Mor Jokai

The Baron's Sons

Publio

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Publio Kiadó

2013

CHAPTER I.
SIXTY MINUTES.

The post-prandial orator was in the midst of his toast, the champagne-foam ran over the edge of his glass and trickled down his fat fingers, his lungs were expanded and his vocal chords strained to the utmost in the delivery of the well-rounded period upon which he was launched, and the blood was rushing to his head in the generous enthusiasm of the moment. In that brilliant circle of guests every man held his hand in readiness on the slender stem of his glass and waited, all attention, for the toast to come to an end in a final dazzling display of oratorical pyrotechnics. The attendants hastened to fill the half-empty glasses, and the leader of the gypsy orchestra, which was stationed at the farther end of the hall, held his violin-bow in the air, ready to fall in at the right moment with a burst of melody that should drown the clinking of glasses at the close of the toast.

At this point the family physician entered noiselessly and whispered a few words in the ear of the hostess, who was presiding at the banquet, and who immediately rose and, with a mute gesture of apology to those of the guests who sat near her, withdrew from the room. Meanwhile the orator continued:

"May that honoured man who, like a second Atlas, bears the burden of our country on his shoulders, whom all future ages will reverence as the type of true patriotism, who is the leader of our party's forces in their march to victory, and whom we all regard as our light-giving pharos, a tower of strength to our side and the bulwark of our cause, though at present he is unfortunately unable to be with us in person,—may he, I say, live to enjoy renewed health and strength and to bear forward the banner of his party for many, many years to come!"

The final words of this peroration were drowned in a storm of cheers, an outburst of music, and the confused din caused by the pushing back of chairs and the dashing of wine-glasses against the wall, while the guests fell into one another's arms in an ecstasy of enthusiasm.

"Long life to him!" they cried; "may he live a thousand years!"

He to whom the assembled company wished so long a life was the renowned and honoured Baron Casimir Baradlay, lord lieutenant of his county, the owner of large estates, and the leader of a powerful party. The high dignitaries assembled about his hospitable board had gathered from far and near to determine upon a programme which should ensure their country's welfare for the coming years. As a fitting close to this important conference, Baron Baradlay was treating his partisans to a banquet in the great hall of his castle, and in the unavoidable absence of the host himself his wife was presiding at the festive board. The administrator, however, Benedict Rideghváry, had taken the absentee's place at the conference.

At the close of the toast, when those near the head of the table turned to touch glasses with the hostess, her absence was noticed, and the butler who stood behind her empty chair explained that the physician had just entered and whispered something in the lady's ear, whereupon she had left the room. Probably, said he, her husband had sent for her. Upon this information a number of the guests made anxious inquiry whether their honoured host was seriously ill; and the administrator hastened to reassure all present, as far as his voice could reach down the long table, by telling them that it was merely a return of the baron's chronic ailment. Some of the better-informed supplemented this announcement by explaining to their neighbours that the gentleman had, for perhaps ten years, been subject to frequent attacks of heart-failure, but could nevertheless, by observing very regular habits, be expected to live for another ten years or more.

Therefore, as it was only one of his habitual attacks, all joined in wishing their honoured host many, many years of life and happiness. The family physician, however, had whispered in the wife's ear these four words: "Only sixty minutes more!"

"I have been waiting for you," said the husband, as his wife entered the sick-room, and the words sounded like a reproach.

"I came as soon as I could," returned the other, as if in apology.

"You stopped to weep, and yet you knew my time was short. Let us have no weakness, Marie. It is the course of nature; in an hour

I shall be a senseless form; so the doctor told me. Are our guests enjoying themselves?"

A silent nod was the reply.

"Let them continue to do so; do not disturb them, or hasten their departure. Having assembled for a conference, let them remain for the funeral banquet. I have long since determined upon all the details of the burial ceremony. The funeral anthem will be sung by the Debreczen College chorus—no opera music, only the old psalm tunes. The customary addresses will be delivered by the superintendent, in the church, and by the sub-dean, in the house, while the local pastor will repeat the Lord's Prayer over the grave, and nothing more. Have you followed me carefully?"

The wife was gazing abstractedly into vacancy.

"I beg you, Marie," urged the speaker, "to bear in mind that what I am now saying I shall be unable to repeat. Have the goodness, then, to be seated at this little table by my bed, and write down the directions I have just given, and also those that I am about to add. You will find writing materials on the table."

The baroness did her husband's bidding, seating herself at the little table and writing down what had just been told her. When she had finished the patient continued as follows:

"You have been a true and faithful wife to me, Marie, ever since our marriage, and have obeyed all my commands. For an hour longer I shall continue to be your lord and master, and the orders that I give you during this hour will furnish you occupation for the rest of your life. Nor shall I cease after my death to be your lord and master. Oh, my breath is failing me! Give me a drop of that medicine."

The wife administered a few drops in a little gold teaspoon, and the patient breathed more freely.

"Write down my words," he continued. "No one but you must hear them or see them. I have performed a great work which must not perish with me. The earth is to pause in its course and stand still; or, if the earth as a whole will not stop, yet our small portion of it must do so. Many there are who understand me, but few that know how to follow out my designs, and still fewer that have the requisite courage. I have three sons who will take my place when I am dead. Write down, Marie, what my sons are to do after my death. They are all too young to assume their duties at once. They must first be trained in the school of life, and, meanwhile, you will be unable to see them. But don't sigh over that; they are big boys now, and are not to be fondled and petted any longer.

"My eldest son, Ödön,[1] is to remain at the court of St. Petersburg; it is a good school for him. Nature and disposition have too long fostered in him an ardent enthusiasm which can bring no good to our stock, and of which he will there be cured. The Russian court is a good training school, and will teach him to distinguish between men born with certain inherited rights, and those born with no rights whatever. It will teach him to stand on the heights without feeling dizzy, to recognise the true rights of a wife in the eyes of her husband, to cast aside all foolish youthful enthusiasm, and, upon his return hither as a man, to grasp the rudder from which my hand has fallen. You are to supply him with money enough to play his part worthily among the young nobles of the Russian court. Let him drain the cup of pleasure to the dregs. Leave him to his extravagances. To gain the serene heights of indifference, a young man must first sow his wild oats."

[1] The vowel *ö* is sounded much like *oe* in *Goethe*. *J*, as in *Jenö*, is pronounced like *y*. In pronouncing other Hungarian proper names in the book, let it be noted that *a* is sounded nearly like *o* in *not*; *á* like *a* in *far*; *e* like *e* in *met*; *é* like *a* in *fate*; *o* like *o* in *whole*, but somewhat shorter; *ó* like *o* in *hole*; *cz* like *ts*; *s* like *sh*; *sz* like *s* in *soft*; *g* is hard; *gy* is sounded like *dy* in *would you*. The stress of voice is on the first syllable in every case, though less pronounced than in English. For typographical reasons the diæresis has been substituted for the double acute accent; the latter gives the same sound to the vowel over which it is placed as the former, only lengthened. [Transcriber's Note: The double acute accent in the name Jenő and in the title *A Kőszívű Ember Fiai* has been restored in this electronic edition. An examination of the original Hungarian text found no other instances where the diæresis was substituted for the double acute.]

The speaker paused to look at the clock, which admonished him to hasten, as time was short and there was still much to say.

"That young girl," he continued, "on whose account he was sent away from home, you must try to marry to some one. Spare no expense. There are men enough suitable for her, and we will provide the dowry. Should the girl prove obstinate in her resolution, you must endeavour to bring about her father's removal to Transylvania, where we have many connections. Ödön is to remain abroad until the family has moved away or he himself has married. The matter need not, I think, cause you any anxiety. My second son, Richard, will remain a month longer in the royal body-guard; but it offers no opening for a career, and he will leave it for the cavalry, where he is to serve a year, after which he must seek an appointment on the general staff. Skill, valour, and fidelity are three excellent aids to a man in making his way upward, and all three are developed by service. There are victories yonder waiting to be won, and my son is to take the lead. There will be war in Europe when once the earthquake begins, and a Richard Baradlay will find work enough ready to his hand. His fame shall cast its glory over us all. He must never marry: a wife would only be in his way. Let his part be to promote the fortunes of his brothers. What an excellent claim for their advancement would be the heroic death of their brother on the battle-field! But you are not writing, Marie. Surely, you are not weeping? I beg you to overcome such weakness, as there are only forty minutes left, and I have yet much to say."

The wife mastered her feelings and wrote on.

"My third and youngest son, Jenő, is my favourite; I don't deny that I love him best of the three; but he will never know it. I have always treated him harshly, and you too must continue so to treat him. Let him remain at Vienna in the civil service and make his way upward step by step. The struggle will give him address, shrewdness, and fruitfulness of resource. Let him learn to supplant others by dint of superior intelligence and amiability, and to take all possible pains to please those whom he is afterward to use as ladders for his own upward progress. Do not spoil him with tender treatment at home, but let him learn to adapt himself to strangers and judge of their worth. His ambition must be fostered, and an acquaintance cultivated with powerful and influential men that shall lead to valuable family connections."

A momentary distortion of the patient's features bore witness to his acute suffering. It lasted but a second, however, when the noble will overcame the weakness of the flesh and enabled the speaker to continue his dying instructions.

"Three such strong supports—a diplomat, a soldier, and a high government official—will uphold and preserve the work of my hands. Alas! why could I not have continued my task a little longer, until they were farther advanced in their careers? Marie, my wife, I beg and most solemnly adjure you to obey my behests. Every muscle in my body is wrestling with death, but my thoughts are not now upon that final dissolution which must so soon overtake me. This cold sweat on my brow is not caused by the death-agony, but by the fear lest all my past striving shall have been for naught, lest the work of a quarter of a century shall be buried with me. Ah, Marie, if you but knew how my heart pains me! No, no more medicine; that cannot help me. Show me my sons' pictures; they will bring relief."

The baroness brought three miniature likenesses and held them before her husband's eyes. The man with the heart of stone looked at them, one after the other, and his sufferings abated. He forgot his death pangs, and pointing with his wasted forefinger at the portrait of the eldest, he whispered: "He will be most like me, I believe." Then, waving aside the three miniatures, he continued, coldly: "But no sentimentality now! The time is short and I shall soon be gathered to my fathers and leave to my sons what my ancestors left to me. But my house will remain as the fortress and defence of true principles. Nemesdomb will live in history as the centre and focus of our national policy. And you, too, will remain after I am gone."

The writer looked up inquiringly.

"You look at me as if to ask what a woman, a widow, can effect in a task under which a man broke down. I will tell you. Six weeks after my death you are to marry again."

The pen fell from the woman's hand.

"That is my command!" continued the stony-hearted man sternly; "and I have chosen a husband for you in advance. You will give your hand to Benedict Rideghváry."

At this the wife could no longer contain herself. She left the writing-table, sank down upon her knees by the bedside, seized her husband's hand and wet it with her tears. The patient closed his eyes and sought counsel in the darkness. He found it.

"Marie," said he, "do not give way in that manner; it is now no time for tears. My orders must be obeyed. You are young yet,—not forty years old. You are beautiful and will not lose your beauty. Twenty-four years ago, when I married you, you were not a whit fairer than you are to-day. You had raven-black hair and bright eyes, and you have them yet. You were gentle and modest, and you have not lost those virtues. I have always loved you warmly, as you well know. In the first year of our married life my eldest son, Ödön, was born; in the next year my second son, Richard; and in the third my youngest, Jenő. Then God visited me with a severe illness, and I have ever since been an invalid. The doctors said I was doomed, and that a single kiss from your beautiful lips would kill me. And so I have been wasting away for the last twenty years at your side like a condemned criminal. Before your eyes the bloom of my life has withered away, and during all this time you have been merely a dying man's nurse. I have dragged out my existence from day to day, possessed by a great purpose which alone enabled me to retain the breath of life in my body amid the most grievous tortures. Oh, what a life it has been,—a life bereft of every pleasure! Yet I endured it, denying myself everything for which other men live. I lived simply for the sake of the future, a future which I wish to be, for our country, the perpetuation of the past. For that future I have reared my sons, for it I have spent my strength, and in it my name will live. On that name now rests the curse of the present, but it will be glorified by the radiance of the future. It is for that name, Marie, that I have suffered so much. But you must live to enjoy yet many years of happiness."

The wife sobbed in mute protest against his commands.

"It is my will," cried the man, and he snatched his hand from her grasp. "Go back to the table and write. 'This is my dying command: six weeks after my death my wife is to marry Benedict Rideghváry, who is the man most worthy to follow in my footsteps. Only thus shall I rest easily in my grave and enjoy peace in heaven.' Have you written that, Marie?"

The pen slipped from the writer's fingers; she buried her face in her hands and remained silent.

"The hour is fast going," stammered the dying man, struggling against the approaching dissolution; "but *non omnis moriar*. The work that I have begun will survive me. Marie, lay your hand on mine and leave it there until mine begins to stiffen. No foolish

sentimentalism, no tears! I will not let you weep now. We shall not take leave of each other: my spirit will remain with you and never leave you. Every morning and evening it will demand of you an account how you have discharged the duties I have laid upon you in this my dying hour. I shall be near you constantly."

The woman trembled from head to foot, but the dying man folded his hands calmly and murmured in broken accents: "The hour is nearly gone. The doctor was right: I no longer feel any pain; everything grows dark around me, only my son's pictures are still visible. Who is that coming toward me out of the darkness? Halt! Advance no farther; I have yet more that I must say."

But the grim spectre's approach was not to be stayed; it laid its invisible hand over the dying patient's face, and the powerful man with the heart of stone succumbed to a force mightier than himself. He voluntarily closed his eyes and pressed his lips together, not calling upon any one to help him die, as do ordinary weak mortals; but proudly and unshrinkingly, as becomes a nobleman, he surrendered his great, indomitable soul to the master jailer, Death.

When the baroness saw that her husband was dead, she fell upon her knees by the table and, folding her hands upon the written page before her, stammered forth: "Hear me, Lord God, and be merciful to his forsaken soul, as I now vow to be merciful and to execute the very opposite of all the wicked commands he has with his last breath enjoined upon me. This is my fixed resolve, O God, and I pray Thee in Thine infinite power to help me."

A cry, unearthly and terrible, rang out on the sepulchral stillness of the room. The startled woman threw a look of horror at the dead form stretched out upon the bed. And see! his closed lips had parted, his eyes had opened, and his right hand, which had been folded in his left upon his breast, was raised toward his head.

Perhaps the departing soul had been overtaken in its flight by the kneeling woman's vow, and had turned back to reënter its mortal tenement and protest with that one fearful cry against the violation of its commands.

CHAPTER II.
THE PRAYER AT THE GRAVE.

The baron's funeral took place a week later. The funeral sermon was very long, and the baroness wept through it all with a grief as unaffected as that of any peasant widow in the land.

"The poor lady is having a good cry once for all," remarked one of the distinguished attendants at the funeral to his neighbour. "They say she was not allowed to shed a tear during her husband's lifetime."

"The baron was indeed a stern man," answered the other, "and would not suffer his wife to give way to grief or pain, however severe."

Meanwhile the lady thus referred to removed her tear-moistened handkerchief from her eyes occasionally, and sought to compose her features.

"She is really a beautiful woman still," whispered one of the gentlemen to the other.

"For twenty years she has been virtually a widow," was the reply.

"I doubt whether she remains one another twelve months," observed the first speaker.

The funeral anthem followed at this point. The village church could boast of an organ, the generous gift of the deceased. The choir sang, in excellent time and tune, one of the most beautiful of funeral melodies,—from the opera "Nebuchadnezzar," with words, of course, adapted to the occasion. Did the lamented Casimir Baradlay hear this opera selection sung over his remains? Administrator Rideghváry gave utterance to this query as he turned to the gentleman at his side.

"Didn't he like opera music?" asked the latter.

"On the contrary, he was always highly incensed when any such music was introduced into the church service. Indeed, he went so far as to give express directions in his will that no operatic airs should be sung at his funeral."

"Are you, then, so familiar with his last will and testament?" inquired the other.

But the administrator merely lowered his eyelids and twirled his mustache, implying thereby that he knew more than he cared to admit.

The funeral anthem did not close the service. Side by side on the bench near the pulpit sat three priests, who were evidently there for a purpose. When the singing ceased one of them mounted the pulpit.

"Are they all three going to preach to us?" asked the administrator's companion, already becoming restless.

"No," was the reply; "one of them is the local pastor, who is to offer a prayer at the grave."

"Ah, is he the one whose"—but here the two gentlemen fell to whispering so softly to each other that the concluding words of the sentence could not be overheard.

"And is the daughter here?" asked one. "Ah, yes, there she is in that corner, dressed in brown, her handkerchief in her hand. A lovely girl, truly!"

"Poor child!" whispered another. And, indeed, she was to be pitied, for she seemed little likely ever to see again the one for whom she was weeping.

At length the service came to an end, twelve haiduks, splendidly attired, raised the magnificent coffin upon their shoulders, the administrator offered his arm to the widow, and the funeral procession issued from the church and took its way toward the family vault, where yet one last ceremony was to be observed.

Upon depositing the remains in their final resting-place, it is customary for the local pastor to offer a prayer for the repose of the departed soul. Many were curious to see and hear the eccentric priest, Bartholomew Lánghy by name, whose duty it was to perform this office. The old preacher was wont to speak in the pulpit like an Abraham-à-Sancta-Clara, and in the county assembly like Lawrence the Club-bearer. After the third hymn a space was cleared for the preacher before the entrance to the vault, where he took his stand with bared head, surrounded by the mourners. On each side of his forehead, which was high and bald, hung a few thin locks of hair; his face was smoothly shaven, as was then the custom in the Church, and the heavy eyebrows over the keen, dark eyes gave his countenance a look of resolute determination.

Folding his hands, he prayed as follows: "O Thou Judge of the living and of the dead, almighty Father of us all, incline Thine ear to our petition. Lo! with much earthly pomp and splendour the ashes of one of Thy servants are borne to the marble sepulchre prepared for their reception, while in the same hour his soul, naked and trembling, cowers at heaven's portals and sues for admission to paradise. What are we poor mortals that we should take our departure from this life amid such vain display and idle pomp,—we whose brothers are the worms and whose mother is the dust beneath our feet? The memory of a single good deed lights our path better than the flare of a thousand torches, and the unspoken benison of our neighbours is a fairer ornament for our coffin than all the escutcheons and orders in the world. O Lord, be merciful to those who in their lives have shown no mercy. Inquire not too sternly of the trembling soul before Thee, 'Who art thou, who led thee hither, and what say they of thee down yonder?' For to what but thine infinite mercy can he appeal who, though great and powerful in this life, yet stands before Thee stripped of his earthly glory? Called upon to answer Thy dread questions, 'Hast thou given help to the needy, raised up the fallen, protected the persecuted, lent thine ear to those that appealed to thee in despair, wiped away the tears of the sorrowing, shown compassion to the oppressed, and repaid love with love?'—he must answer, 'No.' And when Thou askest him, 'What use hast thou made of the power which I entrusted to thee? Hast thou given happiness to those under thy charge? Hast thou built for posterity? Hast thou honestly served thy country, or didst thou render homage to strange idols?'—what answer can he make, to whom turn for help, with what escutcheon or orders shield his breast, whom call upon as intercessor?"

The priest's face glowed, he seemed to increase in stature, and his hearers could not repress a feeling of awe and dread as they listened to him.

"O Lord," he continued, "let justice be tempered with mercy, avert Thy scrutiny from this man's past, and remember only that he walked in darkness here below and saw not Thy face. Weigh not his errors and his failings, but ascribe to him good intentions even where he erred. Forgive Thou him in heaven even as those against whom he sinned forgive him here on earth. Blot out the remembrance of his works, that none may thereby be reminded of him. But if the sinner must atone for his sins, if Thou art inexorable toward him and wilt not dismiss him unpunished from before Thy throne, then let his atonement be the return of his soul, which now sees all things in the clear light of Thy truth, and not as through a glass, darkly,—let his soul, we pray thee, return to the earth and take up its abode in his three sons, in order that the sins of the father may be transformed into virtues in the sons, and that the soil of his fatherland, which was his tomb as long as he lived, may now, when his bones rest therein in death, become the cradle in which he shall at last wake to life everlasting. Hear, O Lord, Thy servant's prayer, Amen."

The closing of the iron portals of the vault terminated the ceremony, and the procession wound its way to the castle, where tables were spread in different rooms for the nobility, the students and the domestics.

The old priest, however, lingered behind and, while all the rest turned their faces toward the castle, took his daughter by the hand and went another way. In vain had a cover been laid for him in the great hall of the castle.

CHAPTER III.
TWO GOOD FRIENDS.

In a splendid hall formed entirely of malachite—its slender columns hewn each from a single block and resembling tropical tree-trunks, its niches filled with rare exotic plants, its centre occupied by a mammoth aquarium, and its arched doorways each affording a glimpse into a seemingly endless series of other magnificent apartments—was gathered a brilliant company. Among the gold-trimmed and order-bedecked costumes of the men was occasionally seen the plain black attire of an attaché to some embassy, and not infrequently these soberly clad young men received quite as much attention from the ladies as did the cavaliers in gaudier

array.

One such black-clothed figure seemed to be the object of unusual interest. His handsome face showed at once youth, high birth, and an air of modesty and refinement. A woman might well have envied him his large blue eyes, shaded by their long lashes; but his noble profile, finely cut lips, and tall and slender, although muscular and elastic, form betokened the early maturity of vigorous manhood.

A gentleman in a dazzling military uniform, with a diamond order on his breast and a silk sash extending over his shoulder and down to his hip, addressed the young man and linked his arm in his. He had known the youthful attaché's father, whom he esteemed as an able and highly gifted man, and he prophesied a yet more brilliant career for the son. As he drew him forth in his promenade, he told him to prepare to be presented to the grand-duchess.

It was a formidable ordeal for a young and unknown man, who had not even a uniform to brace his courage, to be summoned before one of the greatest ladies of the vast empire, in the presence of so many august dignitaries, and to be called upon to frame, on the instant, suitable replies to her questions, and perhaps to repay her gracious words with an improvised compliment or two.

But he stood the test, and many more beside. Dancing began, and on his arm floated one charming partner after another, each a type of beauty and grace. The lovely Princess Alexandra, only daughter of a Russian noble, a blonde beauty whose golden locks seemed to have been spun out of sunbeams, had whirled around the room twice on his arm when, as they again reached her seat, she gave him a stealthy pressure of the hand, as much as to say, "Once more!"—and so they danced around the hall a third time. It was a piece of boldness on her part that is seldom committed except out of wantonness or—love.

The youth bowed, and left his partner, feeling neither weariness nor any undue quickening of the pulse. There was a charm about him which lay in his calm, passionless bearing, and his unfailing self-control where other young men would have shown excitement. Royal pomp and splendour did not appeal to him, nor did beautiful eyes, sweet words, or the secret pressure of a fair hand rob him of his self-possession.

When midnight had struck and the orchestras in the various rooms were all playing national airs, as a signal that the grand-duchess was about to retire to her private apartments, the black-clothed young man hurried into the malachite hall, and reached for a glass of sherbet from the tray which a servant was bearing around the room. Suddenly, however, some one pulled his hand away, and said: "Don't drink that!"

The young man turned, and for the first time that evening a smile of genuine pleasure lighted up his face.

"Ah, is it you, Leonin?" he exclaimed.

Leonin was a young officer of the guard in tightly fitting uniform, a muscular young fellow with full face, carefully kept blond mustache and side-whiskers, and thick blond eyebrows which went well with his keen and animated gray eyes.

"I thought I had lost you in the dancing-hall," said he, with friendly reproach in his tone.

"I was dancing with your betrothed. Didn't you see me? She is a charming girl."

"Charming indeed; but how does that help matters for me? I can't marry her till I am of age and wear rosettes on my epaulets; and that won't be for two years yet. A man can't live all that time on a pair of beautiful eyes. Come with me."

The other hesitated. "I am not sure whether we ought to run away so early," said he.

"But don't you hear the bands playing the national hymns?" asked his companion. "Besides, we can slip out through the rear door; a sleigh is waiting for me there with my furs. Surely you haven't any more engagements with the wax dolls here?"

"Yes, I have," was the reply; "I am down for a quadrille with the Princess N——, to whom I was just now presented."

"Oh, I beg you, have nothing to do with her," urged the young officer. "She will only make sport of you, as she does of all the others. Come with me."

"Whither do you wish to take me?"

"To the infernal regions. Are you afraid to follow?"

"Not at all."

"Will you come with me to paradise, too, if I ask you?"

"With all my heart."

"And if I invite you to a stuffy little inn on Kamennoi Island, where the sailors are having a dance, will you come?"

"Yes, anywhere you please; it's all one to me."

"Good! That's what I like." And Leonin embraced his friend, after which he led him forth from the marble palace by passages known to himself. Once in the open air, they ran in their light ball-room costumes to the bank of the Neva, where a sleigh awaited their coming, wrapped themselves in warm furs, and in a moment were speeding across the ice behind two fleet horses, to the silvery music of tinkling bells.

These two young men were the Russian noble, Leonin Ramiroff, and Ödön, eldest son of the house of Baradlay.

As the sleigh glided along the moonlit row of palaces, Ödön remarked to his companion that they were not going in the direction of Kamennoi Island.

"Nor do we wish to," returned Leonin.

"Why, then, did you say we were going thither?"

"So that no one should by any possibility overhear our real destination."

"And what, pray, may that be?"

"You can see for yourself: we are on the Petrofski Prospect, headed straight for Petrofski Island."

"But there's nothing there except hemp factories and sugar refineries."

"You are right; and we are going to call on a sugar-boiler."

"I have no objection," returned Ödön, wrapping his mantle more closely about him, and leaning back in his seat. Possibly he even went to sleep.

Half an hour later the sleigh crossed the Neva again, and drew up before a red building at the end of a long park. Leonin aroused his companion.

"Here we are," said he.

All the windows of the long factory were lighted up, and as the two young men entered, they were greeted by that unsavoury odour peculiar to sugar refineries, and suggestive of anything but sugar. A smooth-faced man of sleek appearance advanced to meet them, and asked them in French what they wished.

"To see the sugar works," answered Leonin.

"Only the factory, or the refinery as well?" asked the Frenchman.

"Only the refinery," whispered the other, pressing a bank-note into the hand of his questioner.

"*Bien*," replied the latter, and pocketed the money. It was a hundred-ruble note. "Is this gentleman going with you?" he asked, indicating Ödön.

"To be sure," answered Leonin. "Give him a hundred rubles, Ödön: that is the entrance fee. You won't regret it."

Ödön complied, and the Frenchman then conducted them through various passages and past doors from which issued hot blasts of air, stifling odours, and a fierce hissing of steam. Coming at last to a low iron portal which their guide opened to them by pressing a hidden spring, they passed into a dimly lighted passage and were directed to go on, as they could now find their way unaided.

Leonin, as one well acquainted with the place, took his friend's arm and led him forward. They descended a winding stairway, and as they went downward the clanking of machinery and hissing of steam gave place to the sound of distant music. At the foot of the stairs there sat at a little table an old woman dressed in the latest mode. Leonin threw down a gold coin.

"Is my box open?" he asked.

She bowed and smiled, whereupon he advanced to one of a row of tapestry portières and held it aside for Ödön to enter. They passed through another door and found themselves in a sort of opera-box whose front was screened by a light grating. The music was now distinctly audible.

"Is this a theatre or a circus?" asked Ödön, adding, as he peeped through the grating, "or is it a steam bath?"

Leonin laughed. "Anything you will," said he, throwing himself down on a divan and taking up a printed sheet that lay on the railing. It proved to be a programme, prepared in due form. He read it while the other looked over his shoulder.

"'*Don Juan au Sérail*.' That is a fine piece; too bad we missed it. '*Tableaux Vivants*'—awfully tiresome. '*Les Bayadères du Khan Almollah*'—exceedingly amusing; I have seen it once before. '*La Lutte des Amazones*.' '*La Rève d'Ariane*'—charming, only I don't know whether Persida is at her best to-night."

The door of the box opened and a servant looked in.

"Waiter, serve us some refreshments," ordered Leonin.

"For how many?"

"Three."

"Who is the third?" asked Ödön.

"You will soon see," replied Leonin.

The waiter spread the table and brought a roast, side dishes, and champagne in a cooler; then he left the gentlemen to themselves. Leonin bolted the door after him.

"This is a queer kind of a sugar refinery," remarked Ödön, glancing through the grating.

The other laughed. "You thought we only knew how to sing psalms, I suppose," said he.

"But such a resort here in a government building!" exclaimed Ödön.

Leonin smiled and put his finger on his lips.

"Aren't you afraid of being discovered?" asked the other.

"If we were we should all take a trip to Siberia."

"Don't you fear the musicians may betray you?"

"They can't see. Every member of the orchestra is blind. But don't listen to the music. That is well enough for old gentlemen: something better is in store for us."

Leonin knocked twice on the partition wall separating them from the next box, the signal was repeated above, and in a few minutes a door opened in the partition and a woman's form appeared.

A more beautiful creature could not have stepped out of the pages of the "Arabian Nights." She wore a long Persian caftan that reached to her ankles and defined rather than veiled her shapely figure. Her slim waist was encircled by a golden girdle, while around her neck and on her bosom hung strings of pearls. The long, flowing sleeves of her caftan were slit up in front and gathered only at the shoulder, thus exposing to view the most perfect pair of arms ever dreamt of by sculptor. The face was of a noble Caucasian type, with finely shaped nose, full lips, arched eyebrows, and bright eyes of the deepest black. The sole ornament of her head was furnished by two magnificent braids of hair that fairly touched the wearer's heels.

She paused in surprise on the threshold. "You are not alone," said she.

"Come in, Jéza," returned Leonin. "This young gentleman is one half of my soul, of which you are the other half." So saying, with a quick movement he embraced the two and pressed them to his breast, after which he seated them side by side on another divan opposite his own.