Mor Jokai

Debts of Honor

Publio

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CHAPTER *I*

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At that time I was but ten years old, my brother Lorand sixteen; our dear mother was still young, and father, I well remember, no more than thirty-six. Our grandmother, on my father's side, was also of our party, and at that time was some sixty years of age; she had lovely thick hair, of the pure whiteness of snow. In my childhood I had often thought how dearly the angels must love those who keep their hair so beautiful and white; and used to have the childish belief that one's hair grows white from abundance of joy.

It is true, we never had any sorrow; it seemed as if our whole family had contracted some secret bond of unity, whereby each member thereof bound himself to cause as much joy and as little sorrow as possible to the others.

I never heard any quarrelling in our family. I never saw a passionate face, never an anger that lasted till the morrow, never a look at all reproachful. My mother, grandmother, father, my brother and I, lived like those who understand each other's thoughts, and only strive to excel one another in the expression of their love.

To confess the truth, I loved none of our family so much as I did my brother. Nevertheless I should have been thrown into some little doubt, if some one had asked me which of them I should choose, if I must part from three of the four and keep only one for myself. But could we only have remained together, without death to separate us or disturb our sweet contentment, until ineffable eternity, in such a case I had chosen for my constant companion only my brother. He was so good to me. For he was terribly strong. I thought there could not be a stronger fellow in the whole town. His school-fellows feared his fists, and never dared to cross his path; yet he did not look so powerful; he was rather slender, with a tender girl-like countenance.

Even now I can hardly stop speaking of him.

As I was saying, our family was very happy. We never suffered from want, living in a fine house with every comfort. Even the very servants had plenty. Torn clothes were always replaced by new ones and as to friends—why the jolly crowds that would make the house fairly ring with merry-making on name-days1 and on similar festive occasions proved that there was no lack of them. That every one had a feeling of high esteem for us I could tell by the respectful greetings addressed to us from every direction.

1 In Hungary persons celebrate the name-day of the saint after whom they are called with perhaps more ceremony than their birthday.

My father was a very serious man; quiet and not talkative. He had a pale face, a long black beard, and thick eyebrows. Sometimes he contracted his eyebrows, and then we might have been afraid of him; but his idea always was, that nobody should fear him; not more than once a year did it happen that he cast an angry look at some one. However, I never saw him in a good humor. On the occasion of our most festive banquets, when our guests were bursting into peals of laughter at sprightly jests, he would sit there at the end of the table as one who heard naught. If dear mother leaned affectionately on his shoulder, or Lorand kissed his face, or if I nestled to his breast and plied him, in child-guise, with queries on unanswerable topics, at such a time his beautiful, melancholy eyes would beam with such inexpressible love, such enchanting sweetness would well out from them! But a smile came there never at any time, nor did any one cause him to laugh.

He was not one of those men who, when wine or good humor unloosens their tongue, become loquacious, and tell all that lies hidden in their heart, speak of the past and future, chatter and boast. No, he never used gratuitous words. There was some one else in our family just as serious, our grandmother; she was just as taciturn, just as careful about contracting her thick eyebrows, which were already white at that time; just as careful about uttering words of anger; just as incapable of laughing or even smiling. I often remarked that her eyes were fixed unremittingly on his face; and sometimes I found myself possessed of the childish idea that my father was always so grave in his behavior because he knew that his mother was gazing at him. If afterward their eyes met by chance, it seemed as if they had discovered each other's thoughts—some old, long-buried thoughts, of which they were the guardians; and I often saw how my old grandmother would rise from her everlasting knitting, and come to father as he sat among us thus abstracted, scarce remarking that mother, Lorand, and I were beside him, caressing and pestering him; she would kiss his forehead, and his countenance would seem to change in a moment: he would become more affectionate, and begin to converse with us; thereupon

grandmother would kiss him afresh and return to her knitting.

It is only now that I recall all these incidents. At that time I found nothing remarkable in them.

One evening our whole family circle was surprised by the unusually good humor that had come over father. To each one of us he was very tender, very affectionate; entered into a long conversation with Lorand, asked him of his school-work, imparted to him information on subjects of which as yet he had but a faulty knowledge; took me on his knee and smoothed my head; addressed questions to me in Latin, and praised me for answering them correctly; kissed our dear mother more than once, and after supper was over related merry tales of the old days. When we began to laugh at them, he laughed too. It was such a pleasure to me to have seen my father laugh once. It was such a novel sensation that I almost trembled with joy.

Only our old grandmother remained serious. The brighter father's face became, the more closely did those white eyebrows contract. Not for a single moment did she take her eyes off father's face; and, as often as he looked at her with his merry, smiling countenance, a cold shudder ran through her ancient frame. Nor could she let father's unusual gayety pass without comment.

"How good-humored you are to-day, my son!"

"To-morrow I shall take the children to the country," he answered; "the prospect of that has always been a source of great joy to me."

We were to go to the country! The words had a pleasant sound for us also. We ran to father, to kiss him for his kindness; how happy he had made us by this promise! His face showed that he knew it well.

"Now you must go to bed early, so as not to oversleep in the morning; the carriage will be here at daybreak."

To go to bed is only too easy, but to fall asleep is difficult when one is still a child, and has received a promise of being taken to the country. We had a beautiful and pleasant country property, not far from town; my brother was as fond as I was of being there. Mother and grandmother never came with us. Why, we knew not; they said they did not like the country. We were indeed surprised at this. Not to like the country—to wander in the fields, on flowery meadows; to breathe the precious perfumed air; to gather round one the beautiful, sagacious, and useful domestic animals? Can there be any one in the world who does not love that? Child, I know there is none.

My brother was all excitement for the chase. How he would enter forest and reeds! what beautiful green-necked wild duck he would shoot. How many multi-colored birds' eggs he would bring home to me.

"I will go with you, too," I said.

"No; some ill might befall you. You can remain at home in the garden to angle in the brook, and catch tiny little fishes."

"And we shall cook them for dinner." What a splendid idea! Long, long we remained awake; first Lorand, then I, was struck by some idea which had to be mentioned; and so each prevented the other from sleeping. Oh! how great the gladness that awaited us on the morrow!

Late in the night a noise as of fire arms awoke me. It is true that I always dreamed of guns. I had seen Lorand at the chase, and feared he would shoot himself.

"What have you shot, Lorand?" I asked half asleep.

"Remain quite still," said my brother, who was lying in the bed near me, and had risen at the noise. "I shall see what has happened outside." With these words he went out.

Several rooms divided our bedroom from that of our parents. I heard no sound except the opening of doors here and there.

Soon Lorand returned. He told me merely to sleep on peacefully—a high wind had risen and had slammed to a window that had remained open; the glass was all broken into fragments; that had caused the great noise.

And therewith he proceeded to dress.

"Why are you dressing?"

"Well, the broken window must be mended with something to prevent the draught coming in; it is in mother's bedroom. You can sleep on peacefully."

Then he placed his hand on my head, and that hand was like ice.

"Is it cold outside, Lorand?"

"No."

"Then why does your hand tremble so?"

"True; it is very cold. Sleep on, little Desi."

As he went out he left an intermediate door open for a moment; and in that moment the sound of mother's laughter reached my ears. That well-known ringing sweet voice, that indicates those *naïve* women who among their children are themselves the greatest children.

What could cause mother to laugh so loudly at this late hour of the night? Because the window was broken? At that time I did not yet know that there is a horrible affliction which attacks women with agonies of hell, and amidst these heart-rending agonies forces them to laugh incessantly.

I comforted myself with what my brother had said, and forcibly buried my head in my pillow that I might compel myself to fall asleep.

It was already late in the morning when I awoke again. This time also my brother had awakened me. He was already quite dressed.

My first thought was of our visit to the country.

"Is the carriage already here? Why did you not wake me earlier? Why, you are actually dressed!"

I also immediately hastened to get up, and began to dress; my brother helped me, and answered not a word to my constant childish prattling. He was very serious, and often gazed in directions where there was nothing to be seen.

"Some one has annoyed you, Lorand?"

My brother did not reply, only drew me to his side and combed my hair. He gazed at me incessantly with a sad expression.

"Has some evil befallen you, Lorand?"

No sign, even of the head, of assent or denial; he merely tied my neckerchief quietly into a bow.

We disputed over the coat I should wear; I wished to put on a blue one. Lorand, on the contrary, wished me to wear a dark green one.

I resisted him.

"Why, we are going to the country! There the blue doublet will be just the thing. Why don't you give it to me? Because you have none like it!"

Lorand said nothing; he merely looked at me with those great reproachful eyes of his. It was enough for me. I allowed him to dress me in the dark green coat. And yet I would continually grumble about it.

"Why, you are dressing me as if we were to go to an examination or to a funeral."

At these words Lorand suddenly pressed me to him, folding me in his embrace, then knelt down before me and began to weep, and sob so that his tears bedewed my hair.

"Lorand, what is the matter?" I asked in terror; but he could not speak for weeping. "Don't weep, Lorand. Did I annoy you? Don't be angry."

Long did he weep, all the time holding me in his arms. Then suddenly he heaved a deep and terrifying sigh, and in a low voice stammered in my ear:

"Father—is—dead."

I was one of those children who could not weep; who learn that only with manhood. At such a time when I should have wept, I only felt as if some worm were gnawing into my heart, as if some languor had seized me, which deprived me of all feeling expressed by the five senses—my brother wept for me. Finally, he kissed me and begged me to recover myself. But I was not beside myself. I saw and heard everything. I was like a log of wood, incapable of any movement.

It was unfortunate that I was not gifted with the power of showing how I suffered.

But my mind could not fathom the depths of that thought. Our father was dead!

Yesterday evening he was still talking with us; embracing and kissing us; he had promised to take us to the country, and to-day he was not: he was dead. Quite incomprehensible! In my childhood I had often racked my brains with the question, "What is there beyond the world?" Void. Well, and what surrounds that void? Many times this distracting thought drove me almost to madness. Now this same maddening dilemma seized upon me. How could it be that my father was dead?

"Let us go to mother!" was my next thought.

"We shall go soon after her. She has already departed."

"Whither?"

"To the country."

"But, why?"

"Because she is ill."

"Then why did she laugh so in the night?"

"Because she is ill."

This was still more incomprehensible to my poor intellect.

A thought then occurred to me. My face became suddenly brighter.

"Lorand, of course you are joking; you are fooling me. You merely wished to alarm me. We are all going away to the country to enjoy ourselves! and you only wished to take the drowsiness from my eyes when you told me father was dead."

At these words Lorand clasped his hands, and, with motionless, agonized face, groaned out:

"Desi, don't torture me; don't torture me with your smiling face."

This caused me to be still more alarmed. I began to tremble, seized one of his arms, and implored him not to be angry. Of course, I believed what he said.

He could see that I believed, for all my limbs were trembling.

"Let us go to him, Lorand."

My brother merely gazed at me as if he were horrified at what I had said.

"To father?"

"Yes. What if I speak to him, and he awakes?"

At this suggestion Lorand's two eyes became like fire. It seems as if he were forcibly holding back the rush of a great flood of tears. Then between his teeth he murmured:

"He will never awake again."

"Yet I would like to kiss him."

"His hand?"

"His hand and his face."

"You may kiss only his hand," said my brother firmly.

"Why?"

"Because I say so," was his stern reply. The unaccustomed ring of his voice was quite alarming. I told him I would obey him; only let him take me to father.

"Well, come along. Give me your hand."

Then taking my hand, he led me through two rooms.2 In the third, grandmother met us.

2 In Hungary the houses are built so that one room always leads into the other; the whole house can often be traversed without the necessity of going into a corridor or passage.

I saw no change in her countenance; only her thick white eyebrows were deeply contracted.

Lorand went to her and softly whispered something to her which I did not hear; but I saw plainly that he indicated me with his eyes. Grandmother quietly indicated her consent or refusal with her head; then she came to me, took my head in her two hands, and looked long into my face, moving her head gently. Then she murmured softly:

"Just the way *he* looked as a child."

Then she threw herself face foremost upon the floor, sobbing bitterly.

Lorand seized my hand and drew me with him into the fourth room.

There lay the coffin. It was still open; only the winding-sheet covered the whole.

Even to-day I have no power to describe the coffin in which I saw my father. Many know what that is; and no one would wish to learn from me. Only an old serving-maid was in the chamber; no one else was watching. My brother pressed my head to his bosom. And so we stood there a long time.

Suddenly my brother told me to kiss my father's hand, and then we must go. I obeyed him; he raised the edge of the winding-sheet; I saw two wax-like hands put together; two hands in which I could not have recognized those strong muscular hands, upon the shapely fingers of which in my younger days I had so often played with the wonderful signet-rings, drawing them off one after the other.

I kissed both hands. It was such a pleasure! Then I looked at my brother with agonized pleading. I longed so to kiss the face. He understood my look and drew me away.

"Come with me. Don't let us remain longer." And that was such terrible agony to me! My brother told me to wait in my room, and not to move from it until he had ordered the carriage which was to take us away.

"Whither?" I asked.

"Away to the country. Remain here and don't go anywhere else." And to keep me secure he locked the door upon me.

Then I fell a-thinking. Why should we go to the country now that our father was lying dead? Why must I remain meanwhile in that room? Why do none of our acquaintances come to see us? Why do those who go about the house whisper so quietly? Why do they not toll the bell when so great a one lies dead in the house?

All this distracted my brain entirely. To nothing could I give myself an answer, and no one came to me from whom I could have demanded the truth.

Once, not long after (to me it seemed an age, though, if the truth be known, it was probably only a half-hour or so), I heard the old serving-maid, who had been watching in yonder chamber, tripping past the corridor window. Evidently some one else had taken her place.

Her face was now as indifferent as it always was. Her eyes were cried out; but I am sure I had seen her weep every day, whether in good or in bad humor; it was all one with her. I addressed her through the window:

"Aunt Susie, come here."

"What do you want, dear little Desi?"

"Susie, tell me truly, why am I not allowed to kiss my father's face?"

The old servant shrugged her shoulders, and with cynical indifference replied:

"Poor little fool. Why, because—because he has no head, poor fellow."

I did not dare to tell my brother on his return what I had heard from old Susie.

I told him it was the cold air, when he asked why I trembled so.

Thereupon he merely put my overcoat on, and said, "Let us go to the carriage."

I asked him if our grandmother was not coming with us. He replied that she would remain behind. We two took our seats in one carriage; a second was waiting before the door.

To me the whole incident seemed as a dream. The rainy, gloomy weather, the houses that flew past us, the people who looked wonderingly out of the windows, the one or two familiar faces that passed us by, and in their astonished gaze upon us forgot to greet us. It was as if each one of them asked himself: "Why has the father of these boys no head?" Then the long poplar-trees at the end of the town, so bent by the wind as if they were bowing their heads under the weight of some heavy thought; and the murmuring waves under the bridge, across which we went, murmuring as if they too were taking counsel over some deep secret, which had so oft been intrusted to them, and which as yet no one had discovered—why was it that some dead people had no heads? Something prompted me so, to turn with this awful question to my brother. I overcame the demon, and did not ask him. Often children, who hold pointed knives before their eyes, or look down from a high bridge into the water, are told, "Beware, or the devil will push you." Such was my feeling in relation to this question. In my hand was the handle, the point was in my heart. I was sitting upon the brim, and gazing down into the whirlpool. Something called upon me to thrust myself into the living reality, to lose my head in it. And yet I was able to restrain myself. During the whole journey neither my brother nor I spoke a word.

When we arrived at our country-house our physician met us, and told us that mother was even worse than she had been; the sight of us would only aggravate her illness; so it would be good for us to remain in our room.

Our grandmother arrived two hours after us. Her arrival was the signal for a universal whispering among the domestics, as if they would make ready for something extraordinary which the whole world must not know. Then we sat down to dinner quite unexpectedly, far earlier than usual. No one could eat; we only gazed at each course in turn. After dinner my brother in his turn began to hold a whispered conference with grandmother. As far as I could gather from the few words I caught, they were discussing whether he should take his gun with him or not. Lorand wished to take it, but grandmother objected. Finally, however, they agreed that he should take gun and cartridges, but should not load the weapon until he saw a necessity for it.

In the mean while I staggered about from room to room. It seemed as if everybody had considerations of more importance than that of looking after me.

In the afternoon, however, when I saw my brother making him ready for a journey, despair seized hold of me:

"Take me with you."

"Why, you don't even know where I am going."

"I don't mind; I will go anywhere, only take me with you; for I cannot remain all by myself."

"Well, I will ask grandmother."

My brother exchanged a few words with my grandmother, and then came back to me.

"You may come with me. Take your stick and coat."

He slung his gun on his shoulder and took his dog with him.

Once again this thought agonized me afresh: "Father is dead, and we go for an afternoon's shooting, with grandmother's consent as if nothing had happened."

We went down through the gardens, all along the loam-pits; my brother seemed to be choosing a route where we should meet with no one. He kept the dog on the leash to prevent its wandering away. We went a long way, roaming among maize-fields and shrubs, without the idea once occurring to Lorand to take the gun down from his shoulder. He kept his eyes continually on the ground, and would always silence the dog, when the animal scented game.

Meantime we had left the village far behind us. I was already quite tired out, and yet I did not utter a syllable to suggest our returning. I would rather have gone to the end of the world than return home.

It was already twilight when we reached a small poplar wood. Here my brother suggested a little rest. We sat down side by side on the trunk of a felled tree. Lorand offered me some cakes he had brought in his wallet for me. How it pained me that he thought I wanted anything to eat. Then he threw the cake to the hound. The hound picked it up and, disappearing behind the bushes, we heard him scratch on the ground as he buried it. Not even he wanted to eat. Next we watched the sunset. Our village church-tower was

already invisible, so far had we wandered, and yet I did not ask whether we should return.

The weather became suddenly gloomy; only after sunset did the clouds open, that the dying sun might radiate the heavens with its storm-burdened red fire. The wind suddenly rose. I remarked to my brother that an ugly wind was blowing, and he answered that it was good for us. How this great wind could be good for us, I was unable to discover.

When later the heavens gradually changed from fire red to purple, from purple to gray, from gray to black, Lorand loaded his gun, and let the hound loose. He took my hand. I must now say not a single word, but remain motionless. In this way we waited long that boisterous night.

I racked my brain to discover the reason why we were there.

On a sudden our hound began to whine in the distance—such a whine as I had never yet heard.

Some minutes later he came reeling back to us; whimpering and whining, he leaped up at us, licked our hands, and then raced off again.

"Now let us go," said Lorand, shouldering his gun.

Hurriedly we followed the hound's track, and soon came out upon the high-road.

In the gloom a hay-cart drawn by four oxen, was quietly making its way to its destination.

"God be praised!" said the old farm-laborer, as he recognized my brother.

"For ever and ever."

After a slight pause my brother asked him if there was anything wrong?

"You needn't fear, it will be all right."

Thereupon we quietly sauntered along behind the hay-wagon.

My brother uncovered his head, and so proceeded on his way bareheaded; he said he was very warm. We walked silently for a distance until the old laborer came back to us.

"Not tired, Master Desi?" he asked; "you might take a seat on the cart."

"What are you thinking of, John?" said Lorand; "on this cart?"

"True; true, indeed," said the aged servant. Then he quietly crossed himself, and went forward to the oxen.

When we came near the village, old John again came toward us.

"It will be better now if the young gentlemen go home through the gardens; it will be much easier for me to get through the village alone."

"Do you think they are still on guard?" asked Lorand.

"Of course they know already. One cannot take it amiss; the poor fellows have twice in ten years had their hedges broken down by the hail."

"Stupidity!" answered my brother.

"May be," sighed the old serving-man. "Still the poor man thinks so."

Lorand nudged the old retainer so that he would not speak before me.

My brain became only more confused thereat.

Lorand told him that we would soon pass through the gardens; however, after John had advanced a good distance with the cart we followed in his tracks again, keeping steadily on until we came to the first row of houses beginning the village. Here my brother began to thread his way more cautiously, and in the dark I heard distinctly the click of the trigger as he cocked his gun.

The cart proceeded quietly before us to the end of the long village street.

Above the workhouse about six men armed with pitchforks met us.

My brother said we must make our way behind a hedge, and bade me hold our dog's mouth lest he should bark when the others passed.

The pitchforked guards passed near the cart, and advanced before us too. I heard how the one said to the other:

"Faith, *that* is the reason this cursed wind is blowing so furiously!"

"*That*" was the reason! What was the reason?

As they passed, my brother took my hand and said: "Now let us hasten, that we may be home before the wagon."

Therewith he ran with me across a long cottage-court, lifted me over a hedge, climbing after me himself; then through two or three more strange gardens, everywhere stepping over the hedges; and at last we reached our own garden.

But, in Heaven's name, had we committed some sin, that we ran thus, skulking from hiding-place to hiding-place?

As we reached the courtyard, the wagon was just entering. Three retainers waited for it in the yard, and immediately closed the gate after it.

Grandmother stood outside on the terrace and kissed us when we arrived.

Again there followed a short whispering between my brother and the domestics; whereupon the latter seized pitchforks and began to toss down the hay from the wain.

Could they not do so by daylight?

Grandmother sat down on a bench on the terrace, and drew my head to her bosom. Lorand leaned his elbows upon the rail of the terrace and watched the work.

The hay was tossed into a heap and the high wind drove the chaff on to the terrace, but no one told the servants to be more careful.

This midnight work was, for me, so mysterious.

Only once I saw that Lorand turned round as he stood, and began to weep; thereupon grandmother rose, and they fell each upon the other's breast.

I clutched their garments and gazed up at them trembling. Not a single lamp burned upon the terrace.

"Sh!" whispered grandmother, "don't weep so loudly," she was herself choking with sobs. "Come, let us go."

With that she took my hand, and, leaning upon my brother's arm, came down with us into the courtyard, down to the wagon, which stood before the garden gate. Two or more heaps of straw hid *it* from the eye; it was visible only when we reached the bottom of the wagon.

On that wagon lay the coffin of my father.

So this it was that in the dead of night we had stealthily brought into the village, that we had in so skulking a manner escorted, and had so concealed; and of which we had spoken in whispers. This it was that we had wept over in secret—my father's coffin. The four retainers lifted it from the wagon, then carried it on their shoulders toward the garden. We went after it, with bared heads and silent tongues.

A tiny rivulet flowed through our garden; near this rivulet was a little round building, whose gaudy door I had never seen open.

From my earliest days, when I was unable to rise from the ground if once I sat down, the little round building had always been in my mind.

I had always loved it, always feared to be near it; I had so longed to know what might be within it. As a little knickerbockered child I would pick the colored gravel-stones from the mortar, and play with them in the dust; and if perchance one stone struck the iron door, I would run away from the echo the blow produced.

In my older days it was again only around this building that I would mostly play, and would remark that upon its façade were written great letters, on which the ivy, that so actively clambered up the walls, scarcely grew. At that time how I longed to know what those letters could mean!

When the first holiday after I had made the acquaintance of those letters came, and they took me again to our country-seat, one after another I spelled out the ancient letters of the inscription on that mysterious little house, and pieced them together in my mind. But I could not arrive at their meaning; for they were written in some foreign tongue.

Many, many times I wrote those words in the dust even before I understood them:

"NE NOS INDUCAS IN TENTATIONEM."

I strove to reach one year earlier than my school-fellows the so-called "student class," where Latin was taught.

My most elementary acquaintance with the Latin tongue had always for its one aim the discovery of the meaning of that saying. Finally I solved the mystery—

"Lead us not into temptation." It is a sentence of the Lord's Prayer, which I myself had repeated a thousand times; and now I knew its meaning still less than before.

And still more began to come to me a kind of mysterious abhorrence of that building, above whose door was to be found the prayer that God might guard us against temptations.

Perhaps this was the very dwelling of temptations?

We know what children understand by "temptations."

To-day I saw this door open, and knew that this building was our family vault.

This door, which hitherto I had only seen covered with ivy, was now swung open, and through the open porch glittered the light of a lamp. The two great Virginia creepers which were planted before the crypt hid the glass so that it was not visible from the garden. The brightness was only for us.

The four men set the coffin down on the steps; we followed after it.

So this was that house where temptations dwell; and all our prayers were in vain; "lead us not into temptation." Yet to temptation we were forced to come. Down a few steps we descended, under a low, plastered arch, which glittered green from the moisture of the earth. In the wall were built deep niches, four on either side, and six of them were already filled. Before them stood slabs of marble, with inscriptions telling of those who had fallen asleep. The four servants placed the coffin they had brought on their shoulders in the seventh niche; then the aged retainer clasped his hands, and with simple devotion repeated the Lord's Prayer; the other three men softly murmured after him: "Amen. Amen."

Then they left us to ourselves.

Grandmother all this while had without a word, without a movement, stood in the depth of the crypt, holding our hands within her own; but when we were alone, in a frenzy she darted to the coffined niche and flung herself to the ground before it.

Oh! I cannot tell what she said as she raved there. She wept and sobbed, flinging reproaches—at the dead! She scolded, as one reproves a child that has cut itself with a knife. She asked why he did *this*. And again she heaped grave calumny upon him, called him coward, wretch, threatened him with God, with God's wrath, and with eternal damnation;—then asked pardon of him, babbled out words of conciliation, called him back, called him dear, sweet, and good; related to him what a faithful, dear, loving wife waited at home, with his two sweet children,—how could he forget them? Then with gracious, reverent words begged him to turn Christian, to come to God, to learn to believe, to hope, to love; to trust to the boundless mercy; to take his rest in the paths of Heaven. And then she uttered a scream, tore the tresses of her dove-white hair, and cursed God. Methought it was the night of the Last Judgment.

Every fire-breathing monster of the Revelation, the very disgorging of the dead from the rent earth, were as naught to me compared with the terror which that hour heaped upon my head.

'Twas hither we had brought father, who died suddenly, in the prime of life. Hither we had brought him, in stealth, and slinking; here we had concealed him without any Christian ceremony, without psalm or toll of bell; no priest's blessing followed him to his grave, as it follows even the poorest beggar; and now here, in the house of the dead, grandmother had cursed the departed, and anathematized the other world, on whose threshold we stand, and in her mad despair was knocking at the door of the mysterious country as she beat upon the coffin-lid with her fist.

Now, in my mature age, when my head, too, is almost covered with winter's snow, I see that our presence there was essential; drop by drop we were to drain to the dregs this most bitter cup, which I would had never fallen to our lot!

Grandmother fell down before the niche and laid her forehead upon the coffin's edge; her long white hair fell trailing over her.

Long, very long, she lay, and then she rose; her face was no more distorted, her eyes no longer filled with tears. She turned toward us and said we should remain a little longer here.

She herself sat down upon the lowest step of the stone staircase, and placed the lamp in front of her, while we two remained standing before her.

She looked not at us, only peered intensely and continuously with her large black eyes into the light of the lamp, as if she would conjure therefrom something that had long since passed away.

All at once she seized our hands, and drew us toward her to the staircase.

"You are the scions of a most unhappy house, every member of which dies by his own hand."

So this was that secret that hung, like a veil of mourning before the face of every adult member of our family! We continuously saw our elders so, as if some mist of melancholy moved between us; and this was that mist.

"This was the doom of God, a curse of man upon us!" continued grandmother, now no longer with terrifying voice. Besides, she spoke as calmly as if she were merely reciting to us the history of some strange family. "Your great-grandfather. Job Áronffy, he who lies in the first niche, bequeathed this terrible inheritance to his heirs; and it was a brother's hand that hurled this curse at his head. Oh, this is an unhappy earth on which we dwell! In other happy lands there are murderous quarrels between man and man; brothers part in wrath from one another; the 'mine and thine,'3 jealousy, pride, envy, sow tares among them. But this accursed earth of ours ever creates bloodshed; this damned soil, which we are wont to call our 'dear homeland,' whose pure harvest we call love of home, whose tares we call treason, while every one thinks his own harvest the pure one, his brother's the tares, and, for that, brother slays brother! Oh! you cannot understand it yet.

3 That is, the disputes as to the superiority of each other's possessions, or as to each other's right to possession.

"Your great-grandfather lived in those days when great men thought that what is falling in decay must be built afresh. Great contention arose therefrom, much knavery, much disillusion; finally the whole had to be wiped out.

"Job's parents educated him at academies in Germany; there his soul became filled with foreign freedom of thought; he became an enthusiastic partisan of common human liberty. When he returned, this selfsame idea was in strife with an equally great one, national feeling. He joined his fortunes with the former idea, as he considered it the just one. In what patriots called relics of antiquity he saw only the vices of the departed. His elder brother stood face to face with him; they met on the common field of strife, and then began between them the unending feud. They had been such good brothers, never had they deserted each other in time of trouble; and on this thorn-covered field they must swear eternal enmity. Your great-grandfather belonged to the victorious, his brother to the conquered army. But the victory was not sweet.

"Job gained a powerful, high position, he basked in the sunshine of power, but he lost that which was—nothing; merely the smiles of his old acquaintances. He was a seigneur, from afar they greeted him, but did not hurry to take his hand; and those who of yore at times of meeting would kiss his face from right and left, now after his change of dignity would stand before him, and bow their greetings askance with cold obeisance. Then there was one man who did not even bow, but sought a meeting only that he might provoke him with his obstinate sullenness, and gaze upon him with his piercing eyes—his own brother. Yet they were both honorable, good men, true Christians, benefactors of the poor, the darlings of their family, and once so fond of each other! Oh, this sorrowful earth here below us!

"Then this new order of things that had been built up for ten years, fell into ruins, and Joseph II. on his death-bed drew a red line through his whole life-work; what had happened till then faded into mere remembrance.

"The earth re-echoed with the shouts of rejoicing—this earth, this bitter earth. Job for his part wended his way to the Turkish bath in Buda, and, that he might meet with his brother no more, opened his arteries and bled to death.

"Yet they were both good Christians; true men in life, faithful to honor, no evil-doers, no godless men; in heart and deed they worshipped God; but still the one brother took his own life, that he might meet no more with the other; and the other said of him: 'He deserved his fate.'

"Oh, this earth that is drenched with the flow of our tears!"

Here grandmother paused, as if she would collect in her mind the memories of a greater and heavier affliction.

Not a sound reached us down there—even the crypt door was closed; the moaning of the wind did not reach so far; no sound, only the beating of the hearts of three living beings.

Grandmother sought with her eyes the date written upon the arch, which the moisture that had sweated out from the lime had rendered illegible.

"In this year they built this house of sorrow. Job was the first inhabitant thereof. Just as now, without priest, without toll of bell, hidden in a wooden chest of other form, they brought him here; and with him began that melancholy line of victims, whose legacy was that one should draw the other after him. The shedding of blood by one's own hand is a terrible legacy. That blood besprinkles children and brothers. That malicious tempter who directed the father's hand to strike the sharp knife home into his own heart stands there in ambush forever behind his successors' backs; he is ever whispering to them; 'Thy father was a suicide, thy brother himself sought out death; over thy head, too, stands the sentence; wherever thou runnest from before it, thou canst not save thyself; thou carriest with thyself thy own murderer in thine own right hand.' He tempts and lures the undecided ones with blades whetted to brilliancy, with guns at full cock, with poison-drinks of awful hue, with deep-flowing streams. Oh, it is indeed horrible!

"And nothing keeps them back! they never think of the love, the everlasting sorrow of those whom they leave behind here to sorrow over their melancholy death. They never think of Him whom they will meet there beyond the grave, and who will ask them: 'Why did you come before I summoned you?'

"In vain was written upon the front of this house of sorrow, 'Lead us not into temptation.' You can see. Seven have already taken up their abode here. All the seven have cast at the feet of Providence that treasure, an account of which will be asked for in Heaven.

"Job left three children: Ákos, Gerö, and Kálmán. Ákos was the eldest, and he married earliest. He was a good man, but thoughtless and passionate. One summer he lost his whole fortune at cards and was ruined. But even poverty did not drive him to despair. He said to his wife and children: 'Till now we were our own masters; now we shall be the servants of others. Labor is not a disgrace. I shall go and act as steward to some landowner.' The other two brothers, when they heard of their elder's misfortune, conferred together, went to him, and said: 'Brother, still two-thirds of our father's wealth is left; come, let us divide it anew.'

"And each of them gave him a third of his property, that they might be on equal terms again.

"That night Ákos shot himself in the head.

"The stroke of misfortune he could bear, but the kindness of his brothers set him so against himself that when he was freed from the cares of life he did not wish to know further the enjoyments thereof.

"Ákos left behind two children, a girl and a boy.

"The girl had lived some sixteen summers—very beautiful, very good. Look! there is her tomb: 'Struck down in her sixteenth year!' She loved; became unhappy; and died.

"You cannot understand it yet!

"So already three lay in the solitary vault.

"Gerö was your grandfather—my good, never-to-be-forgotten husband. No tear wells in my eyes as I think of him; every thought that leads me back to him is sweet to me; and I know that he was a man of high principles; that every deed of his—his last deed, too—was proper and right, it is as it should be. It happened before my very eyes; and I did not seize his hand to stay his action."

How my old grandmother's eyes flashed in this moment! A glowing warmth, hitherto unknown to me, seemed to pervade my whole being; some glimmering ray of enthusiasm—I knew not what! How the dead can inspire one with enthusiasm!

"Your grandfather was the very opposite of his own father; as it is likely to happen in hundreds, nay, in thousands of cases that the sons restore to the East the fame and glory that their fathers gathered in the West.

"But you don't understand that, either!

"Gerö was in union with those who, under the leadership of a priest of high rank, wished at the end of the last century, to prepare the country for another century. No success crowned their efforts; they fell with him—and fell without a head. One afternoon your grandfather was sitting in the family circle—it was toward the end of dinner—when a strange officer entered in the midst of us, and, with a face utterly incapable of an expression of remorse, informed Gerö that he had orders to put him under guard. Gerö displayed a calm face, merely begged the stranger to allow him to drink his black coffee. His request was granted without demur. My husband calmly stirred his coffee, and entered into conversation with the stranger, who did not seem to be of an angry disposition. Indeed, he assured my husband that no harm would come of this incident. My husband peacefully sipped his coffee.

"Then having finished it, he put down his cup, wiped his beautiful long beard, turned to me, drew me to his breast, and kissed me

on both cheeks, not touching my mouth. 'Educate our boy well,' he stammered. Then, turning to the stranger: 'Sir, pray do not trouble yourself further on my account. I am a dead man; you will be welcome at my funeral.'

"Two minutes later he breathed his last. And I had clearly seen, for I sat beside him, how with his thumb he opened the seal of the ring he wore on his little finger, how he shook a white powder therefrom into the cup standing before him, how he stirred it slowly till it dissolved, and then sipped it up little by little; but I could not stay his hand, could not call to him, 'Don't do it! Cling to life!'"

Grandmother was staring before her, with the ecstatic smile of madness. Oh! I was so frightened that even now my mind wanders at the remembrance.

This smile of madness is so contagious! Slowly nodding with her gray head, she again fell all in a heap. It was apparent that some time must elapse before this recollection, once risen in her mind, could settle to rest again. After what seemed to us hours she slowly raised herself again and continued her tragic narrative.

"He was already the fourth dweller in this house of temptations.

"After his death his brother Kálmán came to join our circle. To the end he remained single; very early in life he was deceived, and from that moment became a hater of mankind.

"His gloom grew year by year more incurable; he avoided every distraction, every gathering; his favorite haunt was this garden—this place here. He planted the beautiful juniper-trees before the door; such trees were in those days great rarities.

"He made no attempt to conceal from us—in fact, he often declared openly to us that his end could be none other than his brothers' had been.

"The pistol, with which Ákos had shot himself, he kept by him as a souvenir, and in sad jest declared it was his inheritance.

"Here he would wander for hours together in reverie, in melancholy, until the falling snow confined him to his room. He detested the winter greatly. When the first snowflake fell, his ill-humor turned to the agony of despair; he loathed the atmosphere of his rooms and everything to be found within the four walls. We so strongly advised him to winter in Italy, that he finally gave in to the proposal. We carefully packed his trunks; ordered his post-chaise. One morning, as everything stood ready for departure, he said that, before going for this long journey, he would once again take leave of his brothers. In his travelling-suit he came down here to the vault, and closed the iron door after him, enjoining that no one should disturb him. So we waited behind; and, as hour after hour passed by and still he did not appear, we went after him. We forced open the closed door, and there found him lying in the middle of the tomb—he had gone to the country where there is no more winter.

"He had shot himself in the heart, with the same pistol as his brother, as he had foretold.

"Only two male members of the family remained: my son and the son of Ákos. Lörincz—that was the name of Ákos' son—was reared too kindly by his poor, good mother; she loved him excessively, and thereby spoiled him. The boy became very fastidious and sensitive. He was eleven years old when his mother noticed that she could not command his obedience. Once the child played some prank, a mere trifle; how can a child of eleven years commit any great offence? His mother thought she must rebuke him. The boy laughed at the rebuke; he could not believe his mother was angry; then, in consequence, his mother boxed his ears. The boy left the room; behind the garden there was a fishpond; in that he drowned himself.

"Well, is it necessary to take one's life for such a thing? For one blow, given by the soft hand of a mother to a little child, to take such a terrible revenge! to cut the thread of life, which as yet he knew not; How many children are struck by a mother, and the next day received into her bosom, with mutual forgiveness and a renewal of reciprocal love? Why, a blow from a mother is merely one proof of a mother's love. But it brought him to take his life."

The cold perspiration stood out in beads all over me.

That bitterness I, too, feel in myself. I also am a child, just as old as that other was; I have never yet been beaten. Once my parents were compelled to rebuke me for wanton petulance; and from head to foot I was pervaded through and through by one raving idea: "If they beat me I should take my own life." So I am also infected with the hereditary disease—the awful spirit is holding out his hand over me; captured, accursed, he is taking me with him. I am betrayed to him! Only instead of thrashing me, they had punished me with fasting fare; otherwise, I also should already be in this house.

Grandmother clasped her hands across her knees and continued her story.

"Your father was older at the time of this event—seventeen years of age. Ever since his birth the world has been rife with discord and revolutions; all the nations of the world pursued a bitter warfare one against another. I scarce expected my only son would live to be old enough to join the army. Thither, thither, where death with a scythe in both hands was cutting down the ranks of the armed warriors; thither, where the children of weeping mothers were being trampled on by horses' hoofs; thither, thither, where they were casting into a common grave the mangled remains of darling first-borns; only not hither, not into this awful house, into these horrible ranks of tempting spectres! Yes, I rejoiced when I knew that he was standing before the foe's cannons; and when the news of one

great conflict after another spread like a dark cloud over the country, with sorrowful tranquillity, I lay in wait for the lightning-stroke which, bursting from the cloud, should dart into my heart with the news: 'Thy son is dead! They have slain him, as a hero is slain!' But it was not so. The wars ceased. My son returned.

"No, it is not true; don't believe what I said,—'If only the news of his death had come instead!'

"No; surely I rejoiced, surely I wept in my joy and happiness, when I could clasp him anew in my arms, and I blessed God for not having taken him away. Yet, why did I rejoice? Why did I triumph before the world, saying, 'See, what a fine, handsome son I have! a dauntless warrior, fame and honor he has brought home with him. My pride—my gladness? Now they lie here! What did I gain with him—he, too, followed the rest! He, too! he, whom I loved best of all—he whose every Paradise was here on earth!"

My brother wept; I shivered with cold.

Then suddenly, like a lunatic, grandmother seized our hands, and leaped up from her sitting-place.

"Look yonder! there is still *one* empty niche—room for *one* coffin. Look well at that place; then go forth into the world and think upon what the mouth of this dark hollow said.

"I had thought of making you swear here never to forsake God, never to continue the misfortunes of this family; but why this oath? That some one should take with him to the other world one sin more, in that in the hour of his death he forswore himself? What oath would bind him who says: 'The mercy of God I desire not'?

"But instead, I brought you here and related you the history of your family. Later you shall know still more therefrom, that is yet secret and obscure before you. Now look once more around you, and then—let us go out.

"Now you know what is the meaning of this melancholy house, whose door the ivy enters with the close of a man's life from time to time. You know that the family brings its suicides hither to burial, because elsewhere they have no place. But you know also that in this awful sleeping-room there is space for only *one* person more, and the second will find no other resting-place than the grave-ditch!"

With these words grandmother passionately thrust us both from her. In terror we fell into each other's arms before her frenzied gaze.

Then, with a shrill cry, she rushed toward us and embraced us both with all the might of a lunatic; wept and gasped, till finally she fainted utterly away.

CHAPTER II

THE GIRL SUBSTITUTE4

4 In former days it was the custom for a Magyar and a German family to interchange children, with a view to their learning the two languages perfectly. So Fanny Fromm is interchanged with Desiderius Áronffy.

A pleasant old custom was then in fashion in our town: the interchange of children,—perhaps it is in fashion still. In our many-tongued fatherland one town is German-speaking, the other Magyar-speaking, and, being brothers, after all to understand each other was a necessity. Germans must learn Magyar and Magyars, German. And peace is restored.

So a method of temporarily exchanging children grew up: German parents wrote to Magyar towns, Magyar parents to German towns, to the respective school directors, to ask if there were any pupils who could be interchanged. In this manner one child was given for another, a kind, gentle, womanly thought!

The child left home, father, mother, brother, only to find another home among strangers: another mother, other brothers and sisters, and his absence did not leave a void at home; child replaced child; and if the adopted mother devoted a world of tenderness to the pilgrim, it was with the idea that her own was being thus treated in the far distance; for a mother's love cannot be bought at a price but only gained by love.

It was an institution that only a woman's thought could found: so different from that frigid system invented by men which founded nunneries, convents, and closed colleges for the benefit of susceptible young hearts where all memory of family life was permanently wiped out of their minds.

After that unhappy day, which, like the unmovable star, could never go so far into the distance as to be out of sight, grandmother more than once said to us in the presence of mother, that it would not be good for us to remain in this town; we must be sent somewhere else.

Mother long opposed the idea. She did not wish to part from us. Yet the doctors advised the same course. When the spasms seized her, for days we were not allowed to visit her, as it made her condition far worse.

At last she gave her consent, and it was decided that we two should be sent to Pressburg. My brother, who was already too old to be exchanged, went to the home of a Privy Councillor, who was paid for taking him in, and my place was to be taken by a still younger child than myself, by a little German girl, Fanny, the daughter of Henry Fromm, baker. Grandmother was to take us in a carriage—in those days in Hungary we had only heard rumors of steamboats—and to bring the girl substitute back with her.

For a week the whole household sewed, washed, ironed and packed for us; we were supplied with winter and summer clothing: on the last day provisions were prepared for our journey, as if we had intended to make a voyage to the end of the world, and in the evening we took supper in good time, that we might rise early, as we had to start before daybreak. That was my first departure from my home. Many a time since then have I had to say adieu to what was dearest to me; many sorrows, more than I could express, have afflicted me: but that first parting caused me the greatest pain of all, as is proved by the fact that after so long an interval I remember it so well. In the solitude of my own chamber, I bade farewell separately to all those little trifles that surrounded me: God bless the good old clock that hast so oft awakened me. Beautiful raven, whom I taught to speak and to say "Lorand," on whom wilt thou play thy sportive tricks? Poor old doggy, maybe thou wilt not be living when I return? Forsooth old Susie herself will say to me, "I shall never see you again Master Desi." And till now I always thought I was angry with Susie; but now I remark that it will be hard to leave her.

And my dear mother, the invalid, and grandmother, already so grey-haired!

Thus the bitter strains swept onward along the strings of my soul, from lifeless objects to living, from favorite animals to human acquaintances, and then to those with whom we were bound soul to soul, finally dragging one with them to the presence of the dead and buried. I was sorely troubled by the thought that we were not allowed to enter, even for one moment, that solitary house, round the door of which the ivy was entwining anew. We might have whispered "God be with thee! I have come to see thee!" I must leave the place without being able to say to him a single word of love. And perhaps he would know without words. Perhaps the only joy of that poor soul, who could not lie in a consecrated chamber, who could not find the way to heaven because he had not waited till the guardian angel came for him, was when he saw that his sons love him still.

"Lorand, I cannot sleep, because I have not been able to take my leave of that house beside the stream."

My brother sighed and turned in his bed.

My whole life long I have been a sound sleeper (what child is not?) but never did it seem such a burden to rise as on the morning of our departure. Two days later a strange child would be sleeping in that bed. Once more we met together at breakfast, which we had to eat by candle-light as the day had not yet dawned.

Dear mother often rose from her seat to kiss and embrace Lorand, overwhelmed him with caresses, and made him promise to write much; if anything happened to him, he must write and tell it at once, and must always consider that bad news would afflict two hearts at home. She only spoke to me to bid me drink my coffee warm, as the morning air would be chilly.

Grandmother, too, concerned herself entirely with Lorand: they enquired whether he had all he required for the journey, whether he had taken his certificates with him—and a thousand other matters. I was rather surprised than jealous at all this, for as a rule the youngest son gets all the petting.

When our carriage drove up we took our travelling coats and said adieu in turn to the household. Mother, leaning on Lorand's shoulder, came with us to the gate whispering every kind of tender word to him; thrice she embraced and kissed him. And then came my turn.

She embraced me and kissed me on the cheek, then tremblingly whispered in my ear these words:

"My darling boy,—take care of your brother Lorand!" I take care of Lorand? the child of the young man? the weak of the strong? the later born guide the elder. The whole journey long this idea distracted me, and I could not explain it to myself.

Of the impressions of the journey I retain no very clear recollections: I think I slept very much in the carriage. The journey to Pressburg lasted from early morning till late evening; only as twilight came on did a new thought begin to keep me awake, a thought to which as yet I had paid no attention: "What kind of a child could it be, for whom I was now being exchanged? Who was to usurp my place at table, in my bed-room, and in my mother's heart? Was she small or large? beautiful or ugly? obedient or contrary? had she brothers or sisters, to whom I was to be a brother? was she as much afraid of me as I was of her?"

For I was very much afraid of her.

Naturally, I dreaded the thought of the child who was meeting me at the cross-roads with the avowed intention of taking my place as my mother's child, giving me instead her own parents. Were they reigning princes, still the loss would be mine. I confess that I felt a kind of sweet bitterness in the idea that my substitute might be some dull, malicious creature, whose actions would often cause mother to remember me. But if, on the contrary, she were some quiet, angelic soul, who would soon steal my mother's love from me! In every respect I trembled with fear of that creature who had been born that she might be exchanged for me.

Towards evening grandmother told us that the town which we were going to was visible. I was sitting with my back to the horses, and so I was obliged to turn round in order to see. In the distance I could see the four-columned white skeleton of a building, which was first apparent to the eye.

"What a gigantic charnel-house," I remarked to grandmother.

"It is no charnel-house, my child, but it is the ruin of the citadel of (Pressburg) Pozsony."5

5 Pozsony. A town in Hungary is called by the Germans Pressburg.

A curious ruin it is. This first impression ever remained in my mind: I regarded it as a charnel-house.

It was quite late when we entered the town, which was very large compared to ours. I had never seen such elegant display in shop-windows before and it astonished me as I noticed that there were paved sidewalks reserved for pedestrians. They must be all fine lords who live in this city.

Mr. Fromm, the baker, to whose house I was to be taken, had informed us that we need not go to an hotel as he had room for all of us, and would gladly welcome us, especially as the expense of the journey was borne by us. We found his residence by following the written address. He owned a fine four-storied house in the Fürsten allee,6 with his open shop in front on the sign of which peaceful lions were painted in gold holding rolls and cakes between their teeth.

6 Princes avenue.

Mr. Fromm himself was waiting for us outside his shop door, and hastened to open the carriage door himself. He was a round-faced, portly little man, with a short black moustache, black eyebrows, and close-cropped, thick, flour-white hair. The good fellow helped grandmother to alight from the carriage: shook hands with Lorand, and began to speak to them in German: when I alighted, he put his hand on my head with a peculiar smile:

"Iste puer?"

Then he patted me on the cheeks.

"Bonus, bonus."

His addressing me in Latin had two advantages; firstly, as I could not speak German, nor he Magyar, this use of a neutral tongue removed all suspicions of our being deaf and dumb; secondly, it at once inspired me with a genuine respect for the honest fellow, who had dabbled in the sciences, and had, beyond his technical knowledge of his own business, some acquaintance with the language of Cicero. Mr. Fromm made room for grandmother and Lorand to pass before him up a narrow stone staircase, while he kept his hand continuously on my head, as if that were the part of me by which he could best hold me.

"Veni puer. Hic puer secundus, filius meus."

So there was a boy in the house, a new terror for me.

"Est studiosus."

What, that boy! That was good news: we could go to school together.

"Meus filius magnus asinus."

That was a fine acknowledgment from a father.

"Nescit pensum nunquam scit."

Then he discontinued to speak of the young student, and pantomimically described something, from which I gathered that "meus filius," on this occasion was condemned to starve, until he had learnt his lessons, and was confined to his room.

This was no pleasant idea to me.

Well, and what about "mea filia?"

I had never seen a house that was like Mr. Fromm's inside. Our home was only one-storied, with wide rooms, and broad corridors, a courtyard and a garden: here we had to enter first by a narrow hall: then to ascend a winding stair, that would not admit two abreast. Then followed a rapid succession of small and large doors, so that when we came out upon the balconied corridor, and I gazed down into the deep, narrow courtyard, I could not at all imagine how I had reached that point, and still less how I could ever

find my way out. "Father" Fromm led us directly from the corridor into the reception room, where two candles were burning (two in our honor), and the table laid for "gouter." It seemed they had expected us earlier. Two women were seated at the window, Mrs. Fromm and her mother. Mrs. Fromm was a tall slender person; she had grey curls (I don't know why I should not call them "Schneckles," for that is their name) in front, large blue eyes, a sharp German nose, a prominent chin and a wart below her mouth.

The "Gross-mamma" was the exact counterpart of Mrs. Fromm, only about thirty years older, a little more slender, and sharper in feature: she had also grey "Schneckles"—though I did not know until ten years later that they were not her own:—she too had that wart, though in her case it was on the chin.

In a little low chair was sitting that certain personage with whom they wished to exchange me.

Fanny was my junior by a year:—she resembled neither father nor mother, with the exception that the family wart, in the form of a little brown freckle, was imprinted in the middle of her left cheek. During the whole time that elapsed before our arrival here I had been filled with prejudices against her, prejudices which the sight of her made only more alarming. She had an ever-smiling, pink and white face, mischievous blue eyes, and a curious snub-nose; when she smiled, little dimples formed in her cheeks and her mouth was ever ready to laugh. When she did laugh, her double row of white teeth sparkled; in a word she was as ugly as the devil.

All three were busy knitting as we entered. When the door opened, they all put down their knitting. I kissed the hands of both the elder ladies, who embraced me in return, but my attention was entirely devoted to the little lively witch, who did not wait a moment, but ran to meet grandmother, threw herself upon her neck, and kissed her passionately; then, bowing and curtseying before us, kissed Lorand twice, actually gazing the while into his eyes.

A cold chill seized me. If this little snub-nosed devil dared to go so far as to kiss me, I did not know what would become of me in my terror.

Yet I could not avoid this dilemma in any way. The terrible little witch, having done with the others, rushed upon me, embraced me, and kissed me so passionately that I was quite ashamed; then twining her arm in mine, dragged me to the little arm-chair from which she had just risen, and compelled me to sit down, though we could scarcely find room in it for us both. Then she told many things to me in that unknown tongue, the only result of which was to persuade me that my poor good mother would have a noisy baggage to take the place of her quiet, obedient little son; I felt sure her days would be embittered by that restless tongue. Her mouth did not stop for one moment, yet I must confess that she had a voice like a bell.

That was again a family peculiarity. Mother Fromm was endowed with an inexhaustible store of that treasure called eloquence: and a sharp, strong voice, too, which forbade the interruption of any one else, with a flow like that of the purling stream. The grandmamma had an equally generous gift, only she had no longer any voice: only every second word was audible, like one of those barrel-organs, in which an occasional note, instead of sounding, merely blows.

Our business was to listen quietly.

For my part, that was all the easier, as I could not suspect what was the subject of this flow of barbarian words; all I understood was that, when the ladies spoke to me, they addressed me as "Istok,"7 a jest which I found quite out of place, not knowing that it was the German for "Why don't you eat?" For you must know the coffee was brought immediately, with very fine little cakes, prepared especially for us under the personal supervision of Father Fromm.

7 "Issdoch," the German for "but eat." (Why don't you eat?) While Istok is a nickname for Stephan in Magyar.

Even that little snub-nosed demon said "Issdoch," seized a cake, dipped it in my coffee, and forcibly crammed it into my mouth, when I did not wish to understand her words.

But I was not at all hungry. All kinds of things were brought onto the table, but I did not want anything. Father Fromm kept calling out continually in student guise "Comedi! Comedi!" a remark which called forth indignant remonstrances from mamma and grossmamma; how could he call his own dear "Kugelhuff"8 a "comedy!!!"

8 A cake eaten everywhere in Hungary.

Fanny in sooth required no coaxing. At first sight anyone could see that she was the spoiled child of the family, to whom everything was allowed. She tried everything, took a double portion of everything and only after taking what she required did she ask "darf ich?"9—and I understood immediately from the tone of her voice and the nodding of her head, that she meant to ask "if she might."

9 i. e., darf ich, "may I?"

Then instead of finishing her share she had the audacity to place her leavings on my plate, an action which called forth rebuke enough from Grossmamma. I did not understand what she said, but I strongly suspected that she abused her for wishing to accustom the "new child" to eating a great deal. Generally speaking, I had brought from home the suspicion that, when two people were speaking German before me, they were surely hatching some secret plot against me, the end of which would be, either that I would

not get something, or would not be taken somewhere, where I wished to go.

I would not have tasted anything the little snub-nose gave me, if only for the reason that it was she who had given it. How could she dare to touch my plate with those dirty little hands of hers, that were just like cats-paws?

Then she gave everything I would not accept to the little kitten; however, the end of it all was, that she again turned to me, and asked me to play with the kitten.

Incomprehensible audacity! To ask me, who was already a school-student, to play with a tiny kitten.

"Shoo!" I said to the malicious creature; a remark which, notwithstanding the fact that it seemed to belong to some strange-tongued nationality, the animal understood, for it immediately leaped down off the table and ran away. This caused the little snub-nose to get angry with me, and she took her sensitive revenge upon me, by going across to my grandmother, whom she tenderly caressed, kissing her hand, and then nestled to her bosom, turning her back on me; once or twice she looked back at me, and if at the moment my eye was on her, sulkily flung back her head; as if that was any great misfortune to me.

Little imp! She actually occupied my place beside my grandmother—and before my eyes too.

Well, and why did I gaze at her, if I was so very angry with her? I will tell you truly; it was only that I might see to what extremes she would carry her audacity. I would far rather have been occupied in the fruitless task of attempting to discover something intelligent in a conversation that was being carried on before me in a strange tongue: an effort that is common to all men who have a grain of human curiosity flowing in their veins, and that, as is well-known, always remains unsuccessful.

Still one combination of mine did succeed. That name "Henrik" often struck my ear. Father Fromm was called Henrik, but he himself uttered the name: that therefore could not be other than his son. My grandmother spoke of him in pitiful tones, whereas Father Fromm assumed a look of inexorable severity, when he gave information on this subject; and as he spoke I gathered frequently the words "prosodia,"—"pensum"—"labor"—"vocabularium"—and many other terms common to dog-Latin: among which words like "secunda"—"tertia"—"carcer" served as a sufficiently trustworthy compass to direct me to the following conclusion: My friend Henrik might not put in an appearance to-day at supper, because he did not know his lessons, and was to remain imprisoned in the house until he could improve his standing by learning to repeat, in the language of a people long since dead, the names of a host of eatables.

Poor Henrik!

I never had any patience with the idea of anyone's starving, and moreover starving by way of punishment. I could understand anyone being done to death at once: but the idea of condemning anyone in cold blood to starve, to wrestle with his own body, to strive with his own heart and stomach, I always regarded as cruelty. I deemed that if I took one of those little cakes, which that audacious girl had piled up before me so forcibly, and put it in my pocket, it would not be wasted.

I waited cautiously until nobody was looking my way, and then slipped the cake into my pocket without accident.

Without accident? I only remarked it, when that little snub-nose laughed to herself. Just at that moment she had squinted towards me. But she immediately closed her mouth with her hand, giggling between her fingers, the while her malicious, deceitful eyes smiled into mine. What would she think? Perhaps that I am too great a coward to eat at table, and too insatiable to be satisfied with what I received. Oh! how ashamed I was before her! I would have been capable of any sacrifice to secure her secrecy, perhaps even of kissing her, if she would not tell anyone.... I was so frightened.