

Thirteen at Table

Maurus Jokai

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We are far amidst the snow-clad mountains of Transylvania.

The scenery is magnificent. In clear weather, the plains of Hungary as far as the Rez promontory may be seen from the summit of the mountains. Groups of hills rise one above the other, covered with thick forest, which, at the period when our tale commences, had just begun to assume the first light green of spring.

Toward sunset, a slight purple mist overspread the farther pinnacles, leaving their ridges still tinged with gold. On the side of one of these hills the white turrets of an ancient family mansion gleamed from amid the trees.

Its situation was peculiarly romantic. A steep rock descended on one side, on whose pinnacle rose a simple cross. In the depth of the valley beneath lay a scattered village, whose evening bells melodiously broke the stillness of nature.

Farther off, some broken roofs arose among the trees, from whence the sound of the mill, and the yellow-tinted stream, betrayed the miners' dwellings.

Through the meadows in the valley beneath a serpentine rivulet wound its silvery way, interrupted by numerous falls and huge blocks of stone, which had been carried down in bygone ages from the mountains during the melting of the snows.

A little path, cut in the side of the rock, ascended to the castle; while higher up, a broad road, somewhat broken by the mountain streams, conducted across the hills to more distant regions.

The castle itself was an old family mansion, which had received many additions at different periods, as the wealth or necessities of the family suggested.

It was surrounded by groups of ancient chestnut trees, and the terrace before the court was laid out in gardens, which were now filled with anemones, hyacinths, and other early flowers. Now and then the head of a joyous child appeared at the windows, which were opened to admit the evening breeze; while various members of the household retinue were seen hastening through the corridors, or standing at the doors in their embroidered liveries.

The castle was completely surrounded by a strong rail-work of iron, the stone pillars were overgrown by the evergreen leaves of the gobe and epomoea.

It was the early spring of 1848.

A party, consisting of thirteen persons, had assembled in the dining-room. They were all members of one family, and all bore the name of Bardy.

At the head of the board sat the grandmother, an old lady of eighty years of age, whose snow-white hair was dressed according to the fashion of her times beneath her high white cap. Her face was pale and much wrinkled, and the eyes turned constantly upwards, as is the case with persons who have lost their sight. Her hand and voice trembled with age, and there was something peculiarly striking in the thick snow-white eyebrows.

On her right hand sat her eldest son, Thomas Bardy, a man of between fifty and sixty. With a haughty and commanding countenance, penetrating glance, lofty figure, and noble mien, he was a true type of that ancient aristocracy which is now beginning to die out.

Opposite to him, at the old lady's left hand, sat the darling of the family—a lovely girl of about fifteen. Her golden hair fell in luxuriant tresses round a countenance of singular beauty and sweetness. The large and lustrous deep-blue eyes were shaded by long dark lashes, and her complexion was pale as the lily, excepting when she smiled or spoke, and a slight flush like the dawn of morning overspread her cheeks.

Jolanka was the orphan child of a distant relative, whom the Bardys had adopted. They could not allow one who bore their name to suffer want; and it seemed as if each member of the family had united to heap affection and endearment on the orphan girl, and thus prevented her from feeling herself a stranger among them.

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There were still two other female members of the family: Katalin, the old lady's daughter, who had been for many years a widow; and the wife of one of her sons, a pretty young woman, who was trying to teach a little prattler at her side to use the golden spoon which she had placed in his small, fat hand, while he laughed and crowed, and the family did their best to guess what he said, or what he most preferred.

Opposite to them there sat two gentlemen. One of them was the husband of the young mother. Jozsef Bardy—a handsome man of about thirty-five, with regular features, and black hair and beard; a constant smile beamed on his gay countenance, while he playfully addressed his little son and gentle wife across the table. The other was his brother, Barnabas—a man of herculean form and strength. His face was marked by smallpox; he wore neither beard or mustache, and his hair was combed smoothly back, like a peasant's. His disposition was melancholy and taciturn; but he seemed constantly striving to atone, by the amiability of his manners, for an unprepossessing exterior.

Next to him sat a little cripple, whose pale countenance bore that expression of suffering sweetness so peculiar to the deformed, while his lank hair, bony hands, and misshapen shoulders awakened the beholder's pity. He, too, was an orphan—a grandchild of the old lady's; his parents had died some years before.

Two little boys of about five years old sat opposite to him. They were dressed alike, and the resemblance between them was so striking that they were constantly mistaken. They were twin-children of the young couple.

At the lower end of the table sat Imre Bardy, a young man of twenty, whose handsome countenance was full of life and intelligence, his figure manly and graceful, and his manner courteous and agreeable. A slight moustache was beginning to shade his upper lip, and his dark hair fell in natural ringlets around his head. He was the only son of the majoresco, Tamas Bardy, and resembled him much in form and feature.

Beside him sat an old gentleman, with white hair and ruddy complexion. This was Simon Bardy, an ancient relative, who had grown old with the grandmother of the family.

The same peculiarity characterized every countenance in the Bardy family—namely the lofty forehead and marked brows, and the large deep-blue eyes, shaded by their heavy dark lashes.*

* There is a race of the Hungarians in the Carpath who, unlike the Hungarians of the plain, have blue eyes and often fair hair.

"How singular!" exclaimed one of the party; "we are thirteen at table to-day."

"One of us will surely die," said the old lady; and there was a mournful conviction in the faint, trembling tones.

"Oh, no, grandmother, we are only twelve and a half!" exclaimed the young mother, taking the little one on her knee.

"This little fellow only counts half on the railroad."

All the party laughed at this remark, even the little cripple's countenance relaxed into a sickly smile.

"Ay, ay," continued the old lady, "the trees are now putting forth their verdure, but at the fall of the leaf who knows if all of us, or any of us, may still be sitting here?"

Several months had passed since this slight incident.

In one of the apartments of the castle, the eldest Bardy and his son were engaged in earnest conversation.

The father paced hastily up and down the apartment, now and then stopping short to address his son, who stood in the embrasure of one of the windows. The latter wore the dress of the Matyas Hussars*—a gray dolmany, with crimson cord; he held a crimson esako, with a tricolored cockade, in his hand.

* Part of the free corps raised in 1848.

"Go," said the father, speaking in broken accents; "the sooner the better; let me not see you! Do not think I speak in anger, but I cannot bear to look at you, and think where you are going. You are my only son, and you know how I have loved you—how all my hopes have been concentrated in you. But do not think that these tears, which you see me shed for the first time, are on your account; for if I knew I should lose you,—if your blood were to flow at the next battle,—I should only bow my head in dust and say, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord takes away, blessed be His holy name!' Yes, if I heard that you and your infatuated companions were cut to pieces, I could stifle the burning tears; but to know that your blood, when it flows, will be a curse upon the earth, and your death will be the death of two kingdoms—"

"They may die now; but they will regenerate—"

"This is not true; you only deceive yourselves with the idea that you can build up a new edifice when you have

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overthrown the old one. Great God, what sacrilege! Who had intrusted you with the fate of our country, to tempt the Almighty? Who authorized you to lose all there is for the hope of what may be? For centuries past have so many honorable men fought in vain to uphold the old tottering constitution, as you call it? Or were they not true patriots and heroes? Your companions have hissed their persecuted countrymen in the Diet; but do they love their country better than we do, who have shed our blood and sacrificed our interests for her from generation to generation, and even suffered disgrace, if necessary, to keep her in life?—for though that life has been gradually weakened, still it is life. You promise her glory; but the name of glory is death!"

"It may be so, father; we may lose our country as regards ourselves, but we give one instead of ten millions, who were hitherto our own people, and yet strangers in their native land."

"Chimera! The people will not understand you. They never even dreamt of what you wish to give them. The true way to seek the people's welfare is to give them what they need.

"Ask my dependents! Is there one among them whom I have allowed to suffer want or ruin, whom I have not assisted in times of need?—or have I ever treated them unjustly? You will not hear a murmur. Tell them that I am unjust notwithstanding, because I do not call the peasant from his plow to give his opinions on forming the laws and constitution,—and what will be the consequence? They will stare at you in astonishment; and yet, in their mistaken wrath, they will come down some night and burn this house over my head."

"That is the unnatural state of the times. It is all the fault of the past bad management, if the people have no better idea. But let the peasant once be free, let him be a man, and he will understand all that is now strange to him."

"But that freedom will cost the lives of thousands!"

"I do not deny it. Indeed, I believe that neither I nor any of the present generation will reap the fruits of this movement. I think it probable that in a few years not one of those whose names we now hear spoken of may still be living; and what is more, disgrace and curses may be heaped upon their dust. But a time will come when the great institutions of which they have laid the foundation will arise and render justice to the memory of those who sacrificed themselves for the happiness of future generations. To die for our country is a glorious death, but to carry with us the curses of thousands, to die despised and hated for the salvation of future millions, oh! that is sublime—it is Messiah-like!"

"My son—my only son!" cried his father, throwing himself passionately on the young man's neck and sobbing bitterly. "Do you see these tears?"

"For the first time in my life I see them, father—I see you weep; my heart can scarcely bear the weight of these tears—and yet I go! You have reason to weep, for I bring neither joy nor glory on your head—and yet I go! A feeling stronger than the desire of glory, stronger than the love of my country, inspires my soul; and it is a proof of the strength of my faith that I see your tears, my father— and yet I go!"

"Go!" murmured his father, in a voice of despair. "You may never return again, or, when you do, you may find neither your father's house nor the grave in which he is laid! But know, even then, in the hour of your death, or in the hour of mine, I do not curse you— and now, leave me." With these words he turned away and motioned to his son to depart.

Imre silently left the apartment, and as soon as he had closed the door the tears streamed from his eyes; but before his sword had struck the last step his countenance had regained its former determination, and the fire of enthusiasm had kindled in his eye.

He then went to take leave of his Uncle Jozsef, whom he found surrounded by his family. The twins were sitting at his feet, while his wife was playing bo-peep with the little one, who laughed and shouted, while his mother hid herself behind his father's armchair.

Imre's entrance interrupted the general mirth. The little boy ran over to examine the sword and golden tassels, while the little one began to cry in alarm at the sight of the strange dress.

"Csitt, baba!" said his mother, taking him from his father's arms; "your cousin is going to wars, and will bring you a golden horse."

Jozsef wrung his nephew's hand. "God be with you!" he exclaimed, and added in a lower voice, "You are the noblest of us all—you have done well!"

They then all embraced him in turns, and Imre left them, amidst clamors of the little ones, and proceeded to his grandmother's apartments.

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On the way, he met his Uncle Barnabas, who embraced him again and again in silence, and then tore himself away without saying a word.

The old lady sat in her great armchair, which she seldom quitted, and as she heard the clash of Imre's sword, she looked up and asked who was coming.

"It is Imre!" said the fair-haired maiden, blushing, and her heart beat quickly as she pronounced his name.

Jolanka felt that Imre was more than a brother to her, and the feeling with which she had learnt to return his affection was warmer than even a sister's love.

The widow lady and the cripple were also in the grandmother's apartment; the child sat on a stool at the old lady's feet, and smiled sadly as the young man entered.

"Why that sword at your side, Imre?" asked the old lady in a feeble voice. "Ah, this is no good world—no good world! But if God is against us, who can resist His hand? I have spoken with the dead again in dreams. I thought they all came around me and beckoned me to follow them; but I am ready to go, and place my life with gratitude and confidence in the hands of the Lord. Last night I saw the year 1848 written in the skies in letters of fire. Who knows what may come over us yet? This is no good world—no good world!"

Imre bent silently over the old lady's hand and kissed it.

"And so you are going? Well, God bless and speed you, if you go beneath the cross, and never forget in life or in death to raise your heart to the Lord;" and the old lady placed her withered hand upon her grandson's head, and murmured, "God Almighty bless you!"

"My husband was just such a handsome youth when I lost him," sighed the widow lady as she embraced her nephew. "God bless you!"

The little cripple threw his arms around his cousin's knees and, sobbing, entreated him not to stay long away.

The last who bade farewell was Jolanka. She approached with downcast eyes, holding in her small white hands an embroidered cockade, which she placed on his breast. It was composed of five colors—blue and gold, red, white, and green.*

* Blue and gold are the colors of Transylvania.

"I understand," said the young man, in a tone of joyful surprise, as he pressed the sweet girl to his heart, "Erdely* and Hungary united! I shall win glory for your colors!"

* Transylvania.

The maiden yielded to his warm embrace, murmuring, as he released her, "Remember me!"

"When I cease to remember you, I shall be no more," replied the youth fervently.

And then he kissed the young girl's brow, and once more bidding farewell, he hurried from the apartment.

Old Simon Bardy lived on the first floor: Imre did not forget him.

"Well, nephew," said the old man cheerfully, "God speed you, and give you strength to cut down many Turks!"

"It is not with the Turks that we shall have to do," replied the young man, smiling.

"Well, with the French," said the old soldier of the past century, correcting himself.

A page waited at the gate with two horses saddled and bridled.

"I shall not require you—you may remain at home," said Imre, as, taking the bridle of one of the horses, vaulting lightly into the saddle, he pressed his csako over his brow and galloped from the castle.

As he rode under the cross, he checked his horse and looked back. Was it of his grandmother's words, or of the golden-haired Jolanka that he thought?

A white handkerchief waved from the window. "Farewell, light of my soul!" murmured the youth; and kissing his hand, he once more dashed his spurs into his horse's flank, and turned down the steep hill.

Those were strange times. All at once the villages began to be depopulated; the inhabitants disappeared, none knew whither. The doors of the houses were closed.

The bells were no longer heard in the evening, nor the maiden's song as she returned from her work. The barking of dogs which had lost their masters alone interrupted the silence of the streets, where the grass began to grow.

Imre Bardy rode through the streets of the village without meeting a soul; few of the chimneys had smoke, and no fires gleamed through the kitchen windows.

Evening was drawing on, and a slight transparent mist had overspread the valley. Imre was desirous of

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reaching Kolozsvár* early on the next morning, and continued his route all night.

* Klausenburg.

About midnight the moon rose behind the trees, shedding her silvery light over the forest. All was still, excepting the echo of the miner's hammer, and the monotonous sound of his horse's step along the rocky path. He rode on, lost in thought; when suddenly the horse stopped short, and pricked his ears.

"Come, come," said Imre, stroking his neck, "you have not heard the cannon yet."

The animal at last proceeded, turning his head impatiently from side to side, and snorting and neighing with fear.

The road now led through a narrow pass between two rocks, whose summits almost met, and a slight bridge, formed of one or two rotten planks, was thrown across the dry channel of a mountain stream which cut up the path.

As Imre reached the bridge, the horse backed, and no spurring could induce him to cross. Imre at last pressed his knee angrily against the trembling animal, striking him at the same time across the neck with the bridle, on which the horse suddenly cleared the chasm at one bound and then again turned and began to back.

At that instant a fearful cry arose from beneath, which was echoed from the rocks around, and ten or fifteen savage-looking beings climbed from under the bridge, with lances formed of upright scythes.

Even then there would have been time for the horseman to turn back, and dash through a handful of men behind him, but either he was ashamed of turning from the first conflict, or he was desirous, at any risk, to reach Kolozsvár at the appointed time, and instead of retreating by the bridge, he galloped towards the other end of the pass, where the enemy rushed upon him from every side, yelling hideously.

"Back, Wallachian dogs!" cried Imre, cutting two of them down, while several others sprang forward with the scythes.

Two shots whistled by, and Imre, letting go the bridle, cut right and left, his sword gleaming rapidly among the awkward weapons; and taking advantage of a moment in which the enemy's charge began to slacken, he suddenly dashed through the crowd towards the outlet of the rock, without perceiving that another party awaited him above the rocks with great stones, with which they prepared to crush him as he passed.

He was only a few paces from the spot, when a gigantic figure, armed with a short broad-axe, and with a Roman helmet on his head, descended from the rock in front of him, and seizing the reins of the horse forced him to halt. The young man aimed a blow at his enemy's head, and the helmet fell back, cut through the middle, but the force of the blow had broken his sword in two; and the horse lifted by his giant foe, reared, so that the rider, losing his balance, was thrown against the side of the rock, and fell senseless to the ground.

At the same instant a shot was fired toward them from the top of the rock.

"Who fired there?" cried the giant, in a voice of thunder. The bloodthirsty Wallachians would have rushed madly on their defenseless prey, had not the giant stood between him and them.

"Who fired on me?" he sternly exclaimed. The Wallachians stood back in terror.

"It was not on you, Decurio, that I fired, but on the hussar," stammered out one of the men, on whom the giant had fixed his eye.

"You lie, traitor! Your ball struck my armor, and had I not worn a shirt of mail, it would have pierced my heart."

The man turned deadly pale, trembling from head to foot. "My enemies have paid you to murder me?" The savage tried to speak, but words died upon his lips.

"Hang him instantly—he is a traitor!"

The rest of the gang immediately seized the culprit and carried him to the nearest tree, from whence his shrieks soon testified that his sentence was being put in execution.

The Decurio remained alone with the young man; and hastily lifting him, still senseless, from the ground, he mounted his horse, and placing him before him ere the savage horde had returned, he had galloped some distance along the road from whence the youth had come, covering him with his mantle as he passed the bridge, to conceal him from several of the gang who stood there, and exclaiming, "Follow me to the Tapanfalva."

As soon as they were out of sight, he suddenly turned to the left, down a steep, hilly path, and struck into the depth of the forest.

The morning sun had just shot its first beams across the hills, tinting with golden hue the reddening autumn

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leaves, when the young hussar began to move in his fevered dreams, and murmured the name "Jolanka."

In a few moments he opened his eyes. He was lying in a small chamber, through the only window of which the sunbeams shone upon his face.

The bed on which he lay was made of lime-boughs, simply woven together, and covered with wolves' skins. A gigantic form was leaning against the foot of the bed with his arms folded, and as the young man awoke, he turned round. It was the Decurio.

"Where am I?" asked the young man, vaguely endeavoring to recall the events of the past night.

"In my house," replied Decurio.

"And who are you?"

"I am Numa, Decurio of the Roumin* Legion, your foe in battle, but now your host and protector."

* The Wallachians were, in the days of Trajan, subdued by the Romans, with whom they became intermixed, and are also called Roumi.

"And why did you save me from your men?" asked the young man, after a short silence.

"Because the strife was unequal—a hundred against one."

"But had it not been for you, I could have freed myself from them."

"Without me you had been lost. Ten paces from where I stopped your horse, you would inevitably have been dashed to pieces by huge stones which they were preparing to throw down upon you from the rock."

"And you did not desire my death?"

"No, because it would have reflected dishonor on the Roumin name."

"You are a chivalrous man, Decurio!"

"I am what you are; I know your character, and the same feeling inspires us both. You love your nation, as I do mine. Your nation is great and cultivated; mine is despised and neglected, and my love is more bitterly devoted. Your love for your country makes you happy; mine deprives me of peace. You have taken up arms to defend your country without knowing your own strength, or the number of the foe; I have done the same. Either of us may lose, or we may both be blotted out; but though the arms may be buried in the earth, rust will not eat them."

"I do not understand your grievances."

"You do not understand? Know, then, that although fourteen centuries have passed since the Roman eagle overthrew Diurbanus, there are still those among us—the now barbarous people—who can trace their descent from generation to generation, up to the times of its past glory. We have still our traditions, if we have nothing more; and can point out what forest stands in the place of the ancient Sarmisaegethusa, and what town is built where one Decebalus overthrew the far-famed troops of the Consulate. And alas for that town! if the graves over which its houses are built should once more open, and turn the populous streets into a field of battle! What is become of the nation, the heir of so much glory?—the proud Dacians, the descendants of the far-famed legions? I do not reproach any nation for having brought us to what we now are; but let none reproach me if I desire to restore my people to what they once were."

"And do you believe that this is the time?"

"We have no prophets to point out the hour, but it seems yours do not see more clearly. We shall attempt it now, and if we fail our grandchildren will attempt it again. We have nothing to lose but a few lives; you risk much that is worth losing, and yet you assemble beneath the banner of war. Then war. Then what would you do if you were like us?—a people who possess nothing in this world among whom there is not one able or one instructed head; for although every third man bears the name of Papa, it is not every hundredth who can read! A people excluded from every employment; who live a miserable life in the severest manual labor; who have not one noble city in their country, the home of three-fourths of their people. Why should we seek to know the signs of the times in which we are to die, or be regenerated! We have nothing but our wretchedness, and if we are conquered we lose nothing. Oh! you did wrong for your own peace to leave a nation to such utter neglect!"

"We do not take up arms for our nation alone, but for freedom in general."

"You do wrong. It is all the same to us who our sovereign may be; only let him be just towards us, and raise up our fallen people; but you will destroy your nation—its power, its influence, and privileges—merely that you may live in a country without a head."

A loud uproar interrupted the conversation. A disorderly troop of Wallachians approached the Decurio's

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house, triumphantly bearing the hussar's csako on a pole before them.

"Had I left you there last night, they would now have exhibited your head instead of your csako."

The crowd halted before the Decurio's window, greeting him with loud vociferations.

The Decurio spoke a few words in the Wallachian language, on which they replied more vehemently than before, at the same time thrusting forward the kalpag on the pole.

The Decurio turned hastily round. "Was your name written on your kalpag?" he asked the young man, in evident embarrassment.

"It was."

"Unhappy youth! The people, furious at not having found you, are determined to attack your father's house."

"And you will permit them?" asked the youth, starting from bed.

"I dare not contradict them, unless I would lose their confidence. I can prevent nothing."

"Give me up—let them wreak their bloody vengeance on my head!"

"I should only betray myself for having concealed you; and it would not save your father's house."

"And if they murder the innocent and unprotected, on whom will the ignominy of their blood fall?"

"On me; but I will give you the means of preventing this disgrace. Do you accept it?"

"Speak!"

"I will give you a disguise; hasten to Kolozsvár and assemble your comrades,—then return and protect your house. I will wait you there, and man to man, in open honorable combat, the strife will no longer be ignominious."

"Thanks, thanks!" murmured the youth, pressing the Decurio's hand.

"There is not a moment to lose; here is a peasant's mantle—if you should be interrogated, you have only to show this paszura,* and mention my name. Your not knowing the language is of no consequence; my men are accustomed to see Hungarian gentlemen visit me in disguise, and having only seen you by night, they will not recognize you."

* Everything on which a double-headed eagle—the emblem of the Austrian Government—was painted, engraved or sculptured, the Wallachians called paszura.

Imre hastily took the dress, while Decurio spoke to the people, made arrangements for the execution of their plans, and pointed out the way to the castle, promising to follow them immediately.

"Accept my horse as a remembrance," said the young man, turning to the Decurio.

"I accept it, as it would only raise suspicion were you to mount it; but you may recover it again in the field. Haste, and lose no time! If you delay you will bring mourning on your own head and disgrace on mine!"

In a few minutes the young man, disguised as a Wallachian peasant, was hastening on foot across the hills of Kolozsvár.

It was past midnight.

The inhabitants of the Bardy castle had all retired to rest.

The iron gate was locked and the windows barred, when suddenly the sound of demoniac cries roused the slumberers from their dreams.

"What is that noise?" cried József Bardy, springing from his bed, and rushing to the window.

"The Olahok!"* cried a hussar, who had rushed to his master's apartments on hearing the sounds.

* Olah, Wallachian—ok, plural.

"The Olah! the Olah!" was echoed through the corridors by the terrified servants.

By the light of a few torches, a hideous crowd was seen before the windows, armed with scythes and axes, which they were brandishing with fearful menaces.

"Lock all the doors!" cried József Bardy, with calm presence of mind. "Barricade the great entrance, and take the ladies and children to the back rooms. You must not lose your heads, but all assemble together in the turret-chamber, from whence the whole building may be protected. And taking down two good rifles from over his bed, he hastened to his elder brother Tamas's apartments, and overlooked the court.

Have you heard the noise?" asked his brother as he entered.

"I knew it would come," he replied, and coolly continued to pace the room.

"And are you not preparing for defense?"

"To what purpose?—they will kill us all. I am quite prepared for what must inevitably happen."

"But it will not happen if we defend ourselves courageously. We are eight men—the walls of the castle are

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strong—the besiegers have no guns, and no place to protect them; we may hold out for days until assistance comes from Kolozsvár."

"We shall lose," replied Tamas coldly, and without the slightest change of countenance.

"Then I shall defend the castle myself. I have a wife and children, our old grandmother and our sisters are here, and I shall protect them, if I remain alone."

At that instant Barnabas and old Simon entered with the widowed sister.

Barnabas had a huge twenty-pound iron club in his hand; grinding his teeth, and with eyes darting fire, he seemed capable of meeting single-handed the whole troop.

He was followed by the widow, with two loaded pistols in her hand, and old Simon, who entreated them not to use violence or exasperate the enemy.

"Conduct yourselves bravely!" replied the widow dryly; "let us not die in vain."

"Come with me—we shall send them all to hell!" cried Barnabas, swinging his club in his herculean arm as if it had been a reed.

"Let us not be too hasty," interrupted Jozsef; we will stand here in the tower, from whence we can shoot every one that approaches, and if they break in, we can meet them on the stairs."

"For Heaven's sake!" cried Simon, "what are you going to do? If you kill one of them they will massacre us all. Speak to them peaceably—promise them wine—take them to the cellar—give them money—try to pacify them! Nephew Tamas, you will speak to them?" continued the old man, turning to Tamas, who still paced up and down, without the slightest visible emotion.

"Pacification and resistance are equally vain," he replied coldly; "we are inevitably lost!"

"We have no time for delay," said Jozsef impatiently; "take the arms from the wall, Barnabas, give one to each servant—let them stand at the back windows of the house, we two are enough here. Sister, stand between the windows, that the stones may not hit you; and when you load, do not strike the balls too far in, that our aim may be the more secure!"

"No! no!—I cannot let you fire," exclaimed the old man, endeavoring to drag Jozsef from the window. "You must not fire yet—only remain quiet."

"Go to the hurricane, old man! would you have us use holy water against a shower of stones?"

At that instant several large stones were dashed through the windows, breaking the furniture against which they fell.

"Only wait," said Simon, "until I speak with them. I am sure I shall pacify them. I can speak their language and I know them all—just let me go to them."

"A vain idea! If you sue for mercy they will certainly kill you, but if you show courage, you may bring them to their senses. You had better stay and take a gun."

But the old man was already out of hearing, and hurrying downstairs, he went out of a back door into the court, which the Wallachians had not yet taken possession of.

They were endeavoring to break down one of the stone pillars of the iron gate with their axes and hammers, and had already succeeded in making an aperture, through which one of the gang now climbed.

Old Simon recognized him. "Lupey, my son, what do you want here?" said the old man. "Have we ever offended you? Do you forget all that I have done for you?—how I cured your wife when she was so ill, and got you off from the military; and how, when your ox died, I gave you two fine bullocks to replace it? Do you not know me, my son Lupey?"

"I am not your son Lupey now; I am a 'malcontent!'" cried the Wallachian, aiming a blow with a heavy hammer at the old man's head.

Uttering a deep groan, Simon fell lifeless to the ground.

The rest of the party saw the scene from the tower.

Barnabas rushed from the room like a maddened tiger, while Jozsef, retiring cautiously behind the embrasure of the window, aimed his gun as they were placing his uncle's head upon a spike, and shot the first who raised it. Another seized it, and the next instant he, too, fell to the earth; another and another, as many as attempted to raise the head, till, finally, none dared approach.

The widow loaded the guns while Tamas sat quietly in an armchair.

Meanwhile Barnabas had hurried to the attic, where several large fragments of iron had been stowed away,

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and dragging them to a window which overlooked the entrance, he waited until the gang had assembled round the door, and were trying to break in; when lifting an enormous piece with gigantic strength, he dropped it on the heads of the besiegers.

Fearful cries arose and the gang, who were at the door, fled right and left, leaving four or five of their number crushed beneath the ponderous mass.

The next moment they returned with redoubled fury, dashing stones against the windows and the roof, while the door resounded with the blows of their clubs.

Notwithstanding the stones which were flying round him, Barnabas stood at the window dashing heavy iron masses, and killing two or three men every time.

His brother meanwhile continued firing from the tower, and not a ball was aimed in vain. The besiegers had lost a great number, and began to fall back, after fruitless efforts to break in the door, when a footman entered breathless to inform Barnabas that the Wallachians were beginning to scale the opposite side of the castle with ladders, and that the servants were unable to resist them.

Barnabas rushed to the spot.

Two servants lay mortally wounded in one of the back rooms, through the windows of which the Wallachians were already beginning to enter, while another ladder had been placed against the opposite window, which they were beginning to scale as Barnabas entered.

"Here, wretches!" he roared furiously, and, seizing the ladder with both hands, shook it so violently that the men were precipitated from it, and then lifting it with supernatural strength, he dashed it against the opposite one, which broke with the force of the weight thrown against it, the upper part falling backwards with the men upon it, while one of the party remained hanging from the window-sill, and, after immense exertions to gain a footing, he too fell to the earth.

Barnabas rushed into the next room grinding his teeth, his lips foaming, and his face of a livid hue; so appalling was his appearance, that one of the gang, who had been the first to enter by the window, turned pale with terror, and dropped his axe.

Taking advantage of this, Barnabas darted on his enemy, and dragging him with irresistible force to the window, he dashed him from it.

"On here! as many as you are!" he shouted furiously, the blood gushing from his mouth from the blow of a stone. "On! all who wish a fearful death!"

At that instant, a shriek of terror rose within the house.

The Wallachians had discovered the little back door which Simon had left open, and, stealing through it, were already inside the house, when the shrieks of a servant girl gave the besieged notice of their danger.

Barnabas, seizing his club, hurried in the direction of the sounds; he met his brother on the stairs, who had likewise heard the cry, and hastened thither with his gun in his hand, accompanied by the widow.

"Go, sister!" said Jozsef, "take my wife and children to the attics; we will try to guard the staircase step by step. Kiss them all for me. If we die, the villains will put us all in one grave—we shall meet again!"

The widow retired.

The two brothers silently pressed hands, and then, standing on the steps, awaited their enemies. They did not wait long.

The bloodhounds with shouts of vengeance rushed on the narrow stone stairs.

"Hah! thus near I love to have you, dogs of hell!" cried Barnabas, raising his iron club with both hands, and dealing such blows right and left, that none whom it reached rose again. The stairs were covered with the dead and wounded, while their death cries, and the sound of the heavy club, echoed fearfully through the vaulted building.

The foremost of the gang retreated as precipitately as they had advanced, but were continually pressed forward again by the members from behind, while Barnabas drove them back unweariedly, cutting an opening through them with the blows of his club.

He had already beaten them back nearly to the bottom of the stairs, when one of the gang, who had concealed himself in a niche, pierced him through the back with a spike.

Dashing his club amongst the retreating crowd, he turned with a cry of rage, and seizing his murderer by the shoulders, dragged him down with him to the ground.

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The first four who rushed to help the murderer were shot dead by Jozsef Bardy, who, when he had fired off both his muskets, still defended his prostrated brother with the butt—end of one, until he was overpowered and disarmed; after which a party of them carried him out to the iron cross, and crucified him on it amidst the most shocking tortures.

On trying to separate the other brother from his murderer, they found them both dead. With his last strength Barnabas had choked his enemy, whom he still held firmly in his deadly grip, and they were obliged to cut off his hand in order to disengage the Wallachian's body.

Tamas, the eldest brother, now alone survived. Seated in his armchair he calmly awaited his enemies, with a large silver chandelier burning on the table before him.

As the noise approached his chamber, he drew from its jeweled sheath his broad curved sword, and, placing it on the table before him, proceeded coolly to examine the ancient blade, which was inscribed with unknown characters.

At last the steps were at the door; the handle was turned—it had not even been locked.

The magnate rose, and, taking his sword from the table, he stood silently and calmly before the enemies, who rushed upon him with fearful oaths, brandishing their weapons still reeking with the blood of his brothers.

The nobleman stood motionless as a statue until they came within two paces of him, when suddenly the bright black steel gleamed above his head, and the foremost man fell at his feet with his skull split to the chin. The next received a deep gash in the shoulder of his outstretched arm, but not a word escaped the magnate's lips, his countenance retained its cold and stern expression as he looked at his enemies in calm disdain, as if to say, "Even in combat a nobleman is worth ten boors."

Warding off with the skill of a professed swordsman every blow aimed at him, he coolly measured his own thrusts, inflicting severe wounds on his enemies' faces and heads; but the more he evaded them the more furious they became. At last he received a severe wound in the leg from a scythe, and fell on one knee; but without evincing the slightest pain, he still continued fighting with the savage mob, until, after a long and obstinate struggle, he fell without a murmur, or even a death—groan.

The enraged gang cut his body to pieces, and in a few minutes they had hoisted his head on his own sword. Even then the features retained their haughty, contemptuous expression.

He was the last man of the family with whom they had to combat, but more than a hundred of their own band lay stretched in the court and before the windows, covering the stairs and rooms with heaps of bodies, and when the shouts of triumph ceased for an instant, the groans of the wounded and the dying were heard from every side.

None now remained but women and children. When the Wallachians broke into the castle, the widow had taken them all to the attics, leaving the door open, that her brothers might find refuge in case they were forced to retreat; and here the weaker members of the family awaited the issue of the combat which was to bring them life or death, listening breathlessly to the uproar, and endeavoring, from its confused sounds, to determine good or evil.

At last the voices died away, and the hideous cries of the besiegers ceased. The trembling women believed that the Wallachians had been driven out, and, breathing more freely, each awaited with impatience the approach of brother—husband—sons.

At last a heavy step was heard on the stairs leading to the garret.

"This is Barnabas's step!" cried the widow, joyfully, and still holding the pistols in her hand, she ran to the door of the garret.

Instead of her expected brother, a savage form, drunken with blood, strode towards her, his countenance burning with rage and triumph.

The widow started back, uttering a shriek of terror, and then with that unaccountable courage of desperation, she aimed one of the pistols at the Wallachian's breast, who instantly fell backwards on one of his comrades, who followed close behind. The other pistol she discharged into her own bosom.

And now we must draw a veil over the scene that followed. What happened there must not be witnessed by human eyes.

Suffice it to say, they murdered every one, women and children, with the most refined and brutal cruelty, and then threw their dead bodies out of the window from which Barnabas had dashed down the iron fragments on the besiegers' heads.

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They left the old grandmother to the last, that she might witness the extermination of her whole family. Happily for her, her eyes had ceased to distinguish the light of sun, and ere long the light of an eternal glory had risen upon them.

The Wallachians then dug a common grave for the bodies, and threw them all in together. The little one, whom his parents loved so well, they cast in alive, his nurse having escaped from the attics and carried him downstairs, where they had been overtaken by the savages.

"There are only eleven here!" cried one of the gang, who had counted the bodies, "one of them must be still alive somewhere— there ought to be twelve!" And then they once more rushed through the empty rooms, overturning all the furniture, and cutting up and breaking everything they met with. They searched the garrets and every corner of the cellars, but without success.

At last a yell of triumph was heard. One of them had discovered a door which, being painted of the same color as the walls, had hitherto escaped their observation. It concealed a small apartment in the turret. With a few blows of their axes it was broken open, and they rushed in.

"Ah! a rare booty!" cried the foremost of the ruffians, while, with bloodthirsty curiosity, the others pressed round to see the new victim.

There lay the little orphan with the golden hair; her eyes were closed and a death-like hue had overspread her beautiful features.

Her aunt, with an instinctive foreboding, had concealed her here when she took the others to the attic.

The orphan grasped a sharp knife in her hand, with which she had attempted to kill herself; and when her fainting hands refused the fearful service, she had swooned in despair.

"Ah!" cried the Wallachians, in savage admiration, their bloodthirsty countenances assuming a still more hellish expression.

"This is a common booty!" cried several voices together.

"A beautiful girl! A noble lady! ha, ha! She will just suit the tattered Wallachians!" And with their foul and bloody hands, they seized the young girl by her fair slight arms.

"Ha! what is going on here?" thundered a voice from behind.

The Wallachians looked round.

A figure stood among them fully a head taller than all the rest. He wore a brass helmet, in which a deep cleft was visible, and held in his left hand a Roman sword. His features bore the ancient Roman character.

"The Decurio!" they murmured, making way for him.

"What is going on here?" he repeated; and seizing the fainting girl in the arms of a Wallachian, he ordered him to lay her down.

"She is one of our enemies," replied the savage insolently.

"Silence, knave! Does one of the Roumin nation seek enemies in women? Lay her down instantly."

"Not so, leader," interrupted Lupey; "our laws entitle us to a division of the spoil. This girl is our booty; she belongs to us after the victory."

"I know our laws better than you do, churl! Due division of spoil is just and fair; but we cast lots for what cannot be divided."

"True, leader: a horse or an ox cannot be divided, and for them we cast lots, but in this case—"

"I have said it cannot, and I should like to know who dares to say it can!"

Lupey knew the Decurio too well to proffer another syllable, and the rest turned silently from the girl; one voice alone was heard to exclaim, "It can!"

"Who dares to say that?" cried the Decurio; "let him come forward!"

A young Wallachian, with long plaited hair, confronted the Decurio. He was evidently intoxicated, and replied, striking his breast with his fist: "I said so."

Scarcely had the words escaped his lips, than the Decurio, raising his left hand, severed the contradictor's head at one stroke from his body; and as it fell back, the lifeless trunk dropped on its knees before the Decurio, with its arms around him, as if in supplication.

"Dare anyone still say it can?" asked Numa, with merciless rigor.

The Wallachians turned silently away.

"Put the horses immediately to the carriage; the girl must be placed in it, and brought to Topanfalvo. Whoever

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has the good fortune of winning her, has a right to receive her as I confide her to you; but if anyone of you should dare to offend her in the slightest degree, even by a look or a smile, remember this and take example from it," continued the Decurio, pointing with his sword to the headless body of the young man. "And now you may go—destroy and pillage."

At these words the band scattered right and left, the Decurio with the fainting girl, whom he lifted into the carriage and confided to some faithful retainers of the family, pointing out the road across the hills.

In half an hour the castle was in flames and the Wallachians, descending into the cellars, had knocked out the bottoms of the casks, and bathed in the sea of flowing wine and brandy, singing wild songs, while the fire burst from every window enveloping the blackened walls; after which the revelers departed, leaving their dead, and those who were too helplessly intoxicated to follow them.

Meanwhile they brought the young girl to the Decurio's house, and as each man considered that he had an equal right to the prize, they kept a vigilant eye upon her, and none dared offend her so much as by a look.

When the Decurio arrived, they all crowded into the house with him, filling the rooms, as well as the entrance and porch.

Having laid out the spoil before them on the ground, the leader proceeded to divide it into equal shares, retaining for himself a portion of ten men, after which most of the band dispersed to their homes; but a good many remained, greedily eyeing their still unappropriated victim, who lay pale and motionless as the dead on the couch of lime-boughs where they had laid her.

"You are waiting, I suppose, to cast lots for the girl?" said Numa dryly.

"Certainly," replied Lupey, with an insolent leer; "and his she will be who casts highest. If two, or ten, or twenty of us should cast the same, we have an equal right to her."

"I tell you only one can have her," interrupted Numa sternly.

"Then those who win must cast again among each other."

"Casting the die will not do; we may throw all day long, and two may remain at the end."

"Well, let us play cards for her."

"I cannot allow that, the more cunning will deceive the simpler."

"Well, write our names upon bricks, and throw them all into a barrel; and whichever name you draw will take away the girl."

"I can say what name I please, for none of you can read."

The Wallachian shook his head impatiently.

"Well, propose something yourself, Decurio."

"I will. Let us try which of us can give the best proof of courage and daring; and whoever can do that, shall have the girl, for he best deserves her."

"Well said!" cried the men unanimously. "Let us each relate what we have done, and then you can judge which among us is the boldest."

"I killed the first Bardy in the court in sight of his family."

"I broke in the door, when that terrible man was dashing down the iron on our heads."

"But it was I who pierced his heart."

"I mounted the stairs first."

"I fought nearly half an hour with the noble in the cloth of gold."

And thus they continued. Each man, according to his own account, was the first and the bravest—each had performed miracles of valor.

"You have all behaved with great daring, but it is impossible now to prove what has happened. The proof must be given here, by all of us together, before my eyes, indisputably."

"Well, tell us how," said Lupey impatiently, always fearing that the Decurio was going to deceive them.

"Look here," said Numa, drawing a small cask from beneath the bed—and in doing so he observed that the young girl half opened her eyes, as she glanced at him, and then closed them. She was awake, and had heard all.

As he stooped down, Numa whispered gently in her ear: "Fear nothing," and then drew the cask into the middle of the room.

The Wallachians stared with impatient curiosity as he knocked out the bottom of the cask with a hatchet.

"This cask contains gunpowder," continued Decurio. "We will light a match and place it in the middle of the

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cask, and whoever remains longest in the room is undoubtedly the most courageous; for there is enough here to blow up not only this house, but the whole of the neighboring village."

At this proposition several of the men began to murmur.

"If any are afraid they are not obliged to remain," said the Decurio dryly.

"I agree," said Lupey doggedly. "I will remain here; and perhaps, after all, it is poppy—seeds you have got there—it looks very much like them."

The Decurio stooped down, and taking a small quantity between his fingers, threw it into the Wallachian's pipe, which immediately exploded, causing him to stagger backwards, and the next instant he stood with a blackened visage, sans beard and moustache, amidst the jeers and laughter of his comrades.

This only exasperated him the more.

"I will stay for all that!" he exclaimed; and lifting up the pipe which he had dropped, he walked over and lit it at the burning match which the Decurio was placing in the cask.

Upon this, two—thirds of the men left the room.

The rest assembled around the cask with much noise and bravado, swearing by heaven and earth that they would stay until the match burned out; but the more they swore, the more they looked at the burning match, the flame of which was slowly approaching the gunpowder.

For some minutes their courage remained unshaken, but after that they ceased to boast, and began to look at each other in silent consternation, while their faces grew paler every instant. At last one or two rose and stood aloof; the others followed their example, and some grinding their teeth with rage, others chattering with terror, they all began to leave the room.

Only two remained beside the cask; Numa, who stood with his arms folded leaning against the foot of the bed; and Lupey, who was sitting on the iron of the cask with his back turned to the danger, and smoking furiously.

As soon as they were alone, the latter glanced behind him and saw the flame was within an inch of the powder.

"I'll tell you what, Decurio," he said, springing up, "we are only two left, don't let us make food of each other; let us come to an understanding on this matter."

"If you are tired of waiting, I can press the match lower."

"This is no jest, Numa; you are risking your own life. How can you wish to send us both to hell for the sake of a pale girl? But I'll tell you what—I'll give her up to you if you will only promise that she shall be mine when you are tired of her."

"Remain here and win her—if you dare."

"To what purpose?" said the Wallachian, in a whining voice, and in his impatience he began to tear his clothes and stamp with his feet, like a petted child.

"What I have said stands good," said the Decurio; "whoever remains longest has the sole right to the lady."

"Well, I will stay, of course; but what do I gain by it? I know you will stay, too, and then the devil will have us both; and I speak not only for myself when I say I do not wish that."

"If you do not wish it, you had better be gone."

"Well, I don't care—if you will give me a golden mark."

"Not the half; stay if you like it."

"Decurio, this is madness! The flame will reach the powder immediately."

"I see it."

"Well, say a dollar."

"Not a whit."

"May the seventy—seven limited thunder—bolt strike you on St. Michael's Day!" roared the Wallachian fiercely, as he rushed to the door; but after he had gone out, he once more thrust his head in and cried: "Will you give even a form? I am not gone yet."

"Nor have I removed the match; you may come back." The Wallachian slammed the door, and ran for his life, till exhausted and breathless he sank under a tree, where he lay with his tunic over his head, and his ears covered with his hands, only now and then raising his head nervously, to listen for the awful explosion which was to blow up the world.

Meanwhile Numa coolly removed the match, which was entirely burnt down; and throwing it into the grate,

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he stepped over to the bed and whispered into the young girl's ear: "You are free!"

Trembling, she raised herself in the bed and taking the Decurio's large, sinewy hands within her own, she murmured: "Be merciful! O hear my prayer, and kill me!"

The Decurio stroked the fair hair of the lovely suppliant. "Poor child!" he replied gently; "you have nothing to fear; nobody will hurt you now."

"You have saved me from these fearful people—now save me from yourself!"

"You have nothing to fear from me," replied the Dacian, proudly; "I fight for liberty alone, and you may rest as securely within my threshold as on the steps of the altar. When I am absent you need have no anxiety, for these walls are impregnable, and if anyone should dare offend you by the slightest look, that moment shall be the last of his mortal career. And when I am at home you have nothing to fear, for woman's image never dwelt within my heart. Accept my poor couch, and may your rest be sweet!—Imre Bardy slept on it last night."

"Imre!" exclaimed the starting girl. "You have seen him, then?— oh! where is he!"

The Decurio hesitated. "He should not have delayed so long," he murmured, pressing his hand against his brow; "all would have been otherwise."

"Oh! let me go to him; if you know where he is."

"I do not know, but I am certain he will come here if he is alive— indeed he must come."

"Why do you think that?"

"Because he will seek you."

"Did he then speak—before you?"

"As he lay wounded on that couch, he pronounced your name in his dreams. Are you not that Jolanka Bardy whom they call 'The Angel'? I knew you by your golden locks."

The young girl cast down her eyes. "Then you think he will come?" she said in a low voice. And my relations?"

"He will come as soon as possible; and now you must take some food and rest. Do not think about your relations now; they are all in a safe place—nobody can hurt them more.

The Decurio brought some refreshment, laid a small prayer-book on the pillow, and left the orphan by herself.

The poor girl opened the prayer-book, and her tears fell like rain— drops on the blessed page; but, overcome by the fatigue and terror she had undergone, her head ere long sank gently back, and she slept calmly and sweetly the sleep of exhausted innocence.

As evening closed, the Decurio returned, and softly approaching the bed, looked long and earnestly at the fair sleeper's face, until two large tears stood unconsciously in his eyes.

The Roumin hastily brushed away the unwonted moisture, and as if afraid of the feeling which had stolen into his breast, he hastened from the room, and laid himself upon his woolen rug before the open door.

The deserted castle still burned on, shedding a ghastly light on the surrounding landscape, while the deepest silence reigned around, only broken now and then by an expiring groan, or the hoarse song of a drunken reveler.

Day was beginning to dawn as a troop of horsemen galloped furiously towards the castle from the direction of Kolozsvár.

They were Imre and his comrades.

Silently and anxiously they pursued their course, their eyes fixed upon one point, as they seemed to fly rather than gallop along the road. "We are too late!" exclaimed one of the party at last, pointing to a dim red smoke along the horizon. "Your castle is burning!"

Without returning an answer, Imre spurred his panting horse to a swifter pace. A turn in the road suddenly brought the castle to their view, its blackened walls still burning, while red smoke rose high against the side of the hill.

The young man uttered a fierce cry of despair, and galloped madly down the declivity. In less than a quarter of an hour he stood before the ruined walls.

"Where is my father? where are my family? where is my bride?" he shrieked in frantic despair, brandishing his sword over the head of a half-drunken Wallachian, who was leaning against the ruined portico.

The latter fell to his knees, imploring mercy, and declaring that it was not he who killed them.

"Then they are dead!" exclaimed the unhappy youth, as, half-choked by his sobs, he fell forward on his horse's neck.

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Meanwhile his companions had ridden up, and immediately sounded the Wallachian, whom, but for Imre's interference, they would have cut down.

"Lead us to where you have buried them. Are they all dead?" he continued; "have you not left one alive? Accursed be the sun that rises after such a night!"

The Wallachian pointed to a large heap of fresh-raised mould. "They are all there!" he said.

Imre fell from his horse without another word, as if struck down.

His companions removed him to a little distance, where the grass was least red.

They then began to dig twelve graves with their swords. Imre watched them in silence. He seemed unconscious what they were about.

When they had finished the graves they proceeded to open the large pit, but the sight was too horrible, and they carried Imre away by force. He could not have looked on what was there and still retain his senses.

In a short time, one of his comrades approached and told him that there were only eleven bodies in the grave.

"Then one of them must be alive!" cried Imre, a slight gleam of hope passing over his pale features; "which is it?—speak! Is there not a young girl with golden locks among them?"

"I know not," stammered his comrade, in great embarrassment.

"You do not know?—go and look again." His friend hesitated.

"Let me go—I must know," said Imre impatiently, as the young man endeavored to detain him.

"O stay, Imre, you cannot look on them; they are all headless!"

"My God!" exclaimed the young man, covering his face with both hands, and, bursting into tears he threw himself down with his face upon the earth.

His comrades questioned the Wallachian closely as to what he knew about the young girl. First he returned no answer, pretending to be drunk and not to understand; but on their promising to spare his life, on the sole condition that he would speak the truth, he confessed that she had been carried away to the mountains, where the band were to cast lots for her.

"I must go!" said Imre, starting as if in a trance.

"Whither?" inquired his comrades.

"To seek her! Take off your dress," he continued, turning to the Wallachian, "you may have mine in exchange," and, hastily putting on the tunic, he concealed his pistols in the girdle beneath it.

"We will follow you," said his comrades, taking up their arms; "we will seek her from village to village."

"No, no, I must go alone! I shall find her more easily alone. If I do not return, avenge this for me," he said, pointing to the moat; then, turning to the Wallachian, he added sternly: "I have found beneath your girdle a gold medallion, which my grandmother wore suspended from her neck, and by which I know you to be one of her murderers, and, had I not promised to spare your life, you should now receive the punishment that you deserve. Keep him here," he said to his comrades, "until I have crossed the hills, and then let him go."

And taking leave of his friends, he cast one glance at the eleven heaps, and at the burning castle of his ancestors, and hastened toward the mountains.

The hoary autumn nights had dyed the leaves of the forest. The whole country looked as if it had been washed in blood.

Deep amidst the wildest forest the path suddenly descends into a narrow valley, surrounded by steep rocks at the foot of which lies a little village half concealed among the trees.

It seemed as if the settlers there had only cleared sufficient ground to build their dwellings, leaving all the rest a dense forest. Apart from the rest, on the top of a rock, stood a cottage, which, unlike others, was constructed entirely of large blocks of stone, and only approachable by a small path cut in the rock.

A young man ascended this path. He was attired in a peasant's garb and although he evidently had traveled far, his step was light and fleet. When he had ascended about halfway, he was suddenly stopped by an armed Wallachian, who had been kneeling before a shrine in the rock, and seeing the stranger, rose and stood in his path.

The latter pronounced the Decurio's name, and produced his pazsura.

The Wallachian examined it on every side, and then stepped back to let the stranger pass, after which he once more laid down his scythe and cap, and knelt before the shrine.

The stranger knocked at the Decurio's door, which was locked, and an armed Wallachian appeared from behind the rocks, and informed him that the Decurio was not at home, only his wife.

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"His wife?" exclaimed the stranger in surprise.

"Yes, that pale girl who fell to him by lot."

"And she is his wife."

"He told us so himself, and swore that if any of us dared so much as lift his eye upon her, he would send him to St. Nicholas in paradise."

"Can I not see her?"

"I would not advise you; for if the Decurio hears of it, he will make halves of you; but you may go around to the window if you like—only let me get out of the way first, that the Decurio may not find me here."

The stranger hastened to the window, and looking in, he saw the young girl seated on an armchair made of rough birch boughs, with a little prayer-book on her knee; her fair arm supporting her head, while a mass of golden ringlets half veiled her face, which was as pale as an alabaster statue; the extreme sadness of its expression rendering her beauty still more touching.

"Jolanka!" exclaimed the stranger passionately.

She started at the well-known voice, and, uttering a cry of joy, rushed to the window.

"Oh, Imre!" she murmured, "are you come at last!"

"Can I not enter? can I not speak with you?"

The young girl hastened to unbar the door, which was locked on the inside, and as Imre entered she threw herself into his arms, while he pressed her fondly to his heart.

The Wallachian, who had stolen to the window, stood aghast with terror and, soon as the Decurio arrived, he ran to meet him, and related, with vehement gesticulations, how the girl had thrown herself into the peasant's arms.

"And how did you know that?" asked Numa coldly.

"I saw them through the window."

"And dared you look through my window? Did I not forbid you? Down on your knees, and pray!"

The Wallachian fell on his knees, and clasped his hands. "Rebel! you deserve your punishment of death for having disobeyed my commands; and if you ever dare to open your lips on the subject, depend upon it, you shall not escape!" And with these words he strode away, leaving the astonished informer on his knees, in which posture he remained for some time afterwards, not daring to raise his head until the Decurio's steps had died away.

As Numa entered the house, the lovers hastened to meet him. For an instant or two he stood at the threshold, regarding the young man with a look of silent reproach. "Why did you come so late?" he asked.

Imre held out his hand, but the Decurio did not accept it. "The blood of your family is on my hand," he whispered. "You have let dishonor come on me, and mourning on yourself."

The young man's head sunk on his breast in silent anguish.

"Take his hand," said Jolanka, in her low, sweet accents; and then turning to Imre, "He saved your life—he saved us both, and he will rescue our family, too."

Imre looked at her in astonishment.

The Decurio seized his arms and drew him aside. "She does not know that they are dead," he whispered; "she was not with them, and knows nothing of their fate; and I have consoled her with the idea that they are all prisoners, she must never know the horrors of that fearful night."

"But sooner or later she will hear it."

"Never! you must leave the place and the kingdom. You must go to Turkey."

"My way lies towards Hungary."

"You must not think of it. Evil days await that country; your prophets do not see them, but I know, and see them clearly. Go to Turkey; I will give you letters by which you may pass in security through Wallachia and Moldavia; and here is a purse of gold—do not scruple to accept it, for it is your own, it belonged to THEM. Promise me, for her sake," he continued earnestly, pointing to Jolanka, "that you will not go to Hungary."

Imre hesitated. "I cannot promise what I am not sure I shall fulfill; but I shall remember your advice."

Numa took the hands of the two lovers, and, gazing long and earnestly on their faces, he said, in a voice of deep feeling, "You love one another?"

They pressed his hand in silence.

"You will be happy—you will forget your misfortunes. God bless and guide you on your way! Take these

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letters, and keep the direct road to Brasso,* by the Saxon-land.** You will find free passage everywhere, and never look behind until the last pinnacles of the snowy mountains are beyond your sight. Go! we will not take leave, not a word, let us forget each other!"

* Brasso, or Kyonstadt, a town in the southeast of Transylvania, on the frontier of Wallachia.

** A district inhabited by a colony of Saxons.

The Decurio watched the lovers until they were out of sight; and called to them, even when they could hear him no longer: "Do not go towards Hungary."

He then entered his house. The prayer-book lay open as the young girl had left it; the page was still damp with her tears. Numa's hand trembled, as he kissed the volume fervently and placed it in his bosom.

When night came on, the Roumin lay down on his wolf-skin couch, where the golden-haired maiden, and her lover before her, had slept, but it seemed as if they had stolen his rest—he could not close his eyes there, so he rose and went out on the porch, where he spread his rug before the open door; but it was long ere he could sleep—there was an unwonted feeling at his heart, something like happiness, yet inexpressibly sad; and, buried in deep reverie, he lay with his eyes fixed on the dark blue starry vault above him till past midnight. Suddenly he thought he heard the report of some fire-arms at a great distance, and at the same moment two stars sank beneath the horizon. Numa thought of the travelers, and a voice seemed to whisper, "They are now happy!"

The moon had risen high in the heavens, when the Decurio was roused from his sleep by heavy footsteps, and five or six Wallachians, among whom was Lupey, stood before him.

"We have brought two enemies' heads," said the latter, with a dark look at the Decurio; "pay us their worth!" and taking two heads from his pouch he laid them on Numa's mat.

The Wallachians watched their leader's countenance with sharp, suspicious glances.

Numa recognized the two heads by the light of the moon. They were those of Imre and Jolanka, but his features did not betray the slightest emotion.

"You will know them probably," continued Lupey. "The young magnate, who escaped us at the pass, came for the girl in your absence, and at the same time stole your money, and, what is more, we found your pazsura upon him also."

"Who killed them?" asked the Decurio, in his usual calm voice.

"None of us," replied the Wallachian; "as we rushed upon them, the young magnate drew two pistols from his girdle, and shot the girl through the head first, and himself afterwards."

"Were you all there?"

"And more of us besides."

"Go back and bring the rest. I will divide the money you have found on them among you. Make haste; and should one of you remain behind, his share will be divided among the rest."

The Wallachians hastened to seek their comrades with cries of joy.

The Decurio then locked the door, and, throwing himself upon the ground beside the two heads, he kissed them a hundred times, and sobbed like a child.

"I warned you not to go toward Hungary!" he said bitterly. "Why did you not hear me, unhappy children? why did you not take my word?" and he wept over his enemies' heads as if he had been their father.

He then rose, his eyes darting fire, and, shaking his terrible fist, he cried, in a voice hoarse with rage: "Czine mintye!"*

* Czine mintye!—A Wallachian term signifying revenge.

In a few hours, the Wallachians had assembled before the Decurio's house. They were about fifty or sixty, all wild, fearful-looking men.

Numa covered the two heads with a cloth, and laid them on the bed, after which he opened the door.

Lupey entered last.

"Lock the door," said Numa, when they were all in; we must not be interrupted;" and, making them stand in a circle, he looked around at them all, one by one.

"Are you all here?" he asked at last.

"Not one is absent."

"Do you consider yourselves all equally deserving of sharing THE BOOTY?"

"All of us."

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"It was you," he continued to Lupey, "who struck down the old man?"

"It was."

"And you who pierced the magnate with a spike?"

"You are right, leader."

"And you really killed all the women in the castle?" turning to a third.

"With my own hand."

"And one and all of you can boast of having massacred, and plundered, and set on fire?"

"All! all!" they cried, striking their breasts.

"Do not lie before Heaven. See! your wives are listening at the window to what you say, and will betray you if you do not speak the truth."

"We speak the truth!"

"It is well!" said the leader, as he calmly approached the bed; and, seating himself on it, uncovered the two heads and placed them on his knee. "Where did you put their bodies?" he asked.

"We cut them in pieces and strewed them on the highroad."

There was a short silence. Numa's breathing became more and more oppressed, and his large chest heaved convulsively. "Have you prayed yet?" he asked in an altered voice.

"Not yet, leader. What should we pray for?" said Lupey.

"Fall down on your knees and pray, for this is the last morning which will dawn on any of you again."

"Are you in your senses, leader? What are you going to do?"

"I am going to purge the Roumin nation of a set of ruthless murderers and brigands. Miserable wretches; instead of glory, you have brought dishonor and disgrace upon our arms wherever you have appeared. While the brave fought on the field of battle, you slaughtered their wives and children; while they risked their lives before the cannon's mouth you attacked the house of the sleepers and robbed and massacred the helpless and the innocent. Fall down on your knees and pray for your souls, for the angel of death stands over you, to blot out your memory from among the Roumin people!"

The last words were pronounced in a fearful tone. Numa was no longer the cold unmoved statue he had hitherto appeared, he was like a fiery genius of wrath, whose very breath was destruction.

The Wallachians fell upon their knees in silent awe, while the women who had been standing outside, rushed shrieking down the rocks.

The Decurio drew a pistol from his breast, and approached the cask of gunpowder.

With a fearful howl, they rushed upon him; the shriek of despair was heard for an instant, then the terrible explosion which caused the rocks to tremble, while the flames rose with a momentary flash amidst clouds of dust and smoke, scaring the beasts of the forest, and scattering stones and beams, and hundreds of dismembered limbs, far through the valley, and over the houses of the terrified inhabitants!

When the smoke had dissipated, a heap of ruins stood in the place of Numa's dwelling.

The sun rose and smiled upon the earth, which was strewed with the last leaves of autumn, but where were those who had assembled at the spring—time of the year?

The evening breezes whispered mournfully through the ruined walls, and strewed the faded leaves upon eleven grassy mounds.

The pen trembles in my hand—my heart sickens at the recital of such misery.

Would that I could believe it an imagination—the ghostly horror of a fevered brain!

Would that I could bid my gentle readers check the falling tear or tell them: "Start not with horror; it is but romance—the creation of some fearful dream—let us awake, and see it no more!"