst craved. I fancy it must have been brandy. When I couldn't drink any more I looked all about me. The burning town was a grand illumination; in the midst of it was the Calvinist church tower—only it was now not one tower, but three. The silly thing was dancing a *pas seul*, and wagging its head now to the right, and now to the left, and all the people, and the horses, and the coachmen, and the hay-carts were leaping and dancing, like wedding-guests considerably the worse for liquor.

"When next day I awoke out of a twenty-hours' sleep, I found myself in the room of a peasant's house. Two men were holding a consultation over me—the camp-surgeon and 'he.' 'How do you find yourself, lady Elizabeth? You are in my little room.'

"So ever since then I have been the lady Elizabeth."

With these words Bessy rushed to the edge of the steep rock, crossed her two hands over her breast, and looked over her shoulder at me.

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"I have now told you everything, and you must judge me. You have no need to push me. Give but a signal with your finger and I'll put an end to myself!"

Horried, I grasped her hand, and snatched her away from the dizzying rocky ledge.

"Do not tempt God! Be reasonable!" And, not without some little force, I made her sit down by the hot embers.

"But do you call this *life*?"

"Come, come, calm yourself! Look, these armed men are close upon us!"

They were not gendarmes. They were two worthy foresters belonging to the domain of the Forests of Diosgyör—a grey-bearded old man with a youthful assistant.

No hostile intentions had brought them thither. They could see, too, that our picnic beside the fire was a very innocent diversion. In the album left upon the rock was my unfinished landscape.

They greeted us cordially, and I returned their greeting in like manner. I asked the elder man whether I was injuring any one's proprietary rights by making a fire with other people's wood. If so, I said, I would make good the trespass. To which the old man replied that he had no quarrel with me on that score. The stuff was there for the poor man to gather, and he cited the classical German ballad in which the evil-minded forester robbed the peasant of his bundle of faggots. He must needs be a lover of letters, then!

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Then he told us why they had come.

"We perceived the smoke from below, and knew, therefore, that there were visitors on the Precipice Stone. We thought it our duty to come up. Wolves are about in the forest. We wished to tell you so."

"I thank you for your great kindness; but, from what I am told, wolves will not attack a man."

"But they've become very aggressive since they discovered that the Government has confiscated all muskets, leaving only a pair or two with us. They avoid men in the day time, I know; but at dark or in a snowstorm they are very impudent."

"We do not intend to remain here till evening. I only wanted to finish the drawing, for the sake of which I scrambled up hither."

"But I would call your attention, sir, to the fact that we shall have a fall of snow here before night. I know the signs of the weather. When such a vast mist lies over the country in the morning, and then rises suddenly, and is quickly followed by darkness, then we may expect a snowstorm the same day. That is an old experience of mine."

"We will hasten home."

"Do you live at Tordona, or at Malyinka?"

"I live at Tordona."

"God bless you, sir. I know every one there."

He didn't ask who I was. We shook hands, and with that the pair of them went on their way.

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"Was it worth while creeping into the cave for this?" said Bessy, when the foresters had withdrawn.

"There are men who can face a great danger and hide away from a little one."

"And you think, then, that our friend there is a fire-eater?—I thought so too for a long time. It was no unexampled thing in those extraordinary times for men to become suddenly transformed. Those who were looked upon as mere carpet knights became veritable heroes; lawyers became colonels: war has an ennobling influence on so many types of character. I really believed that Rengetegi had changed his whole nature with his name. When others had to be aroused, there was no such orator as he. I was absolutely proud that we belonged to each other. When the Austrian troops invested the fortress, and hurled the first bomb into the market-place, the whole of our social life was suddenly turned upside down. There was now no such thing as etiquette. The families of great magnates left their houses (those, that is, whose houses were not burnt down already), pitched their tents in the Gipsy-field and dwelt there. The guns of the Monostor batteries did not carry so far as that. In the barracks, moral law disappeared. An officer was a great personage then, and to walk about the streets leaning on his arm was a much-coveted glory. Whether the lady on his arm was his wife was not the question—he was a fine fellow, a gallant fellow. That was the main thing. And if I met an acquaintance I introduced Rengetegi as my future husband. Every one knew that I had begun a suit against Muki Bagotay. But where were the courts, the advocates, the judges?—every one was either wearing a sword or serving a gun. When people asked me where I lived, I said 'in the fortress!' To dwell in the fortress was an enviable position. The rooms there were fire-proof. I really think that there were more who envied than pitied my fate. I also got familiar with the ways of a soldier's life. They gave concerts, and I fiddled while Rengetegi declaimed. When the enemy was hurling away his bombs at the fortress, we took our band out on the ramparts, and there, with a great flourish of trumpets, we danced *csárdáses*. How that did aggravate the Germans! I had a great reputation as a *rakétás*⁷⁷ dancer."

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[77] Rocket-dance.

I must frankly admit that I was not much edified by this turn in the conversation.

Bessy perceived that I was not well pleased with her doings in camp.

"Ah, my dear friend!" she said, "don't fancy by any means that this episode of my life consisted

entirely of rioting and revelry, there was a little intermezzo in it also. You know, of course, that, during the winter, things at Comorn were very bad indeed. The Commandant had not the capacity for the problem before him, which included the defence of such an important fortress. The garrison was lazy and mutinous. Whispers of treachery arose, and the chief of the artillery was deprived of his post. It was necessary to inform the Hungarian Government at Debreczin of the dangerous state of things at Comorn, and to beg for a new Commandant who should be a distinguished officer. But how was it possible to carry a message from Comorn to Debreczin? Who would undertake the risky enterprise of carrying the despatch from Comorn, through so many hostile armies, and bringing back the reply to it again? They had sent one messenger already, but he had been unable to get back. It was a joke which might cost a man his head.

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"One evening, Rengetegi came to my little room in the barracks, and said: 'Elizabeth, the hour has come for us to part!'

"I immediately thought that he was tipsy.

"'You haven't played me away at cards, I hope?'

"'It is not you, but my own head that I have lost. I have accepted the mission to Debreczin. I've run my head against a wall, I know. It's neck or nothing now. And they've pressed a thousand florins into my hand to make the way before me quite secure.'

"'And you have lost it all at cards this evening?'

"'How did you find that out?'

"'I have made it my study. I know well those Hippocratic countenances. Well, and what are you going to do now?'

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"'Save my honour! I'll go on my way without money.'

"'Listen to me! I believe that you would be very glad to get out of this bombarded fortress—but I've no very ardent belief that you'll ever come back again. I tell you what: give me the official despatch which has to be taken, and I'll take care that it reaches the hands of the Government.'

"'But how?' inquired Rengetegi, immensely delighted.

"'That I shall not tell you. I've been turning the matter over for some time. You have only a passive part to play here. You hide yourself in the village of Izsa, which the enemy has not occupied, because it lies within the range of the guns of the fortress, and wait for me there till I return from Debreczin with the answer of the Government.'"

"And Rengetegi actually accepted the proposal?" I inquired. I now began to admire this woman.

"He jumped at it. He gave me soul-stirring examples of the heroic women of history, who had gone to the wars along with their husbands.... He vowed that if I ever returned in safety from my mission he would henceforth call me 'Queen Zenobia.'

"By the evening of the same day I was ready for the enterprise. I made Rengetegi dye his hair, moustache, and beard black, so that it was almost impossible to recognise him."

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"So that was your idea!" I cried.

"Then I stowed him away in a peasant's hut at Hetény, with strict instructions not to emerge from his prison till I tapped at the door. Next I set to work to thoroughly disguise my own person. I was to be the leader of a gipsy band. Ah! if you could only have painted my portrait! Then, indeed, I really was lovely! I smeared my face with the juice of green walnut-shells till it was so black that I could pass for a gipsy among the gipsies themselves; I clipped my hair till it only reached down to my shoulders; I put on a jacket which some gentleman or other had worn threadbare before giving it away; hose that certainly were never intended for me, and a shirt that had never been washed: and so I transformed myself into as filthy a shape as ever led a wandering gipsy band."

Here I could not forbear from pressing her hand. What sacrifices will not a woman make for her country and for her lover!

"But all this was a mere joke to what followed. I now had to get together a band. If they catch a gipsy alone they arrest him as a spy; but if he be one of a quartet he may go on his way rejoicing. I provided myself with a violoncellist, a clarinet-player, and a contra-bass. It was easy to persuade them to quit the bombarded town, into which the gentry who had robbed them of their poor hovels had forced them to go. Bread and meat were getting dearer and dearer, and there was nothing to be earned. Who had the heart to pay for music amidst such a frightful carnival?

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"Thus, with my little band of three, I set out upon my long and uncertain journey on foot. Gipsies only ride in sledges when a magnate sends for them, and there was no such magnate in the whole district. If on our way we fell in with a cart laden with dried reeds taken out of the swamps for firewood, we would ask for a lift in it. But our legs nearly froze there, and we were glad to get down again and walk.

"In the very first village we came to, O-Gyalla, we fell in with a division of the Austrian investing army, German cuirassiers. The patrol brought us to the major in command. He was indeed a merciless personage. He roared at us, and asked us how we dared to leave the town. We

naturally did not understand a word of German, and all four of us, in true gipsy fashion, began to raise objections at the same time: we could not remain in the town, the Honveds posted us right in front of the bombs, and made us play music at the very top of the bastions; all the cannons had fired at us, and that was a thing that gipsies couldn't stand. 'Was sagen die Spitzbuben?' inquired the major of his auditor. The auditor understood Hungarian, and expounded unto him: 'Nix da, you rascals! You are spies, and must be searched. Come! you must undress.' I was not a little alarmed, I can tell you. Not on account of the despatches I had with me, I had put them in a place where they couldn't be found; but they would discover that I was a woman, and that while my face and hands were gipsy, the rest of me was European—and then I should be lost. I hastily said something to the gipsies, and in an instant they out with their instruments and rattled off *con fuoco* the fine hymn '*Gott erhalte!*' At this the frosty face of the old martinet thawed somewhat. 'Well, well, you rascals,' said he, 'as you know what's proper and decent, I won't have you flogged this time, but be off at once and don't remain in the village here. You mustn't play here for anybody. Whoever has an itch for dancing just let him tell me, and I'll give him dancing enough. There's the whipping-post!' Now the clarinet-player was a merry wag, and could not hide his light. 'Devil bless your honour,' said he, 'you pay with big bank-notes.' 'Was sagt der Karl?' asked the major. He says, 'Gott soll segnen den grossen Herren, der zahlt mit grossen Bank⁷⁸-noten!' At this his honour also laughed. 'But for all that you must pack yourselves off at once. You mustn't stop till you reach Ersekuvar, but there you may play as long as you like.' We kissed his hands and feet, and asked him to let us stay the night there. We were half frozen, we said. We had not a morsel in our stomachs: for a whole week we had only eaten ice and drunk water. But he knew no pity. They blindfolded us, packed us into a sledge, and a patrol of horse escorted us out of the village. Now, of course, it was my very dearest desire to get as soon as possible beyond the iron girdle by which the besieged fortress was girt about. If only he can get out into the wide world, the gipsy has no fear of going astray. He can fiddle his way through the whole of Europe if only he gives his mind to it. And so we made our way along the Danube, from one town to the other, and enjoyed to the full all the romantic adventures of a wandering gipsy's life which abound in winter especially."

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[78] "God bless the great gentleman, he pays with big *bang*-notes!"—a poor jest.

"But," interrupted I, "didn't you come across Görgey's Hungarian army, under whose protection you might have continued your journey?"

"Of course I did, but my instructions were to deliver my despatches to the head of the Hungarian Government, and nobody else, not even to a general. It is true that I might have gone on farther with the gallant Magyar army, where gipsy-music is always heartily welcomed. The Honveds, too, never lose their good humour; but, on the other hand, the main Magyar army was going towards Slavonia, whereas it was my object to get to Debreczin as soon as possible. So there was nothing for it but to go straight through the enemy's lines till we reached the banks of the Theiss, when we could be once more in a friendly world."

"But where did you conceal the despatches?" I asked.

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"I stuck them inside the belly of my fiddle. Who would break the fiddle of a poor gipsy with which he earns his daily bread? The money we earned in one town was sufficient to hire a sledge to convey us to the next. Gipsies dwell on the skirts of every town. We made ourselves at home there, and they never asked us whence we came; but if we were cross-examined at any place, then we lied to such a degree that the difficulty was to find anybody to believe us. You recollect what a terrible winter it was last year?"

"I remember it very well. I was out all through it with my wife," I said.

"How fine it would have been had we run across each other unexpectedly. I would have played a nocturne beneath your window. Ha, ha, ha!—The bitterest stage of the journey was from Kecskemet to the Theiss. There lay Jellachich,⁷⁹ with all his army, occupying the towns of the great Hungarian plain one after the other. Here we had to creep through as best we could. As for me, I had the good fortune to play every evening before his Excellency the valiant Ban. He was very pleased with me. With my little band I managed to play the famous Croatian march, '*Szláva, szláva, mu, mu, mu, Jelacsicsu nas omu,*' in quite a superior manner. I also knew the tune of the fine 'Kolo' dance, and absolutely won his Excellency's heart with the melodious 'Fanny Schneider' polka. I might say that I was really quite spoiled. There was plenty of money and wine, and, despite my black face and my predominating odour of garlic, the enthusiasm rose so high that all the officers kissed me one after the other."

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[79] The Ban of Croatia, who sided with the Austrians against Hungary.—TR.

Bessy had no sooner uttered these words than she buried her face in her hands. Again I came to her rescue.

"Those kisses don't count; you were a man then."

"It was quite a gipsy paradise, but the mischief was we did not know how to escape from it. The chivalrous Ban told us not to try to run away, for in that case he would court-martial and shoot the lot of us. At night, when our duties were done, he locked us up in a little out-house, and placed an armed sentry before the door.

"One night we escaped up the chimney and over the roof of the neighbouring house; that is to say, three of us managed to get away, I and the clarinet-player and the contra-bass. The

violoncello, however, could not be got out of the chimney, and the violoncellist declared that he would rather be stretched on the rack than leave his instrument in the lurch. So there we left him—to pay the piper. Besides, I had now not much need of my band; the Theiss was only a four hours' journey off.

"I had heard from the officers that in the willow woods of the Theiss, in the neighbourhood of the 'Szikra' inn, some Hungarian guerillas were encamping. If only we could get among them! [Pg 210]

"It was a good thing for us that sentinel duty was very laxly ordered in the camp of the Ban of Croatia. At the end of the town was a *putri*, or semi-subterranean clay hut of the kind in which field-labourers pass the night during the summer. The soldiers who had been sent out on forepost duty were sitting in this hut, and their muskets were all leaning against the door. One of the gipsies said: 'Let us steal the muskets!' The other said: 'Steal your grandfather; I play with clarinets, not with muskets.' I urged them to press forward. We were near to the sand-hills. Before us lay a savage, rugged plain, where one sand-hill followed hard upon another. Some of these hills were half hollowed out by the wind, and the hollows between them sparsely dotted with dwarf fir-trees. A ghostly region. The sides of these sand-hills were white, and the snow-fall on the top of them was still whiter; and every tree-trunk there is also white with its pendant branches⁸⁰ bending down beneath the hoar-frost. We dodged up and down among these sand-hills, turning aside from the regular high road so that we might crouch down in case we were pursued. Along the whole length of the plain the broom of the wind swept our footprints over with snow. [Pg 211]

[80] To-day this former waste of shifting sand-hills has been converted into a splendid vineyard, which the Hungarian Government has planted with vines from America proof against the *Phylloxera*.—JÓKAI.

"'If only we don't come across wolves!' said the contra-bass, with chattering teeth.

"'How can they be here when so many soldiers are about?' said I, by way of encouragement.

"'Nay, but they like to prowl about camps, because carrion is always to be found there.'

"Where the sand-hills ended, a far-extending flat began, and in the distance was a direful-looking object, resembling a ruin. A light mist covered the whole district, in which mist every object seemed as large again; the full moon shone wanly, like a huge broad halo in the misty heavens."

Here I explained to Bessy that this district was the famous plain of Alpar, where the ancient Magyars fought the decisive battle against Zalán, which gave them possession of the land; the ruin was the wall of the desert church of St. Laurence.

"Indeed! and I may add that this desert is memorable to me also. While we were waddling along as fast as we could, with our short mantles turned against the wind, the contra-bass, who was going on leisurely in front, exclaimed:

"'Devil take all these crows! Why don't they all go to sleep in the tower of the Calvinist church?'

"I inquired why the crows ought to go to sleep on the top of the Calvinist church of all places in the world. [Pg 212]

"'Let the Calvinist crow stick to the top of the Calvinist church, and the Papist crow to the top of the Papist church, as is meet and right,' he explained.

"I did not understand this sectarian distinction among crows, but the gipsy made it quite plain to me.

"'One sort of crow is ashen grey, another sort black. The grey sort eats no flesh, but only grain; that is the Papist crow. The black sort lives on flesh, whether it be earthworms or fallen horse; that is the Calvinist crow, for it keeps no fast-days.'

"Then he called my attention to the fact that on the hill there straight before us, a whole army of crows was making a great commotion. At one moment they rose high into the air with loud croakings, at another they descended upon the self-same spot from which they had risen. 'There must be carrion,' he said.

"When we got to the top of the hill, we saw, to our great consternation, that the evil foreboding of the gipsy was correct.

"On the highway below, by the side of the ditch, lay a big black mass, the carcase of a fallen horse, and fighting over what remained of it was a whole army of crows and ravens and five large *wolves*.

"We were about five hundred paces from the terrible beasts.

"They immediately perceived us, and, leaving the carcase, forthwith began scudding towards us, spurring each other on with their nasty short sharp yelps. [Pg 213]

"'Alas, alas! It is all up with us now!' wailed the contra-bass. 'The wolves will eat us up.'

"Even in that hour of mortal peril the clarinetist was true to his gipsy humour. 'Then we shall have a very queer shape at the resurrection,' said he.

"I bade them leave off wailing, and hasten to clamber up into a willow-tree, whither the monsters

could not follow us.

"It was an old pollard willow, the branches of which were cut off every year, so that only the crown of it remained, surrounded by young shoots. I, who had never learnt the art of tree-climbing, was hoisted up by the gipsies first of all, and then they hastily scrambled up after me.

"When we had got to the top of the tree we discovered that in the middle of it was a large hole—the whole inside of the tree was hollow, and could contain a man.

"'Leader,' said the contra-bass, 'your loss would be most serious, creep down into that hole.' I took him at his word, and glided down from the crown of the tree into the deep hollow trunk. First of all, however, I tied my long cotton neckerchief to a little branch, that I might be able to hoist myself up again in case of need, for the hole in the willow went right down to its very roots. At the side of the tree, too, close to an old branch, there was an orifice as large as one's fist, through which one could look as through an attic window.

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"The five wolves were not long in arriving.

"They did not come quite near at first, but reconnoitred. Whenever one of them sneaked up a little nearer, the clarinet-player aimed at it with his instrument, which the wolf took for a musket. Then the beast would back a little and scratch up the snow with his hind legs. They say the creature is wont to do this when he sees a man stand on the defensive; he tries to blind him with snow.

"When, however, the wolves at last discovered that we had no fire-arms, they sent up the ugliest howls, and began the siege of the willow. They took tremendous leaps in the air to reach the crown of the tree, but it was too high for them.

"Then it occurred to the gipsies that they had often heard that wolves had a strong penchant for music, and they began giving them a clarinet and fiddle concert.

"It is true that the nasty brutes left off the siege, sat round the willow, and began to howl in concert with the music, at the same time raising their horrid jaws towards the moon, and lashing their sides with their ragged brush-like tails; and for a short time I was quite amused at the scene. But suddenly our double danger occurred to my mind.

"'Hey! gipsies. Stop, I say! Is the devil in you? Your music will bring the pickets of the Croats upon us, and they will flay us alive.'

"At this they stopped their music.

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"This appeared to make the wolves still more savage, and now they tried a fresh stratagem.

"They had found out that the willow leaned a little to one side, and rushing at it from a little distance, they attempted to scale the sloping side of the tree. This manœuvre was likely to have succeeded. It was then that I saw what a powerful beast the wolf really is, and how much more cunning than any species of dog. Scrambling up at full tilt, they managed to reach the crown of the willow, but there the brave contra-bass was awaiting them, and gave them such a kick on the snout with his iron-heeled boots that the attacking beasts fell head over heels backwards.

"This they repeated ten or twelve times.

"And there was this remarkable circumstance about it, that every time an attacking wolf was prostrated by a kick from the gipsy, the others rushed upon him as he fell, and worried him as if to punish him for his failure.

"Suddenly they left off, and went and sat down in a heap just in front of my window. Their tongues lolled out of their panting mouths; their hot, bestial breath rose into the cold air before me. They appeared to be taking counsel together. The biggest of them seemed to be their leader. If one of the younger ones yelped too much, he would snap at his neck as if to say 'shut up!'

"At last they appeared to have hatched their stratagem. The whole lot of them got up and shuffled farther off, squinting over their shoulders all the time towards the willow-tree.

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"My gipsies fancied they were saved.

"'You shall have no roast gipsy this time!' bawled the clarinet-player after them derisively from his sure stronghold, as he fancied it.

"All at once the wolves returned and stormed onwards like race-horses, each one being about a wolf's tail ahead of the other.

"The first of them rushed straight up the tree, and while the contra-bass was kicking him in the head, the second wolf leaped across the first wolf's back and seized the man's leg.

"I heard a despairing shriek:

"'Don't let me go, comrade!'

"The second musician tried to free his down-falling friend from the jaws of the wild beast, and in doing so lost his balance, and the pair of them fell down from the tree.

"What happened after that is more than I can tell you. It is enough that I should have had to live

through that mortal struggle of the two luckless victims with those filthy brutes. How many times have I not dreamt it all over again! I believe that even if I had committed all the seven deadly sins, I should have more than expiated them all in that awful hour. I hid my face in the crumbling rottenness of the hollow tree, that I might hear and see nothing. It seemed an eternity to me while the bestial howling lasted which the wolves made as they shared together their accursed banquet in my very presence.

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"I dared not stir, lest they might find out that I also was there. Great Heaven! What horrors I had to endure!

"Suddenly a sort of growling and snarling began close beside me. The old wolf was running sniffing round the hollow tree. He had discovered that there was still booty inside it.

"He began to scrape the earth at the root of the tree. He evidently meant to dig a hole beneath the tree through which he might get at me. Fortunately for me, it was not sandy soil, but stony, hard-frozen turf. He could not succeed that way.

"Then he caught sight of the hole in the side of the tree. At one time, perhaps, a branch had been sawed off at this spot, and the bark had rotted away. The wolf began to enlarge this opening, tore it with his claws, and gnawed and worried the rotten wood with his grinders. He had soon so far enlarged the hole as to be able to stick his head into it. I saw the green glare of his fiery eyes; I felt his stinking breath; I heard the gnashing of his teeth. Then despair made me foolhardy. I drew my crooked knife out of the leg of my boot, with the other hand I seized the wolf by the ear, and cut it off at a single twirl.

"At this the beast, with a furious howl, drew back his head from the hole, and began to howl and run away like a whipped cur. The others followed after him. With the wolf's ear remaining in my hand as a trophy, I sank back against the hollow trunk; I could not sink right down, because the hollow space was too narrow."

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I felt a cold shudder run all over me at this ghastly narrative. Bessy herself was quite exhausted.

"Alas! I am quite worn out. I tremble at the very thought of it. You are the second person to whom I have told it. But how pale you are all at once!"

I suppose I *had* turned very pallid. It had suddenly flashed through my brain that just at that very time my wife was on her journey through an uninhabited valley, and the foresters told me that wolves strayed about there.

Bessy sighed deeply, raised her drooping head, and then continued her story:—

"Thus I had freed myself from the wolves; but I was not left very long in the belief that shame at my depriving their leader of one of his ears was the cause of it. No! Wolves are not so shamefaced as all that. A troop of horsemen was approaching from behind the sand-hills. There were six men on horseback and one man on assback.

"One terror had been supplanted by another.

"Peering through the hole in the tree, I recognised the uniforms of the horsemen by the light of the moon—they were Jellachich's hussars. And that there might be no doubt about their coming after us, I recognised as they came near the face of the ass-rider. It was my bass-viol player, whom I had left behind me.

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"It was very easy to see what had happened. The gipsy, to save his own skin, or, perhaps, at the flogging-post itself, had confessed that the band had come from Comorn, and was hired by me to go as far as Debreczin. Hence it was not very difficult to conclude that I was only a false gipsy, who was carrying despatches from the beleaguered fortress to the Hungarian Government.

"The horsemen had brought the gipsy with them that he might put them on my track. Once discovered, and I was lost.

"On the snow field, lit up by the moonlight, the scene of the hideous struggle was plain to the newcomers. The long lines of blood, fragments of torn garments, a foot sticking out of a boot in the snow—Ugh! May I never see such a sight again!

"The horsemen galloped quickly up over the crackling snow.

"The violoncellist had to dismount from his ass.

"The good creature howled and groaned from the bottom of his throat, bewailing his comrades in the gipsy tongue, and cursing the monsters who had devoured them.

"The leader of the patrol was a sergeant. He ordered the gipsy about in Croatian, and the gipsy has the peculiar virtue of understanding what is said to him in a language of which he is perfectly ignorant. He replied in Hungarian.

"Oh, woe, woe! Those accursed wolves have devoured our leader! There's his boot! They've only left his boot. I recognise it well. He bought it only last week at Czegled. He gave six florins for it. A brand-new boot! And this is his foot."

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"It was plain to me that the gipsy had guessed that I was hidden somewhere, and there was enough of the gipsy in him, even amidst the greatest horrors, to induce him to make fools of my

pursuers. He betrayed me first of all because he couldn't help it; he saved me finally because he *could*. He knew very well that I had given my new boots to the contra-bass. My boots were of Russian leather.

"Look there!" cried the sergeant, and he pointed with his finger. '*Jeden, dva! Jak sza tri?*'⁸¹

[81] Croatian—"One, two! Where's the third?"

"The gipsy swore by all that was holy that that was the third.

"Then where's the first?"

"That's the first, of course!"

"There was no dinning into his head the arithmetical truism that if you take two from three one remains.

"The sergeant thereupon ordered one of the hussars to dismount from his horse, at the same time pointing at the willow-tree with his sword, whence I concluded that he was about to examine the tree to see if anybody was hidden in its hollow trunk.

"I now veritably believed that the time had come for me to turn my crooked knife against my own throat. [Pg 221]

"All at once a crackle of musketry resounded from the brushwood, and a company of guerilla horse dashed out, crying, 'Forward, Magyars!' The Jellachich hussars didn't see the joke of this at all, hastily turned their horses' heads and galloped off in the direction of the town. The violoncellist also mounted his long-eared beast, and ambled gently off in a third direction midway between the two belligerents. He had no desire to take any part in the struggle.

"The guerillas, who were numerous, sent a few volleys after the enemy, but from such a distance that the bullets couldn't possibly hit the fugitives, and then returned in triumph. Then I, hearing them speak Hungarian, quickly hoisted myself up out of the hole into the top of the tree, and began so far as my hoarse voice would allow me, to give them indications of my existence.

"The gallant warriors immediately hastened to the willow-tree and helped me down from my dangerous perch. Their leader, a handsome, chivalrous-looking young man, with a true Hungarian face, began to cross-question me, and asked me whence I came and whither I was going. Perceiving that I was among Hungarian soldiers, I frankly told them that I had come from Comorn, and had been sent to Debreczin with despatches for the Hungarian Government.

"The guerilla captain was a suspicious man. [Pg 222]

"Oho! I daresay! That's easily said, but difficult to believe. What! confide such a mission to a gipsy! A likely tale!"

"I told him that I was no gipsy, though my face was painted so, but that I lived at Comorn and belonged to the place.

"Then, if you are an inhabitant, tell me if you know one Maurus Jókai there—and what you know of him?"

"I was very pleased to answer such a question. 'I know him very well,' I said, 'and I can tell you this much about him, that he went to the High School at Kecskemet, where he completed his legal studies—or rather learnt how to paint in oils from a worthy comrade of his there.'

"Without more ado he clapped his hand in mine: 'That worthy comrade of his was no other than myself.'

"So you see," she said, turning towards me, "you were of assistance to me, even here."

"Wasn't that old schoolfellow of mine called Jansci?" I asked.

"Yes, that's what they called him. With him was another young man, with quite a girlish face, and him they called Józsi; he inquired about you most particularly. When you gave your artistic representations at Kecskemet, he used to play the girl's parts."

"Quite true," I said, "so it was."

"So you see I must have been there or I should have known nothing about these things. The guerillas told me all about it as they took me with them. They were very attentive. One of them gave me his mantle, another let me mount his nag, and so they took me to the 'Szikra' inn, where they made me drink punch with them, regaled me with veal, and then made me a bed on the straw with their mantles that I might sleep off my exhaustion. The Jellachich hussars gave us no trouble. They could not come back till morning, when the whole regiment would doubtless turn out to capture the guerillas, who would, by that time, be on the other side of the Theiss. The sledges were all ready to start, and would scour back across the frozen river at the first signal to Czibakhaza, where were the foreposts of the Hungarian army under Damjanich. [Pg 223]

"But for a long time I could not sleep. Constantly before my eyes flitted the horrible death-struggle between the two unhappy men and the wild beasts, and amidst the howling and shrieking resounded the gay song of the guerillas:

"The hut's ablaze, the rush-roof crackles,
Press thy brown maid to thy breast!"

In my dream this tune was mingled with the howling of the wolves, and at one moment the wolves were singing, 'The hut's ablaze,' and at another the Croats were howling at the gipsies sitting on the branch. Towards morning I was awakened by two cannon-shots. I rejoiced to be delivered from my spectres. The lieutenant of the guerillas hurried me into the sledge, as a regiment of hostile horse was approaching from Kecskemet.

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"It took us ten minutes to dash across the frozen Theiss. On the opposite bank the foreposts of the Honveds were encamping. The business of the guerillas was to harass the enemy, capture their forage waggons, and then bring word of their movements to the main army.

"They took me straight to General Damjanich.⁸²

[82] Made Commander-in-chief of the 3rd Hungarian Army Corps in consequence of his brilliant exploits at Alibunar and Lagerdorf; he annihilated Karger's brigade at the great battle of Szolnok, and was elected to represent that town in the Hungarian Diet. After fresh exploits he was made War Minister, and, after the war, was court-marshalled at Arad by the Austrians and shot. He had not the military genius of Görgey perhaps, but as a general of division was admirable.—TR.

"I was now no longer obliged to keep my despatch hidden, so I split up my fiddle, took out of it the documents that were gummed to it, and their production was my best credentials.

"The approving, smiling glance of the powerful, heroic-looking General I shall never forget. At the sight of him I quite forgot that I was personating a man, and would have liked to have fallen down before him and kissed his hand. Indeed, I was so agitated that I could not utter a word.

"The General filled a little glass full of *szilvorium*.⁸³ 'Drink, my son!' said he, 'it will loosen your throat.'

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[83] A spirit made from plums.

"My throat was hoarse; I had a voice as deep as a man's. I told him I had come from Comorn, and I was sent to Lazar Mészáros, the War Minister.

"You will seek old Kóficz⁸⁴ in vain at Debreczin, my son, he commands there no more. So you Comorn folks don't know what's going on outside, eh? Another is at the head of the War Department now. I will give you a letter of introduction to him.'

[84] This Hungarian War Minister had said in one of his reports that the motions of the Opposition in the Diet would turn to nothing but *Kóficz* (*i.e.*, water-gruel). The name stuck to him ever after.—JÓKAI.

"Then he sat down and wrote me a couple of lines to a General with a German name, which is expressed in Hungarian by the word *Bacsi*.⁸⁵

[85] Cousin.—Vetter was the General in question.

"He said, while he was writing this letter, that this General with a German name was the life and soul of our military organization.

"Then, by the General's command, I received a nice clean Honved uniform (I had to retain my brown countenance for some time longer), and besides that I had an open passport enjoining upon all to give me every facility to reach Debreczin as quickly as possible.

"On the evening of the following day I arrived at Debreczin, and on descending from my sledge, proceeded at once to the General's. He was a mild, soft-featured gentleman, with a close-clipped beard and moustache. He didn't even wear a General's uniform. Nobody would have guessed his rank from the look of him. After reading through my letter of introduction, he looked me straight and sharply in the face.

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"You are Captain Tihamér Rengetegi, eh?"

"If I had only been intent on my own interest, I might have told him quite frankly that I had no right either to the name or the uniform of a soldier; but how could I betray my faithful consort who was smuggled away in the hovel at Hetény?"

"Yes, General, I am.'

"Who made you captain?"

"The War Minister.'

"For deeds of valour?"

"During the siege of Vienna I twice carried despatches through the besieging camp from the Hungarian Government to General Bem."

Here I intervened: "That is not true; I know very well through whom the Hungarian Government got those despatches."

"Anyhow, my friend boasted of it as his own deed," said Bessy; after which she resumed her

narration.

"'Good!' said the General; 'now give me the despatch.'

"The information was written in a secret cipher.

"'I must decipher this first. There will be a meeting to-night of the Committee of National Defence. Early to-morrow morning you will appear before me. Now go to the "White Horse." Speak to nobody. Keep your room!'

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"Nevertheless, an hour afterwards he sent for me.

"He led me into his inner room, for he allowed himself the luxury of a double-roomed apartment at Debreczin. Two other ministers, Paul Nyáry and Joseph Patay, were not so fortunate. They had to be content with a double room between them.

"The General was now very gentle with me. He made me sit down at table, and poured me out some tea. He offered me a cigar too, and although I ought not to have done so, I lighted it. It nipped my tongue a good deal, but I had to show them that I was a man.

"Then he made me tell them how I had got out of the fortress, and how I had forced my way through the hostile camp. My relation made a great impression. When I was dismissed, they pressed my hand and assured me that my good and boldly executed service should be rewarded. They further commanded me to come to them early the next day.

"I appeared next day at his headquarters in full parade, and they admitted me before any one else.

"Again they made me sit down in the inner apartment, and drew the bolt before the door of the outer room.

"Stretched out on the table was a large military map which embraced Upper Hungary and Galicia. 'You have brought very important information with you from Comorn,' said he, in a low voice. 'Considering the time when you set out, you have arrived here with astonishing rapidity. You must now take the reply back, which will contain the directions of the Council of War and the appointment of the new Commandant, who will be gazetted to-night. Can you make your way back to the fortress with this despatch?'

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"'I'll try.'

"'You must get back without fail. What's your plan?'

"'To go back by the same road in the same manner and the same disguise is impossible. The wolves tore two of my comrades to pieces, the Croats captured the third, and as he may have confessed everything, they would recognise me at once if I appeared before their eyes as I am now. Besides, there is no conceivable reason why gipsies should wish to leave the open plain in order to get into a bombarded town. This despatch can only be conveyed to Comorn by a woman who is *obliged* to go there on some unimpeachable business, and is provided with an Austrian safe-conduct.'

"The General clapped his hands together in amazement.

"'And do you know of any woman who would undertake such a thing?'

"'Certainly I do.'

"'Where? What's her name?'

"'That's my secret, General. The difficulty of getting into the fortress is also very much increased by the fact that the appointment of Richard Guyon as the new Commandant has already become generally known.'

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"The General leaped furiously from his seat.

"'Who, then, has made this public?'

"'It is here in the official gazette,' I replied, drawing out of my pocket that morning's issue of the *Közlöny*.

"The General tugged his short moustache still shorter.

"'Well, well! I see that we Magyars have yet to learn the art of keeping a secret. The enemy knows it now, but the Comorn folks do *not* know it.'

"'I have already hit upon a good idea of enabling the mandate of the Council of War to reach their hands.'

"'By a carrier-pigeon or a balloon, I suppose?'

"'A foreign passport is necessary for my plan.'

"'That you shall have—an English passport *viséd* by the Embassy. In whose name?'

"'In the lady's.'

"Then you must give us the lady's name.'

"Then I gave him my real name as the lawful wife of Muki Bagotay.

"And you? Will you get into the fortress?'

"Possibly, as that lady's coachman—possibly not at all; but the despatch will get in, anyhow.'

"And how will this lady of yours manage to hide the despatch? I can tell you beforehand, that even if your lady were provided with a safe-conduct from the Princess Windischgrätz⁸⁶ herself, and so got right through the hostile camp into the invested fortress, the Austrians would indeed welcome her most courteously; but they would at the same time say to her: "Would your little ladyship be so good as to step into that side-chamber; there you will find a complete set of lady's clothes, would you be so kind as to put them on—if they are a little more abundant than your own, that doesn't matter? The toilet you have brought with you may remain here, down even to the shoes and stockings; whenever you like to come back again, you can re-exchange your clothes." For they know that it is possible to write on chemises with invisible ink and reproduce the writing by means of chemical re-agents. It is also possible for the heels of your boots to have secret openings, in which a letter written on straw-paper might be inserted. They might also retain the comb with which you fasten up your hair, for a valuable message might be written thereupon in microscopic letters.'

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[86] The wife of the Austrian Commander-in-chief.—Tr.

"All this they may do if they like, and yet this lady of mine will convey the despatch into the fortress.'

"I should like to know her secret.'

"'Tis a very simple one. She will learn the whole despatch by heart from beginning to end.'

"The General began to laugh.

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"Oho ho! My dear friend, you don't suppose that we would entrust our couriers with a despatch in good Hungarian for the enemy to snap it up on the way, and thus learn all about our military operations. It may also be deliberately betrayed. In the times in which we now live men are quick enough to discover excuses for *changing their saddles*. This despatch contains all our secrets: where we are strong, where we are weak, where we want to assume the offensive, where we are obliged to stand on the defensive. Such a despatch would be worth 200,000 florins to the enemy at the very least.'

"I can assure you, General, that neither I nor this lady will betray it.'

"You couldn't if you would, for the whole despatch is in cipher. Take it, and look at it. Do you understand a word of it? Can any one possibly learn it by heart?'

"The writing which he placed in my hand was composed of a jumble of letters grouped into words—characters whose contents could scarcely be called language at all. I nevertheless assured the General that this lady of mine would learn the despatch off by heart all the same.

"'Tis impossible.'

"Nothing is impossible. Once, when we were actors ...'

"Then you were actors? And this lady was an actress too, eh?'

"Yes. Once our whole company went to Eszek, and there we acted a whole piece in the Croatian tongue without understanding a word of its meaning. A man is like a starling. If he repeats a thing a hundred times it remains in his head although he does not understand it.'

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"Look here, then! Read but two lines of this despatch a hundred times over, half an hour will do, and see if it remains in your head.'

"I consented. A quarter of an hour had not yet elapsed when I said that I was ready. I gave the General the despatch back again, and asked for ink and paper. And then slowly, meditatively, I wrote down the contents of those two lines letter by letter.

"You've got a marvellous headpiece,' said the General, in amazement. 'And has that lady of yours just such a marvellously retentive capacity as you have?'

"Just the same.'

"Then I consider the stratagem as feasible."

Here I could not help leaping to my feet. "What!" cried I, "you actually undertook to learn by heart a whole despatch written in cipher?"

"No, my sweet friend! I won't deceive you as I deceived that other man. The whole thing was a delusion. The cryptograms which reached the Commandant of the fortress were entrusted to Rengetegi, that he might unpod them with a secret key. He communicated this key to me. One had only to know a single word whose consecutive letters repeat all the characters of the alphabet in different series. The whole thing only required a little calculation; there was no need to rack one's brains about it. With the assistance of the secret key I first of all deciphered the

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cipher, and then I retransferred it into its original rigmarole."

"But are you aware," I interrupted, "that if the General had found you out, he would have had you shot on the spot?"

"I suspected as much. But he suspected nothing. He was really a good, worthy man. He said that things being as they were, he could safely confide the despatch to my hands.

"After that he pointed out to me on the military map the route I ought to take through Galicia, by which I should possibly avoid falling in with the enemy's squadrons. My passport in the name of Madame János Bagotay he filled up with his own hand. I begged him to leave a blank space for the personal description of my travelling companion.

"When this was ready he gave me a portfolio full of Austrian bank-notes, besides a hundred louis d'ors and a handful of silver money.

"Then he pressed my hand, and said: 'The last line of this despatch announces the promotion of Captain Rengetegi to the rank of major.'"

At this both Bessy and I laughed heartily, and then she merrily resumed her story as follows:—

"My return journey was in a much more lordly fashion. Everywhere relays were waiting for me. In a couple of days I reached Vienna. While still in Comorn, I had learnt that my mother had gone there for refuge, and still kept up her intimacy with a certain high official in the Imperial army. He was in the service of the War Minister there. It was not difficult to find him. I will leave you to picture to yourself the scene of our meeting. My mother loves acting, but she is a bad player, she never knows her part. She would have liked to have cried and fainted when I came rushing in, but she got no further than sobbing. I was all the better able to play my part. I hastened to excuse her for her behaviour at our last meeting. I took all the blame on myself. I ought to have remembered, I said, that it was not the proper thing to cling on to my mother's carriage when the infuriated populace was seeking her life. Then I went on to the motive of my coming there. The Hungarian Governmental Commission at Comorn had ordered that every Austrian bank-note which could be laid hands upon was to be burnt in the middle of the market-place. My mother had 40,000 florins in bank-notes, which the Orphanage Fund had retained from my patrimony. This amount had been lent out to various persons at interest. These persons, as soon as they heard of the order of the Governmental Commission, had hastened to deposit their German bank-notes—not in the fortress, but in the town bank, that they might at least get back their securities; and thus it was *our* money that would be burnt. That was why I had come at such a break-neck pace, I said. If my mother would give me a power of attorney for the purpose, I would immediately return, and as I had great influence with the Commandant, I would so manage that our money instead of being burnt should be handed over to me. After that I would settle with my mother. She also had money locked up there which I would get handed over to me. [Pg 234]

"This proposition made an impression.

"I had already informed my mother by letter of all this when communications were freer than now, but she, as all nervous people do with their letters, the moment she recognised my handwriting in the address, put it away without opening it. She fancied it was full of maudlin penitence. Now, however, when I called her attention to this letter, she took it out and opened it, and almost fainted with terror when she saw the annexed official communication of the Governmental Commission, and learnt therefrom that the term fixed for the bonfire of the Austrian bank-notes would be reached in three days.

"Then there was such a scampering to her good friend the high official, and to all sorts of high commanding officers, in order to procure for me a safe-conduct; then she got me a power of attorney neatly written out, by means of which I could reclaim her money, and then she said: 'Now, don't wait a moment, my darling girl, but jump into a fiacre and gallop off to Comorn.' [Pg 235]

"I found my journey back much freer from obstacles than my coming away. The self-same major of cuirassiers who would have had me flogged as a gipsy leader was now full of courtesy towards me. After reading my letter of introduction, in which the object of my journey was mentioned, he could not have the slightest doubt that I was about purely private business which was very pressing. He did not even have me searched. I could have smuggled into the fortress anything I liked. [Pg 236]

"When I had passed through the besieging lines, I turned off from the highway in the direction of Hetény, that I might seek out my captive.

"After the first delights of meeting each other again were over, I told him the whole story which I have just been telling you. I must say that I had a much more appreciative audience than you are. At the sensational scenes, he flung himself on the ground ... and with folded, uplifted hands implored the wolves not to devour me. He swore that if he caught the Ban of Croatia he would dance the life out of him for making me fiddle so unmercifully. When I dictated to him the despatch I had learnt by heart, by means of the secret key, the last lines of which contained his promotion to the rank of major, he exclaimed, with an irresistible burst of grateful emotion: 'My Queen! my Zenobia!' I had made him a major; he made me a queen. We were quits.

"'And now let us hasten to the fortress,' I said, 'for I have urgent business there. I want to save my property. Our house has been burnt already; if our money is burnt too, we shall be beggars.' This made him hasten. [Pg 237]

"I must, however," said he, 'devise something to round off my expedition, something of the quality of a heroic deed.'

"And by the time we reached the fortress he *had* devised something.

"The return of the courier with the despatch of the Hungarian Commander-in-chief created an extraordinary sensation in the fortress and spread even to the town. The Commandant immediately proclaimed that Captain Tihamér Rengetegi had been promoted to the rank of Major by the Hungarian War Minister for extraordinary services.

"A banquet in honour of the returning hero followed. All the officers were present. The ladies also took part in it. I was there too. Never had I seen Bálványossi (I beg his pardon, Rengetegi) play his part in so masterly a manner as on that evening. He was the gipsy leader who, with three others, fiddled his way right through every hostile camp. And what amusing adventures befell him on the road! I believe he laid under contribution every book of gipsy anecdote that was ever published. And when he came to that ghastly scene with the wolves—that was indeed a drastic description. The reality was nothing like so horrible as his account of it. The ladies swooned, the men were horror-stricken, only I was inclined to laugh. And when the guerillas turned up, how valiant my Rengetegi became all at once! He took horse and started off in pursuit of the cuirassiers. (To him they were cuirassiers!) It would have been beneath his dignity to have chased mere hussars.... By way of climax came the splendid description of how he cut his way through the besieging host. In the dark night, amidst a blinding blackness of midnight snow-storm, he cut his way on horseback through the Austrian foreposts, leaping over trenches and earth-works, with the bullets skimming about his ears right and left. His horse was shot dead beneath him, but ever equal to the occasion, he hastily fastened on his skates, and skated with the rapidity of lightning over the frozen Zsitva and the Csiliz, and two other rivers the names of which I never heard of before. Thus at last he reached the fortress. Every one was enchanted with the narration. The ladies rose *en masse* and kissed him, and improvised a laurel-wreath for his brows out of muscatel leaves.

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"To save appearances, I also went up to him that I might condole with and congratulate him upon all the exploits and sufferings he had gone through, when all at once my friend turned quite stiff and rigid, gave me a cold bow, pursed his lips, and turned up the whites of his eyes.

"'Madame!' said he, 'I have a word or two to say to you also. Where were you, may I ask, while I was jeopardizing my life a hundred times every day for my country? Can you tell me how you were occupying your days all this while?'

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"I was confounded. Language died away on my lips. The blood rushed to my face. I felt that every one was now looking at me. Naturally nobody in Comorn had seen me all this time.

"'If what the world whispers turns out to be true, and you have in the meantime been to Vienna—but no! I will not believe it.'

"His magnanimity offended me even more than his indictment.

"'What is it to you whence I come or whither I go?' I replied, turning my back upon him and beginning to talk to the young officers, like one who has nothing to be ashamed of.

"Shortly afterwards I quitted the banqueting-room. I hadn't reached the end of the long pavilion corridor in the fortress when Rengetegi came running after me.

"'What on earth possessed you to calumniate and accuse me before the whole company,' I said to him, 'just as if I were a traitor, or I don't know what?'

"'Tsitt! Zenobia, my Queen. Let us understand each other. It was in your own interest that I had to feign jealousy and rage. Let us go into my room and I'll explain everything.'

"When we were alone together he locked the door and then explained things nicely.

"'It concerns your money.'

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"'Aha!'

"Amidst all this laudation, appreciation, and ovation, and all the other flummery, I did not lose sight of the *main chance*. I told the Governor privately that if he wished to reward me in any way, he might do me the favour not to give to the flames the property deposited in the bank to the credit of the damsel who was so near to my heart, but allow me to bring it back to her. The austere patriot was as inexorable as Brutus. "Never!" said he. "We will burn what we have laid hands upon, even though it were the property of my own father. We can make no exception. What would those poor devils say whose paltry ten or twenty florins we surrender to the flames of the *auto-da-fé* if we allowed the forty or fifty thousand florins of the rich to fly away? Burn they shall!" This he said with a very wrathful voice. Then he added in a milder tone: "However, I'll confide the burning of them to you."

"Now I began to understand.

"A quarrel between us therefore has become an absolute necessity. We must fly into a rage with each other. The *auto-da-fé* will take place in a couple of days. The bonfire will be in the centre of the public square. I shall throw the bundles of bank-notes one by one among the spluttering faggots. You must be close by the booths of the bread-sellers, and break out into curses. You

remember the cursing scene from *Deborah*? Very well, it may be useful. After the *auto-da-fé* there must be a lively scene between us. We must cast our mutual souvenirs at each other's feet. I'll throw at you the embroidered cushion which you worked for my birthday, and inside it will be the money belonging to you and your mamma which I have rescued. Then be off as quick as you can to Vienna.'

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"But how about the packet that you have to burn?"

"Leave that to me; a few copies of the *Comorn News* will give every bit as brisk a flame.'

"Everything happened according to his instructions. I saved our property, and you must admit that my friend and I displayed considerable prudence on this occasion. We did nobody any wrong: I only recovered what was my own.

"Then we fell out together publicly, as preconcerted. My friend Rengetegi played Othello in a masterly manner. Then as our acquaintances could not succeed in reconciling us, we solemnly separated and I went back to Vienna.

"On the way back I again fell in with the Austrian major. I showed him the money I brought with me, naturally without letting him know how I came by it. He became so friendly as even to entrust me with a letter to an old acquaintance of his in Vienna, who was none other than my mother's colonel....

"You may imagine the friendly reception which awaited me when I returned to Vienna and gave my mother her money. She folded me in her arms, covered me with kisses, bedewed me with tears, and called me her darling child. What still remained to me of my patrimony, about 40,000 florins, I placed in the Vienna savings-bank. The rest of my dower was in the hands of Muki Bagotay, with the exception of what we spent while we lived together. This also I contrived to get back again—but how?

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"In the spring, when the fortune of the war changed, Comorn was relieved, and I hastened off home again. I told my mother that I was urgently bent upon building up again our burnt house—only the roof had been burnt off, the walls remained standing. She approved of my resolution, and was very proud of having such a sensible and enterprising daughter. I immediately set about rebuilding our house, taking advantage of the time which elapsed from the raising of the first to the beginning of the second siege. During my stay at Vienna I moved continually in military circles, and I saw quite plainly what was coming. But why reopen my wounds? All my illusions were over. I had learnt to know my hero at close quarters, behind the scenes, I might say. This 'lord of creation' used to whine before his tailor for a respite with his account till next pay-day, and immediately afterwards would ascend his triumphal car drawn by captive kings and declaim to the populace of conquered Constantinople. But in one particular thing Major Rengetegi really extorted my admiration, I mean by his strategical science."

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"Ah!" cried I.

"You may well say 'ah!' I have read the campaigns of Napoleon I., I have read the campaigns of Charles XII., but in none of them could I discover so many ruses of war as my hero invented in order to triumphantly solve the problem—how a man in his capacity of superior officer may constantly be taking part in the most ticklish skirmishes without allowing his person to get into the way of any wandering bullet. He always knew how to hit upon some mission whereby he might manage to skeddaddle out of danger. And if I now and then fluttered the red rag of *self-esteem* before his eyes, he would reply: 'I have duties towards art; if they shoot away half my leg, how shall I be able to act on the stage again?' Yet, when the battle was over, who so great a hero as he! Others only mowed down the enemy, he thrashed them afterwards with a flail. 'Tis a dreadful thing when a woman discovers that her hero is a habitual liar, lying with the fiery burning conviction that no man will dare to doubt him, so that she has to make him swear to the truth of every word he utters.

"Meanwhile, I continued my house-building. Every sort of building material was very dear, and there was plenty of money too. Whence did all this money come? I'll tell you. The Russian hosts had already invaded the kingdom. The speculator-species perceived that the national cause was declining. The Hungarian armies were everywhere falling back. Then Klapka, by a brilliant victory, raised the second siege of Comorn and was within an ace of capturing the besieging host. The region was instantly alive with people, and a whole series of triumphs followed one after another. And now there flocked to Comorn from every part of the kingdom quite a tribe of panic-stricken speculators and jobbers, with bags full of Hungarian bank-notes, and bought everything that was for sale, at whatever price the sellers liked to ask. My Muki also took advantage of this lucky period to regulate his finances. He sold his herds at four times their real value, and paid the price, in Hungarian bank-notes, into the deposit bank at Comorn. It was my dowry paid back, he said. The bank hastened to place the amount in my hands; and I hastened to satisfy therewith my architects and builders, who did not let the money stick to their hands.

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"Doesn't this remind you of the round game we used to play as children, when we lit a straw, and, sitting in a circle, passed it round from hand to hand; whoever was the last to hold it till the fire burned his hands, him we used to thump unmercifully—that was the forfeit? Just such a burning straw was the dowry paid back to me by my husband. The roof of my father's house was the straw end which remained in my hands. The amount which I deposited in the Vienna bank is all I have left in the world—except Tihamér Rengetegi. But not even he has remained mine, for he has changed into Bálványossi. And now here we are together. The playing of a common part unites

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us. From morn to eve every word we say to one another is a lie. It is not even true that any one is pursuing Rengetegi, for at the capitulation of Comorn he received his safe-conduct which guarantees his life and liberty. That is not what distresses him. But he wishes to deny the whole part he played during the Revolution, that as Bálványossi, the theatre-director, he may get the necessary concession. He is continually urging me to go to Miskolcz to the Government Commissioner and settle the business for him."

"I understand."

"No, you don't. It is none of those interventions which we see in romances and dramas, when a pretty woman goes to move a mighty tyrant with her tears, and sacrifice her charms to him as the price of the life and liberty of her persecuted husband. Oh no! my hero is no plagiarist! His ideas are all original. He wants me to go to the mighty gentleman and tell him that the Debreczin expedition, which has given rise to the whole of this heroic poem, is not his '*crime*,' but mine. I was the gipsy leader who played before the Ban Jellachich, and then escaped. It was I who carried the despatch to the Hungarian Government. In a word: I am to sacrifice myself on his account!"

"Fie! fie! And still you love this man!"

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"What am I to do? I have nobody but him in the wide world; and besides, he is such a droll, amusing character. All day long we are either fighting or frolicking, and it is this variation which makes life so charming."

But for all that, she flung herself on the ground and hid her face in the green moss. She was in such a good humour!

"Sha'n't we give our friend a signal to come out of his hole?"

"He is quite comfortable—don't disturb him."

"I wonder you don't hit upon the very obvious idea of putting an end to this pantomimic game of hide and seek. You have a foreign passport. You could enter your friend in it under some such description as major-domo or travelling companion. You could take him with you to Naples or to Paris, and you could live without care on the interest of the fund deposited at the Vienna bank."

"I know that."

"Then why not do it?"

"Because I don't choose."

And as she said this she looked strangely at me with her enigmatically mysterious eyes, in which heaven and hell were blended together like starlight in darkness!

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CHAPTER XIV

THE DEMON'S BAIT

I said in the last chapter that the lady was looking straight into my eyes with the glance of Circe. Then she shrugged her shoulders, flung herself down beside the fire-ashes, and began to blow the cinders so as to entice a flame from the smouldering embers.

"It's useless to give advice to me, for I always do exactly the contrary. Let us rather have a chat together. What is your fate, now?"

"The fate of the grub when it is in its chrysalis."

"Then it was not without cause that I went to you that evening when you shut your door in my face? And yet I only said what I did because I feared that either the gibbet or suicide awaited you on the path you chose to take."

Here her voice trembled, her chin, her lips twitched convulsively, and her eyes filled with tears.

A lady in tears is dangerous!

I did *not* hasten to dry her tears. On the contrary, I replied with cool cynicism:

"Every career has its own peculiar *maleficium*—drowning awaits the sailor, shooting the soldier; the doctor may fall a victim to an epidemic; the glass-maker suffers from caries; choke-damp kills the miner; and he who meddles with politics runs a chance of being hanged or guillotined."

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"No, no! They shall not do it!" she cried hoarsely, seizing my hand in both her own.

"I do not want them to do it," I said, "and that is why I am hiding myself here at the back of beyond."

"But how long is this to go on? What future do you see before you?"

"For the present I am like the convalescent beggar whose promenading does not go beyond the house-door. I thought of beginning a little farming in this valley and forgetting all my dreams of glory. I shall become an agriculturist."

"Very nice! And your wife?"

"She will join me."

"And you seriously think so? You think she'll come and settle down with you in a hut with a clay floor and a straw roof, like the one you are living in now."

"It's a palace compared with what we lived in in our Debreczin days. When my wife did the cooking—for we had no servant—we loved each other better than ever. In a little house loving hearts are nearer to each other than in a large palace."

"It was possible then, no doubt. I have experienced the same thing. But this is quite different. When a man has such brilliant hopes, want is no affliction. It will be over soon, he thinks. But to enter upon misery with the knowledge that it will last till death, is beyond the power of resignation. And particularly with a woman! Believe me, I know my own sex. Your wife, who now stands at the summit of her artistic fame, cannot quit her brilliant career. No! If you were an angel she could not."

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I could not defend my point of view against her. Stern reality was on her side; on my side were only faith and imagination.

"I believe in my wife's promise to deliver me out of my difficult position."

"I can't imagine how. She cannot do what I can do for Bálványossi—in other words, accuse herself and say: 'It was not he who proclaimed freedom on March 15th. It was not he who wrote those heart-stirring articles to the nation. It was not he who edited those newspapers; not he who went to battle with the armies; not he who inspired the Honveds at the siege of Buda: but I.' Your wife cannot take your fault on her shoulders."

I couldn't help laughing.

"I would not let her."

"But let us suppose that a great *artiste*, a renowned beauty, might perhaps manage by some means or other to procure an amnesty for her hidden husband" (and as she said this she discharged murderous, envenomed darts at me from the corners of her eyes), "what will be your subsequent lot when you return to Pest as a rebel amnestied at the intercession of his wife? The earth and the sky which you used to adore have vanished. No poet, no newspaper, no publisher: what will you do? Will you enter a lawyer's office again to copy deeds, issue summonses, and serve writs at so much a day? Or will you translate comedies (under official protection) at fifty florins each for the National Theatre; or paint fashionable portraits of butchers' wives at five florins apiece? Or, perhaps, you'll do nothing at all, but live simply under the wing of your wife as 'the actress's husband,' and see a woman bending beneath the load of sustaining a household—accomplishing the most exhausting work; coming home after her day's acting is over, tired to death, excited, unstrung. See her, poorly though she be, hurry from one provincial town to another, acting uncongenial parts, so as to scrape together a little money wherewith to satisfy the Jews with whom she has to haggle for the material for her costumes. And the husband must look on at all this with his arms folded, or, if he does anything at all, may perhaps paint the flowers for her costumes, which she herself will then sew on with her own hands."

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"It will not last for ever—other times will come."

"Other times! You think other times will come, eh? Now, that is what I fear most of all. I know you well. You are not the sort of man who can content himself with the thought—what is past is over! You will never forget what you used to be, still less what you meant to be. The glory of fame is not forgotten as easily as a pawned jewel. You will again fall into those straits from which you have been set free."

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And the woman saw right into my soul. My face is so maladroit that it never could keep a secret. You can read my features like an open book. When I am frightened, it is vain for me to pretend that I am plucky. When I'm in a rage, it is useless for me to affect calmness—nobody is taken in by it. I cannot even haggle over a bargain properly, people can read from my face what I have to give. This woman could see where my soul was wandering in secret, far, far away, in a gloriously arisen Hungary of the future. And she regarded this talk of turning farmer as little more than the incoherent delirium of a fevered visionary.

"Let it be as you say," I said.... "If I live I will build a tower out of the ruins of my country's glory; if I die, my grave will become an altar. Vainly does this coward flesh of mine tremble in every nerve. I am neither a hero nor a giant. The report of a gun makes me tremble; I grow pale in the presence of death; grief draws tears from me—but I will not depart from my set path. If I cannot write under my own name, I will write under the name of my landlord's dog. I will be 'Sajó.'⁸⁷ We'll bark if we can't speak, but we'll not be silent."

[87] My works "*Forradalmi és csatakepek*," "*Bujdosó naplója*" were written under the pseudonym *Sajó*.—JÓKAI.

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The lady, in terror, seized me by both arms.

"For Heaven's sake, take care! A step backwards, and you'll fall over the rock."

"But I don't mean to take a step backwards."

"Listen to me quietly. Don't fly into a rage. Sit down beside me. You need have no great fear of me. I am not a luring demon. I have not a word to say against what you've said. Do whatever your soul bids you. I ask for nothing more. Don't you believe that I've a good heart also?"

"I believe that you've a little too much heart."

"Perhaps all that my heart led me to do was sinful. I was mad. I was blind. Passion got hold of me; but the feeling I had for you would not have been out of place in heaven itself. When I am alone, I am always with you; and when I think of anything I think of you. I wish you to go onwards and upwards along the rugged path that you have entered upon; but can you do it here, with a leaden weight on your feet, a padlock on your mouth, and a strait jacket on your body?"

"'Tis because it *is* heavy that I must needs carry my burden."

"But how much more brilliant would be the success of your struggle if you could continue it on a foreign soil—in free France, for instance! Just think! If you were now to appear in Paris, the leaders of the French literature would receive you with open arms. The French public would enrol you among its great writers, and then you might write of the glory, the sufferings, and the heroic struggles of Hungary, and of the amiable qualities of its people; you might write all this with perfect freedom, from the very bottom of your heart, and millions and millions, the whole round world, would read your writings, and not merely a handful of people, as here at home. There you would be a rich man, here you are only a day-labourer. Here you might sing like a Tyrtæus, and the world outside would hear nothing of it; but if you raised your voice abroad in the midst of a great nation and a cosmopolitan capital, your voice would be like the horns of Joshua before the walls of Jericho."

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Ah! how luring was the panorama.... To become a great French writer! To be raised aloft on the shoulders of the most glorious of nations! What here at home was but the crack of a whip in my hands, would there be a thunderbolt!

"But it is impossible," I objected. "How could I possibly force my way to the frontiers of France from the depths of Tordona, through my own country, through Austria, through Germany, without a passport, without money, in a semi-Asiatic garb? Just as well might I cast myself down from the mountain-top in the belief that I could fly."

"Well, come now, I have a very good plan to suggest to you. I've got an English passport. Have I not told you exactly how I got it? None besides yourself knows that I have it, except, of course, the officials who have *viséd* it on the way. In this passport the blank for my travelling companion has not yet been filled up. You asked me just now why I did not insert the name and description of Bálványossi. Now, I'll tell you. Nobody is pursuing him. I always intended to fill up that blank with your name. You won't have to sacrifice much beyond that little moustache and beard of yours, and resigning yourself to speak nothing abroad but French and German. I appoint you my secretary. I myself am an English lady. We mustn't go *viâ* Vienna. But the way is clear in the direction of Breslau. I have quite enough money for us both. I still retain the hundred ducats which I received at Debreczin. We shall do sumptuously with this till we get to Paris. My capital in the Vienna bank I can leave where it is, or I may have it sent after me, and the interest from it will suffice for your modest needs at the beginning of your residence at Paris, so that you will not have to resort to the emigrants' fund. When once you have won a position for yourself in Continental literature you will need no further assistance from anybody. You will be able to refund to me what I advanced to you as a loan. Only as a loan remember, not as a gift; still less do I expect anything in exchange, not even a warm pressure of the hand. I am simply your proselyte whose mission it is to make straight the way of the prophet."

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It was a seductive picture, and still more seductive was she who presented it to me.

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To be free! To be able to pronounce my name boldly in the face of every one who met me! Not to tremble at the pattering of every footstep at my door! To fight for great ideas in the company of great and noble minds!

And how her *eyes* sparkled as she said these words, like the parhelia in the glowing girdle of a solar halo! And her face was as open as a child's. I could have sworn that she was an artless virgin opening her heart for the first time to a true sentiment. Her hands were folded as if in prayer.

Had I wavered but a hair's-breadth, I must have plunged down into the abyss.

Ah! what a different man I should have become. Had I fled with her, I should now be the grand master of the Realists, for there is as much erotic flame, satiric vein, and luxurious fancy in me as in them; but I have not used these qualities, because I write for a Hungarian public. Had I flown with her, millions would have read my works, and fathers and mothers would have cursed me as the corrupter of their children. And I should have laughed at them, and tapped the fat paunch, which as an idealistic writer I have never been able to acquire.

And whither would this reinless, bridleless passion have hurried me had I been swayed by such a fascinating Calypso, whose every movement was a charm, whose every word was a snare, who was herself the personified joy of a Mohammedan paradise? For, remember, I was then only four-

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and-twenty!

Fortunately, a sober thought still remained in my head.

"I mean to remain in my own land," I said abruptly.

"Why?"

"I will not forsake those who arose at my word. If they lie on the earth, I also will lie down beside them. I will take my share of the suffering of which I was the cause."

"You won't remain out in the cold for ever, of course. Haven't you, then, the hope that those who have sought refuge abroad will one day return in triumph? Then you also will return home at the head of the reprieved."

Even this weapon she managed to turn against me! Oh, what a weak coat of mail it was that defended me—only a single word!

"I have given my word that I'll not depart from hence," I said softly.

"To whom?"

"To her who gave me her word that she would come and seek me here."

"Your wife?"

"Yes."

"And if she seeks you, what then?"

"She will bring me liberty."

"How? In what way?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know, and yet you believe?"

"I believe with my whole heart."

"And you never think what may be the price of such freedom?"

"I spurn such a thought as often as it arises."

"You believe in a woman's loyalty, a woman's virtue?"

"I do."

"Then you are a very happy man!"

During this conversation I continued my drawing, and she called my attention to several objects in the landscape which had escaped me. Shortly after that she began a very ordinary conversation about the weather.

"Look! the prophecy of the old forester is well-nigh fulfilled. The sky is quite overcast. The snowstorm will surprise us here."

"Then, perhaps, it may be as well to call our friend out of his hiding-place?"

"Oh, that will be very easy! I need only give him one signal. He himself selected it from the romance 'Ivanhoe'—the note of the hero's horn—'Wasa húa!' At this signal he will appear immediately."

"Well, I can scarcely see to sketch any more, it is so dark."

"Then you are determined to go to that little village down there?"

"Yes."

"No news from the world will ever penetrate thither."

"That will be all the better for me."

"You have heard nothing of what is going on outside all this time, I suppose?"

"Nothing pleasant."

"It is a dreadful world. How would the women manage to live if they couldn't chatter?"

"They could sew their children's clothes."

"Perhaps you haven't heard that Petöfi's widow has married again?"

Ah, that was indeed a murderous thrust! A calculated, well-aimed, poisonous dart where there was a weak joint in my coat of mail.

"What do you say?" cried I, in a perfect passion.

"It is a fact known to everybody."

"Petöfi's wife! Then what has become of Petöfi?"

"He fell at the battle of Segesvár."

"Who saw him fall?"

"A Honved officer who testified to the fact. This was quite enough for his widow. She immediately went to the altar with another young writer, who was not perhaps such a knightly hero as your friend, but who is a pleasant young man in a good official position, moving in the best society, and who is able to assure his wife a comfortable existence."

Every one of this woman's words went right through my heart.

Now, indeed, after years have elapsed, I can say that poor Julia did well to confide her fate to a good and worthy man. She had a child, and had duties towards that child. But at that moment a heavier blow could not have descended upon my head. The death of our martyrs, let it be never so cruel, was not nearly such terrible news to me as the news that the martyrs had been forgotten.

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That any woman could ever forget Petöfi! The woman whom the poet had encompassed with the rays of his soul of flame! That the poet should be able to make himself immortal to the whole world and not to her whom he had worshipped!

No doubt the widow was right, she will be blessed in the next world, and there Petöfi himself will justify her—the righteous are always just; but to me this news seemed to open the very gates of hell. If the grass can grow so quickly over my overthrown idol, what am I, I should like to know? A frog enclosed in a tree, whose calling it is to live for a hundred years—beneath the bark!

"I won't believe it! I won't believe it! I won't believe it!"

She laughed at me. "Now wriggle away!" she seemed to say.

From the crown of my head to the heel of my foot I was full of bitterness. If such a thing as this could happen, why shouldn't that other thing happen, too? Why shouldn't another fallen writer forget the promise he had made to his wife, seize the hand of his former ideal, and fly away with her out into the world? That would be tit for tat.

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Her two eyes flamed as she looked at me and laughed. It was just as if she knew she had wounded me and would fain stir me up to vengeance.

She had destroyed my idol: belief in a woman's heart.

Women were all alike!

"No, no, no! My wife is not like other women."

I sat down on the edge of the precipitous rock, made a speaking-trumpet of the palms of both hands, and called loudly down into the valley "Wasa húa!"

The echo repeated my words. And not long afterwards could be heard from below the proud refrain:—

"Whom he meets upon his way
Him he cruelly doth slay;
But if a pretty girl draw near,
Ah, then what gayer cavalier!
Tremble and quake ye tongues that lie,
And speak his name all whisp'ringly:
Diavolo, diavolo, diavolo!"

As the song drew nearer, I packed up my traps and clasped my stick all ready to say good-bye.

"Forget what we have been speaking about!"

I said this.

"Have we been speaking about anything, then? I didn't know!" replied the lady with the eyes like the sea.

"Adieu!"

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"Adieu!"

I was quite persuaded that we should never meet again.

I did not wait till my friend had climbed up again out of his hole. They would easily find one another. The snow had already begun to fall in thick flakes. I set off homewards.

The snowstorm drove full against me as I proceeded. I had very nearly lost myself in the forest. The evening had fallen early; by the time I had descended from the hill it was quite dark.

But still darker was what I carried with me in my brain—the black thought that there was now no such thing as love or loving remembrance in the world. Where we fall, there we lie, and none cares. Some of us die, and there is none to mourn us; the rest of us remain alive, and mourn over

ourselves.

How fair is the fate of a fallen tree. There it lies, and the ground-ivy covers it.

If the wild beasts were to tear me to pieces now, nobody would know where I had perished.

At last I stumbled upon the linden spring.

This was a good guide. The stream flows right along beside the house of the Csányis; one can get home by keeping near its banks, even in the dark.

My soul blamed me for having passed so much time by the Pagan Altar with that "other" woman.

The snow now completely covered the fields, and through it in serpentine flight darted the threefold stream. The autumn leaves were still on the trees, their crowns bent down beneath loads of snow. The whole landscape was sombre, but it was not more sombre than my soul.

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Suddenly, like a ray of hope, the window-light of the little house in which I was lodging flashed out before me. It stood at the end of the village, and was the last house of all.

I was utterly wearied both in body and soul when I arrived at last at the little dwelling.

It had neither courtyard nor enclosure. It stood right out upon the road. The carts and ploughs stood there beneath a shed. There are no thieves here.

The door of the house is never bolted, and it opens out upon a little passage. On the right-hand side of this passage lie kitchen and store-room; on the left the living-rooms, and a side chamber, which served me as a bedroom, and the rest of the family as a sort of withdrawing-room. It is the only room in the house which has a deal floor, all the other floors are of clay.

The kitchen door was also open, and a large fire was blazing on the open hearth. My hostess with her serving-maid was busy baking and boiling.

When I bade her good evening, she glanced at me with a roguish smile.

"Ei, ei! A nice time to come home, I must say! But go into the room—supper will be ready presently."

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I went into the room.

By the lighted stove sat my wife!

Rapturous joy drove every other thought out of my soul.

I don't know what I said. I wouldn't believe she was there till I had caught her in my arms and embraced her tightly.

'Tis true, 'tis true, 'tis true—loyalty, love, sweet remembrance still belong to this world!

She told me afterwards—very briefly—how ill she had been. She had wanted to come before, but couldn't; as it was, she had left Pest by stealth, and had come with a passport made out under a false name. She had suffered much on the way. She had gone astray in the snowstorm in the beech woods, and it had been as much as she could do to find her way again. She had been terrified by the wolves, whose howls even now resounded from the woods.

And all the while I suffered the mental torture of a man who hears the person who *is* talking to him and the person who *has been* talking to him at the same time. I saw the one figure and I saw the other also.

Our good host, worthy Beno Csányi, as he sat by the table, kept on mumbling in his beard: "That's something like a woman—that *is* a wife, if you like!"

Well, now that we are both together again, what does it all matter?

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Yes, but how long shall we be together again?

My wife must go back the day after to-morrow. Only grudgingly had the director of the theatre allowed her a four days' leave. On the fifth day she must play.

But my captivity was soon to draw to a close.

My wife took a carefully concealed piece of paper from her breast; it was a tiny little grey schedule, but that little schedule was in those days a great treasure. It was the guarantee of my liberation—a Comorn passport.

It was a very simple method of deliverance, as simple as the egg of Columbus.

When the fortress of Comorn capitulated, each of the officers of the garrison there received a passport which guaranteed his life and liberty, and also dispensed him from enrolment in the Austrian army. My wife managed to procure me such a passport in the simplest way in the world. There was a brother of Szigligeti's in the Comorn garrison, Vincent Szathmary (Szathmary was their family name), who wrote my name down in the list of the capitulating officers as a Honved lieutenant, and handed the passport bearing my name to my wife.

This was the reason why I was obliged to remain in concealment in the meantime.

Thus my dove had brought me two leaves of the olive-branch, namely, life and liberty; but how about the third? I had still to wait for that. I was not free to come forth till I got it. I should have to wait till she came back for me a second time. I no longer ran any risk of being condemned, but I might still run the risk of being interned at my native place, Comorn, and that would have been a fresh torment for me.

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Then my wife asked me: "Have you been thinking of me also all this time?"

And if I had not been able to answer, "Always of thee!" and if, while saying this, I had not been able to look her honestly in the face, she would have been amply justified in tearing the passport to pieces and flinging the fragments in my face.

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CHAPTER XV

MARVELS NOT TO BE SEEN FOR MONEY

It was now four years since I had made friends with the beech woods. For two years I was "Sajó," but after that I was again able to practise the art of letters in my own name.

My wife and I saw nobody, and nobody came to see us. We had both of us quite enough to do without paying visits. My wife was an actress, and I an author. And let nobody suppose that actresses and authors live in the land of Cockaigne.⁸⁸ Both have very hard work to do, and rest is their dearest recreation.

[88] Lit., a sky full of fiddles.

Unfortunately I was engaged in publishing and editing. Nominally, indeed, the director of the National Theatre was the responsible editor and publisher of the belle-lettristic and artistic journal *Délibab*, for my name was still under police supervision; but, in reality, I wrote and edited the whole paper, corrected the proofs, and folded up, directed, and despatched the copies of it to the subscribers—and got into trouble for it besides.

My only assistant was a worthy, semi-rustic, very pronounced Hungarian lad, called Coloman Iglódi, who had served as lieutenant under the banner of the red-capped Honveds in our Utopian days.⁸⁹ At the battle of Tarczal he had received three bullets, one in the face, the second in the arm, and the third in the leg, and these wounds he had to thank for his dismissal as a genuine invalid. So he joined me as messenger, secretary, and door-keeper, and a worthy, honest fellow he was.

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[89] *i.e.*, during the war.

One afternoon "clerk Coloman" (that was his familiar epithet) opened the door of my working-room. "I beg pardon, sir," said he, "but a cuirassier is here."

"What sort of a cuirassier?"

"A senior lieutenant."

"What does he want with me, I wonder?"

In the fifties the visit of an officer was tantamount to a challenge. Those were the days of the famous political duels in which Coloman Tisza,⁹⁰ Julius Szapary,⁹¹ and Francis Beniczky fought with the delegated officers.

[90] The late Prime Minister of Hungary and leader of the Liberal party there.

[91] The present Prime Minister.—Since this note was written, Szapary has given way to Weckerle.

"Admit him!"

"Call me, please, if necessary," said clerk Coloman confidentially, making at the same time a significant movement with the paper-knife.

Then the visitor entered.

In figure he was half a head taller than me at the very least. He was a strong, broad-shouldered fellow. His bony face wore quite a stony expression by reason of a powerful eagle nose and a broad double chin. On the other hand this sternness was somewhat contradicted by a pair of honest, bright-blue eyes, a little mouth, and offensively light hair, though his eyebrows, moustache, and whiskers were even lighter.

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My visitor, as he advanced from my door to my writing-table, took those three short mazurka steps which, with men, are generally the preliminaries to a military salute; he held, close pressed to his thigh, his beautiful helmet, with the golden lions and the black-yellow plumes; and when he stood in front of me, he clashed his spurs together and introduced himself in Hungarian.

"I am Wenceslaus Kvatopil, senior lieutenant of dragoons."

He had the peculiar habit of accompanying every word with an explanatory movement of his hand, so that a stone-deaf person could have understood perfectly what he meant. The deprecatory movement of his hand meant—Wenceslaus Kvatopil; the indication of the twin stars on his collar meant that he was a lieutenant; the slight elevation of his helmet signified that he was a dragoon, and the simultaneous sweep of the hand towards his breast gave me to understand that he was *not* a cuirassier.

"I am glad to see you," I said; "how can I be of service?"

"I should like to have a long conversation with you, sir, if you will let me."

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At this I would have offered him a chair, but on no account in the world would he suffer me to do so, but helped himself to one, and then once more apologised for the trouble he was giving before he sat down opposite to me.

I begged him to address me in German, as I was quite capable of making myself understood in that tongue.

"No! no! En *akarom* magyarul beszélni"⁹²—and at the same time he made as though he were ducking the head of a refractory urchin in a basin of soapsuds.

[92] "I want to talk in Hungarian."

"*Akarok*," I good-humouredly corrected him.

"No! no! *Akarok* is the *indefinite* mood, *akarom* the *definite* mood; and I want to speak Hungarian *definitely*."

I was forced to acknowledge to myself that his logic was stronger than his grammar.

"I was born in Leutomischl"⁹³—here he let his head fall regretfully on his breast.

[93] A Bohemian town. He meant by this that he belonged to Czech officials who had been forced upon Hungary.—TR.

I with corresponding pantomime replied that that need not make any difference between us.

"My father was"—here with both hands he took aim with an imaginary gun.

It now occurred to me *why* he made all these gestures. Such is often the way with those who have taught themselves a foreign language without a master, and cannot find quickly enough the word they want. I hastened to his assistance.

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"A forester?"

"Yes, a forester. He had sons"—he lifted up both hands, and then one finger.

"Eleven?"

"Yes, eleven. I myself was"—he held the palm of his hand quite low down towards the floor.

"The youngest?"

"Yes, the youngest."

"My father gave me"—here followed a very suggestive gesture.

"Yes, a *very rigorous* education."

"But it was all"—he lightly tapped the hollow of his hand, as much as to say "No good!"

"He wanted me to be"—he laid the palms of his hands together as if in prayer.

"A priest?"

"Quite right! I wouldn't"—a snap of the fingers, and then a lizard-like dart into the palm of the hand.

"You mean to say you took French leave of the Seminary?"

At this we both laughed. The gesture next following—a smack on the palm of the hand illustrated by a little equitation on the back of a chair—gave me to understand that my visitor had then become a soldier.

"At four-and-twenty I was a lieutenant. I lay at Cracow for two years. I served in the Hungarian war from beginning to end. I am now thirty-four years old. And still I am only a lieutenant. Curious, isn't it?"

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I agreed with him that it was certainly most surprising.

"My other comrades—no, not *comrades*, that's a French word."

"*Bajtersai*?"⁹⁴ I suggested.

[94] "Your comrades"—the Hungarian equivalent.

"Yes, of course! my other *bajtersai* all became captains and majors, and have got decorations. I've

nothing! Nothing, I tell you! And I'm pretty plucky too. I'm a good horseman—I've never given offence—I understand my duties. What do you think the cause is?"

I really was curious myself to know the cause of this misadventure.

"All through the war I was interned at Temesvar with my squadron. No occasion for displaying valour. Cavalry behind trenches. My comrades all on the battle-field"—he made a swift motion with his hand.

"And fought bravely?" said I, completing the sentence.

"Yes, they fought bravely, whilst we horsemen besieged in the fortress might"—here he put the tips of his thumbs between his teeth and puffed out his cheeks.

"Smoke your pipes?" I suggested.

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"Yes, we smoked our pipes."

Here we both gave way to merriment once more. Again I urged upon my visitor to speak in German, and we could then perhaps get along more easily, but he only replied, "*Muszaj!*"⁹⁵ Well, if he knows even that *Hungarian* word, I thought, he *must* have his own way, that's all.

[95] A corruption of the German *müssen*, but as used in Hungarian it expresses the most emphatic necessity. When all other arguments fail, the word *muszaj* is supposed to carry everything before it.—Tr.

"Yes, I *must* speak Hungarian, by command of the highest authority."

"The highest?"

With that he seized the lappets of my coat with both hands.

"Come, now! Do you know who is the greatest tyrant in the whole world?"

"Dionysius of Syracuse."

"Ha! ha! ha! Young blood! 'Tis this!"—and with his index finger he tapped himself between his fourth and fifth ribs on the left-hand side.

"The heart, eh?"

"You're right. The heart. 'Tis the greatest tyrant. *It* commands me to speak Hungarian."

"Then you are in love, eh?"

A gesture with the palm of his hand right up to the chin was the answer.

"Up to the neck, eh?"

"No, over head and ears."

"With a lovely Hungarian damsel?"

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He raised his three fingers closely pressed together to his lips, which were pointed as if to receive a kiss, thereby explaining that she was *very* lovely.

Then he passed his extended palms softly over his face, then, joining them together beneath his chin, affirmed, so far as I understood him, that she was also young and charming.

Then he pressed his waist with both hands, which meant "slim as a lily stalk."

After that he cracked his fingers right in front of his eyes, which meant "What eyes!"

Finally he crossed his arms, and immediately afterwards disengaged them again.

"In a word, a ravishing beauty," said I. "I congratulate you!"

"I think you may."

"Your tender sentiment is naturally reciprocated?"

"Oho!" and he caught hold of the flat of his sword.

"I did not mean to insinuate the contrary," I said.

"Naturally."

Then he was silent, and began to fumble about his stiff cravat. I saw that he wanted me to ask him some more questions.

"A maiden lady?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then a widow lady?"

"Ah, no!"

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"Then it can't be a lady at all?"

"No, no! What are you thinking of?"

"Then what is she?"

"A lady who has a husband, but yet is not a married lady."

"Aha! A *divorcée*?"

"Yes."

"Then the relations between you are quite legitimate."

At this, my lieutenant of dragoons rose from his chair and stood before me in quite a magisterial position. I also stood up.

"The lady desires you to be her ..."—here the word he wanted would not occur to him. He raised the three first fingers of his right hand above his head, like one who is taking an oath. I guessed his meaning.

"A witness to her marriage?"

"No, not that. She used another word."

"Oh, she meant I was to give her away?"

"Yes, that is it. How I do forget!"

"Then is the chosen of your heart an acquaintance of mine?"

"Naturally. If I were only to mention her first name you would remember at once. Bessy!"

"Ah, Bessy!"

"How red you've got! You were in love with her once yourself. I know! She told me. Well, will you give her away?"

"With pleasure."

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"Really?"

"With all my heart."

Then he caught hold of my hand with both his hands; squeezed my hand violently, and his eyes grew quite tiny with sheer rapture. I believed he would have liked to kiss me; but he had a big nose, and I had a big nose, too, so we could not very well have managed it.

"Then will you allow me to bring in my bride?"

"Whence?"

"She is waiting outside."

"Not on the staircase?"

"Yes, indeed. On the staircase. She won't come in till she's quite sure you'll give her away. She's a bit shy."

I immediately hastened to open the door for my hesitating visitor.

It really was Bessy.

It was winter time just then, and she had all sorts of furry garments upon her, and a furred cap on her head; she looked just like a fair Muscovite.

There really seemed to be some sort of coquettish bashfulness in her face.

I couldn't imagine why. I had seen her face before under many similar circumstances, and after Muki Bagotay, Peter Gyuricza, and Tihamér Rengetegi, Wenceslaus Kvatopil was decidedly an improvement.

The bridegroom remained in the room while I admitted the lady. Then he first craved permission to kiss her hand, and then begged her pardon for kissing it. After that there was absolutely no getting him to take a seat, but he persisted in standing on one spot, leaning over the back of the arm-chair in which his lady sat.

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"Have you grasped what my hero has told you?" inquired Bessy, when she had got over her first embarrassment. "Just fancy! he has given me his word as a gentleman that henceforth he'll never address a word to any Hungarian except in the Hungarian language. And he tortures his Hungarian orderly to death with it to begin with."

"A most laudable resolve," I was obliged to answer.

"But now, first of all, let me explain to you why I ask you to put yourself to the inconvenience of giving me away."

I assured her that to give her away was not an inconvenience, but a pleasure.

"After our last meeting you never anticipated, perhaps, that we should meet again in this life?"

I lifted my head and looked at her with amazement.

"Oh! we can say anything before *him*" (here she pointed at her bridegroom). "He's as nice and good a boy as ever lived. I could twist him round my little finger if I liked. You can say anything before him. You know my story, I think, up to the time when I had to go into hiding with Bálványossi after the Revolution. I shouldn't like you to imagine that I quitted that man from pure lightness of heart. Just fancy! he had the impudence to commit that act of baseness which I mentioned to you: he told the Imperial Commissioner the whole story of the conveying of those despatches, cleared himself from the accusation of that heroic deed, and at the same time denounced me. He justified himself to me on the ground that it was necessary to '*purify himself*,' in order that he might obtain a theatrical licence, and that they would not *impute* this little joke to me because I was a woman. But they *did* impute it! They arrested me, they imprisoned me, and they severely cross-examined me. And I have to thank this worthy young fellow alone for getting off scot-free. He took my part. But for him I should have had to pay most dearly for my heroic exploit. Shouldn't I, Wenzly?"

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The lieutenant hinted, with a deprecatory wave of his hand, that no more need be said about the matter.

"Hence our acquaintance began," continued the lady, "and this, perhaps, will justify me in your eyes for selecting a foreigner, a foreign officer, as my *fiancé*. I had very strong reasons, you must admit, for growing cold towards my former hero."

The fair lady did not appear to be satisfied with the impression that her eyes had made upon me; at least, I had some reason to believe that the following commentary was intended not so much for the delight of her bridegroom as for my own edification.

"Believe me (I am perfectly serious about it), I am not merely grateful to Kvatopil because he has rescued me from my great difficulties, and, what is more, from any further improprieties on the part of that Barabbas Bálványossi;—no, I also esteem him as a noble nature worthy of all respect; from the crown of his head to the tip of his toe he is full of the love of truth, not even in jest would he tell a lie. He is valiant and strong-minded, and at the same time affectionate and tender-hearted. A man of his word, in fact, who does not lightly give his word either. A really model man."

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A pencil was in my hand, and before me was a blank sheet of paper, and I involuntarily scribbled on this piece of paper "Number 4."

The lady grasped the import of my hieroglyphic and shook her head, but she smiled a little too.

"But he is not like the others," she insisted; "he is the direct opposite of what *ladies' men* think a man should be. It will sound incredible, I know, but it is the simple fact that he has been my visitor these three years. He has come to see me nearly every day during that period, and never has he permitted himself a single bold advance or a single unbecoming expression. Every day I have to tell him, just as if it were the first time, to take a seat, put down his helmet, and place his sword in the corner, and our conversation has never gone beyond the criticism of Schiller's verses."

I was bound to admit that this was really an extraordinary case.

"I couldn't help rallying him about it," continued the lady; "you know that I am not accustomed to a wooer who imitates the statue of Memnon; and then Kvatopil confessed, with perfect simplicity, that he was *afraid* of me. 'If I were as timid on the battle-field,' said he, 'as I am in your presence, His Majesty would only give me my deserts by dismissing me from his service.'"

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The lieutenant signified by a nod of his head that his words had been correctly reported.

"Finally," continued Bessy, "I had to ask for his hand—hadn't I, my friend?"

The bridegroom replied that such had indeed been the case.

"Even then he was quite coy. He pleaded his humble rank. He begged time for consideration. Now, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did."

"I had to remove his scruples one by one, till at last I brought him to a definite declaration, and he said he would take me to wife. Never have I met with such an officer before."

Bessy read from my face the expression, "Why bother me with all this?" I never asked about it, and I didn't care a fig about her affairs.

"Look now," continued she, in an almost supplicating voice, "I don't tell you all these things to amuse you, but because I have an earnest request to make of you."

"So the lieutenant informed me."

"I don't mean about giving me away—that is *not* a serious request. You would do that to oblige any servant of yours. I have a much greater request than that to make. I wish to ask you to be my guardian, my foster-father."

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"I? Your *foster-father*?"

"Don't put so much emphasis on the word *father*. You are four years older than I am, remember."

"What does a married woman want with a guardian?"

"I assume the case of a married woman who mismanages her property."

"And do you believe, then, that *I* am such a great financier?"

"I believe that you are my sincere friend, anyhow. You are my only real friend in the round world who neither asks nor expects anything for his kindness to me. I know it from experience. You have heard, no doubt (and if you haven't heard, you might easily have guessed it), that my relations have shaken me off. They deny that they ever knew me. My mother has married again and removed to Prague. Every one in whom I would confide tries to get something out of me—either money, or what is more precious than money. Whosoever would attach himself to me is either a swindler, or a seducer, or a parasite. As for myself, I am a stupid, credulous creature, who will never have any brains to bless herself with. I need a strong hand over me, some one to look after my material interests and save me from bankruptcy, some one in whose good-will I may confide. I know very well I might find a more *experienced* guardian than you, even if I went no further than the civic magistrates; but I could endure dictation from nobody—but you. Your dictation I could put up with. For Heaven's sake do not let me perish!"

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I could not help being sorry for her. I perceived also that she forbore to take my hand. Still, it is a rather ticklish position to become the guardian of a pretty woman, especially a pretty woman of this kind.

"Very well, I don't mind. But let us consider the whole business seriously. I suppose the lieutenant agrees to it?"

Wenceslaus Kvatopil assured me that he had no will of his own in the matter.

"Well, now, let us consider the merits of the case. Have you still got the money which you deposited in the Vienna savings bank?"

"Yes, and as soon as you are my guardian, I mean to draw it out and deposit it in the bank at Pest."

"So much the better, it will be more convenient for the quarterly payments of interest. And then, too, you will have to pay out of this amount the usual caution-money required of every officer about to marry."

"Yes, I know. Six thousand florins."

"Of course, you might also mortgage your father's house to this amount."

"Whichever you think best."

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"I think the latter way will be best, for I foresee that you will get very little profit from your houses, and I want to save as much of your ready money as possible."

"*Save*, do you say?" cried Bessy, opening her eyes very wide at this word.

I scratched my head all over (I had lots of hair to scratch in those days). It was my duty as guardian to express my views with perfect candour. At last I found the requisite formula.

"Look now, my sweet ward Bessy, and you also, respected lieutenant, I have seen all sorts of wonders in my lifetime. I have seen a one-legged ballet-dancer who could turn the most difficult pirouettes; I have seen a painter without hands who painted masterly pictures with his feet; I have seen a blind actor who played Hamlet right to the very end. But what I never have seen yet is a cavalry officer without debts."

At this, the pair of them burst into a loud ha! ha! ha!

"No, no!" cried the bridegroom, "I am not such a wonder as that!"

I now begged him, since we had become so confidential, to be so good as to draw his chair close to the table and put down his beautiful helmet with the black and yellow plumes and go into figures.

"How much do your debts amount to?"

And a very pretty little amount he made of it.

The bridegroom could read from my face that I thought the amount a trifle extravagant for a lieutenant; for that amount Bessy could have got a major at least. He hastened to explain matters.

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"I did not incur this large debt myself, the culprit was another lieutenant, a friend of mine, a rich and distinguished young fellow. He got me to write my name to a bill as guarantor of the amount. He was still a minor. I wrote my name, of course—what did I know about it? Suddenly, when my young friend got over head and ears in difficulties, he blew his brains out. His father refused to pay the bill, and so I inherited it from his creditors. Since then I have been paying and paying, but the debt, instead of diminishing, increases, and the terrible *boa conscriptor* winds itself

tighter and tighter round my body."

A boa constrictor indeed, was this gigantic constrictor⁹⁶ serpent!

[96] A translation of the Hungarian word *Osszeiro*, which means a conscript or schedule of anything, *here* a schedule of debts.

At this we all three laughed again, which was rather odd, for there was nothing at all to laugh at.

The long and the short of it all was that after discharging her lover's debts, and depositing the caution-money, my ward Bessy still had twenty-five thousand florins left.

"All right," said she, "that's just why I asked you to be my guardian, for if the money remains in my hands, every bit of it will vanish by the end of the year." [Pg 284]

"I wonder you've kept it so long."

"The wonder is owing to the fact that my mother inhibited the payment of the amount to me, and this embargo can only be removed when I am married to a man of rank and honour."

"You'll have to be very economical in your housekeeping," I said, "not to exceed your income."

"There's Kvatopil's pay, too, and as a cavalry officer he is entitled to free unfurnished quarters."

"And you'll be able to put up with an officer's free quarters?" I said.

"You know very well that to such things" ... (I saw that she meant to say, "I am used to such things," and I pulled a wry face. She rightly understood from my pantomime that it would be scarcely *proper* to mention the events of "Anno Rengetegi" in the presence of her Royal and Imperial⁹⁷ bridegroom, so, with theatrical *savoir-faire*, she passed in an instant from the impudent nonchalance of a *vivandière* to the tender cooing of a turtle-dove) ... "true love is always ready to sacrifice itself." And with an enchanting smile she extended her hand to her bridegroom, who raised it with tender enthusiasm to his lips. They were just like turtle-doves.

[97] Royal as belonging to the service of the King of Hungary, Imperial as serving the Emperor of Austria.

"Eh, Wenzy?"

"Yes, Eliza!"

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I felt no particular pleasure in this version of Romeo and Juliet, indeed I was half-inclined to hiss the performers.

"Before giving you my paternal blessing, my dear children," said I, "I have one question to ask you. Most honoured Mr. Lieutenant, as I understand that you were originally intended for a priest, I presume that you are a Catholic?"

"A Roman Catholic, yes."

"During the time you spent in the Seminary, then, have you not so much as learnt that a Catholic is not free to marry a Calvinist woman whom the civil tribunals have divorced from her husband; for, according to Catholic dogma, marriage is a sacrament which the secular power cannot dissolve?"

At this the bridegroom looked very much amazed.

"Neither of us thought of this certainly."

Bessy suddenly cast a basilisk look at me. Huh! what lightnings flashed in those sea-like eyes!

"Then how are we to get over that?" inquired the bridegroom of me, with childlike helplessness.

"Why, by your becoming a Calvinist, I suppose."

"A *Calvi* ..." he was already outside the door when he said the ... "*nist!*" He caught up his helmet and bolted without saying good-bye to any one. Clerk Coloman told me afterwards he had never seen a dragoon in such a hurry.

Bessy he left behind on my hands.

The young lady was in a terrible rage.

"It was pure malice on your part," cried she, "to do me out of my bridegroom like that! What do you mean by it? To serve me such a nasty trick as that!" [Pg 286]

I justified myself as best I could.

"He would have had to know it sooner or later. The priest would have refused to unite you."

"You should have left that to me. If once I had paid his debts, his honour as a gentleman would have bound him to make this sacrifice for me; he could not have got out of it then."

I was forced to admit that I had acted very clumsily. I humbly begged her pardon. I would never do it again. Her next bridegroom might be a Mohammedan, for all that I cared.

"You never could speak sensibly to me. No matter! I'll bring Wenceslaus Kvatopil back here one of these days."

And off she went in a huff.

This interruption had annoyed me. I had lots to do. I had to write the addresses of our subscribers on the covers of the neatly folded newspapers. This was not an ideal occupation, especially when one had to paste on the wrappers as well, which it was also *my* business to do. Some proof-sheets were also awaiting me with a lot of printers' errors. It was a realization of the proverb, "When the church is poor, the parson tolls the bell himself." In my leisure hours, however—my time of repose—I went on with my romance, "A Hungarian Nabob"; the idea of the principal character I had borrowed from a story of my wife's.

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A couple of weeks elapsed. One evening, when I was hesitating whether I should go and see about my oil-lamp myself, or wait till clerk Coloman returned home from the post, or the chamber-maid from the theatre, whither she had gone to carry my consort her costume in a basket, a violent ringing began outside. I had to go and open the door myself.

To my great surprise, I saw Bessy before me with her lieutenant on her arm.

Wenceslaus Kvatopil was bubbling over with affability.

"Here I am again, sir. They have arrested me, and put me in chains. I must surrender."

Yes, I thought, when the starving garrison is reduced to horse-flesh.

"The siege was vigorous. Such batteries. Look! Those eyes! Congreve rockets are nothing in comparison. The star battery is already taken."

"The firing must have been terrible indeed."

"And now I must ask you once more to be my witness."

"You mean your bride's witness?"

"No, mine. First you must come with me to the priest to inform him that I have renounced the Catholic faith."

"What, already?"

"Yes, and from conviction."

"Would you take a chair, please?"

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"From absolute conviction."

"Bessy is a more clever arguer than any missionary; an energetic propagandist."

"And if I were to be damned on the spot, if I were to lose my hope of eternal salvation, I should be ready to sacrifice that also for those dear, lovely eyes."

"Come, come, Mr. Lieutenant," I said, "pray don't talk so wildly."

"But I mean what I say—I am ready to become a Mohammedan for her sake."

"I can quite believe it."

"Then you will be my witness at the priest's?"

"Pardon me. 'Tis a serious matter. I honour my own religion as much as other sects honour theirs, yet I am no proselytizer. Do you wish to become a Calvinist from sincere conviction?"

At this word he leaped furiously from his seat.

"A Calvinist? Certainly not! Heaven forbid!"

"Then what do you want to be?"

"I want to be a Lutheran."

"'Tis all one."

"The devil it is! We at Leutomischl hold the Calvinists to be infidels."

"Your bride might have told you, I think, that this is not true."

At this, Bessy again intervened. She implored me prettily not to deny her this little kindness. Kvatopil had only consented to be converted because they have crosses in the Lutheran churches and believe in the sacraments, so that by joining them a man does not risk losing his heavenly hopes so much, and the Commander-in-chief would not be down upon him so fiercely as if he were to go over to the Calvinist Kurucz.⁹⁸ The end of it all was that I, a Calvinist presbyter, had to introduce a newly-converted soul into the Lutheran Church.

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[98] *Kurucz*, a name originally given to the Transylvanian insurgents under Francis Rákóczy; they were mostly Protestants.—TR.

I really must have been a very good sort of fellow formerly, that is to say, before my heart was

hardened.

At last every obstacle was overcome. I consented to give away my ward, Wenceslaus Kvatopil's bride. Bessy received from her excellent mother (who was now a general's wife) intimation that she had withdrawn her sequestration from the money in the Vienna bank; the caution-money was deposited, the boia conscriptors were satisfied, and nothing hindered us from going to church.

The marriage party, besides the bride and bridegroom, consisted of two witnesses; the bridegroom's witness was a battalion commander, a major who brought his wife with him.

And here, perhaps, every one will ask me why the wife of the *other* witness was not there also?

It is an awkward question.

I might, I know, summarily dispose of the whole matter by saying that my wife had just gone, by special invitation, to act at Szabadka; she had been invited, but could not come. But this answer, I know, is unsatisfactory.

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I would, however, first of all, lay down this axiom: "An honourable husband should give his wife *no occasion* for jealousy; but neither ought he to make her jealous *without occasion*."

The sacred truth is that I had never mentioned Bessy's name in my wife's hearing. ("Slipper-hero!") Did she know of her? I don't know. She was much too proud to have ever shown it if she did.

I had Bessy's portrait, and it was in the drawer of my writing-table. It was there even when I got married. And if it had found its way into any one's hands, I could not have said that it was the portrait of my grandmother. But this is what did happen. When the Russian armies broke into the kingdom, I, foreseeing the end of the unequal struggle, shouldered my musket, tied on my sword, fastened my knapsack round my neck, took leave of my wife, and went forth to seek the camp of Görgey—on foot. On my way I met Paul Nyáry. "Whither away so armed to the teeth, brother Maurice?" said he. "I am going to die for my country," I replied, with tragic pathos. "And what have you got in your knapsack?" "A ham." "Well, before dying for your country, let us have a bit of that ham of yours together." With that he helped me up into his car, and in the car beside him was already sitting Joseph Patay—two members of the Hungary Government at Debreczin, in fact. I was curious enough to inquire whither we were going, whereupon Nyáry replied:

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"The dog that bolts to Szeged town
T'wards Buda lets his tail hang down."⁹⁹

[99] Buda and Szeged being in diametrically opposite directions.

Even with the danger of instant death hanging over his head, his bitter irony never forsook him. So I went on with Nyáry to Szeged. A week afterwards my wife followed me. Our house she had entrusted to poor old Dame Kovacs. The clever comic actress had no need to fear the Cossacks. When, however, the Russians occupied Buda-Pest, and the rigorous order was issued that all arms, uniforms, and Hungarian bank-notes were to be given up, whilst every one in possession of a prohibited object or a revolutionary proclamation was to be tried by court-martial and shot, then indeed the good old dame ransacked all the drawers of my writing-table, and crumpling up into a heap all she found there, including Petöfi's correspondence, a letter of Klapka's, the whole of my diary which I had written during the Revolution, with innumerable and invaluable data, pitched the whole behind the fire, and so they disappeared. In this great *auto-da-fé* Bessy's portrait was also reduced to ashes. I therefore have my suspicions that something was known about it, but nothing was ever said to me on the subject.

So that, you see, was why *only I* was present at Bessy's wedding.

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The rendezvous took place in her apartments. Here I had the opportunity of making the acquaintance of my fellow-witness, the major of dragoons, and a very genial man he was. He was a good copy of a genuine Hungarian lord-lieutenant of a county. Nothing but cordial hilarity and jovial merriment, you would never have taken him for a soldier, least of all for an Austrian soldier. He blackguarded the "Bach¹⁰⁰-hussars," but had nothing but praise for the Hungarians. He had not been shut up in Temesvar like the lieutenant, but had been fighting in Italy, and had only just come hither. He had the habit of seasoning his discourse with Hungarian proverbs and pithy aphorisms. He introduced his wife to me also. "My domestic dragon," he said; he could not dispense with his jesting even then. The lady, however, clearly did not belong to the dragon species. On the contrary, she was a remarkably pleasant woman, in the prime of life, with really handsome features. One thing I will say of her: when once she began to talk she never knew when to leave off. Her conversation knew neither rest nor pause. In my eyes, however, this is an advantage, for it is my invariable practice to entertain my lady friends by letting them talk to their hearts' content, while I listen.

[100] The reactionary Austrian Minister who was mainly responsible for the attempted denationalization of Hungary.—Tr.

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When the bride was still in her boudoir, the major's lady made me thoroughly acquainted with the family affairs of all the officers' wives in the regiment. When the bride appeared in all her bridal glory, accompanied by the bridegroom, who held his helmet in one hand and a gigantic bouquet of camellias in the other, the exchange of notes between the witness of the bridegroom and the witness of the bride took place with all the usual formalities.

Towards me the major acted with the studied courtesy of a high Government official, but towards the lieutenant he acted the part of a senior officer from beginning to end. He ordered him about as if he were sitting on horseback and on the point of setting out for scout duty. And the lieutenant obeyed him like a machine. In fact, the bridegroom quite gave me the impression of a man sitting in his saddle at the head of his squadron. The small arms were beginning to fire, the musket balls were piping about his ears, the hissing grenades strike the ground in front of him, and he cannot so much as move his head aside till the liberating command sounds: "Forward! March! Draw your swords! On 'em! Cut, slash!" Stop! What am I saying? Here was no question of cutting and slashing! No; press her to your breast, rather! Is she not your bride?

Finally, at the word of command, we reached the altar.

It was all over. I had given Bessy away. She was married.

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She bore up very gallantly; but then, of course, she had had a deal of practice.

But as for the bridegroom, every one of his movements had to be by order; he was accustomed to have it so. He was so moved indeed that he could scarcely draw off his glove, and would have forced the bride to stand on the right hand, whereas the priest wished her to pass to the left; and when the ceremony was over, he turned towards his own witness with the expression of a delinquent condemned to death who has now no hope left save in the mercy of the Court of Appeal.

"We have been married with our left hands," he stammered.

His best man reassured him: "Have no fear of that, my son. 'Tis the usual thing. The bride always stands on the left, but your right hands were duly placed within each other."

"Impossible!"

Worthy Kvatopil did not seem to know which was his right hand and which was his left.

On the way home the happy bride and bridegroom sat together in a little coach.

A splendid banquet awaited the guests in Bessy's lodgings. The table was already spread.

When the happy husband had conducted his darling yoke-fellow into the midst of us, he, without more ado, flung himself on the sofa, and, hiding his face in the palms of both hands, began to weep bitterly. Such a wonder as that is surely not to be seen for either love or money! That a bridegroom should weep fit to break his heart immediately after the marriage ceremony, and bewail the loss of his bachelordom in floods of bitter tears!

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The two ladies, however, took him in hand between them, and began to entreat and console him, but he could not stifle this outburst of feeling. The major also reassured him very prettily: "Come, come, my dear friend, you need not take it so tragically. Look at me now! I've been through it all! Look how well I get on with my domestic dragon!" This, however, was poor balm to him in his great affliction. At last the major fairly lost his temper. "A thousand Turkish skulls! What's this, lieutenant? Do you wish to regale us with a specimen of the higher morality? Bombs and grenades! Embrace your wife, sir, immediately!"

Bessy looked at me as if she were on the point of weeping. I pitied her from the bottom of my heart.

"Mr. Lieutenant," I said, "have you ever learnt English?"

The newly-married husband was amazed.

"Yes," said he.

"From Ollendorf's grammar?"

"Yes."

"Do you recollect exercise No. 2: '*Why does the Captain weep?—Because the Englishman has no bread.*'—Well, then, let us *give* the Englishman some bread."

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At this every one burst out laughing. The lieutenant also laughed.

And so this scene came to an end. We sat down to table, and amidst the merry ring of glasses we made a good deal of fun out of the odd and mystical question of Ollendorf's, "Why does the Captain weep?" and the still more curious answer, "Because the Englishman has no bread."

The lieutenant's frame of mind remained an inexplicable enigma to me. In after years I discovered its true solution.

The cause of his weeping was altogether different from what Ollendorf had supposed.

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CHAPTER XVI

SOLDIERING

The idyll did not last very long, and was quickly followed by the epic.

War broke out, not among the young married folks, but among the European Powers. This only so far concerned my ward as Kvatopil was also mobilized; with his dragoon regiment he went towards the eastern frontier. Bessy, naturally, went with him.

We parted abruptly. They both came to me to say good-bye. Kvatopil's face was radiant with joy, and the reflection of it was visible in the smiling face of the lady. There will be war. The soldier's harvest will now ripen.

For the purpose of sending her her quarterly allowance it was absolutely indispensable that I should know their place of sojourning.

"Our title for the present will be—'An Ihre hochwohlgeboren Frau Oberlieutenantin Elisabeth von Kvatopil!' For the present, I say. Later on we shall no doubt advance *farther* and *higher*."

"*Farther* towards the frontier, and *higher* in the scale of rank, I suppose?" said I, by way of solving the rebus.

My ward (she was four years younger than I) was very pleased with my polite elucidation, and the pair of them parted from me in the best humour in the world. [Pg 298]

After that I received a letter from my ward every week. There is absolutely nothing in the most intricately combined knights' moves of the severest chess problems which can be compared with their peripatetic zigzagings. Now towards the south, a week afterwards towards the west, then up again towards the north, retreating, advancing, then back again; knocking about in such utterly unknown hamlets, that one could only discover them on the best charts by means of microscopes. Finally, the war took a flying leap into Wallachia and Moldavia, skipped about Jassy and Bucharest, and then leaped across and all along the Pruth, and at last settled down in Czernovicz, till it had to move on farther to Przemyśl, whence again it happily doubled back by way of Stry, Munkács, Tokaj, Miskolcz, Kecskemet, and through Kalocsa again to Buda-Pest.

Bessy accompanied her husband everywhere. All the vicissitudes of the seasons which naturally abounded in such a martial pleasure trip she patiently endured with him. The letters which she sent to me during this period would make a very interesting chapter in a history of camp life. *Opportunist* reasons restrain me from making them public—they might deter our young persons (I allude, of course, to the female sex) from following Bessy's example.

Often and often I thought how accurately this young woman had foretold all these things of herself when we sat beside each other in my little wooden hut on the Comorn islet. In a straw-hut, in a cow-stall, in a besieged fortress, in a bare barrack, in the tent of an itinerant player, at the bivouac of an out-camping soldier—anywhere and everywhere, it is Love that makes us happy, and its sweet illusion can conjure up fairy palaces out of these wretched surroundings. And remember, too, that an officer in the field is by no means an amiable husband. Plagued, worried, chicaned by his official superiors; flouted by the weather; looking at the enemy with wolf's eyes, and kept back from falling upon him; eternally bickering with an unfriendly population; a guest beheld with evil eyes; and his wife (if he have one) like an iron chain hanging to his neck—it requires no small amount of love on the lady's part for her to follow him everywhere, and put up with his ill-humour. [Pg 299]

And she had prophesied all this beforehand. What was to be the end of it all?

But there had been no advance whatever up the ladder of rank. My last letter was still addressed to a lieutenant's lady.

When the great universal war was over, which left behind it so much bitter disillusion, Lieutenant Wenceslaus Kvatopil again came tapping at my door.

Clerk Coloman was no longer with me. The *Délibab* had come to grief. I now edited the *Vasárnapi Ujság*, in the place of the publicly advertised and responsible editor Albert Pakh, who was lying ill at Graefenberg. My new name was "Kakas Márton."¹⁰¹ Eh, what a popular man I was then! There were Kakas Márton meerschaum pipes and Kakas Márton clays, with bowls in the shape of cock-headed men. I really was in the mouth of the nation in those days. *O tempi passati!* [Pg 300]

[101] Martin Cock.

"Ah! 'tis you, brother, eh?" said I.

"So you still recognise me, then?"

I must admit that his physiognomy had considerably changed. During the campaign the officers were permitted to grow absolutely counter-regulatory beard-pieces. Wenceslaus was now bearded *à la Haynau*, that is to say, the beard was shaved so as to run into the moustache, till the two seemed one, which contributed not a little to the formidability of the whole face. But a still more notable correction of the features was due to his nose, which had grown quite red,—a piece of ruby.

He began by laying his index finger on the bridge of his nose.

"Do you see that? My sole booty from the Russo-Turkish war is this red nose. Last winter, while we were encamping on the Galician frontier, I happened to be out in the open field the whole of

one night, and got in the way of a villainous Russian blast. The wind drove the powdered snow into my face, and each flake stung me like a red-hot needle-point. I was not even able to turn my back upon it. In the morning my nose was just as you see it now. That same week twenty of my men were frozen to death in their saddles, half of my regiment was down in the hospital with inflammation of the lungs, scurvy, and hunger-typhus. Of my whole squadron I only brought forty men home—and this blood-red nose as a trophy."

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At this I did not know whether to condole with or congratulate him.

"I shouldn't have minded so much if only we had been able to fight with some one; but to go through a six-months' campaign without having anything else to do with one's sword than lay the flat of the blade about the shoulders of stubborn peasants during our requisitions for hay, that I *do* call hard. Sometimes our foreposts were so close to the enemy that we could *see* each other's breath, and yet we were not allowed to attack. At one time we were face to face with the Turks, at another time with the Muscovites. It would have been all one to me whom I pitched into, so long as I could pitch into some one. No such luck! Just when I was fancying that now we really were going to begin the battle, the order came again, 'Sheathe your swords!' and we marched somewhere else. I would have preferred storming trenches with cavalry to this sort of thing. And then that cursed maize-bread! Nothing but maize-bread, and not always enough of that. Half-roasted horse-flesh, too! Thank you for nothing!"

"But, thank Heaven, it is all over now!" said I encouragingly.

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"It is over, certainly. But what have I gained by it?"

He pointed to his collar. There certainly were only two stars there still.

"No promotion. I am just where I was before. And yet our major has retired. He was obliged to go, poor fellow; every limb was full of rheumatism. Our senior captain was promoted to his place, our second captain into the first captain's place. His place is now empty. I am the senior lieutenant, but there's not a word said about me. It is enough to make a fellow blow his brains out!"

I earnestly begged him not to think of such a thing. He had other duties. With such an amiable consort too!

"True, brother! She really is an angel. I dare not think what that woman has gone through during these bitter times. She was with me everywhere; but for her, perhaps, I should have gone to the bad. Ah, my friend, you don't know what bliss it is when, after going one's rounds through a biting snowstorm, one returns to one's quarters to find there an angel awaiting you with a bowl of steaming-hot punch."

"I do know, for I've tried it."

"The punch never failed. If rum was to be had for money, she got it from somewhere. I have known her, sir, get into her sledge and drive a day's journey into town to get rum for me. A diamond-hearted woman, I say! And then her love, too! Despite this ruby nose of mine, she loves me. She says it suits me very well. Nay, she is not even hurt at remaining simply the wife of a senior lieutenant. But for her I should have sent a bullet through my head long ago."

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I tried to comfort him with the assurance that a senior lieutenant in active service was worth ever so much more in the world's estimation than a general on the retired list.

He wound up by inviting me to have a glass of punch with him in the evening as soon as his lodgings were ready to receive me.

I didn't go.

Frequently did he invite me, by letter in his wife's name even, and yet I never went to drink punch with them. When we met together afterwards, I always invented some excuse. On the first occasion I said my head ached; on the second occasion I said I was too busy; on the third occasion unexpected country cousins had looked in upon me, and so on.

Every time I met him, however, friend Wenceslaus always wound up with the bitter exclamation: "I shall have to blow my brains out. Still no promotion!"

At last I was tired of telling so many lies, so I told my friend the truth.

Now, there are three sorts of truths in the world.

The first sort of truth is that which pleases my friend, but doesn't please me.

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The second sort of truth is that which pleases me, but doesn't please my friend.

The third sort of truth is that which pleases neither my friend nor myself, and which brings us to loggerheads at once. Let me illustrate what I mean.

To take number one first, I might have said to friend Kvatopil: "My dear comrade, a constitutional regime prevails in my house: my wife reigns, but I am *responsible*, and I could never obtain her majesty's consent to a bill authorizing me to go and have tea once a week with your pretty wife."

But this truth I did *not* tell him.

But supposing I had said to him: "My dear lieutenant, I move in a completely different sphere to you. I should be infinitely honoured by your society, but I should not know what to talk to your colleagues about," that would have been the second sort of truth.

But I did not tell him that.

I told him the third sort of truth. I said: "My dear Kvatopil, if you want to know the reason why you don't get promotion, I'll tell you. It is because you are so friendly with me. I am a *persona ingrata* in the eyes of the authorities. Only yesterday the police paid me a visit, packed up every scrap of paper they could lay their hands on, and carried it off; they even took my pictures out of the frames. Then Police-inspector Prottman came and worried me for half a day by asking me what I knew about Kossuth's proclamation and the dollar notes. If you keep on visiting me and writing to me, and if I were to go and amuse myself among your brother officers, they would think it gospel truth that you were also concerned in the conspiracy. Fortunately, I always burn your letters of invitation, or Prottman would now be engaged in docketting them."

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My friend was startled.

"I only invited you to a glass of punch!" he cried.

"Punch here and punch there! The police would be sure to read it '*putsch*.'¹⁰² And look ye, comrade, to be perfectly candid with you, I think it would be better for you if you left off all this punch-drinking, for 'tis that which makes your nose so red."

[102] A riot or sedition.

Now *that* was the truth which pleased neither of us.

"You think so, eh? By Jove, you're right! It has often seemed to me when I swallow down a glass of punch as if my nose were assuming enormous dimensions and diffusing a radiance all about me. From this day forth I'll drink no more punch. My word upon it! What's to-day? January 23rd? Note it in your diary: 'On January 23rd, Lieutenant Wenceslaus Kvatopil gave me his word of honour as a gentleman that he would never drink punch again.'"—And he left me no peace till I had entered it in my diary.

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"Nay, more than that, no kind of brandy, or schnaps, or wine, or beer; in a word, no sort of spirituous liquor whatever."

All this I had to make a note of.

"And now for a whole year and a day we'll watch the result. Nothing else now but pure water."

For a whole year after that I saw nothing of Kvatopil, nor did I hear anything of Bessy.

One day, however, my lieutenant suddenly invaded me again; he was still the wearer of two stars only.

"Now, if it isn't really enough to make a fellow blow his brains out! Again they have passed me over. I went straight to the Colonel. 'Your Excellency,' I said, 'here have I been in the service for the last twelve years. I have faithfully performed my duties. I have never used bad language. I know the regulations. I am at the head of the riding school—and still I am set aside. I want to know what objection they have against me.'"

"Manly conduct on your part, comrade," I cried.

"And do you know what answer I got? You were quite right, after all."

"Your suspicious intimacy with me, I suppose?"

"Oh dear, no! Who the devil cares for your chatter about the police? Not you it is, but this red nose! Here it is still, and it stands in my way." And he viciously tugged at the object that stood in his way as if it were some stubborn remount.

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"I don't understand."

"Then I'll make you. The Colonel replied to my interpellation with perfect candour. 'My dear Kvatopil,' said he, 'you have indeed the very best good-conduct report. There's but one fault which weighs heavily in the scale against you: you are too much devoted to drink.' 'What? I? Given to drink? Why, for more than a year I have been drinking nothing but water.' 'Impossible!' cried the Colonel—'just look at your red nose!' 'I acquired that while campaigning out.' The Colonel shook his head incredulously. 'But I assure your Excellency that I am speaking the truth, I have written testimony to the fact.' 'Then I should very much like to see it.' So that is why I have come straight to you. My dear friend, I adjure you by your hope of heavenly bliss, if you love me, if you ever loved Bessy, if you would save the life of a human creature, to give me that note-book in which, a year ago, you entered the vow that I made on my honour as a gentleman, that I may show it to the Colonel."

I energetically resisted this proposal.

"My dear friend, all sorts of ticklish items have been entered in this note-book of mine which absolutely cannot be read by anybody but myself."

But he solemnly assured me that he would never while he was alive suffer the little book to leave

his hands, and would only show to his superior that one page relating to his solemn engagement, so that at last I was obliged to submit to his discretion. He promised to return in an hour's time.

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And he kept his word. In an hour he returned, gave me back my little book, embraced me and pressed me to his breast.

"My friend, you have made me a happy man. I have obtained my object. His Excellency, on reading the oath recorded in your note-book, laughed to such an extent that I could count at least four of his teeth that were stopped with gold. Great Heaven! he eats gold with gold, while I have to gnaw bones with bone! When he had somewhat recovered from his outburst of hilarity, he smacked me on the shoulder, and said: 'Mr. Lieutenant, a great injustice has been done you. You are not a drunkard. There has been a mistake. This must be seen to. And I promise you that at the very first vacancy you shall obtain your third star.'"

This promise raised my friend into the seventh heaven of delight. Hope gave him back the desire of life.

This now is the speciality of a soldier's life. We poor civilians can have no idea of the joy he felt, especially if we be nothing but simple-minded authors. For an author has only one star, and that is high above his head. If he can get it, he may keep it, 'tis his. If he cannot get it himself, nobody in the world can get it for him.

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CHAPTER XVII

TEMPTATION

The most beautiful comet I ever saw was the comet of 1858. It was visible in the sky for a whole fortnight, from October 1st to 15th, and all the time the weather was as fine as could be, not a cloud in the sky. And meanwhile the comet drew steadily nearer to the earth, growing bigger and bigger, and in shape it exactly resembled a Turkish scimitar; at last it was quite visible in broad daylight.

I had very good cause for remembering this comet so well. In September of the same year I was seized with hæmorrhage of the lungs, an alarming symptom in a young man. Our doctor, Sebastian Andrew Kovacs of blessed memory, said that it was not medicine that I wanted, but change of air.

I submitted to his directions, and at the beginning of the autumn I undertook an audacious expedition—to visit the Western Carpathian Alps on horseback. Our good old friend Gabriel Török (he had been a Government Commissioner during the Revolution) and his two sons were my guides, for they had been all through those beautiful regions¹⁰³ before. Five to six hours in the saddle every day for a fortnight, through pathless forests, up and down steep rocky precipices, wading through streams and mountain torrents, dancing of an evening at the balls frequently given in our honour, in the big-heeled boots that we had worn on horseback during the day, gobbling bacon as we stopped to rest on the fresh grass, and washing it down with a gurgling drink out of our brandy-flasks—that is what I call a radical cure for inflammation of the lungs.

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[103] Jókai has immortalized these wonderful landscapes in *Az Erdelyi arány Kóra*, perhaps his best descriptive romance.

It cured me, anyhow.

With my suite, which gradually swelled into ten strong, I visited Bihar, and found out the rocky grave beneath which reposes my good friend Paul Vasváry, who died such a heroic death.¹⁰⁴ I also saw the Hungarian California, the gold-diggings of Abrudbanya and Verespatak. I painted that marvellous basalt hill Detonátá, than which it is impossible to imagine a more interesting formation. I was in *Csetátye Mára*, that overwhelming relic of the Roman power, a gigantic gold-producing hill entirely hollowed out by the slavish hands of a subjugated race. When they would have dug still deeper, the top of the scooped-out mountain fell in and buried beneath it both slaves and slave-holders. And there it stands now, a gaping chasm, like one of the circular Mountains of the Moon.

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[104] One of the victims of the Revolution.

I love to look back on this delightful tour; and the lovely comet accompanied me in the sky all the time.

The result of my journey was that I returned home with perfectly healthy lungs. From the comet, moreover, I borrowed the idea of starting a weekly comic paper under the title of *Ustökös*.¹⁰⁵ And this paper gave me something to do for the next fifteen years. During all that time it had great influence. With a preliminary and a supplementary censure to deal with, it was only possible to say a word of truth or a word of encouragement in verse or by way of anecdote. Sometimes a printer's error served our turn instead. For instance, to the question, "What shall a Hungarian man do now?" the answer was, "*Várjon és türjön*" ("Wait and suffer"); but by a printer's error the "*türjön*" became "*türrjön*," which the reader, in his own mind, would read as

"*Türr jön*" ("Let Türr come"), and associate it at once with the popular ballad sung from one end of the kingdom to the other, and which begins, "*Hoz Türr Pizta puskrát!*" ("Pizta Türr he brings his musket!")

[105] This comic paper still exists, but M. Jókai is no longer its editor.

But the comet had another signification also.

In those days war was our universal prayer. And the following year actually brought it.

Napoleon III.'s historical new year's greeting settled the dread destiny of the year.

One day my lieutenant again came to see me; I was still his guardian. His face beamed with joy. [Pg 312]

"God be with you, my friend!"

It was a strange beginning.

"I suppose you've got your promotion in your pocket?"

"Not that, but an order to march. Our whole regiment goes to Lombardy, and perhaps even farther. There will be war with Italy, but pray don't say anything about it. 'Tis a State secret."

"I knew it long ago."

"From whom?"

"From the Chief of the Police himself. One day he summoned before him all the newspaper editors in Buda-Pest and sternly commanded them not to write a single letter as *to the preparations* for the impending war. And thus we heard all about the coming campaign from the very best authority."

"Well, they certainly might have acted more discreetly than that."

"Where, then, shall I send you your remittances in the immediate future?"

"Nowhere at all, dear friend. Bessy will remain here. Nobody is allowed to take his wife with him, not even the Colonel; whilst from the very day on which the war begins I shall receive double pay. So give the money to Bessy."

"I'll *send* it to her."

"I say *give* it to her. Take it yourself personally."

"I am much obliged for your confidence."

"It is more than confidence. I wish you, while I am away, to go and see her: be her guest every day, and make yourself quite at home." [Pg 313]

"The deuce! Do you consider me, then, one of those ninnies to whom one can confide a pretty woman *à l'outrance*?"

"*Au contraire!* I am convinced of the contrary. I know that in such matters no reliance can be placed upon mere honour. The only thing a man expects from his worthy comrades is discretion. I am well informed of everything. My wife has confessed everything to me: the little wooden hut on the Comorn island, and then the visit in your private room, the meeting at the Pagan Altar.... He, he, he! we know all the circumstances quite well!"

(It was an unheard of case. To think that a pretty woman should become the trumpet of her own notoriety!)

"But, my dear comrade, on my word of honour ..."

"Here we have nothing to do with words of honour. You were in love with her once, and I need have no further fear of any one who *used* to love Bessy. Jupiter was the chief of the gods, and had the loveliest of women for his wife, yet *he* didn't keep the ten commandments. 'Twill be better to pour pure wine into our glasses, I think."

"But, I repeat, I don't want to pour any wine at all into my glass."

"Stuff and nonsense! We know all about that. Bessy makes a fool of every man, and showers contempt on her worshippers. Of you alone does she always speak with rapture. Whenever your name is mentioned she sighs deeply, and says, 'Ah, and I might have been his, too!'" [Pg 314]

"That proves all the more that our relations have been purely Platonic."

"Very good indeed! What I like about you best of all is the serious face with which you are always able to defend your point of view. Another man in your place would rejoice at his good fortune; you nobly deny yourself. You will compromise nobody. You have that advantage over all my other good friends. I would rather entrust her to you than to anybody."

"But why not rather trust her to herself? Foster within her the sentiment of fidelity. Write to her every day from the camp."

"Nay, my friend, a letter won't do. I can't be always scribbling and raving to her. Bessy is not one of the romantic sort. You know all her various temperaments."

"Indeed, I know nothing of the sort."

"Well, I do then. I know that the moment I've cast my right foot over my horse's back she will be unfaithful to me. It is as much her nature to be so as it is my nature to fight and yours to write. When I can't sit on horseback I'm ill, when you can't write a romance you're ill, and when a pretty woman is not flirting she gets the *migraine*. Your hand upon it that you will visit my Bessy while I am far away and comfort her!" And the tears really started to his eyes. [Pg 315]

Now, here was a situation which is not to be found in any romance, and which the reader will, I know, only accept as true under protest. A soldier departing for the wars forcibly compels his good friend to try and comfort the pretty wife he leaves behind him. But that that friend should kick and struggle with all his might against such a marvellous piece of good fortune is a fact which I am sure I shall never get the enlightened public to believe anyhow.

"My friend," said Kvatopil finally, drying the tears from his eyes and violently pressing one of my hands in one of his, "you know that we valiant horsemen, dragoons and uhlans, are going down to Italy; the hussars have gone already. The volunteers will take our place here in garrison-duty. During our absence down there they will be raging furiously here. If I thought that mine would be the shame to see my place here taken by one of those red-braided, chicory hussars, I should be capable of blowing out first my wife's brains and then my own. Don't allow such a thing to happen. If one of those cockatoos were to see your astrachan pelisse with the large chalcedon buttons of yours hanging up in my ante-chamber, he would be scared into flight at once."

At this we both laughed heartily. [Pg 316]

We took leave of each other very prettily. Kvatopil with the fairest hopes followed the glorious career which promised him fame and promotion.

The whole kingdom waited for news from the seat of war with rapt attention.

Our parting had taken place at the end of April. In May, the official newspapers gave us a brief account of the battle of Montebello. It was not a regular pitched battle, but a forced reconnaissance by the Austrian general with a jumble of some 12,000 men of all arms. Both the Austrians and the French fought bravely. The official *communiqué* did not give further details.

I, however, through the kind offices of a courier sent from the seat of war to the Commandant of Buda, also received a private letter from the field of battle. Kvatopil wrote thus:—

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—

"I hasten to write to you after the battle. The whole of our regiment was under fire, repulsed the French chasseurs and pursued them into Montebello. *I received a slight wound in the forehead, which did not, however, prevent my further fighting. The Commander-in-chief immediately promoted me to the rank of captain, and praised my valour in front of the regiment. Make known the joyous news to my dear wife. I am not able to write to her. A thousand kisses to the pair of you.*

"WENCESLAUS KVATOPIL, Captain."

But there was a postscript also. [Pg 317]

"P.S.—Show this letter to nobody, and don't let it out of your hand. Destroy it when you have read it through, for, if it were discovered, it would bring me into the greatest trouble, as it is absolutely forbidden to write letters from the camp. That is why I have addressed it to you instead of to my wife, for I can count upon your discretion. In her triumph she would show the letter everywhere. But you burn it.
—W. K."

Now, this letter made it my positive duty to visit Bessy, for I could only tell her about it by word of mouth. I might indeed have destroyed Kvatopil's letter, then written its entire purport to his wife in a letter of my own, but in that case she would certainly have carried my letter from pillar to post, and the mischief would have been the same.

If I went to her in broad daylight, every one would see me. I could not go *incognito*, for I was as well known as a bit of bad money. Besides that, the Hungarian national costume was in fashion just then. Every one who wore it might expect to have his name bawled after him in the street for a week afterwards at the very least. If, on the other hand, I were to go to Bessy when it was dark, and they were lighting the gas-lamps, that would only make matters worse.

And again, it would be an inconceivable absurdity not to suppose that one or other of Bessy's fair neighbours would not be looking out of the windows of the house opposite, with the most persistent curiosity, to see who was going in at the gate. And if but one of them saw me, the whole theatre would know all about it on the morrow. [Pg 318]

A husband with a conscience (and there *are* such husbands) ought in such cases to stand before his wife with a demure countenance, and say to her honestly and openly: "My dear angel, I am obliged to pay a disagreeable visit to this or that lady, and I don't half like it; I wish you would come too." Whereupon the wife will naturally be quite magnanimous and say: "Go along by yourself, my dear; you know that I am not a bit jealous."

But my wife happened, just then, to be away acting at Szeged, and would not be back for a week. That would be an aggravating circumstance in the case of a visit.

While I was thus debating with myself, a smart little maid-servant came to my door. She had a covered market-basket on her arm, and she drew out of it a neatly-folded little *billet-doux*, which she placed in my hand. The note smelt of celery, under which it had been put. I recognised the handwriting of the address, it was Bessy's. I opened and read it. The maid stood there and waited. At last she grew impatient of the long delay, and said: "I am waiting for an answer."

"Oh, so you're still there? Stop a bit!"

I read the letter once more.

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"MY DEAR GUARDIAN,

"Very serious business makes me send to you. Come and see me. As your honoured wife is now engaged on a provincial tour, can't you come and dine with me to-day? We shall be all by ourselves.

"BESSY."

Was there ever an odder reason?—"As your honoured wife is now engaged on a provincial tour"! No doubt she found that out in the *Fővárosi Lapok*.¹⁰⁶ But the conclusion: "therefore you can come and dine with me to-day"! And finally: "We shall be all by ourselves"! If that wasn't a temptation, I don't know what is.

[106] *News of the Capital*, a popular newspaper of the period.

I began to walk up and down.

The maid waited to see if I was going to count how many paces it was from the window to the door. At last she grew importunate.

"Is there any answer, please? I have to go home and cook the dinner."

"Ah, yes, of course! Greet your mistress from me, and tell her that I'll come and see her in the forenoon to-morrow."

"But I want to know whether you are coming to dinner, that I may arrange my cooking accordingly."

"True! Then say I'll come to dinner."

In Bessy's house the custom seemed to prevail for the mistress to dine six days of the week with Duke Humphrey, and then on the seventh, her at-home day, to make a great parade before her guests.

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I was now running into the very centre of danger.

I could not possibly back out of this engagement.

"A serious business, eh?" I know it was serious enough to me.

An ideal of my youth, and lovelier now than ever, with a husband of her own too, and that husband a fine manly fellow. So far from being jealous, he had openly entrusted me with the consolation of his sorrowing spouse. And I am the last person in the world to be enrolled in the Order of Anchorites.

I candidly admit that I am not a bit better than my neighbours.

So I tricked myself out finely. I put on my new coffee-coloured clothes with the antique buttons; I neatly tied my embroidered cravat; I drew on my Kordofan-leather boots with the silver spurs; I fastened a crane's plume in my new spiral hat.

This was the audacious fashion of the year, and within a twelvemonth this costume was worn in the whole kingdom. And after that, I went to the barber's and he twisted my thick blonde hair into masterly ringlets. Aggravating circumstances, the whole lot of them!

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CHAPTER XVIII

A COLD DOUCHE

How my heart beat when I set forth on my expedition!

On the way from my dwelling to Bessy's lodgings my ill fate brought me face to face with all the veteran actresses of the National Theatre, and they all stopped me and asked where I was going. They all remarked that I was very stylishly got up, and they all shook their fingers at me, and said: "Fie, fie! you straw-widower!"

The devil must really have been in me to make me take the trouble to have my hair so prettily frizzled.

I was just about to dash hastily up the staircase of Bessy's dwelling, when whom should I run into but Tóni Sági. It only needed that. He came from the same town as I did, was a common friend of all my friends, and was about as reticent of news as a town-crier.

"Your servant, friend! Why, you're quite a stranger. I've just come from Bessy. The young lady is in a very bad humour. She as good as pitched me out of doors. She must be expecting some one. Perhaps you are the very man, eh?"

It was all up with me now! To-morrow every newspaper in the town will report my visit here. For "quod licet *bovi*, non licet *Jovi*." [Pg 322]

If I were to turn back now, it would only make matters worse.

I hastened up the steps. Bessy lived on the third floor.... To get to her rooms I had to follow the open corridor which led down to the courtyard. I passed on my way the lodgings of a milliner, a female pawnbroker, and a lady who supplied families with servant-maids, and all three poked their heads out of their windows and watched me disappear.

On reaching Bessy's number, I found, tugging at the bell-rope, a red-peluched young coxcomb. The door was about a fourth part open, and the face of the vicious looking cook was protruding out of it. She dismissed the visitor with curt ceremony.

"My mistress is not at home!"

We nearly trod each other's spurs off as we cannoned against each other in the narrow corridor.

A minute afterwards the countenance of the self-same cook, rounded into complete amiability, again appeared, and she said to me:

"Would you do us the honour to walk in?"

And she held the door wide open for me.

You should have seen the face which my red furbelowed gentleman made at this. It was not enough for him to open his eyes and mouth at me; he stuck his *pince-nez* on the bridge of his nose as well.

That will mean a duel for me to-morrow. [Pg 323]

Meantime, however, I was master of the situation.

I had to go through the kitchen to get to Bessy's room. The kitchen was also the ante-chamber; you hung up your overcoat there. Her cook was her only servant, parlour-maid, chamber-maid, everything.

"Would you kindly walk into the saloon?" urged the servant.

"But announce me beforehand. Here's my card."

"Beg pardon, but I can't take it; both my hands are doughy." (She was in the middle of kneading some dough cake or other with butter.) "Would you kindly put your card between my teeth?"

Thus, like a retriever, she carried in my card between her teeth. A moment afterwards she cried:

"Come in now, please!"

I entered the room which the servant had called a saloon.

Nobody was there. I looked around me. I found nothing there of the luxurious splendour which had surrounded the young lady formerly in her mother's house; but for all that everything was neat and pretty. Embroideries, a music-stand with songs upon it, and a fiddle, flower-pots, a cage with exotic birds, Wallachian *Katrinças*,¹⁰⁷ Szekler pottery, a few handsomely bound books—all these were so disposed as to fill the mind with a sense of refined elegance combined with the utmost simplicity.

[107] Aprons. [Pg 324]

A curtained door led from the saloon into another room—possibly a bed-chamber.

In a few minutes this door opened and the fair lady fluttered in.

It did not escape my attention that the moment she entered she turned her head on one side, and contracted her eyebrows as if to bid some one else remaining behind there to keep quiet. The momentary opening of the door also permitted me to see that in the direction in which she had looked was a tall tester bed with the curtains drawn close.

The moment, however, that she had shut the door behind her and turned towards me, the face of the lovely lady became all amiability. She hastened up to me and pressed my hand.

"It was very nice of you to come and see me. Don't be angry with me for giving you the trouble."

The lady was now more amiable than ever.

She was in the simplest stay-at-home toilet. The only ornament on her head was her own bright silky hair, twisted up into a knot and tied at the top with a ribbon.

She looked just as she was ten years before, a little girl of sixteen.

Her whole being recalled to me her childish days. There was the same candid, guileless look; those open eyes through which you could read into her very soul; the same artless mouth.

She invited me to sit down. She took my hat and laid it on the table.

"I suppose you'll remain to dinner? I have told the cook to prepare your favourite dish."

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"Then you know what it is?"

"Why, of course! *Beans with pig's ear*. Why, all your admirers throughout the kingdom know that."

I had now good reason to be proud! My nation, then, has some regard for me, after all. To others it presents *bays*, to me—*beans*.¹⁰⁸

[108] In Hungarian the resemblance is closer still, *babo* meaning bean, and *babér*, laurel.

"In that case I'll remain," I said.

"In Kvatopil's time I was never permitted to cook beans, for he maintained that they make a man stupid."

"On the contrary. Pythagoras assures us that the bean contains the same component parts as the human brain."

Having thus rehabilitated the bean, I reverted to the real motive of my visit there.

"I should have come to visit you to-day even without a special invitation."

"Was there any special reason, then, why I should occupy a place in your thoughts?"

"I have received a letter from Italy, the contents of which will greatly interest you."

At these words she looked at me as coldly as if she had become an alabaster statue.

"Interest *me*?"

"So I believe. On the 20th instant there was a battle on the Mincio, at which your husband distinguished himself."

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"Really?" said the lady mechanically.

("Really?"—In that tone? It was rather odd. However, I went on.)

"Nay, in the heat of the combat he was even wounded."

(I calculated surely on the dramatic effect of these words. I fancied that the tender spouse would leap to her feet, pale, ready to faint, wringing her hands, till at last, amidst sobs, the name of the adored husband would burst forth from her lips: "Oh! my Wenceslaus! Oh! my Kvatopil!" But she did not so much as turn her head round.)

"Indeed?" she said, with complete *sangfroid*.

Just as if it were an every-day occurrence for a beloved husband to be wounded in battle.

I was offended. Such ungrateful indifference I had never met with before. How was I to go on? I had calculated that when the despairing consort had wept and sobbed her fill, I should hasten to console her.

"It is true," said I, "that his wound is not sufficiently dangerous to prevent him from continuing in the field."

"I can easily believe it," replied the lady, with a shrug of the shoulders.

Now this was a want of feeling worthy of an alligator! Surely she had the nerves of a rhinoceros! I was not prepared for this reception. "I can easily believe it!" Was that all?

Well, then, if our tender feelings are so hermetically sealed, we must try what more drastic means will do. We must appeal to other sentiments. Vanity, for instance, is a sentiment which never can be blunted.

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So I moved forward my heavy artillery.

"Lieutenant Kvatopil," I said, "was called to the front and made a captain straight off for heroic valour in the field."

But even at this the lovely lady did not fling herself on my neck. She did not even utter a sound, but contracted the corners of her mouth. What did that mean? When you tell a lieutenant's wife that from to-day she has a right to the title Mrs. Captain; that every one who meets her in the street and congratulates her will address her as, "Frau Rittmeisterin," while the other lieutenants' wives naturally burn with secret envy; that she may now print her corresponding

rank on her visiting cards—when you tell her all this, and even then no impression is produced, and the cherry lips do *not* expand with joy, revealing the sparkling, pearly teeth and the dimples on the sunbright face; when, instead of that, she purses up her mouth so nastily and gives herself a double chin—what *are* you to think? There is nothing so hideous as a pretty woman with a double chin. A double chin makes a woman look absolutely old.

I was quite confused. What am I to do to amuse her now? Should I talk about the weather?

"May I congratulate you?" I said, seizing her hand.

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But not only did she *not* press my hand in return, as she ought to have done; on the contrary, she irritably drew it back and turned aside her head.

Suddenly a light flashed through my brain, a light kindled by my immeasurable self-conceit. "Why go on praising the distant husband," said I to myself, "when you yourself are present? Do you think she invited you to dinner to sing the praises of Wenceslaus Kvatopil?"

I drew my chair nearer to the sofa on which Bessy was sitting, and airily passed my hand through my frizzled locks.

Bessy observed the movement, and quickly turned her face towards me. A mocking smile suddenly lighted up her face, a smile from which a man can read a whole chapter in a moment. That is something like stenography.

"Ha, ha, sir! then we have come thither with that thought, have we? We have had our hair frizzled, eh? We have decked ourselves out to be irresistible, I know?"

A thousand mocking fish-tailed nixies were wriggling about in those sea-like eyes.

It was a murderous sort of smile.

I was conscious of having been taken down pretty considerably. Here was I (quite contrary to my usual custom) tricked and furbished up like a "*petit maître*," while she, the lady, received me in her simplest barracan house-dress, without any finery, and with a smile she discharged at me the saying of the great poet:

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"O Vanity! thy name is woman!"

But why, then, had she sent for me?

Why had she driven away one visitor and denied herself to another if not for my sake?

Perhaps for the sake of a third party who had already arrived? When she came out of her boudoir she seemed to me to be signalling with her eyebrows at some one.

I quickly pulled myself together. I fancy I must have been very red in the face, and I certainly had good reason to be ashamed of myself.

I saw that I had not been able to reap laurels in the *rôle* of Don Juan, so I began to take up the part of Tartuffe. Let us play the righteous judge!

"Perhaps I have not come at a very convenient time?"

"On the contrary, I *asked* you to come at this time."

"On a serious business, eh?"

"A serious business for me."

"But isn't what I've just been saying to you serious?"

"Apparently."

"Yet you received it with a very queer face."

"I listened seriously enough."

"But the affair had its cheerful aspect also, surely?"

The fair dame made a contemptuous clicking with her tongue.

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"Don't you feel any interest, then, in Kvatopil's heroism, wounds, distinction, and promotion?"

"No!" she replied resolutely, almost snapping my sentence in two. Her eyes sparkled like burning naphtha lakes.

"No?" I repeated, in my amazement. "You take no interest in your husband's fate whether it be bad or good? You feel neither hot nor cold on the subject?"

"No!"

("No!" again).

"But you parted in the greatest affection when he went to the wars?"

"True."

"And it is scarcely a month since then."

"Only twenty-nine days, I've counted them."

"And meanwhile winter has come?"

"It has."

After that she began to laugh maliciously. She leaped to her feet and rumbled my frizzly hair with her fingers.

"Let's leave the matter till after dinner; then I'll tell you everything. But don't let us spoil a good dinner in the meantime. You are quite horrified at me now, and fancy that I've laid a trap for you. You will see later on that this serious business of mine is not a joke. Let us leave it till after the black coffee."

I revived again. The lady was capricious, and it suited her.

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"I was determined to give you a good dinner. I owe you your revenge. It is a long time since we dined together. Last time I was your guest. Don't you remember? At the Pagan Altar. I never ate so heartily. What splendid toast you had! And the bacon, too, broiled on a stick! Why, I've got the taste of that good red pepper of yours in my mouth to this day! And now I mean to give you hospitality that you will remember for a long time!"

This again was delightfully reassuring! She was of the true cat species—she purrs and fondles, but one must be continually on one's guard against her claws.

"Come now, help me to lay the table! My cook has enough to do without that."

So I had to help her lay the table, for the saloon was the dining-room also. One had only to remove the books, porcelain vases, and china knick-knacks from the table in front of the sofa, and then cover it with the table-cloth.

I was curious to see how many she would lay for. Only for two. Two plates, two knives, forks and spoons, and two glasses.

But how about that third person, that person in the bedroom yonder? Or had I rightly interpreted that peculiar expression of hers? I was beginning to think the whole thing was pure hallucination on my part.

Suddenly the scraping of a cautiously-moved chair sounded from the boudoir.

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I saw that the lady was considerably put out, and felt decidedly uncomfortable. She wrathfully pressed her lips together.

"Have you any one in the next room?" I inquired, in a stern, judicial voice.

"I have!" she replied defiantly.

"Madame!" I exclaimed, in virtuous high dudgeon.

"Would you like to know who *is* inside?" she cried, in an offended tone.

"Oh, dear, no! I'm not a bit curious," said I, and began looking about for my hat and stick.

"But I *wish* you to know," she cried indignantly, barring my way, and, seizing my hand, she led me to the door of the bedroom, and hastily flung it open. In the room a blonde young lady stood before me gazing at me with wondering large blue eyes.

Bessy introduced this lady to me.

"Madame Wenceslaus Kvatopil, from Cracow."

Then she pulled aside the bed-curtains, and on the bed was lying a little girl about eleven years of age.

"This is Wenceslaus Kvatopil's daughter. Poor things! let us leave them alone!"

For at least a minute I felt as if some magic power were whirling me round and round the globe with it from the North Pole to the Equator, and back again.

How I got out of that room into the other I really cannot say. Before me continually were the faces of that large-eyed, timid-looking woman and the little girl.

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I heard the sound of weeping behind me.

It was Bessy. She had hidden her face in her hands, and was sobbing.

"Oh, how I loved that man! How good, how perfect I thought him! I fancied him a model man! Even now I cannot accuse him. It was not his fault, but mine alone. His sin is my crime. Oh, what folly! Let us speak of the situation seriously. You know now, I suppose, why I wanted to see you. I wished to ask your advice."

I sat down beside her.

Bessy dried her eyes, and then began to speak quite soberly.

"The whole world judges me wrongly. They fancy I am full of levity. But if anything pains me, the pain lasts a long, long time. Since *he* went away I have been nowhere, and seen nobody. If any of my old acquaintances came to see me, I told them that the whole place was topsy-turvy, and there was not even a chair to sit down upon. My servant had orders to say to every one who called—with *one exception*—that I was not visible. Who was this exception? Yourself! She could easily guess whom I meant, and if she didn't guess it, it didn't much matter. When *he* had to go away so suddenly, he was in a very tender mood. He wanted to make me swear that I would not be faithless while he was away. He even brought me a crucifix for the purpose, and when he saw that I laughed at him, he besought me, if I really must deceive him, at least not to bestow my favours upon the first ragamuffin that turned up; nay, he even took the trouble to indicate a worthy man to me, of whom he could not be jealous; whereupon I told him, very seriously, that the man he meant was capable of *killing* anybody who stood in the way of *his* love, but was altogether incapable of *filching* love from anybody else!"

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(At this my face grew very red indeed.)

"Then he suddenly assumed a mystic mood, he knew my weak side. He said: 'If you deceive me for the sake of any other man, at that same moment I shall die. Day and night I stand where death is meted out every instant, and the moment a kiss from your lips touches the lips of another man, at that self-same moment, I say, the bullet which is lying in wait for me will fly straight to my heart!' A horrible saying! It would not let me sleep, and rose up before me in my dreams. When one or other of my lady friends came to visit me and we fell a-chatting and began to laugh and joke, a sort of cold shiver would suddenly run all down my body. While I am smiling, I thought, perhaps he is dying a death of torments beneath the horses' hoofs. Every savoury morsel sticks in my throat when I think—perhaps he is now suffering hunger and thirst; and when the blast shakes my windows, I think—now he is standing defenceless amidst the tempest and freezing. And I unable to protect him!"

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"In short, this threat of his made me quite a somnambulist. At last I denied myself even to my lady friends. I became quite morbid. I fancied I had no right to be gay. Ten times a day I went to the crucifix by which he had wished me to swear and knelt down before it to pray. I made all sorts of vows provided he were preserved and brought back safely to me. And yet I am a Calvinist! But that crucifix was *his*. He remained faithful to it through all his change of faith. In fact, I was in a fair way of becoming a Pietist. I began to think a life of virtue very beautiful. I should very much have liked to see you now and again, if only to show you that I could be just as moral as you. I would have praised your wife to you, and you would have returned the compliment by praising my husband. This would have been my ambition."

It was the cook who interrupted this burst of feeling.

"Shall I bring in the stew, madame?"

"Yes, bring it in, if it is ready."

Then she turned to me to explain the circumstances of the case.

"I have to let these ladies have their food cooked separately, for Magyar dishes would make them mortally ill. That is why I don't lay the table for three. *Your* favourite dishes would be death to these Germans."

The cook now brought in the stewed chicken.

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Bessy tasted it first with a little spoon to see if it were salted enough, and also to see whether the cook had put parsley in it by mistake, for the doctor who was attending the little girl had forbidden every sort of seasoning ingredients in her food. Then she herself sliced up a roll of the best white bread for the little girl, poured some water for her into a glass, and warmed it a little by holding it tightly for a while between the palms of her hands instead of popping a live coal into it, as thoughtful mothers often do for their sick children. For the mother of the child, however, she had a bottle of Pilsener beer uncorked, and sent to her.

Only when they had dined was our dinner served.

Meanwhile, we did not resume our interrupted conversation; the servant was constantly passing in and out, and we could not speak before her. Then, after that, when we sat down to dinner (and a bitter meal it was to me) the thread of our conversation was broken as often as the cook came in with a new dish or to change a plate, and all that time she played the part of the amiable hostess, inviting me to fall to in good old Hungarian style.

"One morning," she said, "while I was doing my hair, my servant came and told me that a shabby-looking woman was outside, with a biggish girl, making inquiries about the lieutenant. I went out to them into the kitchen. I saw before me a blonde, blue-eyed woman, of about the same age as myself, and clinging to her arm was a lanky slip of a growing girl about ten or eleven years of age. In the woman's hand was a travelling-bag and an umbrella. She was in bourgeois costume, without the fashionable crinoline, and on her head was a simple felt cap; her girl was dressed in just the same way. They both wore their hair quite smooth and combed back from the forehead."

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"The woman wished me good-day in German.

"I asked her what she wanted.

"The woman replied that she wanted her husband, Mr. Wenceslaus Kvatopil.

"The lieutenant?"

"When he left me he was only a lieutenant."

"I quickly caught her by the hand and led her out of the kitchen into the saloon. My servant, fortunately, did not understand German.

"I led them right into my bedroom. I invited them both to be seated.

"Ah, that will do us good," said the woman, "for we have come a long way. We have come here from Cracow."

"Surely not on foot?"

"On foot all the way. We couldn't afford to come by rail."

"Just fancy! The very thought is terrible! To come on foot all those hundred miles hither from Cracow with a growing girl! Can one's imagination realize such a thing?"

"Are you the wife of Lieutenant Wenceslaus Kvatopil?" I inquired of the woman.

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"I am, and this is his daughter, Marianna."

"And by way of proving her assertion she drew from her travelling-bag her marriage lines, extracted from the registers of the cathedral of Cracow, to wit:—'Bridegroom: Wenceslaus Kvatopil, Sub-Lieutenant in the *** Dragoons. Bride: Anna Dunkircher. Witnesses: Babolesky, Colonel, and Kolmarsky, shopkeeper. Officiating clergyman: Stanislaus Lubousky. Dated, Feb. 16th, 1846.'

"Then she showed me the baptismal certificate of the daughter. 'Marianna, born in lawful wedlock, June 19th, 1846. Father: Sub-Lieutenant Wenceslaus Kvatopil. Mother: Anna Dunkircher. Officiating clergyman: Stanislaus Lubousky. Godparents: the above-mentioned marriage-witnesses.'

"A marriage contract, duly attested, was also among the documents."

All at once Bessy burst out laughing.

The cook came in and brought the soup.

"Ha! ha! ha! Do you know why, according to Ollendorf, the Captain weeps?"

"Because the Englishman has no bread."

"Look, Susy, you've forgotten to give my guardian some bread! Give him a crusty bit, he likes that!"

The servant apologised, but said that she didn't think the soup required bread.

It was excellent soup, made of cream and eggs and rice and finely-chopped chicken. Bessy filled my plate with it.

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"Thank you, that will be enough."

When the servant went out we resumed our conversation. And here, I may remark, by the way, that there is no more pleasant *tête-à-tête* in the world than that which is interrupted every ten minutes or so by the incursions of the servants.

"Now we know," said I, "what was the cause of the extraordinary phenomenon of a happy bridegroom beginning to sob bitterly immediately after his marriage. It was his deserted wife and child that the poor fellow was thinking about."

"True, but don't let your soup cool on that account. Would you like a little Parmesan with it?"

"Thank you, but I like it much better without."

"Wenceslaus Kvatopil liked his *with* Parmesan."

Then we settled down to our soup.

"Wenceslaus Kvatopil always had a second serving of rice soup."

"Thank you, but I never take a second serving of any dish."

"I know that, and I also know that it is your habit to leave the best bit at the side of your plate."

"How did you come to know that?"

"I first observed it when I was a little girl and you sometimes came to dine with us. They say that it is a species of superstition; the tit-bit placed at the side of the plate signifies that our distant true love is suffering from hunger."

"It is no superstition, but a simple rule of health to leave off eating and drinking while your appetite is still at its best."

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Thus we continued our dietetic discussions as if we had no other desire in the world than to live a ripe old age and be free from gout.

I have already mentioned that there was chopped-up chicken in the soup, and that portion of the chicken fell to Bessy's lot which is known as the spur-bone.

Now, it is a well-known custom among young unmarried ladies in confidential conclave, when one of them gets such a spur-bone, for her to invite her fair colleague to crack the bone with her. One of them then takes one end of the spur-bone and the other takes the other end, and they pull away in different directions till the bone comes in two. Whichever of them gets the spur portion will be married soonest. That is a fantastic sort of superstition, if you like.

Bessy laughed and said:

"When we ate our first dinner together, a spur-bone of this sort fell into my hands. I stretched it out towards Anna. 'Pull,' I said, 'and see which of us is to have Kvatopil.'"

"Then you got to be good friends pretty quickly?"

"Why shouldn't we? Hadn't we both the same husband? I naturally kept them here with me. I don't know what would have become of them if I hadn't taken them in. At this moment they haven't got a farthing. They travelled the whole distance on coffee only. They had no other upper garments but what they were actually wearing on their bodies.... My first duty was to get them properly dressed. My clothes fitted the woman very well, and I bought some for the child in Kerepesi Street. But the little one had to take to her bed immediately, for she had a bad headache and was very feverish. I sent for a doctor, and he gave her some medicine which sent her to sleep. She and her mother have slept in my bed ever since, and I sleep on the sofa.—Won't you have a little liver?"

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"No, thank you. Pray, go on!"

"When the poor lady saw that I received her kindly, her heart melted; she fell upon my neck, and our tears flowed like spring showers. We knew that one of us would be the death of the other, but which was to be the victim? Then we quickly told each other our experiences of our common husband, and how we first met him. I could make a strange dramatic scene out of it.

"I inquired: 'Come now, Anna, tell me, how did you first meet with Kvatopil, and how could you remain absent from him for thirteen years?' Anna replied: 'It is a strange story. Do you happen to know, Bessy, the history of the Cracow Republic?'

"I: 'No, dear, I never heard of the poor thing.'

"Anna: 'Then you must know that it is a large Polish town where the Polish kings were formerly crowned and buried when they died. I am a native of that city. My father was a famous glove-maker in Cracow, whose goods were sold far and wide. Our town was the last free Polish Republic when Poland was finally partitioned. Its territory consisted of twenty-two square miles.'"

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("Less than Debreczin," I interrupted.)

Bessy went on with Anna's narrative:—

"When I was a little girl ten years of age a fresh Polish insurrection broke out. The united forces of the Austrians, Russians, and Prussians again put it down, and the care of the Cracow Republic was entrusted to Austria. The old Polish customs and assemblies remained in force, but Austrian soldiers garrisoned the citadel continually. When I was sixteen years old my mother died, and I had to take her place behind the counter. Here I made the acquaintance of Kvatopil. He was a young sub-lieutenant, and he generally came to our shop to buy his gloves. Would that he had stopped short at gloves! Can any one justly give a bad name to a young girl because she is confiding? I believed in him! And he really had such a good heart. When he saw that I had only to choose between shame and death, he went to my father and begged for my hand. Naturally they gave us to each other. It was never the custom among the Poles when a girl married a soldier for her to go and ask permission first of all from the military authorities, and deposit a terribly big sum by way of caution-money; the priest simply united us without any questionings. We had not been man and wife a week when the Revolution again broke out. Cracow was the centre of the Polish rising. At first the Polish rebels fought with great success. I saw the Polish scythemen drive my husband's cavalry regiment from one end of the street to the other. My husband had not even time to say good-bye to me.'

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"Then you are a Pole?' said I.

"Why shouldn't I be?' replied Anna. 'Surely I may be a Pole though I have a German name? Dark days followed. My little girl was born. Twice a day I felt bound to go to church—the first time to pray that my country might triumph, and the second time to pray that my husband might return to me. A mad idea, wasn't it? Surely it is impossible for Deity even to grant two diametrically opposite prayers at the same time? My husband returned indeed to Cracow, but the Polish cause was crushed. The champions of freedom fled in all directions, and the garrison troops returned. It was a sad meeting. After that catastrophe Cracow ceased to be a republic, and was incorporated with the Austrian hereditary possessions as a simple city. My father wept, but I rejoiced because I had got my husband back. But very soon I was punished for my criminal joy. My husband informed me that things were going badly with us. Hitherto the Austrian officers in Cracow had

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not been wont to ask the permission of their general to marry. Now, however, when Cracow had been joined to Austria, the military regulations of the rest of the empire had been extended to us, and a lieutenant's wife had to pay down caution-money to the amount of 7,000 florins. My father was incapable of raising such a sum. He had another daughter besides me, and could not withdraw so large a sum from his business. Danger threatened us if my husband's superiors discovered his marriage, for in such a case Kvatopil would have been degraded to the ranks. My father suggested that Kvatopil should quit the profession of arms and settle down to some sort of profession. But it was an impossible idea. Who would give employment in Cracow to an Austrian officer who had taken up arms against the Poles?

"Just about this time, too, Kvatopil was promoted to the rank of senior lieutenant. This at once inflamed our hearts with the joyous hope that he would rapidly scale the ladder of promotion, and we knew that if once he became a major he would not have to deposit his matrimonial caution-money, and we might then fearlessly publish the fact that we were man and wife. Nobody knew of it hitherto except our friends and relations.

"So we agreed to keep it quiet, and immediately afterwards Kvatopil and his regiment were transferred to Hungary.

"Since the revolution broke out in Hungary I have heard nothing more of Kvatopil. I know not where he is, or what has become of him, or whether he is alive or dead: no tidings of him whatever. In times of war they make a mystery of the whereabouts of this or that regiment.

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"Once we read from a bulletin that my husband's regiment had taken part in a battle in the Banat. My poor father then resolved to go personally to the Banat and inquire of the colonel whether my husband was still alive. Just as he got there, they were burying the colonel with great pomp. He had died of typhus fever. He had been the witness of our marriage, and was the only one of the officers who knew anything about it. He had kept his secret well, for his officiating as a witness at an irregular ceremony might have cost him his place also. All that the lieutenant-colonel could tell us of Kvatopil was, that his company had been detached on some expedition, and had not come back. Possibly the Hungarian insurgents had eaten them all up.

"I could thus very well put on and wear mourning, and till the end of the war I heard not a word about my husband.'

"So far spoke Anna; but now I began to speak.

"You didn't hear of him, because all through the campaign he was closely invested in the besieged Temesvar with his company, and no news could come out of that place till the end of the year.'

"But why couldn't he let me hear from him when Temesvar was free again? He could at least have written that he was still alive?'

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"The cause of that is easy to find. So far as he was concerned, the whole campaign was sterile of glory. As a cavalry officer he was unable to be of any service to the besieged city. At the end of the campaign he still remained a senior lieutenant, whilst all the others had reached the rank of captain. Bitter disappointment was all that remained to him. An officer who is passed over is worse off than if he were dead. He cannot even say, "Thank God, I am still alive!"

"But subsequently? In all these latter years? Why didn't he write to me all these three or four years, if but a line to say that he was still alive and thinking of me, and of the child whom he loved so much?'

"I can tell you the reason of that also,' I said. 'To save a frivolous comrade, he got into debt, and fell into the hands of unmerciful usurers, who immediately dragged him deeper into the mire. An officer in such a vexatious position is certainly not very much inclined to fetter himself with a wife and child as well. It is now not only the want of the caution-money which separates him from you, but also that nasty bog called Debt. This bog he cannot wade through. If under such circumstances he thinks of his wife and child, that only increases his despair. If he wrote you a letter at all, it would only contain these lines: "By the time you read these lines I shall have ceased to exist."'

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"Anna was curious to know how far into debt Kvatopil had actually got. I immediately mentioned the neat little sum it amounted to.

"You should have seen what a long face my friend pulled.

"She asked me in consternation whether this immense load of debt still remained upon him.

"The situation was so droll that, despite all its bitterness, I couldn't help laughing. I could read from the poor simple creature's face that if I were to say to her, 'My dear, sweet friend, debt is the one thing in this earth which the tooth of time never nibbles, Kvatopil's bills still live' (this was quite true, but they were living in my strong box), she would have been capable, poor, unhappy lady! of taking her little girl by the hand and walking all the way back to Cracow. But I was sorry for the poor thing. I told her the pure naked truth. Four years long her husband had told her nothing of his goings on because of his creditors, but after that time because of me. I made his acquaintance; I did not know that he was married; I fell in love with him, and—offered him my hand. I was bound to acknowledge that he had hesitated to accept it. He made all sorts of excuses except the unexceptionable one that he had a wife already. But as he was already up to

his eyes in hot water he had had no choice but to blow his brains out or commit bigamy. Apparently he had regarded the latter alternative as the less unpleasant one.

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"Anna herself admitted that it was very much wiser of Kvatopil to have chosen the latter course. What a good, affectionate creature the woman was!

"I then satisfied her that I had paid off all worthy Kvatopil's debts before his marriage. I even showed her the bills preserved in my strong box, explaining to her besides that they had now expired, but that I did not mean to proceed against Kvatopil for the amount in spite of our altered relations. At this the good soul fell down at my feet, shedding tears of gratitude. She even kissed my knees, and assured me that she would bless my memory to the very day of her death. Ever since this comforting reassurance on my part, her tender inclination for the beloved Kvatopil was perfectly re-established.

"I put the finishing touch to my kind-heartedness by describing to her the scene when Kvatopil, as bridegroom, fell to weeping bitterly after the wedding; there could be no doubt that those bitter tears were shed on account of his forsaken wife and daughter.

"This quite overcame poor Anna. 'Look now, what a good heart poor Kvatopil has!' said she.

"Then we began quoting to each other the various noble traits that we had mutually discovered in Kvatopil's character...."

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—"Well, did you find the pig's ears with beans to your liking, sir?" inquired the cook of me at that moment, as she came in to change the dishes.

"On my word of honour as a poet, I have never tasted such pig's ears and beans," I replied.

An apricot pasty followed, of which—I confess it freely—I am also fond.

Bessy then continued her story:—

"I went to my lawyer, put my case before him, and asked him what he advised me to do in my situation. I applied to him first (a dry, prosaic man, with his mental vision bounded by the law); after that, I wanted to lay the matter before you, that you might judge between us."

"Between whom?"

"Between me and my lawyer, for we are of diametrically opposite views as to what I ought to do next."

"Then you have a view on the subject, too?"

"Of course I have; but listen first to the view of the man learned in the law, and before you do that, let us drink to the health of those we love, and those who love us."

We drank the toast accordingly, but we mentioned no names.

"And now listen to the opinion of the lawyer:—

"'It is a great misfortune, certainly,' he said, 'but the only person to suffer will be Anna Dunkircher. If we lived in ordinary peaceful times, the business might be settled by the military authorities compelling Lieutenant Wenceslaus Kvatopil to renounce his rank by marrying contrary to the regulations. In that case the marriage contracted with Anna Dunkircher would remain valid. On the other hand, according to the tenor of the Austrian criminal law, Mr. Kvatopil would then have the pleasant prospect of two years' imprisonment for the subsequently committed crime of bigamy. Nevertheless, under our present circumstances, when the army of Lombardy has great need of every valiant and experienced officer, the Cracow wife would, undoubtedly, get this answer for her trouble: "Your marriage has been contracted illegally, and is consequently null and void." The parson who joined them would be sent for a twelvemonth to a monastery, by way of penitential discipline; but Wenceslaus Kvatopil would remain a lieutenant, or even, if he distinguished himself, become a captain. You, consequently, will be Mrs. Lieutenant, and perhaps Mrs. Captain, for the annulling of the former marriage will restore to you all your rights.'

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"Those were the lawyer's words. I laid them to heart. Now, do you know anything of martial law?"

"I frankly confess that martial law occupies a most prominent place among those sciences which I do *not* know."

"Well, I'll tell you what I replied to him. 'Good!' I said, 'the laws, the circumstances, the position of things, everything, in fact, proves and proves to demonstration that Anna Dunkircher has forfeited all her marital rights; but has not the law of the human heart also its validity? Do I express myself in proper legal phraseology?'"

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At this I couldn't help laughing, but she proceeded with her story.

"My lawyer was very far indeed from laughing. 'What!' said he, 'do you imagine that Wenceslaus Kvatopil's heart still beats for his first wife whom he deserted—to whom he did not write of set purpose, not even when he could, lest he might thus have supplied some written testimony to the fact of her really having been Wenceslaus Kvatopil's lawful spouse, and not merely some betrayed girl with whom he had, at some time or other, unlawfully cohabited? Do you fancy that Wenceslaus Kvatopil, thirteen years after the event, is still so romantic as to ask for his dismissal

from the service in the middle of a campaign, on the very field of battle, and desert the standard of his Sovereign, whom he has sworn to obey, simply to enable Anna Dunkircher to save her matronly dignity? Do you fancy that Wenceslaus Kvatopil will throw up his career at the very moment when it is full of the most brilliant hopes for him, and allow himself to be shut up as a felon for a couple of years, at the end of which time he will be discharged a branded beggar, simply to live for the rest of his life as the lawful husband of a beggar woman even more beggarly than himself? And finally, do you imagine that Wenceslaus Kvatopil has so completely lost the use of his five senses as to be capable of spurning away from him, and exposing to the contempt of the whole world, a young and lovely consort like yourself, a rich and noble lady who can keep him in comfort for the rest of his days—and all for what? for the sake of taking back a faded, withered woman, whose face is wrinkled with care, who is the daughter of an honest glover, to whom it would be no advantage to stick the name of Kvatopil on his sign-board instead of the time-honoured firm of Dunkircher? No, madam. That he is such a good-hearted man as all that I do not for one moment believe. I would as soon believe in sea-maidens with finny tails—upon my word I would.'

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"I did not interrupt my lawyer. I allowed him to have his say out. But when he made a brief pause, I said to him: 'I am not speaking of Kvatopil's heart, but of my own.'

"Your own?' cried he, in amazement. 'What has *your* heart got to do with it?'

"I have my own notion of settling this painful business,' I said. 'I propose to transfer to Anna Dunkircher the surety-money which I deposited on the occasion of our marriage, and then she will have satisfied the conditions imposed on officers who marry—and may she and her husband be happy. I can easily disappear somewhere in the crowd. The world is large.'

"At this the lawyer flew into a passion. 'If you do that,' he cried, 'you are only fit to be locked up in a lunatic asylum at Döbling.'

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"Nevertheless," concluded Bessy, "it is my serious and fixed resolve to do so."

I could not help laying my hand on hers. What true, what noble sentiments were slumbering in that heart! If only she had had some one to awaken them! What an excellent lady might have been made out of this woman, if she had only met with a husband who, in the most ordinary acceptance of the word, had been a good fellow, as is really the case with about *nine* men out of every ten. Why should she have always managed to draw the unlucky *tenth* out of the urn of destiny?

She guessed my thoughts during that moment of silence. Those large, deep fiery eyes slowly filled with tears. The fire of a diamond is nothing to be compared with the fiery sparkle of those tears. How lovely she was at that moment!

Her lips began to quiver, and she could scarcely pronounce the words:

"*That other woman had a child.*"

And at this she began to sob convulsively, covering her face with one hand, and squeezing my hand violently with the other.

My heart was so touched that, a very little more, and I should have mingled my tears with hers.

When she had wept out her bitter mood, she sighed deeply, and dried her tears.

"Now you know why I asked you to come here," said she. "Be you the judge in this matter. Which is right, the reason or the heart? Am I to do what my lawyer advises, or what my own feelings suggest?"

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It was a difficult matter.

"Let us see," I said, "can't we hit upon some middle course? I advise you neither to do what your lawyer advises nor what you yourself propose. Wait a bit. The great war is still going on, more than a million of warriors are standing face to face. Not a fifth part of that number will return to their homes when the war is over. In this war your Kvatopil will either fall or remain alive. If he falls, you can both go into mourning. You need not quarrel about the widow's veil. If, however, Kvatopil survives the end of the war, a brave and ambitious officer like him will undoubtedly have mounted higher on the ladder of promotion—the battle-field is the forcing house of advancement! He will have become a major, and as major he will not be required to deposit¹⁰⁹ any matrimonial caution-money. He can then take his Anna Dunkircher, and you will have no need to surrender your guarantee money, which you want very much yourself."

[109] I say this of past times.—M. J.

"I thank you," said the lady. "'Tis every bit as simple as the egg of Columbus. Then we'll wait, Anna and I, till the war is over, and till then we'll make one family."

"Let me call your attention to one thing, however. For the present it would be well if you were to hide yourself somewhere, in some little town, for instance, where nobody knows you. Here, in this capital, you will quickly find yourself in an awkward and untenable position. The story of the first wife will very quickly be known by all the world. The title of *straw-widow* would do pretty well perhaps, but the title of *straw-wife* won't do at all. Pack up your traps, I say, go straight off to the country to-morrow, and take your guests along with you."

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"I'll do so."

We had scarcely finished speaking when the doctor knocked at the door. When there's sickness in the house one cannot deny oneself to the doctor. The doctor, too, was an old acquaintance of mine. He had a very extensive practice, and he was a homœopathist. I could take it as absolutely certain that when he went his rounds among his patients on the morrow, he would let them have, in addition to their *nux vomica*, or whatever else it might be, the very latest bit of scandal—to wit, that he had found me closeted with the pretty lady, and both of us in our cups—tea-cups of course.

I waited till he came back from his little patient. He satisfied us that there was now no danger, and she might leave her bed.

Bessy asked whether the girl might be taken into the country.

"Yes, it will do her good."

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The doctor and I left at the same time.

I had no sooner got out of the door than I again stumbled upon Tóni Sági.

"*Corpo di Bacco!* And you have been sitting all this time with that pretty young lady?"

"And you have been walking all the time in front of the door, eh?"

The window of the house opposite was full of inquisitive female faces. I rushed into a coach and had myself driven to the railway station. The same evening I was at Szeged. There I remained for three days, and stayed with my wife till her provincial engagement was over. On every one of these three days one or two anonymous letters reached my wife from Buda-Pest of the following import: "My poor dear friend,—Your husband passes whole nights and days with his former lady-love, the lieutenant's wife. Our hearts bleed for you. The whole town knows all about it."

How we did laugh at these letters! But what if I had *not* traversed the intentions of our *dear friends*?

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CHAPTER XIX

ESAIAS MEDVÉSI¹¹⁰

[110] Bearish.

It fared with Wenceslaus Kvatopil as I had predicted.

I am very sorry, but I really can't help it. Willingly would I bring him back a full major if it depended on me; but it was written in the book of fate that the worthy officer was to end his heroic career on the battle-field. He had at least the consolation of falling in a famous battle. While MacMahon at Solferino broke through the mass of Schlick's forces, Benedek on the right wing pressed victoriously forwards and drove the Piedmontese army under Victor Emmanuel as far back as San Martino, and there it was that a mortal bullet struck Captain Kvatopil through the heart. Yet I am able to say that at that moment the kisses of his lovely wife pressed the lips of nobody but his own deserted daughter.

The two widows could now share the widow's veil between them in peace.

The bigamy became known, but of course they could not bring an action for it against a dead man. The events of those great days quickly obliterated all recollection of the petty scandal. Both Anna and Bessy could now assume the title of Widow Kvatopil, and nobody could have a word to say against it. There was this little difference, however, that while the one might style herself Mrs. Captain Kvatopil, the other had only the right to Mrs. Lieutenant.

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By the intervention of her lawyer, and with my consent as her guardian, Bessy recovered her deposited caution-money. One thousand florins of it she gave as a gift to Anna, who returned with it to Cracow to her father's. The rest of the money Bessy invested in a pretty little house, in the village where she was stopping, surrounded by a pleasant garden. I was now quite easy in my mind as to her subsequent fate. She had now her own house, an honourable title—"Özvegy Kapitányné,"¹¹¹ and a certain regular income. In the little village where she was she could play a leading part. In her present situation, moreover, she was completely protected against all the snares of the evil world, for in this particular village every man was virtuous, and the women ruled them with a rod of iron. To stumble, make a *faux pas*, and fall into sin was not possible, because it was not allowed.

[111] Lit., The widowed Captain's lady.

I could now be quite easy as to Bessy's prospects. A woman who had learnt such bitter experience at her own cost could not help drawing conclusions from the past; and if ever she were to make her choice again she certainly would not allow herself to be led astray by superficial graces, but would judge him whom she might definitely and finally select as the

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partner of her destiny by his inner worth alone. I even took the trouble, with the true solicitude of a guardian, to write this beautiful and sensible phrase to her in a letter. I also impressed upon her not to give herself away to any official "for the time being," or any other kind of dog-headed Tartar, for such a husband could only be provisional.¹¹² She gave me her word that she would not do so.

[112] Towards this period it was plain that the Austrian domination of Hungary could not last much longer, and that the foreign officials who had been appointed by the Vienna Court must speedily go.—TR.

For nearly four years I heard nothing more of Bessy. She had fallen into the ranks of those women who do nothing to make people talk about them, and this category is the best of all. Every year I sent her the interest on her money; she acknowledged the receipt of it with thanks, and—that was all.

But I, too, had cause enough not to think of those lovely but dangerous Eyes like the Sea.

My evil stars were in the ascendant.

Not a year passed without a heavy blow descending on my head. At one time it was a dear dead friend whom I had to bury; at another time I had to go through a severe illness which brought me to the very brink of death; I had scarcely recovered when my wife also fell dangerously ill. Through the conduct of persons whom I had regarded as my friends I very nearly became bankrupt; I had to work day and night at my writing-table to draw myself out of the mire. Then my publisher bolted to America; then came a year of calamity, when nobody cared a fig for either books or newspapers; then I had to fight a duel through no fault of my own; and all along there was the wretched fate of my country, which demanded my help. The whole plan of winning back our confiscated liberties was *my* secret; I was the organ of the Committee, the organ that was tormented, persecuted, insulted by a derisive tyranny. Life under such conditions was like a dreadful dream—an incoherent, continually shifting vision of hope, an eternal nightmare; and when I awoke from this nightmare I found I was quite bald.

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One fine spring the Fairy Queen of my fantastic dreams locked me up in prison by way of variation. Nobody can escape his fate. I had founded a political journal. I was its responsible editor and publisher. My assistants were the votadores of the Liberal party. We soon had a large public. I had quite enough to do. It was my business to write romances for this paper, and leading articles too. Once an admirably elaborated article was sent to me, signed by one of the most illustrious names among the Hungarian magnate families. Without more ado I published it. It was a loyal, patriotic article on purely constitutional lines, showing in the most matter of fact way in the world the justice and the necessity of a constitutional government for Hungary. On account of this article, the Governor brought both the Count who wrote it and the editor who inserted it before a court-martial. He signified to the pair of us beforehand that he meant to lock us up for three months for it.

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The court-martial consisted of a colonel, a major, a captain, a senior and a junior lieutenant, a sergeant, a corporal, and a private; the last four were Bohemians. Before this Areopagus I delivered a powerful defence in German, to which they naturally replied "March!" The tribunal condemned me and my comrade the Count to twelve months hard labour in irons, on bread and water, with enforced fasting, loss of nobility, and a fine of a thousand florins.

When the sentence was read out, I said to the President:

"This is very strange. The Governor promised us only three months."

To this the President replied with a smile:

"Yes, three months for the incriminated article, but nine more for your high-flying defence."

Our sentence was for no offence against the press-laws. Oh dear, no! We were condemned for inciting to a breach of the peace. The Count and I had been throwing stones at the windows, and breaking the gas-lamps in Kerepesi Street! It was as public brawlers that we were sent to cool our heels in jail!

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The reader must not expect me, however, to weave a martyr's crown for myself, or describe the tortures of the Venetian dungeons.... The whole of my life in prison was a pure joke and diversion. The Commandant of the place, with whom I lived, used to come every day to tell and be told anecdotes, and then took me out for country walks. He had my writing-table, my books, and my carpentering tools brought into my dungeon, and it was there that I turned out a bust of my wife. The Commandant also was passionately fond of carpenter's work, so we worked away together at our lathes as if for a wager. There was no talk whatever of chains or fetters, and I was allowed to have with my bread and water the best that money could purchase from the inn. In the afternoons my friends from the Pest Club came to play cards with me, so that when, on one occasion, one of my most radical acquaintances, Beniczky, entered my apartment and looked around, he exclaimed with contemptuous indignation: "Call this a dungeon! Why, there's no romance at all about this sort of thing!"

Once I took my fellow-prisoner and my jailer to my villa at Svabhegy, where my wife had made ready for us a splendid supper. I tapped my new wine, and we amused ourselves to such a very late hour that when we returned they would hardly let us into prison again. Fortunately we had the Provost with us, and with our assistance he managed to force his way in.

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And then my visitors!

In the whole course of my life I never received so many visitors as during the *month* that my *year's* captivity lasted. In the following month, by the way, I had to make room for the editor of the *officious* government, who was also condemned by the court-martial for disturbing the public peace.

I was sought out in my dungeon by all sorts of good friends, who came from far—lords and ladies, countesses and actresses. It happened once that a magnate's wife, who was a great invalid, and therefore could not ascend to the second flight where our prison was, begged us to come down to her carriage, and there we received our visitor in the street—poor slaves that we were!

In fact, I had too much of a good thing.

How could I work when my admirers were crowding at my latch all day long? At last I had to beg my jailer, with tears in my eyes, to sentence me to *solitary* confinement for a couple of hours every day, and write on my door the hours when I was free to receive company. "Wasn't I in prison?" I said.

I had an honest Bohemian lad as my servant. His name was Wenceslaus. We soon got to understand each other very well.

I explained to him that at certain hours when I was sitting down to work nobody was to be admitted—except when a pretty woman came to see me.

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Honi soit qui mal y pense!

And singularly enough, one cannot imagine a more convenient place for an assignation than such a dungeon as mine. I only wonder that our *bon-viveurs* have not grasped the fact. And what a capital place for an afternoon nap such a locality really is! The best advice I can give to any one who suffers from sleeplessness is—get yourself locked up! Is it not a special mercy of Providence that slaves can sleep so soundly?

One afternoon Wenceslaus aroused me from my sweet afternoon nap with the intimation that a pretty woman wanted to speak to me.

"Really pretty?"

"Oh yes!"

"Oh yes?"

"Oh yes, yes!"

It was indeed "oh yes!" for it was Bessy.

She was dressed in complete mourning, with a black silk veil over her head. I saw from her eyes that she was in mourning for my fate.

I anticipated her by making her a compliment.

"Why, how nice you look, my dear ward! The country air seems to agree with you."

With this I put a stop to her tearful anxiety on my account.

"I see that the air of a dungeon has not done you much harm, either."

"And how did you get in here?"

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"Not very easily, I can tell you. They would hardly let me in. They said that the prisoner was confined to his room. I thought of giving the warder a box on the ears, and then perhaps they would have shut me up along with you by way of punishment."

"That would have, indeed, been a *heavy* chain to bear."

She laughed.

"I understand the allusion. My figure *has* become a little sturdy, I know. What else has a person to do in a little country town but grow fat?"

"It is a sign of peace of mind," I said.

I offered her my arm-chair, and in this act of politeness she read another allusion.

"It has good strong legs, I hope?" said she, as she sat down in it.

I must candidly admit that her figure had grown pronouncedly rotund, but this by no means injured her beauty. She really looked quite appetizing! I was very glad, too, to see her again.

"Don't take my remarks amiss," I said; "it is so good for the poor slave when a smiling lady's face lights up the gloom of his dungeon. A sweet, melodious woman's voice sounds so consolingly amidst the clanking of his fetters."

"I am glad to see that you preserve your good humour, for I have come to you on a very serious business."

"What! Then it was *not* tender sympathy for the poor captive that brought you hither?"

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"That also—I may even say principally. Every day I read in the *Fővárosi Lapok* how many and what sort of visitors you receive—noble ladies, pretty actresses, and what not. Well, thought I, if they may go and see him, it is only my duty to go too. At the same time there are other circumstances which have brought me here."

At this she furtively looked around her.

"Won't they hear what we are talking about through that door?"

"Have no fear. That room is empty. My fellow-prisoner is provided with a separate apartment."

"I have come to inform you of something. I have petitioned the office of wards to relieve you from your guardianship."

"And you've very good cause, too, I think, seeing that I myself have been under guardianship for some time."

"That's not my reason, however. But my position has now become such as to make it indispensable for me to have the free disposal of my money."

"May I guess the cause? Another misfortune has happened. We have lost our heart again, eh?"

Bessy covered her blushing face with her silk veil.

"Eh, but how you do always detect a thing at once! You would have made a capital magistrate."

"But it is such a natural thing to suppose. You are so young, you know."

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"I am well advanced in the thirties."

"You are only four years over thirty. I ought to know, for I was at your christening. Then you have once more discovered your ideal?"

"This time I most solemnly believe that I really have found him."

"But no provisional person, I hope?"

"Don't insult me, please."

"I'm above such a thing. But, as your guardian, I would not have given my consent to it; so I was bound to suppose that that was why you wanted to be freed from my guardianship."

"Not at all! In future also I mean to take your advice as though it came from my own father. Scold me as much as you like when you catch me tripping. I will continue to be your obedient ward if only you don't shut the door in my face. All I want is my money. Believe me when I say I will do nothing frivolous with it. The sum will remain to my credit, but I wish to be free to use it as I like in the future."

"I presume your bridegroom is some squire to whom the amount will be of service?"

"He is *not* a squire."

"Then perhaps he is a merchant? That also is an honourable walk in life. In good commercial hands the amount will yield a nice income."

"He is not a merchant."

"Then perhaps he is a manufacturer, the proprietor of a saw-mill or a steam-mill?"

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"Neither the one nor the other."

"Then what on earth is he?"

"My bridegroom is a worthy and eminent schoolmaster, whose name is Esaias Medvési."

"Esaias Medvési! But what the deuce does a village schoolmaster want with twenty-five thousand florins?"

"I'll tell you presently. But I must go a little farther back first. Have you the time to listen to my story?"

"Of course I have: I remain at home all day."

"Will nobody interrupt us?"

"My servant is a very sensible fellow, he knows the rules of the place."

"But won't they lock the door of the prison behind me?"

An ordinary person would have replied to this question that it would have been no great harm if they did; but I pulled out the drawer of my writing-table and showed the fair lady that I had *my own key* for opening my prison door. At this she laughed and seemed quite satisfied.

"Well, I'll begin by telling you how I made his acquaintance."

"What, your Ezzy?"

"I beg your pardon, but you must always pronounce the name in full, or you will aggravate its owner. He is very particular about giving to every one his full name and corresponding titles; never breaks that rule himself, and constantly addresses me as 'Worthy dame Captain!' It is in vain to call me 'Madame' in his presence, for he roundly maintains that such a title belongs to the consort of the Prince of Transylvania only. His motto is '*suum cuique*.' Oh, I've learnt such a lot of Latin since I made his acquaintance?"

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"Oh, then you have been taking Latin lessons from him, and so the acquaintance began?"

"No irony, please! It didn't begin that way at all. I suppose you know that in our little town there is a very well attended Calvinist church?"

"I know it pretty well."

"And I am a very zealous church goer?"

"That I did *not* know."

"With us the laudable custom prevails of going to church every Sunday for the purpose of devotion."

"And to show off your new bonnets."

"Don't make fun of me, please. Esaias is not only the schoolmaster, but the cantor and the organist as well. He has a splendid bass voice. When he intones the verse—

'How blest the man whose walk in life ...'

the whole podium trembles. It was that wondrously beautiful voice which first enthralled me."

"But I should have thought that the organ would have drowned the sound of the hymn?"

"But not only in church have I had the opportunity of hearing him, but at funerals also."

"Then you condescend to go to funerals too?"

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"Not as a habit. But you must know that most of the people there beg me to act as sponsor to their new-born children. Now, two-thirds of our children seem only born to die, and I am obliged to always go to the funerals of my little *protégés*."

"Then Esaias is in the habit of speaking and singing over them?"

"Yes, and what beautiful speeches they are too, all in verse."

"So Esaias is a poet into the bargain?"

"Yes, he really makes most beautiful verses."

"And I've no doubt he wrote a nice onomasticon on St. Elizabeth's Day?"

"He did nothing of the kind. He's not that sort of man. It is not his habit to flatter anybody; on the contrary, he always tells them the truth to their faces."

"That is generally the distinguishing characteristic of all Calvinist schoolmasters."

"Well, but let us keep to the point. I left off at the funerals, I think. I was struck by the frequent mortality among our little ones, and set in movement a project among the ladies of the town for starting a *crèche*. The idea found zealous partisans. We soon found a large meeting-room; the ladies supplied linen in large quantities; milk and other necessary aliments were provided by public subscription; money we resolved to collect in the usual way."

"By a charitable concert?"

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"I see that you are a practical man. A charitable concert was indeed arranged, and a committee of seven appointed to manage it. The sessions of this committee were held in my house; mine was the most convenient locality, and I had a piano besides. Each member of the committee had her part assigned to her: one was to recite, another to sing a solo, a third to give a comic reading, a fourth to play a piece on the piano, a fifth to dance a Hungarian dance; I was to fiddle, Esaias was to sing the high priest's aria from the opera of *Nabucco*: 'He who trusts in the Lord!'—You know the rest."

"Of course I do. At the first meeting of the committee one of the members had a slight misunderstanding with another member, at the second meeting a second member had a second misunderstanding, and by the time the fifth meeting was held Esaias and yourself were left to practise alone."

"That is, word for word, what did happen, with this little difference, that we never had any practice at all. On the fifth occasion, four of the six members of the committee sent letters of excuse. Every one of them was ill. It was a veritable epidemic. Only the dancing master found no excuse for himself. As he was the only dancing-master in the town he could not go and lie that he had sprained his foot."

"Esaias walked three times up and down in front of my house, puffing away at his big pipe. Every time he passed he looked up at the window, and, seeing nobody there, went on farther. [Pg 372]

"At last the dancing-master came *chassé*-ing up; I could see from his grinning face that he had some ill-tidings to tell me. Only people who have found some excuse for covering their retreat come smiling like that.

"My lady! I am inconsolable'—('I know all about *that!*' thought I)—'but I can't come to the concert. Our gipsy musicians have gone to Pest.' ('What do they want there?' I asked.) 'All the gipsy bands in the kingdom have assembled together for a grand competition.... Now, without gipsy music I can't dance. Who can play me the "*Bihari Kesergó*," I should like to know?' ('I will!' I said.) 'Ha! ha! ha! that wouldn't do at all! What? *one* dancer and *one* violin-player!—it would be a mere farce.'

"Hereupon Esaias popped in. Seeing through the window that I was no longer alone, he took heart and came in. He had not dared to do so before."

Here I intervened: "If I am not very much mistaken, I know this dear Esaias of yours. It once happened to him, while still a student, that he sat beside the priest's daughter at supper. He did not dare to say a word to her; but in the afternoon he went up the church tower and courted the young lady from one of the windows."

"It is possible that it was he. I, however, made both the gentlemen stay, that at least the coffee and 'cowl-skippers'¹¹³ might not be wasted. They did not wait to be asked twice, but ate with right good will. During the meal we fully discussed the best means of helping forward the stranded concert. Suddenly the dancing-master looked at his watch: 'Gracious me, if it isn't six o'clock! I must be off to give the children of the chief magistrate a dancing-lesson'—and with that he jumped up, kissed my hand, and pirouetted off. [Pg 373]

[113] A sort of dumpling.

"Then Esaias also rose from the table, brushed the crumbs of the cowl-skippers from his coat, and said: 'Blessing and peace be with you!'—This was always his parting formula. Such a salutation as 'Your humble servant!' or 'I commend myself to your protection!' nobody has ever heard from his lips—no, not even his superintendent; for Esaias is not *humble* and not *your servant*, and does not commend himself to anybody, nor will he tell a lie even as a matter of form.

"What! must you go too?' I replied to his 'blessing and peace.' 'You have no six-o'clock school this evening.'

"No; but why should I stay here if there's to be no practice?"

"Must I, then, begin singing in my own house before a man?"

"It depends upon the man,' replied Esaias.

"What am I to understand by that?' I inquired, much astonished.

"What are you to understand by that?' said he, striking the leg of his boot repeatedly with his pipe stem—'what are you to understand by that? It is not very hard to understand, I should think. If a lawyer, a doctor, or a squire were to come to see you and amuse himself here with or without music, not a dog in the village would have anything to bark at; but if they saw the schoolmaster come here at six o'clock in the afternoon—if they saw him, I say, remain here last of all when the other guests were gone, then there would be such a stir in Israel that men would be ready to stone me.' [Pg 374]

"Do I stand, then, in such evil odour as all that?"

"I did not say that you were in any evil odour at all.'

"It is true,' he continued, 'that there are as many names written in your album as in Charles Trattner's almanack. That, however, does a pretty woman no harm. But me the Church would not forgive. If I get into evil odour, if I overstep the line, I shall be sent packing.'

"Then celibacy obtains among the Calvinists also?"

"Not celibacy, but we have the canonical prescriptions. A canonical offence is a very serious business for a Calvinist priest or schoolmaster. Let a man be a veritable John Chrysostom, and it will avail him nothing if he commit a canonical offence.'

"And *you* have *never* committed a canonical offence?' I said to him.

"Never!' he replied resolutely. And he grew quite red in the face. He was so proud of his virtue." [Pg 375]

"Why surely this is quite a new thing?" I interrupted—"a thing never known in the world before: a man who is virtuous, and not ashamed to confess it?"

"Quite unique, isn't it? When I heard this I seized his hand and would not let him leave me. I could read from his eyes that it was the first time he had ever felt the pressure of a lady's hand. 'You have been candid,' I said to him, 'I will be candid also. You would never approach a woman whom you had not led to the altar. I know it. Then you shall lead *me* to the altar!'

"Even this did not seem to surprise him. His face remained as motionless as a statue.

"That is soon done,' said he; 'but *respice finem!* Man proposes, but 'tis an old dog that holds on. I am not like other men. I am a very difficult man to get on with. You can't deal with me as with those who look through their fingers at the goings-on of their spouses. If I take you to wife, there must be an end to all this dancing and prancing and gadding about, and flirting and ogling. My wife will not have to go fasting, but she won't be allowed any junketing. I don't understand a joke. Do you see this cherry-wood pipe-stem? If I catch my wife at any piece of trickery, I'll break this cherry-stem across her back—take my word for it."

I couldn't help smiling at this. "And you, my dear, pretty ward, have actually taken the schoolmaster to husband, cherry-stem and all?"

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"I should like to have taken him, but he didn't surrender himself so easily. I assured him that I would submit myself to the most stringent discipline of virtue, and if I transgressed against him, I should not mind his beating me. But even that did not vanquish him. By no means whatever could he be brought to sit down beside me on the sofa. He even pushed back the chair on which he was sitting, when he saw that I was besieging him. At last he brought his big guns to bear upon me.

"Look now, my dear dame, I know very well that humorous habit of yours of never remaining long in one nest. You deal with your sweethearts on a sort of give-and-take system. You are here to-day and off to-morrow. Supposing now, that in the exercise of my marital authority, I were to inflict an edifying chastisement upon you for your flightiness, you might easily take it into your head to bolt, and there should I be left in the lurch for the finger of scorn to point at. A Calvinist schoolmaster cannot submit to the fate of an ordinary man. If my wife were to leave me, I should be expelled from the Church with contumely. Then I should have to flee. I should be as good as excluded from human society. Now, I am very well satisfied with my present condition. I have a fixed salary of six hundred florins in good hard cash, and my perquisites amount to about as much again. I live honourably, you see, and I cannot afford to stake everything on a throw of the dice.'

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"Then I talked big also.

"Listen to me!' I said. 'I have capital sufficient to bring me in as much as your yearly income—that is to say, twenty-five thousand florins. I will make over the whole amount to you by way of a dower, and I am ready to forfeit it all in case I am unfaithful to you."

"And didn't your Esaias capitulate even then?" I inquired of Bessy.

"He asked for three days to think about it. I immediately hastened to you to signify my desire that your guardianship might cease."

"Then Esaias has still two days' grace," I said. "I hope and trust he may be inwardly illuminated to say no!"

"Then you do not approve of my determination?"

"I am a friend of truth, and I understand a little about prophecy too. It doesn't matter to me if you surrender all your capital as a sort of shrift-money, and your house as well."

"Such a man as he is worthy of it."

"I'll take your word for it. You are something of an expert in such matters! But one thing I strongly advise you to do: keep the garden attached to the house at your own disposition."

"Why?"

"That you may have it planted full of cherry-trees. I know the natural history of the Calvinist-schoolmaster species. I know that what once he has promised he always performs. I also know the natural history of the lady with the eyes like the sea, and it is my belief that you will frequently give occasion for the employment of cherry-tree stems."

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At this the fair lady sprang from her chair, boiling over with rage.

"What a gross monster it is! Poet indeed! A pedantic lout is what I call you! They've done very well to lock you up. This is the last time that we shall ever talk to each other."

And with that she went, or rather flounced, away.

But I gave a great sigh of relief.

"May she keep her word, and never, never come back again!" I said.

One of the first things I saw, on my release from prison, was the announcement in the newspapers of the solemnization of the marriage. The bank also informed me by letter that the amount there standing to the credit of my ward had been transferred to her husband's name.

Well, at last Bessy had got the *ne plus ultra* of husbands. For, really, the man who has reached his two-and-thirtieth year without sinning against the canonical prescriptions must indeed be a superlative treasure in the eyes of a lady who knows how to appreciate the value of such renunciation.

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CHAPTER XX

CONFESSION

Well, the long and short of it is, confess I must, that I have a sweetheart for whose sake I have been unfaithful, not only to my wife, but to my muse also—a sweetheart who has immeshed me in her spider's web, and sucked my heart's blood dry, who has appropriated my best ideas, made me scamper after her from one end of the kingdom to the other, and whose slave I was and still am. Often have I wasted half my fortune upon her, and rushed blindly into misfortune to please her. For her have I patiently endured insult, ridicule, and reprobation. For her sake I have staked life and liberty.

Sometimes, when I have felt the pinch of her tyranny, I have tried to escape from her; but she has enticed me back again and would not let me go.

Now, if she had been some pretty young damsel, there might have been some excuse for me. But she was a nasty, old, painted figure-head of a beldame; a flirting, faithless, fickle, foul-mouthed, scandal-mongering old liar, whom the whole world courts, who makes fools of all her wooers, and changes her lover as often as she changes her dress.

Her name is *Politica*,¹¹⁴ and may the plague take her.

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[114] Politics.

There was one particular year in which I was over head and ears in love with her, and did absolutely everything she wanted. On her account I fell out with a good friend of mine who was the very right hand of my newspaper. I fought (also on her account) a duel with pistols with another good friend of mine, who had no more offended me than I had ever offended him, in fact, we had always respected each other most highly. But *Politica* insisted upon it, and so we banged away at each other. Then she hounded me on against a third good friend of mine, who was an excellent fellow, and a Hungarian Minister of State to boot, and induced me to endeavour to thwart his election. And I actually *did* make this excellent fellow's election fall through, this good friend whom I respected, loved and honoured. *Politica* demanded it. What a parade she made when she dragged me along after her triumphal car! She actually made me believe that I was now the most famous man in the whole kingdom! And she made me *pay* for her precious favours, too! What *petits soupers* for five hundred men at a time! What hundreds of carriages! What toilets!... But in those days I was quite wrapped up in her.

After my great triumph a torrent of congratulatory letters and telegrams showered down upon me. I had actually upset a Cabinet Minister! That *was* a triumph! Every one who, at any time, or under any circumstances, had been acquainted with me, called upon me after my brilliant success. Old school-fellows with whom I had formerly fought in the playground now recollected me. There was a brisk demand for my autograph. I was proud of it all. I was not even surprised, therefore, when one afternoon they brought into me a visiting card with the name "Mrs. Esaias Medvési" upon it.

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It was very natural that she also should visit me. The sunbeams of my glory had melted the ice of her displeasure. Six years had now passed since I had seen her. I could imagine how she had filled out in the meantime. Well taken care of, with no vexations to worry her, harassed by no passions, what other fate could possibly await my fair ideal than—to grow fat?

All the more startled was I, therefore, when I *did* see her.

She had grown quite gaunt. Her old-fashioned dress, which had been made to fit fuller forms, hung loosely about her. Her face, once so rosy and gay, was now lean and haggard; sombre wrinkles, which met together beneath her chin, had taken the place of her roguish dimples. Only by her eyes could I recognise her: they were still the eyes of yore.

When she saw me she forced a smile, but I could see how much it cost her.

I have never thought it a proper question to ask any one whose face has altered a good deal, "Are you ill?" but she herself led up to it.

"I have greatly changed, haven't I? 'Tis a wonder that you recognise me. I have been very ill. I have just come from the doctor. I have been suffering from a quartan ague, which our country doctors could not drive away."

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"But otherwise you are all right, I trust?"

"No, I am not. I fancy that my physical ailment is only as stubborn as it is, because my mind also is not as it should be."

I asked her what was the matter.

"I have come on purpose to tell you. You always gave me good advice, and I never took it. It may be that I wouldn't take it even now; but at least it would relieve my mind to tell you all about it. I have a secret desire which is destroying my whole soul: I go to sleep with it, and I wake up with it."

"What desire can it be?"

"If you but look at my face, you can easily see that it is no sinful affection."

"And yet it must be kept secret?"

"Yes, for I go about day and night with the thought of becoming a Catholic."

I was so startled by this, that in my amazement I knew not what to say to her.

"It is my fixed resolution. The only thing that can give to my soul peace on earth and salvation in heaven is conversion to the Roman Catholic Church."

"How did you come by this resolution? There is no Catholic church in the town where you reside."

"But there is a monastery quite close to it, a sweet, quiet, pleasant place. I am wont to go there when they are not watching me. A mere accident moved me at first. Curiosity led me into the church when I heard the holy chants through the door; but now it is devotion which leads me there. Ah! how much more sublime a place it is than our bald, bare place of worship. Wherever I look I see groups of holy figures who bless and beckon me. And those sublime chants, which seem to come from the angelic chorus of heaven, and ravish my soul away to a world unknown—but oh, how ardently desired! And then the deep silence, which is scarcely broken by the solemn sanctus-bell; and then the form of the priest himself, who, like a supernatural being, speaks before the altar in a language which men may not, but God does, understand. When I come out of such a church it seems to me as if I have been speaking to God."

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I began thinking what would be the end of it all. The lady became insistent.

"What do you advise? What shall I do? My soul compels me to it."

"My dear friend," I replied, "you know that I am a Protestant—and as a Protestant I am liberally and indulgently inclined towards every other creed. I *advise* nobody to change his religion, neither do I dissuade him from so doing. I have a real veneration for the Catholic faith. I consider its ritual majestic and sublime, and its ceremonies are undoubtedly imposing and touching. Had I been born a Catholic, I should have been an ardent champion of my Church. But how can I approve of the conversion of a person in your position? Do you not reflect that your husband is an officer of the Calvinist communion?"

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"But it is the very prosaic nature of this communion which offends me. For in what a dull manner do our elders and deacons perform their sacred functions! Prayer, sermon, hymns—everything is with them a mere matter of enforced routine. How can they inspire others who have not themselves the gift of grace? Such people can only mock at and speak scornfully of their neighbours' faith because they have no real faith of their own."

"But pray recollect that a Protestant schoolmaster loses his post if his wife changes her religion."

"He may lose his material comforts, but I lose the repose of my soul."

"My dear Bessy, I can imagine that a woman with extraordinarily sensitive nerves may find no consolation in Puritan simplicity. If you would seek refuge in true devotion, procure Allach's prayer-book—the manual of Catholic prayers, you know. In that book you'll find everything that is sublime, majestic, and heavenly in Catholic theology. Pray out of that book when you are alone and nobody sees you."

"That is not enough for me. Religion does not consist in prayers and singing alone."

"Then perhaps it is the pomp of the external ceremonies which has such an effect on your mind?"

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"That affects me least of all. But there is in the Catholic Church an institution as sublime as it is comforting, an institution sufficient of itself to spread the Catholic religion all over the round world wherever there are hearts that bleed, wherever there are those who suffer from other than merely material aches and pains. That institution is *confession*. It was a gross blunder of John Calvin not to have retained that institution for the faithful. He did not know the heart, especially the female heart. There is no greater torture in this world than to carry about in one's soul night and day an evil thought which harasses and pursues, and be unable to tell it to anybody. A Catholic woman can always find a word of consolation for her despair, a hand stretched out to raise her when she falls; *she* has a refuge against the accusations of her own conscience; if she has sinned, she can beg for absolution, and her soul is lightened of its load. But who can absolve me? To whom can I tell that which tortures me within?"

Her eyes were fixed and staring like the eyes of a somnambulist who sees nothing before her but a visionary world which others do not see, and at the same time she raised her index finger and laid it on her parched and cracking lips, as if to keep back the moanings of her dumb distress.

I was deeply grieved for her. She had no need to tell me what she felt; her features spoke for themselves, and said how much she must have suffered since the last change in her life.

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"My dear friend," I said at last, "you have now known me for a long time, and you know that I have always been your well-wisher. If you have any bitter thought which oppresses you, confess it to me. *Amongst Protestants every man is a priest*. That is our fundamental dogma. Confess to me!"

She smiled strangely; just as a sick man smiles when the doctor tries to persuade him that he really is well, while he himself is thinking all the time: "Just you wait a bit, and I'll turn the joke

against you and—die!"

"You will receive my confession, then?"

"Yes; and rest assured that I'll keep the solemn secret as sacred as a consecrated priest."

"As long as I am alive, at any rate. After I am dead, I don't care what you do. You may then proclaim it to the world if you like. When I am dead, I authorize you to write a romance about me, a romance like mine you have never written yet. But *till* then, not a word to any one of what you will now hear from me. To nobody, not even to your wife! Promise me that! Your word of honour on it!"

"My friend, there is a crypt within my breast for buried secrets. Your secret shall repose among the rest."

She bent down to my ear, her burning breath scorched my face, and she whispered: "I confess to you that I wish *to kill my husband*." [Pg 387]

Horrified, I looked into her eyes, they flashed up at me like the eyes of devils. That wish of hers was a real living wish.

"And what I've said, I'll do"—and she pressed her lips together till they were quite thin, and her eyes distended into orbs filled with threatening fire.

"Good Heavens! what thought is this?"

She looked at me with a malicious smile.

"There, you see you are no priest, and can give no absolution."

"Nor would a priest give you absolution either. A priest can impose penance for sin repented of, but he cannot give indulgence beforehand for a meditated crime. A priest could only say to you what I say now: 'Fly to God and cleanse your soul from this dark thought!' How could you ever have suffered it to enter your soul, that good and gentle soul of yours that used always to love and never to hate?"

"Yes, such I ever was, was I not? I was indeed a loving fool. You once wrote a tale which I remember reading when a child. In this tale a distracted heart relates how many ways there are of extinguishing life. Amongst other things written there is this: that if honey is allowed to stand till it rots, it turns into the deadliest venom. This is quite true as to the honey with which the heart of a poor credulous woman is full, but it is *not* true with regard to the honey of the field. I have tried and found that it is not true." [Pg 388]

"Believe me, neither case is true. In married life there is no such sea of bitterness as cannot be made sweet again by a single drop of love."

"Alas! what I suffer exceeds even the power of your imagination. Contempt, degradation, is my daily bread. Insult follows upon every step I take. When I speak, my words are misinterpreted; when I am silent, I am chided; when I weep, I am bullied and brow-beaten."

"Do you think that perhaps your husband suspects your intention of changing your faith?"

"So much he knows, that I frequently visit the monastery, and often have talks with one of the monks. I solemnly swear that I've talked to him about nothing but religion and holy things. He, however, accuses me of the nastiest things. Then when we sit together at table, he poisons every dish I eat by singing the most derisive songs he can think of about those women who rave about cowls and cassocks; in fact, he is *always* singing such songs in my presence."

"But, my dear friend, you take these things too tragically. These derisive songs have been sung time out of mind. Your husband has not invented them for your special aggravation. Laugh at him to his face, and he'll hold his tongue."

"Very well, then. Let what he does to ridicule *me* be forgiven. But ever since he has begun to suspect my spiritual condition, he leaves no stone unturned to disturb my devotions. If in the afternoon or evening, when the chiming of the cloister bell is wafted over to us, I involuntarily join my hands together, he laughs at me: 'Ha! ha! ha! they are ringing the bells to call you to prayer, are they?' Now, the Calvinists do not ring for evening prayers, neither do they sound the Angelus, and this is a great grief to me. It is like rolling my bread in the mud and then making me eat it. This continual ridiculing clings to me like tar; it chokes, it nauseates. I feel just as if I were swimming in a sea of glue. He relates to me the most villainous anecdotes about the holy images. Last Saturday it rained the whole morning, and I could not go to town. He saw my impatience, and said to me derisively, 'Never mind, *thou female*, it will clear up this afternoon, for the Virgin Mary wants to dry her son's little shirt for Sunday!' It was well for him that he left the room that instant, for I was very near driving my knife into his heart!" [Pg 389]

I tried to quiet the excited creature by saying that though this was no very reverent jest, yet it was not an invention of Esaias's. This jest about the breaking out of the sunshine on Saturday afternoon was a common saying among the Hungarian country folk, and, taken seriously, had really nothing impious about it, representing, indeed, that sacred figure, whom all of us are bound to reverence, as a provident mother from the homely, rustic point of view. [Pg 390]

"I don't like to hear *that* name on *his* lips. Why, I sent away an old servant of mine called Marcsa

for no other reason than because her master was always calling her Maria, and every such time it was as if a dagger were piercing my heart."

I saw that the woman was really suffering. It was a case where a heroic remedy was required.

"My dear friend," I said, "I cannot blame your husband. Your religious extravagance, which has been not a little stimulated by the irritability of your nerves and the nostrums which the provincial doctors have made you drink, is a question of 'to be or not to be' for your husband. If you cling to the saints, poor Esaias will feel the earth giving way beneath him. You are bound to one another, remember. If you go and seek heaven in another church, you will only install hell in your own house. Believe me, if your husband discovers your design, he will fly into a fury and tear you to pieces. If I were you I should go to some medicinal watering place and get your nerves braced up a bit."

"I see—I see. You do not understand what is the matter with me. You think it is a mere feminine ailment, which is, generally, half affectation. Look at that recipe. The most famous doctor in the capital prescribed it for me. I went to him, he diagnosed me. He said that the country doctors had not treated my case properly. They had stuffed me full of quinine, he said, and it was not the medicament that I wanted. So he prescribed me another. Read it!"

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I looked at the prescription and saw it was arsenic.

"The doctor prescribed six drops for the first day, and a drop more every other day up to twenty drops, and then back by single drops to six again. Then my fever will return no more. But he cautioned me to keep most strictly to his prescription, as the remedy was a very dangerous one. Is that so?"

"It is."

"I have had it made up in the Józsefváros dispensary." And with that she drew out the flask from her pocket and showed it me.

"That will do for me. I will now go with this prescription to all the ten apothecaries in the town and have it made up by every one of them. *Ten times the strength will certainly do for him.*"

Horried, I seized her hand.

"Miserable woman, what wouldst thou do? Surely not commit murder? Wouldst thou poison thy husband's body and my soul? Every time I have thought of thee I have seen thee before me in the idealized form of my pure love of early days, and wilt thou now put horror and aversion in the place of it? Give me that prescription!"

With terrified, staring eyes, and trembling in every nerve, the woman fell down on her knees before me, and when I said to her: "Hitherto thou hast always had a place in my prayers, dost thou wish me to cast thee forth from my remembrance with curses?" she began to smile.

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"*'Tis the first time in your life that you have 'thou'd' me.* Let me then return the compliment. But no, I cannot *thou* thee. The word *thou* cannot come out of my mouth. Don't lift me up. Let me kneel before you. I fain would only weep, but no tears will flow. Here is the prescription. Destroy it if you like. I was mad. I knew not what I said. 'Tis true. If life be grievous to me, 'tis I who ought to die."

"What you now say is also a sin. Heaven does not give us that divine spark, the spirit, only that we may fling it back again. Learn to bear your sorrows in silence. Every one of us has his cross which God has laid upon him that he may carry it ... If you would believe in the saints, follow their example. *Be* a martyr, if God so wills it—that is the *real* Catholic faith...."

She began to sob, but after some little difficulty I contrived to pacify her. I also provided her with all sorts of good homely counsels. "A good wife," I said, "ought to humour her husband, and not sit in judgment on his faults." I told her to bring him to me and introduce me to him. Perhaps I might make some impression on him, and prevail upon him not to press his crotchets too far. It was even possible that I might find him some work to do, something relating to spiritual subjects which might occupy his mind, kindle his ambition, and make him peel off his cynical husk. No doubt he was a good and worthy man, who only needed to be properly taken in hand to get on very well.

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The lady with the eyes like the sea listened with many shakes of the head, but she had gradually grown much more quiet. Those eyes of hers, how they could express gratitude! It really seemed as if, beneath the influence of my words, her face was recovering the rosy hue that it had lost.

Alas, no! Vain thought! 'Twas not my words, but something else.

She arose and rallied her spirits.

"Very well! I'll take your advice. I will endure. I will be patient. I will down with every evil thought. I will show that I can be a good wife. You shall be satisfied with me. But one thing I'll tell you. My husband has threatened to strike me. If ever he does that, then God be merciful both to him and me."

Now I knew why her face had turned so red—"If my husband dishonours me by a single blow, I swear that I'll seize a gun and shoot him dead!" And with that she rushed out of the room. I felt as if I ought to call after her: "Don't go home, wretched woman!"

CHAPTER XXI

MARIA NOSTRA.

Ah! what an ocean of time has passed since this happened. It must be twenty years, at least. It makes me giddy when I look back upon it. But how many evil years there were, how many days that I do not love to think about! How many have been torn from my side to whom life was a joy and on whom the future smiled! And I still remain! Only here and there, now and again, perhaps, do I encounter a grey-headed shape like myself, a relic from that brilliant time, and what a joy it then is to look back upon those old days and say: "It is not so good now as it was then!"

Some years ago I was on a visit of inspection among our large national State prisons. I happened to be at Szamosujvár and Illava, where the aristocracy of crime is collected together, persons condemned to a term of imprisonment exceeding ten years, all of them criminals once under sentence of death, but reprieved by an act of grace. Here were interesting studies of the night side of human nature.

I also visited the Maria Nostra. Here the female criminals resided, and nuns were the warders. [Pg 395]

This house of correction can only be visited by special permission of the Ministry.

There the discipline is strict, but the prisoners are very well treated.

Last of all we visited the day-room, where the prisoners were at work.

They all sat in a long room, and were sewing. Those who could do the finer sort of work were at little tables of their own. I stopped before one of such tables; a woman was sewing some sort of child's garment. It is the rule that when a visitor stops before the table of one of the felons, she shall immediately rise from her seat and, whether asked or unasked, say what her crime is and how long her term of imprisonment.

She arose when I stood before her table.

Her hair was as white as autumn gossamers, but her eyes still flashed with their old varying fires—they were still, as of old, the flaming eyes like the sea! In a dull monotone she told me her crime and her sentence: "I killed my husband. I am condemned to imprisonment for life."

For life!—and life so long!

"Can I not use my interest in your favour?"

"I thank you, but it is well with me here. I wish for nothing more in this world."

And with that she returned to her place and went on with her work.

Poor little Bessy! [Pg 396]

Last year I received a letter announcing her death. It was her last wish that I, but nobody else, should be informed of it.

THE END.

EYES LIKE THE SEA.

BY MAURUS JÓKAI

12MO, CLOTH

A FEW COMMENTS OF THE ENGLISH PRESS

Half autobiographical, dramatic, and at the same time humorous, Jókai's novel, crowned by the Hungarian Academy in 1860, is a delightful exception to the tendency which is fast making fiction a branch of science instead of art.—*Morning Post*.

It is a strikingly original and powerful story ... The great charm of the book is the manner in which Jókai analyses Bessie's character. All through the story indeed we feel ourselves in the presence of a master of the human heart, and again and again we come upon sentences pregnant with that wisdom which it is the lot of but few

to acquire.—*Speaker*.

From beginning to end "Eyes like the Sea" teems with entertaining matter and the English version is highly creditable to Mr. Nisbet Bain the translator of this sprightly autobiographical novel.—*Daily Telegraph*.

"Eyes Like the Sea" is an alluring book into which to dip at random ...—*Academy*.

"Eyes like the Sea" is one of those rare books that break all rules and defy criticism by justifying their irregularities.—*Guardian*.

It is good to know too that fiction in Hungary has a master so hearty, so human, and so free at once from priggishness and *naturalism*.—*Saturday Review*.

In some respects the heroine reminds us of Becky Sharp and in others of Manon Lescaut, and in feminine dexterity and sexual eccentricities is no unworthy mate for either.—*Athenæum*.

It is truly, as Mr. Bain remarks in his preface, a brilliant example of the now rare novel of incident and adventure ... The vigor of the book is astonishing.—*World*.

The charm of the original as a work of art loses a good deal in the translation ... none the less the book is extremely interesting. It is a sketchy and vivacious summary of the more salient incidents in the political and literary career of the eminent Hungarian poet and romancist, its author.—*Literary World*.

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON

Transcriber's Note: The following typographical errors present in the original edition have been corrected.

In the Preface, "pronounced preference" was changed to "pronounced preference".

In Chapter I, a missing period was added after "Valsez là".

In Chapter II, "would have withdrawn" was changed to "would have withdrawn", and a missing quotation mark was added before "you ought really to be a tamer of animals!".

In Chapter III, a missing period was added after "after her wedding".

In Chapter IV, a quotation mark was added before "They are all in a very good humour to-day".

In Chapter VI, "amongst us at the, Table of Public Opinion" was changed to "amongst us at the Table of Public Opinion".

In Chapter VIII a missing quotation mark was added after "skiz and pagát...."

In Chapter X a missing period was added after "Newspapers he never reads".

In Chapter XIII, "beleagured fortress" was changed to "beleaguered fortress", "hide yourself in the village of Isza" was changed to "hide yourself in the village of Izsa", a missing period was added after "glass full of szilvorium", and an extraneous quotation mark was deleted after "the hovel at Hetény".

In Chapter XIV, a quotation mark was added before "Forget what we have been speaking about!"

In Chapter XV, "Wencesclaus Kvatopil was decidedly an improvement" was changed to "Wenceslaus Kvatopil was decidedly an improvement".

In Chapter XVI, "Kakas Mártn," was changed to "Kakas Mártn."

The ellipses in Chapter XVII both contained an extra dot (a period plus four dots at the end of a sentence, and four dots following an incomplete sentence). The extra dots have been removed. Also, a missing period has been added after "her various temperaments".

In Chapter XVIII, a missing quotation mark was added after "mutually discovered in Kvatopil's character....". In Chapter XIX, "Özvegy Kapitáuné" was changed to "Özvegy Kapitányné", a period was changed to a colon after "said to the President", a missing quotation mark was added after "left to practise alone", and "pirouted off" was changed to "pirouetted off".

In Chapter XX, "turn the jok against you" was changed to "turn the joke against you", "the Józsefvarose dispensary" was changed to "the Józsefváros dispensary", "the real Ca holic faith" was changed to "the real Catholic faith", and a misplaced quotation mark was move from after "taken in hand to get on very well" to after "sit in judgment on his faults".

Numerous Hungarian words have been spelled inconsistently, sometimes with an accent and sometimes without, and some words have been inconsistently hyphenated. Each occurrence has been left as it appeared in the original text, except as follows: "Fövarosi" has been changed to "Fövárosi", "Heteny" to "Hetény", "Honvéd" to "Honved", "Jokai" to "Jókai", "Rakóczy" to "Rákóczy", "Sagi" to "Sági", "Segesvar" to "Segesvár", "Valy" to "Vály", "Vasvary" to "Vasváry", and "Verchovszky" to "Vérchovszky".

Also, the section titled "A Few Comments of the English Press" has been moved from the front of the book to the back.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK EYES LIKE THE SEA: A NOVEL ***

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