

ZSIGMOND MÓRICZ: BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

A play in three acts

First performed on November 1929 by the Budapest NATIONAL THEATRE directed by Sándor Hevesi  
20 male, 5 female parts and supers

Misi Nyilas, the quiet, poor son of tradesmen is an outstanding scholar in his fourth year at the Debrecen College. He coaches in the home of the Doroghys, an impoverished gentry family, and also reads aloud to a lonely blind old man by the name of Pósalaky. Misi is happy that he earns enough to be able to send some money home to his mother, but also because he is able to move in an admired world of adults. How good it is to be an adult, the schoolboy thinks, they know what is good and what is evil, and they can always do what is good and beautiful.

Misi buys a lottery ticket for the blind old gentleman, and he tells the Török family where he used to lodge that half the winnings would be his if the ticket gets a prize. János, the flighty son of the house finds out that the ticket was drawn and won a large prize. He steals the ticket and lies to the boy that the drawing would only take place in a fortnight.

The Doroghy family puts on airs though they live in want. Sanyi, Misi's pupil, who is not very clever is guardian of all their hopes. The father is a drunkard, and the mother only reads novels, the two girls haven't a thing to wear. If Sanyi becomes a lawyer and wears a frock coat he might marry an heiress and put an end to the misery of the family, and raise it up again to the level of their illustrious relations. Misi loves one of the Doroghy girls as only little boys can love. Her name is Bella, and he dreams of helping her if he should win the lottery. When Sanyi tells him that the lottery was already drawn, Misi runs to the large tobacconist's and looks at the winning numbers in the shop-window. He cannot however find the ticket anywhere.

Misi cannot explain to Mr Pósalaky what happened to the ticket. He first tries to lie, but then he admits that he lost it. Pósalaky takes steps to stop payment, but too late, someone has already drawn the money.

Misi rushes to the Doroghys and finds János there too. The thief is ready to elope with Bella, he has more than enough money to do so, and he secretly slips a ten-florin coin into Misi's waistcoat pocket.

Misi has to face the Disciplinary Council of the College and the police is also looking for him because of the lottery ticket. János, who has meanwhile eloped with Bella, sends a letter from Budapest saying that he bought the ticket from Misi for ten florins. The ten florin coin is then found in Misi's pocket.

The School Council mercilessly questions Misi, one of his teachers only believes in the boy's honesty and stands by him. Misi becomes disillusioned by the much admired adults, and following his mental torment he passionately complains about justice. "I do not want to live amongst adults anymore," he shouts, "I do not want to be a Debrecen student anymore". The tension of the last scene is overcome by a telegram: Bella was accepted by the rich relations of the Doroghys in Budapest and she then returned the stolen money.

Móricz first wrote the story as a novel. The first performance of the play took place ten years after the publication of the novel. It has been performed many hundreds of times since. It was shown in New York in 1930, under the title The Lottery. A film made in 1936 was based on it.